

**FEMINIST THEORY AND DISCURSIVE INTERSECTIONS**  
**ACTIVATING THE CODE OF 'POLITICAL CORRECTNESS'**

**Alison Convery BA (Hons), MA**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of  
Newcastle

February 2011

## **Statement of Originality**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Alison Convery

## **Acknowledgments**

That this journey is finally at an end owes much to my principal supervisor, Jim Jose, whose faith in me and this project never wavered, even at times when there was every reason for it to do so. Not once did I leave his office without having had my energy and determination renewed. This, and the deftness with which he managed to guide without directing, were his special gifts as a supervisor. His tireless promotion of feminist studies within our school, as well as his feminist practice in his daily life and work, have created a truly nourishing environment for me and all my women colleagues in what is often elsewhere a masculinist discipline. Augmenting his excellent guidance were Rob Imre's spirited support and editing advice in the crucial final stages. Thanks also go to Rebecca Stringer, whose interest and encouragement at a conference of the Australian Political Studies Association in the early months propelled me forward with increased confidence.

Every doctoral student knows that the isolation of a long, single-handed project would be unliveable were it not for being able to walk alongside others who are similarly engaged. Over the years, a number of women have shared my physical and mental PhD space, especially Li Siquwen, Hawzhin Azeez, Taha Chaiechi, Dian Reindrawati, and Lisa Barritt-Eyles. Our achievements and disappointments have been collectively borne, and their company has sustained me considerably. Different nationalities, ages, and cultural and disciplinary backgrounds were represented in this group. Across these disparities, we recognised a common experience of living, working and partnering as women. This, more than anything else, has confirmed my conviction that what women share is far greater and more compelling than their differences. Special gratitude is owed to the most generous of colleagues, Phil Felton, sadly lost to us early in my candidature. He is still remembered and sorely missed. I have no doubt that Phil would be filled with utterly selfless delight that I have reached this point.

The full extent of the ups and downs of this project were known only to those closest to me – my partner Peter, and our sons, Sam and Tom. Sam and Tom grew to adulthood during the rather long gestation of this thesis. There were times when their pride in my endeavour seemed the only good reason to continue. Their enthusiasm for the broad issues taken up in this thesis is cause to be hopeful for the future of all women and men. During

this process, as in all things, Peter has provided perspective, calm and infinite forbearance. He has been my compass when my own sense of direction failed. I owe him much that cannot be accounted for here, and for which my simple gratitude is surely inadequate reward. They all helped me to understand that I was other and more than this project, which gave me the safety to pursue it and to bring it, at last, to fruition.

## Table of contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	i
<b>Introduction: Feminist Theory And Discursive Intersections</b> .....	2
<i>PART ONE. Setting the Framework: Reading Discourse into Texts</i>	
<b>1 Discourse And Feminist Texts: Theory As Practice</b> .....	26
Introduction .....	26
1.1 'Discourse', 'text' and 'language' .....	28
1.2 Texts and reading: discourse at work .....	34
1.3 Texts and the 'special competence of theory' .....	42
Conclusion .....	52
<b>2 Knowing Feminists: From Epistemology To Method</b> .....	55
Introduction .....	55
2.1 Surveying 'feminist theory': considering possibilities .....	58
2.2 Refining the approach: what counts as evidence?.....	70
2.3 Defining the method.....	79
Conclusion .....	90
<i>PART TWO. Mapping the Terrain</i>	
<b>3 Academic Feminism And The Discourse Of 'Political Correctness'</b> .....	95
Introduction .....	95
3.1 Against 'political correctness': the attack on the 'victim's revolution' .....	99
3.2 Enter the 'prodigal daughters' .....	106
3.3 'Political correctness' updated: the contemporary attack on victimhood .....	116
3.4 Absorbing the attack: academic feminism and victimhood .....	123
Conclusion .....	135
<b>4 In Search of 'Victim Feminism'</b> .....	137
Introduction .....	137
4.1 The reification of 'victim feminism' .....	139
4.2 Conflicting narratives: where is 'victim feminism'? .....	145
4.3 Haunted still: the spectre of 'victim feminism' .....	154
Conclusion .....	175
<i>PART THREE. Reading the Map</i>	
<b>5 Victims And 'Victims' In Feminist Theory: Telling The Difference</b> .....	179
Introduction .....	179
5.1 Definitional essentialism and the semantics of victimhood .....	180
5.2 Victimhood and its outcomes: 'denying the antecedent' .....	193
5.3 Beware the 'passive victim' .....	199
5.4 The power of representation: victimhood as fiction .....	211
5.5 Victimhood and subjectivity: representation as objectification .....	225
5.6 From victim to 'victim': the invisible transition .....	234

Conclusion .....	247
<b>6 No Victims, No Oppression? Agency And The Erasure Of Victimhood .....</b>	<b>251</b>
Introduction .....	251
6.1 Agency and victimhood: dichotomies and double standards .....	253
6.2 Agency and the virtues of complexity .....	263
6.3 Poststructuralism and feminist progress: back to the future? .....	271
6.4 Questioning the ontological primacy of agency.....	289
Conclusion .....	301
<b>Conclusion: Navigating Discursive Intersections.....</b>	<b>306</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1 .....	331
Appendix 2 .....	335
Appendix 3 .....	336
Appendix 4 .....	342
Appendix 5 .....	351
<b>References .....</b>	<b>354</b>

## Abstract

This thesis is impelled by the unsettling suspicion that academic feminism has adopted modes of theorising which undermine its political *raison d'être*. Specifically it argues that certain discursive conventions observed in popular attacks on feminism have, somewhat surprisingly, been imported unchanged into feminist theory. From the late 1980s, attempts were made to silence minority claims of discrimination and subordination via the discourse of 'political correctness'. In particular, this discourse belittled such claims as the exaggerated and irrational expression of largely self-inflicted 'victimhood', an argument which depended for its force on denigrating the figure of the 'victim' as a morally, and not just practically, diminished status. I suggest that the same logic occurs in a more or less sublimated form in feminist theory – the self-identified victim is positioned as having crossed a threshold of reasonableness, the standard for which is set by non-victim others. With a few notable exceptions most feminist scholars have failed to address, let alone notice, this resonance.

However, this thesis goes beyond documenting a surface correspondence between these two ostensibly incompatible discursive domains. Its significant claim is that a discursive strategy designed specifically to undermine the basis for feminist claims has become integral to the meaning-making practices of academic feminism. The issue is not simply one of a disturbing coincidence with a discourse from which feminist theory nevertheless remains largely autonomous. On the contrary, the claim here is that readers of feminist theory cannot make sense of certain modes of argument without reference to anti-feminist systems of meaning erected elsewhere. In that sense, the discourse of 'political correctness' has infected the very core of feminist theorising.

An additional contribution of the thesis is that, in the process of establishing precisely how this discursive imbrication is accomplished, it utilises a theory of reading practice which is applicable to the study of discourse more broadly. This approach addresses questions about the mechanisms by which prominent discursive tropes come to act upon and be transmitted by otherwise disparate subjects, a point which has remained largely unresolved by discourse scholars. The argument is that the discourse of 'political correctness' facilitates the accurate recognition by readers of the denigrated 'victim' in

feminist theory, normalising it and making it comprehensible in the absence of other explanation within the individual texts themselves. Successfully accomplishing these acts of recognition is furthermore a criterion of membership of the feminist discourse community, demonstrating competence at deploying its knowledge standards and a willingness to collude in the exclusions those standards entail.

Corresponding to the way the devaluation of victimhood has been discursively normalised in feminist theory, it is argued that the concept of ‘agency’ has achieved an ontological primacy in feminist thinking which is far from innocent. Analyses of agency and resistance operate as moral correctives to an alleged historical preoccupation with victimisation, rather than as disinterested scholastic endeavours aimed at expanding our knowledge of women’s behaviour under conditions of oppression. The binary opposition of victimhood and agency therefore oversees a normative structuring of feminist approaches and modes of argument, a structure supported at its origins by the meanings encoded in a hostile discourse.

In an attempt to disrupt that normativity, the thesis concludes by sketching the possibilities for a less coercive feminist rhetorical practice which does not embed exclusionary assumptions about victimhood. Such a practice would not have as its primary intention the resumption of supposedly more neutral modes of referring to victimhood, although that is certainly proposed as a conduit to greater inclusivity. Rather, that ostensible neutrality is itself a politically invested discursive usage which is aimed specifically at initiating only those interpretive processes that must refuse the discourse of ‘political correctness’ as a meaning enabler. This thesis therefore provides a method of discursively re-politicising feminist theory in a way which is neither simply reactive nor resigned to its inevitable imbrication with other discourses.



## **INTRODUCTION**

## **Introduction: Feminist Theory And Discursive Intersections**

It has long been a key feminist insight that a genuine change in sexist social relations could not be achieved while working and theorising within malestream conceptual apparatuses. Part of the feminist project has entailed the development of new conceptual tools that neither shore up nor draw legitimacy from dominant norms and discourses. For the purposes of this thesis the labels ‘feminist theory’ and ‘feminist project’ are used as a convenient shorthand means to describe the multiple forms of feminist theorising that have emerged over the last several decades. This singular usage is not meant to erase the differences between various streams of feminist thinking. However, it does assume that what most, if not all, of these streams have in common is a concern to challenge and transform the masculinist mindset that informs the social and cultural context in which women live and work. Therefore, the terms ‘feminist theory’ and ‘feminist project’ are used herein as anchor terms that serve to hold one area of inquiry steady to enable the investigation of a problem that bears in very real ways on all of the feminist approaches grouped under it. Baldly stated, the problem is this: why has feminist theory succumbed to the seductions of ‘political correctness’ discourse? At first sight, this question might seem counter-intuitive. After all, many feminists have contested the claims circulated by this discourse and defended feminist positions against it. At the very least, those feminists who give any credence to these claims analyse them from a critical and self-reflective position. Yet this question raises two deeper inter-related issues.

The first concerns the diverse uses to which the ‘political correctness’ tag is put, and the extent to which it can still be pressed into service, long after its initial emergence, as an instantly devaluative framing of any number of socially progressive positions, including a homogenised feminism. And the second issue is that, if feminist theorists are aware of this rhetorical framing of feminism, then how have its technologies come to be embedded so profoundly in the structures of feminist modes of argument? The fundamental aim of this thesis is to explain how the order of meaning constructed by what is referred to as the ‘discourse’ or ‘code’ of ‘political correctness’ has found its way into the ‘common sense’ of feminist theorising – the ideas and presuppositions that feminist writers take for granted as

the base knowledge on which new arguments and debates proceed. This aim is propelled by the concern that the ‘political correctness’ code remains a key discursive tool for attacking feminism. On that basis, it is asserted that feminists should be alert to the ways in which the discursive practice they use in the course of their own theoretical expositions imbricates their logic within what was and remains a thoroughly anti-feminist discursive strategy.

Of particular interest was the possibility of a correspondence between these quite divergent fields of discursive production when it came to theoretical claims and arguments which assumed a negativity about the idea of ‘victimhood’. A particular mode of referencing victimhood in academic feminist writing pointed to an apparent consensus about that negative posture. This mode of reference – part of what I call feminist rhetorical practice – suggested that certain knowledge about victimhood could be assumed in the reader, and did not need to be explained or justified. That was despite the fact that giving priority to this way of framing victimhood entailed the active suppression of alternative understandings and reading postures. The content of this assumed knowledge appears to correspond with a readily recognisable set of derogatory connotations around concepts of ‘victimhood’ articulated within the discourse of ‘political correctness’.

The issue of how feminists shape their approaches to victimhood against the backdrop of this code is a continuing problem within feminist theory, and elaborating that issue forms the substance of this thesis. This elaboration unfolds along several axes. The task is firstly to consider how this negative posture towards victimhood has become regularised across diverse locations of feminist theorising. At the same time, it is to show how the wider interpretive framework provided by the code supports this regularisation by normalising the denigration of victimhood. Finally, it is to suggest ways of formulating a feminist rhetorical practice with respect to victimhood that refuses discursive imbrication with the code of ‘political correctness’. The use of the term ‘rhetorical practice’ throughout is intended to signify that the emphasis is on what words in combination *do* rather than on the meaning they *contain*.

The term ‘political correctness’ became entrenched in the popular lexicon in the US with the publication in October 1990 of an article in the New York Times (Weir 1995, 60; Newfield and Strickland 1995b, 1; see also D’Souza 1992a, xiv; Shea 1995, 95; Smith 1995, 31; Wilson 1995, 13; Berman 1992, 1; Messer-Davidow 1993, 40; Scott 1995, 118;

Keefer 1996, 27)<sup>1</sup>. This essay introduced the concept of ‘political correctness’ to the wider public as a way of describing support for various measures being adopted on university campuses to equalise access to higher education and the processes of knowledge production for women and other subordinated groups. These measures included affirmative action in hiring and student recruitment, guidelines for speech that was ethically sensitive to differences in gender, race and sexuality, and adjustments to the literary canon, course curricula and disciplinary boundaries to recognise alternative modes of evaluating what had previously counted as ‘universal’ knowledge. Arguments against such measures, couched as threats to the maintenance of a common culture essential to proper democratic functioning, were enthusiastically taken up by the mainstream media and further disseminated by several widely successful books aimed at popular audiences, such as Kimball’s (1990) critique of the excesses of ‘tenured radicals’, and D’Souza’s (1992a) of the ‘victim’s revolution’ on campus.

D’Souza’s criticisms of victim identification as a platform for political action were typical of conservative writings of the period, which argued that the pseudo-sensitivities of minority groups were being indulged at the expense of enterprising individuals, and that the institution of measures designed to ‘protect’ these so-called victims constituted unwarranted bureaucratic intrusion into private social relations. Speech guidelines were criticised as a project of linguistic sanitisation which stifled free speech and open debate. Such guidelines were described as instruments enforced by ‘thought police’ or other coercive agents, with the descriptions routinely invoking military metaphors or comparisons to totalitarian figures. The recognition of alternative ways of knowing necessarily entailed the contestation of notions of objectivity and neutrality in knowledge production. For conservative critics, such a challenge constituted inappropriate politicisation of the educational agenda, which in their view should be aimed at producing citizens ready to participate in the democratic project on the basis of shared values, versed

---

<sup>1</sup> Other accounts (e.g. Suhr and Johnson 2003, 8; Dickstein 1993, 542; Weir 1995, 53; Cameron 1994, 21) of the term’s history detect its emergence in its contemporary form through the mid to late 1980s. Some writers (e.g. Hollander 1996, 40; Berman 1992, 4; Wark 2001, 167; Richer and Weir 1995b, 3; Annette 1994, 7; Sparrow 2002, 120; Faludi 1992, 324; Ginsberg and Lennox 1996, 170, 178-9) date the beginning of the attacks on higher education, of which the ‘political correctness’ discourse was a central plank, specifically from the publication in 1987 of Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students*. Nevertheless, Bernstein’s article is usually considered as a definitive moment in the cementing of the term in media discourse, especially as it also ‘educated’ the public in its usage.

in the ‘truths’ of Western civilisation and skilled at objective analysis according to established standards. Within months of these criticisms appearing in the US, the term ‘political correctness’ entered public discourse in Anglophone Canada (Shea 1995, 90; Wallace 1995, 147; see also Richer and Weir 1995b, 3; Weir 1995, 77; Keefer 1996, 183), the UK (Dunant 1994, x; Suhr and Johnson 2003, 10) and, shortly afterwards, Australia (Wark 2001, 183; Johnson 2000, 65; Bennett 1993, 437). In each case, the term was readily adapted as a framing device for local issues, despite the specificities of its emergence in the US.

Feminists presented a prime target for conservative criticisms due to the widespread installation of women’s studies departments in universities. These were supposedly an important contributor to the much-maligned ‘balkanisation’ of the academy, diverting attention from the acquisition of ‘core’, universal knowledge which prepared students for citizenship in the modern, globalised democracy (D’Souza 1992a, 250-1). In a section of *Tenured Radicals* entitled ‘The Feminist Assault’, Kimball singled out radical feminism as being in the vanguard of the liberalisation of higher education – not only had it mounted ‘the single biggest challenge to the canon as traditionally conceived’ (1990, 15), but it ‘[had] provided a kind of blueprint for special interests that wish to appropriate the curriculum to achieve political goals’ (1990, 19). Likewise, D’Souza (1992a, 211) accused women’s studies departments and programs of being the sites where the ideological distortion of the pedagogical process was most consistently evident. For Klein (1998, 19), academic feminism ordained a relativism that constituted ‘a serious enemy’ to true scholarship, endangering the health of the academy and harming students. In reporting the proceedings of the first convention of the National Association of Scholars (NAS) – which had been set up specifically to combat ‘politically correct’ developments on campus (Adler 1990; D’Souza 1992a, 18; Ravitch 2005, 7, 18) – Mooney (1998, A11) noted that feminist scholars in particular were accused in that forum of abandoning rational thought in the process of advancing their own political agendas via their teaching. Radical feminism’s ‘insidious legacy’ – the claim that ‘the personal is political’ – was identified as having authorised regulatory intrusion into the private realm (Hollander 1994, 65; see also 1996, 40). Observers outside the US (e.g. Alibhai-Brown 1994, 69; Wallace 1995, 146; Scalmer 1999, 12; Greenfield and Williams 2001, 34; Cahill 2004, 20; Sawyer 1997, 73) also

commented on the way the code was used in their own polities to single out feminism as representing a particularly illegitimate and undeserving constituency. And it was noted that a further anti-feminist dimension in these criticisms was that challenges to traditional epistemologies were feminised – and consequently delegitimised – as irrational, emotional, and the cause of weakness in the democratic body, while the intellectual rigour seen to inhere in the study of Western civilisation connoted maleness and muscularity (Jones 1994, 389; Munt 1997, 96).

In this way feminist ideas were positioned at the very foundations of the edifice labelled ‘political correctness’. What has to be stressed here is that these critics created the very entity that they attributed to feminist and other politically progressive theorists. The ‘political correctness’ code emerged as a mechanism for undermining minority challenges to the status quo, firstly by discursively collapsing all claims of disadvantage as being about victimhood and victimisation (whether or not such claims were couched in precisely these terms), and then by devaluing victimhood as a morally, and not just a practically, reduced state. Paradoxically, at the same time victim status became a terrain to be vigorously contested by conservatives anxious to defend their own claims to its legitimate occupation as representatives of a mainstream under attack by ‘special interests’. In particular, men were portrayed as the ‘real’ victims of man-hating feminists intent on a program of comprehensive emasculation.

As part of these general attacks on feminism within the discourse of ‘political correctness’, a subset of populist literature emerged aimed specifically at critiquing contemporary feminism – broadly drawn as a homogenised movement which had strayed from its original, legitimate purpose to place disproportionate emphasis on women’s victim status. This literature stood out also because its authors for the most part self-identified as feminist, a factor which complicated its reception by academic feminists, who variously positioned it as an attack on feminism by a separable cadre of anti-feminists, or as semi-legitimate self-critique from within feminism’s broad church. The fact that the membership of this group of authors is somewhat fluid – the core is usually seen to consist of Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Sommers, Naomi Wolf and Katie Roiphe, but others from within the academy are also variously included – further suggests that it may be difficult to clearly demarcate the discourses and theoretical positions of academic feminism from those of

these populist offerings, and perhaps even, therefore, from the more obviously conservative and anti-feminist views with which these writers are generally aligned.

As a result, identifying an appropriate *feminist* discursive strategy in the context of these attacks is not straightforward. Nevertheless, the fact that feminist challenges to power were answered by reassertions by the powerful of their own claims to victim status had obvious implications for a movement premised on women's subordination. Moreover, the question of how feminists shape their approaches to victimhood against the backdrop of the 'political correctness' code remains compelling because the code retains its effectiveness in framing public discourse about a range of contemporary issues across the Anglophone world, despite the lapsing of the precise conditions of its emergence in the 1990s. It continues to operate as an interpretive framework which facilitates public acceptance of the marginalisation of redistributive political endeavours, including feminist ones, as counter to the interests of the majority.

It is important to recognise that the term 'political correctness' had been used previously within social movement groups (including feminism) as an ironic and self-deprecatory recognition of the potential for their own political dogmatism (for various accounts of the term's history, see Perry 1992; Berman 1992, 5; D'Souza 1992a, xiv; Weir 1995, 53; Suhr and Johnson 2003, 8; Cameron 1994, 18-9). In discursive terms, the 1990s incarnation did not emerge entirely *ex nihilo*. However, three things rendered the 1990s version distinctive. One was its deployment to attack progressive movements from outside their ranks. A second distinction was a purposive and well-funded publishing campaign undertaken by conservatives that successfully entrenched their understanding of the concept in the popular consciousness (Messer-Davidow 1993; Diamond 1995, 25-9, 32; Nielson 1995, 72-4; Jones 1994, 386-7; Smith 1995, 25-6). Lastly, the 1990s usage relied on the nominal form ('political correctness'), whereas earlier uses within left politics had been largely confined to the adjectival one ('politically correct') (Cameron 1994, 20). Cameron noted that the noun form implies the existence of a referent, of a phenomenon that is objectively identifiable, despite its being a discursive construction by self-proclaimed opponents who orchestrated the terms in which the phrase came to be used in the public sphere (see also Fairclough 2003, 21; Mills 2003, 90; Jones 1994, 385; Dasenbrock 1995, 172). Ironically, the reification of 'political correctness' as an identifiable object has been

reinforced by the titles of several edited collections aspiring to present analyses which are either balanced or broadly sympathetic to positions coded negatively as ‘politically correct’. Thus, titles which suggest looking ‘beyond’ (e.g. Aufderheide 1992; Richer and Weir 1995a) or ‘after’ ‘political correctness’ (e.g. Newfield and Strickland 1995a) collude unavoidably with the terms in which conservatives framed a collection of disparate issues under a single rubric and manipulated its negative valorisation in the popular imagination. This is especially so when the subtitles figure ‘the inclusive university’ (Richer and Weir 1995a), or ‘the politics of understanding’ (Aufderheide 1992) as happening in that realm ‘beyond’ or ‘after’ the obstruction which ‘political correctness’ apparently presents to these desirable states.

This is not intended as a criticism of these editors – indeed, the use of the phrase as a sort of short-hand way of encapsulating the diversity of elements associated with its generation is almost unavoidable in the interests of expediting useful discussion, and I will surely be guilty of similar usages here. I mean rather to underline the difficulty faced by analysts and oppositional groups in handling the discursive aspects of the term when attempting to counter or nuance the conservative attack. They enter a debate whose terms have already been set by their opponents, and any attempt to deconstruct ‘political correctness’ cannot avoid continually referring to an entity whose definition and existence are the very matters being contested (see Cameron 1994, 16). As Suhr and Johnson (2003, 6) note, the very act of categorising a text as part of the discourse of ‘political correctness’, especially when it does not contain occurrences of that phrase or its derivatives, works within the terms originating elsewhere rather than problematising the processes by which certain issues come to be framed in this way. Suhr and Johnson (2003, 7) bracket these procedural and terminological difficulties as somewhat insuperable, but the very impossibility of escaping ‘political correctness’ as an interpretive framework suggests even more urgency about tackling the issue of feminist discursive positioning in relation to the semantic elements that have been so efficiently marshalled within it.

For those attempting to defend the equity agenda at the time, the conservative strategy foreclosed the possibility of an obvious counter-strategy. To align with the so-called ‘politically correct’ was to accept a label not of one’s own making. To refuse such an alignment either implied collusion with the conservative attack, or involved elaborate



attempts to expose fallacies in the content of conservative arguments, when the strength of those arguments resided less in their inherent ‘truth’ than in the rhetorical coding work performed by the phrase. As Smith (1995, 27) shows, the trope of ‘political correctness’ functioned as an ‘ideological code’, ‘a free-floating form of control in the relations of public discourse’, which forced even dissenting views to operate according to its framework, and worked to organise perceptions and structure decision-making in sites far dispersed from the central point of command. Many analysts (e.g. Mills 2003, 104; Cameron 1994, 20; see also Suleri 1992, 756-7; Drakich et al. 1995, 132 note 3) attempt to acknowledge these discursive complexities and simultaneously mark a position of critical detachment from the terms set by conservative rhetoric by explicitly adopting quotation marks as their mode of reference, and I will conform to that custom as a way of signifying the contested status of ‘political correctness’ as an objective reality<sup>2</sup>.

An additional element in the titles of the edited collections mentioned above is the misconception they create of the discourse of ‘political correctness’ being temporally contained – they anticipate the period ‘beyond’ or ‘after’ the phenomenon has abated. However, although the precise conditions of the term’s emergence in the US in 1990 have passed, the label has continued to operate into the current decade and beyond across the various polities where it was adopted as a mechanism for instantly discrediting policies and positions that are leftist, redistributive, or deemed to be out of touch with the ‘mainstream.’ Speaking from within the British context, Suhr and Johnson (2003, 6) recommend revisiting the term because ‘its enduring capacity to act as a discursive frame for such a wide range of topics [is] inherently problematic’, and Fairclough (2003, 27) enjoins the left to treat the issue of ‘political correctness’ seriously, since its critics continue to strategically deploy it in effective and damaging ways (see also Bressey 2008). These observations confirm as quite prescient Dunant’s (1994, xiv) earlier warning that the way the left chose to engage in the ‘political correctness’ debates would have political and moral ramifications in Britain ‘well into the next century’.

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that scare quotes are not in themselves a foolproof mechanism for implying the sorts of caveats about the existence of ‘political correctness’ discussed here. Much depends on the assumed political alignment of the writer, and quote marks can be recruited by the right as well to signify ideological distance – in this case, from a phenomenon purportedly created and owned by the left (e.g. Sykes 1992, 5).

Vindicating Dunant's concern, Tsiolkas (in Tsiolkas et al. 2008, 26) retrospectively identifies the emergence of the 'political correctness' concept as the definitive moment in the left's loss of political traction in Australia and across the Anglo-European world. From that point on, the 'slur of political correctness' has been able to operate discursively to wedge advocates of equity agendas<sup>3</sup>. A cursory survey of conservative publications and the mainstream press in Australia reveals a level of permeation by the code that illustrates Tsiolkas' point. In recent issues of *Quadrant*, 'political correctness' continues to be associated with the 'dumbing down' of educational curricula in line with feminist and other 'minority' perspectives (Donnelly 2008a, 36; 2008b, 8; 2008c, 43; Lopez 2008, 99), the development of a culture of victimhood (Colebatch 2007, 46), a ridiculous level of pandering to 'diversity' (Allan 2008, 59), and the feminisation of traditionally masculine domains (McCauley 2008, 30). Likewise, current media continue to associate feminism with 'political correctness' and the ills that follow: the secularisation of institutions (Auty 2009, 12), 'unfair' equal pay for women tennis players (Wilson 2009, 118), the discouragement of vibrant debate and diversity of opinion (Farrelly 2008, 13), and disproportionate institutional responses to alleged sexual harassment (Sorensen 2009, 10).

Moreover, the code continues to serve in Australia to denigrate expansion of government and institutions into areas deemed appropriate for more localised or individual regulation – the same basis on which speech codes and affirmative action policies were criticised in the US in the early 1990s, though the policies at issue may bear no relationship to those which prompted the original objections. For example, Day's (2008, 40) objection to the proposal to institute voluntary codes of conduct in relation to the use of images of thin fashion models draws on two reliable bogeys of 'political correctness' discourse – government censorship and the 'nanny' state. Although the term appears only once in a reasonably lengthy piece, its use in the title orients the reader's perspective from the outset, helping to justify the ambitious assertion that the (voluntary) suppression of these images amounts to the 'stifling [of] free debate in society', and facilitating the reader's acceptance

---

<sup>3</sup> It must be said, however, that Tsiolkas' discussion is an example of how even those speaking from a left perspective can take on the discursive terms in which progressive agendas were framed by those manipulating the code. The crux of Tsiolkas' (in Tsiolkas et al. 2008, 26-7) argument is the failure of 'political correctness' as a cultural intervention, an argument that assumes 'political correctness' to be an objectively identifiable phenomenon. Although he is alert to the crudeness with which proponents of liberalism defined the rhetorical terrain (Tsiolkas et al. 2008, 26), Tsiolkas (e.g. 28-9) slips easily to an acceptance of conservative constructions as an accurate account of the inherent properties of the left's project.

that responsibility for the management of children's body image is more properly that of schools and parents. In contrast, where the family and social relations in question are those of indigenous Australians, criticisms of 'politically correct' reluctance to impose Western legal and cultural expectations on remote indigenous communities can be used to *promote* interventionist strategies, thanks to the code's versatility (e.g. Devine 2007, 11).

Mirroring the contemporary deployment of the code in Australia, the term continues to appear in the US to critique a range of social and policy areas. For example, Ravitch (2005, 18) recycles the familiar rhetoric of the early 1990s in praising the enduring efforts of the NAS in defending educational standards against 'the excesses of political correctness'. These 'excesses' comprise a familiar list of culprits: the curricular de-centring of Western culture and perspectives (Ravitch 2005, 8), the dissolution by multiculturalism of a sense of national community (15), and 'misinformation' about the alleged systemic disadvantage experienced by females in the academy (16). In contrast, Wright and Cummings (2005) reapply the code in a new way to argue that the impact of 'political correctness' on standards of appropriate treatment for mental illness has been destructive. In his preface, Cummings (2005, xiii-xiv) decries the move away from scientific integrity and open inquiry in the psychology profession at the hands of 'agenda-driven ideologues' who facilitate the destigmatisation of mental pathologies (see also Wright 2005, xxiv-xxv; Cummings and O'Donohue 2005, 13; Zur 2005, 53ff.).

As the above shows, the code of 'political correctness' is still an effective force in shaping public discourse about the issues around which it initially circulated (feminism, multiculturalism, and the nature of common culture), despite the particulars of those issues varying over time. This can be taken as a sign of the term's robust elasticity, which allows it to be deployed in a variety of new and not so new contexts as the authoriser of sometimes quite contradictory positions, without these contradictions and diverse applications threatening the coherence of the code as a framing device. The ongoing deployment of the term to authorise racist and anti-feminist views across the Anglo-American world suggests that the passing of time has not led to any weakening or diffusion of the code's ability to discursively organise social and political positions. Suhr and Johnson (2003, 6) note how the code, in the process of being applied to a wide range of disparate contemporary scenarios, has the ability to recontextualise 'old' issues as of immediate concern, and in

need of urgent address. As such, the continuing permeation of popular discourse by references to ‘political correctness’, and the breadth of their application, should not be dismissed as a sign of fetishistic adherence to old discursive habits, but understood as alarming proof of the durability, effectiveness and flexibility of its encoding capacity. It indicates the necessity for further exploration of the ongoing relationship between the code of ‘political correctness’ and the narratives used by progressive political movements like feminism to set and justify their own positions.

Of particular concern to academic feminists are observations that, in the institutional domain as well, accusations of ‘political correctness’ are still used to contest the relevance of gender to the research process (Logan and Huntley 2001, 634) and to underpin the reinvigoration of gender inequity (Morrison et al. 2005, 151). Beyond that, feminists (e.g. Suhr and Johnson 2003, 10; Bailey 1997, 22) have been alert to the extent to which the successful devaluation of positions labelled ‘politically correct’ has supported the critique of ‘second-wave’ feminism in contemporary culture by creating common understandings about the appropriate attitudes to adopt in regard to political agendas which foreground oppression in their demands for social goods. Announcements of a postfeminist age or alignment with the ‘third wave’ also accomplish that detachment for feminists themselves who are anxious to distance themselves from a ‘politically correct’ emphasis on women’s victim status (Nurka 2002, 177, 188, note 1; Bailey 1997, 22). The devaluation of victimhood as a platform for collective solidarity, and the corresponding redefinition of discriminatory practices as personal interactions demanding individual responses – classified as part of the impact of the campaign against so-called ‘political correctness’ – have been recognised as weakening the feminist movement and causing women’s renewed reluctance to identify coercive practices like sexual harassment as victimisation (Prokhovnik 2004, 2; Kitzinger and Thomas 1995, 39, 46).

Alongside feminists’ awareness of how such recontextualisations of their political rationales affect the movement can be found urgings by discourse analysts for increased research into the discursive operation of the ‘political correctness’ code (e.g. Suhr and Johnson 2003, 6) and a general recognition that politics – understood in its material, outcomes-oriented aspects – is mediated through struggles over meaning-making and narrative production (e.g. Weir 1995, 52; Farred 1995, 183; Cameron 1994, 29). Discursive

interventions, especially those which are orchestrated via the sorts of institutional and financial power applied by conservatives in constructing and critiquing ‘political correctness’, structure the field of actions available to members of a polity by delimiting the forms of reasoning customarily used in relation to particular issues (Greenfield and Williams 2001, 34). In view of these parallel analytical insights, it is somewhat surprising that, amongst feminist discussions of the complex of matters connected to the ‘political correctness’ code, consideration of how feminists themselves should navigate the discursive field produced by the debates around ‘political correctness’ has been virtually absent. Such considerations would seem to be particularly pertinent to academic feminists as participants in discourse production – writers and readers of theoretical texts which cannot remain detached from the wider discursive field of feminist and public commentary in which they are embedded.

That is not to say that feminists have not engaged the concept of ‘political correctness’ from a discourse-analytic perspective at all – both Weir (1995) and Smith (1995) have contributed detailed demonstrations of how the discourse operates as a cultural frame in media stories. They demonstrate how the code is made to organise disparate and locally specific social phenomena according to its overarching meaning system (e.g. Weir 1995, 64; Smith 1995, 30). However, neither study deals directly with the implications for feminism of the code’s discursive aspects, nor specifically with the question that might naturally emerge from such a focus: what would count as an appropriate feminist discursive practice in the context of the code’s broad and deep capacity to structure our perceptions of cultural and political life? By way of a tentative answer I suggest that such a practice would need to be a sort of parallel but pro-active endeavour, which would seek neither to navigate round the code as if it were an immovable obstruction, nor to engage it in the form of a directly dialogic response.

The first of those options would be typified by Mills’ (2003) solution to the problems women now face in specifying their preferred labels of address (whether or not to use ‘Ms’) in the context of such linguistic interventions now being categorised under the banner of ‘political correctness’. Mills’ (2003, 90) framing of the problem constitutes a retreat of sorts – for her, the task for language campaigners now is to define their campaign as ‘anti-sexist’, and therefore distinct from (and even a challenge to (104, note 1)) that which has

been defined as ‘politically correct’. Her solution is therefore not to mount a challenge to the discursive terms of ‘political correctness’, but to skirt around them by carving out a space for reform which can remain uncontaminated by them (assuming that such a discursive disimbrication were even possible (see Atmore 1999a, 190; 1999b, 92)). Such accommodations to the discourse of ‘political correctness’ on the part of feminism have even been revalued as a mark of feminism’s inventiveness in a hostile environment – less deradicalisation than ‘survival in a climate of backlash and declining opportunities’ (Taylor and Rupp 1993, 38). Whatever such moves say about the resourcefulness of feminists, disengagement from the complexities of the codifying frames that structure public discourse to feminism’s disadvantage seems both unnecessary and ill-advised.

The second option – that of confronting the code-makers from a discourse-analytical perspective – might take the form of focused deconstructive attempts to challenge the discursive logic which underpins attacks on feminist ontologies of women’s experience. The aim would be to demonstrate, amongst other things, the lack of necessity in the semantic clusters that have formed around the concept of victimhood, or of the lack of foundation in the meaning systems which are invoked to legitimise the distinction between ‘real’ victims and those who simply wallow in a state of their own making. Such strategies have their place, and indeed, will inform some of the analysis developed in this thesis. However, these remain to some extent meta-discursive strategies which require a temporary evacuation of the discursive field in which feminist theory normally operates during the process of its production. What are really required are consistent approaches to negotiating the code in potentially disruptive ways in the everyday course of our theoretical production when the code is not necessarily the topic of conversation. In writing theory, feminists are participants in a discursive field where, in the broadest sense, the code exists as an available interpretive framework. With understandings of the code’s associations so well-developed, references to any of the code’s individual components (victimhood, speech regulation, ‘date rape’, etc.) risk activating interpretations of those components according to the code, irrespective of whether the code itself is specifically invoked. As feminists writing theory, that is, as producers of discourse, it is not possible for us to disengage from the discursive field in which the ‘political correctness’ code is now such a prominent organiser of meaning, and our discourse production should take account of that.

Furthermore, the prospect of mounting a direct ‘response’ to the code is both risky and problematic. It is risky because the concept of ‘response’ entails imagining feminist reasoning as impelled by other forces and dictated by terms originating elsewhere. Conservative framings are positioned as having the power to demand a reaction, which feminists duly provide. The problematic nature of ‘response’ also lies in its assumptions about the clarity of the demarcation between various ‘sides’ of the debate, and the temptation to conclude that the political imperative that emerges for feminism from that construction is necessarily an oppositional one – should *we* automatically reject the substance of *their* arguments, and, if not, would it be possible for feminists to incorporate positions that may resonate with those of professed antagonists in ways that nevertheless retain autonomy over meaning-making processes? Such autonomy would rely, at the very least, on a certain mindfulness about the forms in which available interpretive codes are invoked, manipulated and accommodated within feminist writing.

My raising of these questions presupposes the view that feminist efforts to date to develop ethical and strategically effective rhetorical practices in the context of powerful anti-feminist codes like ‘political correctness’ have been inadequate. I assert this specifically in relation to feminist practice which involves the orientation of writers and readers of feminist theory towards victimhood and the category of the ‘victim’. As will be demonstrated later in this thesis (see Chapter 5 below), it is now commonplace for feminist theorists to repudiate victimhood as a viable ontology of women’s experience of gendered subordination, preferring instead to highlight the ways women exercise agency and develop coping strategies within the constraints of that subordination. My elaboration of the impact of this apparent consensus on feminist theorising is developed on the basis of Smith’s (1990; 1999) analyses of the part played by reading practice in the operation of ‘textually-mediated discourse’. While a more in depth discussion is undertaken later in the thesis (see Chapter 1 below), here it is useful to summarise briefly Smith’s approach. Reading practice consists of the iterative process whereby texts dynamically enter into the formation of social consciousness as readers utilise their interpretive competencies to realise the meanings intended by the text. In doing so, readers suppress any evidence at their disposal which counters the text’s presumptions and threatens its coherence; they must collude with the text in recognising the knowledge objects pointed to by the text, and which are

presumed to be recognisable by all such readers. By drawing readers into such acts of recognition, in company with the imagined collective who are similarly capable of recognising the named objects, texts operate coercively to repress aberrant data and to consolidate certain forms of knowledge as commonly accepted by participants in particular social spheres. These forms of knowledge constitute ‘worlds-known-in-common’ (Smith 1999, 51) which organise social relations between these participants, and position them appropriately with respect to that objectified knowledge. That is, readers of feminist theoretical texts enter into social relations with other feminists during the act of reading. Where the interpretation of references to victimhood is concerned, I will show that readers are often required to subscribe to the devaluation of victimhood and to excise alternative views of victimhood in order to make sense of texts. Such interpretive manoeuvres are not optional – if the reader does not have the skills to accomplish them, she will literally not understand the text.

Apart from the coercive aspect of that process – significant enough in the context of feminism’s aspirations towards inclusiveness – is the role of the ‘political correctness’ code in normalising these devaluations of victimhood and the particular understandings of victim attributes that appear to warrant them. The act of recognition in which texts call upon readers to engage, and which involves readers identifying the object named in the text – here the ‘victim’ as an undesirable (even impossible) subject position – relies on that object having been consolidated as a recognisable entity. Whilst this *may* have been accomplished by repeated feminist statements of this position, it has *surely* come about through the success of the ‘political correctness’ code in establishing victim claims as suspect in popular consciousness. In this sense, I use Smith’s broader theory of reading practice to extend her specific explanation of how the ‘political correctness’ code works to generate ‘procedures for selecting syntax, categories, vocabulary in writing and speaking, for interpreting what is written and spoken, and for positioning and relating discursive subjects’ (Smith 1995, 27). Once a collection of disparate semantic, syntactical and classificatory elements has been reorganised and recontextualised as belonging to the phenomenon called ‘political correctness’ (see also Jardine 1995, 132), those individual elements henceforth bear the potential for conceptual re-association with the entire edifice of the code, especially if that re-association serves an interpretive requirement.



The problem is only partly that the interpretive apparatus which is activated during the work of meaning-making within feminist theory is furnished by an aggressively anti-feminist rhetoric. That may indeed be cause enough for alarm, and elsewhere, feminists have certainly seen any resonance between conservative or popular discourses and feminist narratives as problematic (e.g. Mardorossian 2002a, 746; Hemmings 2007, 71; Atmore 1999a, 201; see also Walters 1995, 136). However, given that the lines of demarcation between the discourse of feminists and of those who comment about feminism, hostile or otherwise, are not perfectly clear (Loudermilk 2004, 154; 202 note 4), the issue of defining what an oppositional stance might look like is complex, even if we were to allow that this is the strategy that necessarily serves feminism the best. Indeed, what is oppositional along one dimension may be collusive along another. As much as I do not want to minimise the fact that the ‘political correctness’ code was (and is) part of a concerted campaign to erode feminist gains, I also do not want to make assumptions about what constitutes the appropriate feminist position to occupy with respect to conservative discourses about ‘political correctness’. The immediate problem is that particular understandings of victimhood have swiftly stabilised within feminist theory without having been subject to conscious and truly collective deliberation. That is despite the fact that these understandings are often invoked as part of the given, ‘world-in-common’ knowledge shared by all feminists. Because this mode of referencing victimhood unavoidably draws in coded meanings from elsewhere, it is impossible for any assumptions in play to be marked as having been developed autonomously within feminism. Perhaps more importantly, it enjoins feminist agreement by requiring the suppression of alternative framings of victimhood.

A number of deleterious consequences flow from that. Firstly, the apparent strength of the feminist consensus about the need to repudiate ‘victim politics’ that is the starting point of much feminist reasoning mutes what few concerted feminist arguments there are for greater nuancing of the conceptualisation of victimhood. The presumption of this consensus opens out a hospitable space within feminist thinking for celebratory analyses of localised, individuated resistance. The ostensible motivation for such a refocusing is simply the recovery of that which the preoccupation with victimhood has allegedly overshadowed, but the outcome in practice is the displacement of that which, by definition, cannot co-exist

with agency. The denial of the possibility of that co-existence repositions the origins of victimhood within the innately weak psychology of the victimised, so that the subject who acts cannot simultaneously identify herself as the object of oppression. As a result, one of the foundational analytical categories of second-wave feminism, that which enabled the redefinition of previously naturalised practices and institutional arrangements as victimising to women, has been emptied of its political force (see Siegel 1997b, 57; Mardorossian 2002a, 766). Finally, the social relations enacted during the reading of theoretical texts include not just those that orient academic feminists to the knowledge objects they are called upon to recognise, but also those which establish the spaces within feminist theory where the voices of the women it claims to speak for and about might notionally be accommodated. Because feminist modes of discourse invalidate the theoretical possibility of the knowing victim-subject, it works to silence the voices of those seeking to claim victim status. As Bacchi (2005, 205) reminds us, it is beholden on us as feminist writers to scrutinise the interpretive schemas that underpin our own supposedly reformist discourse, lest they authorise the development of agendas which ‘may well help some women at the expense of others’. In that context, we should consider whether a more ethical and strategically useful mode of reference might be adopted, one which opens a discursive space for those currently excluded, but which also succeeds in working disruptively against the anti-feminist code of ‘political correctness’. This possibility is developed in the conclusion of this thesis.

Recommending the pursuit of a rhetorical practice such as this makes no assumptions about the merits or otherwise of reinstating victimhood as a primary driver of feminist political engagement. That said, my anxiety about the extent to which feminists are called upon to endorse embedded assumptions about the inherent weakness of such a politics presupposes a readiness to recover whatever strategically effective formulations of victimhood are suppressed in that process. It is envisaged that one of the outcomes of opening up feminist rhetorical practice to the perspectives of self-identified victims along the suggested lines would be the re-imagining of victimhood in more flexible and politically potent terms than those which currently prevail, as well as the re-incorporation of victim subjectivities into the project of feminist knowledge production.

Nor does the thesis aim to trace a shift in feminist attitudes to victimhood over time, nor necessarily to ascribe the causation of such a shift directly to the impact of negative codings of victimhood in the discourse of ‘political correctness’. Others certainly *have* drawn causative links such as this between various changes in feminist approaches and the success of the ‘political correctness’ code in supporting the general backlash against feminist demands (e.g. Prokhovnik 2004; Nurka 2002; Kitzinger and Thomas 1995; Atmore 1999a; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Loudermilk 2004; Gill 1995, 172, 183 note 5). Whilst these arguments are intuitively acceptable and I have no wish to challenge them (not the least because these suspicions point to the need to investigate these links more fully), the causal effects they cite are broad and fairly diffuse (with the possible exception of Loudermilk 2004), and as such are difficult to demonstrate conclusively. The thesis does not aim to establish a point at which we can detect evidence of the infiltration of anti-feminist perspectives into academic feminist writing, which we could then use to deduce particular lines of causation. Tracing such causation would assume furthermore that the analyst can discern what is ‘really there’ in feminist theory as a body of raw and directly interpretable data, but what ‘is’ there may be difficult to distinguish from the historiographies feminists construct about what is there (Hemmings 2005, 120; 2007, 73; Dunn 2005, 7). The focus, then, is not on a ‘before’ and ‘after’ moment dividing two styles of feminist theorising, but rather on a ‘before’ and ‘after’ moment *in the contextualising conditions* within which feminist theoretical discourse is produced. As noted, that moment has been precisely located by a number of commentators and provides a point where the nature of the discursive intersections to which feminist theory was liable definitively changed, and then remained relatively static in the context of the durability of the ‘political correctness’ code. This is so, however we envisage the nature of the internal discussions being played out in feminist theory over time.

The position taken, then, is that the interpretive apparatus constituted by the code of ‘political correctness’ is indispensable to realising the meaning intentions of many feminist texts, naturalising negative valuations of victimhood when these are not fully supported or explained by the text itself. Feminist references to victimhood become the point of articulation between feminist theory and the discourse of ‘political correctness’, the point at which this discourse is mobilised in the service of feminist meaning-making practices.

Bringing into view these processes of meaning-making transforms interpretive analysis from an archaeological investigation of the static, written archive constituted by a body of dumb texts into the dynamic, conscious re-enactment of reading practice. In line with this, the stance I adopt towards the academic feminist texts in question is a meta-theoretical one, interrogating how they act discursively on readers to secure their subscription to particular narratives. Because of that, I do not undertake a literature review in the conventional sense, since the feminist literature which I contextualise as relevant to the issue of the ‘political correctness’ code is itself one of the objects of the meta-analytical approach taken here. That is, it constitutes in part the data which is analysed for the rhetorical mechanisms which connect feminist references to victimhood back to the code, rather than for the substance of the arguments put forward. If the concerns of this thesis were to be situated within any particular literature, that would consist of studies that undertake a similar task of meta-critically examining regularities across feminist writing. The actual content of those studies (the specific regularities they discuss) is not necessarily relevant to the concerns of this thesis. What is relevant, however, are the epistemological questions raised in those studies about the position of the analyst as explicator of these regularities.

It is appropriate that these questions be taken up, and I do so in Chapters 1 and 2 where they serve to illustrate points about my own theoretical (and consequently methodological) framework. In Chapter 1, I outline my theoretical approach to unpacking the disciplinary processes at work in the enlistment of feminist co-operation in recognising and accepting the dominant understandings of victimhood as beyond debate. I apply Smith’s (1990; 1999) theory of ‘textually mediated discourse’ to position feminist theoretical writing less as a body of textual content than as the site where social relations between writers and readers, and between individual subjects and an imagined collective, are discursively operationalised through rhetorical practice. In that sense, feminist *theory* is taken to be *practice*, in that it functions to progressively consolidate certain forms of knowledge as collectively shared via preferred modes of reference. Specifically, I draw on Smith’s notions of referral and recognition to suggest that the discourse of ‘political correctness’ constitutes the extra-textual site where the reader of feminist texts can correctly recognise objects, such as the ‘passive victim’, which are named therein. When that happens, that discourse is iteratively re-mobilised by and within feminist writing.

In keeping with the view that the research methodology is contingent on the theoretical approach, methodological issues are addressed in Chapter 2. Having positioned feminist theory as a social *practice* with explainable effects on readers' consciousness, it is necessary to consider what implications that epistemology has for our survey method and evidence gathering. It is assumed that reading practice is a dynamic process which enters readers into social relations with other members of her community and activates iteratively and *in situ* the interpretive schemas required to make sense of the text. Texts are not resting repositories of data which await and remain inert under our archaeological scrutiny. As analyst, I am also first and foremost a reader, and my analysis takes the form of a documented enactment of reading practice, which brings into view the interpretive processes in question in the very act of recording these as evidence to support my case. The acts of reading, interpretation and explanatory analysis are therefore isomorphic. In that chapter I examine how this isomorphism, prohibiting as it does the possibility of any discreteness between reading subject and static text, bears on the questions of what counts as 'evidence' in the context of the requirements of acceptable scholarship. As well, I discuss how acknowledging the role played by the iterative and dialogic nature of reading activity in forming collective knowledge affects our intuitive impulse towards data *accumulation* as a case-building strategy. I consider whether the quantitative assumptions which recommend that cumulative approach are an appropriate basis on which to capture the multi-dimensional aspects of reading.

Having established the theoretical premise that the discourse of 'political correctness' infiltrates feminist theory via feminist framings of victimhood, in Chapter 3 I describe how the category of 'victim' has been encoded by that discourse. This is by way of setting the discursive context which has a bearing on the way feminist references to victimhood succeed in being understood. The chapter describes the interpretive framework which continues to constitute a reliable mechanism for orienting readers to certain positions, especially when explicit intra-textual clarification of intended meanings is not provided. Part of that chapter focuses on the populist writings of a group of self-identified feminists who repeat the attacks on victimhood and contemporary feminism which were circulating in the wider discourse. That these writers claimed to be themselves feminists means that it is by no means obvious what a typical feminist 'response' to the conservative attacks can

be expected to be. Indeed, the final section of this chapter deals with the varied ways in which academic feminists immediately reacted to and framed the issue of ‘political correctness’ and its narrative of feminism’s obsession with victimisation. The significant finding is that, despite its agenda of critical examination, this academic feminist literature often fails to interrogate the discursive operation of the ‘political correctness’ code and accepts the objectivity of entities like ‘victim feminism’ which the code constructs and vilifies.

The extent to which ‘victim feminism’ has been reified in academic feminist writing as a recognisable form of feminism is taken up more specifically in Chapter 4. The argument is that feminist analysis of this concept has been less than robust. Even feminist challenges to the attribution of this term to contemporary feminism often took the form of simply denying that feminists were preoccupied with victimisation. In short, feminists seemed to credit ‘victim feminism’ as a knowable concept which could and even did apply to a form of feminism that was excessive in its emphasis on women’s victim status, arguing that the contemporary form either did or did not correspond to it. This registers as a decisive moment in setting the stage for ongoing repudiation of victim identification by feminists to pass as relatively unremarkable. It also saw the inception of a narrative about the dangers and limitations of ‘victim feminism’ whose potency endures even in very current feminist writing. This narrative is problematised on two counts. Firstly, it contains conflicting strands: either the entrenched rejection of ‘victim feminism’ is a mark of the sophistication of contemporary feminism and its break from earlier forms of theorising, or ‘victim feminism’ poses a continuing risk and contemporary feminists must be on the alert to counter its effects. Secondly, feminist attempts to define both the temporal and spatial location of ‘victim feminism’ are so inconsistent that the grounds for crediting its objective existence are highly questionable.

In the context of the interpretive schemas whose construction these two chapters have described, Chapter 5 is devoted to documenting the processes by which these schemas are regularly invoked in a sample of feminist theoretical writing. These schemas enable readers to recognise the denigrated object named as ‘victim’ by matching its features to the discursive object constructed in the extra-textual world by the code of ‘political correctness’. Thus, this anti-feminist discourse is implicated in feminist meaning-making

practices and in the repression of alternative framings of victimhood entailed in these practices. The survey data is derived from a selection of feminist journals on the basis that journals represent a particularly potent form of theory for our purposes. Firstly, the journals self-situate via their titles and vision statements within feminist theoretical literature, and are therefore recognised by the feminist community as forums for feminist discussion. The perception of their function as organising forums for the circulation of feminist knowledge – as central foci which co-ordinate a wide diversity of contributions – is strengthened by peer review and editorial processes which work to authorise those contributions as a legitimate part of the collective feminist project. Any rhetorical regularities which emerge in that scenario are significant in that they seem to originate spontaneously in a set of otherwise unrelated authors – this appears to be a true consensus, and one which is de-problematized as a function of the peer review framework. The discussion of the way victimhood is framed by feminists will also reveal how a binary conceptualisation of passive victimhood and agentic resistance has been rhetorically secured.

I expand on the privileged place ‘resistance’ and ‘agency’ now occupy within feminist thinking in Chapter 6, where I assert that the uncritical valorisation of agency has been enabled by the comprehensive devaluation of victimhood in feminist writing, itself legitimised by the extent to which victim status is denigrated in the wider discursive context. The suggestion is that, far from empowering women and feminists as it was intended to do, the abandonment of victim terminologies to articulate women’s experience has not only replaced one form of supposedly dominant thinking with another, but also eradicated the discursive space where the victim subject might express herself. Moreover, the agent/victim binary has developed as a central structuring principle within feminist thinking, staking out what counts as appropriate feminist research agendas and defining the grid in which certain perspectives sit more comfortably than others.

The exclusion of victim subjectivities, along with the disciplining of feminist readers in line with dominant understandings, is contrary to a feminist ethic of inclusion, and potentially strategically limiting for the feminist project. As well, while recognising feminists’ long-standing ambivalence towards the advantages of claiming victim status for women, I suggest that the emergence of the ‘political correctness’ code recontextualised this ambivalence so as to raise new questions of discursive entanglement for feminists.

Whatever intervention is possible will therefore serve a double purpose. Firstly, it will recommend a rhetorical practice which avoids incorporating assumptions about already-given knowledge in such a way that certain subjectivities are disallowed. Secondly, it will consider whether that practice could reflect the autonomous production of feminist thought at the same time as it acts as a circuit breaker in refusing to replicate the ‘political correctness’ code. The possibility of mindfully negotiating the discursive field in which feminist theoretical writing inserts itself depends on being able to counter some of the views most commonly held by discourse analysts – the essential uncontrollability of meaning production and interpretation, the constitution of subjects by discourse, and the irreducible paradox of simultaneously inhabiting and attempting to critically analyse a discourse.

The thesis concludes with an examination of that possibility in the light of my interpretation of Smith’s (1990; 1999) theory of reading practice and the analysis that I have developed from it. Such a theory admits a view of readers who knowingly mobilise selected interpretive frameworks and, in the process, knowingly suppress potentially disruptive elements. My contention is that knowing readers can become knowing writers who have some control over the sorts of interpretive manoeuvres their texts will require of readers. Feminist theoretical writing is itself a form of ‘textually mediated discourse’ in Smith’s sense, organising social relations between members of the participating feminist community, and working to consolidate the knowledge it holds as an objectified ‘world-in-common’. In that sense, rhetorical practice – the micro-endeavour of how words and sentences are put together in the porous context of all discourse production – provides a significant opportunity for a form of feminist activism and the realisation of a feminist ethics.



## **PART ONE**

### **Setting The Framework: Reading Discourse Into Texts**

# 1 Discourse And Feminist Texts: Theory As Practice

## Introduction

If the aim of this thesis is to explicate how the discourse of ‘political correctness’ is invoked and replicated by feminists, then the obligation is also to situate this discussion within what could be broadly classified as discourse analytical approaches. Identifying thematic similarities in the way victimhood is negatively framed both across feminist theoretical writing and between feminist theory and anti-feminist commentary is only indicative of a discursive power whose precise operation demands to be unpacked. Therefore, our theoretical framework needs to be able to do more than simply draw comparisons in terms of content and meaning. It needs to be able answer questions about *how* such a normalisation in feminist modes of referring to victimhood and agency has been accomplished: why do feminists persist in replicating the victim/agent binary, as if it exhausts all the possible meaning requirements they have for talking about women’s experience of subordination; what legitimises these regularities and why are feminist theorists so routinely obedient in their devaluation of victimhood; how does the feminist stance towards victimhood remain coherent in the face of disruptive empirical and logical evidence? And importantly, if we are implicating the power of the code of ‘political correctness’ in that normalisation, then we also need to describe how the discursive connections are made between the code and feminist modes of expression.

To assist in answering these questions, I will draw heavily on Dorothy Smith’s (1990; 1999) analysis of reading practice as a dynamic, consciousness-forming process. In analysing the ramifications of the way victimhood and, by extension, agency are being constructed in feminist theory, my approach is to treat feminist theory as a site of rhetorical practice, in that the focus is on the interpretive effects produced by words in combination. The interest here is in what words *do*, not in the meaning they contain, and especially not in the meaning they might contain as discrete units. In this sense, the view of feminist theory assumed in this thesis is that it is itself a discourse amongst other discourses in the heuristic way we understand that broad term: it is an active organiser of the external world and of feminist subjectivity, rather than a vehicle that transparently transmits ideas and represents

its objects of analysis. Following Smith (1999, 75), the aim is to disrupt the notion of theory as meta-narrative standing outside the realm of social activity and to collapse the distinction between theory and practice.

For Smith, this collapse comes about because the relationship that is established between writer and reader in the activity of reading a text is a social one, in which the reader is required to draw on the particular interpretive frameworks made available by the writer/text. The text assumes that the reader is familiar with these frameworks and competent at applying them. In fact, she must be in order to make sense of the text (Smith 1990, 223; see also Mills 1995, 73). Thus, the reader cannot avoid participating in the text's meaning-making, and must collude in sharing the text's invocation of common understandings, even if she does not agree with them. She is coerced by the text, but can be knowingly so to varying degrees, depending on the idiosyncrasies of the experience she brings to the reading encounter. In this sense, then, the theoretical text is not simply the container for the product of intellectual activity; it cannot be viewed as belonging to a realm that stands outside practice. On the contrary, it *acts* by positioning the reader in precise ways, towards both its own content, and the knowledge community of similarly skilled readers amongst whom this reader must situate herself.

Reading is a social activity that produces material effects on the reader's consciousness in that it consolidates for her certain knowledge and beliefs as part of the shared understandings of her community. In this way, the individual consciousness is coordinated with the 'social forms of consciousness' which organise and are embodied in daily, local practices and social relations (Smith 1999, 49; see also 75-9). The reading of a text is the moment when 'discourse' is retrieved from its extra-textual virtuality and actualised in the meaning-making exercise undertaken by the reader. The material effects of reading are quite apart from the performative function that linguistic output is also assumed to have by discourse analysts (Coyle 2000, 253). While feminist theory certainly acts in the sense that it asserts, argues, or attempts to persuade to a point of view, this is not the main sense in which we redefine it as practice in this discussion. Rather, like all textual material, it also summons the reader to the task of *doing* reading, and doing it in precisely directed ways.

### 1.1 ‘Discourse’, ‘text’ and ‘language’

Although Smith regularly uses the term ‘discourse’ in the works on which I draw here, she does not describe her method of inquiry as ‘discourse analysis’ in either case (see Smith 1990, 9-11; 1999, 5-8). Where discourse appears as integral to her analytical method, it is always ‘textually-mediated discourse’ on account of the predominant role of texts as sites of the activation of discourses (e.g. Smith 1990, 163; 1999, 75, 232 note 2). She supports this view of texts with reference to Foucault, whose exploration of discourse implies, Smith (1990, 4; see also 1999, note 2, 232) claims, ‘working within the textual and from the textual’. However, as I will show, the place of the textual in Foucault’s concept of discourse (itself ill-defined) is highly contested. Therefore, although he is often the theorist of choice where the stated perspective is a discourse analytical one, his lack of attention to the way language is put to work in texts makes his approach fundamentally inadequate for our purposes. Indeed, disagreements across the whole field of discourse analysis (and there are many) frequently revolve around the relationship of discourse to language and texts. These disagreements are compounded by the fact that ‘texts’ are variously interpreted as anything from written and spoken language, to ‘the products of every other sort of signifying practice too’ (Coyle 2000, 253). The quest for clarity is not assisted by the fact that some discourse analysts eschew method almost as an article of faith (e.g. van Dijk 2001, 95-6; Torfing 1999, 291-2). For these reasons, it is necessary to give some consideration to where Smith’s (and hence my own) analysis fits in the diversity of discourse approaches.

I will not attempt to provide a precise definition of discourse or of what constitutes discourse analysis, since a wide variety of competing approaches travel under this banner (Cameron 1998, 947), albeit all underpinned by a broad rejection of the notion that words contain an invariant meaning that signifies a discursively independent reality. Some analysts (e.g. Wodak 2001, 66; Frow 1985, 209; Coyle 2000, 253) emphasise the linguistic component of discourse (such as its semantic and thematic patterns), but distinguish discourse by its systematic character – utterances are made possible not just by forms of language, but by ‘forms of combinations of these forms’ (Frow 1985, 209). Others (e.g. Fairclough 1989, 24; Hall 2001, 72; Hook 2001, 53) highlight those components that

exceed the linguistic (such as the social and institutional pressures that shape discursive production, but are included as part of ‘discourse’).

It is generally agreed that discourse is not reducible to either language or texts, but the place these occupy in discourse analysis is uncertain. Mills (1997, 42) solves the definitional issue by collapsing the terms as ‘language/discourse/texts’, before launching a discussion that reverts to using ‘discourse’ synecdochically to refer to that somewhat nebulous conglomerate. Burman (1991) uses ‘language’ and ‘discourse’ interchangeably to refer to the same entity, a usage that is facilitated by her assumption that preoccupations with discourse/language are to be seen in opposition to (possibly more effective) practical intervention in political disputes. In contrast, Hall (2001, 72) distinguishes language from discourse in claiming that Foucault’s contribution was to shift attention from the former to the latter, and Threadgold (1997, 60) criticises Weedon (and feminist poststructuralists in general) for having *reduced* discourse to language. In both these views, discourse exceeds, or is incommensurable with language, and is privileged as a theoretically superior concept. The relationship between this excess and instances of linguistic usage is not clear, but has been summarised as ‘language-in-action’ (Blommaert 2005, 2) or ‘language use, but language use as socially determined’ (Fairclough 1989, 22). These descriptions reflect perspectives shared across what is nonetheless a broad range of discourse approaches – that language is not a static vehicle for the direct transmission of already-existing meaning, but constructs and constrains meaning (e.g. Fairclough 1992, 39; Torfing 1999, 113; Potter and Wetherell 2001, 199), and that language is a social activity, rather than a mode of representation (e.g. Fairclough 1992, 63; Coyle 2000, 253; Tonkiss 1998, 248; Hall 2001, 72).

Within these broadly shared orientations, however, interpretations differ about how it is, for example, that language can be said to construct meaning. Fairclough (1992, 75 *passim*) reads the constitutive power of discourse via the vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and structure of texts, and he appeals to Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge* a number of times in the process. While Fairclough (1992, 40) interprets Foucault’s use of the term ‘statement’ from a conventional grammatical perspective, other theorists (e.g. Frow 1985, 208; Mills 1997, 60) would consider this too liberal an application of Foucault’s ideas, in that Foucault’s concept of the ‘statement’ did not refer to discrete utterances or sentences.

Foucault (2003 [1972], 53) was quite specific about his lack of interest in ‘the linguistic analysis of meaning’ as an archaeological tool to excavate these formations – whilst analysis of ‘a lexical organization, [or] the scansions of a semantic field’ might be legitimate in itself, studying how meanings of words have changed over time is not relevant in investigating discourse as the locus of the appearance and disappearance of conceptual objects. There are implications here for this project, whose focus is partly on the semantic associations that have accrued to the concept of the victim. Therefore, whilst Fairclough’s analytical focus is a productive one (and not dissimilar to that of other analysts (e.g. Potter and Wetherell 1990; Lemke 1995, 39-40)), there remain problems of theorising the systematisation of certain meaning formations that cannot be solved by recourse to Foucault. With respect to my research questions, Foucault’s ideas provide no guide for understanding how the collective feminist consciousness has been directed towards rejecting the politics of the victim when there are no particular institutional requirements to do so, nor precipitating conditions that necessitate that trend.

Part of Fairclough’s (1992, 37) agenda is to connect texts to wider social and power relations by combining linguistically-oriented discourse analysis with the social-theoretical approach typified by Foucault. This is in the hope of producing more rigorous and methodical Foucauldian analyses on the one hand, and more politically conscious linguistics ones on the other. Following Fairclough, Threadgold (1997, 10-12) aims to relocate Foucault within the tradition of structural linguistics in order to rescue linguistics from the neglect caused by poststructuralist preoccupation with discourse, but her success is also limited. In an approach not unlike Smith’s, Threadgold (1997, 177) focuses on the active role of texts in forming the habitus via the corporeal effects narrative positioning has on readers. However, although she introduces her textual analysis by situating it within a Foucauldian concept of discourse (‘all the *statements* that you might make about race or gender or protection [...] in this context at this time’ (Threadgold 1997, 168; emphasis in original)), she immediately begins to outline in detail the elements of Halliday’s functional grammar that she will utilise, and indeed, Foucault disappears from the subsequent analysis in which Halliday takes centre stage. Like Fairclough, Threadgold does not quite accomplish the reframing of linguistic and textual analysis within a Foucauldian

perspective, partly because the micro-operation of semantics and linguistic structures was not addressed in Foucault's concept of the 'statement'.

Similarly, Threadgold (1997, 145-6; see also 137) heuristically applies Foucault's concept of the 'archive' to talk at a broad level about how discourses of race and gender limit what can be known as 'true' at any given time. However, once she advances to the detailed analysis of a sample text, she falls back on Halliday – as, indeed, she must, partly because, as Foucault (2003 [1972], 146) points out, we cannot talk about our own archive, 'since it is from within these rules that we speak'. For Foucault, the scope of the archive appeared to be too far-reaching to serve the kinds of discourse analyses most researchers are in a position to do – ones which have a more detailed and concentrated focus than Foucault's sweeping historical genealogies (see Blommaert 2005, note 3, p241). This is not to suggest that it is invalid to highlight what Threadgold does – the discipline exercised by discourses, especially insofar as they are institutionally supported by, say, the law or medicine. Intense interest in Foucault's concept of the 'statement' and the constraints on what is 'sayable' in certain contexts has indeed yielded valuable insights into the workings of discursive power, irrespective of whether Foucault's definitions have been accurately interpreted in each case.

But, if Threadgold's (1997, 62) reading of Foucault is correct – that his concept of discourse includes behaviours, practices and technologies, and, moreover, that the verbal aspect of discourse is not homologous with 'language' – then Foucault's ideas do not seem to provide the theoretical means to expound the role of individual linguistic events in the operation of discourse. The nature of the 'whole series of criss-crossings' (Threadgold 1997, 65) which connect the otherwise anisomorphic realms of the discursive and non-discursive is not adequately explained by Foucault's concept of discourse, which is why Halliday must be brought into play to explicate the detail of textual and linguistic issues. But it is precisely these criss-crossings that we need to investigate here – how the code of 'political correctness' infiltrates feminist thinking and thence the daily material practices of readers-cum-social actors. Our project is roughly analogous to Threadgold's in its intent to reconnect broadly poststructuralist insights about the power of discourse to linguistic and textual modes of analysis by drawing the links between textual phenomena and generally pertaining cultural meanings and ideologies. But the fact that Threadgold must keep both

Foucault and Halliday in view to provide tandem theoretical frameworks, which are alternately invoked as required, suggests that this reintegration has not been fully accomplished.

As the above discussion suggests, attempts to revalorise textual studies by claiming them to be informed by (rather loose) interpretations of discourse in the Foucauldian sense (e.g. Threadgold 1997, 168) are less than convincing, at least insofar as that theoretical framework lacks some justification. As has been noted (Blommaert 2005, 102; see also Kendall and Wickham 1999, 119), Foucault's approach was historical, not linguistic, and animated by questions about the historical conditions of emergence of discursive objects. For these reasons, some writers displace the textual from Foucauldian discourse analysis. For example, Hook (2001) claims that the locus of Foucault's 'discourse' was not the internal properties of language, but material power, from which texts derive their authority – '[p]ower [...] cannot be fixed, or apprehended in the meanings and significations of texts, but must be grasped and traced through the analysis of *tactical and material relations of force*' (Hook 2001, 51; emphasis in original). Hook (2001, 54) points out that the sorts of bodily discipline described in *Discipline and Punish*, for instance, cannot be reduced to the operation of texts.

His emphasis on material power as the origin of the authority of texts figures texts (and discourse) as an instrument or outcome of power only – not as the site where that power is mobilised on an iterative basis, as Smith sees them. That is to say, discourse is taken to be 'true' simply because the power behind it guarantees that, not because of any rhetorical techniques that are *active* within the discourse itself (see Hook 2001, 46). For Hook (2001, 66, note 2), the conditions that establish the 'sayability' of saying certain things in certain contexts are all institutional, not conditions that it would be possible to accomplish textually. His encouragement to refocus on the authorising conditions beyond the text positions texts as a completely inappropriate means of excavating anything conclusive about discourse – textual evidence can be corroborated only by 'driv[ing] the analysis of the discursive *through the extra-discursive*' (Hook 2001, 65, emphasis in original; see also 54, 59). Texts are relevant only insofar as they are the knowledge products of institutional power, which is extra-discursive – figured as already there, and therefore able to be theorised as the origin of textual effects. However, the process by



which this power comes to be consolidated is left unexplained. As I go on to discuss, Smith addresses this issue through her theory of the dialogic operation of texts – reading is a dynamic activity involving the manipulation of knowledges which are at various stages of becoming consolidated, partly as the result of the consciousnesses that are formed by reading practice.

Hook's (2001, 41) argument is premised on providing a corrective to what he asserts to be habitual misapplications of Foucault's concept of discourse, which, according to Hook (2001, 43), includes aspects of materiality and power. However, it is possible that Hook's is also a serious misreading of Foucault. According to Sawyer (2002, 440), Foucault did not use the notion of discourse after *Archaeology of Knowledge*, when he shifted to addressing non-discursive practices. The concept of discourse is, therefore, quite distinct from Foucault's power/knowledge model with which it is often conflated. Whilst Sawyer's account is thoroughly convincing, I do not critique Hook's argument based on whether his is a more or less correct reading of Foucault for the reasons noted above – if Foucault's ideas generate an alertness to phenomena that are then cogently theorised, it is not necessarily invalidating if the resulting account is shown to lack perfect correspondence to Foucault's version. As Sawyer's title suggests, there is by now a well-developed 'discourse on discourse' which has produced a set of possible preoccupations with respect to discourse that are broadly accepted as being legitimate. However, it needs to be said that Hook's account does leave unanswered the question of the place of texts and language in his version of discourse (whether this is Foucault's or not). If the texts in question are, for example, the statements of penal law (which is the example that Threadgold (1997, 65) chooses to illustrate the incommensurability of discursive and non-discursive manifestations of the 'discourse' of panopticism, a view that Hook would seem to share), then it is relatively easy to argue as Hook does – that texts derive their authority from their institutional origin. Legal statutes are, after all, the designated instruments of state force; they do not need, in themselves, to *persuade* readers to their point of view. But if power is, as Foucault asserts, everywhere and operating at the micro-level where its institutional affiliations are diffuse or absent, then the role of texts in those instances is more complex and less easily dismissed. The problem with Hook's analysis is not that it relies on a collapsing of discourse and power/knowledge that is not provided for by his Foucauldian

framework; it is that, in his determination to detach ‘discourse’ from language and text and anchor it so firmly in the material, he does not explain precisely what is discursive about discourse.

Those of us who wish to situate the texts we are studying in wider contexts are still faced with the problem of explaining the connections between extra-textual power relations, tangible social outcomes, and textual strategies. Despite the contested status of texts in some versions of discourse analysis, it has been suggested that, if ‘the tectonic realm of discourses’ is to be breached, then it is necessary to eventually engage with close textual analysis (Potter and Wetherell 1990). Lemke (1995, 39) echoes this view –

If we are to have a social model of discourse as part of a general theory of social processes, then at some point we have to get very specific about what is actually said and done in a particular social event or text. Since so much of our viewpoint toward the world and social issues is constructed in language, and since we know more today about how language works that we do about any other system of semiotic resources, linking the phenomenon of social heteroglossia to the actual semantic patterns constructed in particular texts is an important task.

This is where Smith’s theory of the formation of social consciousness through the *activity* of reading is especially helpful. Although she sometimes appeals to Foucault, Smith (e.g. 1990, 30, 33) is also not averse to developing her own terminology to perform some of her most penetrating readings. Thus, decoupling textual analysis from any pretence to the pursuit of ‘discourse’ analysis as it is understood in the Foucauldian sense does not mean forgoing the contextualisation of the reading process within wider social relations. Smith (1990, 163) re-privileges texts as the site where the mechanics of discourse are open to direct investigation, as they are put to work in positioning readers in these relations in ways that will manifest eventually in the organisation and accomplishment of individuals’ daily social practices.

## **1.2 Texts and reading: discourse at work**

Along with Smith (and unlike Hook), many discourse theorists underline the close relationship between discourse and texts as the means of emergence of discourses (e.g. Kress 1985, 29; Fairclough 1992, 4; 1989, 24; Lemke 1995, 7; Parker 1990; Mills 1995, 159). These theorists aim to address the gap between Foucauldian-inspired discourse analyses, which lack detail about how the discursive process actually works at the micro

level, and linguistic ones, where the concept of discourse is confined to samples of spoken or written text. The motivation is to incorporate an emancipatory agenda into close textual analyses by addressing questions of social power as they manifest in discursive events. From that perspective, their approach appears promising for our purposes, but these analyses sometimes manifest a problem that makes them of dubious use, quite apart from the tendency noted above to press Foucault into a theoretical service for which his work is ill-equipped. The problem is that the focus is often small textual samples (e.g. individual speeches), which are contextualised by the analyst in such a way that his/her interpretation of the language sample is justified (Blommaert 2005, 240, note 3). For example, Fairclough (1989, 172ff.) analyses a speech by Margaret Thatcher, for which he narratively sets up over less than two pages an economic and political context extending back over thirty years. As part of this strategy, he selectively categorises a multiplicity of disparate historical factors as part of various ideological trends which are posed as pre-existing entities. He then interprets the speech as discursively embodying these trends. Thus he ‘finds’ in the text that which he has already constructed as potentially there. Elsewhere, Fairclough (1992, 94) claims –

[M]aking sense of Thatcher’s texts requires interpreters who are capable of making coherent connections between their heterogeneous elements, and part of the hegemonic project is the constitution of interpreting subjects for whom such connections are natural and automatic.

This may be true, but Fairclough does not demonstrate that making these connections is indeed ‘natural and automatic’ because he provides his readers with whatever interpretive tools he thinks they need.

Nevertheless, Fairclough’s comment does resonate with Smith’s (e.g. 1990, 121, 223) statements about the ‘making sense’ requirements of texts. Like Fairclough, she is also interested in exploring the fundamental importance of texts and their replicability in shoring up the ruling relations (Smith 1999, 79). However, Smith (1990, 12ff.) strengthens her credentials as a textual analyst in one significant case by carrying out a detailed reading of the construction of mental illness that does not rely on a potted contextualising narrative. She wants to show how the text instructs the reader to interpret certain details in accordance with the normative conceptual framework that identifies someone as mentally ill (Smith 1990, 15), but she avoids describing this framework as background for her analysis. Instead, she posits the analysis as the demonstration of the dynamic process of recovery of

the conceptual schema that has allowed her to recognise the text as an account of mental illness (Smith 1990, 16). Rather than her analysis allegedly illustrating the working out of macro forces that have already been asserted as informing the language sample, she shows how her interpretation is possible *only* because she has mastered the appropriate interpretive schema. In this, she also differs somewhat from Lemke (1995, 22, 55), who implies a degree of latitude in what ‘intertexts’ the reader chooses to use in interpreting a text. In Smith’s (1990, 223) view, the reader *must* use certain intertextual resources and interpretive frameworks in order to make sense of a text. This is not discretionary – if the reader does not have these intertextual resources at her disposal, she will not understand the text. This is so, irrespective of where the reader situates herself with respect to the ‘discourse viewpoints’ of her community (see Lemke 1995, 55), although this positioning *will* affect how she reacts to the interpretive imperatives imposed upon her.

In his reading, Fairclough (1989, 178) was interested in the relations constituted between Thatcher, the audience, and ‘the people’ in general. But Fairclough, the analyst, stood outside the discourse/text and is not part of the network of relations it creates. In contrast, Smith develops a theory of reading that puts her necessarily, as a reader of the texts she studies, *inside* the process of analysis (Smith 1990, 3-4, 223). Indeed, the work of analysis is isomorphic with the activity of reading, and the meanings she makes during that activity are only those that her recourse to particular conceptual frameworks allows her to make. As she makes various interpretive moves, she simultaneously brings into view these enabling frameworks. Smith’s focus on reading as a dynamic social activity of meaning recovery differentiates her approach from other feminists who also use forms of close textual analysis. Like Smith, Mills (1995, 25, 73) states that meaning does not reside in texts, but is the product of a negotiation between text and reader directed by ideologies circulating in other texts and discourse that make that text understandable. But unlike Smith, Mills (1995, 35) maintains that the reader can influence the interpretation of the text, and expects that once the constructed meanings have been demystified and supposedly commonsense interpretations ‘made strange’, ‘readers will see them as not being in their interests’ (Mills 1995, 197), and will be accordingly less captive to those interpretations.

In Smith's (1999, 150) view, though, there is a more complicated relationship set up by the way the text demands the reader's collusion in the retrieval of certain conceptual schema that militates against such an immediate resolution:

The text's trap is that its dialogue with the reader is reader-activated. In becoming the text's proxy, she takes on the text's organizing powers as her own. Just knowing how to read it enables the text to creep into her consciousness and take over [...] – not necessarily forcing the reader to agree with it, of course, but to adopt its organizing framework in selecting and interpreting other texts. This is the special competence of theory.

The reader may be compellingly aware of examples that are not accommodated in the order of the text and be able to mount counter-arguments to its rationale, but the reading process demands that she temporarily subdue these disruptive elements because she must enforce the text's rules in order to recover its meaning (Smith 1999, 152). A significant discursive shift is needed to break out of the order that regulates the text and the social relationship into which the reader must enter. The text remains impervious to disruption because its terms make no place for whatever subversive voices might well be imposing themselves on the reader (Smith 1999, 155).

Note that here Smith singles out theory as a particularly potent example of the way a discursive regime can insulate itself against challenge. The case in point is a passage from Giddens, a writer who has the authority to 'speak for sociology' (Smith 1999, 147). Smith's (1999, 147ff.) analysis of this passage is an attempt to account for her own sense of dislocation from Giddens' view that choice and freedom are intrinsic to *all* human action. Like all texts, Giddens' account provides instructions on how to defuse the potential inconsistencies that might be exposed in it by the reader's own experience or knowledge of other texts. In this case, Smith is aware of many examples of women who do not feel free, despite Giddens' (cited in Smith 1999, 147) assertion that 'we feel ourselves to be free' whatever our circumstances. However, Giddens' text does not admit the voices of these women, since it provides a particular definition of freedom according to which Smith is forced to concede that the women in her examples are indeed free, despite their assertions to the contrary (Smith 1999, 150-51). The replicability of the text means that a succession of individual readers are enlisted as proxies, participating in a form of social organisation as they iteratively take their place within (or without) the 'shared subjectivity' defined by the text's particular rules (Smith 1999, 153).

In terms of this study, Smith's theory helps to explain how assumptions of victim passivity have been threaded through feminist criticism and naturalised as the already taken-for-granted knowledge that is peripheral to the primary argument. In much the same way as the empirical evidence adduced by Smith cannot penetrate the order of meaning set up by Giddens' text, the reader of feminist theory may be able to point to examples of victims who are known to be, or claim to be, not helpless and self-deluded. However, the reader must still apply the text's rules that figure the victim as passive, and the 'passive victim' as deplorable, in order to understand the text's argument. Textual instructions direct her to interpret agentic behaviour as incompatible with victimhood, and often supply an alternative vocabulary to describe those who might otherwise be considered as victimised – survivors, resistant thinkers, conscious accommodators. This semantics has been constructed in such a way as to steer us around the need to combine associations of agency with the terminology of victimhood:

There are certain combinations of things, certain connections, it never occurs to us to make. There are gaps in the system of contextualizing relations that do not seem to be there because all those that *are* in use form a pattern that leads us 'around' the absent ones. In order for a gap to remain unnoticed, there must not be any possible combination of meaning-making practices that could lead us into it (Lemke 1995, 176).

I argue that such gaps do not remain quite as unnoticed as Lemke suggests, but the incentive is strong to read as if they were not there. Victim claimants, and the subjectivities announced by their claims, are not accounted for by a meaning structure that positions victims as objects and casts suspicion on the worthiness of victim claims on account of victims' inherent immaturity and deludedness.

Smith's theory of reading goes some way to resolving a conundrum to do with the epistemological status of the discourse analyst – how to reconcile the inescapability of being forever *in* discourse at the same time that discourse is held apart as a stable object of observation. Smith dissolves this dilemma by embracing it rather than eliding it, by presenting the process of interpretation and the revelation of the interpretive schemata that enable it as isomorphic. The analyst's activation of the meanings intended by the text depends on her competence at those schemas, and that competence stems precisely from her membership of society, not from her withdrawal from it in the name of textual analysis (Smith 1990, 223; 121; 1999, 49). The text is 'in the same world' (Smith 1990, 4) as the analyst, and her reading of the text is an exercise in 'doing knowing', in drawing on her

competence as a practitioner of the social relations initiated by her engagement with the text:

I explore the reader doing knowing where knowing is specifically a practice of reading. [...] Texts are analysed to display what the subject knows how to do as reader and what the subject knows how to do in reading, and in so doing also displays the organizing capacity of the text, its capacity to operate as a constituent of social relations (Smith 1990, 5).

Compare this to the position adopted by the analyst/reader in three other studies (Gallop 1992; Shands 1999; Hemmings 2005; see also 2007) whose aims resonate with that of this thesis: to examine textual regularities across feminist writing with the intent of intervening in the processes by which the technological properties of texts are operationalised to support dominant preoccupations and structure feminist argumentation. These operational aspects are articulated respectively as ‘the marks produced in the discourse of knowledge by a subject’ (Gallop 1992, 7), ‘the technology of Western feminist story-telling – its form, function and effects’ (Hemmings 2005, 117), and for Shands (1999, 2) the ‘structuring and orienting force’ of spatial metaphors, which constitute thereby ‘a primary axis around which feminist discourse revolves and as such, a key to feminist discourse’ (Shands 1999, 31). All these writers deploy the notion of a collective feminist subject to account for the regularity with which certain narrative habits recur across the body of feminist theory despite the diversity of individual authors (Gallop 1992, 7-8; Shands 1999, 28-9; Hemmings 2005, 117). This collective (un)conscious takes the role of propagating these limiting narratives where that would otherwise have to be attributed to individual authors, a more or less unappealing prospect for all of these analysts (Gallop 1992, 9; Shands 1999, 29; Hemmings 2005, 118). As I point out in the thesis conclusion, this reliance on a disembodied author, although it registers quite justifiably the fact that all knowledge production is a collaborative process not limited to authorial creativity, does compromise the potential for the sorts of individual textual interventions that are the ultimate aim of these studies. But, of course, it also compromises the analytical posture of these writers, who therefore cannot fully explain their own position vis-à-vis this collective writing subject. If the collective feminist (un)conscious appears to be capable of using otherwise disparate ‘real’ authors as the vehicle for transmission of common structuring narratives, how are these writers not equally in thrall to it (but see Hemmings 2005, 117)?

For example, Gallop (1992, 9) undertakes an exercise in ‘symptomatic reading’ of feminist literary criticism, and echoes Smith in her awareness that we can all only know

and speak from within history. But where this prompts Gallop deferentially to acknowledge the limitations that her necessary subjection to historical ‘symptoms’ imposes on her perception, for Smith, the social embeddedness that produces textual ‘symptoms’ is instrumental to the process of understanding texts. It is not a matter of ‘symptoms’ producing a generalised state of degraded perceptiveness or blindness (see Gallop 1992, 7, 9) against which the analyst must then somehow account for her own authority to diagnose these symptoms. It would be a paradox for Smith to be concerned, as Gallop (1992, 9) is, lest she appear to be relying on superior perception in her accounts of reading practice because the reader’s success in making sense of a text depends on the invocation of precisely those conceptual frameworks intended to be invoked by the text (Smith 1990, 121, 223). This is true even if those frameworks might be oppositional to or unaccommodating of elements of the reader’s own experience and knowledge of the world. Both Smith (1990, 121) and Gallop (1992, 9) assert that the interpretation of texts is not contingent or idiosyncratic, but this places Gallop the analyst in a difficult position. If she brings no idiosyncrasy to the task, if she is as historically symptomatic as anyone else, then from whence comes her capacity to excavate hidden textual meanings, to ‘[wrest] secrets the author might prefer to keep’ (Gallop 1992, 7)? For Smith, on the other hand, it would be impossible to recover from texts meanings that are not there or unintended.

Like Hemmings (2005, 117), the focus in this thesis is on the performative capacities of texts: what rhetorical techniques secure dominant narratives; ‘[what ...] work does this narrative do’; what is ‘the technology of Western feminist storytelling – its form, function and effects’? But if we are interested in the *effects* of feminist rhetorical practice, then we need to address ourselves to the site where those effects play out – reading activity. Whatever ‘securing’ texts succeed in doing can be accomplished only via the cooperation of readers who then perpetuate these dominant assumptions in their own writing. Hence, following Smith, we attend here to the process by which the individual consciousness *must* collude with the dominant narrative in order to understand a text, at the same as there is no imperative for her to completely relinquish alternative understandings of the social world represented by the text. She must hold them in abeyance, but she is not theoretically required by Smith’s account to be unaware of them. Successful transmission of the regularity in this case is achieved by a kind of virtual peer pressure exerted on the reader by



the awareness that all readers of the text are expected to be skilled at activating the same interpretive frameworks, irrespective of their opposition to those frames' embedded assumptions.

For Smith, as for these writers, the realisation of textual meaning is not a contingent or idiosyncratic process. Indeed, Smith (1999, 76) shares to some extent with the above writers the notion of a non-local disembodied consciousness to explain the replicability of meanings across dispersed sites. What *is* contingent in Smith's view is the particular intertextual experience each reader brings to the text, and the degree to which the requirement to call upon certain interpretive apparatuses and not others strikes her as odd or constraining. In other words, the reader must surrender to textual symptoms, must activate the particular interpretive process the text demands for its meaning to be realised, but she is not without the capacity to critically observe her own infection. Another way of explaining this variation in the extent to which different readers feel aligned with or alternatively repelled by the meaning that the text obliges them to recover is provided by Grasswick's (2004) theory of 'individuals-in-communities'. As Grasswick (2004, 103) explains, the 'particularization' of individual knowers derives from their simultaneous memberships in multiple epistemic communities, whereby they have been socialised to the practices of knowing peculiar to each community and develop competence in the epistemic standards that allow them to function as knowers in those communities. The potentially unique combination of memberships held by each individual in any community might cause that individual to experience 'a disunity of standards' (Grasswick 2004, 96) between the knowledge systems of the various communities to which she belongs. In that light, knowledge production becomes a process of negotiation between epistemic agents attempting to integrate other points of view into their particular (though nonetheless communally produced) set of interpretive frameworks.

It is precisely this straddling of different epistemic communities that causes Smith's aversion to Giddens' statements about the irreducibility of freedom. Her concurrent reading of texts from outside the discipline of sociology, in which writers assert their lack of freedom, causes Giddens' use of the pronoun 'we' to '[create] a rent in the text' (Smith 1999, 149). Although Smith knows how to take up the text's instructions about how to occlude apparent exceptions, these alternate accounts make her alert to the repressive

operation of the textual de-authorisation of those who claim to be not free (1999, 152). By framing reading practice as a process of necessary but knowing collusion with a text's order of meaning, Smith (1999, 76) reconnects the embodied historicity of readers and writers to the apparently autonomous circulation of 'discourse'. At the same time, this discourse does not hold the reader completely in its thrall, for its terms and assumptions can be brought into relief by the competing discursive terms of other epistemic communities to which the reader is equally committed.

However, whatever contingencies have worked to denaturalise certain textual assumptions for the individual reader, disrupting the knowledge standards of the community in which she is currently located is not easy. The text assumes the willingness of all its readers to follow the rules of interpretation that allow it to make sense. As Smith (1999, 151) observes, such is 'theory's capacity to control the bolt-holes through which the meaning of other texts or voices might escape its regime' that she was alone amongst her immediate colleagues in the dislocation she experienced in her reading of Giddens. Their frustration at her missing the point is aimed at her failure to properly take up the textual instructions, a skill that is required in order to enter into the social relations of sociological discourse and one that is assumed to be shared by all practitioners of sociological theory. Failure to sublimate her idiosyncratic sense of alienation to the interpretive standards held in common threatens Smith's credentials as a member of the disciplinary community of sociology.

### **1.3 Texts and the 'special competence of theory'**

Although Smith's view of reading practice informs the detailed analysis of the survey data in Chapter 5, there is value in confirming at this point the utility of her theory for our purpose. To that end, let us briefly apply it to some specific cases from the dataset in the light of what concerns us here – the successful recognition of the unworthy victim referred to in feminist theory. So, for instance, as 'trained reader[s] of the textual realities' (Smith 1999, 50), we are able to correctly interpret what is meant by 'a paradigm of victimhood' in Fernandes' (1999, 141) discussion of the film adaptation of the life story of India's 'bandit queen', Phoolan Devi, and of Devi's opposition to the screening of the film, especially its rape scene:

Phoolan Devi's effort to block the film's screening cannot be understood simply as a form of consent to the existing silence on rape in the hegemonic public sphere in India. On the contrary, her opposition to the film signals significant paradoxes in the representation of violence against women and the dangers of reproducing a paradigm of victimhood through this representation.

The use of 'paradigm' anticipates that we know how to assemble an assortment of semiotic elements into a particular cluster. Not only this, but we need to figure this clustered meaning as so reified that it is easily reproducible in a predictable form, and to know the grounds on which such a reproduction would present 'dangers'. We also need to understand how such dangers could inhere in what might otherwise seem to be the straightforward connection between 'violence against women' and these women's victim status. The text does not supply all the elements we need to apprehend it as a coherent whole – our recognition of what constitutes the 'paradigm of victimhood' and our acceptance of its being able to be understood as dangerous entail work of coordination to make the connections between other statements elsewhere about victimhood and this one (see Smith 1999, 127). In accomplishing this coordination, we have recognised what the text has intended us to – we have suppressed divergent possibilities for representing and understanding victimhood that could not be categorised within the 'paradigm', and subscribed to the formulation of a 'paradigm of victimhood' as an objectified entity that exists independently of our own experience and perception (see Smith 1999, 50, 118). Our recognition of what has been named engages us as individual readers in a social relation –

Naming objects is more than naming what is already constituted. It sets up a social organization of relations among subjects and 'what is there' that naming coordinates as the perception or recognition of an object in an ongoing social act. There is an alignment of the individual consciousnesses via the utterance (Smith 1999, 116).

The anticipation that the 'paradigm of victimhood' will be readily recognised both for what it is and for the risks it presents (even where victimisation by rape seems indisputable) grounds Fernandes' assertion that Phoolan Devi's motivation – open to speculation up to this point – 'cannot be understood' other than in this context.

The 'paradigm' of victimhood surfaces again in an article whose stated purpose is to disrupt the distinction between 'victims' and 'survivors' (Bahar 2003, 1026). The achievement of this purpose is, however, undercut by the interpretive moves the reader must make in the opening sentences:

Not wanting to deny the structural domination and day-to-day violence that most women experience, many feminists are equally preoccupied with acknowledging women's agency

and recognising their resistance. The feminist movement against domestic violence and sexual abuse, for example, has challenged the image of the passive, battered woman. Speaking not of 'victims' but of 'survivors', it has shifted attention to the multitude of ways in which women resist both male violence and its social legitimation [...] As such, the movement has helped feminism to disturb the paradigm of 'woman as victim' [...] (Bahar 2003, 1025).

The first sentence establishes as potentially contradictory the twin aims of wanting to acknowledge both structural oppression and women's agency in the face of that oppression – the goal posed is to maintain a delicate balance between these 'equal' but separate preoccupations, rather than to dissolve the distinction between victims and resisters/survivors. There being no inherent reason why representing women's agency should not be seen as compatible with talking about the structural domination that women suffer, the 'trained reader' must be able to view as natural Bahar's positioning of these as in tension. As the reader moves through the passage, it becomes no longer a question of balancing equal preoccupations, for attention has *shifted* to women's resistance – the initial tension has been resolved in favour of focusing on women's agency. The story recounts the discursive reframing of the passive, battered victim by the resistant survivor, with the 'battered resister' falling through the terminological cracks (and what are we now to make of the battered woman who *is* passive?). As readers we must be adept at taking up the textual instruction to view this discursive move positively – it 'has *helped* feminism to disturb the paradigm of 'woman as victim'' (emphasis added), a paradigm which evidently demanded disturbance. Again the naming of the 'paradigm' requires the reader to provide for herself the set of phenomena that constitutes it. Furthermore, the text expects the reader to enter into a particular social relation, with respect to her affiliation with the feminist project. It states that '[t]he feminist movement against domestic violence and sexual abuse' speaks now of survivors, not victims, and this has moved feminism in a positive direction. The text leaves no place for the reader-feminist who sees precisely this shift as problematic. If she does, her feminist membership is put in doubt.

Drawing on Smith (1990, 223; 1999, 117), I argue that the act of referring to the 'paradigm' of victimhood in these passages unites writer and reader in their competence as practitioners of certain interpretive schemata – the writer who knows how to invoke recourse to these schemata by the reader, and the reader who knows how to do that reading. This is a social relation, which 'creates the virtual space of a world recognized as known in

common' (Smith 1999, 128; see also 1999, 50). The reader must recognise the object 'paradigm' of victimhood in order to make sense of the text, and in making sense of the text, she ratifies the writer's assumptions about the recognisability of that object. Even more importantly, the acts of referring and recognition establish a 'community of attention' (Smith 1999, 119), where the community in question includes, at that moment, all the other putative readers imagined by this reader as also capable of making the required connections to accomplish recognition. From the reader's perspective, the consolidation of this 'paradigm' as an objectified form of knowledge owes much to the writer's clear presumption that there are no readers who would not know how this paradigm is constituted. This is what Smith (1999, 128) calls the 'dialogic of knowing': the virtual coming together of the reader with her community in concerted recognition of the extra-textual object named in the text, confirming what is known in common as a function of the subduing of divergent perspectives. This dialogic space is the site of knowledge formation, not 'the solitary Cartesian consciousness', nor the disembodied sphere of the discursive. In the local, physically isolated act of reading, the reader materialises the latency of 'discourse' in the effort to negotiate the present and the immediate of this text, and at the same time is integrated with other members of her knowledge community, with 'those who participate in the social act, whether present to one another or not' (Smith 1999, 127).

The complicating factor in this 'dialogic of knowing' with respect to victimhood is the co-existence throughout feminist texts of what could be called purely denotative or referential usages of 'victim' alongside references pointing to the paradigmatic victim. After all, feminists routinely refer to victims of, say, discrimination, sexual violence, or sexual harassment in ways that acknowledge victim status as incontestable in these cases. Feminist readers must be able to maintain parallel but competing competencies: to know when to activate their understandings of victimhood as paradigmatically negative, and when to suspend them. The reader must submit to the rules that the text establishes about how to distinguish cases where the designation 'victim' is intended to arouse suspicion from cases where the label is deployed to refer to a 'real' and uncomplicated state. In this sense, the successful recognition of what is named as 'victim' is an even more potent indicator of the reader's skilled membership of her community. This is especially so as non-referential usages of the term do not always overtly advertise their appeal to the

paradigmatic understanding of ‘victimhood’ in the way that Bahar (2003, 1025) and Fernandes (1999, 141) do. So, for example, when Guy (1996, 157) paraphrases (and endorses) Paglia’s description of contemporary feminism as ‘a loose coalition of groups of self-defined victims, obsessed with codes of political correctness and focused on blame’, the reader must utilise her training in the ‘paradigm of victimhood’ conceptual framework to interpret ‘self-defined’ as automatically rendering these victims’ claims suspect, since ‘self-defined’ by itself does not convey this. Her competence as a practitioner of the ‘paradigm’ helps her to normalise the proposed connection between the surface neutrality of ‘self-definition’ and the negative connotations of obsessiveness and revenge-seeking. The text functions to organise the reader’s attention in such a way that she selects the elements of her intertextual experience that authenticate this text as one that makes sense (see Smith 1999, 150). However, her simultaneous suppression of elements from the alternate ‘denotative’ interpretive schema complicates the dialogic process of referral and recognition, exposing the points at which the theoretical ‘bolt-holes’ are closed, but where they might also be prone to leakage.

This complexity plays out in a pair of articles by Jo Goodey – the first (2003) in the criminological journal *Punishment and Society (PS)* (‘Migration, Crime and Victimhood: Responses to Sex Trafficking in the EU’), followed in 2004 by one on the same topic and expressing similar concerns in *Feminist Review (FR)* (‘Sex Trafficking in Women from Central and East European Countries: Promoting a ‘Victim-Centred’ and ‘Woman-Centred’ Approach to Criminal Justice Intervention’). Goodey’s transportation of her arguments from the disciplinary domain of criminology to that of feminism reveals her in the act of practising, with varying degrees of comfort, the invocation of the conceptual schemata relevant to the respective domains. The first point to note is that the word ‘victimhood’ has been dropped from the title of the *FR* article and replaced with a title that clearly states Goodey’s position at the outset – supportive of victims’ rights, which are aligned with women’s rights. While it would be inappropriate to try to intuit Goodey’s motivation in making this change, it can be observed that in the context of the conceptual frameworks normally brought into play in contemporary feminist writing, the term ‘victimhood’ could not be presumed to elicit a sympathetic response to the article’s argument, nor even be accepted as the neutral signifier of a universally understood state. The article aims to

establish the victim status of trafficked women for the purpose of attracting to them the benefits which attach to such a recognition, but this is a sensitive endeavour in a disciplinary environment which has largely repudiated victimhood as a source of political and moral leverage. In this context, the equation of ‘victim-centred’ with ‘woman-centred’ has to make explicit that which would not normally be assumed within the feminist domain: that focusing on victimhood has a positive connection to the promotion of women’s rights. Meanwhile, the title of the *PS* article does not clarify what valuation the reader should attribute to ‘victimhood’, which might suggest that its moral valuation is less at issue in that disciplinary context.

This is supported by the fact that in the *FR* article there are many more instances of ‘victim’ and its derivatives used within quote marks (forty-two as opposed to two in the other journal), a technique which often signals some irony in the usage, an awareness of instability in the meaning of a term. That said, even in *FR* this does not always seem to be Goodey’s intention, since she includes them at times when her usage is uncomplicatedly referential (e.g. Goodey 2004, 26, 30, 35). At other times, the inverted commas do invoke the paradigmatic construction of victimhood, signalling awareness of a conceptual schema wherein victim status can be cause for suspicion (e.g. Goodey 2004, 34). Furthermore, ‘victim’ is also used in the *FR* article many times over without inverted commas, and there seems to be no particular system in Goodey’s choice of usage. The erratic application of quote marks is symptomatic of the tension between Goodey’s need to presume the facticity of victims of sex trafficking as central to her argument, and her acknowledgement of the alternative interpretive frameworks which make ‘victim’ a more fraught terminology within feminism.

Goodey’s apparent confusion can be read in terms of Smith’s (1990, 166) concept of ‘language-games’, whereby the organisation of the various social arenas we inhabit is reflected in the way we talk in and about them, and governs the terminology and syntactic connections we make as practised inhabitants of those arenas:

The words used are essentially part of the activity which forms a phase of the social relations. The social relations are not a context for the use of the term but the use of the term, how it means there, is part of the activity forming the relation. Thus, learning how to ‘mean’ with words correctly in that setting is learning how it is socially organized.

Goodey’s inconsistent practice in referring to victims might be interpreted as indicating that she is grappling with how to talk about victims in a particular disciplinary environment,

where complex interpretive practices come into play in the naming and recognition of the knowledge object 'victim'. Including 'victimhood' in the title of the *PS* article is 'part of the activity of forming the relation' with other criminologists and victimologists, who are less likely to find the term problematic and more likely to be oriented by it in favour of Goodey's position. Equally, omitting it from the title in *FR* also forms the relation with a feminist readership less inclined to automatically interpret the term as part of an emancipatory vocabulary.

Knowing how to invoke certain interpretive practices as a writer, and knowing how to activate them on instruction as a reader, enter both into the social relations which gave rise to, and are expressed in, these practices as a local accomplishment of a sequential process (see Smith 1990, 121; 222-3). Each textual interaction forms and re-forms the shared recognition of '[o]bjectified worlds-known-in-common' (Smith 1999, 51), whose authority subsumes the particularities of individual experience and subjectivity. The invocation of these objectified forms activates relations not just between writing and reading subjects, but also between them and 'those others of whom the text does (or does not) speak' (Smith 1990, 52). Thus, self-identified or apparently passive victims find their stories repressed within contemporary feminist theory, which assumes these states to be universally recognised as condemnable. Moreover, feminists who seek to promote the interests of oppressed women based on their victim status struggle to find an appropriate vocabulary to provide an entry point into these relations, as the variations in Goodey's articles demonstrate. The activity of writing and reading texts is constitutive of social relations, in that texts organise social consciousness in particular settings via the requirement to mobilise objectified knowledge to understand and be understood. Each utterance draws on the meanings established in other contexted situations, and 'contributes prospectively to what others may be able to say elsewhere and elsewhen down the line' (Smith 1999, 136).

For Smith, texts perform an active role in the formation of social consciousness. The activity of reading (with all the interpretive labour that requires) is an iteration in a series of material activities and enactments of social relations. Therefore, Smith collapses the distinction between thought and activity, theory and practice. The apparently non-material phenomena of interpretation and shared knowledge formation are 'as much actual socially organized practices as cutting the grass in the front yard' (Smith 1999, 49; see also 75,



154). The text operates as a kind of map, naming objects in the extra-textual (discursive, social, political) environment which the reader is expected to recognise, and providing instructions on how to navigate and organise perceptions of that environment: '[t]he map 'tells' her what features of the world to find and recognize as expressions of the relations it draws, *but she has to look outside the map to find them*' (Smith 1999, 125; emphasis in original; see also 129). At the same time, the text also 'maps' the reader's consciousness, consolidating this particular conceptual arrangement of the extra-textual landscape for the reader's future reference (see Smith 1999, 148). Finding objects in the extra-textual environment that correspond to what the text names confirms the text as a reliable organiser of that environment. This organisation becomes one of the conceptual maps at the reader's disposal as she engages in that environment on a daily basis, acting on it in material and social ways.

Although the examples Smith (1999, 121) uses in applying her metaphor of map-reading tend to involve the recognition of extra-textual *physical* objects and phenomena, she does acknowledge that the objects referred to by texts may also have been constructed 'in social acts exclusively in and of discourse' (Smith 1999, 243 note 33). It is this sense of extra-textual object that will be the focus in this study, since the claim is that successfully reading the intended meanings of many feminist texts entails the recognition of the figure of the devalued victim which has already been discursively created elsewhere. The 'elsewhere' in this case is the cogent delineation of this version of the 'victim' in the widely circulating discourse of 'political correctness'. In line with Smith's view of the social investments in such acts of recognition, so it is that the orientation of feminist collective thinking away from victimhood and towards resistance is a material phenomenon, accomplished by successive activations of texts, and having potentially observable effects on feminist practices – strategy-making, engaging (or not) with the state, the setting of editorial agendas that control what count as viable contributions to feminist knowledge building, and tangible reactions to the victim-identified.

As Smith's (1999, 148) account of her reading of Giddens' passage has shown, a significant discursive shift is needed to gainsay these objectified forms of consciousness, these 'worlds-known-in-common'. This is partly because they can operate surreptitiously, via what Mills (1995, 70) calls 'indirect address'. Dominant readings are reinforced by

what is presented as obvious or assumed as background knowledge, because these strategies constitute readers as ‘the type of people to whom this information would appear to be self-evident’ (Barthes 1977, cited in Mills 1995, 70; see also Threadgold 1997, 177, 182). Arresting a textual argument at the level of its foundational assumptions disrupts what is proffered as the main topic of conversation. Ordinarily, we are disposed to cooperate with the text in order to follow this conversation, not stopping to closely interrogate its embedded logic unless something idiosyncratic about the interpretive repertoire we bring to the text makes it reveal its erasures (Smith 1999, 148). Moreover, there are risks in bringing about that disruption – in Smith’s case, of being thought to have failed to operate the conventions of sociological discourse correctly, and in Gallop’s, of being thought anti-feminist (see Gallop et al. 1990, 356ff.). For both of them, admission to or exclusion from their respective disciplinary domains is at issue, based on their competence or willingness to adopt the methods of reading prescribed in those domains. Hegemony enforces by virtue of the fact that ‘*there is a real price to be paid for being anti-hegemonic*’, a price which includes not being heard, understood, or recognised as a subject (Blommaert 2005, 167; emphasis in original).

As I have emphasised so far, both Smith and Mills are keen to move away from the notion of texts as ‘inert extra-temporal blobs of meaning’ (Smith 1990, 3; see also Smith 1999, 53). Texts do not *contain* meaning, which the reader uncovers; reading is rather a dynamic process of reader positioning accomplished via the reader’s competence as a practitioner of discourses and ideologies circulating outside the text (Mills 1995, 25, 35, 73; see also Sarup 1993, 3). For Smith (1999, 53, 73-9, 134), the operation of texts is fundamental to the maintenance of the ‘ruling relations’ because of the heavily textual mediation of daily activities and the replicability of texts. One can also see how this replicability might coordinate with what Mills (1995, 70ff.) calls ‘indirect address’ to reinforce the effects of textual assumptions about what is taken for granted – the reader sees not only herself positioned as automatically accepting what the text proposes to be self-evident, but also an infinite number of readers who can similarly recognise these objectified forms of knowledge. These forms of knowledge thus become established as standard or normal not just as the result of multiple iterations of the text-reader interaction, but by the

incorporation, at each of these iterations, of this reader in a virtual community of like-minded readers.

Thus, both writers focus on the process of negotiation between reader and text – the local, particular and dynamic activation that is achieved at each iteration – in an effort to dispel the concept of texts as durable repositories of meaning, what Smith (1999, 75) calls the ‘deceitful stasis’ of texts. However, this apparent stasis itself contributes to the mechanics by which readers come to recognise certain knowledge as objectified. The reader is not necessarily aware of the extent to which she actively participates in accomplishing the meaning of the text in a historically and locally specific moment (see Mills 1995, 1), for she comes to the text as a material artefact or retrieves it from the electronic repository in which it is stored. From the reader’s perspective, the meaning of the text does indeed seem to wait for her in the text, independent of her interpretive intervention, so when she succeeds in making sense of the text, she retrieves what appear to be meanings solidified in a permanent form that exists before and after her engagement with it. The deceitfulness of texts is not just that their status as discrete, physical objects conceals the iterative consciousness-forming interpretive work that reading them initiates, but that this inertness works in conjunction with the local dynamic of reading to figure certain modes of consciousness as *already* formed and stable.

It can be argued that, in the case of institutionally produced theory, this deceitfulness has particularly potent effects on account of theory’s pretensions to objectivity and analytical thoroughness. Academic rigour demands that arguments be pursued logically and substantiated with appropriate evidence and reference to other relevant studies. The reader’s assumption, on approaching published academic work, is that it has *ipso facto* met these stringent standards. Therefore, where the work contains embedded presuppositions or assumes what is ‘obvious’, the reader must conclude that there really is absolutely no potential for disagreement on these points. If she does disagree, it is with the awareness that this disagreement marginalises her from the disciplinary community for whom such assumptions *are* settled. All the intertextual resources the reader supposedly needs are explicitly indicated as references or other acknowledgements of intellectual progeniture. Theory makes available for discussion only that which it proffers as its primary object of analysis, maintaining the illusion of an ongoing conversation which is moving towards a

more complete understanding of that object. That which is peripheral to the main argument, away from the focus to which the ‘community of attention’ is drawn, is assumed to be already completely understood and beyond debate. This is the ‘special competence of theory’ (Smith 1999, 150): its ability to render its order of meaning impregnable by concealing the regulatory mechanics of its own consciousness-forming operation beneath its self-presentation as a transparent vehicle of ideas.

Feminists have long been applying themselves to demonstrating the exclusions that operate in every ‘malestream’ theoretical domain under the guise of the neutral, positionless account, and Smith has highlighted the *active* role of theory in the formation of social consciousness by devoting much of her work to exposing the disciplinary processes at work in reading sociological discourse. However, despite regular disclaimers acknowledging the unavoidably reflexive nature of the theoretical endeavour, feminists have not always been mindful of the sorts of exclusions effected by their own discursive practices. The efforts of Gallop (1992), Shands (1999), and Hemmings (2005; 2007) in analysing the technological dimension of feminist theoretical production are somewhat of an exception to the general orientation to assume that feminist theory is somehow exempt from the sorts of regulatory operation that feminists identify in other theoretical discourses.

## Conclusion

In relying on Smith’s ideas to frame my own analysis, I have been influenced by the fact that my data – a corpus of feminist theory – is exclusively textual. I therefore need to privilege the possibilities of the textual in investigating what I have intuited about feminist theory of the past two or three decades: that it is ‘symptomatic’ in the sense that there is a regularity in the production of meanings around the concepts of the victim and resistance that cannot be explained as the effect or instrument of material power. While Hook (2001) situates the material exclusively in the extra-textual, I join with Smith in investing materiality in texts. This materiality involves not just the text as the physical artefact that results from particular processes of production – although those processes do influence how texts are received – but the consolidation of knowledges via the invocation of shared interpretive schemata. The process of consolidation is iterative and dialogic – each instance of reading practice conjoins the consciousness of the individual reader to the collective

social consciousness of her knowledge community through the recognition of what is understood in common. This recognition is not framed, *pace* Hook, primarily as a function of textual authority grounded in extra-textual forces, for this positions textual mechanics as unanalysable in themselves. Smith's dialogic view of the relationship between discourses and texts re-centres the textual as the site where the latent conceptual frameworks of discourse are both operationalised and reified, by *actual* people engaged in *actual* activities (Smith 1999, 134).

Whilst it is true that Smith is not the only writer to underline the importance of intertextuality in the interpretive process, she sets herself apart by situating her own interpretation of texts as integral to the task of demonstrating the conceptual frameworks that enable her interpretation. As such, she does not seek to sidestep or otherwise deflect potential criticism of her account on the grounds that it is the product of an idiosyncratic interpretive stance. The fact that she has been able to reconstruct the meaning of the text is evidence of the existence of these frameworks and of her competence at resorting to them appropriately, a competence she shares with all others who are similarly able to make sense of the text. Moreover, these intertexts are imposed on the reader – she must use these particular ones to make sense of the text; she must participate in fulfilling the text's intention, irrespective of her personal experience and opinions. After all, the text *means* to be understood – it relies on the predictability, the regularity with which the same interpretive schema will be invoked in response to certain references; it assumes that what it names will be systematically connected to a particular object and understood in the same way by all readers. If the reader does not have the competence to respond in line with that expectation, she will not be able to understand the text. The central point is that the text, by dint of being understood, has had its coherence actively maintained even by those readers for whom its statements are manifestly untrue.

This differs from Lemke's (1995, 10; see also 22, 25) reading, whereby the utilisation of intertextual resources is described as a happy matter of deciding which texts and discourses bear on the current text, based on a community-specific system of intertextuality. Here Lemke sees intertexts as the enabling building blocks of meaning production, as indeed they are, but his emphasis on enablement suspends value judgements

about what is produced and how. The language Smith (1999, 133; emphasis added) uses in relation to the intertextual activity within her own discipline is less value-free:

[S]ociological language *isn't clean*. It is *contaminated* in multiple ways by sociology's dialogue with the heteroglossia of the society. Sociology pulls other forms of language in to do its discursive work, language that trails with it a *debris* of meaning from its original site.

No discourse or text can be considered immune from heteroglossic infiltration, even where these infiltrating elements originate in competing political positions.

It is not a matter of arguing here that the community of feminist theorists has *decided* to include in its own preferred set of intertextual resources conservative attacks on 'political correctness' and victimhood, as Lemke's (1995, 10) view suggests. The problem is that the meaning which is enabled, indeed intended, in academic feminist references to victims unavoidably appeals in part for its enablement to a powerful anti-feminist discourse whose express purpose was to motivate the withdrawal of resources from victim claimants and to perpetuate the institutional exclusion of women. When feminist texts refer to victimhood in ways that initiate a process whereby feminist readers must look outside the immediate text to recognise the 'victim' as a devalued entity, the 'debris' of the 'political correctness' code enters feminist theoretical discourse. If we accept Smith's insights about the material effects on social consciousness of reading practice, then we must consider the implications of the regularity with which the interpretive schema of devalued victimhood is invoked in feminist theory, and of the consistency of the composition of that schema. I argue that feminist theory is truly 'symptomatic' in this regard, and the consciousness that is being formed in the process is that of a collective subject – the academic feminist critic (cf. Gallop 1992, 7). Before moving on to an analysis of the data which exhibits that symptomaticity, the method to generate and evaluate it needs to be elucidated. That is the task of the next chapter.

## 2 Knowing Feminists: From Epistemology To Method

### Introduction

The process of refining an appropriate methodological approach begins with the assumption that decisions about method devolve upon the epistemological position adopted by the researcher (Letherby 2003, 63). Whether the researcher considers herself as a neutral observer of objectively definable data, or alternately as perceiving from within the limits of her particular ‘situatedness’, will shape her view of what counts as evidence, of how much can be extrapolated from it, and of what conclusions it can support. It follows, therefore, that my choice of Smith’s (1990; 1999) theory of reading practice to explain how the code of ‘political correctness’ is iteratively activated within feminist writing will influence decisions about data collection and presentation. In particular, her positioning of the reader as a knowing colluder in the text’s order of meaning – able to understand the text only by virtue of her skill at operating *within* the interpretive frames it invokes, but also able to think outside them – raises potentially unique methodological questions. This is because, as the researcher, I am also a reader, and the research process undertaken here is essentially the documentation of sequential iterations of reading activity of the sort described by Smith.

As was made clear in the previous chapter, the interpretive process which I activate as the reader/researcher is identical to that of any reader of the same text. Although individual readers may differ in their reactions to the interpretive work required of them, they must perform the same work in order to arrive at the text’s intended meaning. In this respect at least, Smith (1999, 76) shares with Gallop (1992), Shands (1999) and Hemmings (2005) the notion of a collective academic feminist subject, whose ‘consciousness’ is expressed in regularities occurring across a body of texts, and which is instrumental in the formation and recognition of knowledge as shared in common. However, Smith provides no prototypical method or system for analysing such regularities. And if we look to feminist work devoted to the pragmatics of method, what emerges most saliently is how uneasily notions of collectivity, regularity and predictability in knowledge production sit with current feminist methodological preoccupations and the epistemological concerns that underpin them.

Perhaps those feminists who are most exercised by issues of research method are feminist ethnographers, who are aware that their presence as observers of other women's lived experience constructs and particularises the research scenario (e.g. Letherby 2003, 66, 76, 87; Ramazanoglu 2002, 105, 155; Fonow and Cook 1991, 9; Acker et al 1983, 431-2). They are thus acutely sensitive to the situatedness of their own perspective, reluctant to project assumptions onto their research subjects, and defend the necessary partiality of the knowledge that results from such endeavours as the mark of a normatively ethical research posture. In these cases, the researcher's interpretations are necessarily inflected by her positioning, a caveat which is also issued in relation to discourse analysis (e.g. Cheek 2004, 1146). Indeed, there is a view that the analysis of textual content 'to document and understand the communication of meaning' is itself a variant of ethnographic research (Altheide 1987, 68). On that basis, it might seem reasonable to extend the reservations expressed by feminist ethnographers to the sort of enterprise in which we are engaged here.

However, considering our insistence on the fact that readers of a text must all execute similar interpretive manoeuvres in order to (re)construct it as coherent and meaningful, methodological approaches that assume the utter specificity of every research engagement cannot serve to guide us. Nor does the subtext that deeper, interpretive work is necessarily allied to a focus on a particular situation whose generalisability is not guaranteed augur well for our plan to examine textual patterns across multiple sites. The option that normally presents itself for application to large-scale studies is quantitative analysis (Rose 2001, 11; Seale and Silverman 1997, 379; Fonow and Cook 2005, 2226-7). However, this approach usually sacrifices attention to the epistemological issues related to the practices of definition and categorisation that premise quantification. Applied specifically to the study of textual phenomena, this dilemma translates as a choice between 'situated analyses of the particular' as the methodology preferred by discourse analysts, and the corpus linguist's emphasis on quantifying linguistic items across large bodies of texts, an approach where both frequency and the analyst's detachment from the data are key (Virtanen 2009, 52-3; Baker 2006, 8-9).

The nature of my investigation is not adequately captured by this set of methodological options. Diverging from the view that the researcher is uniquely situated and accordingly constrained, my interest is in how much feminists think alike, and in how



much I, as the researcher, must participate in that like-mindedness. Therefore I do not take as my starting point the insuperable specificity of all feminists with respect to each other, nor of my own with respect to them, nor of my reading of feminist theory with respect to other possible readings. By the same token, however, the positivist certainties that underpin quantitative methods seem ill-suited to capture the mechanics of something as intuitively immeasurable as the materialisation of discourse in textual modes of reference and the consequent formation of feminist knowledge. And yet assertions about ‘patterns’ of thinking and the risks implied by repeated activations of a particular discourse do seem to call for the marshalling of a certain *quantity* of evidence.

What quantity would be enough to satisfy these evidentiary requirements is not certain, and is one of the questions I address in this chapter. The answer will be shaped in part by my use of Smith’s description of the dialogic movement between referral and recognition that is central to the interpretive process. It will also reflect my conviction that it is possible to make observations about regularities in knowledge formation that apparently flout the requirement to acknowledge one’s limited perspective, but which nevertheless do not fall back on the positivism which necessarily grounds a purely quantitative approach. Nor will I therefore need to juggle deference to my own situatedness with explanations of my particular interpretive capacities, explanations which must emerge in the light of that balancing act to be epistemologically questionable<sup>1</sup>. If this position is epistemologically unique in the context of the methodological options noted above, then it means that our data will not necessarily have to function in the ways evidence is normally expected to within those approaches. I must stand inside the realm of feminist theory, not outside it, in order to realise textual intentions and reconstruct the meanings whose

---

<sup>1</sup> We saw in the previous chapter (*supra* 40) how Gallop (1992,7) framed her textual readings as aggressively demystifying, revealing and denaturalising that which our partial historical view had kept hidden, at the same time as she deferred to her own historically induced ‘blind spots’. Likewise, in another work dedicated to questions of methodology, Letherby (2003) attempts unsuccessfully to reconcile her awareness of the limitations on accuracy imposed by the subjectivity of the researcher (5, 76) with assertions intended to establish the superiority of academic research findings over alternative versions (77). Letherby (2003, 77) argues that the academic scholar benefits from access to more complete training and information, which enables her to better adjudicate between competing views, especially as she also takes into account her ‘own values and prejudices’. In this view, the researcher is inexplicably more able to rise above her prejudices than her research subjects are, a leap which allows Letherby (2003, 77) to suggest that ‘we [academics] are not only privileged but also ‘superior’: we have a right to be regarded as a ‘knower’ in a way our respondents do not’. If this is the case, then it is logically incoherent to make a show of also respectfully acknowledging one’s situatedness.

regularity I want to point out. Thus, delineating patterns across a body of texts does not presuppose here the neutral detachment of a positivist epistemology. This, then, begs questions about whether my raw data is or needs to be representative, and how much can be generalised from the findings. The answers to these will not be as clear-cut as in those approaches that rely on the statistical manipulation of large quantities of data, but nor am I in a position to deflect the obligation to consider those questions by brandishing my reflexive credentials and deferring to my own blindness.

## **2.1 Surveying ‘feminist theory’: considering possibilities**

Let us briefly restate the aim of this thesis in order to think through the methodological task before us. It is to examine how the code of ‘political correctness’ is transmitted into feminist theory. It will attempt to demonstrate this with some precision by focusing on the interpretive manoeuvres set in motion by feminist modes of referencing ‘victimhood’. It does this on the basis that the devaluation of victimhood is a particularly prominent and potent signal within the code, central to its discursive delegitimation of claims of discrimination. References to victimhood within feminist theoretical texts therefore function as the point of articulation where the extra-textual, hitherto latent, discourse of ‘political correctness’ is iteratively actualised in the process of readers’ attempts to make sense of the text. Stated in these terms, this endeavour requires two broad methodological decisions in the first instance – what do we take to be ‘feminist theory’ and what survey protocols need to be developed to detect regularities in the way feminists generally talk about victimhood?

In the course of coming to a position on these points, it is useful to consider the methodologies adopted in other studies which attempt to chart a phenomenon across the totality of feminist theory<sup>2</sup>. The works by Gallop (1992), Shands (1999) and Hemmings (2005) already cited are examples of this, and they share common ground with this study in their focus on textual technologies and their gesturing towards a kind of collective feminist consciousness. In addition to these, I will also consider Adair’s (2005) article length

---

<sup>2</sup> These are relatively few for the reasons noted above: the broadly held conviction that the researcher’s perception is partial and localised militates against the conceptualisation of feminist theory as a quasi-coherent intellectual field exhibiting an analysable systematicity of meaning production across multiple texts.

critique of the dearth of class analysis in feminist writing, Torr's (2007a) attempt to settle the question of whether feminist preoccupations have really shifted from the material to the discursive and symbolic, and Dunn's (2005) analysis of the growing preference for the terminology of the 'survivor' over that of 'victim' in the field of domestic violence advocacy<sup>3</sup>. These three studies differ from the first three (and from mine) insofar as their focus is primarily on the content of the sampled texts and less on the mechanics of securing feminist commitment to the trends they examine. But all of these writers must confront questions of what constitutes feminist theory as a whole and how to vouch for the validity of any claims they make about that whole. I make no claims here about which of these approaches is the most appropriate in any absolute sense. At this stage, the aim is to discover what questions may need to be answered in formulating a method, taking into consideration how epistemological and methodological commitments bear on sampling procedures and the weight of evidence that data is expected to carry.

Gallop (1992) and Shands (1999) are the least systematic in their approach, in that they establish the loosest bounds for their sample pool and both caution about the indicative nature of their findings. This reflects a creditable modesty about the status of knowledge claims, but the ambiguity of their epistemological position as researchers results in an absence of clearly-stated parameters in relation to sampling and evidence. Gallop (1992, 1-2) outlines the somewhat organic process by which she retrospectively gathered a number of apparently disparate projects into this one volume, the focus of which she by now envisaged to be somewhat different from that which had informed the individual pieces at the time of writing. Thus the fact that the sample is composed of American feminist critical anthologies published from 1972 to 1987 (Gallop 1992, 10) is not the outcome of a research strategy designed in accordance with particular research questions in mind. Gallop (1992, 7-8) confines her task to the documentation of observable 'symptoms', a metaphor which has a bearing on the shape of her research agenda since it gestures towards the

---

<sup>3</sup> Although there is some resonance between the subject of my study and those of Dunn and to some extent Hemmings, these similarities are not necessarily relevant at this point. Here I am interested in how feminists who interrogate regularities across feminist texts go about that task from a methodological perspective, so any similarities in the substance of the regularities detected by different researchers is coincidental in terms of this discussion. It also needs to be noted that both Dunn (2010) and Hemmings (2011) have recently published books whose titles suggest that they take up some of the issues sketched in their articles discussed here, including possibly methodological ones. However, these works became available only when this thesis was in the process of being finalised, and therefore have not been considered.

presence of something deeper and more systemic, but makes no claims in itself to knowing the precise nature of that underlying pathology. It is a metaphor in keeping with Gallop's (1992, 4) deference to the 'inevitable historical limitations' of one's own perspective as a researcher. There is certainly a tension between that deference and Gallop's (1992, 4, 7) interventionist intentions, whose justification must be that these symptoms can be shown to constitute a significant risk by virtue of their dispersion and predictable uptake across multiple textual sites. But that aside, the insistence on the partiality of her vision ordains a less rigorous methodology in which the role of evidence is limited to supporting modest intuitions about textual regularities (despite the fact that the appeal to a collective feminist writing subject would seem to demand that the question of systematicity be addressed).

Similarly, Shands (1999, 32) admits '[her] own immersion in the middle of feminism', which prevents complete detachment from the discourse she is interrogating. Nevertheless, her title suggests a panoramic view of feminist discourse as a whole, and she claims to draw on *representative* contemporary feminist texts (Shands 1999, 21; see also 22) in order to '[demonstrate] the absolute centrality of spatial metaphors in feminist discourse'. Having said that, Shands does not adduce any specific evidence for the assertion that the texts she chooses are indeed representative<sup>4</sup>. Like Gallop, Shands (1999, 32-33) never really reconciles the epistemological contradiction of both practising 'scholarly detachment' and being immersed in that which she seeks to analyse. Nor is it clear how 'the power of metaphor' to *unconsciously* structure feminist perceptions will surrender to the sort of conscious, strategic manipulation that Shands has in mind. Lack of methodological precision is framed more as a mark of virtuous caution, a recognition that, while exhaustiveness is not claimed or possible, this will nevertheless be 'an impressionistic but hopefully suggestive meditation' on feminist spatial metaphors (Shands 1999, 21). Indeed, the premise that metaphor is difficult to pin down with the intellect (Shands 1999, 27; see also 31) dictates a less rigorously planned and executed analysis, despite the fact that

---

<sup>4</sup> In fact, Shands (1999, 28) examines fiction as well as feminist critical texts. Whilst Shands sees the elision of the distinction between the two as a 'fruitful' exposure of the conflictual middle ground occupied by feminist discourse, this confuses the nature of the project and of the corrective she offers – is the issue of how feminist (un)consciousness is betrayed in metaphorical usage one of political strategy and knowledge formation, or of feminist affectivity? The two are not unconnected, as Shands rightly implies, but the nature of that connection needs some clarification, especially as Shands' (1999, 2) goal is the intentional manipulation of metaphor towards specific political outcomes grounded by a transformed collective intellectual temperament.

claiming the ‘absolute centrality’ of spatial metaphors in shaping the feminist imaginary would seem to demand it.

The intent is not to impugn Gallop’s and Shands’ recognition of the limitations of their perception, since it suggests a spirit of open-handedness about their engagement in the feminist conversation. It is simply to observe that their approach allows them to avoid a host of difficult questions that seem necessary to confront when the project is based on making assertions about the regularity of phenomena across a body of texts imagined as a delimitable discursive field. Must the regularity of the phenomenon under investigation be asserted on the basis of the proportion of positive cases against the totality of the field in which such cases are likely to occur? If so, how should this totality be bounded and defined? There are special difficulties in identifying the boundaries of the feminist epistemic community (see also Ramazanoglu 2002, 139) and, therefore, of which texts carry that community’s epistemic investment, since feminism’s emancipatory animus militates against any propensity to exclusion. Even assuming one could make such a definition of the whole, how many instances would be necessary to warrant claims of systematicity? And how might one go about conducting an exhaustive investigation of the totality, or at least one which could reliably demonstrate proportionality, if proportionality is required to settle the case? I have been deliberately indefinite in saying that it only *seems* necessary to confront these questions because I want to reserve a space for considering later whether these are indeed the right questions to ask when the task is to analyse the formation of feminist consciousness around progressively solidifying forms of knowledge. With these issues in mind, let us consider how Adair (2005), Torr (2007a) and Dunn (2005) use some form of quantitative measurement and defined concept of ‘feminist theory’ to address the sorts of questions left aside by Gallop and Shands.

Adair (2005) sets herself the difficult task of documenting the regularity, not of the positive prevalence of a phenomenon, but of an absence – that of class analysis in feminist studies. Of particular concern is the extent to which the stated goals of feminist projects do not accord with actual texts and teaching, whose content is revealed on closer inspection to be largely devoid of the promised focus on class (Adair 2005, 576). Given that Adair wants to ‘prove’ a negative condition, she is arguably under an even greater obligation to vouch for the exhaustiveness of her survey, and makes some attempt to be comprehensive in her

sampling. Adair draws her sample texts from the sites where priorities about appropriate feminist areas of interest are revealed: tertiary course curricula, reading lists and introductory anthologies. However, the specific rationale behind the sampling within each category is not outlined in detail, and does not appear to be systematic across all categories<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the extent to which the samples indicate the whole is not fully described.

Adair (2005, 577) acknowledges that quantitative analysis is inherently superficial, and the account of her method reveals several limitations in statistics-based conclusions. These are largely a function of the amount of data she wishes to analyse, which imposes certain variations in survey protocols depending on the category of text retrieved. In cases where Adair relies on abstracts and author-supplied keywords to classify a text's contents (Adair 2005, 580, 600-1 note 5), we must take on faith her quantified abstractions from the raw data in terms of how she measures 'substantial focus', 'central discussions', '[seeming] to focus' (578), and 'primarily about' (579). Therefore, while Adair's quantitative approach allows her to draw some statistically significant conclusions, the processes of classification conceal and potentially misrepresent the complexities of textual content, as Adair (600-1 note 5) herself admits. Moreover, statistically documenting class erasure as a fait accompli as we stand at this moment treats texts as dumb repositories which either contain or do not contain certain elements. The assumption is that the revelation of these statistical realities will automatically initiate a corrective, which ignores what is perhaps the most pernicious element of class erasure – that feminists appear to be regularly telling the story that class *is* being attended to, even when evidence confirms that it is not (Adair 2005, 577). It is precisely the securing of this sort of counterfactual position that is part of the investigation in this thesis – what legitimates the recurrent urging to repudiate victim identification when there is no evidence that a strong inclination to so identify exists? Adair's methodology, though certainly providing a valuable insight into a problem, is therefore not adequate for our purposes here.

---

<sup>5</sup> Adair's (2005, 576ff.) sampling is listed as follows: 'more than 200' women's studies programs for the period 1999-2003 (though whether this constitutes the entirety of surveyable data for that period is not clear), 'more than 100' introductory level syllabi from a range of tertiary institutions for the same period (though the reasons for selecting these particular institutions and these syllabi are not stated), upper-level course offerings (but only for 2003), anthologies set for introductory course reading, feminist journals (only for 2001), *Feminist Studies* in particular (from 1998-2003), and faculty research interests (for 2004, based on 173 faculty). In the process, she has surveyed 'hundreds of texts'.

A similar orientation towards identifying and categorising what is held in stasis within feminist texts begs the same questions about exhaustiveness and sampling for Torr (2007a, unpaginated). Torr's goal is to determine whether a presumed shift from materialism to poststructuralism as the dominant theoretical framework informing Anglo-American feminist academic scholarship is really reflected in the literature. Although Torr's approach has something in common with Adair's focus on classifying the content of texts, rather than the work that they *do* (at least at the rhetorical level), Torr's work is of all those discussed in this section the most informed by a confident positivism. She assumes the viability of charting an intellectual field to determine what has 'really happened' over feminism's recent past (Torr 2007b). This presupposes that she is in a position to make neutral judgements about whether texts match the expected trend or not. The first hint that the process of classification is problematic (and that, as Hemmings (2005) suggests, the stories that are told about the shift are worth investigating in their own right) is when Torr has to adjust her definition of 'materialist' when confronted by poststructuralist accounts that are also described as materialist. In order to preserve what she simultaneously reveals as the artificial distinction on which her analysis depends, Torr must qualify materialism as 'historical materialism' to ensure its difference from poststructuralism.

Although her confidence in the scrutability of texts as inert artefacts makes her approach epistemologically opposed to mine (and obviously also to Hemmings' (2005)<sup>6</sup>), Torr must nevertheless grapple as we do with the question of what it means to survey feminist theory as a whole. This is especially so since her determination of whether a trend is dominant is dependent on a simple cumulative count of foci across a range of feminist texts which is exhaustive, or failing that, representative. To ensure that her sample truly reflects the state of *feminist* theory, Torr includes in her survey self-described feminist journals which satisfy McDermott's (1994) criteria for assessing publications' scholarly credentials. In all cases, Torr (2007a) chooses to scrutinise the selected texts in their entirety, rather than rely on the way abstracts and author-supplied keywords categorise

---

<sup>6</sup> Although Hemmings (2005) deals broadly with the same issue as Torr – poststructuralism's apparent usurpation of the feminist theoretical terrain – she does so from an entirely different perspective. Eschewing the task of finding what is 'really' in feminist theory, Hemmings (2005) is more concerned with the stories feminists tell about that theoretical shift (and how these are politically invested) than with whether the shift is reflected in fact. Indeed, this fundamental difference prompted Torr to initiate an exchange with Hemmings about the validity of their respective approaches (see Torr 2007b and Hemmings 2007).

textual content. While Torr outlines the development of her data collection strategy in some detail, she devotes less energy to guaranteeing the validity of her qualitative analysis of intellectual trends. How is it, for example, that she has been able to differentiate some ‘definite intellectual trends’ in the midst of a nonetheless ‘complex and messy intellectual terrain’, or to decide that these trends are ‘definite’ but ‘not strong enough to count as dominant’? This is not to imply that such questions are easily answered, but to note that Torr does not appear to think any justification for her interpretations is necessary. The assumption seems to be that a properly derived sample can speak eloquently for itself. Torr’s focus on the process of data extraction fails to acknowledge the significance of the finding that the actual weakness of the trend is ‘contrary to what much of the existing literature appeared to suggest’. For Torr, it is a matter of setting the record straight: whatever might be put about in the existing literature, it will cede before the evidence of her corrective.

The reflexive way the stories in the literature function – pointing to something that is supposedly there in the theory of which they form a part, but also thereby furnishing some evidence of that to which they refer – poses significant methodological difficulties for those, like Torr (2007a), who seek to trace such movements. These sorts of difficulties also confront Dunn (2005) in her attempt to track the replacement of the terminology of ‘victim’ with that of ‘survivor’ to refer to women who have experienced domestic violence. In line with Hemmings’ (2005, 120; 2007, 73) problematisation of the vision of feminist theory as the repository of raw and directly interpretable data, Dunn (2005, 7) notes the obstacles presented to her own research by

the multiple levels of data collection and analysis required to simultaneously review the history of the battered women’s movement, the history of the social construction of battered women, the discourse related to these constructions, and the constructions themselves (Dunn 2005, 7).

Having acknowledged these complications, Dunn leaves them aside, but both Dunn (2005) and Hemmings (2005) alert us to the impediments to fixing along a single dimension what counts as data, and to using that data to construct an analytical narrative about causation or objectively verifiable shifts in thinking over time.

Where Dunn needs to separate out each of these multiple levels of data to determine what is ‘in’ the texts, the theory of reading used in this thesis allows that the effect on the



reader of the modes of reference used at these various levels may be similar in terms of the interpretive schema they deploy. Therefore, although Dunn's identification of the preference for 'survivor' terminology is consistent with my own findings, the method she uses to track this preference is not appropriate for the current purpose. The focus of my analysis is displaced a step further back from Dunn's in the process of meaning production. Instead of asking, as Dunn (2005, 8) does, what outcome the writer/speaker is trying to achieve by constructing the battered woman as either 'pure victim' or 'survivor' at different points in history, my questions about that construction would be as follows. How has it been rendered acceptable and meaningful within the text? How has the image of the 'pure victim' or 'survivor' already been positioned as the legitimate one to take up to achieve the designated outcome and where have the terms of that image been defined? How much of that legitimisation is provided within the text and how much by interpretive schemas drawn from elsewhere? If the construction is aimed at a specific outcome, what manoeuvres are expected of readers to enable them to recognise correctly that this is a construction of, say, a 'pure victim', and what is it about these constructions that enables Dunn (2005, 8) to categorise them as 'exemplary, ideal-typical'? In other words, my analysis takes up, amongst other things, that which Dunn (2005, 24) declares to be outside the scope of her paper, but which she suggests constitutes a fruitful area for future research – 'the conditions under which 'survivor,' rather than 'victim,' typifications are put into play in various arenas.' In my reading (though not necessarily Dunn's (2005, 24)) these conditions would include the availability and deployment of meaning frameworks which can legitimise the chosen terminology.

From this perspective, Hemmings' interest in the technology of fixing dominant historiographies across Western feminist theory rather than in the 'truth' of these stories resonates more closely with the epistemology adopted here. That such stories have gained purchase 'despite the fact that we (feminist theorists) know better' (Hemmings 2005, 115) is all the more reason to investigate what rhetorical technologies have enabled that to occur<sup>7</sup>. She therefore takes up an aspect neglected by both Adair (2005) and Torr (2007a):

---

<sup>7</sup> Although Hemmings (2005, 118) stresses that her focus is on the mechanisms of securing these stories, and not on *disproving* them in the light of counter-evidence, there does remain throughout her discussion an uncomfortable tension between the assertion that there is no 'right' version and the persuasive rationale for her analytical intervention – that the success with which these stories have accomplished exclusions is all the

the disparity between what feminists commonly say has happened in their theory over time and what can be found in that theory. Hence, any decisions that Hemmings makes about her method are of particular interest. Firstly, Hemmings (2005, 117) elects to examine only journals, not books. These journals are intentionally not discipline-specific journals, and are not limited to those that self-identify as feminist forums. The latter choice means some urgency is added to Hemmings' concerns. That certain stories circulate within feminist knowledge domains despite the fact that we 'know better' (Hemmings 2005, 115) is disturbing enough, but when they circulate outside feminist spaces, where participants do not necessarily 'know better', there is a greater chance that their consolidation as a 'truth' about feminism is definitive. Hemmings' is a legitimate approach, but for the purposes of this thesis, I limit the survey to forums designated specifically as feminist. This is because the focus is on the shaping of feminist consciousness – the shared perspectives and assumptions that are taken to inform a feminist posture towards the world – in line with a certain ideological position. I expand on the reasons for this below (see section 2.3).

However, Hemmings' reasons for limiting her investigations to journals rather than books are significant. For Hemmings (2005, 117; emphasis in original), textbooks or readers, unlike journals, are 'not as helpful for an examination of techniques of citation that secure a history as a *prelude* to the author's own particular insights'. I will return to this point in the next section, because I agree with Hemmings, and will focus on journals for similar reasons. The numbered volume/issue publication format of journals establishes a developmental logic, whereby journals operate as an ongoing forum that confers a certain coherence and linearity to the arguments expressed therein. This format fosters the sense of an ongoing conversation, which is often literally manifested in the familiar 'response to'/'reply to' pieces. Each new piece of work builds on that which has already been accumulated within that journal (and others) and attempts to move beyond it. In the process, certain forms of knowledge are assumed and taken to be accepted by all participants in this knowledge enterprise. This group of participants, the facticity of a collective readership skilled in particular modes of interpretation, even has a minimum

---

more startling and, indeed, grievous because the stories are not only dominant, but *erroneous* (Hemmings 2005, 115). This thesis is not entirely free of a similar tension, especially in the discussion of the place of so-called 'victim feminism' (see below Chapter 4), though I try there to concentrate on anomalies within feminists' own accounts rather than between these accounts and what might be 'actually' the case. It is the former anomalies themselves that cast doubt on the reality of 'victim feminism'.

tangible form in the list of journal subscribers. Journals function as organisers of feminist attention in ways that books, published in isolation, cannot. Therefore, they are especially useful in identifying, as Hemmings (2005, 118) puts it, ‘which assertions do not need to be evidenced, which histories are told as a matter of course’, assertions which constitute the ‘common sense gloss’ (117) that enables us to move on to more pressing concerns.

The second decision of note is related to the citation format that Hemmings (2005, 118) adopts, which is to reference the journal name rather than the individual author as the provenance of the quoted material. This is intended to reflect the fact that the production of knowledge is the result of a combination of factors, deriving as much from communal standards (and their constraining/enabling effects) as from authorial invention – a journal article is ‘the material result of an author’s work, editorial practice and broader disciplinary and institutional conventions’ (Hemmings 2005, 118). Thus, in line with what I have noted in the previous chapter in regard to editorial and peer review practices, whatever authorial assumptions are allowed to pass unremarked at the review stage are thereby legitimised as generally accepted by the prospective readership – and each reader must recognise that legitimisation, even if she has objections to the assumption. Hemmings’ desire to deflect responsibility from individual authors to the collective is reminiscent of both Gallop’s (1992, 7) interest in the symptoms of the collective feminist subject, not ‘the inadequacies of any individual’, and Shands’ (1999, 29) signalling of the tension between the conscious intentions of actual authors (who are only ‘*seemingly* in control of their texts’; emphasis added) and the unconscious and irresistible attraction to particular metaphorical usage shared by the ‘intersubjective textual subject of feminism’.

I am completely in sympathy with these writers’ recognition of the collaborative role played by factors other than individual agents in the fixing of certain attitudes, and I share with Hemmings an interest in the rhetorical mechanisms that support this consolidation. Like them, I am reluctant to single out individuals as bearing the responsibility for this process. I am aware of the complex inhibitors against challenging what appears to be already given knowledge. As Smith has shown, significant discursive shifts can be required to make a space for those peculiarities of reader uptake that are ‘cut out’ by a text, and the submersion of these peculiarities is replayed when these readers become writers. Nevertheless, I will be deliberate in not following Hemmings’ citation usage and in

adhering to standard referencing practice, partly because I want to preserve the possibility of theorising the authorial agent who has the capacity to negotiate knowingly the discursive intersections in which she finds herself. I will take up that possibility in the conclusion to the thesis, but at this point I stress that the aim is to avoid positioning feminist writers as uniformly and similarly ‘stuck’ and ‘attached’ to specific historical and institutional discourses, as Gallop (1992, 9) describes it, or as at once irrevocably drawn to certain ways of expressing themselves and *disconnected* as ‘real’ authors from the realm beyond reason of ‘feminism’s narrative posture’, as Shands (1999, 29) suggests. Indeed, in stressing the collaborative nature of knowledge production (to the extent that she wants to reflect that in her citation formatting) Hemmings (2005) begs a question about the origins of her individual contribution in the context of the communal and institutional pressures that shape feminist thinking.

In addition, whilst I have alluded to the extent to which authors are hostage to the editorial expectations that enforce collaboratively developed knowledge trends, there is also evidence that editorial boards can accommodate a degree of open challenge. For example, the title of Adair’s (2005) critique of class absence in feminist studies already contains an oblique reference to (and therefore criticism of) the journal in which the article appears. Indeed, Adair (2005, 580) goes on to single out *Feminist Studies* as typical of this phenomenon. And *Signs* is both the forum for and an obviously implied target of Mardorossian’s (2002a, 743) dismay at the ‘puzzling scholarly neglect [of the victimisation of rape] reflected in the pages of some of the most influential journals in the field’. In fact, where Mardorossian (2002a, 742 note 1) expands on that statement, she devotes most of her attention to detailing the inadequacies of *Signs* in this respect. My adherence to the practice of citing individual authors is a conscious attempt to avoid positioning authors as simply mouthpieces of journal-focused knowledge conventions. It is not meant to signal that I subscribe to the notion of a completely autonomous author, who can be expected to shoulder blame for expressing attitudes I find problematic.

Lastly, in presenting evidence of the sorts of feminist stories in circulation, Hemmings (2005, 118) makes the decision to quote passages in isolation, rather than detailing an article’s argument as a whole. This is in line with her particular interest in ‘those assertions which do not need to be evidenced’ – those assumptions that are signalled

by the way, as precursors to the main topic of analysis, and which themselves require no extended discussion. In the same way, I see the devaluation of victimhood as embedded in feminist theory by the way passing references make it unavailable for debate. It is in the nature of these references that their connection to the surrounding argument is not made explicit. Therefore, following Hemmings and by virtue of the way these references are supposed to function, I will for the most part cite isolated portions of text and contextualise them only as needed. These examples are intended to show how a certain regularity in this mode of reference pertains across a large number of feminist discussions which, apart from that, reflect a broad diversity of interests and perspectives.

I have interrogated these varied methodological case studies to discover how they deal with the problem of surveying ‘feminist theory’, and how method is fitted to epistemological assumptions and evidence requirements. The processes of data selection and validation are the aspects of research that are most open to critique (Taylor 2001, 29), and the intention has not been to detract from the concerted attempts of all these writers to develop creditable and epistemologically coherent ways of going about their analyses. Where I have raised questions about their approaches, it is to flag those issues that I must be careful to consider as I refine my own research method, and I do not claim to be able to fully resolve them all. Adair’s (2005) and Torr’s (2007) studies both attempt to combine quantitative and interpretive techniques with limited success, even though they begin from a relatively uncomplicated positivism which assumes that texts exist in stasis ready to deliver up their evidence on inspection. If texts are not viewed as inert repositories of textual data that we go to, pick over and gather at our leisure, but as factors in a dynamic activity of meaning-making, the question of counting textual examples as simple instantiations of a pattern or phenomenon is further complicated. On the other hand, the approaches of Gallop (1992) and Shands (1999), who depart from a counter-positivist epistemology, raise the question of whether it is possible to resolve the tension inherent in wanting to avoid the positivism of a quantitative approach but also demonstrate one’s case about ‘symptoms’ and regularities through some process of evidence *accumulation*. All of these writers have helped to crystallise the link between the simplest procedural decisions, epistemology and research goals. Bearing in mind the methodological issues raised by these studies, I will set about refining my own research method.

## 2.2 Refining the approach: what counts as evidence?

The starting assumption is that my application of Smith's (1990; 1999) account of the nature of reading practice and its centrality in the formation of shared knowledge will have an impact on the way I approach the question of gathering evidence, indeed on what I consider to constitute evidence. According to this view, texts cannot be approached as inert holders of content which is retrieved by an equally inert observer, but nor is the way the researcher/reader collaborates with the text's meaning intentions a function of her idiosyncratic situation. Repeated and forced collusion with the same interpretive frameworks as part of the realisation of textual meaning progressively objectifies certain forms of knowledge for readers. That the phenomenon of reading practice to be unpacked is iterative, processual and dialogic will dictate what sort of data counts as adequate to illustrate how that formation is being accomplished.

A number of the analyses (e.g. Hemmings 2005, 115, 131; Shands 1999, 2; Adair 2005, 576) just examined are motivated by an anxiety about how the regularity of a particular phenomenon is influencing the direction of collective feminist thinking. The unspoken assumption in these studies is that the more instances of a particular phenomenon are adduced, the more convincing is the case for both the presence and potential impact of some sort of textual pattern. While it seems counter-intuitive to argue against that assumption, I will interrogate that logic of accumulation in the light of what I expect my data to demonstrate – the dialogic nature of the relationship between reading activity and interpretive schema. I suggest that counting occurrences of the 'pattern' only captures the extent of what has *already* happened. It is essentially an audit of the current state of feminist thinking arrested at the moment of inspection. This process of simple accumulation neglects the complexity of causes and effects of which these regularities are the surface manifestations only, causes and effects that are operationalised through individual reading activity – 'the actual local practice of a particular individual, reading just where she is, for just the what-comes-next that her reading initiates' (Smith 1999, 75).

For recall that reading practice initiates a complex sequence of meaning production (Smith 1999, 121): the move outside the text to find the referenced object whose recognition is essential for allowing the text to mean at all, the virtual joining with the

collective whose competency at finding that object must also be assumed, and the consolidation of the reader's knowledge of the connection between reference and object that will be called upon in subsequent iterations. In that scenario, the function of each occurrence of a regularity is not simply additive within the 'composite of statements which recur in different specific readings' and which are synthesised to speak for the disembodied collective feminist critic (Gallop 1992, 8-9). Instead, each occurrence is also both input and output of that knowledge formation: the evidence of the effect of that formation on the consciousness of an individual writer, and potentially the cause of further formations in her readers. In that light, the one-dimensional exercise of accumulating as many examples as possible as proof of systematicity seems inadequate to capture the actual *size* of the phenomenon at hand.

This is for two reasons. Firstly, counting the occurrences of thematic elements within a discursive field does not in itself tell us about anything sinister in the way that repetition has been secured. Remember that, for Smith (1990; 1999), texts can mean only through the manipulation of readers into co-operating with the text's logic and repressing alternative narratives. According to this view, the capacity of texts to normalise knowledge is not necessarily, or not only, a function of the sheer weight of numbers of similar attitudes occurring across a corpus; it has at least as much, if not more, to do with the work done by each of these references to entangle the reader in their particular order of meaning. It is conceivable, for example, that victim identification could be repeatedly criticised by feminists in ways that nevertheless posed those criticisms as contestable, and enabled a reader to resist being enlisted to that stance no matter how many instances of such criticism she encountered. If the regular mode of referral did not require the reader to recognise the 'criticise-ability' of victimhood as legitimately assumed, it is possible that the 'knowledge' of victimhood as a terminally devalued concept would not have taken such a hold in feminist consciousness.

The second reason that the extent of a textual phenomenon is impossible to measure by simply accumulating references one by one is that each occurrence operates as a kind of micro-system in itself, by virtue of the dialogic movement between text and discourse or extra-text that the reader is required to undertake. The intuitive impulse is to gather examples in linear fashion, in the hope that eventually we will have enough to convince

others by weight of evidence that a particular way of thinking recurs systematically. We cannot ignore the importance of quantity since, even for Smith (1999, 75, 134), iterability is central to the progressive consolidation of knowledge. But the point is that quantity alone cannot describe the interpretive micro-system by which a single reference is made to mean by the reader's recovery of extra-textual objects. Accumulating instances might indicate the regularity of a correspondence between feminist and conservative devaluation of victimhood, but it would be an inadequate demonstration of how the code of 'political correctness' has infiltrated feminist theory in an operational sense. Nor could such an approach account for the power of the mechanisms set in train by a single reference to act on the reader's consciousness. The reader joins with her community, virtually speaking, in concerted recognition of the extra-textual object named in the text, in activating the same interpretive frameworks that all readers would have to, in order to make the right name-object connection and to be able to understand this text. Whether or not the reader has encountered enough similar examples to form her own perception that victimhood is regularly devalued, the individual reference tells her that there *is* such a regularity, since it assumes the predictability with which a particular interpretive schema will be invoked in response to references of this kind. To follow the text's logic, the reader must momentarily accept that such a regularity does exist, irrespective of whether it is demonstrable in fact. This text therefore suggests to her (and us, as researchers documenting each example) the very regularity whose tangible existence we might be trying to prove by our accumulation of data. The actual regularity of similar references may not pose as much of a threat to the independence of feminist thinking as the *story* of regularity entailed in each single reference. After all, not every reader encounters every occurrence in the accumulation intended to indicate the consciousness-forming potential of discursive patterns.

Therefore, each instance both forms part of the repetition that allows us to demonstrate a systematic way of understanding, *and* relies on our recognition of the prior existence of that system in order to make sense. It thus stands in relation, not just to other iterations as part of the logic of accumulation, but to what is pointed to outside the text as already existing knowledge. Each instance does more work than we can describe if we view its function as purely additive within the aggregated data. It points to the system which has been formed in part by all instances in the repetition, but which does not consist solely in



that repetition. The reader does not need to be able to confirm the reality of this system of repetition to succumb to the power of a reference which assumes its existence. In a kind of self-fulfilling process, the competence of the individual reader to operate the required interpretive schema becomes an *actual collective* competence less because individuals become persuaded through repetition, than because each instance tells the individual that this is *already* a collective competence. It is this which exerts a pressure to conform on the reader, poised as she is at that moment to engage in the current conversations within her discipline and disposed to apply the knowledge conventions that will enable her to do so.

My reasons for considering the pursuit of data quantity as epistemologically inadequate for this study also bear on the question of how to handle apparently disconfirming cases. These might seem to be numerous, in view of the widespread denotative use of victim semantics that co-exist with the coded deployments of the victimhood paradigm which are the focus here. Even within the qualitative framework, the issue of discrepancies has been conceptualised quantitatively, as one of accumulation and proportionality:

To test the evidentiary warrant for an assertion the researcher conducts a systematic search of the entire data corpus, looking for disconfirming and confirming evidence [...] If the discrepant cases outnumbered those that fitted the assertion, the assertion would not be warranted by the data (Erickson 1986, 146, cited in Freeman et al. 2007, 29).

Here, counter-evidence is a direct threat to the coherence of the hypothesis, which is supported or not by a simple process of addition and subtraction of sequentially collected instances to deduce a net result. Similarly, Seale and Silverman (1997, 380-1) see the defence of validity in qualitative research as a function of reconciling ‘counts of events (quasi-statistics)’ against deviant cases. Supporting and deviant cases are figured by that process as representing a system of meaning which is held wholly *within* the confines of the data corpus. For the computation to make any sense, the borders of the whole represented by the data corpus must be clearly defined, and the researcher confident that she has surveyed what is typical of the whole. If the balance of confirming evidence is not as expected, the hypothesis must be changed to better reflect the data (Freeman et al. 2007, 29). The need to acknowledge and assess counter-evidence is assumed in even the most anti-positivist feminist guidelines for carrying out appropriately reflexive research (e.g. Ramazanoglu 2005, 138).

However, on the basis of the theory of reading practice used in this thesis, I have argued against the idea that evidence for patterning discourses in a body of texts can be adduced purely on the basis of how many confirming instances can be accumulated. What counts on the surface as one textual instance has multiple and incalculable effects because it is encountered by an unknown number of individual readers. Each encounter also provides instructions precisely for discounting disconfirming evidence and annulling its potential disruptiveness. Although it may be easy to point to non-conforming cases, a discursive shift is needed to make a space to articulate those because the immediate text creates an epistemic field in which those cases do not make sense. In that context, although ‘disconfirming’ evidence signals the possibility of a different epistemic order, it is no threat to the power of this text. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the impact of this text will be offset by texts that call up alternative interpretive competencies. From that perspective, ‘disconfirming’ cases (here, the occurrence of neutral modes of referencing victimhood) do not weaken claims made about the power of the ‘confirming’ examples (where the ‘political correctness’ code facilitates the recognition of the devalued victim). The two kinds of cases occupy different and ostensibly unrelated frames of reference. To assume that one simply cancels out the other misses a crucial dynamic: the fact that parallel but conflicting competencies are required of feminist readers serves to underscore the exclusions that are entailed when they are called upon to recognise the unworthy victim.

This is not to say that frequency of occurrences is entirely irrelevant for our purpose. While it is impossible to say how many exposures to instances of the pattern would be required to produce conformity in that reader, it stands to reason that disciplinary effects will increase in proportion to the amount of exposure to similar interpretive schema. My data gathering should reflect this balance. On the one hand, I want to adduce ‘enough’ evidence to suggest that the repression entailed in the disparagement of victimhood is generalised enough to be disturbing. On the other, I want to problematise the impulse towards exhaustiveness in sampling and the accumulation of data for the reasons outlined above. Moreover, this impulse assumes that the borders of the field being surveyed are identifiable, and the question of whether that is possible with respect to feminism (or even desirable, since the existence of borders entails the requirement to patrol them) has been debated (e.g. Ermarth 2000; Winter 2000; Thompson 2000). As well, a glance at the web

pages of several self-described feminist journals indicates that there is a normative aspiration towards interdisciplinarity and escaping any notional boundaries (see Appendix 1, especially with reference to *Signs*, *Feminist Studies*, *Hypatia*, *Feminist Review*, and *Australian Feminist Studies*).

On the basis of this desire to balance competing understandings of what counts as adequate evidence, I need to sample somewhat widely, but also purposively. The data needs to show that feminist thinking is indeed being oriented in a particular direction, as a proliferation of examples would confirm. But it also needs to reflect the power that the sporadic encountering of a smattering of these examples might exercise to accomplish conformity in the individuals who embody the collective. Encountering these occurrences across a variety of texts undoubtedly has a formative effect on consciousness – indeed, the fact that such encounters can take place anywhere, in diverse contexts, when they are least expected, is part of their rhetorical power. However, if I am trying to gauge the risk of exposure to these sorts of cases, I might consider whether encounters are more likely, or more powerful, in some texts rather than others – more likely because these texts are read more than others, more powerful because these texts carry more authority than others.

For Smith (1999, 150), the call to shared recognition that is involved in all reading practice is especially imposing in the case of theoretical texts, since the competencies that the reader is expected to acquire and utilise in common with her community apply in this case specifically within her discipline. Going further than that, and in line with Hemmings (2005, 117-8), I suggest that journals, rather than readers or textbooks, are particularly potent carriers of what the feminist collective takes to be assumed knowledge. If the aim of feminist research is the production of continually ‘better’ knowledge (Grasswick 2004, 89 and 115, note 15; Lowe and Benston 1984, cited in McDermott 1994, 5; Ramazanoglu 2002, 118, 146; Letherby 2002, 67), this teleology is represented in the sequential numeration of issues and volumes, the cataloguing of a history always connected to the present but always in the process of being transcended. As well, editorial and peer review establish what passes for generally accepted knowledge and what still requires elaboration and justification. Because of that, the disparagement of victimhood that is dispersed casually through journal articles bears most heavily on reader consciousness because of the authority which that review process confers. The formal review context authenticates the

distinction between what is beyond debate (the devaluation of victimhood) and knowledge which is still under construction in primary arguments and whose development that devaluation is required to support.

Moreover, the consistency of particular attitudes is even more marked when these are expressed across texts with diverse foci, united to all intents and purposes in most cases only by their publication under the auspices of the same journal. In this, I differ from Gallop (1992, 8), who chooses anthologies as the best place to read the symptoms of the collective on the basis that, although they are the forums for many voices, these are ‘organized choruses’ – actual collectives brought together around particular topics. On the contrary, my view is that it is precisely the fact that victimhood is portrayed with such regularity in its associations across multiple texts which are in the main *not* ‘organized choruses’ adhering to a declared agenda, that most potently demonstrates how effectively the collective can function. Perhaps it is not surprising that similar symptoms appear within the confined space of the anthology, but if they recur across myriad and apparently unrelated locations, then maybe we have an epidemic on our hands!

The decision to restrict the survey to journal articles is also supported by McDermott’s (1994) analysis of the role feminist academic journals play in the production of feminist knowledge. In remarks that are reminiscent of Smith’s (1999) view of reading and writing (theory in particular) as the social activities of knowledge construction, McDermott (1994, 1, 7) argues that feminist academic journals function as a kind of feminist public sphere, which orchestrates the transformation of private speculation into ‘publicly available, socially sanctioned knowledge’. Academic journals in general constitute the primary means of legitimating scholarship, disseminating knowledge across a particular interpretive community, and determining disciplinary direction and shared systems of meaning (McDermott 1994, 11). What counts as legitimate (that is, publishable) knowledge is evaluated as such according to culturally and institutionally produced ‘values, beliefs, rules, codes, categories, and assumptions about what is good, bad, believable, and possible’ (McDermott 1994, 10). The social interaction which alters that knowledge, and the political power of the interpretive community to set the terms of that interaction, are partly obscured by its institutional origins – the academy is taken to be the protector of rational discourse and impartial scholarship, which pursues ‘truth’ free from the influence

of emotion and political interests (McDermott 1994, 4-5). With respect to the construction of feminist knowledge in particular, McDermott (1994, 11) aims to examine how the interpretive community which collects around the production and consumption of feminist academic journals uses them 'to determine the political and scholarly terms on which feminist scholarship is produced'. In terms of our immediate concerns, McDermott's (1994) view of the important role that journals play as organisers of feminist cognitive activity positions these texts as powerful codifiers of what the feminist interpretive community considers 'good, bad, believable and possible' about victimhood, and of the shared systems of meaning that make those judgements plausible.

Of special interest is McDermott's (1994) discussion of the political implications of editorial decisions and the mechanics of manuscript selection. The discipline of women's studies occupies an ambivalent position within the patriarchal university – seeking to maintain links to its community roots, whilst working as the conduit through which feminist content will be ratified by the university as a legitimate site of knowledge production. In that context, McDermott (1994, 130) asserts that 'the political and scholarly criteria that editors of [the journals] use are not idle abstractions but powerful constructs that shape and define the discipline's parameters and applications'<sup>8</sup>. As a case in point, various editors of *Feminist Studies* cited by McDermott (1994, 110, 130-1) have recognised the journal's role in both reflecting the current critical issues in the field and shaping what those issues are. Editors dictate the direction and terms of the ongoing feminist conversation, conferring on it a certain insularity: 'Editors shape the kind of work we publish and, therefore, shape the kind of work we get. Consequently, there will be internal reference to other work we've published in the journal, and the questions we've raised' (Ryan, cited in McDermott 1994, 131).

Of prime importance in that process are the editorial criteria used for judging whether material contributes to the realisation of feminist goals, and for the purposes of this thesis, McDermott's (1994) findings incidentally yield a special insight. Abstracting from interviews with editors and staff, observation of editorial meetings, and scrutiny of

---

<sup>8</sup> Note that McDermott draws her conclusions based on the three journals she has selected for study: *Signs*, *Feminist Studies* and *Frontiers*. Nevertheless, her comments should be taken as more broadly applicable since she has deliberately avoided feminist sub-discipline specific journals with the express aim of discovering how feminist discourse operates generally across unspecified knowledge domains (McDermott 1994, 2).

editorials and review and rejection letters, McDermott (1994, 124) draws out four attributes that mark a manuscript as ‘feminist’ according to the journals’ *broad* definition. For the most part, these are quite general – for instance, the manuscript should focus on gendered power relations, and be interested in social change. However, the third criterion is that ‘[the] argument centralizes women’s experience in a way that does not objectify, *victimize*, romanticize, or overgeneralize women’ (emphasis added). Note that these exclusions are applied in line with what McDermott has already described as the broadest, most forgiving definition of ‘feminist’. Therefore, material which is considered to ‘victimize’ women is disqualified at the crudest stage of the triage<sup>9</sup>. Remember that these criteria are abstracted

---

<sup>9</sup> In fact, its disqualification is even more likely if we consider that, as I will show, representing women as victims is often equated with the objectification of women and the homogenisation of their experience, two of the aspects that McDermott (1994, 124) also lists as grounds for manuscript rejection.

I place ‘victimize’ in scare quotes above to also signal the ambiguity in the way it is used in this list, and one which reappears in the data analysed in due course. The suggestion is that representing women as victims is objectionable not only on political, moral or other grounds, but because women are directly harmed, rendered *actual* victims, by such representations. To ‘victimize’ women thus encompasses both the representation as victims (‘victim-ize’) and the fact of victimisation thought to be caused by such portrayals. As such, this item seems to occupy a slightly different register to the others in the list. In this sense, the reader is required to draw on an interpretive framework that enables her to understand and accept the conflation of representation and actual harm in order to preserve the list’s grammatical coherence.

The list structure encourages the presumption that all items in the list share similar characteristics, which appear on the whole to relate to representational styles. The reader carries that presumption alongside her immediate interpretation of ‘victimize’ according to its lexical meaning relating to direct harm. To maintain the cohesion and rhetorical momentum of the list, she must know (or quickly work out) how to replace ‘victimize’ comfortably alongside the other items, and recover its representational connotation as the primary meaning in this context. She can resolve this tension by figuring material harm to women as isomorphic with or causally related to representing them as victims. In the process, she adds to her knowledge about the appropriate way to view victim politics, by learning that representing women as victims is anti-feminist according to the *broadest* definition, and this knowledge is partly legitimised by the association that is implied here between representation and direct harm.

Here we find ourselves forced to utilise a value-loaded understanding of what it means to represent women as victims, even as we are reading through the *rational* output of McDermott’s deliberations. This is not meant as a criticism of McDermott, nor as a suggestion that she agrees with the criteria for manuscript selection that she outlines here. Indeed, her analysis contains an implied critique of the inevitable exclusions entailed in the consensus that evolves from editorial practice, and an acute awareness of the extent to which the myth of scholastic detachment conceals the social and political investments in that consensus. But it is meant to highlight how easy it is to activate the process of ‘map’ reading (what do I know in my social and discursive environment that matches the text and makes it ‘right’?), even though McDermott is analysing these criteria critically and has no intention herself necessarily of condemning victim representations.

The length of this footnote is symptomatic of the very phenomenon under investigation in this thesis: how reading activity and the formation of consciousness work during the routine practice of research by invoking interpretive moves at the periphery of our main focus. Even in the midst of a study devoted precisely to the technology of the formation of feminist knowledge about victims, it has been necessary to parenthesise these remarks. They do not quite fit in the body of the text; they interrupt the real business, which is to use McDermott’s observation as it stands to vindicate my suspicions about the role of journals in encouraging a generalised repudiation of the ‘victim’ category at a conceptual level. In making use of her insights to foreground the evidence I need at this particular point, I must temporarily suppress the ambiguity of the way

from McDermott's observations of editorial practice; they are not overtly stated as actual requirements, and therefore do not in themselves explain feminist conformity to a negative view of victimhood. That conformity is self-perpetuating in the ways we describe throughout this thesis. Nevertheless, McDermott's observations suggest that journals do have a disciplinary role in supporting that conformity.

### 2.3 Defining the method

As a consequence, bearing in mind both Hemmings' (2005) and McDermott's (1994) arguments about the role of journals in shaping academic feminist agendas, I interrogated a number of feminist academic journals for evidence of the infiltration of the 'political correctness' code. These journals were: *Signs* (US), *Feminist Studies* (US), *differences* (US), *Gender and Society* (US), *Hypatia* (US), *Feminist Review* (UK), *Australian Feminist Studies* (Australia), and *Women's Studies International Forum* (formerly *Women's Studies International Quarterly*) (UK/International)<sup>10</sup>. All these journals have a declared focus on feminism or women's studies either in their title or publication description (see Appendix 1). They are academic in the sense that they have a clear affiliation with a particular university, and/or have academics on their editorial boards. They are thus clearly positioned as authoritative vehicles for feminist critical debate and knowledge building, especially as these relate to the consolidation of the disciplinary status of feminism and women's studies in the academy.

Unlike Hemmings (2005), who examined feminist contributions to any journals, I chose journals that self-defined as feminist or having a focus on women. This was because when the reference-recognition-interpretation mechanism is activated in journals that self-designate as forums for developing feminist theoretical directions, this activation is more loaded as an instrument of forming feminist consciousness than where that process occurs elsewhere. There was also the difficulty in designating a writer as feminist, where the

---

she has framed them. To explicate that ambiguity, to bring the interpretive moves from the periphery into full view, requires a significant disruption to the flow of the main argument. This footnote enacts that disruption.

<sup>10</sup> Note that there is some overlap between this selection and the journals scrutinised by McDermott (1994, 2) for their editorial norms (*Signs* and *Feminist Studies*), and those analysed by Torr (2007a) for their content (*Signs*, *Feminist Studies*, *Feminist Review*, and *Women's Studies International Forum/Quarterly*). Both McDermott and Torr take these to be exemplars of feminist scholastic journals, according to McDermott's (1994, 2) criteria.

material appears in a domain that was not clearly defined as belonging to the feminist knowledge project. This is not to suggest that Hemmings' (2005) approach was wrong. The borders of feminist theory and of the epistemic community that speaks that theory are not clearly defined, and there is no reason to believe that the decrual of victimhood by feminists is confined to publications that announce their feminist provenance. Studying the ripple effect of feminist contributions in wider forums is a legitimate endeavour, insofar as they represent the release of feminist knowledge into other epistemic communities and the point at which the feminist collective's autonomy over its epistemic products decreases. However, I was interested not simply in what feminists think, but in the mechanics of how feminists come to think the way they do. A crucial element in that process is the reading experience of the 'individual-in-community' (to borrow Grasswick's (2004) term) – the reader making sense of a text in concert with those she must imagine to be her like-minded and similarly skilled sisters, for whom this text is intended. The evocation of that collective way of knowing acquires additional force in the case of feminist journals, since that knowledge has been legitimised by authoritative members of the collective during the editorial and peer review process. Feminists have political and disciplinary investments in the epistemic standards these journals articulate, but are less entangled, as feminists, in those that inform other kinds of journals. In the latter case, the 'community of attention' which the reader is called upon to join as part of meaning-making has a more diffuse membership – one which the feminist reader temporarily shares during that reading activity, but which does not necessarily form part of her feminist political and intellectual identity.

For the same reasons as McDermott (1994, 3), I avoided using feminist journals that have a very specific sub-disciplinary focus in preference to those that profess a more eclectic perspective, on the basis that these would manifest a wider cross-section of feminist perspectives on victimhood. Some may be seen as holding more flagship status than others – McDermott (1994, 163) saw older journals like *Signs* and *Feminist Studies* as representative of traditional or hegemonic feminism (especially in North America), forced into that role partly by the appearance through the 1980s of more specialised journals, in which she included some of our selections: *Hypatia*, *Gender and Society* and *differences* (McDermott 1994, 184 note 4). However, although these later journals represent more



precise disciplinary perspectives, and all assert the uniqueness of their contribution in that context, they nevertheless emphasise their relevance to the feminist community as a whole. For instance, *Hypatia* is positioned at the intersection of philosophy and feminism, but also claims to '[serve] as a resource for the wider women's studies community', and aims to be 'broadly accessible'. All have as part of their vision the promotion of critical and theoretical debate, but many are also sensitive to the need to maintain a connection between the development of theoretical knowledge and community activism<sup>11</sup>.

The declared sensitivity to that connection is important, since it implies that the knowledge that is consolidated about victimhood in the theoretical domain is intended to have practical application. Smith has already shown that theory is not separable from practice in the sense, firstly, that writing and reading theory activates a particular mechanics of interpretation, and secondly, that what is formed in the consciousness during reading practice will also inform the daily social and material practices of the reader. I am not suggesting that editorial visions of the connection between theory and practice are of the same order as Smith's. Indeed, they are not, since for Smith, theory *is* practice, and the desire for community relevance expressed in journal vision statements seems intended largely to counter the assumed natural divergence of theory and practice. However, these statements indicate that, quite apart from Smith's view of the isomorphism of theory and practice, there is reason to be concerned about how regularities that occur across the theoretical domain might be translated in the practical.

A possible exception to the above model is *differences*, since it declares its commitment to *theoretical* debates, and specifically debates to do with the category of difference (see Appendix 1). McDermott (1994, 166) also differentiated this journal from traditional feminist academic ones because it is animated by the need for feminism to examine its relationship to emerging poststructuralist theories, whose potential impenetrability risks alienating feminist activists. However, note that Mardorossian (2002a, 743) included *differences* alongside *Signs* and *Feminist Studies* as examples of 'the most influential journals in the field', and Adair (2005, 580) cited these same three as

---

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 1 (especially *Feminist Studies*, *Feminist Review* and *Women's Studies International Forum*), the frontispiece of the inaugural issue of *Australian Feminist Studies* (1985), which states its aim of encouraging the examination of the interaction between theory and practice, and McDermott's (1994, 165-6) observation that *Signs* is aimed at having an identifiable benefit to women.

representative of an eclectic approach to content, in contrast to specialised journals like *Journal of Women and Aging* or *Women and Criminal Justice*. As such, I included it in my survey.

In choosing these journals, I concentrated firstly on those with a reasonably high profile, which were also readily available electronically at my regional university, and therefore presumably to most feminist scholars. Within that set, there was a degree of diversity in terms of journal focus and vision, publication start date, and country of origin/publication. These two considerations weighed on the specific preoccupations of the research. If part of the concern about the impact of the ‘political correctness’ code is the formation of feminist consciousness about victimhood, then I needed to examine the sites where the risk of exposure to pertinent references was both highest and most potent. The first requirement was satisfied by selecting journals which have an established profile and are widely accessible. The second was satisfied by focusing on journals which represent both broad and varied interests, such that the activation of particular interpretive frameworks cannot be seen as a disciplinary quirk, and is similar in its operation across journals that nevertheless do differ in significant respects.

Originating in the US, UK, and Australia<sup>12</sup>, these eight journals therefore represented in the first instance a cross-section by nationality of Anglo-American feminist thinking, since a dispersion of examples throughout these suggests that a particular understanding of victimhood is shared across several national and cultural sites. These sites were the same in which the discourse of ‘political correctness’ was prevalent from the early 1990s. Since that discourse underpins the interpretive mechanisms that are activated in disparaging victimhood within feminism, the focus of my search should coincide with the geographical and linguistic sites of its circulation. The US appears to be over-represented in the sample, but this is attributable to the preponderance of long-standing, reputable feminist academic journals that are based there. In terms of non-US representation, *Feminist Review* (UK) is one of the oldest academic feminist journals and ‘sustains its unique role as an

---

<sup>12</sup> I have included *Women’s Studies International Forum* because of its explicitly international orientation, though it has been considered as a UK-based journal (see Torr (2007a)). I did not include Canadian feminist journals because of their relative unavailability at my location.

interdisciplinary, agenda-setting publication’<sup>13</sup>, and *Australian Feminist Studies* is claimed to have become ‘a leading journal of feminist studies’ since its inception in 1985 (Appendix 1).

That said, it could be argued that the decision to represent different national origins in the sample was more a concession to a commonsensical view of what would constitute a sufficiently diverse sample than one which was strictly justifiable in terms of my research agenda. It is true that some of the journals explicitly recognise their national context. The inaugural editorial of *Feminist Review* (1979 (1), 2) concedes that the journal is ‘necessarily rooted in the British experience’; *Australian Feminist Studies*’ first editorial (1985 1(1), viii) articulates the intention that the journal serve the Australian feminist community, in the same way that feminists are served in North America by *Signs* and *Feminist Studies* and in Britain by *Feminist Review*; and despite its avowedly international perspective, *Women’s Studies International Forum* (1978 1(1), 1-2 (then *Women’s Studies International Quarterly*)) was conceived to address the lack of a vehicle for bringing together the rapidly accumulating work in women’s studies in the UK. Nevertheless, most of the journals’ web page descriptions (with the exception of *differences* and *Hypatia*, arguably the most ‘theoretical’, and therefore least specifically situated in terms of content) also emphasise their international perspectives. Thus, although a diversity of national affiliations seems intuitively appropriate to reflect the ubiquity of a phenomenon (and therefore the risk of exposure to it), it must be said that the lines which mark that diversity are somewhat blurred. This is partly a function of the journals’ brief to be internationally relevant, but also of the increasing globalisation of publishing houses, the regular publication of writers outside their country of residence/employment, and the proliferation of electronic access to journals. In terms of our specific selection, all the journals (with the possible exception of *differences*) also had editorial structures which included affiliates abroad.

It must also be remembered that, if the iterative consumption of texts is ‘the actual local practice of a particular individual, reading just where she is’ (Smith 1999, 75), then the journal’s provenance is not a prominent component of the reading experience. Nor should ensuring diversity of origin suggest that a reader needs to encounter an evenly

---

<sup>13</sup> Bear in mind also Torr’s (2007a) comment about the difficulty of sourcing British university-affiliated feminist journals.

distributed number of cases across various dimensions for her to be affected. Indeed, the fact that she has been able to interpret the text implies that she shares a competency and familiarity with the discursive frameworks it deploys, irrespective of whether she is situated in precisely the same geo-political context. On that basis, an Australian or British feminist who is iteratively required to activate a victim-averse interpretive schema only in, say, *Signs*, may experience its consciousness-forming effects just as much as if she encounters these instances spread across a more eclectic mix of articles. In that case, it would be *theoretically* justifiable (though perhaps counter-intuitive) to be wary of a discursive pattern in feminist thinking on the strength of findings from a single (but very influential) journal.

In that sense, the quest for some diversity in the sample was more a deferral to intuition than strictly necessary within the terms of our research framework. I settled on a selection of journals which struck a balance in yielding an amount of data that is both manageable and indicative of a fair dispersion of relevant cases across a variety of sites. Unlike Torr (2007a), who limited her inspection to four journals to enable comparisons between journals, I took a larger sample because I did not intend to look at variations in, say, respective frequency of occurrences per journal. This was because consciousness-forming is not necessarily connected to any journal-specific features. This decision was also in line with the desire to refrain as much as possible from positioning the body of texts as ‘existing in meaning’ (Smith 1999, 53), as artefacts which hold the sum of feminist thought, traceable in its contours and inert enough for similarities and differences to be identified. The aim was to deflect attention away from the text as singular written product, with a unique author and date of publication, to focus on the disorderly, non-chronological, diversely located, iterative but incalculable processes of reading. Part of my commentary involves re-enacting that process through the recovery of the interpretive schema that allows me to talk about what the texts mean. To do so, the sample needed to be large enough to supply convincing evidence, but of a size which still enabled me to analyse in some depth the mechanics of meaning recovery in as many individual cases as possible.

Since the case was to be made in this fashion, rather than by the straight accumulation of textual examples where quantity would be the telling feature, I chose not to summarise the data numerically. Presenting findings in quantified form is merely the translation of

observations into numbers, and does not of itself evince transparency in sampling and data analysis (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991, 93-4). As I have pointed out, there are questions about what numerical tabulation could convey, given the following: the number of occurrences that would confirm a pattern in feminist thinking is unclear, the number of exposures that would impact individual consciousness is unknown, and each iteration initiates a circular mechanics that renders it as something more than simply the next in a sequential aggregation of data. Although the aim is to account for as many individual instances in the sample as possible within the body of my analysis, it is also to make a deliberate move away from methodological approaches that recommend quantitative evaluation of word frequency, for example, as the only way of '[revealing] hidden meanings in large sets of documents' (Reinharz 1992, 154). The view here is, of course, that meaning is neither held fully *in* texts, nor is it so concealed that only expert excavation will dislodge it. I also wanted to avoid inviting comparisons between journals based on respective frequencies of occurrences, because, as I have noted above, they are not necessarily indicative of different outcomes in reading practice and the ongoing formation of feminist consciousness.

Turning now to the specifics of data retrieval, the journals were to be surveyed for what they revealed about the infection of feminist theoretical texts by the code of 'political correctness'. For that reason, the journals were searched for the period between 1987 and 2007, taking the publication of Bloom's (1987) book as the nominal point when the formation of the code was set in motion (*supra* 4 note 1). It is the point at which the contextualising conditions of feminist writing changed by making available a particular interpretive schema for understanding references to certain concepts. Moreover, material dating from 1987 represents most of that which could still be considered current in terms of feminist research and referencing practice; that is, it is still likely to figure in the consciousness-forming effects of reading activity. Closing the survey period at 2007 was a function of the need to draw a line under the search process at a convenient point in the project life, and does not signify that the code has entered into obsolescence. Since this thesis does not aim to trace historical changes in feminist attitudes and modes of reference, there was no attempt to differentiate between material published at various stages within that period. The focus was on the experience of the reader 'reading just where she is'

(Smith 1999, 75), not on that of the writer, writing just where she was. That is, the impact of invoking the code of ‘political correctness’ to understand certain references is the same in the present of the reading activity, irrespective of where in the period the work that contains that reference is published.

The goal was to identify with some precision how the discourse of ‘political correctness’ articulates with feminist theory. The point at which that articulation occurs was taken to be feminist modes of reference which devalue the category of ‘victim’, a devaluation which correspondingly ennoble agency and resistance as marks of self-reliance. The first task was therefore to gather from the sample pool instances of these sorts of crucial reference. The particular interest was less in cases where victimhood was the topic of discussion, but where the reference was incidental. These were considered to be potentially more potent mechanisms for consolidating feminist attitudes to victimhood because they pointed to assumed knowledge, which was integral to understanding the text but peripheral to what was being proposed for discussion – ‘the embedded material dis/appear[s] to be part of another larger structure which is presented as the main clause or argument’ (Threadgold 1997, 122).

Such references were unlikely to be retrieved via indexed lists of abstracts of the sort used by Adair (2005, 580), and which are searchable by ‘the titles and author-generated keywords indicating the [articles’] primary foci’. Even where abstracts did contain references to victims, these would not all be the paradigmatic uses in which I was interested. In any case, as Adair found, abstracts were not reliable indicators of the presence of class analysis even when authors identified that as central to their discussions. Whilst Adair’s procedural problem was that article content did not always reflect the intentions stated in the abstract, mine was more likely to be the reverse – a lack of references to victims in abstracts would not be indicative of a generalised absence in feminist theory of the articulation of knowledge about victims<sup>14</sup>. Such a discrepancy would go precisely to the crux of my argument – the positioning of that knowledge as no longer the focus of active negotiation. In terms of survey practicalities, the unreliability of abstracts confirmed by Adair in faithfully accounting for even the primary article content, let alone that which is

---

<sup>14</sup> For example, using JSTOR to search articles published between 1987 and 2003 (the period available in this database) in *Signs*, *Feminist Review*, *Feminist Studies*, *Hypatia* and *Gender and Society*, yields 849 uses of ‘victim’ derivatives in full text, but only 39 in abstracts, and 21 in titles.

included as assumed knowledge, requires that the full text of articles be searched in order to unpack the mechanics and context of that naturalisation. In view of the large quantity of texts to be scrutinised, the method for locating relevant articles/occurrences was to search electronically using the journal databases available through my institution.

The first search conducted was for articles where the word ‘victimhood’ occurred in the full article text. This produced the primary dataset, comprising 98 articles (see Appendix 3). Searching on this term located references where victim status was more likely to be framed as a state or identity. By dint of that, referential uses of the word ‘victim’ were also more likely to be filtered out, which was necessary in any case to produce a dataset of a manageable size<sup>15</sup>. This does not distort the research findings, since, as has been said, referential uses of ‘victim’ do not have a counter-balancing effect on paradigmatic uses – rather they illuminate the disciplinary power of the latter to achieve the erasure of material victimhood as a necessary component of their capacity to mean. The two types of usage point to incompatible understandings of victimhood – they call us to recognise two completely distinct objects, rather than present divergent perspectives of the same object. Hence, it is not a question of needing to account for the two together with the intention of producing a more complete and balanced picture of feminist attitudes to victimhood. A second set of 154 articles was retrieved by searching article full text for the phrase ‘passive victim’ or ‘passive victims’ (see Appendix 4). I also drew on a small set of articles which contained the word ‘victimology’ or its derivatives (see Appendix 5), since these uses were often identical to the way in which that term was deployed in conservative discourses as an instantly recognisable code for the unworthiness of victim claimants and their supporters. Of course, these three datasets can overlap, with individual articles potentially appearing in more than one. In all cases, all types of articles were retrieved, including book reviews, which functioned to contextualise the writing of other feminists within the meaning systems constructed around the category of ‘victim’, whether the authors of the books in question did so or not.

The composition of these datasets was also conditioned by the availability of the journals at my (regional) institution. Most of the journals I selected were accessible

---

<sup>15</sup> As already noted (*supra* 86 note 14), a search on ‘victim\*’ across five of the selected journals for a shorter period returned 849 articles, too many for the style of interpretive re-enactment I proposed to use in this analysis.

electronically for all of the search period (1987-2007), and were in fact more completely held in online databases than library hardcopy (see Appendix 2). The exceptions were *differences*, which began publication in 1989, but was available only from 1994 (and not at all in hardcopy), and *Australian Feminist Studies (AFS)*, which has been published since 1985, but is also available electronically only from 1994 (though accessible in hardcopy for the period 1987-1993). Therefore, *AFS* was the only case where a visual scan of the physical journal was potentially both necessary and possible to supplement the electronic material. However, since the chances of retrieval of relevant instances were much less certain than for electronic searching, a physical search was not done for those years. Although the publication start dates vary between 1972 (*Feminist Studies*) and 1989 (*differences*), all except the latter were being published in 1987, and continued appearing until at least 2007.

Some constraints were also imposed by idiosyncrasies in the flexibility of the search functionality of the databases being used, and in their particular protocols of retrieval and display. For instance, in some cases, a phrase could be matched only if placed in double quotation marks; in others, single quote marks were sufficient. Sometimes, a word could not be matched if it appeared in the article itself in quotation marks. Where possible, I cross-matched the retrieved dataset through different databases. This did not always return a perfectly identical set of articles because of these sorts of search peculiarities, but the substantial amount of overlap between the lists provided some confirmation of reliability, and in some cases discrepancies brought important omissions to light. It should also be borne in mind that the availability of the separate journals varied to some extent over the life of the search process, as my institution's subscription arrangements changed. The databases specified in Appendix 2 are those which I was using at the time of the actual survey. In addition, the functionality of some of the databases changed over time, though generally not to the detriment of search capability. All these changes required some verification that similar results could be achieved under the new conditions.

The mode of analysis adopted was to re-enact the interpretive processes set in motion during reading practice in line with Smith's (1990, 163; 1999, 75, 232 note 2) ideas about the operation of 'textually-mediated discourse'. This necessitated a discursive treatment of the data. The majority of retrieved articles will therefore be referred to in some form in the



data analysis in Chapter 5, especially those from the primary dataset (containing ‘victimhood’). The small minority which are not dealt with specifically exhibit for the most part a weak or absent negativity to the concept of victimhood. However, as I have explained, these do not constitute ‘disconfirming’ cases in the sense that they do not necessarily offset the effects of the other cases. The articles in the second dataset are dealt with in a subsection (5.3) of Chapter 5 to demonstrate how the equation of passivity with victimhood has been normalised, and how the ‘passive victim’, and by extension the ‘victim’ in general, has been positioned as an object of repulsion. I do quantify these kinds of reference to some extent in that chapter (section 5.1) because they virtually all operate in the same way, in that the phrase is deployed with mantra-like regularity and lack of reflection. Of all the forms of references being analysed, these initiate the most automated and predictable interpretive sequence.

Having retrieved an analysable set of articles, I did not necessarily limit the discussion to the ‘victimhood’ references where the treatment of the ‘victim’ label more broadly in the article is pertinent. Searching article text for ‘victimhood’ operated in part to provide a window into feminist rhetorical practice around that concept, on the basis that whatever was present in the data was then open to interrogation. The analysis was also enhanced by the random nature of what was thrown up by this search – the attention given to issues of victimhood in individual articles varied along a continuum from some degree of focus to passing reference only. I am confident that, were it feasible to access feminist theory by searching on ‘victim\*’ and extracting the paradigmatic uses for analysis, the rhetorical technologies deployed in those cases would mirror those which emerge in our datasets.

Part of the argument about the impact of the ‘political correctness’ frame on the shape of feminist agendas is that the understanding of ‘victimhood’ which it ordains promotes a morally uncritical posture towards the concepts of ‘agency’ and ‘resistance’. The scope of the thesis did not allow for an exhaustive examination of the way knowledge about these concepts is formed across feminist theory as a separate exercise. In any case, the primary focus remained on references to ‘victimhood’ (and the ‘passive victim’) as the activation point for the discourse of ‘political correctness’. The contention was that feminist knowledge formed about agency and resistance was a function of the knowledge formed

about victimhood – the interpretive schema which allow feminist readers to recognise victimhood as inherently negative enable by extension the recognition of agency/resistance as inherently positive. Therefore, the articles in the datasets already retrieved constituted the primary site for observing how feminists might also refer to ‘agency’ or ‘resistance’, and what assumptions came into play in the process. The coincidence of these two types of reference in the same article was thought to be able to reveal much about the way they worked to construct mutually exclusive semantic fields. Where appropriate, evidence was drawn from other sources to further illustrate these observations, for the most part from sources whose title signalled a focus on ‘agency’ or ‘resistance’. But it remains that the entry point for unpacking the textual mediation of the discourse of ‘political correctness’ is the mode of referencing ‘victimhood’ and its associated categories. The discussion of the way feminists define ‘agency’ and ‘resistance’ in contradistinction to these is intended to be an indicative but not comprehensive foray into the wider repercussions of incorporating particular discursive terms into feminist rhetorical practice.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter began from the premise shared in many feminist discussions of methodology: that decisions about research method are dictated by the research epistemology. It was noted that in these discussions the procedural options tended to play out along well-established lines. Quantitative approaches proceed from positivist faith in the reliability and repeatability of observations, whilst qualitative approaches acknowledge the situatedness of the researcher and the partial nature of the knowledge produced by the research. The suspicion was that this bipartite set of options was too inflexible to point to the kind of methodology which would be compatible with our theoretical framework.

Of particular interest was the way these issues were framed in studies whose broad aims of analysing regularities in feminist theory share something in common with the focus of this thesis. For example, Shands (1999) and Gallop (1992) both issued disclaimers about the partiality of their perspective. These disclaimers work to limit expectations of rigour or systematicity in the research procedure, indeed to frame a certain methodological fluidity as an epistemological virtue. In contrast, Adair (2005) and Torr (2007a) pursued more positivist agendas in seeking to identify what *is* in feminist theory, but problems of

classification emerged in both cases. These examples bore out the initial suspicion that there was a dearth of guidelines for going about the task of examining feminist theory in a way which neither took refuge in a reflexive posture, nor relied on quantification and quasi-scientific sampling to bolster general observations.

In the context of these difficulties, the title of this chapter, where ‘knowing’ serves as both adjective and gerund, contains an intentional ambiguity. The adjectival usage has become routine in feminist discussions about the status of knowledge to describe feminists in the act of knowing and making claims about the world around them (e.g. Ramazanoglu 2002, 138; Hawkesworth 1989). However, I mean the gerund form to introduce another element into the considerations about feminists and knowledge – not just the question of how and what feminist know outside themselves, but the question of how to know ourselves and each other as feminists in the act of producing and consolidating knowledge. How might we monitor the mechanisms by which we form and propagate shared knowledge, how might we develop insights into the formation of consciousness which allow us to *know* feminists?

As a way of answering that question, I have drawn on Smith’s (1990; 1999) theory of reading practice and Grasswick’s (2004) notion of ‘individuals-in-communities’ to start from an epistemology which resolves some of the dilemmas inherent in the approaches mentioned above. Their approaches allowed me to envisage the possibility of the individual reader/researcher preserving a level of detachment from the epistemic conventions of her knowledge community, whilst also being heavily invested in those standards according to which she functions, contributes and can be recognised as a competent knower within that community. This positioning of the researcher helps on the one hand to legitimise the process of scrutinising feminist theory for regularities in meaning-making, a positioning which the normative acknowledgement of situatedness tends to discredit. On the other, the entanglement of the individual knower in the community explains how knowledge standards operate to effect a certain predictability of interpretation among its members, and sometimes to impede challenges to those standards.

This hybrid epistemology has a bearing on the way my data functioned as evidence, since it allowed me to make claims which did not have to be based *either* on quantitative generalisations *or* on very localised frames of reference. It freed my meta-commentary

from the obligation to explain away any presumed superiority or special perceptiveness, since as I went about the business of analysing examples, I brought into view the same processes of interpretation and activated the same skills as all those who engage as writers and readers with the texts in question. At the same time, precisely because this epistemology legitimised the reach of my analysis beyond the confines of the local and situated *without* being premised on omniscience, it demanded that I problematise the assumptions which traditionally underpin the quantification of data in broad-ranging studies. These assumptions inform to some extent even those approaches which defer to the suggestive nature of their findings: the more data, the more convincing the findings. Such a view frames the data and its analysis in terms of totality and proportionality – do the supporting cases outweigh the deviant ones, what proportion of the whole do the supporting cases represent?

My caution with respect to these assumptions stemmed from my application of Smith's theory of reading, which moves away from viewing texts as inert products *containing* meaning to refocus on the consumption of texts. Bearing in mind what emerged from feminist methodological discussions as the guiding principle of feminist research – the connection between epistemology and research method – I heeded the particularities of the way Smith positioned readers/researches in relation to texts in developing my methodological approach. That meant questioning what drives the impulse towards amassing data, since the complex and exponential effects of the iterative reference-recognition-objectification process that constitutes reading activity cannot be captured by the one-case-one-value logic of linear data accumulation. Although claims about regularities of thought in a body of texts entail a commonsensical obligation to make the case using the quantity, and not just the quality, of the collected data, I wanted to be clear about what those accumulated instances represent.

Taken together and at a particular moment, they are symptomatic of the current condition of the body of feminist thought. Yet, if we remember the part texts play in organising relations between members of the epistemic community, then these collected instances represent an unknowable mixture of cause and effect in the ongoing process of knowledge formation. The conventional aim of data accumulation is to demonstrate the completed objectification of knowledge by the regularity of its expression, but also to

suggest the threat that such a *weight* of data poses to the collective consciousness. In contrast, I wanted to stress that this threat is less a function of simple repeated exposure to the same attitudes, from which the individual deduces this to be a commonly held belief. Instead, the threat derives from the reader being called to recognise and collude during each exposure, no matter how few, with what is posited as the assumed knowledge of the collective. My rejection of quantification was meant to reflect the messy, indeterminate nature of progressive knowledge consolidation and was an attempt to problematise the pursuit of exhaustiveness and accumulation as adequate in themselves to capture that process.

## **PART TWO**

### **Mapping the Terrain**

### **3 Academic Feminism And The Discourse Of ‘Political Correctness’**

#### **Introduction**

This thesis demonstrates how the interpretive schema of ‘political correctness’ can be used to make sense of dispersed allusions to victimhood in feminist theory, and the methodological issues addressed in the previous chapter pertain specifically to that undertaking. This is the first of two chapters which lay the ground for that demonstration by profiling the interpretive framework in question at the moment of its genesis in the early 1990s. A prominent strategy at the time to defend the institutional status quo from the threat of so-called ‘political correctness’ was to discredit those claiming to be victims of social, political and academic exclusion. In line with this strategy, conservative commentators denied the organised nature of discrimination, attributing victim identification to moral weakness and reluctance to take personal responsibility for one’s fate. It was argued that, in claiming subordination and driving the implementation of measures intended to correct structural disadvantage, ‘victims’ actually caused their own victimisation by provoking the retaliation of those unfairly disenfranchised by programs like affirmative action. The latter repositioned themselves as the ‘real’ victims of such programs, in that their entitlement to the rewards of individual merit was being sacrificed to the ‘special interests’ being pandered to by the newly politicised academy.

In this chapter, I set out the broad lines of conservative attacks on victims in the literature discursively catalogued as part of the ‘political correctness’ debates, with particular attention to those directed specifically at the gains made by feminists. I also consider feminist interventions in this debate, specifically feminist reactions to the delegitimation of victim status insofar as this bears on the rationale of a movement premised on the assumption of women’s subordination. In doing so, I confront a particular problem to do with defining and delimiting political affiliations. As I go on to examine how academic feminist references to victimhood resonate with these conservative attacks, the crux of my objection to that is, after all, that ‘we’ are doing what ‘they’ did. This assumes that I know where ‘we’ stop’ and ‘they’ begin, and that ‘we’ and ‘they’ represent discrete

and opposable political camps. On one level, this is self-evident – the label ‘feminism’ exists precisely to designate a particular constituency with a distinct set of political interests, the discreteness of which was fundamental to the attacks directed at the benefits this constituency supposedly enjoyed over other social and political groups. But my discussion of feminist engagement with the conservative commentary of the time reveals that, in places, some concessions were already being made by feminists to the reasonableness of some of the objections to measures catalogued under the rubric of ‘political correctness’. Even my use of the word ‘concessions’ embeds an assumption of separability and natural opposition that might be problematic.

The question is further complicated by the entry into the debate of several publications aimed at the popular market and penned by self-identified feminists, themselves critiquing feminist preoccupation with victimhood on the same grounds as those outlined in the more extended backlash literature. I borrow (and take some liberties with<sup>1</sup>) Minnich’s (1998) phrase in referring to this loose collective of writers as feminism’s ‘prodigal daughters’, a group which is most commonly seen to comprise Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Sommers, Katie Roiphe and Naomi Wolf<sup>2</sup> (e.g. Atmore 1999a, 183; Gavey 1999, 61; McDermott 1995, 669; Mardorossian 2002a, 748; Haag 1996, 24; Kozol 1995, 648), but sometimes includes the likes of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Rene Denfeld and Daphne Patai (e.g. Cole 2000, 135; Minnich 1998, 159).

The academic feminist response to these populist contributions positioned their authors variously as categorically anti-feminist, or as quasi-legitimate feminist commentators on the current state of feminism. In any case, the different profiles of these writers resist homogenisation in some respects – for example, at one extreme Sommers had the financial support of the conservative Olin Foundation, while Wolf has been ranked as the least conservative of the group (Atmore 1999a, 186) and, within the academic feminist critique of her work, regularly drifts back and forth across the notional border between legitimate feminists and this hostile pseudo-feminist cadre. The point here is that this popular literature and the responses to it blur the dividing line between what can be called

---

<sup>1</sup> Minnich’s (1998) review dealt specifically with writing by Sommers, Patai and Koertge, Fox-Genovese, and Roiphe.

<sup>2</sup> Note that Wolf’s publication of *Fire With Fire* (1993) normally accounts for her inclusion in the group. This book is considered something of a retreat from her earlier book, *The Beauty Myth* (1990), where she espoused more recognisably feminist views on women’s positioning in a patriarchal culture.



feminist and what cannot, with some participants framing the exchange as an intra-feminist debate, rather than as part of a clear antagonism between feminism and the broader, concerted attacks on the social enfranchisement of subordinated groups. Indeed, the fact that this group is accorded a somewhat fluid membership already signals the difficulty of clearly bracketing its pronouncements from other forms of feminist commentary.

While I cannot definitively settle matters of border control here, I am flagging that what appears to be an obvious and straightforward opposition between feminism and its critics raises important issues of gate-keeping and exclusion around what counts as authentic feminist theory. These are sensitive issues considering feminists contestation of their own exclusion from dominant assumptions about what constitutes 'knowledge'. The logic of my objections to feminist treatments of victimhood rests to some extent on being able to sheet an opinion home to its ideological provenance and evaluate it (damn it) accordingly. I am not alone in being disturbed when similarities are detected between feminist positions and those that declare hostility to feminists, including specifically the backlash construction of 'political correctness' and the value system which it erects. Nor can feminists abdicate questions of ideological and strategic commitment. Obviously, not all political interests coincide with ours, and where these interests become discursively entangled, as they have been in the devaluation of victim status, this entanglement needs at the very least to be studiously negotiated. Feminists do not necessarily have to adopt a reactive stance, but where these other interests construct feminism with pernicious intent, feminists need to attend carefully to the way they develop and frame their own positions, especially if these positions bear some similarity, surface or otherwise, to those espoused by opposing camps.

The speciousness of a simple differentiation between political 'sides' means that my division of the literature for the purposes of this chapter into that which attacks 'political correctness' and that which either responds to these attacks or critically analyses the issues at hand involves a certain brutality of categorisation. I have tried to limit that by relying only on those brutalities that are a *fait accompli* – that is, I draw evidence as much as possible from books, collections and journal special issues dedicated to 'political correctness', some of which organise their contents along the lines of a 'for' and 'against' debate (e.g. Friedman and Narveson 1995; Berman 1992; Aufderheide 1992). Although

these sorts of publications do as much to construct the debate and ideological affiliations as reflect them (and, moreover, reify the objective reality of ‘political correctness’ in their titles), we must assume that their contributors endorse the organisation of their views in these terms. I avoid for the most part appealing to commentary outside these dedicated debates, unless there is a clear reference to ‘political correctness’ and, therefore, an intentional positioning by the author of their views within that discourse. Therefore, I bracket the more diffuse literature which treats issues that the construction of ‘political correctness’ has encoded as seminal to that phenomenon (for example, the restrictions on hate speech), but where the term itself is not used – if only to resist, somewhat futilely perhaps, its organising power. The exception to these provisos is my use of material from the journal *Academic Questions*, the organ of the National Association of Scholars (NAS), which coalesced around the specific intent of combating ‘political correctness’ (Adler 1990; D’Souza 1992a, 18; Ravitch 2005, 7, 18). The articles in the journal can, therefore, be seen as potentially informed by this broad agenda, even when they do not deploy the term itself. With respect to the ‘prodigal daughters’, the literature by and about them is relatively delimitable, but occupies, as I have suggested above, an ambivalent space which bridges the polarity between academic feminists and their hostile conservative critics.

I also differentiate between the term ‘political correctness’ as used by conservatives to undermine equity agendas during the 1990s and beyond, and its deployment within feminism during the ‘sex wars’ of the 1980s to suggest the idea of a required conformity to sexual practices considered to be authentically feminist. These usages are not entirely distinct on two counts. Firstly they invoke a similar interpretive framework to cast certain politically conscious directions as repressed and puritanical, and renegade positions as transgressive and liberatory (see Weir 1995, 58). Secondly, both conservative and feminist critiques of ‘politically correct’ dogmatism often converge on MacKinnon as its exemplar (e.g. (on the conservative side) Kimball 1993; McElroy 1996, 5, 23; Iannone 2000, 29; Cummings and O’Donohue 2005, 21; Bennett 2007, 63ff.; (on the feminist side) Rich 1986, 527, 554; Rodgeron and Semple 1990, 21-3; Walters 1998, 63-4; Willis 1994, 46, 48-9; see also Glick 2000, 21, 22, 24). However, it should be noted that the way the phrase has been used within feminism has been marked by some fluidity, sometimes appearing simply to denote strategies that are politically coherent and most in line with the movement’s aims,

rather than to critique the conformity that such formulations are seen to entrain (e.g. Offen 1988, 137-8; 1989, 209; Dimen 1984, 139; Alcoff 1988, 411-2). By the time of its deployment in the broader debates of the 1990s, the expression had consolidated its derogatory connotations. My interest here, therefore, is in the traction that the conservative usage has gained in the popular domain, and the corresponding ability of the phrase to situate feminist politics within a wider social system of values and meaning where victims are viewed with suspicion.

### **3.1 Against ‘political correctness’: the attack on the ‘victim’s revolution’**

The preservation of existing power structures and knowledge systems threatened by ‘political correctness’ relied on a discursive counter-attack on the claims of victimised groups aimed at evaporating the obligation to mount a social and institutional response to marginalisation. In fact, the powerful and privileged executed a complete reversal of these claims, repositioning themselves as the *real* victims of the excessive and unreasonable demands of minority groups, and powerless to stop the momentum of the ‘victim’s revolution’ (D’Souza 1992a; Will 1992a, 25), the ‘juggernaut’ of political correctness (McElroy 1996, 16; Kramer 1993, 570; see also Adler 1990) and the ‘war of aggression’ it prosecuted (Will 1991, 72). According to this argument, ‘political correctness’ was an instrument of intimidation, forcing adherence to speech codes (Dent 1999, 30; Phillips 1994, 38-9) and threatening the professional advancement of the deserving through affirmative action (D’Souza 1992b, 21; Kramer 1992, 321; Epstein 1989, 41) or spurious charges of sexual harassment (Robinson 2001, 31, 33; Friedman and Narveson 1995, 100; Iannone 2000, 35-6; Partington 2000, 33). In view of the centrality in the debates of demands to expand understandings of what constituted sexual coercion, feminists were seen as front-line operatives in a war against men (McElroy 1996, 60; Bennett 2007, 2), destroying their careers and reputations with ease on the basis of flimsy evidence (Partington 2000, 33).

The subtext of this reversal was the obviousness of the legitimacy of some claims to victimhood and the equally obvious illegitimacy of others. Those pursuing equity measures and regulation of racist and sexist language were thought to be programmatically following an agenda of ‘victimology’, a ‘faddish, pseudo-scientific [folly]’ that constituted one of the

‘principles and mechanisms of PC’ (Klatt 2003, 44; see also Lehman 1993, 599; Kimball 1993; Casement 2001, 24; Horowitz 1995, 57; Cummings and O’Donohue 2005, 8, 13; Epstein 1989, 40). In contrast, the critics of ‘political correctness’ and its excesses considered their claims to be self-evidently sound according to some assumed criteria which were objectively verifiable by all. These criteria were nowhere defined, but the confidence these commentators showed in their self-assessed victim status denied the inter-subjective processes by which public consensus about the legitimacy of victim claims is reached, and the plasticity of the standards involved in doing so.

Secondly, this reversal involved the obvious paradox that those who claimed to be victimised by ‘political correctness’ set great store on the political and moral capital of victim status to authorise their calls for urgent rectification of the situation. On the other hand, their rejection of others’ claims of structural disadvantage appealed to the innate capacities of individuals to overcome their misfortune. By this reasoning, it was a nonsense to suggest that individuals were victims as a function of their membership of a marginalised collective – no-one was a victim who did not really want to be. These victims, then, were accorded no narrative position from which to articulate their subjective perception of victimisation. Indeed, the act of self-identification as a victim automatically delegitimated the claim to victimhood. Indeed, for Epstein (1989, 40), the more someone insists on their victim status, the more suspect their claims. Those who call themselves victims ‘never blame themselves for their condition’. In other words, the self-proclaimed victim is not really a victim because she is more than likely responsible for her disadvantage (noting that Epstein has already explicitly discounted that women as a collective can be victims because they do not qualify as a minority group). Legitimate victims used to wait politely for that status to be conferred by the compassionate indulgence of non-victims; now ‘victims’ pressed their own claims ‘in tones that seem increasingly shrill and meanspirited’ (Sykes 1992, 20).

In these terms, the only acceptable victim was one who refused to act like one, especially when acting like one was part of a political agenda aimed at gaining social benefits. The oppressed who did not act like victims ‘in the end [seemed], far from victimized, immensely dignified and quietly heroic’ (Epstein 1989, 41). Ravitch (1992, 278) was equally inspired by such displays of courageous perseverance in the face of

disadvantage. The morally virtuous (and not the shrill and mean-spirited), therefore, were more likely to have their oppression acknowledged by the powerful. The catch was that the exhibition of these virtues simultaneously expunged their victim status. In a statement which suggests that victimhood actually has a particular utility in providing the opportunity for such inspirational behaviour, D'Souza (1992a, 243) observed:

Victimhood may provoke sympathy, but it does not, by itself, produce admiration. Being historically oppressed is nothing to be ashamed of, but neither is it an intrinsic measure of social status or moral worth. What evokes admiration is the spectacle of oppressed victims struggling against their circumstance, heroically, despite the odds. In this way victimhood can pave the way for greatness. Yet the current victim psychology makes it impossible for them to be relieved of their oppression. [...]

The position occupied by the victim here is one of spectacle for non-victims, and D'Souza's phrasing suggests that the admiration of these spectators should be the primary goal of the victim. Those who submit to 'victim psychology' squander the potential for greatness that is latent in victimhood and are singularly responsible for perpetuating their oppression.

D'Souza's individualisation of victimhood here – a function of a defective psychology rather than external factors – was a common framing across the literature attacking 'political correctness'. This literature ridiculed the idea that particular social groups were victimised by their structural positioning, obviating in the process the need for any fundamental reorganisation of material and cultural norms (e.g. Hollander 1994, 65; Crawford 2001, 55; Searle 1999, 51). Women's apparently unequal status was actually a function of natural differences between the sexes which resulted in a reduced feminine presence in the public sphere (Iannone 2000, 33; Kersten 1991; Bennett 2007, 3). Sometimes they simply chose to participate in practices claimed by 'fundamentalist' feminists like MacKinnon to be oppressive (Kimball 1993). To attribute disadvantage to the structural and historical relations between social groups was a crude and unsophisticated explanation (Lehrman 1992, 31; Sykes 1992, 18; Lehman 1993, 599; Crawford 2001, 55). Where real hardship existed, the solution was not to be found in social or institutional correctives, but in the spirit of individual enterprise which was crucial to surmounting obstacles. Therefore, D'Souza (1996, 75) could argue that the suffering of blacks would continue even if racism disappeared, unless they could divest themselves of the victim mindset that perpetuated their lack of achievement. And the correct response to the threat of

date rape and sexual harassment was self-assertion, not institutional and legal measures which reflected the 'collectivisation' of rape and mistakenly located the problem in the normalisation of gender inequalities, rather than in the wrong choices individual women made in the course of their interactions with men (Lehrman 1992, 34; McElroy 1996, 3, 7; Loury 1993, 615-6; Kimball 1993; see also Sykes 1992, 185; Bennett 2007, 63; Cummings and O'Donohue 2005, 21).

Those who did not avail themselves of their innate capacities for self-advancement were therefore necessarily assumed to be purposely clinging to their victim status for various odious reasons – to avoid personal responsibility for their disadvantage (Lehrman 1992, 33; Magnet 1995, 83-4; Sykes 1992, 11, 242-3; Wright 2005, xxiv; Epstein 1989, 21; Cummings and O'Donohue 2005, 13; Zur 2005, 50-1), to preserve public sympathy and the moral capital that ensued from victim status (Delbanco 1993, 540; Hollander 1994, 61; 1996, 43; McClay 1995, 81; D'Souza 1992a, 242-3; Will 1992b, 260; Sykes 1992, 12), and to continue to qualify for the 'special treatment' and tangible benefits that status conferred (Hollander 1994, 41-2; 1996, 60-1; Richardson 1991). Such obvious rewards generated an unseemly competition to press claims to be the most disadvantaged (D'Souza 1992a, 242-3; Boyte 1992, 179; Will 1992b, 260; Sykes 1992, 11; Martin 1993, 649). These moral and material advantages endowed victims with a disproportionate power of which they pretended to be ignorant, but in which these commentators identified the central motivation of victim claimants, who were driven by a lust for power and retribution against their oppressors (Adler 1992, 64; Bennett 2007, 3; Iannone 2000, 31, 38; Zur 2005, 49; Richardson 1991; Epstein 1989, 21; McElroy 1996, 3; Sykes 1992, 42; Friedman and Narveson 1995, 53). Alternatively, Casement (2001, 24) saw the adoption of victim identity as a stubborn attempt to differentiate oneself from the powerful. Victims were therefore cast as morally inadequate on the basis of both their active quest for or refusal of power, depending on whether power was seen as an evil instrument for punishing the innocent upholders of the status quo or as every individual's noble capacity for self-improvement.

According to this logic of ulterior motive, the substance of claims of victimisation was explained away as exaggeration or fabrication of evidence (Williamson 1996, 115; Dench 2000, 47; Klatt 2003, 44; Epstein 1989, 40-1; Sykes 1992, 185; Brustein 1993, 528), or as the result of an abnormal, even cultivated, sensitivity to insult (Cummings and

O'Donohue 2005, 19; Wright 2005, xxvii; Friedman and Narveson 1995, 96; Hughes 1993, 8, 149; Sykes 1992, 164). Labelling the articulation of the subjective injury of victimisation as the 'hurt feeling' movement' (Klatt 2003, 44) was an attempt to disable the initiation of debate about the readjustment of agreed standards for evaluating subjective grievance. The prospect of admitting victims' perspectives into the conceptualisation of justice was objected to on the grounds that, taken to the extreme, this would '[turn] injustice into a subjective experience and [deny] the validity of objective and shared understandings of equity and justice to which victim and nonvictim can appeal' (Sykes 1992, 164). The assumed unfeasibility of this extreme authorised a retreat to the position from which judgments about what was victimising or not could be made only by those less subjectively involved in the matter (non-victims).

To suggest that it was possible to codify acceptable modes of public discourse and interaction was seen as a ridiculous enterprise in view of the fact that such codes would have to protect 'designated groups of victims [...] from whatever they decide offends them' (Will 1992b, 260). While these critics were prepared to recognise that real oppression did exist, even sometimes at the level of the collective, 'political correctness' was a misguided attempt to mount a political response to the psychological problems of emotional hypersensitivity or internalised passivity (Lehrman 1992, 33; Partington 2000, 33; Cummings and O'Donohue 2005, 23; Epstein 1989, 21, 40; Sykes 1992, 18, 242-3; D'Souza 1996, 75). The fundamental narrative was one of excess – victims had gone too far in their demands, inflating the extent of their victimisation and over-regulating the public sphere instead of attending to private issues of 'character'. In '[tending] to push it' (Epstein 1989, 40), victims lost their entitlement to that status, even when their victimisation had originally not been in doubt. Adjudication on matters of victimisation (the frequency of which would be kept to a minimum if victims were more self-reliant) should appeal to the nebulous but universally accepted standard of 'common sense' (Sykes 1992, 254; see also Dench 2000, 46; Iannone 2000, 36; Bennett 2007, 63). Subjective offence was not a reliable indicator of the extent of injury, partly because it were unpredictable, but more so because it was seen as confected for the purposes of manipulating the system for personal reward. This assumed, of course, that the system was generally oriented towards

showing indulgence towards self-identified victims, and therefore susceptible to exploitation by these sorts of deluded or devious individuals.

The basis of victim claims having been thus eroded, the real source of victimisation was relocated in the very act of naming people as victims. There lay the real insult – to suggest that those so labelled were helpless, dependent and in need of protection (Kimball 1993; Dickstein 1993, 544; Phillips 1994, 38; Lehrman 1992, 30; McElroy 1996, 59; Sykes 1992, 179; Iannone 2000, 35-6). Allowing women in violent relationships, for example, to think that they had no capacity to minimise the violence by adjusting their own behaviour was to ‘revictimise’ them (Zur 2005, 51). Victimhood was legitimate only if the victim could demonstrate that all their natural agentic capacity had been exhausted by the forces ranged against them, a standard of proof that had very little likelihood of being met in the eyes of critics who believed in the potential for individual will to overcome all obstacles. To satisfy this standard, self-proclaimed victims therefore had to be feigning helplessness, or seeking in it ‘an attractive escape hatch’ from the responsibilities imposed by modern society (Sykes 1992, 23). This calculated pretence sometimes resulted in victim claimants internalising this helpless identity and feeling more vulnerable than they actually were (Lehrman 1992, 30; McElroy 1996, 59; Sykes 1992, 178), so their inability to surmount difficulties was caused not by the external factors that prompted claims of victimisation in the first place, but by the process of identifying and naming these factors. Victimhood was the state of thinking like a victim (Epstein 1989, 41) and it was therefore possible to refuse to be a victim. In contrast, the helplessness of those who were victimised by ‘political correctness’ made them objects of pity, and proved the extent of the intimidation wrought by equity agendas. Ironically, in these cases, the only way of combating the sense of helplessness was to publicise incidents of reverse discrimination, that is, to articulate the sense of victimisation (Dent 1999, 30).

Claims of victimhood were responsible for victimisation also in the form of retaliation from those reversely discriminated against by measures designed to alleviate the original (spurious) problems (McElroy 1996, 7; D’Souza 1992a, 228; 1992b, 21 Epstein 1989, 31). This capacity to provoke reactive victimisation attested the power victims actually enjoyed, contrary to their pretence of helplessness. Sometimes, even the original victimisation was attributed to this capacity. For instance, Zur (2005, 55) saw in the aggressive and violent



feelings therapists themselves developed when dealing with victims of domestic abuse evidence of ‘the power embodied in the unconscious make-up of the victim to evoke victimization’. Here, contrary to what one might ordinarily expect in the therapeutic relationship, the fault, and the responsibility to correct it, all lies with the victim and not with the therapist, whose unmediated feelings of irritation are assumed to represent the legitimate standard by which the wrong of the victim is to be assessed. By Zur’s (2005, 55; emphasis added) reasoning, those ‘who *maintain* a primarily victim identity will not be attracted to a nonabusive partner’. In other words, the domestic violence victim is not a victim by virtue of the violence, but of her pre-existing and self-fulfilling victim identity, which it has largely been in her power to ‘maintain’ or relinquish.

The gist of these arguments, then, was that victim status was largely a matter of choice. So-called victims always had the option of refusing to think like a victim and to thereby rise above their difficulties. If they did not exercise this power, the only conclusion was that the claim of victimhood was a manipulative ruse to avoid personal responsibility for one’s oppressed situation and to gain the benefits that accrued from public recognition of disadvantage. To this end, victims inflated the extent of their injury and helplessness, so that, even if the original fact of victimisation was acknowledged, the element of choice was still central – victims’ demands were out of proportion to their disadvantage, and this over-playing of their condition was a deliberate strategy or a cultivated hypersensitivity. At some point – judged by some unstated standard, but one set and understood by non-victims – victims exceeded their legitimacy and became objects of suspicion. At every turn, victims’ subjective narratives were marginalised as unreliable, if not outright false, and unrepresentative of the perceptions of the mainstream, which were informed by the unobjectionable standards of ‘common sense’. This exclusion was justified in part on the grounds that defining someone as a victim was implicitly to ascribe to them the helplessness and fragility taken to be constituent elements of that definition – this was insulting, and constituted the real victimisation. No-one, apart from the morally bereft or psychologically defective, wanted to be identified as a victim.

In outlining the main points of the critics’ position, I have appealed to their own statements, rather than to the prolific secondary literature on what became known as the ‘political correctness’ debates, some of which I have touched on in the thesis introduction,

and much of which makes similar observations to mine. I have confined the focus in this way so as to describe *in situ* the broad lines of the interpretive framework which, as I am arguing, sits ready to assist readers of feminist theory to accomplish the meaning of references to victims in cases where the text does not provide all the interpretive material required. I will suggest that, where the text instructs us to view the ‘paradigmatic’ victim in a particular (negative) way, this framework legitimates that positioning and provides the logic for doing so that may be missing from the immediate text. It provides the background story of feigned innocence, of helplessness as a demeaning attribute rather than a cause for compassion, of exceeded legitimacy, and of the degraded and negligible subjectivity of the victim.

### 3.2 Enter the ‘prodigal daughters’

In the context of this broadly directed backlash against minority group agitation emerged the populist contributions of the ‘prodigal daughters’, whose criticisms were aimed specifically at the state of contemporary feminism and its abandonment of the interests of ordinary women. These writings deployed all of the narrative tropes described above in undermining the legitimacy of feminists’ claims about the victimisation of women, and replicated in expanded form the specific attack on feminists that was mounted in the wider literature. Indeed, both Sommers (1994, 110-11, 253-4, 274) and Wolf (1993, 70, 161) used the discourse of ‘political correctness’ to describe the form of feminism they decried – as making ridiculously excessive assertions about the ‘patriarchy’, silencing dissenting views, and taking a morally superior and puritanical position<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, with the possible exception of Wolf (whose allegiance, we have noted, is less easy to define<sup>4</sup>), these writers were cited admiringly in a number of journals associated with opposition to ‘political correctness’ (see, amongst numerous examples, Iannone 1993, 51; 2000, 32; Kaiser 2000,

---

<sup>3</sup> McElroy’s (1996) eponymous critique of ‘sexual correctness’ also made this link clear – ‘[gender] feminism has joined hands with political correctness’, the movement which championed groups ‘who [had] been historically victimized by white males’ (McElroy 1996, 6). Gender feminists were allegedly responsible for the spread of ‘sexual correctness’, and the collectivisation and politicisation of what McElroy saw as essentially individual, unsystematised social interactions between men and women.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Wolf (1993, 125) was critical of attempts ‘in popular debate’ to undermine women’s studies and distort its agenda, and cited D’Souza’s critiques as typical of this strategy of ridicule. Presumably, Wolf bracketed her own work from the excesses that marked the popular debate of which she speaks, despite using its discursive tropes to deny her own membership of the sort of feminism ridiculed by D’Souza and others.

72; Kimball 1993; Young 1994, 56). These journals include *Academic Questions*, and *New Criterion* under the editorship of Kimball, whose opposition to feminist influence in the academy was well documented (Kimball 1990, 15, 19).

That is not to say that there were no differences in the approaches of these writers. In fact, Wolf (1993, 147-8) was critical of both Paglia's and Roiphe's diminution of the reality of the victimisation that women suffer, especially the extent of sexual violence. She accused them of 'doing something slick and dangerous with the notion of victimization'. Furthermore, Wolf (1993, 110) levelled at Paglia the sorts of criticisms that have also been directed at Paglia within academic feminist writing – that she expressed anti-feminist views under cover of her self-proclaimed feminism, and utilised the influential media forum to misrepresent feminism as a homogeneous and simplistic set of precepts. Elsewhere, Wolf (1992, 23) described Paglia as 'spokeswoman for the anti-feminist backlash', and, in so doing, positioned herself on the side of those protesting against the backlash. On her side, Paglia (1992, 4) described herself as a vigorous supporter of feminism, whose legitimate aims were being endangered by Wolf's brand of rigid orthodoxy allegedly on display in *The Beauty Myth* (see *supra* 96 note 2).

Wolf was similarly ridiculed by Roiphe (1993), Sommers (1994) and Denfeld (1995) in relation to the arguments put forward in that book. Roiphe (1993, 55-6) objected to Wolf's equation of rape with all kinds of sexual coercion, and the social significance invested in the prevalence of rape as an instrument of oppression. Roiphe categorised Wolf's views as of the same ilk as Brownmiller's portrayal of rape as the constant latent threat that keeps women in their place. However, Wolf's (1993, 132ff.) later complaint that the media had bastardised some influential feminist statements, including Brownmiller's, should not necessarily be read as resounding support for Brownmiller. The impression is that Wolf reserves a suspicion that feminists like Brownmiller, while making important contributions to advancing our understanding of feminist issues, should shoulder some responsibility for leaving themselves and feminism open to attack by engaging in confrontational critique.

For her part, Sommers (1994, 17) aligned the Wolf of *The Beauty Myth* with MacKinnon as one of the 'gender feminists' she blamed for inculcating a siege mentality in women by focusing on their subordination, and disputed the statistics on the incidence of

anorexia nervosa that Wolf used to argue the impact of beauty norms on women's body image (Sommers 1994, 11-2). However, Sommers extended no indulgence to Wolf for shifting her view in *Fire With Fire* to one which was closer to Sommers' own. Instead, Sommers (1994, 244-5) was snide about Wolf's promotion of 'power feminism', seeing it as a too-little-too-late conversion to liberal mainstream feminism which did nothing to repair the damage of her earlier pronouncements. In much the same way, Denfeld (1995, 161-2) simultaneously pointed to Wolf's conversion in *Fire With Fire* to support her own contention that women were alienated by feminism's emphasis on victimisation, and to castigate Wolf for the contribution *The Beauty Myth* made to this 'obsession with oppression'. In fact, for Denfeld (1995, 162), Wolf's departure from her earlier position did not go far enough, since Wolf still credited notions like 'patriarchy' and had a cautious view of women's success to date in combating their subordination.

Nevertheless, despite these variations, what these writers had in common was their antipathy to the representation of women as victims of male power, a depiction that they claimed actually reinforces women's self-image as passive and helpless. I do not intend here to do other than sketch the broad lines of the way these writers depicted contemporary feminism as overly preoccupied with women's victimhood. There is already a copious academic feminist literature which does attend to these arguments in some detail, and I will touch on that shortly. The interest here is in the extent to which these 'anti-feminist feminists' (Martin 1996, 608) imitate in a specifically feminist context the negative posture towards victims and victimhood that was circulating more broadly. It is also in whether the academic feminist response to these critiques succeeded in disrupting the terms set by the 'prodigal daughters' and the wider 'political correctness' discourse.

These writers all privileged a form of equity/reformist/classic liberal feminism over every other variety of feminism, all of which were collapsed as representative of the wrong turn that the feminist cause had taken, irrespective of other differences. The feminism they favoured centred around individual empowerment and practical reforms aimed at ensuring the equality of all human beings, without questioning either the definition of that equality or the benchmark against which it was to be measured. Feminists of all other stripes were conflated as radicals, 'gender feminists' or 'resenter feminists' (Sommers 1994, 16, 44), or 'victim feminists' (Wolf 1993, 147ff.). These kinds of feminists were portrayed as militant

ideologues who brooked no opposition and comprised feminists as diverse in their views as, for instance, Carol Gilligan and Catharine MacKinnon (e.g. Wolf 1993, 156; Sommers 1994, 139, 152-3, 231, 272; Denfeld 1995, 170-1, 93ff.), a portrayal that completely elided the existence of ongoing debate among feminists on a number of key issues. For instance, despite MacKinnon's (in DuBois et al. 1985, 73-4) stated opposition to Gilligan's argument that women speak with an essentially 'different voice', the two were positioned by some of the 'prodigal daughters' as representing a seamless whole of the type of feminism under attack.

Similarly, MacKinnon was criticised for her anti-pornography stance on the basis that any kind of censorship was antithetical to feminist interests (Denfeld 1995, 91; Sommers 1994, 272; Roiphe 1993, 153; Wolf 1993, 116) and that it fostered a risky alignment with the conservative right (Denfeld 1995, 94; Roiphe 1993, 156; Paglia 1994, 108). Again, what was ignored was that these same objections had also been raised no less intensely in the course of a vigorous and divisive debate by representatives of the sort of contemporary feminism that is here derided (e.g. Vance and Snitow 1984, 135; Strossen 1993, 1143, 1165, 1167; see also O'Sullivan 1995, 112). On the one hand, the resonance between these two sets of criticisms makes it less easy to dismiss out of hand the claims of the 'prodigal daughters' to be political moderates, equally horrified as they were at the prospect of an 'unholy alliance' (Roiphe 1993, 156) between feminists and the extreme right. On the other, these similarities indicate that claiming this moderateness in contra-distinction to academic feminists was based on a crudely over-simplified depiction of academic feminism.

What was particularly disturbing for these writers about contemporary feminism, and what MacKinnon's work supposedly typified, was the view of pornography and rape as paradigmatic of men's victimisation of women, and the source from which all other forms of subordination flowed. The feminist/victimist preoccupation with sexual victimisation was challenged on a number of levels: statistics on the incidence of sexual assault were discredited (Sommers 1994, 193, 210-11; Roiphe 1993, 52; Denfeld 1995, 59); rape was taken to be not symptomatic of cultural gender discrimination, but the activity of an (already) criminal fringe (Roiphe 1993, 52, 56; Denfeld 1995, 59; Sommers 1994, 220; Wolf 1993, 196-7); and the expansion of the definition of sexual victimisation to include a

range of less violent forms of coercion was contested in favour of a return to a traditional, legalistic definition of rape. Indeed, there was a general scepticism in regard to concepts like patriarchy, the existence of structural subordination, and the fostering of a feminist collective consciousness focused around a shared sense of oppression. Although these writers allowed that injustice against women does occur, they rejected the notion that such injustice was symptomatic of structural features of society. For Denfeld (1995, 162), '[p]atriarchal theory is, above all, pure victim mythology. Naming all society as patriarchal promotes a view of women as powerless victims in every aspect of their lives' (see also Roiphe 1993, 46-8; Sommers 1994, 16, 51; Wolf 1993, 149).

Denfeld's comment was typical of the argument that is central to these texts – that those feminists allegedly preoccupied with victimhood were not simply identifying and articulating the pervasiveness of male dominance in order to theorise appropriate challenges to it, but were actually turning women into frightened, passive and helpless victims. In other words, women were not victimised until misguided feminists filled them with fear of sexual assault and taught them to interpret unfortunate interactions between *individuals* as examples of the dire state of *gender* relations, a process Wolf (1993, 196) termed 'transference'. Indeed, such feminists were the real victimisers – of the women who become convinced of their own powerlessness, and of their opponents (including the authors) who were silenced by the militancy of the 'politically correct' feminist line (Roiphe 1993, 7, 44; Denfeld 1995, 83; Sommers 1994, 18, 113). According to Sommers (1994, 274), 'gender feminists' were posing a 'grave threat' to the women's movement, and to the 'reasonable and just cause of equity feminism' (Sommers 1994, 53).

Whilst there was some recognition by these writers that it had been necessary to draw attention to injustice against women in the past, it was claimed that contemporary feminists had gone too far in their preoccupation with women's oppression. These injustices might well have once aroused a quite justifiable indignation, according to Sommers (1994, 40), but were now the focus of 'a feminism of resentment that rationalizes and fosters a wholesale rancor in women that has little to do with moral indignation'. Wolf (1993, 153) was more indulgent – she did signal the utility of documenting the victimisation of women, and acknowledged that this in itself did not cast women as 'natural victims'. However, her view of contemporary feminism was that victim status had been redefined as 'a source of

strength and identity' (Wolf 1993, 154), whereby women became locked in a static state of 'victimhood', '[like] Victorian invalids who can wield power only through their illness' (Wolf 1993, 108). The consciousness of victim status was reconfigured by these writers as a pathologised psychology, rather than as a considered response to the reality of external factors.

According to this representation, the pathological state of victimhood had a number of characteristics. Women who adopted it (and in these accounts victimhood is always taken on, rather than imposed from outside) became paralysed by powerlessness and passivity – 'beleaguered, fragile, intuitive angels' (Wolf 1993, 147). As Denfeld's (1995) title suggests, the 'old feminist order' and its victim focus cast women back to the age of Victorian puritanism, when women were dainty, easily offended and sexually repressed (Denfeld 1995, 62; see also Roiphe 1993, 6), like 'frail, exotic flower[s]' (Wolf 1993, 190). This feminism's celebration of 'feminine' values supposedly played into these outmoded and damaging beliefs in women's innocence and moral superiority (Roiphe 1993, 6, 158; Denfeld 1995, 187; Sommers 1994, 76-7, 91; Wolf 1993, 147). The advantage of hiding behind the mantle of victimhood was therefore that women did not have to take responsibility for the power that they do possess to control their own fate. Thus, for Wolf (1993, 190; see also Roiphe 1993, 67), 'victim feminism' infantilised women, consigning them to dependence on others to protect them on the basis of their specialness. On the other hand, 'power feminism' (Wolf 1993, 187) treated women as adults, who were not afraid of power and did not consider using it to be consorting with the patriarchy (Wolf 1993, 157). Wolf (1993, 242) exhorted women to leave aside the persona of false innocence and embrace their 'bad girl', and held up Madonna (155) and Catwoman (244) as exemplary 'power feminists'.

An analogous debate about the feminist propensity to adopt the victim position and to appeal to legal protection from, in this case, sexual harassment, erupted in Australia at about the same time. In *The First Stone* (1995), Helen Garner criticised two young women who brought sexual harassment charges against the master of Ormond College at the University of Melbourne in 1992. In her opinion, this was an exaggerated reaction to something that could have been dealt with more effectively by individual self-assertiveness, a response which would have also been less punitive and less destructive of the master's

equanimity and reputation, in short less victimising in its turn (Garner 1995, 40, 210). The culprit responsible for this excessive litigiousness was a familiar one – ‘a certain kind of modern feminism: priggish, disingenuous, unforgiving’ (93). This feminism saturated public discussion with stories of women’s victimhood, claiming the moral high ground in doing so and denying the power that women did possess (168; see also 209, 221). It placed too much stress on passivity and weakness, and turned helplessness into a virtue (99). The components of Garner’s objections had been well-rehearsed elsewhere, and commentators in Australia and New Zealand on both sides of the debate framed it as a variant of the furore about ‘political correctness’ in the US and of the feminist generational in-fighting that had manifested there in the ‘prodigal daughters’ publications (e.g. (supporting Garner) Manne 1996, 10; Partington 2000, 33; Guy 1996, 157; (critiquing Garner) Morgan 2005, 226; Taylor 2007, 80; Davis 1997, 223-4, 239; Mead 1997, 9; Ricketson 1997, 99; Blackmore 1997, 77; see also Spongberg 1997).

A further parallel to the critiques of contemporary feminism in the US can be found in Beatrice Faust’s (1994) pamphlet against ‘wimp feminism’, the equivalent of Wolf’s ‘victim feminism’ (Faust 1994, 52). Again, the ordained representative of this debased form of feminism was MacKinnon (Faust 1994, 9, 37, 43, 46-9, 60). As founder of the Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL) in Australia, Faust framed the recent history of Australian feminism in terms of a growing and somewhat hostile split between WEL and the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM). Faust (1994, 11, 13) defined the former as ‘Reformist feminism’ and the latter as ‘Revolutionary feminism’. ‘Reformist feminism’ sought improvements by using existing political norms and structures, and was the only effective feminism, according to Faust (1994, 38), whereas ‘Revolutionary feminism’ wanted society to change in fundamental ways. ‘Wimp feminism’ figured variously as synonymous with Revolutionary feminism as a whole (15) or as a disappointed and embittered sub-branch (38). Faust’s (1994, 43ff.) central thesis was that there was no such thing as a backlash against feminism – at least the Reformist branch had succeeded in making continuous improvement in women’s situation and political visibility, and feminist principles enjoyed broad support, both among women and the wider community (13). The concept of backlash had been manufactured by Revolutionary feminists to explain away the failure of their



chosen forms of activism (43), focused as they were on promoting their victim status and blaming it on men or systemic problems (22).

These ‘wimps’ displayed the usual behaviours – exaggerating the general prevalence of violence against women (Faust 1994, 7, 22-3, 59), embracing victimhood as an identity for the rest of their lives, refusing in the process to recognise their own coping capacities, and, contrary to their claimed disempowerment, enjoying a kind of celebrity status as ‘helpless, inert but uniquely valued flotsam’ (22). If they happened to be academics, they spread the contagion of ‘wimporrhoea’ via dubious research on sexual assault and harassment (60). Faust deployed the same paradoxical narrative as the other ‘prodigal daughters’. On the one hand, ‘wimp feminism’ was denigrated on the grounds that it did not represent most women’s interests and aspirations (57), and held meetings that were under-attended and unpublicised (57). On the other, it ‘[crowded] out effective feminism’ (38), and was held to have a particular access to the popular imagination via the media in a symbiosis that became ‘victim journalism’. This resulted in feminism’s image problem (15, 22ff.), the enormity of which warranted Faust’s (and others’) intervention. And while Faust constantly extolled the virtues of Reformist feminism and its exclusive claim to political efficacy, she traduced feminists like MacKinnon because of their supposed ‘resolute refusal to admit that there is more than one feminism’ (43; see also 38).

These arguments clearly resonate with those we have already seen set out by the ‘prodigal daughters’, but Faust also tapped specifically into that discourse by speaking approvingly of Roiphe (Faust 1994, 54) (though not of Paglia (12)) and adopting the customary ambivalent stance towards Wolf. Where *The Beauty Myth* was on a par with works by MacKinnon and Faludi in terms of their dissemination of the ‘wimp feminist’ message (37), Wolf saw the light in turning against ‘victim feminism’ in *Fire With Fire* (52). Again, Wolf’s conversion was taken as convincing proof of the extent to which the excesses of ‘wimp feminism’ had alienated even some of its most ardent devotees (57), but at the same time, she was maligned for being too diffident in her critique. Moreover, the motivation for this was attributed to self-interest – the need to preserve her reputation in the women’s movement and protect her sales figures (52). For these critics, the sins of *The Beauty Myth* were not easily forgotten, despite Wolf’s change of heart making her an exemplary ally to their cause against victimhood.

A further connection to the North American critiques is constituted by the fact that Faust wrote the foreword to Denfeld's (1995) book, which she classified along with the works of Wolf (1993), Roiphe (1993), and Sommers (1994) as laudable attempts to reclaim feminism from 'the ideologically narrow women who have hijacked [feminism] with anti-male and anti-sex programmes' (Denfeld 1994, ix). Paradoxically, these 'hijackers' are more than likely the very same feminists Faust (1994, 57) demeaned on account of their political irrelevance and confinement to separatist enclaves. Faust commended Denfeld's courage in speaking out when others were afraid to do so, and agreed with her that the sexual values of 'current feminism' derived from nineteenth century puritanism (Denfeld 1995, x) – a view which, when coming from Wolf, Faust (1994, 52-3) had expressly refuted.

However, perhaps seeking to preserve a semblance of coherence in her own previously stated views, Faust took issue with parts of Denfeld's approach. She pointed out that, although all these writers divided feminists into gender/victim feminists and equity/power feminists, they then tended to ascribe malevolence to a single, homogenised 'feminism' (the same 'current feminism' about which she has just paradoxically agreed with Denfeld?). Faust was right about this, but the primary motivation here seems to be to press home the historical and contemporary pre-eminence of the WEL form of equity feminism and its distinction from other forms, rescuing it in the process from Denfeld's homogenisation. For Faust, Denfeld committed the error of '[overestimating] the ghetto feminism she finds repugnant', while underestimating the strength of equity feminism (Denfeld 1995, xi), an argument intended to remind us of the worthiness of the WEL brand to which Faust subscribes. This invites two observations. Firstly, if this were so – if the 'ghetto feminism' was actually weak, and equity feminism actually strong – then the need for Denfeld's, and indeed Faust's, corrective would be thoroughly eroded. Faust was very invested in establishing the self-evident superiority of reformist feminism as a political strategy, so as to simultaneously assert the inferiority of revolutionary/wimp feminism. Unfortunately for the coherence of her logic, it also obviated the urgency of her critique. Secondly, Faust's assertion that Denfeld had underestimated the strength of equity feminism followed closely on Faust's endorsement of what she took to be Denfeld's own observation that the values of traditional/equity feminism were broadly supported. Denfeld

did indeed pursue these twin lines of argument (as did the other ‘prodigal daughters’) – that ‘traditional’ feminism was at once solidly embraced by most women and under siege from a radical rump. However, the contradiction between them, as conveyed in Faust’s own account of them, does not register for Faust.

Taking all these critiques together, we can observe some common features. Firstly, within the framework of these arguments, those who claim victim status automatically take on in addition a number of unattractive qualities – weakness, passivity, whininess, pretended innocence and immaturity. Victimhood cannot be disentangled from these character flaws; indeed, it is defined as these flaws, not as the neutral designation of the state of being a victim. Although it is allowed that there have been, and may still be, legitimate victims, it becomes impossible within the portrayal of victims offered in these texts, to mount a claim of oppression that is not suspect – of exaggeration, of being trumped up, or of being ideologically driven. If, as these texts imply, there is a difference between ‘real’ victims and those who appropriate the excuse of victimhood, the authors leave aside the question of who gets to set the dividing line between the genuine and the pretenders. These accounts establish a climate that severely restricts the valid criteria for claiming victim status in feminist terms – the definition of sexual coercion is pared back; there is no evidence on which to base a theory of structural inequalities; articulating victimisation ‘creates’ victims; and lack of effective resistance to oppression is interpreted as weakness of individual will, not imposed constraint. Secondly, the category of authentic victims is taken to include the authors and the masses of women like them who are repelled by this unappealing form of feminism. Thus, even whilst indicting the feminists in their sights for their preoccupation with victimisation, they simultaneously confirm and rely on the moral capital that inheres in being able to lay claim to authentic victim status. They take their own status as victims to be self-evident, and elide the political nature of the process by which competing claims to victim status are negotiated and assessed.

These assertions of reverse victimisation at the hands of ‘politically correct’ feminists open up a further paradox. In these texts, there is a constant contradiction between what the authors claimed to be overwhelming rejection of this feminism by most women on the one hand (Sommers 1994, 49, 274; Denfeld 1995, 88; Wolf 1993, 230ff.) , and the dominant influence that these feminists had achieved in the academy and the media on the other

(Sommers 1994, 224; Roiphe 1993, 154-5). If, as these authors said, '[w]omen of all ages are rejecting today's women's movement' (Denfeld 1995, 88) and 'women are psychologically burning the clothing of victimization' (Wolf 1993, 234), how does one reconcile the 'grave threat' these feminists were said to pose with the supposedly comprehensive lack of appeal their message holds for 'mainstream' women? The 'victimising' capacity of so-called 'victim feminists' is questionable.

Lastly, just as MacKinnon incited the particular wrath of critics of 'political correctness' (e.g. Kimball 1993; D'Souza 1992a, 173; McElroy 1996, 5; Iannone 2000, 29; Cummings and O'Donohue 2005, 21; Bennett 2007, 63ff.), so these writers portrayed her as the exemplar feminist victimist (a characterisation which, as it turns out, is echoed in academic feminist critiques of MacKinnon's position). Both Roiphe (1993) and Denfeld (1995) devoted a chapter to denigrating MacKinnon's fight against pornography. Sommers (1994, 231) attacked MacKinnon's '[militant] gynocentric feminism' and Wolf (1993, 154) complained that she focused on 'female victimization at the expense of female agency'. And Paglia (1994, 110), in describing MacKinnon and Dworkin as 'victim-mongers, ambulance chasers, atrocity addicts', also asserted that they were 'like most feminists today' (Paglia 1994, 111), positioning MacKinnon and Dworkin as typical of what was wrong with contemporary feminism as a whole.

### **3.3 'Political correctness' updated: the contemporary attack on victimhood**

Thus far in this chapter, I have situated the construction and critique of 'political correctness' and of its feminist proponents at a particular historical moment. However, as I made clear in the introductory chapter, this construction of victimhood and the organisation of its particular set of connotations under the code of 'political correctness' is not limited to the early 1990s. Because the term encoded such a potent and cogent narrative about victims during this phase, that narrative remains relatively easy to invoke in more contemporary times, and in contexts that are disconnected from the institutional site of its original emergence and deployment. A disturbing example of this (but one which is perhaps not surprising in view of the redefinition of victimhood as a psychological problem) is the dissemination of these views into the disciplinary areas dedicated to dealing with psychological defects: therapeutic psychology and psychiatry. The spread into these

domains threatens to have salient effects on the women who present to these services, some of whom have suffered violence or assault. As we have seen, Zur (2005, 55) emphasises the victim's role in exciting violence against herself, and maintains that what differentiates victims from non-victims 'lies not in external factors, as is so often argued' (Zur 2005, 53).

The collection in which Zur's essay appears is strongly informed by the argument that 'political correctness' is the 'destructive trend in mental health' to which the title refers, and it repeats all the lines of argument I have rehearsed above. Wright and Cummings (2005) devote the first section of their collection to essays on the damage wrought by 'political correctness' on approaches to treating mental illness. Cummings (2005, xiii-xiv) blames 'agenda-driven ideologues' for silencing discussion of 'legitimate psychological topics' (such as the treatment of 'gayness' as a psychiatric condition (Cummings and O'Donohue 2005, 9; Wright 2005, xxv)). The claim is that the de-stigmatisation of mental health problems has gone too far, allowing individuals to abdicate personal responsibility for their problematic behaviour under the guise of victimhood (Wright 2005, xxiv-xxv; Cummings and O'Donohue 2005, 13). In a familiar discursive move, these writers position themselves as representing the true victims – of intellectual intimidation by the 'politically correct' (Cummings 2005, 15), of silencing by the 'thought police' (Wright 2005, xxvii), and of socially sanctioned hostility directed at certain groups. This is exemplified for Cummings and O'Donohue (2005, 20) by the issue of sexual harassment, where the 'PC approach' is taken as a licence to attack male heterosexuals.

This approach to victimhood within the mental health professions can retain its own momentum in cases where it is only tangentially supported by a link to the 'political correctness' code. For example, Heru (2001, 15) appeals to 'prodigal daughters' Paglia and Wendy Kaminer (a sometime member of this cadre (e.g. McDermott 1995; see also Siegel 1997a, 67-8)) to point to 'a major flaw in feminist theory and politics', to wit feminists' (and, as usual, particularly MacKinnon's) preoccupation with outlining the patriarchal domination of women. Thus, Heru situates her discussion within an already well-established frame of reference, one which makes sensible such sweeping statements. Entirely misrepresenting the scope of MacKinnon's arguments, Heru (2001, 14) calls up a familiar narrative of MacKinnon's puritanism when she claims that MacKinnon 'believes, along with the social purists and Christian Temperance Ladies at the turn of the century,

that ‘fallen’ women need to be rescued and returned to their pure state of femininity’. While Heru (2001, 15) ostensibly argues in favour of the claiming of victimhood as a first step towards addressing the effects of a social problem (in the psychiatric context, obtaining treatment), the thrust of her corrective is the creation of a perception of the ‘victim’ with which male victims of abuse are more ready to identify.

For Heru (2001, 18), this involves developing the understanding ‘that the term ‘victim,’ [sic] is a sociological designation and not a psychiatric term’. Such an understanding would work to de-gender victimhood by detaching it from the connotations of passivity, submissiveness and purity which make it a particularly feminised identity (14). Whilst we could only agree with the view that victimhood should not be seen as a psychiatric condition, Heru’s position develops somewhat incoherently. On the one hand, she points to the disparagement of victimhood as a disturbing symptom of the backlash against the gains that women as an ‘oppressed group’ have made (14). On the other, she blames the ‘reduction’ of women to victims on feminist theorists who highlight women’s subordination (14-5). Furthermore, she reinforces the view that ‘victim’ is a feminised identity by outlining women’s particular psychological predisposition to ‘developing the role of victimhood’ (17). Heru thus explains the disparagement to which she has briefly objected by locating its origins in the association of victimhood with an essentially feminine nature. This explanation holds up only if we accept that what is identified as essentially feminine is by definition essentially negative and an identification that is necessarily unappealing to men. And we must also accept that what is essential about this femininity are the same traits which mark victimhood: passivity, submissiveness, masochism, and a propensity to self-annihilate (16). Heru conflates victimhood and femininity on the basis that both are characterised by false innocence and natural vulnerability, without unpacking the extent to which this conflation has served political interests hostile to both women and victims.

Heru wants to make victimhood less gender specific, but what this means in the end is less woman-specific for the benefit of men. Her aspiration towards enabling victim-claiming for men relies on the assumption that such claiming is a means to get needs met by a society (Heru 2001, 15). Where victim-claiming on behalf of women is concerned, however, it is ‘a major flaw in feminist theory and politics’ (15) and symptomatic of a

mistaken belief in the moral authority and purity of victimhood. The proposed relocation of victim status along a sociological, rather than a psychiatric, dimension would serve both men and women well, and is an approach which this thesis broadly supports. However, it is unclear where this new de-feminised victim identity sits in relation to woman victims, since for them, victim identity has been argued to be closely related to their particular psychology, in short, to their nature.

There are some significant logical gaps in Heru's reasoning, but she has tapped into some elements of a well-used narrative: feminism's disservice to women, victimhood as a psychological state where the conflation of feminisation and pathologisation is naturalised, and women's 'ownership' of victimhood whereby the benefits they accrue from victim status are a function of men's corresponding disadvantage in being unable to claim it, and hence of the 're-victimisation' of men. The familiarity of these elements may work to deflect attention from the underlying complexities that Heru's discussion fails to address. It is also important to be alert to the fact that Heru deploys a narrative which has been broadly disseminated in the media and popular culture, and which is readily available to be appealed to in authenticating her position by an audience who may not be thoroughly acquainted with feminist writing itself on these topics.

Contemporary feminism continues to be a prime target of criticism which draws on similar arguments and discursive tools as earlier attacks. In announcing her book as a 'politically incorrect' guide to feminism, Lukas (2006) draws on the code that connotes such an approach as imaginative and transgressive in the face of oppressive orthodoxy (see Weir 1995, 58). Such a coding sits as usual somewhat paradoxically alongside the suggestion that the 'politically correct' feminist line runs counter to the experiences and aspirations of actual women (Lukas 2006, xii), who are to be much more faithfully represented by the author (xi). As in earlier iterations of these arguments, the feminist movement is charged with being at once marginal (most women do not identify as 'feminist' (xiv)) and powerful enough to both suppress the discussion of certain issues affecting women (xi) and saturate the minds of young women with 'politically correct' misinformation to the extent that they are unable to make sensible decisions about their future (x-xi).

In certain respects, the feminist ‘orthodoxy’ against which Lukas rails is of quite a different order from that which prompted populist critiques, especially from the ‘prodigal daughters’, during the initial wave of ‘political correctness’ literature<sup>5</sup>. Lukas’ (2006, ix-x) suggests that the entry of women into the corridors of political, educational and professional power has resulted in the wholesale dissemination of a feminist message which devalues marriage, romantic love, and committed (hetero)sexual relationships – the things to which most women, as opposed to the special interest group of professional women, really aspire. Asserting the irreducibility of biological differences which explain women’s distinctive reactions and preferences (Lukas 2006, 6), and which undermine ‘the feminist dream of an androgynous society’ (4), Lukas prepares the ground for her subsequent arguments. These include claims that traditional courtship rules allowed women to find the intellectually superior and physically protective partners they naturally sought (11); that promiscuity in women is unnatural, both because women are biologically averse to casual sex on account of their greater propensity for emotional investment, and because it has been ‘deselected’ by the male preference for faithful mates (31-2); and that women are more fulfilled by family and relationships than paid work (140).

On these counts, Lukas is directly at odds with the impatience expressed a decade or so earlier at feminism’s deviation from the well-established and legitimate endeavours undertaken under the auspices of liberalism – the legal and educational reformist aims of ‘equity feminism’ (Sommers 1994, 22), the eradication of political, economic and reproductive inequalities (Denfeld 1995, 20), and the seizing of financial independence and the entrepreneurial spirit through ‘power feminism’ (Wolf 1993, 263). On the one hand, Lukas (2006, 5) attacks ‘politically correct’ feminism for denying the innate differences between men and women and for aspiring to the interchangeability of the sexes as a precursor to equal representation ‘in all disciplines and all walks of life’ (6). On the other, Wolf (1993, 59) asserts that it is *only* through appropriating masculinist behaviours that

---

<sup>5</sup> Unlike Wolf (1993), Sommers (1994), Roiphe (1993) and Denfeld (1995), Lukas does not self-define as a feminist, partly because she purports to speak for women, with whom ‘feminism’ has lost touch. As such, she is perhaps easier to categorise as ‘against’ feminism than those writers. The main interest at this point, however, is the diverse uses to which the ‘political correctness’ tag is put, and the extent to which it can still be pressed into service as an instantly devaluative framing of a homogenised feminism long after its initial emergence. My purpose here is to establish the continuing relevance of analysing the ‘political correctness’ trope as a discursive tool for attacking feminism and its ‘re-victimisation’ of women, regardless of how variously ‘feminism’ is conceived in different accounts.



feminism will achieve its ends, and this appropriation depends precisely on rejecting ‘difference feminism’ and the prescriptiveness which has crept into the celebration of those values deemed to be distinctively female (Wolf 1993, 188-9). Where Wolf (1993, 161) derides the feminist fear of power’s seductive force as ‘politically correct virginity’ and bemoans the return to Victorian stereotypes of women as delicate and pure (Wolf 1993, 147), Lukas (2006, 14) objects to orthodox feminism’s de-privileging of traditional courtship, chivalry and romance because men have been the principal beneficiaries of women’s greater sexual availability. Obviously, what constitutes the ‘political correctness’ of feminism in each case is diametrically different, but the term functions nevertheless as a way of instantly establishing the opposite point of view as excessively dogmatic and counter to the interests of the majority of women – and is still capable of functioning that way for Lukas well after the term gained its initial momentum.

However, Lukas (2006, 56) rejoins these earlier critics of ‘politically correct’ feminism on the issue of sexual violence against women by claiming that its extent is exaggerated by feminists who thereby position all women as victims, if not of actual physical assault, then of an ever-present threat of male violence. Lukas (2006, 58) regrets the expansion of the definition of rape beyond the legal one of ‘forced sex’. In her view, the latter properly figures sexual violence as an aberrant, criminal behaviour, where rape redefined is but the extreme form of the sexual coerciveness which characterises heterosexual relations (cf. Denfeld 1995, 59; Roiphe 1993, 52, 56; Sommers 1994, 220; Wolf 1993, 153). Like Roiphe (1993, 79-80) before her, Lukas (2006, 58) views women’s accusations of rape under this broader definition as rather after-the-fact rationalisations of regretted sexual encounters. Based on the narrower definition of rape supported by these writers (e.g. Sommers 1994, 193, 210-22; Roiphe 1993, 52; Denfeld 1995, 59), and subsequently by Lukas (2006, 177), feminist statistics on the incidence of sexual assault are seen as inflated and misleading, convincing a generation of women that they are naturally prone to victimisation. In all these cases, the spectre of contemporary feminism’s emphasis on women’s victimhood operates as a kind of fulcrum on which various visions and criticisms of ‘political correctness’ swing in different directions. For Lukas (2006, 60), the feminist orthodoxy which allegedly has women perpetually at risk from male violence is problematic because it deters women from the things which are most fulfilling and to which

most women still secretly aspire – heterosexual marriage and family. For Roiphe (1993, 62), on the other hand, the ‘politically correct’ obsession with establishing consent, and its premise of women’s general susceptibility to sexual coercion, interfere with the fluidity and appealing unpredictability of normal, uncommitted sexual relations.

In a more vitriolic attack on feminism, Bennett (2007, 2) describes his discussion of the politics of contemporary American feminism as a survey of ‘the anti-male movement’, allegedly composed of rabid feminists who lust after state power in order to revolutionise our culture by violent means, desiring ‘nothing less than the eradication of human nature’ (3). The transformation of language to reflect feminist concerns squeezes publishers ‘in the vice of political correctness’ (81), and the ultimate aim of the ‘feminist language police’ is to exercise sinister control over the minds of students with the same relentlessness as ‘the most jihad-crazed extremist imam’ (83), an image which demonstrates both the historically variable mobilisation of other available discursive elements by critics of ‘political correctness’, and the flexibility of their application to attack feminists. Whilst the so-called tyranny of ‘political correctness’ was often compared to McCarthyism in the 1990s, during this decade the term has acquired an association with terrorism, in a modernised and topical twist on the imagery of dogmatism and threat (see also Klatt 2003, 44)<sup>6</sup>. Bennett’s argument turns on the central theme of the reverse victimisation of men by feminists, whose prime target is the ‘American Male’ (Bennett 2007, 17). Their strategy has been to ‘[raise] the cult of [their own] victimhood to Mount Everest-like heights whilst demonizing men and marginalizing children in a fashion that can only be called rabid’ (4). Like Lukas, Bennett’s aim is the reinstatement of natural biological difference as a means of renormalising and reliberating the male behaviour framed by feminists as symptomatic of gender inequality (Bennett 2007, 3, 21ff.). Bennett (2007, 2) signals the ancestry of his thesis not just by restaging his attack on feminism as an issue of ‘political correctness’, but by appealing to, amongst others, McElroy (1996) and Sommers (1994) as invaluable critics of twenty-first century feminism. In doing so, he typifies a willingness to revivify the

---

<sup>6</sup> Both in the US and Australia, ‘political correctness’ was invoked to criticise the readiness of some on the left to nuance the rhetoric of (Western) good versus (Islamic) evil after the ‘war on terror’ was declared (e.g. Kocan 2002, 29; Windschuttle 2001, 24; Bendle 2008, 37; Martin and Neal 2002). Note, however, that the rhetorical comparison to McCarthyism still comes into play to convey the excesses of ‘political correctness’, which for Cummings (2005, xv) exercises an even more pervasive and insidious form of intellectual intimidation.

earlier attacks as required, and situates the criticisms voiced by McElroy and Sommers as perennially applicable to feminism, whatever the time frame. That signals for feminists that the discursive strategy of ‘political correctness’ is not a mere historical oddity, from which our contemporary discursive practice is now immune.

### **3.4 Absorbing the attack: academic feminism and victimhood**

Clearly, there are strong links between all these writers in terms of their rhetorical strategies and modes of argumentation, but also a certain amount of fluidity in emphasis and approach. The broad discursive schema of ‘political correctness’ and its associated antipathy to victimhood inform some quite contradictory framings of contemporary feminism and its failures. On one level, this indicates a confidence that the code is robust enough to anchor the attack on feminism successfully despite these variations. On another, it makes it less easy to demarcate these critics as a cohesive anti-feminist bloc, outside of which we will find an equally clearly delineated feminist response.

Apart from the variations in the approaches of these particular writers, the membership of the group they supposedly represent is, as noted, somewhat unstable. For instance, Bulbeck (2001a) and Stringer (2009, 20) both categorise British writer Natasha Walter alongside Wolf, Roiphe and Denfeld, but, while Walter’s (1999) views do synchronise with theirs in some respects, her book is also strikingly different in others. Walter (1999, 6) explicitly links her book to the current debates about feminism in the US, but also stresses that hers will be a uniquely British variant. From time to time she does appeal to these ‘prodigal daughters’ to support her own arguments, such as when she urges the rejection of a view of heterosexual culture in which women are positioned as victims (Walter 1999, 113-4 (see 265 note 20)). At other times, she explicitly challenges their views, and that includes their attitudes to victimhood. For example, Walter (1999, 138-9) rejects Roiphe’s assertion that drawing attention to sexual violence turns women into victims, claiming that the transformation of legal and social responses to rape is instead a source of empowerment.

Walter is altogether more ready to emphasise the continuing material and sexual subordination of women, though this emphasis comes by way of accusing second-wave feminists of having led us into an impasse – Walter (1999, 4) would like to see feminist

strategies that are informed more by the ‘political’ and less by the ‘personal’, and less constrained by ‘the spectre of political correctness’ (see also 36, 76, 221). Walter’s version of what constitutes feminist ‘political correctness’ seems to be quite different from, say, Wolf’s or Sommers’. It does not, as we have seen, involve entirely diminishing women’s victim status – indeed, Walter (1999, 65-8) is highly suspicious of Wolf’s vision of ‘power feminism’, arguing (as MacKinnon (1984, 187) does) that the suggestion that women’s empowerment is to be accomplished by psychological change ignores the reality of material inequality and hostile social and political structures. And Walter’s (1999, 122-3) reaction to statistics about sexual assault is not to discredit them, but to use them to call for intensified efforts against the social and legal distrust of rape victims (her depictions of rape and post-rape trauma being as graphic as anything we might find in the writing of MacKinnon or Dworkin (e.g. Walter 1999, 125, 132)). In short, Walter’s ‘new feminism’ is less pugnacious towards other forms of feminism, and motivated primarily by the desire not to have women’s behaviour prescribed by a few vocal feminists, be they Wolf, Paglia, or MacKinnon (Walter 1999, 121)<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that Walter (2010, 8-9; see also 33) has just now recanted the views expressed in this earlier book: ‘I believed that we only had to put in place the conditions of equality for the remnants of old-fashioned sexism in our culture to wither away. I am ready to admit that I was entirely wrong, [...] [What] we see when we look around us is not the equality we once sought; it is a stalled revolution’. Walter (2010, 10-11) blames women’s renascent political and economic inequality on the increasing sexualisation and hyper-feminisation of girls from an early age, a trend which equates sexual allure with feminine success and empowerment. However, Walter (2010, 14) continues to adhere to her prior position in one pertinent respect: ‘I am just as sure as I ever was that we do not need to subscribe to some dour and politically correct version of feminism in order to move towards greater equality.’ Walter rightly assumes that the code of ‘political correctness’ still functions in the popular domain as an effective means of pointing to an extreme version of feminism that needs to be bracketed (especially when helped along by ‘dour’). It works to assert by contrast the reasonableness of her claims. But how that extreme feminism might be characterised is unclear. In the first book, ‘politically correct’ feminism was that which focused too much on private behaviours (Walter 1999, 4), where now it is precisely the expectation that women adopt a stereotypically feminine personal presentation that Walter claims ordains their decreasing political visibility. Walter (2010, 32) also makes the point that the hyper-sexualisation of young women is not a solely masculine invention: ‘We cannot pretend that this is all about women as victims, when women are deeply complicit in creating and selling this culture.’ This comment is motivated by her observation of women’s apparent willing collusion in even the most degrading of sexualised performances, an impression of choice she goes on to debunk by pointing out that the cultural revaluing of a sexualised femininity has eliminated options for young women to obtain equal success via other avenues. But in refuting the appearance of choice, Walter does not revise her denial of these women’s victim status. The denial remains in place on the grounds on which it was originally made – that women are not entirely passive in their engagement with this culture – even when their active participation is revealed to be a completely counterfeit version of ‘choice’. Walter’s revision of the views she espoused in her earlier book are well-taken. Nevertheless, she leaves intact some of the discursive mechanisms used at that time to undermine feminist positions which were convinced of the obduracy of patriarchal norms, a position she now shares.

In view of these sorts of indeterminacies, it is perhaps not surprising that academic feminists have articulated a variety of reactions to the writings of the ‘prodigal daughters’<sup>8</sup>. In this section, I will address these reactions specifically, on the basis that they crystallise the feminist response to the construction of victimhood in the wider debates on ‘political correctness’, within which this commentary generally positions the populist contributions (e.g. Loudermilk 2004, 154; Suleri 1992, 757-8; Guy 1996, 157; Atmore 1999a, 204; Hammer 2002, 19; McDermott 1995, 671; Minnich 1998, 160; Cole 1999a, 81; 2007, 57; Taylor 2007, 80). It is also generally thought that the popular critiques represent a particularly urgent problem for academic feminists, in that they replicate the conservative assault ostensibly from ‘within’ feminism (e.g. Atmore 1999a, 184; Cole 2007, 49; Hammer 2002, 5; Minnich 1998, 174-5; Modleski, cited in Siegel 1997b, 81 note 27).

The variety of nomenclatures adopted to describe the ‘prodigal daughters’ reflects the range of feminist reactions to their views – from robust repudiation, through cautious endorsement of parts of their critiques, to outright agreement and participation in similar sorts of attacks on the elements of contemporary feminism thought to be represented by MacKinnon. So, for Hammer (2002, 8), who is concerned about the tangible effect such discourses will have on domestic violence policy in the US, they are ‘antifeminist pseudofeminists’ (Hammer 2002, 16), ‘faux-feminists’, or ‘betrayal feminists’ (Hammer 2002, 22ff.). Similarly, others who assume their own distance from the ‘prodigal daughters’ call them ‘retrofeminists’ (Ebert 1996, 253), ‘backlashers’ (Mardorossian 2002a, 746), ‘anti-feminist feminists’ (Martin 1996, 608; Stacey 2000, 1191; see also Stringer 2009, 23), ‘dissenting daughters’ (Siegel 1997b, 58), or ‘media feminists’ (Atmore 1999a, 183). For academic feminists who are, on the other hand, more receptive to the popular critique, the ‘prodigal daughters’ are more benign ‘sisterly critics’ (Mandle 1999), or simply ‘non-

---

<sup>8</sup> Here I struggle already with these issues of categorisation, in trying to settle on a terminology which designates a separation between the populist accounts and the feminist critical commentary on them. ‘Academic feminists’ does not really satisfy, in that some of the ‘prodigal daughters’ group (especially in its more extended permutations) work, or have done, in academia (e.g. Paglia, Sommers, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Jean Bethke-Elshtain). Nevertheless I will adopt that term, however advisedly, partly on the strength of the fact that these writers bracket themselves from academic feminists by their specific targeting of academia as the breeding ground for the sort of feminism they despise (Cole 2007, 191 note 3). This problem of defining what constitutes ‘us’ and ‘them’ has variably taxed other writers in this area (depending on the extent to which they are prepared to define the ‘prodigal daughters’ as anti-feminist) and is seen as germane to wider issues of feminist border control (e.g. Hantzis and Looser 1995, 224; Loudermilk 2004, 153, 202 note 4; Dean 1994, 91).

academic women' (Abrams 1995, 329), who, it is noted in passing and with some restraint, have engaged in anti-feminist rhetoric which is perhaps 'not unintentional' (Abrams 1995, 333 note 105)<sup>9</sup>.

Some of the strongest critics of this popular feminism (e.g. Mardorossian 2002a; Atmore 1999a; Ebert 1996; see also Gill 1995, 172-3, 183-4) base their concerns on the extent to which its strident anti-'victimism' synchronises with some forms of feminist postmodernism which have refocused feminist politics away from the materiality of oppression and sexual violence. Thus, for Ebert (1996, 253ff.) there is little to separate, on the one hand, 'retrofeminist' Paglia's celebration of the *natural* body and the primordial laws that govern and normalise male sexual and cultural domination, and, on the other, 'ludic' postmodernism's privileging of the *textual* body, whose indeterminacy turns it into the site of individual liberation through reinscription. In both cases, the reality of economic and political oppression is denied – for Paglia, gender relations are in the natural order of things and therefore are incapable of generating discontent; for ludic postmodernists (classified within 'other counterfeminists' (Ebert 1996, 267)), women who do not take up the opportunity to rewrite their own bodily experience have only themselves to blame. Therefore, for Ebert, both the popular writers and academic ludic feminists do equally the work of patriarchal capitalism. In the case of ludic feminists, this comes about because their enthusiasm for the destabilisation of all meanings beyond the myopically local removes the grounds for evaluating and contesting the popular 'retrofeminist' redefinition of feminism as 'victim feminism'. In the ludic feminist world, all (re)definitions are as valid as each other (Ebert 1996, 253-4).

---

<sup>9</sup> Bear in mind also that there are some references to the 'prodigal daughters' that occur in discussions that cannot be framed as I have here: in terms of the position taken with respect to the discourse of 'political correctness' and its critique of victim identity, and how this crystallises questions of who counts as a feminist or not. Considering the 'prodigal daughters' writings through different lenses produces different configurations of authors' ideological alignments that might seem counter-intuitive viewed from within our current framework, further complicating the notion of assessing political affiliations according to the terms of the 'political correctness' discourse. For example, in reviewing the history of the concept of gender in feminist thought, Oakley (1998, 34) traces a trend to collapse gender back into sex, to re-naturalise social inequality in terms of women's essential characteristics. According to this analysis, the popular literature sits within a broader set of writings that typify this trend, so the 'prodigal daughters' share company with writers from Greer and Friedan to Jean Bethke-Elshtain, Marilyn French and Gloria Steinem, and a number of non-feminists. Within Oakley's (1998, 51) framework, it becomes sensible to liken MacKinnon to Christina Hoff Sommers in terms of their ambivalence about what constitutes gender.

In a similar vein, both Atmore (1999a, 203) and Mardorossian (2002a, 747-8) view the deflection of attention to sexual violence in academic feminist theorising to have been legitimised on two fronts. Firstly, the ascendance of feminist interest in postmodernism displaced experience as a bedrock foundation of feminist knowledge. Secondly, there existed a broader discursive and political climate that was hospitable to the works of the ‘prodigal daughters’ and their deframing of rape as the quintessential form of patriarchal domination. Both Atmore (1999a, 201) and Mardorossian (2002a, 744, 762) also remark on similarities in the critiques of radical feminism, especially MacKinnon, who is misread by ‘prodigal daughters’ and postmodern feminists alike.

Though Atmore is intent on contesting the validity of the ‘prodigal daughters’ claims about so-called ‘victim feminism’, she is nevertheless somewhat resigned to the impossibility of disimbricating the discourses of apparently conflicting political interests (Atmore (1999a, 204; 1999b, 92). For her, the issue is to consider the sort of cultural and discursive milieux that frame and enable the accusations of victimism and feminist responses to them, as a first step in promoting a productive conversation between radical feminists and others. This thesis takes up Atmore’s challenge by elucidating the discursive nexus which oversees the operation of feminist talk about victimhood. Its findings may, however, disappoint Atmore, since they indicate that her hopes for the development of a conversation with radical feminists, as yet ‘barely begun’ (Atmore 1999a, 205), have not been realised. Academic feminist rhetorical practice still, by and large, works to exclude self-identified victims and their advocates from participation.

Mardorossian’s (2002a) discussion is a bolder indictment of postmodern feminist collusion with conservative victim-blaming discourses, claiming as it does that this alignment is closer than that between postmodern and activist feminists (Mardorossian 2002a, 746). She takes particular issue with Wendy Brown’s arguments about the risks of appealing to the state to address victimisation, and with Sharon Marcus’ claim that rape plays out according to a ‘script’ which assigns a victim role to the woman but which can nonetheless be resisted. Although Mardorossian (2002a, 759) finds much to agree with in the risks identified by Brown, she distinguishes between the effects of state interventions which tend to the preservation of the victim in that position, and the motivations Brown attributes to feminists who advocate these strategies. Brown applies the Nietzschean

concept of *ressentiment* to explain feminists' recourse to legal redress as driven by vengefulness and the desire for a simple power reversal. Mardorossian (2002a, 760) argues that this critique inappropriately subjects a feminist political manoeuvre to a psychoanalytical assessment. It thereby displaces the basis of the objections from the negative outcomes which could legitimately call into question a particular strategy to the defective (collective) psychology that supposedly motivates it. Mardorossian (2002a, 752-3) objects to Marcus' position on similar grounds – the formulation of rape as a socially scripted interaction makes the woman's lack of psychological independence in resisting the script's inducements the decisive factor in the rape's completion. This emphasis on psychological capacity and personal agency replays the rationale for the dominant culture's distrust of rape victims, and the feminist postmodern privileging of the discursive and representational over the experiential means that 'the practice of making the experience of victimization visible is immediately deemed suspect and undertheorized' (Mardorossian 2002a, 769).

Apart from these very clear challenges to the 'prodigal daughters'' accounts, the array of feminist reactions is quite diverse. Cole (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2007) has produced perhaps the most sustained critique of these accounts, though it does not go as far as either Atmore's or Mardorossian's. Cole's project is one of detailing the similarities between conservative framings of victimhood in the attacks on 'political correctness' and those used by the 'prodigal daughters' to impugn contemporary feminism. She therefore does not start from the assumption that the 'prodigal daughters' 'belong' to the conservative camp, but takes this affiliation to be in need of demonstration. Cole (1999a, 73; 2000, 135; 2007, 49) describes the feminism espoused by the 'prodigal daughters' as 'anti-'victim-feminism'' (or 'AVF'), and her concern is with how their views act as a conduit for a conservative element to enter into ongoing feminist debates about the appropriate way to draw attention to women's oppression (Cole 2007, 49). Her aims are therefore relatively modest – she does not, as Mardorossian does (and as I do) for example, suspect that traces of this anti-victimism are evident in academic feminism more broadly. And it is only after some deliberation that Cole (2007, 77) concludes that the writing of the 'AVFers' undermines feminism, and rebrackets their critiques as part of the broader anti-victimism of which the discourse of 'political correctness' formed a cogent part.



A number of other feminist commentators are also highly critical of the motives and effects of the popular writing (e.g. Hammer 2002; Kelly et al. 1996, 81; Siegel 1997b; O'Sullivan 1995; McDermott 1995; hooks 1994). Kelly et al. (1996, 77-8, 84-5) situate the 'prodigal daughters' challenges to the legitimacy of victim claiming in the context of ongoing debates amongst academic and activist feminists about how to articulate the meaning of sexual violence without becoming confined by these meanings in detrimental ways. For them, the task for feminists is to continue the rigorous process of negotiating these meanings as a bulwark against their redefinition by those who seek to contain feminist developments. It is also to steward the relationship between academic feminists and activists which can be strained by their different allegiances, and thus to resuture the space in which commercial feminism can gain ground (Kelly et al. 1996, 96-7). The politics of naming is a central concern of their analysis – the mechanisms by which experience becomes knowable and speakable, and subjectivity able to be represented in comprehensible ways in the public domain (see also McDermott 1995, 675-6). Similarly, for Siegel (1997b, 67), 'name-calling is never a neutral act – politically, ontologically, or epistemologically', and this is especially so when we consider that the 'prodigal daughters' narrativising of feminism as a contest between 'good' and 'bad' feminisms throws into question 'the status and function of three of second wave feminism's foundational words: *we*, *feminist*, and *victim*' (Siegel 1997b, 57; emphasis in original).

But even those who disagree with the popular critiques make some more or less grudging concessions to the legitimacy of the 'prodigal daughters' complaints. For instance, Siegel (1997b, 66) allows that Wolf's recommendations are well-researched and appealing in comparison to those of Roiphe and Denfeld, and Kelly et al. (1996, 95) express some reservations about the long-term usefulness of victim identity for feminism. While Cole (1999b, 110) is anxious about the alignment of the 'prodigal daughters' argument strategies with those of conservatives, she stops short of defining them as anti-feminists, conceding that these writers raise legitimate feminist concerns which warrant due consideration in view of the popularity of their books. And in other cases, the popular view finds quite a hospitable reception by academic feminists. So, although Willis (1994, 51) is suspicious of the failure of authors like Roiphe to take into account the part coercion can play in women's sexual activity, she nonetheless agrees with the objections raised to the

characterisation of sexual violence as emblematic of sexism, rather than merely its most extreme manifestation (see also Lamb 1996, 24; Grant 1994, 84ff.). For Willis (1994, 52), the driver of feminist strategy in this regard should be the maximisation of women's sexual pleasure, not the presumption that violence is always latent in (hetero)sexual relations<sup>10</sup>. And both Mandle (1999, 97-8), in her response to Cole (1999a), and Sorisio (1997, 136), though disagreeing with important aspects of the popular criticisms, urge academic feminists to take them seriously in the spirit of reconnecting with cultural debate and enhancing the feminist enterprise via the incorporation of multiple self-proclaimed feminist viewpoints.

Finally, rounding out the range of academic feminist reactions, some writers express quite strong agreement with aspects of the 'prodigal daughters' views. For Haag (1996, 24), unlike Mardorossian, the correspondence between the parallel attempts by the 'prodigal daughters' and poststructuralist feminists to problematise feminist focus on the victim is not cause for alarm – the breadth of the opposition to a victim-centred politics is rather evidence that the 'victimological' perspective is terminally bankrupt. Haag (1996, 61) is dismissive of the popular arguments only to the extent that poststructuralist approaches offer a vastly superior way of theorising the complex relationship between subjectivity and cultural positioning than either the feminist politics of victim identity or the individualist solution favoured by the 'prodigal daughters'. Where Haag classifies the 'prodigal daughters' as deluded, albeit well-intentioned, participants in the fight against victimology, Guy (1996, 157) positively fetes their courage in refusing to be silenced by the 'groups of self-defined victims, obsessed with codes of political correctness' who currently dominate feminism. And Walters (1998, 63-4) channels an identical rhetoric when she describes MacKinnon as 'the high-minded high priestess of political correctness', accuses her of being motivated by an 'indignant puritanism' (Walters 1998, 63), and bewails the fact that the optimism of 1970s feminism has been transformed into an obsession with victimhood by a 'malignant fairy godmother' (Walters 1998, 59).

---

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the similarities between the 1990s popular critiques of contemporary feminism and the 1980s critiques of feminist 'dominance theory' by 'pro-sex' theorists (a label which Willis (1994, 52) still applies to herself), see Abrams (1995). Abrams draws a further comparison between these two bodies of critique and the intra-feminist challenges to the concept of women as perpetually victimised that were emerging within academic feminism contemporaneously with the popular writing.

The disturbing element of even the most reluctant of these concessions is that endorsing the legitimacy of the popular criticisms means also subscribing to the sorts of associations the ‘prodigal daughters’ assign to victimhood and on which they base their hostility to contemporary feminism. For example, in conceding that the limitation in defining social problems in terms of a victim/victimiser paradigm lies in the fact that ‘victimhood is a non-divisible, non-negotiable status’, Cole (1999a, 90) leaves intact the conservative construction of victimhood as a monolithic, fixed state which is outside discursive redefinition, even as she draws attention to the destructive intent of the conservative accounts. And when Cole (2000, 137; 2007, 77) notes that a point on which ‘most feminists agree’ is that women’s emancipation cannot be achieved if women are seen as ‘nothing more than victims’, she operates within the terms of the critiques she is contesting by defining the ‘victim’ as a diminished subjectivity with no other complicating attributes. She further positions this attitude to the ‘victim’ as the proper and agreed feminist one, defined in contradistinction to a hypothesised feminism that does indeed treat women as ‘nothing more than victims’.

We can also recognise certain modes of argumentation in the academic response which are familiar from both the attacks on ‘political correctness’ and the ‘prodigal daughters’ critiques of contemporary feminism. So, Mandle (1999, 114) accuses Cole (1999a) of having a different goal to her own, which is to ‘encourage a vigorous and honest debate within feminism’. Thus Cole is positioned as one who would stifle debate, and her objections to the infiltration of conservative lines of thought into feminist positions as not legitimate contributions to that debate. In these terms, ‘vigorous and honest debate’ comprises only challenges to victim identification, and excludes even the most moderate defences of the ‘victim’ category like Cole’s. The implication is (as it was in objections to so-called ‘political correctness’) that challenges like Mandle’s are relatively isolated attempts to contest the infinitely more powerful hegemony of the feminist ‘victimist’ stance. This rhetoric is belied by the wide circulation of the popular writings and the media exposure of their authors, and the substance of this thesis is that, within academic feminist writing as well, Cole’s intervention, far from representing a hegemonic view, is one of a very few attempts that could be broadly classified as sympathetic to the victim standpoint. And, as I noted above, Cole’s is in some ways a very attenuated attempt to disrupt the

conservative construction of victimhood, and hardly in the confrontational style suggested by Mandle's accusation.

Similarly, Guy (1996) appreciates Garner's and Paglia's protests against feminist exaggeration of heterosexual violence against women as emboldening her to express her own opposition, hitherto suppressed by 'the prescriptive radical feminist hegemony that prevailed in New Zealand throughout the late 1970s and 1980s' (Guy 1996, 154). In a section titled 'Feminists silenced', Guy details the repression she has experienced at the hands of this orthodoxy, by which only those accounts that accord with the radical feminist line are permitted to be heard – 'and still are, in what remains of a radical feminist network' (Guy 1996, 157). Here, she seems to portray contemporary radical feminism as a somewhat marginal rump of the feminist movement as a whole, and certainly as a diminished version of its previous hegemonic incarnation. But Guy positions it as paradoxically still able, despite being now but the remnants of a movement, to have subdued her own voice well into the mid 1990s until it is liberated by the courageous interventions of the 'prodigal daughters'. The paradox of Guy's framing of radical feminism as at once peripheral and overwhelmingly influential replays the irony of Mandle's (1999) attack on Cole, and signals an inconsistency in the narrative which figures feminist defenders of the victim perspective as having both the intention and the power to repress alternative views. Indeed, Guy's section title suggests that those who have been silenced constitute a broad and diffuse group ('feminists'), and leaves aside the question of whether the silencers themselves can be considered members of that group.

Mandle's (1999) criticism of Cole is also organised by the same logic that informed the popular attacks on the legitimacy of victim claiming – victims had gone too far in their demands, or exaggerated the extent of the offences against them. Victim perspectives were thus marginalised by being deemed excessive according to the common sense measures shared by most. Therefore, Mandle (1999, 99) acknowledges that it is the awareness of victimisation that mobilises a feminist consciousness – the problem with this awareness occurs only at the point when one '[gets] stuck on victimization', '[dwells] on women as victims rather than as effective resisters', or places 'a disproportionate emphasis on victimization' (Mandle 1999, 100). At the same time, Mandle (1999, 100) urges us to 'be vigilant in highlighting and publicizing the persistence of women's victimization'. As I will

discuss at some length in my analysis of the surveyed journal material in Chapter 5 (section 5.6), the logic of excess permeates academic feminist references to the issue of victimhood well beyond the confines of the immediate debate discussed here. According to this logic, a certain amount of attention to women's victimisation is acceptable, indeed necessary, but too much immediately tips the offending analysis into illegitimacy and empties it of *any* potential to contribute usefully to feminist debate. I will argue that those treatments suffer from the same erasures as Mandle's – a crucial element in the logic of evaluating the legitimacy of victim claims is identifying the point at which being 'vigilant' about women's victimisation is transformed into being 'stuck' in that perspective, 'dwelling' on it, or giving it disproportionate attention. The problem is that, despite the crucial role this tipping point plays in assessing victim representations, there is little discussion of its placement, or of who has the skills to recognise it and how they have acquired them, nor even of whether it is reasonable and ethical to posit the existence of such a point at all from the narrative position of non-victim.

While their avowed suspicion of the preoccupation with victimisation makes it natural that Mandle (1999) and Guy (1996) should replicate the rhetoric and logic of the 'prodigal daughters' and other conservatives, similar lines of reasoning are deployed even by those academic feminist who are more critical of the popular arguments. For example, in her review of the disservice done by media representations of feminism, Rhode (1995, 702) situates MacKinnon and Dworkin on the one side, and Roiphe and Paglia on the other, as typifying the extreme positions normally presented in consequently distorting media accounts of feminist debates. Choosing quotes from both MacKinnon and Dworkin that have been ridiculed by conservatives, Rhode observes: 'That these are not exactly mainstream feminist positions is rarely acknowledged'. Thus, Rhode's objections to media distortions of feminism are grounded in part on the view that the media present MacKinnon and Dworkin as typical feminists – whose extremism is all the more worrisome for that for non-feminists – when they are actually atypical feminists, who are also considered extreme by most feminists. For Rhode, the issues to be unpacked do not include what dominant interests are being served by this non-feminist, media definition of feminist extremism, a definition to which Rhode gladly subscribes.

In much the same way, Sorisio (1997) issues a proviso when she challenges Wolf's claim that women's entitlement to sexual pleasure-seeking has been policed by feminists. According to Sorisio (1997, 139), Wolf does not substantiate her claim – '[except] for her references to Andrea Dworkin, who hardly speaks for all feminists'. Sorisio's phrasing here (the inclusion of 'hardly', for instance) goes a little further than necessary in pointing out that Wolf's evidence of one example is thin. As with Rhode's objections, it suggests agreement that Dworkin can be bracketed from the majority of feminists, and therefore dismissed as a representative case. Sorisio's strategy is to undermine Wolf's factual evidence for the existence of a repressive 'victim feminism' as a significant component of feminism, and she does so by relying on the common wisdom that Dworkin is an ignorable extreme. In short, she is countering Wolf by saying, if Dworkin is the only evidence you have for 'victim feminism', then we can discount your critique. Of course, Sorisio's line of argument also assumes that Dworkin, unrepresentative though she apparently is, does indeed accomplish the sort of silencing of which Wolf complains – for remember that Sorisio has stated that Wolf does not adduce any support for her claims, *except for* some references to Dworkin. So, while Sorisio disputes Wolf's evidence that 'victim feminism' is widespread and contemporary feminism therefore generally repressive, she allows that it does indeed exist as Wolf has portrayed it in the albeit negligible figure of Dworkin.

What Sorisio's challenge definitely does not include, as her subsequent comments make clear, is a defence of highlighting victimhood as a legitimate feminist task. Indeed, she goes on to caution against the problems it can generate – notably the homogenisation of women's differences through constructing a sisterhood of shared oppression (Sorisio 1997, 141ff.). In the process, she maintains the contradictory narrative of so-called 'victim feminism's' marginal status *and* worrisome impact that we have seen in the 'prodigal daughters' discussions and in the academic feminist reactions, particularly in Guy (1996) as outlined above: 'Although what some are calling 'victim feminism' is only one tendency in a multi-faceted field, it has serious implications for feminism's future' (Sorisio 1997, 141). Moreover, Sorisio (1997, 147) deploys the logic of excess to both justify that caution, and at the same time maintain an adequate respect for the obvious feminist imperative of describing the contours of power and its effects – feminists can 'provide a basic understanding' of these contours, but 'just because we recognize the means by which

women have been exploited does not mean we have to cling to the status of victim'. Here, anything more than what is necessary to build a 'basic understanding' is questionable, and threatens to qualify as clinging to victim status. Sorisio appeals to the unwritten standard of evaluation which inscribes the accepted threshold levels for highlighting victim status<sup>11</sup>.

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the construction of the category of 'victim' in the discourse of 'political correctness'. This construction worked to assemble a fairly well-defined and regular set of associations around the figure of the 'victim': denial of personal responsibility as an excuse for inaction, feigned helplessness and innocence, moral weakness, and delusion about the true nature of, and solutions to, adversity. Taken together, these helped to form a narrative about the disproportionate emphasis self-identified victims placed on their victimhood. This logic of excess explained the anomaly that ran through these attacks. Critics acknowledged that oppression did exist, and were prepared to recognise the validity of the victimhood produced in these cases. However, this recognition

---

<sup>11</sup> Note that these imitative modes of argumentation are also evident in feminist literature that can be classified as oppositional commentary on the broader debates about 'political correctness' (as opposed to the material that deals specifically with the 'prodigal daughters' which is the focus at this point). Langton (2001, 101) urges Aboriginal people to 'refuse to be victims of the past', despite her argument as a whole being directed against the attempts of political conservatives to contain the history of indigenous disenfranchisement in order to avoid responsibility for it in the present. In fact, this single remark is at odds with every other element of her argument over these pages (Langton 2001, 101-2), which is to emphasise the inextricable link between present-day indigenous suffering and past experiences, and appears therefore to be a knee-jerk insertion to deflect the common criticisms aimed at those who seemingly wallow in victimhood.

In a similar attempt to ward off the orientation towards victimhood, Kessler-Harris (1992, 799) warns feminists not to accept the conflation of minority interests that the discourse of 'political correctness' constructs, since this goes against feminists' long-standing efforts 'to avoid victim politics'. Her article is animated by the question of how differences should be handled within women's studies in the context of the need to resist the conservative attacks while not being drawn into the terms of the discourse they dictate. Despite this sensitivity to potential discursive imbrications, Kessler-Harris nevertheless fails to contextualise her own negative assessment of 'victim politics' within the heavily anti-victim rhetoric of the right.

Where Kessler-Harris' concern is the homogenisation of difference within one amorphous, oppressed group, Scott (1995, 122-3) is disturbed by the individualisation of injury imposed by protective measures like speech codes, which require the claimant 'to take on the mantle of the victim' and to thereby cast themselves as without agency (see also Jones 1994, 401). Surprisingly, in view of the intent of their discussions, all of these writers reinforce the meanings that were being constructed around victimhood, and which were being used to delegitimise minority claims (see also Hantzis and Looser 1995, 245). Furthermore, both Kessler-Harris (1992, 795) and Scott (1995, 124) also resort to the rhetoric of excess in admitting the existence of a condemnable extreme of 'politically correct' behaviour. In doing so, they position themselves as outside arbiters, along with conservatives, of what is an acceptable degree and style of minority activism (see also Valverde 1999, 350; Alibhai-Brown 1994, 59; Morris 2001, 159).

co-existed with a generalised suspicion of victim claimants and their motives. The subtext was that there was a threshold beyond which even the most legitimate victim could be said to be exaggerating the extent of their suffering or clinging for too long to their victim status. Having crossed this threshold, all claims to legitimacy were forfeited. The positing of two categories of victim allowed the critics of so-called ‘political correctness’ to assert the validity of their own claims to have been victimised by the demands of feminists and others, while relegating those they wished to discredit to the category of illegitimate victims.

The variety of academic feminist responses to these criticisms makes it difficult to differentiate between properly feminist and anti-feminist attitudes to the category of ‘victim’. However, I suggest that the question is not whether there is a superficial similarity of outcome in the repudiation of the category by opposing political interests. Nor is it necessarily whether feminists should regulate their strategies in accordance with these superficialities, embracing the category just because it has been delegitimised by those seeking to undermine feminism. The question is rather what strategic stance feminists want to adopt towards victim identification, based on their own negotiated definition of victimhood. The decision may be to dispense with that strategy, or it may not. But what is most disturbing about the feminist response to the popular attacks, even where the intent was to rebut them, is that the hostile construction of victimhood is often taken up by feminists, and the criticisms accepted or rejected on the basis of the terms it defined. Therefore, these responses recognised as objectively true the existence of the sort of victim described by this construction, even as they denied that feminists or the women they represented fell into this category. In the next chapter, I expand on this tendency within academic feminist writing. Specifically, I consider how academic feminists have, not always inadvertently, authenticated the reality of the sort of feminism often referred to as ‘victim feminism’, allowing that a feminism that is excessively wedded to victim identification might actually exist in exactly the form in which it is framed by the critics. The feminist response, then, becomes confined to judging whether contemporary feminism does or does not match that conceptual reality.



## **4 In Search of ‘Victim Feminism’**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter sketched some reservations about the adequacy of academic feminist attempts to denormalise the narrative of pathological victimhood encoded by the emergent discourse of ‘political correctness’. In this chapter, I examine more closely the consolidation of the term ‘victim feminism’ in the immediate context of those debates. Despite this term being specifically Wolf’s (1993) invention, it came to be broadly applied even within the academic feminist response literature to the kind of victim-oriented feminism under attack. Importing this term into feminist commentary reified so-called ‘victim feminism’ as a knowable concept, suggesting that it could apply to an actually existing form of feminism which was recognisable to us all. Closer inspection reveals that the evidence provided for the existence of this feminism is thin to say the least, and that the historiographies of its emergence are replete with contradictions. I argue that the adoption of this terminology constitutes a further failure to interrogate the discursive terms set by conservative anti-feminism at the time, and that the effects of this failure continue to reverberate in feminist anxiety about the category of ‘victim’.

To problematise this anxiety is not to say that we are constrained to endorse only those views that are deemed to be contra those of our pre-determined political opponents, a pre-determination which is in any case, as I have said, fraught with assumptions. Justifying our concerns on the grounds that those who reject victim identification must be aligned automatically with the right because the right denigrates victims would be simplistic. Indeed, if we accept the argument often used by academic feminists to neutralise the popular critiques of feminist preoccupation with victimhood, feminists have long expressed a degree of caution about over-emphasising the victimisation of women (Siegel 1997b, 69; Stringer 2009, 24-5; Ginsberg and Lennox 1996, 184; Kelly et al. 1996, 81; McDermott 1995, 670; Hammer 2002, 197; Cole 1999a, 84ff.; 2007, 67ff.). To suggest that such debate about the disadvantages of victim identification should cease just because hostile political interests also seek to erode the credibility of victimhood would be to adopt a reactive

position that is no more an exercise in feminist autonomy than is the joint devaluation of victim status that is challenged here.

Nevertheless, ideological and discursive alignments with anti-feminist interests should give some pause, as indeed has been the case even in the sort of feminist responses just cited, some of which attempted to draw an ideological boundary between feminist and non-feminist suspicion of victim identification. For instance, Stringer (2009, 24) noted that ‘it is [...] possible to critically interrogate feminist dealings with victim identity without losing sight of feminism’s political purpose and crossing into anti-feminism’. What defines the boundary between feminism and anti-feminism here is the tone of the critique – feminists may share reservations about the disempowering effects on women of identifying as victims, but they express these without ridicule and in a way that is respectful of the feminist project (hooks, cited in Stringer 2009, 24). In fact, Stringer (2009, 20) counters these fears of disempowerment by refuting the assumed passivity of victims. In so doing, she instates a more solid ideological dividing line than hooks between feminist and popular rhetoric about victimhood – ‘when feminists use the word ‘victim’ they do not necessarily refer to a passive subject who lacks agency’.

As my analysis of academic feminist theory in the following two chapters suggests, on both these criteria for distinguishing between feminist and anti-feminist treatments of victimhood, we have not succeeded in staying on the right side of anti-feminism. As I will demonstrate, and contra Stringer’s observation, the assumption that ‘victim’ equates to ‘passive victim’ is widespread. Moreover, feminist interest in women’s agency and resistance is predicated on a dichotomous definition of victimhood and agency which disables the simultaneous analysis of these as integrated elements in women’s experience of oppression. For the most part, when feminists ‘use the word ‘victim’’, especially when this is not within a dedicated discussion of victimhood, these usages appeal directly to apparently intuitive understandings of victimhood that derive much of their legitimacy from interpretive frameworks that were automated outside feminism. And while hooks may be correct in saying that most (but by no means all) academic feminist references to victimhood do not engage outright ridicule or mockery, the vast majority of these references assume the devalued status of victimhood, and assume it from the narrative position of the evaluating non-victim subject. Broadly speaking, victimhood is dealt with in

ways that are quite counter to the spirit of respect and openness that hooks maintains differentiates feminist treatments of the concept from popular ones.

This chapter prepares the way for our demonstration of that phenomenon, focusing on academic feminists' peculiar willingness to participate in the establishment of 'victim feminism' as a real and recognisable object of analysis. Little attempt was made to question the terms by which 'victim feminism' had been made into a sensible concept, nor the rules by which such a feminism could be understood as excessive. Even when the intention was to challenge this depiction of contemporary feminism, the strategy often remained bound by the assumptions embedded in the code of 'political correctness', the very assumptions that were being used to discredit feminist arguments about inequality. Accordingly, the attribution of 'victim feminism' was denied on the basis that feminists were actually very intent on highlighting women's agency and resistance, an argument which presumed a natural antagonism between the revelation of victimhood and the revelation of activism. As a consequence, at virtually no point was there a defence mounted in its own right of the value of defining women's experience in terms of victimhood in the context of the dominant culture's resistance to recognising women's subordinate status.

#### **4.1 The reification of 'victim feminism'**

Academic feminist responses to the popular critiques often approached 'victim feminism' as if it were an objectively identifiable entity, a feminism that we recognise, conceptually at least, from the 'prodigal daughters' descriptions. This framed the argument as one about whether contemporary feminism matched this entity or not, not as one about the discursive construction of meaning. At their most innocuous, academic feminist references to 'victim feminism' function as a short-hand way of pointing to the sort of feminism that is the object of the 'prodigal daughters' criticisms. In these cases, we can read the use of this term as the temporary adoption of that narrative position while the views of the 'prodigal daughters' are being paraphrased, one which implies no commitments on the part of the writers (e.g. Cole 1999a, 73-6; 2000, 136; 2007, 49ff.; Atmore 1999a, 185-6; Ebert 1996, 267; Schneider 1993, 394; McCaffrey 1998, 266). It is indeed difficult to avoid this kind of usage without a degree of circumlocution. However, I suggest that it is worth doing so when it is considered that feminist deployments of this terminology are not always so

uninvested. That is, sometimes these deployments emanate from the writer's own speaking position, as she points to an objectified concept that she herself knows and expects us to recognise. In these cases, references to 'victim feminism' cease to be merely proxies for the views of the 'prodigal daughters'.

Let us revisit the comment from Sorisio (1997, 141) quoted towards the end of the previous chapter: 'Although what some are calling 'victim feminism' is only one tendency in a multi-faceted field, it has serious implications for feminism's future'. Here we can see a slippage in the narrative position from which 'victim feminism' is indicated – from one which channels the 'prodigal daughters' to one from which Sorisio herself speaks. From the first position, Sorisio retains her detachment from the label ('some are calling' it that), but from the second, she expresses her own anxiety about the implications of 'victim feminism'. Indeed, the slippage was already evident even in her first clause – 'what some are calling 'victim feminism' is only one tendency in a multi-faceted field'. Here, Sorisio feints an uncommitted perspective at first, only to indicate that there *is* a form of feminism that approximates what is described by the 'prodigal daughters', albeit not as prevalent as they claim.

In other cases, the term 'victim feminism' is deployed from the writer's own narrative position much more flagrantly, and is applied to feminist classifications of the author's own making. It thus becomes detached from the site of its original formulation, even whilst the commentary purports to borrow the terms of that debate, and thus to be innocent of the generation of such terms and meanings. For example, there is no recognition by McCaskill and Phillips (1994) that 'victim feminism' (and 'power feminism') are primarily discursive constructs (and value-loaded ones at that). Instead, they accept that these terms refer to actual 'camps' of feminists (McCaskill and Phillips 1994, 110) and 'constituencies' of women (116). Frustrated by the stalemate that has developed between these (in their view) actually competing camps, the authors urge a reconciliation – 'the lives of power feminists and victim feminists and nonfeminists [...] are equally important' (112), and both victim feminism and power feminism (no scare quotes to express reservation here) are valid 'standpoints' with their own particular strengths (120). But, moreover, the definition of 'victim feminism' given by McCaskill and Phillips (1994, 120) here as 'the recognition of and opposition to women's historical and transcultural oppression' is quite at odds with

Wolf's own. Wolf (1993, 153-4) differentiated between the legitimate identification of inequality, and the clinging to victim status as a source of strength and identity that was the mark of 'victim feminism'. So, according to this distinction, Wolf (1993, 14, 153, 273) positions Faludi, for instance, as *not* a 'victim feminist', but as performing the legitimate task of documenting the victimisation of women. However, McCaskill and Phillips (1994, 111) explicitly classify Faludi as a 'victim feminist' – which, according to their definition, she is.

In her criticism of both 'victim' and 'power feminism', Sandell (1994) utilises these terms in even more idiosyncratic ways, even though she specifically contextualises her discussion within 'the recent debates about victim and power feminism' which have imbued the vocabulary of 'victim' and 'power' with a historically particular kind of intelligibility (Sandell 1994, 25). For Sandell (1994, 25), both 'victim feminism' and 'power feminism' individuate oppression and the response to it at the expense of attending to structural subordination. In her terminology, 'victimisation' is understood as individual injury, while 'oppression' is systemic<sup>1</sup>, and 'power feminism' is an understandably individualist response to the already individualising 'victim feminism'. It is tempting to rationalise Sandell's individualised version of 'victim feminism' as a retrospective definition based on the fact that Wolf's 'power feminism' outlines the ways women can draw on their individual inner resources to combat inequality. In other words, Sandell defines as individualist that which the individualist 'power feminism' is designed to correct.

Otherwise, there is no way of explaining Sandell's framing of 'victim feminism' within the terms of the literature she is discussing, since it is entirely at cross-purposes with it. For a start, the problem with 'victim feminism' for Wolf (1993, 157ff.) was the over-generalisation of women's powerlessness, certainly not its individuating aspects. And in a radical reversal of Wolf's formulation, Sandell figures 'victim feminism' here as both the analysis of, and the *antidote* to, women's individuated victim mentality. Sandell (1994, 25) equates it loosely at one point with 'victim-oriented feminism', which she claims takes its

---

<sup>1</sup> Sandell does not, however, always succeed in clearly differentiating between these. For example, according to her framing of what she calls at this point 'victim-oriented feminism', 'the cycle of oppression becomes completely individualized and women are seen as being victims both of male domination and their own pathology' (Sandell 1994, 25-6). Here, 'male domination' suggests that systemic inequalities are also the source of victimisation.

inspiration from social constructionism to suggest that women invite oppression by adopting the role of victim to which they are socially and psychologically conditioned. The ‘victim feminist’ solution is to intervene in that conditioning:

Victim feminism and power feminism both locate the problem of male domination and violence at the level of individual men and women. While victim feminism advocates that women should recognize their victim status and make changes at the level of interpersonal relations, power feminism suggests women should recognize their potential for power and seize control in public life (Sandell 1994, 27).

This framing of ‘victim feminism’ bears no relationship whatsoever to Wolf’s, where it produced a victim mentality and commensurate inertia in women by over-articulating their victimhood. In Sandell’s version, ‘victim feminism’ is the polar opposite – instead of unwittingly producing such a mentality, it actually argues, almost in line with Wolf, that women do have such a mentality. Sandell endows ‘victim feminism’ with a perceptiveness about what predisposes women to identify as victims, which was entirely absent in Wolf’s account. In Sandell’s version, ‘victim feminism’ and ‘power feminism’ are on a par, in that they both frame a problem and provide a solution to it, whereas in Wolf’s formulation, ‘victim feminism’ *was* the problem that ‘power feminism’ would resolve.

Taken in isolation, Sandell’s (1994, 27) summary of Wolf’s argument is a fair reflection: it notes that Wolf critiques the solidification of victim identity as the basis of a feminist position, and that, for Wolf, ‘victim feminism is that which relies on women’s specificity as the cause of their oppression, as well as any feminism that valorizes community over individual achievement’. But this means then that, even by Sandell’s own account of Wolf’s view, the discrepancies between Sandell’s definition of ‘victim feminism’ as individuating what should be an emphasis on structural oppression, and Wolf’s critique of the systemic focus of ‘victim feminism’ are glaringly obvious. Yet Sandell makes no attempt to reconcile the two positions or clarify the relationship between them, despite implying that the ‘victim’/‘power feminism’ model which she is describing is cut from the same cloth as that outlined by Wolf.

Sandell’s (1994) discussion of ‘victim feminism’ is a very potent example of how that term can take on a life of its own within academic feminist discourse, and function as a catch-all for various contradictory formulations of the sort of feminism which is thought to be under attack – and, indeed, as the ground on which some academic feminists join in the attack. In this light, the apparently innocuous usages of the term which it was noted earlier

serve merely as proxy carriers of the ‘prodigal daughters’ own views might be seen as somewhat less innocent. Moreover, even these usages are not as free of authorial mediation as they appear – most of these commentaries extend the term ‘victim feminism’ to apply to the kind of feminism being attacked by *all* of the ‘prodigal daughters’, even though this term was specifically Wolf’s. To that degree, then, even those academic feminists who contest the popular claims work to consolidate ‘victim feminism’ as the homogeneous object of a combined attack, and to construct it as an objective entity by categorising the various feminist elements criticised by the ‘prodigal daughters’ under the one label. By extension, this categorisation then organises our conceptualisation of the contemporary feminism that they portray as allegedly that which is not ‘power feminism’.

This facilitates a line of counter-argument that goes something like this: we recognise what is meant by ‘victim feminism’, we know what sort of feminism that is, but contemporary feminism is not it. And the means of contestation becomes the highlighting of that which is ‘powerful’ about contemporary feminist perspectives. Therefore, the ground on which the popular accounts are challenged is that feminists are not preoccupied with victimhood and do not imagine women to be powerless victims, as is claimed, but that feminists are actually intent on detailing women’s agency and resistance to subordination (e.g. Atmore 1999a, 202; Morgan 1997, 114; Kelly et al. 1996, 81; O’Sullivan 1995, 112; Sorisio 1997, 143; Davis 1997, 229; Cole 1999a, 87, 90; Hammer 2002, 197). Other counter-arguments stress that victimhood can co-exist with agency (e.g. Hammer 2002, 57; Stringer 2009, 20), or that the act of self-defining as a victim itself requires considerable agency (e.g. Morgan 2005, 227; Siegel 1997b, 76). Similarly, McCaffrey (1998, 272-3) argues that ‘critics of victim feminism’ have overlooked the extent to which victims of sexual abuse disavow the weakness that is a central feature of dominant constructions of victimhood, and emphasise instead their own strength and agency. These may be broadly unobjectionable arguments in themselves, and utterly necessary to disrupt stereotypical definitions of victims. Nevertheless, these responses do not step far outside the terms established by the popular literature, in the sense that they seem to subscribe to the view that agency is self-evidently more morally defensible (as opposed to simply practically desirable) than powerless victimhood. Where victimhood is defended, it is only in cases where we can also point to proof of agency.

Consider, for example, Siegel's (1997b, 76) self-negating defence of victim claiming in a piece which is otherwise far from sympathetic to the 'prodigal daughters'. She is anxious to assert that naming victimisation is a radical articulation of strength, and on that count, Wolf and her sisters are quite wrong in their depiction of the nature of victims. This argument is immediately undercut by the claim that 'to give a name to the injustices that oppress is to adamantly refuse victim status', and Siegel proudly defines herself as 'a feminist activist who actively refuses to be a victim'. So, her argument is, first, that Wolf, Roiphe, and Denfeld are wrong to equate victimhood with helplessness because self-identified victims are by definition agentic, and then, conversely, that this act of agency is proof that the claimants are not really victims. The argument seeks first to expand the concept of victimhood to include agency, only to contract this again by confirming that evidence of agency dispels victimhood.

Hence, in responding to the 'prodigal daughters' with these counter-narratives of women's agency, academic feminists tend to collude with them in trying to distance themselves from 'victim feminism' and the moral failure they attribute to it. Assertions about feminism's historical legacy of activism aim to challenge the factual errors of the popular critiques, but only by accepting their depictions of victimhood – feminism has not been preoccupied with victimhood (read helplessness and powerlessness), since it has been engaged in activism. But challenges mounted at this level do not think to vouch for the validity *in itself* – irrespective of whether there is the overlaying imprimatur of 'agency' – of a feminism whose political project it is to rearticulate as victimising what the dominant culture has normalised (see Stringer 2009, 26). Undoubtedly, women do exercise agency and whatever power is at their disposal whenever they can, in the midst of their subordination. But if victimhood can always be either expunged by, or redefined as, agency, then the victim who is truly powerless, helpless, or immobilised will find no avenue of defence in the strategies adopted in many of these counter-arguments.

On this basis, there is much to agree with in Hammer's (2002, 19) assessment of the academic feminist commentary on these critiques, that '[the] 'reactionary backlash' [...] has been so effective that mainstream feminism has in response developed a defensive position that has had serious implications for more progressive agendas [...]'. Positioning agency as that which can contradict charges of victimhood, when victimhood has been



defined as moral failure, enables the concept of agency to develop conservative codings (see Hammer 2002, 58; Mardorossian 2002a, 763-4 note 20). One of the aims of this thesis is to delineate how this process has been secured, not just within the confines of this feminist response literature, but more broadly across academic feminist theory in general. The response literature, in choosing these particular counter-strategies and in extending the term 'victim feminism' in ways that make it conceivably applicable to some form of feminism somewhere, plays its part in forming the spectre of 'victim feminism' as something to be avoided or denied. As Sandell's (1994) discussion in particular shows, the term 'victim feminism' has been allowed to float free from its origins to lend its dubious connotations to the indictment of any form of feminism which can be construed as centralising victimisation in its ontology.

#### **4.2 Conflicting narratives: where is 'victim feminism'?**

I have taken issue with the reification of an entity called 'victim feminism' by academic feminist commentators who have treated it as a conceptually recognisable form of feminism. We are urged by various writers to take the criticisms of 'victim feminism' seriously, on the basis that we can visualise that form of feminism as a potentially valid target of critique. My questioning of that reification has been based in part on the fact that the understanding of what constitutes 'victim feminism' is quite variable, among 'prodigal daughters' and academic feminists alike. Now, I suggest that the objectification of 'victim feminism' can be further contested by examining the broad intuition that informs a number of these discussions – that, at some point, feminism has departed from its original and legitimate objectives, and become irrelevant to its constituency because of its preoccupation with victimisation. When inspected more closely, however, the details of this historiography become more sketchy, in terms of both the point at which feminism's fall from grace occurred, and how much historical and/or contemporary influence is exercised by whatever feminist corps is seen as responsible for it.

The 'prodigal daughters' themselves offer different versions of the story of feminism's failure. For Roiphe (1993, 3-4) and Denfeld (1995, 20), the authentic feminism is second-wave because of its robust activism and the enormous improvements it brought about in women's condition. Contemporary feminism – for Roiphe (1993, 4), already well

in place in 1986 – bears no relationship to it, taking its cue from ideals of delicate femininity originating in, alternately, the 1950s (Roiphe 1993, 6) or the 1800s (Denfeld 1995, 10). Similarly, Garner (1995, 39-40) decries the modern propensity to appeal to legal protection from sexual harassment, where she and other feminists of her generation responded to such problems with their individual witfulness and resources.

Sommers' historiography is the complete reversal of these. Her nostalgia is for the first-wave feminism that pursued liberal and egalitarian principles at the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, and wanted nothing more radical than for women to be treated the same as men in law (Sommers 1994, 22-3). In her account, it is the second-wave that has caused the unpopularity of feminism, with its emphasis on collective subjugation at the hands of the 'patriarchy' and the 'sex/gender system'. But, Sommers (1994, 24) then muddies her temporal account somewhat by reinflecting 'new' and 'old' to differentiate between feminisms philosophically rather than chronologically, so that 'old' feminism is that which is driven by equity and individualism, where 'new' feminism focuses on issues of collectivity. According to this definition, 'old' feminism is therefore represented, not just by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the participants at Seneca Falls, but by Greer and Friedan 'in our own day'.

Others share Sommers' faith in the principles that motivated first-wave feminists and/or her disapproval of second-wave feminism as the point at which contemporary feminism's problems began (e.g. Lehrman 1992, 31; Bennett 2007, 2; Lukas 2006, xii), though accounts of the extent of 'victim feminism's' influence during the 1960s and 1970s are tremendously varied. Bennett's (2007, 2) denigration of second-wave is complete – '[we] are living with the fallout [of 1960s feminism] today', with twenty-first century feminists having abandoned the republican and egalitarian principles of the Declaration of Independence. Bennett quotes from McElroy (1996) to fill in the historiographical gap between 1776 and the twenty-first century (the period which oversaw the replacement of sexual liberation with 'sexual correctness'), ignoring the fact that McElroy's own version of this history is quite confused. For McElroy (1996, 3) begins by differentiating between the laudable revolutionary impulse of the 1960s and the allegedly victim-focused feminist orthodoxy of the 1990s. But this '*new* ideology' (McElroy 1996, 4; emphasis added) of the 1990s is simultaneously framed as the apogee of a trend that began in the 1970s with the

introduction of the concept of ‘patriarchy’ (McElroy 1996, 4). Up to this point, therefore, McElroy’s view of earlier feminism is nuanced to the extent that the 1960s had a legitimate agenda, which began to be derailed in the 1970s. However, McElroy (1996, 5) then draws a clear contrast between, on the one hand, the productive feminism of the 1960s and 1970s and, on the other, the degradation of feminism by the forces of ‘political correctness’ from the 1980s onwards. So second-wave feminism emerges from this account as alternately informed predominantly by the liberal aspirations of which McElroy approves and containing the germ of a destructive radicalism which made its presence felt as early as the 1970s.

Likewise, Faust’s (1994) account of the emergence of ‘wimp feminism’ in Australia features a shifting posture towards the place it occupied during the second-wave. Following closely on the statement that ‘wimp feminism’ is ‘the *new* face of feminism’ (Faust 1994, 5; emphasis added) is the assertion that the ‘Revolutionary feminists’ of the WLM were already overly focused on women’s victimhood ‘in the late 1960s’ – and still were, ‘as recently as 1989’ (Faust 1994, 9). Like McElroy, Faust provides conflicting diagnoses of the current state of feminism, arguing both that it exhibits defects which had contaminated feminist activism from the 1960s onwards, *and* that it has no precedent – ‘[the] cringing, querulous tone of victim feminists pursuing bandaid solutions to women’s problems is relatively new’ (Faust 1994, 53).

In the course of presenting her arguments, Faust (1994, 52) draws a parallel between what she refers to as ‘wimp feminism’ and what Wolf defines as ‘victim feminism’. However, she disputes Wolf’s chronology which frames contemporary ‘victim feminism’ as drawing on nineteenth century stereotypes of submissive and naturally maternal femininity. According to Faust (1994, 52), Wolf’s position is irreconcilable with the continuous opposition of WLM (‘wimp’ or ‘victim feminists’ in Faust’s framework) to the nuclear family and the feminine domestic role model. In other words, the historiography of the origins of ‘victim feminism’ are in dispute mainly because Faust’s and Wolf’s understandings of its defining characteristics are vastly different, if not entirely contradictory, at least according to Faust’s reading of Wolf. Faust (1994, 52) also challenges Wolf’s claim that ‘power feminism’ is ‘the new feminism’ on the basis that the WEL (‘reformist’ feminists) have operated according to the principles of Wolf’s preferred

feminism since the 1960s. Thus, in terms of the span of Faust's historical interest, there has always been 'power feminism', but it is not entirely clear whether there has always been 'victim feminism'.

In fact, Wolf's explanation of the emergence of 'victim feminism' is more fluid – and, therefore, arguably more unsustainable – than Faust claims, and indeed, than any of the above accounts. This is significant, considering that Wolf is the author of this concept. She traces its roots to two utterly conflicting philosophical standpoints – firstly (and here, Wolf's history aligns with Faust's (1994, 53-4)), to '[a] small but influential strand of feminism' that developed in the 1960s along Marxist revolutionary lines (Wolf 1993, 73), and secondly, to the mid-nineteenth century feminine stereotype disputed by Faust (Wolf 1993, 181-2). The first scenario already begs the question of how a cadre that is small can also be influential – indeed, influential enough 'to create much of second-wave feminist culture' (and contradicting McElroy's (1996, 4) assertion that liberal feminism was the dominant school of feminism during the second-wave of the 1960s). And this question becomes even more pressing when Wolf claims that revolutionary left feminism '[survives] vestigially in some circles of the women's movement' (that is, it is a vestigial remnant of what was small to start with), but is nevertheless largely responsible for the current unpopularity of identifying as a feminist (Wolf 1993, 73).

Further confusion is introduced into this account when Wolf (1993, 147) explains that 'power feminism' – 'the old belief in a tolerant assertiveness' – has struggled against the rise of 'victim feminism' '[over] the last twenty years', and here, she defines 'victim feminism' as 'a set of beliefs that cast women as beleaguered, fragile, intuitive angels'. So, at this point, 'power feminism' is not a new version of feminism, but an old (even typical?) one, just as Faust claimed, even though elsewhere Wolf (1993, 247ff.) rationalises her intervention in terms of promoting 'a new psychology of female power'. The chronology Wolf presents is blurry – how much does 'power feminism's' heyday (the twenty years leading up to 1993) overlap with Marxist feminism's hegemony in second-wave culture? And are the 'victim feminists' who adopt the identity of passive angels the same as those who are inspired by Marxist radicalism and subversiveness (see Wolf 1993, 74)? In the final analysis, Wolf (1993, 156) defines 'victim feminism' as a 'murky brew' – and murky indeed it is, combining as it does feminist positions as diverse as MacKinnon's and

Gilligan's, a radical left aversion to power, the 'cultural feminism' of the 1970s, and old-fashioned ideals of feminine behaviour.

This incoherently broad assignment of responsibility for the spread of 'victim feminism' is incidentally repeated even more baldly by Heru (2001) – and, in the process, imported into the socio-medical academic disciplinary environment. She supports her argument that victimhood is synonymous with being female by drawing our attention to the fact that detailing the ways in which women were 'victims of the patriarchy' was a focus for 'feminists of the late 1800's [sic] and early 1900's and the second wave of feminists in the 1960's and 1970's' (Heru 2001, 14). The gendering of victimhood, then, has a long, but distinctly amorphous ancestry (and we might also take issue with her imprecise reference to 'patriarchy' as part of the ontology of all feminist perspectives throughout that time). That '*many* feminist writers *still* consider the victim to have moral authority' and that '[this] *is* a major flaw in feminist theory and politics' (Heru 2001, 14; emphasis added) is supported by a reference to a 1973 work, so again, what was the broad case for unspecified periods from the 1800s to the 1970s is very loosely but categorically applied to the contemporary context.

Nonetheless, having said that, the model that Heru takes as exemplary of the kind of framing of victimhood that might take us forward and out of the current impasse is not, at her time of writing, a new one – it dates from 1988, and is a feminist one at that (Heru 2001, 17). In fact, Heru (2001, 17) disrupts her own blanket evaluation of feminism's past and present preoccupation with claiming victimhood in observing that feminists 'argue most vehemently around [the] flash point' of whether women are 'victims of the patriarchy or [...] responsible adults'. Leaving aside the value-loaded alternative to victim identification that Heru offers here, it can be noted that, even within her terms, far from being an obdurate flaw in feminist thinking, the issue of victim-claiming seems to be a highly contentious one that generates healthy debate and its fair share of opponents within feminism.

Equally conflicting accounts of feminism's degeneration are also offered in some academic feminist responses to the popular literature (and this is so even in pieces that are only weakly receptive to the criticisms contained therein). Both Haag (1996) and Sandell (1994), for example, appeal to various members of the 'prodigal daughters' to reinforce

their own objections to contemporary feminism's alleged obsession with the victim perspective, but their historiographies are opposed. For Sandell (1994, 25; see also 28), that focus became pathological only around the 1990s, while the 1970s effort of detailing structural *oppression* (as opposed to victimhood) was a legitimate feminist direction. Conversely, Haag (1996, 61) traces the roots of the current intellectual climate to the 'two-dimensionality of second-wave feminism' and its essentialising of women's vulnerability, against which contemporary poststructuralist feminists of the 1990s wage an ongoing struggle. This struggle has continued throughout 'the last five years' as various feminist constituencies endeavour to 'find their way out' of what seems by this account to present an especially stubborn obstacle, despite Haag's observation that 'most thoughtful feminists within the academy' deem the politics of victim identity to be theoretically inadequate (Haag 1996, 24).

While Haag's (1996) and Sandell's (1994) analyses represent opposing positions on the political strategies of second-wave feminism and the extent of their continuing impact, there are times when both such contradictory views are endorsed within the one discussion. Sorisio (1997, 134) opens her piece by posing a conundrum – how is it that the image of robust activism that characterised the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s (an image which Sorisio endorses as a faithful representation of the tangible change wrought by feminism during that period) has morphed into a view of contemporary feminism as over-reliant on the representation of women as passive victims? However, the view expressed here is itself reinflected later to locate the source of the problem which has 'serious implications for feminism's future' within that very period of intense feminist struggle – '[in] my area of feminist literary scholarship, the notion of women as universal victims resurfaced in the 1970s and lingers today' (Sorisio 1997, 141). From whence this notion *resurfaced* is not clarified, and that it only 'lingers' suggests that perhaps its influence is not particularly strong. Indeed, Sorisio provides no evidence to substantiate the claim that it does linger (and my subsequent discussion of contemporary academic feminist theory will demonstrate that it emphatically does not).

Throughout Sorisio's discussion, there is oscillation between two competing narratives – the imperative that we take seriously the charges levelled against us by the popular writers (Sorisio 1997, 136, 140, 141), *and* the denial of the possibility that these

charges actually apply to the majority of contemporary feminists. For instance, she derides Roiphe for drawing conclusions from ‘such a nonrepresentative group of women’ (Sorisio 1997, 140) and specifies several feminists who have been intent on highlighting the power that women have exercised to bring about change, adding that ‘[these] scholars, *among many others*, reject notions of victimization’ (Sorisio 1997, 143; emphasis added). By the time Sorisio (1997, 147) reaches her conclusion, her historiography has shifted again. The temptation to ‘cling to the status of the victim’ seems to be a singularly contemporary issue, the resolution of which can be found in ‘[looking] to past struggle for strategies of resistance’. At this point, second-wave feminism is once again the site of change activation. Instead of being the source of a residual and resolute problem, it is the history which risks being forgotten, and which we need to remind ourselves could hold the key to resolving a current dilemma.

Second-wave feminism occupies an equally ambiguous status in Guy’s (1996) critique of the silencing power of ‘politically correct’ feminists. On the one hand, she identifies the early to mid-1970s works of Brownmiller and Griffin as the origin of the feminist hegemonic view of rape as the quintessential instrument of male domination (Guy 1996, 156-7). This is the hegemony which Guy claims has suppressed dissident voices like hers from that time to the present. To cement her claim, Guy points to the fact that similar arguments are being made by Paglia, but in paraphrasing Paglia, she disrupts her own timeline. According to Guy (1996, 157), Paglia’s recent work ‘laments a decline from a strong and effective force of eccentric individualists (1970s feminism) to a loose coalition of groups of self-defined victims’. Just as in Sorisio’s fluid portrayal of second-wave feminism as both the locus of the movement’s legitimate activity and the seed of contemporary problems, 1970s feminism is here the agent of a hegemonic line of argument about collective oppression on the one hand, and on the other, counter-hegemonic and pluralist in its eccentricity and individualist orientation. And it is this ‘strong and effective force’ of individualists which has given way in the current period to a coalition of victims who impose their ‘politically correct’ modes of belief on feminists at large.

This discussion has problematised the fact that what was already a patchy historiography of so-called (for the most part by *us*) ‘victim feminism’ in the popular literature has, despite that, been credited within even the least sympathetic academic

counter-commentary as documenting a potentially real and serious problem for feminism. And some commentaries replay similarly incoherent versions of the historical emergence of an over-reliance on victim status in feminism, and of the extent to which it continues to pose a threat to its emancipatory agenda. However, as soon as we interrogate these accounts in order to pin down the location of this problem, it dissipates. Where ‘victim feminism’ is objectified in these accounts as a knowable concept, one which might and, in some views, actually does signify existing forms of feminism, the lack of specifics about its manifestation suggests that it refers to a problem that never was – *and still isn’t*. This is despite the fact that this narrative of a potentially excessive and destructive focus on victimhood drives much of the content and analytical logic of contemporary feminist theory at large. That is to say that this narrative has gained traction in an extended sphere, well beyond the immediate context of debates about the issues collectivised under the banner of ‘political correctness’, and of the academic feminist contributions to those debates.

The objections raised herein to feminist negativity towards the victim category is therefore not primarily a function of a similarity of content between feminist and conservative arguments. Rather, it is directed at a feminist rhetorical practice which is exclusionary, and which attests to a failure to adequately interrogate and manage the political investments of the meaning frameworks it deploys. Where these meanings have been used expressly to delegitimise feminist agendas, we need to be acutely aware of the grounds on which it is decided to turn away from strategies organised around claiming victimhood. At the very least, we should wonder what discursive legitimisation has enabled both a shift in the estimation of the political value of establishing victim status, and the rewriting of certain stages of feminist activism as quintessential examples of that newly identified object known as ‘victim feminism’. This approach has some elements in common with Mardorossian’s (2002a, 766-7):

I want to suspend the assumption that it is the ‘reality’ of feminist practice that motivates such prevalent contemporary discourse about feminism [i.e. that feminism is victimological]. Instead, I adopt a Foucauldian stance whereby representations are not seen as reflections of reality but as reflections of particular discursive formations that determine ‘regimes of truth’ (what counts as truth). In other words, I am trying neither to absolve nor accuse feminists of adhering to ‘victimology’ but rather attempting to assess the climate that could make such a portrayal of feminism so popular. Specifically, I ask how the radical and revolutionary women of the 1970s whose activism has remained unparalleled in the history of second- and third-wave feminisms have come to represent ‘victimhood’ two decades later? There is at



least a paradox in this discursive development that requires a scrutiny of the very term *victim* and what it encompasses.

My analysis accepts in a heuristic sense (since I do not appeal to Foucault to elaborate the work of discourse here) Mardorossian's point that discursively constructed 'regimes of truth' naturalise certain framings of feminism and of victim status, and contract the space in which counter-narratives could play out. And I have aimed to carry out the sort of scrutiny of the way the term 'victim' is used that Mardorossian recommends, arguing, in line with her, that the discourse of 'political correctness' organised perceptions of feminism and victimhood in particularly cogent and reusable forms.

In this chapter, I have been particularly interested in the way academic feminists, even when subjecting the popular claims to dedicated scrutiny and even open challenge, have in some cases been oblivious to the incoherence of the historiographies they themselves construct in the process of specifying the location and extent of what *they* collapse as 'victim feminism'. Such inconsistencies beg the question of what mechanisms are at work to reconstitute the coherence of these texts both for the authors, and for the readers for whom they are assumed to make sense. And, while Mardorossian's reticence about determining the 'reality' of feminist practice is *de rigueur* in a postmodern intellectual climate, the success of popularising a certain story about feminism is surely all the more problematic if it can be shown that what that story purports to represent is far from palpable and identifiable. So, the objection here is not to conscientious interrogation of the utility and validity of ontologising victimhood as an important plank of a feminist politics. Instead, the issue here is the extent to which academic feminists have incorporated into their theoretical directions and preoccupations an assumption of the objectivity of what appears from the above discussion to be in fact the constantly evanescent referent of 'victim feminism'. This incorporation has entailed a readiness to deploy the simplistic, popularised understanding of victimhood, and I join with Mardorossian (2002a, 771; 2002b, 789; see also Lamb 1999, 121; Kelly et al. 1996, 78) in calling on feminists to reappropriate the term 'victim' on their own terms and for their own ends.

### 4.3 Haunted still: the spectre of ‘victim feminism’

I have focused thus far on describing the context in which the wider contemporary academic feminist discourse about victimhood should be considered. The argument is that the immediate feminist response to popular framings of feminism and the place of victim-claiming in its politics already contained some problematic aspects. These can be classified broadly as a failure to contest adequately a hostile construction of the concept of victim status, and to absorb that construction as the basis on which the conservative critiques were either challenged or allowed. The crux of the subsequent discussion is that this failure has become well-entrenched in feminist theoretical writing, and, moreover, that subscription to this construction has become a condition of membership of the feminist knowledge community.

However, before embarking on that discussion proper in the next chapter, I draw attention to two texts which are very pertinent to our current concerns. The first is the collection edited by Faulkner and MacDonald (2009a) entitled *Victim No More: Women’s Resistance to Law, Culture and Power*. The focus will be particularly on the way the editors frame the central concerns of the collection in their introduction and in their forewords to some of the individual contributions. The relevance of this work derives firstly from its currency, and from the fact that its title clearly announces a position on women and their relationship to victim status. It therefore augments the journal data to suggest that what our analysis reveals in that data is also evident more widely, at this moment, in feminist writing. Secondly, the trope of ‘victim feminism’ is taken up in the title of the first essay in the collection by Stringer (2009), and the editors position this essay as providing the conceptual framework for analysing the debates featured in the collection as a whole (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009d, 19). In addition, Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 9) situate their collection in the context of a backlash which has overseen past *and* current cutbacks to feminist programs, citing Wolf and Roiphe in that regard. The discussions in the collection are therefore framed in part as a continuation of the earlier debates. Coincidentally (and, judging from the reference list, quite unintentionally), the title settles the rhetorical question of Cole’s (2000) earlier article resoundingly in the affirmative. Where Cole’s (2000) title (‘Victims No More (?)’) expressed doubt about the popular claim that women were no longer victimised and that feminist focus on their victim status was

therefore pathological, the title of Faulkner and MacDonald's (2009a) collection dismisses this uncertainty, and triumphally confirms the relinquishment of victim status.

The second text is a political studies primer by Hoffman and Graham (2006b), *Introduction to Political Theory*, which contains a chapter dedicated to 'victimhood'. In the second sentence of that chapter, Hoffman and Graham (2006b, 510) remark that in the US 'feminism has sometimes been characterised as 'victim feminism'', thereby establishing at the outset a close connection between this general topic and its specific application in characterising feminism. As was the case with Faulkner and MacDonald's collection, this material is therefore contextualised within a particular discursive history. Of the two authors, Hoffman is announced in the front material as having published widely on feminism (amongst other things). As such, this text occupies a significant position at the nexus between feminist theory as contained in clearly marked feminist journals and other intra-disciplinary publications, and the wider political theory literature. Whatever views are here expressed about victimhood and its place in feminist politics represent therefore something of a 'feminist' position to a broader and potentially less initiated knowledge community. That some of the intended readers of this text *are* less initiated is also obviously the case, since these are undergraduate students to whom the text offers a potted summary of the knowledge currently held by political science scholars. From these readers' point of view, its statements are those held to be true by this general body of experts, one of whose representatives also specifies his credentials to put a feminist perspective. By virtue of the explicit connection drawn to earlier debates about victimhood, both texts qualify as barometers of the continuing power of the earlier discursive interventions outlined here to contextualise and shape contemporary approaches to the victim category as it relates to feminism. As such, I critique them here primarily from a cautionary perspective as compelling evidence of the way 'victim feminism' still registers as a spectral threat that is in need of perpetual rebuff.

Turning first to Faulkner and MacDonald's (2009a) collection, the intention is not to offer a comprehensive examination of its individual contributions. The interest is more in the way Faulkner and MacDonald frame their editorial agenda, and domesticate contributions that might be seen to deviate from it. That there are individual contributions I signal here mainly in relation to the dynamic peculiar to edited collections – the editors and

contributors constitute a micro-community, where the latter are to all intents and purposes willing participants in a semi-organised, joint collaboration in the approach as defined by the editors. This dynamic is not negligible in the process of establishing what counts as consensus feminist knowledge, especially as the contributors in this case bring a variety of sub-disciplinary perspectives to the endeavour. As well, Faulkner and MacDonald (2009b, 7) make it clear in their preface that the selected contributions represent only a small sample of the total submissions they received in response to the requirements specified in their call for papers. So the immediate and tangible community of the collection also points to a more diffuse and extended one beyond it, whose members all apparently saw their own research aspirations as resonating with those of the editors.

The preface states at the outset what those aspirations are: ‘to create an alternative to what we saw as a depressingly large body of literature on the female ‘victim’’ (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009b, 7). We are asked to accept as common wisdom that such a body of literature exists (since it is not detailed here, nor in fact in the editors’ introduction), and that an alternative to it is currently lacking and sorely needed. That alternative will be the documentation of how the ‘victim’ moves to a position of empowerment, and the diverse subject matter of the contributions will be linked by ‘the concept of resistance’. That is to say, the assumption that frames the collection from the first is that there is an overwhelming amount of literature on the ways in which women are victimised, but not much on how women resist<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> The preface is actually quite confusing in its framing of the relationship between victimhood and resistance. The opening and closing statements establish a very clear desire to dispense with victim representations in favour of stories of resistance, and as such, I take them as indicative of the editors’ broad agenda, a reading which is borne out by their introduction which I go on to discuss above. But between these opening and closing statements, there are some interesting logical leaps. The original aim, the editors say, was to look at women’s experiences of law, specifically in the context of their ‘re-victimization’ by the legal response to sexual violence. At this point, victimisation seems to be privileged as a viable topic of analysis, if only as the context in which women’s resistance to the legal process is revealed. But then the editors record a shift in their agenda during the project’s formative stages: ‘[we] soon realized that victimization comes in many forms and that law as a framework would not ‘hold’ all the work we had uncovered. We moved, then, to a more encompassing framework – one of resistance’ (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009b, 7). There is no conceptual equivalence between ‘law’ and ‘resistance’ that would seem to warrant the substitution of one by the other, and in the process of that substitution, ‘victimization’ as the framework that is acknowledged to cover ‘many forms’ and ‘diverse topics’ gives way to the framework of ‘resistance’ that is seen as inherently more able to accommodate a diversity of findings. What had seemed to be a one-to-one relationship between instances of victimisation and instances of resistance (victimisation calls forth equal resistance) has morphed into the privileging of resistance as somehow more in both quantity and quality. And, as the title of the collection makes clear, victimhood and resistance are not concomitant states (women’s resistance makes them

The editors' introduction (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c), announcing as its title does the forthcoming emphasis on 'agency and resistance', elaborates in more detail the broad approach of the collection. In what follows, I identify three interconnected lines of argument used by the editors in this introduction to recommend their approach. The first (and my listing in this way is not intended to suggest that these elements are separable or presented sequentially therein) is the one already indicated in the preface – the uniqueness of the collection lies in its focus on resistance, which balances the over-abundance of literature on women's victimisation. The second is that this approach is an advance on those that characterised earlier feminist strategies, which relied on what the editors call the 'woman-as-victim' model. And the third is that the framework of victimisation is too narrow to address the diversity of women's experiences and behaviour; on the contrary, framing that experience using the concept of resistance allows its diversity to appear. I will discuss each of these below, being particularly interested in how this surface narrative – the one that is meant to predominate, since it provides the rationale for the collection – is constantly exploded by other lines of reasoning. This piece is instructive in the sense that it concentrates the conflicting narratives I have already identified in the popular *and* feminist writing above – and which I will go on to show permeate feminist theory broadly. This concentration allows logical fractures to be revealed more sharply, at the same time as we might ponder what it is in the discursive and intellectual climate that could justify the obvious confidence on the writers' part that such fractures do not exist or are not visible to readers.

Let us consider what I have indicated above as the first rationale. Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 11) state clearly that '[what] is unique in this collection is the rapport between this scholarship and resistance'; it 'documents resistance in particular ways', and will 'offer the beginnings of a framework of resistance (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10). Such an endeavour, then, is supposedly a deviation from the norm, and forges a new, untried path. It is said that the anthology is meant to 'trouble the concept of the victim', in order to bring into view women's resistance (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10). So far so good – *if* this troubling were to take the form of reintegrating the possibility of resistance

---

'[victims] no more'), so the move to framing the subject matter through the concept of resistance necessarily excludes an equal emphasis on victimhood.

into our concept of victimhood. If that were the case, then this collection *would* constitute an original approach to theorising the category of victim, in the context of the one that I go on to show currently prevails in feminist writing. But that does not appear to be the aim here, which is to '[explore] the moments *beyond* victimization, how women do not stay crushed and broken, but move on, build and grow' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10; emphasis in original). Being a victim and being a resister are therefore not concomitant stages, but sequential moments on a developmental trajectory, where being a victim ('crushed and broken') is framed as the complete absence of an internal propulsion towards growth. Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 13-14) make it quite explicit later that they see victimhood as part of a 'journey of life' process: 'Simply put, victims do not stay victims. They heal, regroup, move on [ref]. Those who do not move on, who stay crippled by the experience, are a minority'. In order to justify this model of progression, victimhood is figured as an extreme state ('crippled') which is consequently more difficult to imagine persisting for an extended period, or indeed, as co-existing with other states. And we must accept that it is easy to judge at what point it would be normal to expect a victim to emerge from her victimhood into empowerment, and that this transition is a definitive one. On the basis of the normalisation of that process we are also encouraged to share the blatant disregard for the aberrant fringe who do not conform, and on whose behalf it is clearly implied that feminists need not concern themselves.

The actual state of affairs that will be described in due course is quite the reverse of what Faulkner and MacDonald present here: focusing on resistance is well-established as the normative framework for feminist theory, feminists are rhetorically disciplined towards that norm, and the literature that privileges agency and resistance and denigrates victimhood far outweighs that which tries to revalue victim terminology. In that context, and taking for the moment the editors' evaluation of their collection at face value, it does not trouble the concept of the victim at all, in the sense that it leaves intact a by now very stable understanding of victimhood as anti-resistance, and as a conceptual framework that needs to be avoided. It does not trouble the *concept* of the victim so much as the idea that women *are* victims in any other than a very delimited sense, and in that way, it totally conforms to current standards of appropriateness for feminist research agendas.

This reading is supported by the message contained in the multiple references to women's responses to the *label* 'victim'. We are told, for example, that 'the women's movement lives on, largely reactive to the label of 'victim' and seeking changes on both individual and structural levels' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10), and that the stories documented in the collections will attest 'the courage, persistence and patience of women's resistance to the label 'victim'' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 17). Here, seeking change and resisting are framed less as responses to the fact of victimisation than to the label of 'victim' and its associations – that victimhood is antithetical to action and progress. Is it possible to interpret these statements as aspiring towards a reintegration of the concepts of victimhood and resistance? Is the argument here something like 'we know that victimhood is understood to have connotations of passivity and immobility, but our collection will show that women, as victims, also resist'? I think that such a reading is soundly disqualified on several counts.

Firstly, another of these references states early in the piece that '[true] resistance, therefore, can be found through [amongst other things] the transformative power of *negating* the label of victim' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10; emphasis added). Secondly, as already noted, the rationale of the collection, as it is stated in the title and explicitly elsewhere in its introduction, is that victimhood and resistance are mutually exclusive states. The relationship between the two is not that victims *are* also resisters, but that resisters *were* victims, and the past tense defines that relationship. This reasoning is a replication of the status quo; the 'troubling' that is really required is of an entirely opposite order to that which is heralded here. Lastly (and replaying earlier iterations of this argument), the 'woman-as-victim' model is explicitly rejected because, far from rallying women to the emancipatory cause, it is 'highly analogous to the right-wing, conservative agendas that would keep women politically passive' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10)<sup>3</sup>. So, despite the fact that the preface announces that the collection contains 'work on war victims, political and ideological victims, victims of sexual violence' (Faulkner and

---

<sup>3</sup> Just as in some of the earlier academic feminist analyses of so-called 'victim feminism', there is no acknowledgement here of the fact that equating being a victim with being 'politically passive' is to subscribe to a construction of victimhood that was itself developed and promulgated by conservative, anti-feminist agendas. Note also that the book's back cover blurb condenses some of the particular statements made at this point, making it quite clear to the casual browser that the aim here is to '[challenge] the idea that women are simply victims of patriarchal systems' by supplanting that with stories of individual and collective resistance and 'growth'.

MacDonald 2009b, 7), there is no will shown at this point to recover victim terminology and to re-inflect it with feminist meanings.

So far, I have used what this research project has revealed in feminist theory outside this text to disrupt the editors' framing of this collection as unique or counter-hegemonic in its aspirations. However, it is also amply disturbed by the mixed intra-textual evidence provided for one of the lines of argument identified above – that earlier feminisms deployed a 'woman-as-victim' model which is now obsolete (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10). There are actually two parts to this narrative – feminists *did* rely on the victim model; now they do not – which I will address in turn. Both parts are disrupted by counter-evidence, leading to a completely incoherent picture of when and how much this model has impacted feminist politics, and in the process calling into question the rationale given for the inception of this editorial project.

Let us examine the first part – that '[early] feminisms, for all their achievements, stayed in a victim framework' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10) – together with the disruptive logic. To start with, the period designated by 'early' at this point is diffuse and fairly prolonged – it covers a variety of historically separated feminist endeavours, from getting the vote to fighting for pay equity and maternity leave. Nevertheless, 'early' feminism is what 'our foremothers' did (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 11), which suggests it is at some remove from contemporary feminism. The achievements of early feminism listed here in themselves belie the claim that it stayed within a victim framework, at least as Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 10) define that framework here, where victims are those who 'stay crushed and broken'. As well, they list a range of feminist literature from the 1970s and 1980s which pointed out precisely the problem which exercises them now – the narrowness of the early movement, where narrowness is framed as a function of its focus on victimhood<sup>4</sup> (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 11). In citing this literature to support their own assertions about that narrowness, they undermine the primary

---

<sup>4</sup> The first paragraph on this page, opening with the statement, '[the] early movement was narrow', outlines the complaints about the early movement's failure to accommodate differences of race, sexuality and geography, but does not explicitly mention its victim focus. However, it follows the paragraph which argued that the early movement stayed within a victim framework, and criticised this because it is not an adequately emancipatory position. The paragraph after the one in question begins: 'Alternatively, those who choose not to conceptualize women as victims argue that [...]' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 11). This clearly equates narrowness with a victim framework – one of the most problematic aspects of this is that this equation is not explicitly drawn and substantiated, but embedded as part of a background logic.



justification for their collection, which is to balance what they imply to be, not just a large literature on victimhood, but one which has historically obliterated other approaches. More explicitly, feminist work which analyses women's interaction with various social structures from a resistance perspective is cited at several points (e.g. Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10, 11, 14), further suggesting that the framework offered in this collection is not as unique or new as claimed.

To further complicate the matter of what constitutes 'early' feminism and its reliance on the 'woman-as-victim' model, Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 13) go on to remind us that '[first-] and second-wave feminists resisted oppression and domination' and that consciousness-raising texts from *The Second Sex* onwards drew on women's personal stories of resisting male domination. The sisterhood that was nurtured by this process also revealed, it is said, alternative avenues of resistance and survival. From these assertions of the early movement's focus, not on victimhood, but on resistance, the editors insert an abrupt non-sequitur, reinstating the narrative of early feminism's reliance on the victim model – 'it became evident that feminist theory may 'need' victims perhaps a little too much'. This comment, despite being entirely at odds with the emphasis on earlier interest in strategies of resistance in the previous two paragraphs, is neither explained nor substantiated.

This brings us to the second component of this narrative line – that contemporary feminism is motivated in part by reactivity to the narrowness of earlier feminist perspectives, and to their reliance on the victim model (two characteristics that are framed here as homologous). I have just shown that the first part of the narrative – that earlier feminisms were focused on victimhood – is perpetually disrupted by other evidence of resistance that is brought into play. But the same goes for the line that feminism is now marked by its temporal and ideological distance from that earlier time. If that is so, then the urgency of the corrective that is supposedly provided by this collection dissipates, and the argument that it offers 'the beginnings of a framework of resistance' is less easy to sustain. The only way this argument can be made sensible is to insist that contemporary feminism is still informed and constrained by the 'woman-as-victim' model – as, indeed, Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 14) later do, when they refer to 'the victimization model consistently

used by feminists', and which can be transformed if we only take on board some of the perspectives of '[radical] theory'.

In addition, the familial metaphors they use to register the generational differences in feminist preoccupations end up blurring, rather than delineating, those distinctions. I have mentioned above the editors' concessions to the necessities felt by 'our foremothers' to contain their focus to specific targets (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 11). This situates the use of the victim model firmly in the past, but this is only one moment in the chronological slippage that marks these few paragraphs. Initially, Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 10) frame their criticisms of the victim using the past tense (this *was* the model, against which feminism *is* now reactive). But the tense slides into the present when it is asserted that '[woman]-as-victim *is* not an emancipatory cry', and that this focus 'is not what our mothers *and sisters* intended, at all' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10; emphasis added). Suddenly, 'our foremothers' have been replaced by more contemporary relations, and the logic of the argument has also been strangely inverted. On the one hand, it has been asserted (and will be again) that earlier feminists (clearly 'our foremothers') used a victim model whose workability they in all innocence 'presumed', the implication being that, from our more informed perspective of the present, this presumption was misplaced. But here it is implied that the contemporary movement has clung to this problematic model *against* the wishes of 'our mothers' and, even more confusingly, of 'our [...] sisters' (with the time-frame to which our mothers belonged becoming less separable from that to which our sisters do<sup>5</sup>). The most coherent reading we could construct at this point would be that a victim framework may have been/be utilised by feminists both past (mothers) and present (sisters), but that those who did/do, were/are alert to its limitations in a way which some contemporary users of that model (other than the 'sisters' in question) are not. Yet, these are the same 'mothers' of whom it has just been said as a criticism that they 'stayed in a victim framework' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 10).

With respect to this particular strand of reasoning, it is actually impossible to differentiate clearly between the surface or primary story, and the one that disturbs it. There is a constant shift between contradictory positions and historiographies, and little

---

<sup>5</sup> In fact, Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 14) assert this alignment quite explicitly at one point: 'It may be that second- and third-wave feminisms have more in common than they believe'. Needless to say, this statement is hard to reconcile with the criticisms levelled at earlier feminisms.

interpretive work is required to identity these contradictions – they are not concealed beneath another more dominant line of thought, but emerge in the most overt and direct statements. At any point, entirely incompatible narrative elements are deployed to explain the need for a collection such as this. At one moment, it is to counter a continuing over-emphasis on victimhood at the expense of other aspects of women's situation; then it is to address the limitations of earlier models of feminist thought and reflect the modern tenor of the movement; at another, it is to readjust the focus of contemporary feminism to be more in line with the intentions of our mothers and sisters from which we have strayed. In all of these conflicting arguments, the victim model figures as the limiting factor from which the collection propels us away. But the desire to present a compelling recommendation of the collection's contribution leads to an over-determined picture of feminist reliance on a victim framework that is ultimately self-sabotaging. The impression is created that the victim model presents a generalised threat to feminist progress, but various sub-narratives within that generalisation cancel each other out, dissolving the threat completely.

There is a final narrative strand that I have not yet dealt with explicitly, though I have gestured towards the way the alleged narrowness of the 'early movement' is implicitly equated with its use of the 'woman-as-victim' model. The failure of this model is thus connected to its assumed inability to theorise the diversity of women's experience. On the other hand, '[true] resistance [...] can be found through examining the *specificity* of women's conditions [...] and the transformative power of negating the label of victim' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 11; emphasis in original; see also 13). Here a resistance framework is linked to attention to specificity, and these in turn together entail a negation of the victim model. There is an inherent logical gap in asserting these connections and exclusions, but this gap comes to the surface in one troublesome passage, in which the authors observe, quite justifiably, that the law's depiction of the victimisation of women is most often framed in sexualised terms.

Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 12) claim that this framing obscures 'the more common places of women's victimization', and '[renders] invisible those areas of women's lives in which other types of victimization occur', be that sexual harassment at work or the gendered experience of war. And the law's framing role is not insignificant, since it allegedly reflects the way we socially organise the world. Before continuing, let us first

note that, if the variety and locations of women's victimisation is invisibilised by legal definitions which are also highly socially relevant, then it would seem that there is a need for more, not less, effort on the part of feminists to elaborate this aspect<sup>6</sup>. This solution to the distortion of women's experience is obviously not the one pursued in the editors' introduction, which promotes the idea that this effort is already excessive. Having noted the limitations of legal concepts of victimisation, the authors make an apparently unrelated leap to the subject of resistance: 'The means by which women from diverse backgrounds are able to resist depends on context', and the volume will present 'women who all have the ability to resist, despite differences of class, race, [...]' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 12). These are non-sequiturs – the solution given to the erasure of the specificities of victimisation is to highlight the specificities of resistance (see also *supra* 156 note 2). The former are referred to only insofar as they prepare us to accept the proportionate diversity of resistant responses. However, the variety of victimisation must then paradoxically be submerged in accordance with the logic already stated: that a victim focus is too limiting and that examining the specificities of women's conditions reveals not the variety of their victimisation, but of '[true] resistance' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 11).

Our particular interest in examining these three strands of argument is that the logic which grounds the editors' rationale for their project relies on an eminently disruptible narrative about the need to counteract excessive attention to women as victims. We have seen a similarly fragile narrative in the feminist and popular literature examined earlier in the chapter, and the purpose in discussing the way this volume is framed by its editors is to underline the ongoing feminist confidence in the capacity of this narrative to legitimate particular research agendas, despite its logical unsustainability. As far as this collection is concerned, the editorial agenda seems particularly single-minded in cases where the main thrust of an individual contribution is reframed by the editors in an attempt to reposition it in line with the collection's stated vision. I argue that this happens in the editors' introductions to two pieces in the collection, those by Stringer (2009) and Coates and Ridley (2009).

---

<sup>6</sup> Remember, too, that it was pointed out in the preface that 'victimization comes in many forms', not just those that can be framed within a legal context (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009b, 7).

Firstly, the editors state that Stringer's (2009) essay 'challenges us to think critically' about, amongst other things, negative media portrayals of sexual assault victims, since these contribute to the backlash against feminist gains (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009d, 19). It is asserted that Stringer's recognition of women's agency challenges 'the discourse of victim feminism'. Thus, Stringer's position is presented very ambivalently. Thinking critically about media constructions of women's victimhood implies neither an endorsement nor a defence of feminist use of a victim model. And the reference to agency does not clarify whether its challenge to 'the discourse of victim feminism' consists of contradicting the perception of women as victims, or merely the idea that victimhood cannot co-exist with agency.

The evidence at this point certainly does not lead us to think that Stringer defends victim identity, especially as in the next paragraph, the editors stress that Stringer's 'ultimate message' is the need to resist, situating this message as part of 'the common thread throughout this anthology'. We might not want to say that the editors' précis is categorically false<sup>7</sup>, but it fails to foreground Stringer's central arguments, which are more directly at odds with the editors' stated agenda and with their assurances that the studies contained in the collection 'speak volumes to [...] women's resistance to the label 'victim'' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 17). Stringer (2009, 24-6) is adamant that feminism cannot relinquish the terminology of victimhood if it is to continue to expose women's subordination, and the task is to reclaim and redefine the word 'victim' in a feminist sense (Stringer 2009, 25). The solution is categorically *not* to produce alternative terminologies which put the emphasis on women as resisters and deflect attention from their victim status (Stringer 2009, 25). Feminists must insist on the language of victimisation, especially as the powerful are disposed to refute the definition of certain conditions as victimising (Stringer 2009, 26).

Similarly, Coates and Ridley (2009, 109) argue for the reclamation of the term 'victim', and assert that 'we cannot theoretically or practically simply 'get past' victimization' (Coates and Ridley 2009, 124). In the course of their chapter, they argue that therapeutic understandings of victims as inherently passive and damaged contribute to the

---

<sup>7</sup> I must, however, point out that I can find no evidence in Stringer's chapter of some of the examples of the 'multi-level resistance strategy' that the editors claim she outlines therein.

stigmatisation of victims by not recognising the resistant behaviours of victims as such. The corrective they propose is the redefinition of victim responses in ways that de-pathologise victims and relocate their victimisation as a function of an externally applied harm, and not of a defective psychology which invites abuse (Coates and Ridley 2009, 111). The revelation of victims' resistance that Coates and Ridley undertake here is a mechanism for accomplishing that redefinition and revaluing the term victim. Where resistance is discussed in this piece, it is within an agenda which is the opposite of what the editors defined in their introduction, wherein resistance was premised on the negation of the victim label. Moreover, the assertion here that feminist theory cannot simply relegate the concept of victimhood to the past as if victimisation has ceased to exist is counter to the developmental frame assumed by Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 10; emphasis in original) – that there is more than enough theory about victims, and now it is time to 'offer the beginnings' of an approach to what lies *'beyond victimization'*.

As with the introduction to Stringer's (2009) chapter, the editors' emphasis in prefacing this piece is on the way Coates and Ridley bring into view the resistant dimension of victims' responses as part of their 'challenge [to] the all encompassing victim identity' according to which therapists treat their clients (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009e, 76). This is a fair enough summation of the issues dealt with in the chapter, but it makes no commitment about the relationship between victimhood and resistance, and it is not clear at this stage how exactly we might read what constitutes the challenge that Coates and Ridley mount. That it specifically involves a reconstruction and reprivileging of the concept of victimhood as a feminist political instrument of solidarity and justice-seeking, and that this is their primary objective, is not brought out by the editors. Nor is it recognised in the editors' general description of the section that contains Coates and Ridley's chapter, which asserts that it 'traces collective resistance strategies beyond law to public fora', and that its individual pieces 'all point clearly to the need to highlight the situations of women's resistance in various Canadian settings' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009e, 75). This description aligns the section's chapters with the vision outlined by the editors in their introduction to the collection, despite the fact that not all of the chapters in the section share the premise of that vision – that a focus on resistance is a mechanism of denying or offsetting attention to women's victimisation.

In the case of both these chapters, important aspects of the authors' arguments are de-emphasised with the result that their work can be seen to cohere more readily with the editors' broad aims, and with the rationale that their collection provides a long overdue corrective to an over-emphasis on victimisation. Attentive reading of the chapters themselves should highlight these discrepancies, but the capacity of the editors' (re)categorisation to neutralise the main message of these authors should not be dismissed. Their editorial role in organising the collection's contents carries some authority which may work to encourage readers to attend more closely to the contributors' highlighting of resistance in its own right than to the extent to which that is instrumental to the primary goal of re-elevating victim status within feminist theory and praxis. At the very least, the editors' framing positions the emphasis in these two chapters as aberrations from the central agenda of moving 'beyond' victimisation, and indeed from the common wisdom on which the editors drew to establish that as an imperative: that there was already an excess of literature on women's victimhood (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009b, 7), that 'feminist theory may 'need' victims perhaps a little too much' (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 13), and that the minority of victims who fail to conquer their victimhood do not constitute a critical constituency for feminist theorists (Faulkner and MacDonald 2009c, 13-4).

Turning now to the second text flagged for our attention above, its potency lies in the way Hoffman and Graham (2006b) present their statements about victimhood as part of a thoroughly petrified and settled knowledge, which is ready to be transmitted intact to unknowing, neophyte political science students<sup>8</sup>. For this audience, 'victimhood' is positioned as a concept for which a definition can be offered, and whose key aspects can be

---

<sup>8</sup> Note that a later edition of Hoffman and Graham's (2006b) book was published in 2009, *without* the chapter on victimhood. There is no explanation provided for that omission. However, I maintain that it is still valid to issue a caution based on my reading of the relevant chapter in the earlier edition for the following reasons. The 2006 edition is still no doubt in library circulation, and available for consultation by students and others. Both editions refer the reader to the book's companion website (<http://www.pearsoned.co.uk/HigherEducation/Booksby/HoffmanGraham/>). This site maintains the link to the student exercises and case studies for the 2006 edition, including those that relate to the chapter on victimhood. Moreover, Hoffman and Graham (2006a) published a similar volume around the same time as the earlier edition of *Introduction to Political Theory*. That book, called *Introduction to Political Concepts*, comprises a subset of the chapters from the longer text in their original form, including the chapter on victimhood. As far as can be ascertained, there is no later edition of that book, and so the analysis of victimhood discussed here remains current and unrevised in that text. Finally, a year later Hoffman (2007) published (without Graham) *A Glossary of Political Theory*, for which there again appears to be no later edition. This glossary contains an entry for 'victimhood', is available electronically from my institution's library, and therefore distils in a particularly accessible and rigid form the pejorative definition of victimhood offered in the two 2006 book chapters.

encapsulated as part of a conceptual starter kit they will use to erect their developing knowledge about politics. The book has a companion web site, with student and instructor areas, further study questions and links to other politics resources (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, xix). It contains special ‘How to Read’ boxed text sections, which ‘analyse key political texts and identify core points’ (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, xxv) – students are directed to pay particular attention to ‘important’ chapters of texts, but to skim others. Each chapter ends with a series of questions designed to test the student’s understanding of the concepts discussed (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, xxv), and other exercises throughout the chapter reinforce what has been ‘learnt’. The book occupies an intersection point between feminist theory and political theory more generally, since Hoffman (the more senior of the authors) is announced as having published widely on feminist topics (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, xxix). Moreover, the chapter eponymously devoted to ‘victimhood’ has a heavy emphasis on the question of women’s victim status. As such, it constitutes an important initiation for beginning students into the social relations of the discourse about victims, relations which – by virtue of the book’s function as an introduction to political theory - extend across the entire discipline of political analysis and position students at the borders of feminist theory in the ‘correct’ orientation. In this respect, Hoffman and Graham’s book has a significant role to play in shaping ‘what others may be able to say elsewhere and elsewhere down the line’ (Smith 1999, 136).

In their introduction to the book, Hoffman and Graham (2006b, xxxi) promote the value of ‘theory as abstraction’, of grasping general concepts which will constitute a framework within which political events and debates can be understood (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, xxxii). In other words, students are presented with a pre-digested interpretation of core concepts that will supposedly form the baseline from which they can later go on to evaluate political practicalities. In no way, therefore, is the material presented as being up for debate or inflected by particular political or ideological investments. In fact, this is explicitly stated at the outset: ‘in this book we strive to make our ideas as true as possible – i.e. we seek to make them objective, accurate reflections of the external world’ (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, xxxv). Indeed, the book’s conclusion reiterates the neutrality of properly presented academic political theory – its task is not to convince or persuade, but



to educate people ‘in a systematic and coherent way’. It eschews rhetoric in favour of logic, ‘extravagant emotion’ in favour of ‘sober evidence’ (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 531).

The claim to ‘truth’ is an ambitious one in the contemporary intellectual climate, and Hoffman and Graham (2006b, xxxv) do concede that what we perceive to be ‘absolute concept[s]’ is historically conditioned. Nevertheless, they also provide a fall-back position, an instruction in Smith’s sense, to the reader who finds herself wanting to challenge their version of the political scene. That is that, notwithstanding this conditioning, at any historical moment some definitions are preferred over others (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, xxxv). Therefore, the way they define ‘victimhood’ (and they go on to do so with categorical precision) must be taken as, if not true in the absolute sense, then preferred – and the introduction of the notion of preference arguably invokes a social relation in a way that reference to an absolute truth (if such a thing could be identified) does not. Those who do not ‘prefer’ to define things in this way are positioned at the outskirts of the knowledge community, unable to share in the processes of decision-making which devolve on these definitions. They ‘[do] not recognize what anybody else would recognize, [... do] not share the same cognitive ground as others’ (Smith 1990, 30).

Let us consider how Hoffman and Graham’s (2006b) presentation of victimhood warrants their claim to neutrality and sobriety, starting with the opening page of the chapter. This page is set out (as for all the other chapters) with an ‘introduction’ – a short abstract of the chapter – and a ‘chapter map’ listing the main points covered. No chapter text proper appears on this first page. It is instructive to quote the introduction/abstract in full, as it is an important first step in firmly positioning the student reader towards the concept of victimhood (remembering that this is accomplished in a supposedly unextravagant, unemotional, logical and coherent way):

We live in a society in which it had become increasingly common for people to think of themselves as victims. In the USA feminism has sometimes been characterised as ‘victim feminism’. We want to argue that ‘victimhood’ is one of the newer concepts that political thinkers ought to tackle, since it involves the question of the state, conflict resolution and the problem of violence. To espouse victimhood is not the same as being a victim. We will argue that victimhood arises when a person who may be a victim, believes that nothing can be done to rectify their situation or expects others to come up with a solution that they cannot conceive themselves. Victimhood is a pathology, by which we mean a negative situation that paralyses a person’s capacity to act on his own behalf (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 510).

Thus, the reader is met immediately with a particular narrative about victimhood – it is a dominant social phenomenon, and it emanates from people’s own thinking about themselves. The implied excessiveness of this newly dominant mindset is confirmed in the categorical assertion that victimhood is pathological – a view for which the authors, for all their ostensible refusal to engage in persuasion, will ‘argue’. That victimhood has nothing to do with the inter-subjective processes by which victim status is determined is also made clear – victimhood is ‘espoused’ by individuals who may, or may not, be victims, suggesting that it is actively and knowingly pursued by the very persons claimed by the authors to be psychologically paralysed by this mindset.

This passage baldly sets out the rules of triage for separating legitimate victims from those afflicted with victimhood. The two groups may overlap, but those who ‘espouse’ victimhood are pathological irrespective of the veracity of their original claims, which are delegitimised as a matter of course once this pathology sets in. The reader is instructed in the classification of those who claim that they can do nothing to eliminate their victim status – this is *always* a matter of perception brought on by the paralysis of ‘victimhood’, and never an accurate account of the situation. Those who cannot change their situation do not actually exist in an objective sense. Within these rules, it is not logically possible to press a claim of personal powerlessness without that very pressing being the grounds for the delegitimation of the claim. As Smith (1999, 195-6) argues, these triage rules are constituted by objectifying discourses that suppress alternative positions in the process of purporting to provide fail-safe ways of interpreting them.

Not the least important point about this abstract is that the only constituency specified as an example of this morbid propensity is feminists. And Hoffman and Graham take the reference to ‘victim feminism’ out of its original context without clarifying at this point the origins of that term, who was doing that characterising, and what the political motivations behind it were. It is presented as a generalised way of referring to feminists by an unspecified number of people, when it was, strictly speaking, a term invented by one person (Wolf 1993) in a particular historical context. Hoffman and Graham (2006b, 516) do attribute the phrase to Wolf later, but only secondarily from Atmore – and without

acknowledging Atmore's critique of its use<sup>9</sup>. This singling out is repeated in the 'chapter map', where one of the dot point topics listed is '[women] as the victims of victimhood'. That victimhood is itself victimising we might conclude is a function of the alleged immobilising effect of its pathology, but the question is why women are picked out as the particular exemplars of this pathology, with the facts of the actual victimisation suffered by women failing to register as any kind of reference point in the 'map' of the chapter's central concerns, and by extension, in the context of the issues that 'political thinkers ought to tackle' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 510).

The chapter goes on to elaborate the definitive position that victimhood is, to put it baldly, wrong, and its view of power 'mistaken'. Where victims deserve our compassion, the implication is that those who 'espouse' victimhood (also referred to as the 'proponents' or 'purveyors' of victimhood (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 513, 525)) certainly do not (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 512). The assumptions here are, firstly, that it is a simple matter to differentiate between legitimate victims and these pathologised others, and then that the proper persons to do this evaluation are non-victim claimants. Moreover, we are told that making this distinction is 'crucial' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 527). That victimhood is marked by misconception is the gist of the book's glossary definition: 'a belief, usually from victims, that their plight is caused by themselves or others who must be blamed and punished as a substitute for actively seeking the roots of their problem' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 539).

Hoffman and Graham set about demonstrating the self-delusion at the heart of this belief, the unstated premise being that they have the omniscience to make such judgments. Indeed, students have been primed to accept that premise by the assurance that this is a book that delivers a set of abstract concepts in a logical and neutral way. Thus, it is stated with a tone of confident finality that 'victimhood is ideological in the sense that it rests upon falsehood [and] illusion', that 'victimhood arises because the knowledge of a person's plight is superficial and thus misleading' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 513), and that those affected by victimhood are 'unable to understand the real causes' of their situation, to

---

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, although the authors hazard a weak criticism of Wolf's stance, they end up damning feminists at least as much as, if not more than, Wolf, who is described as having given 'a one-sided presentation of a one-sided position' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 516). And it is the damning of feminists and their alleged adoption of a 'one-sided position' that rings more loudly at this point, since it is their propensity to engage in victimhood that is under discussion.

which they '[ascribe] an imaginary causality' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 527). We are to assume, of course, that this act of differentiation and the implicit claim to superior knowledge which justifies it are themselves not 'ideological', even though the subjective perspectives of those designated as 'embracing' victimhood (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 513) are utterly erased.

Those who allegedly embrace or espouse victimhood would obviously not describe themselves as such – that is a psychology ascribed to them by others, who often happen to be critical of their victim claims. On the contrary, the claimants believe in the legitimacy of their claim and of their diagnosis of the origins and causes of their victimisation. In any case, it seems clear that even those initially credited as victims according to the arbitrary standards assumed here will have their position delegitimated if they are judged to have embraced victimhood. In that event, they will have become 'victims of victimhood' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 522, 524), a description that relocates the origins of their primary victim status to within their own oppressive psychology and erases that which is an effect of external factors.

Remember that it has been stated at the outset that those who exhibit victimhood *may* be victims (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 510), as if who are and who are not victims is obvious to the casual observer, rather than a complicated political matter of definition and acknowledgment in a context of competing interests and power inequalities. Where a subject's analysis of their own victim status is at variance with the public perception represented here by Hoffman and Graham, the subject is diagnosed as afflicted with victimhood, and their powers of analysis discredited by definition. And the latitude within which legitimate victim status can be situated continually narrows in this chapter. The glossary definition implies that the valid victim does not find the root of the problem in the fact that others are to blame, despite the fact that having perpetrators identified might serve to authenticate their victimisation. Nor does the legitimate victim attribute their situation to group 'difference', so that explaining domestic violence by pointing to systemic social and cultural gender inequities 'rather than aggressive partners' is a symptom of victimhood, relying as it does on 'a process of generalisation that distorts reality' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 513).

And the particular *bête noir* of the authors is the seeking of state ‘protection’ as a response to victimisation, a course followed in their view only by the embracers of victimhood (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 516, 524). This is despite the fact that the pursuit of legal recognition of victim status, and the attendant social authentication of what counts as harm, might well qualify as the sort of active quest for a solution that signifies the worthy victim. There is no explanation of why activating legal instruments does not count as an example of the ‘appropriate intervention’ that is able to be perceived and sought when victims ‘understand critically and rationally their plight’ (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 523), nor how that particular intervention (whatever it might be) is less protective or disempowering than that provided by the state. The impression given is that such measures of redress (‘a protector [...], a benevolent spiritual force, or an external agency that rescues the victim who is unable to act on her own behalf’<sup>10</sup>) have dropped from the sky unbidden, rather than been enlisted via the active struggle of individuals who might be considered rational and competent, whether one agrees with their strategy or not (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 513).

As noted above, Hoffman and Graham (2006b, 515) specifically implicate feminism in their criticism of victimhood, devoting four pages of their chapter to answering the question: ‘Are women victims?’ They may well be, according to the authors, but it seems that, so far, feminists have not ‘[found] a way that sees women as victims, but avoids victimhood’ (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 516). To blame men for women’s suffering, as radical feminists do, is to institute a dualistic conception of gender which is ‘contrary to a feminism that takes women seriously’ (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 517). This position is informed by the broad antipathy to the state that pervades this chapter (see also Hoffman

---

<sup>10</sup> The authors’ choice of pronominalisation here is worthy of remark. This sentence comes at the very end of an entire page of text devoted to answering the question ‘What is victimhood?’ (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 512-3). By this point, we have been acquainted with the full panoply of victimhood’s defects, its ‘proponents’ and ‘purveyors’. Throughout this page, there has been a studious avoidance of using singular pronouns – the authors speak instead of people, persons, or individuals who are conscious of ‘their’ victimisation. In that context, the insertion of the *feminine* singular pronoun for the first time is very abrupt and cannot fail to be noticed. Where the use of the feminine pronoun normally works to enhance women’s social profile by counteracting the norm of the masculine pronoun masquerading as neutral, here it seems to signal the invidious position given to women victims in this chapter, singling them out as particularly vulnerable to charges of espousing victimhood. The first appearance of the feminine pronoun here seems precisely chosen to conflate the pathological inertia of victimhood with femininity.

1998), whence the authors retroactively delegitimize those who pursue in response to victimisation a particular strategy with which they happen to disagree.

In critiquing the recourse to the law, Hoffman and Graham (2006b, 515, 516, 518, 524) draw extensively on Wendy Brown's *States of Injury* to support their analysis of victimhood, particularly in relation to the role of state 'protection' in reifying the victim status for which it is intended to provide redress. Relying on this 'protection' is seen to encourage those (negative) characteristics associated with victimhood – lack of responsibility, passivity and powerlessness – and to foreclose the emancipatory possibilities of '[tackling] the problem in a meaningful way' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 524)<sup>11</sup>. The discussion of Brown's ideas is fully referenced, and a 'How to read' box provides novices with a convenient entrée into the most important chapters of Brown's 'valuable book'. Contrast this to the treatment of the work of 'the radical feminist, MacKinnon' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 516) – unlike Brown, not endowed anywhere in this chapter with her first name (which in any case is misspelled throughout the rest of the book). Brown's criticisms of MacKinnon's position as static and authoritarian are being relayed here by Hoffman and Graham, but Brown's voice disappears as the paraphrase proceeds – that 'MacKinnon sees women as subject to victimhood' situates MacKinnon within their own argument framework and terminology (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 516).

And can we view as entirely innocent that the first detail provided from Brown's discussion of MacKinnon is that the most frequent response from students to her work is that 'there is no way out'? The authors may well argue that their claim to neutrality is not impugned here, since they are simply conveying an observation that Brown (1995, 91) does actually make. But they cannot fail to have grasped the persuasive impact on their student readership of the verdict apparently delivered by a majority of their peers. MacKinnon's work itself is not cited, nor does it appear in either the chapter reference list (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 528) or suggested further reading, at which point Brown's book, on the other hand, is recommended as 'a real classic' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 529). In case students think of examining Brown's treatment of MacKinnon for themselves, in the 'How

---

<sup>11</sup> Note that one of the objections to reliance on the state is the privatisation of injury and compensation entailed in setting up the state as the arbiter of case by case grievances (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 524). This objection sits oddly with what seemed earlier to be an attempt by the authors to privatise domestic violence as a matter between individual women and individual aggressors, rather than as a gender issue that implicated 'men' (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 513).

to read' hints they are specifically directed away from the fourth chapter of Brown's book, where most of this analysis occurs (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 518).

The caution about augmenting the punitive power of the state in the process of instituting legal impediments to victimisation is well-taken. But Hoffman and Graham (2006b, 524) posit an arbitrary distinction between state interventions that might be 'thoughtful and innovative' and those that encourage passivity, with one of the most important recommendations for the former being that it assists people to 'resist victimhood'. Recourse to the state is equated here with the belief that nothing can be done to rectify the victim's situation, that no 'political redress' is possible (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 516), discounting the institution of legal standards in regard to certain forms of subordination as a legitimate avenue of political activism which works to consolidate wider social consensus about the definitions of victimisation. The attribution of responsibility for victimisation to broader social phenomena is also connected here with the sense of impotence that supposedly distinguishes victimhood from victim status (Hoffman and Graham 2006b, 513), begging the question of what 'political redress' is envisioned which does not take into account structural power differences. These sorts of distinctions underwrite the marginalisation of those deemed to pursue unacceptable correctives, invalidating a sub-group of self-identified victims on the basis of a completely arbitrary diagnosis of their pathological tendency to delusion and misjudgement.

## **Conclusion**

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, conservatives in the US began to deploy the discourse of 'political correctness' to undermine the fragile advances made by minority and marginalised groups for greater representation in the academic project of knowledge production. That discourse worked to discredit minority claims of subordination and exclusion by vilifying certain sorts of self-identified victims as deluded about the true nature of their situation, pathologically dependent, and a threat to the standards of objectivity by which valid forms of knowledge were supposedly distinguished. The assumed excessiveness of these victims' claims marked them as undeserving in contrast to those whose legitimate victim status was conferred according to the unstated standards of non-victim observers.

Nearly two decades later, Hoffman and Graham (2006b) assume a nearly identical position, from which they evaluate different victim perspectives according to equally arbitrary measures of what counts as an appropriately emancipatory response to perceived victimisation. They do so from a position of authority within both the academy, and to some extent, specifically the discipline of feminism. To operate from that position as proxies for historically anti-feminist and anti-victim positions is disturbing enough, but the framework in which these views are articulated makes their impact especially acute. Knowledge about ‘victimhood’ is delivered as a discrete piece of pedagogical content, ready-packaged and beyond debate, to the next generation. The recipients of this delivery include future political science scholars who are intended to incorporate this knowledge as part of the basic conceptual apparatus they will use to frame all their subsequent theoretical endeavours. They also include those who will simply import this knowledge into their daily lives and practices as more casual observers of social and political events, and as participants in social relations with members of oppressed groups who are subject to the application of these evaluative skills.

I look on the two recent volumes discussed in the last section above as representing in particularly salient form a ‘bookend’ moment (approximately) of the period for which I want to examine the assumptions that inform feminist theoretical treatments of victimhood. If that examination is about the way a certain attitude and narrative position towards victimhood has been consolidated in that theory, then Hoffman and Graham’s discussion especially symbolises the complete culmination of that process of consolidation. What has been constructed over time via a peripheral and quasi-subliminal strain of assumption has been recovered to the centre of conscious inspection before being passed fully formed to those outside the immediate knowledge community. To the concerns expressed twenty years earlier about the impact minority challenges were having on academic standards, Hoffman and Graham’s (2006b) book responds with the comforting reassurance that the pedagogical process is insulated against the intrusion of victims’ claims to different knowledge, especially those of women. And it does so from within the discipline of political science, where we would normally expect such issues of power and marginalisation to be most critically assessed.



The question this thesis sets out to investigate is what has happened in feminist theory during that period to help secure the transmission of victim-blaming from its origins in conservative anti-feminism to its expression in an ostensibly disinterested presentation of the fundamentals of political theory. This chapter has indicated that the immediate feminist response to the attacks on the contemporary movement was itself inadequate in establishing its own terms to debate the place of the victim category in feminist politics. It adopted some of the conservative framings of victimhood, and propagated a similar narrative about the threat of ‘victim feminism’ without being alert to its logical inconsistencies. As we have seen, the introductory essay by Faulkner and MacDonald (2009c, 13) still encapsulates many of these inconsistencies, rationalising the analytical intervention their collection represents on the basis that ‘feminist theory may ‘need’ victims perhaps a little too much’. The propagation of this originally anti-feminist narrative into feminist theory has set the context in which any attempt to focus on oppression will be categorised automatically as an instance of the resumption or continuation of this damaging and hegemonic style of feminist analysis. As the next chapter shows, such attempts are rather isolated challenges to a dominant order of a quite opposite kind.

## **PART THREE**

### **Reading the map**

## 5 Victims And 'Victims' In Feminist Theory: Telling The Difference

### Introduction

Flatly referential uses of the word 'victim' and its derivatives co-exist in feminist theory with other usages which require us to adopt a negative stance towards 'victimhood' and to utilise extra-textual constructions of 'victimhood' in doing so. These usages, which I have referred to as 'paradigmatic', oblige us to suppress awarenesses which have the potential to disrupt that critical attitude. Unless we do, we are unable to realise the meaning which the text intends – it will literally not make sense to us. Temporarily at least, during the act of reading, we must subscribe to a pre-ordained set of assumptions about victimhood and accept a variety of semantic associations which form the distinct and minimum definition of that concept. This is irrespective of whether we might be able to call on examples of victimhood which are unaccounted for by this definition. Our collusion with the text involves in the first instance our refusal to acknowledge the extent to which referential or denotative uses of 'victim' terminology present an obvious problem for the integrity of the meanings which attach to the paradigmatic definition of victimhood, and on which the coherence of the texts which deploy them depends. In enlisting our cooperation, the text engages us in a social relation premised on the expectation that all the likely readers of this text will know how and when to make that same refusal – to recognise in community the paradigmatic victim as a repellent object, despite the facticity of victimisation being objectively acknowledged elsewhere in feminist writing with great regularity.

The co-existence of two ways of referring to victimhood which demand incompatible responses from the reader points to a broad erasure of the rules by which the victimhood which repels can be differentiated from the oppression which constitutes 'real' victims and which orients feminism towards its emancipatory goals. These rules are nowhere stated, but our skill in applying them is everywhere taken for granted. The reader's perception of what is assumed about her (and others') skills in achieving particular interpretive outcomes does much of the work in incorporating these outcomes into her ongoing fund of already-given knowledge about victimhood. At the very least, she recognises that knowledge as

objectified for the collective audience of which she is a member, so that if she happens to be able to reinstate an independent position towards victimhood once the text has released her, she must recognise the potential marginality of her position within that audience.

This chapter documents the various rhetorical moves by which the reader's antipathy to the 'paradigm of victimhood' is both expected and secured. I have categorised these moves according to the chapter sub-sections below, though individual examples might occupy more than one category. What they all share in common, however, is that success in understanding references to the paradigmatic victim requires readers to reseal the rhetorical elisions and logical flaws which might otherwise constitute opportunities to problematise the meaning frames the texts require us to accept. The wonder is that texts succeed in being read as coherent sequences of meaning despite these easily discernible inconsistencies. Readers are motivated to comply with the text's instructions to ignore such disruptive elements partly because these meaning frames have already been naturalised by our familiarity with similar statements about victimhood occurring elsewhere. These may be in other feminist texts of the sort analysed here, but are readily available and reliably found in derogatory, anti-feminist constructions of victimhood. The text forces readers to seek in these statements the rendition of 'victimhood' which corresponds to and facilitates its meaning, and in turn, indicates the reliability of these statements as valid reference points and meaning enablers (see Smith 1999, 127, 146). This works to consolidate the credibility of this framing of victimhood, and in many cases, the recognisability of the 'paradigm of victimhood' is fundamental to the author's ability to orient argument in certain directions. These arguments are therefore grounded in the way the texts work to organise our perceptions of victimhood, setting up the specific parameters by which we must select and deselect elements from our own knowledge and experience in accordance with those arguments, preserving the text's immunity from disruptive evidence in the process.

## **5.1 Definitional essentialism and the semantics of victimhood**

Central to the strategy of delegitimising paradigmatic victimhood is the clustering of a set of semantic associations around the concept of the victim in such a way as to establish them as essential attributes of victims. My argument is that academic feminists have adopted the definitional conventions established in anti-feminist discourse in their entirety – at least in

the service of their paradigmatic deployments of the concept. In this connection, it is useful to draw on Martin's (1994) remarks in relation to a different feminist issue: the repudiation of essentialism which Martin believes is founded on a logical fallacy. Martin (1994, 639) points out that, in attempting to avoid essentialist framings which attribute necessary characteristics to certain relevant categories (such as women and gender), feminists have fallen into another essentialist trap – 'they have committed themselves to essentialism at the definitional level'. By this she means that the definitions of these categories, according to which their essences are identified, have been taken to be unchangeable by those anxious to distance themselves from essentialism. The only solution which presents itself in that case is to reject the concept of, say, 'woman', rather than to attempt a less essentialising definition, exclusions which Martin claims are counter to feminism's need to maximise opportunities for imaginative and diverse interpretations. She argues for a more elastic approach to the use of categories which understands that general terms can be used as the theoretical and political need arises, as particular similarities between phenomena become more or less relevant in different circumstances (Martin 1994, 637, 639-40). Such an approach does not necessarily entail a commitment to the sort of essentialism which attributes a static set of common properties to all instances of a phenomena – the important point is that it is within feminists' control to manipulate the composition of category and definition according to the purposes of the moment (Martin 1994, 637).

Her observations are relevant to our consideration of feminist approaches to the definition of the category of victim, which for the most part fail either to challenge the assignment to it of particular attributes, or to generate understandings of victimhood which are more strategically useful. For example, Bumiller's (1987, 423) anxiety about using the term 'victim' because it 'evokes and reinforces its own social reality', along with her concern about the way legal expectations of victims require women to present as 'powerless and defeated' (433), assumes that such definitions cannot be contested. The possibility of reworking these definitions to feminism's advantage having been renounced, the only available theoretical direction is to critique the model of legal protection which constructs and imposes them, and to thereby eliminate whatever positive role the legal response to victimisation can play. In other contexts as well, feminists remain captive to

these accretions of meaning in their eradication of the concept of victimhood from their theoretical purview.

In this section, I examine how the components of the definition of victimhood have been mustered in feminist theory, leading to the consolidation of certain semantic regularities which are supposed to indicate the unsuitability of the concept for a feminist politics. At the same time, I suggest that our endorsement of that rejection is procured by rhetorical moves that work to eliminate disruptive conceptualisations of victimhood, and to repeatedly anchor us in the appropriately disapproving posture. Nevertheless, slippages can be detected, and the fact that writers evidently see no need to explain or attend to those slippages encourages the reader to find ways to co-operate in smoothing out these inconsistencies. What appears to be not a priority for the writer (nor for the editors and reviewers who authorise these lapses) must also be taken to be so by the reader as she endeavours to find tools within her repertoire of interpretive skills to follow the meaning and argument structure of the text.

As is shown in Table 1, the survey data reveals how victimhood comes to be defined in feminist writing via its association with a cluster of supposedly repellent characteristics.

Helplessness	Chow (1999, 155) Doezema (2001, 17, 18) Mankekar (1997, 40) Gullickson (1991, 261) Taylor (1999, 27) Franks (2003, 148) Chetkovich (2004, 129) Wendell (1990, 28) Flew et al. (1999, 399)
Haplessness	Mankekar (1997, 40)
Ignorance/diminished rationality or consciousness	Mankekar (1997, 40, 45) Gullickson (1991, 259) Williams (2002, 113) Wendell (1990, 37) Lister (cited in R. Mason 2007, 306) Gilmore (2003, 710) Sengupta (2006, 632)
Infantilisation	Wendell (1990, 28)
Denial of responsibility	Wendell (1990, 15, 26) Warner (2004, 501)

Weakness/powerlessness	Lau (2006, 161) Haag (1996, 60) Gullickson (1991, 259) Throsby (2004, 142)
(False) innocence	Haag (1996, 60) Mankekar (1997, 40) Andrijasevic (2007, 32) Clegg (1999, 80) Doezema (2001, 30) Helms (2003, 19)
Monolithic consciousness/lack of subjective complexity	Gray (2004, 424) Steinberg (2000, 148) Davis (2002, 27) Garrison (2000, 161) Flew et al. (1999, 394) Gangoli (2006, 535) Lau (2003, 373) Dwyer (2000, 483)
Silence	Fernandes (1999, 123)
Being pathetic or abject	Taylor (2006, 45) Williams (2002, 113)
Fixity/entrapment	Clegg (1999, 79) Andrijasevic (2007, 41-2) Reagan (2003, 378 note 55) Chetkovich (2004, 126) Wendell (1990, 28) Flew et al. (1999, 398) Morley (1992, 523, 524)

**Table 1. The semantics of victimhood**

As this mix of references suggests, these descriptors often do not occur in isolation, but are combined with each other in ways that establish relations of interconnectedness between them. For example, innocence can be seen as inseparable from helplessness, weakness, passivity and/or a lack of knowingness (e.g. Mankekar 1997, 40; Lau 2006, 161; Haag 1996, 60; Gullickson 1991, 259; Helms 2003, 19), and fixity from universalising and homogeneity (e.g. Flew et al. 1999, 398). Sometimes the interdependence of these characteristics is made explicit. For example, Helms' (2003, 19) use of parentheses in her discussion of representations of women as 'innocent (passive) victims' of the war in Bosnia establishes passivity as either equal to or subsumable under innocence. In a further slippage, Helms' (2003, 27) assertion that women 'have specifically been cast as (passive) victims and symbols of their ethnic group's victimization' collapses passivity with

victimhood – here the function of the parentheses is to suggest that it is not strictly necessary to qualify the reference to victims, that their passivity is possibly already implied. These descriptors become so entrained that it is difficult to dislodge them from each other, and more importantly, from what they describe – instead of serving as qualifiers which distinguish one sort of victim from another (such as the helpless victim from victims who are not helpless), they come to infect definitively the concept of victimhood, signifying the inherent attributes which form part of its essential definition.

References to victimhood are commonly constructed in such a way as to exclude the possibility of alternative semantic and conceptual configurations. The texts discourage us from intervening in this clustering, which situates ‘victimhood’ at the extreme and therefore self-invalidating end of the possible range of responses to oppression. This invalidation extends to both the state of mind of the oppressed, and to the use of ‘victimhood’ as an analytical category by their feminist advocates. Deploying the routine opposition of victimhood and agency, Franks (2003, 2003, 148) critiques the presentation of Afghan women ‘as helpless victims, rather than as active individuals fighting for their freedom’, which leaves no space for imagining the agentic victim. Even though the observation that these women are ‘fighting for their freedom’ implies that they are oppressed, the terminology of victimhood is reserved specifically for the helpless and inert. Victimhood is similarly expelled as a valid analytical category in Garrison’s (2000, 161) praise for Third Wavers who, instead of claiming a position of ‘total victimhood’, attempt to understand how women experience interweaving modes of domination and privilege along axes of power not limited to sexism. Since victimhood is ‘total’, it cannot accommodate the sort of complexity recommended by Garrison, and evidently cannot be applied even within the contexts of domination alluded to here as part of those shifting relations of power.

The monolithic nature of victimhood is also invoked by Gangoli (2006, 535; see also 536), who attributes the failure by feminists to acknowledge the perpetration of violence by women to the ‘focus on women as permanent victims of male violence’. She praises the books she is reviewing for not ‘[falling] into that trap’. The view of female victimhood supposedly put forward in such analyses of male violence can be understood as logically excluding attention to female perpetrators only if we share in the conception of victimhood as necessarily invariant over time and space, both across all women and within the



experience of individual women. The fact that some women act violently some of the time does not automatically preclude the co-existence of women who are being victimised, nor does it preclude the possibility that individual women who are violent may also experience violence or oppression of a quite different sort in other dimensions of their lives. However, the prospect of an ‘impermanent’ victimhood, one which is not all-encompassing in its effects and therefore hospitable to nuances of experience, is not entertained, since under Gangoli’s scenario the existence of such nuances can only contradict a diagnosis of victimhood outright. The only kind of victimhood available is the permanent kind, and ‘permanent’ here seems to carry an imprecise mix of temporal *and* spatial connotations. Our task as readers here is to not hesitate over the precise meaning of this ‘permanence’. Instead, it is to bring to bear our capacities to recognise the object named here – victimhood as monolithic and impenetrable category or state of mind – in order to understand how such approaches constitute a ‘trap’ and to follow Gangoli in her bipartite categorisation of feminist analyses of women and violence. We are also introduced here to a particular economy of victimhood – analyses which focus on women as victims of men’s violence have obliterated those which might attend to women’s perpetration of violence, and therefore must be made to cede in order for the latter to gain traction. There is a finite quantity of victimhood to go around, and some (women’s) must be given up or ignored in order to accommodate a rise in another quarter (men’s). According to Gangoli’s particular application of this economy, any analysis which deals with women as victims of violence would have to be categorised with those said to focus on women’s ‘permanent’ victimhood, and would therefore be complicit in the annihilation of more balanced approaches.

A particularly well-established and potent semantic pairing is that of passivity and victimhood, and I will return to the issue of how feminist readers are trained to recognise the ‘passive victim’ below (see section 5.3). For the moment, it can be noted in the context of semantic consolidations around the ‘victim’ that across the surveyed journals, 154 articles contain the phrase ‘passive victim’ or ‘passive victims’. These are quite apart from those which might link victimhood to passivity in more broadly discursive ways. Of these, 122 expressly do one of the following: criticise representations which cast women as passive victims, support efforts aimed at disrupting such representations, contradict the impression that women are passive victims, or disclaim any potential (mis)interpretation of

the aims of the current article as being to portray women as passive victims (see Appendix 4). Counter voices are rare. Only four (Gottfried 1987, 821; Faderman 1992, 821; Mardorossian 2003, 268; Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1993, 232) specifically attempt to disrupt this normative antipathy to passive victimhood by questioning the effectiveness of the kinds of resistance with which it is so often unfavourably compared, and by implication the moral virtue such resistance accrues in contrast to the pathologisation of inaction. In all but these four cases, our comprehension of the object named as the 'passive victim' is organised according to a meaning system which links 'passive' with various other pejorative qualifiers (such as 'gullible', 'uniform', 'isolated', 'homogeneous', 'stereotypical', 'objectified', and 'ignorant') and contrasts it to qualifiers reserved for the non-'passive victim' (such as 'courageous', 'informed', 'complex', 'politically conscious', and 'self-reflective'). The non-'passive victim' most often invoked as the most positively-coded object is the 'active agent', these exact phrasings being used in a number of cases which set these in direct contrast (e.g. Matthews 2002, 207; Henwood and Wyatt 2000, 128-9; Lan 2003, 42; Markens et al. 2003, 463; Segura and Pesquera 1992, 520; Amy 1999, 531; Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 49; Vicinus 1992, 481; Koskela and Tani 2005, 428; Deveaux 1994, 233-4; see also Abu-Lughod 2001, 107<sup>1</sup>), again configuring the semantics in such a way as to exclude the agentic or active victim, and requiring us to accept this dichotomy as exhausting the possible field of combinations. In addition, since the two phrases are put forward as antonymic but grammatically equivalent, passivity is confirmed as an inherent property of victims, just as agents are by definition those who act or have the capacity to act.

Although in some articles the recommendation is to provide analyses which complicate the simplistic binary of passive victims and active agents, their subsequent discussions open a space only for more nuanced understandings of agency, whilst the concept of victimhood is abandoned at the point where the binary is noted. For example, Gustafsson-Larsson et al. (2007, 49) justify their call for approaches to gender and power relations which enable analyses of greater plurality and complexity in the following terms:

---

<sup>1</sup> Abu-Lughod's precise contrast is between 'passive victims' and 'complex agents', and thus replays the common view that agency, rather than victimhood, is the proper province of complexity. The next chapter elaborates the way these particular semantics are organised so as to frame victim representations as unsuitable in properly scholarly feminist analyses.

In relation to women's agency, this may help us overcome the dilemma of describing people either as passive victims or as active agents and to establish a coherent notion of agency that is capable of integrating and balancing both structural constraints and the capacity of agents to act against such barriers in specific contexts.

Note that the elaboration believed capable of achieving the required analytical complexity is to the notion of agency – the brief is to develop a concept of agency that can coherently accommodate an awareness both of structural impediments to action, and of possibilities of action. There is no such call to similarly complicate the notion of victimhood, so that it might be considered as multi-layered, as marked by inaction at some points but propelling to action at others, or as being applicable in some respects to women who occupy simultaneous oppressed/oppressor roles depending on their positioning within intersecting axes of power – in other words, one that could also coherently incorporate elements of agency. From here on, there are no further references to the idea of victimhood, and thirty-three of the forty-five references to 'agents' or 'agency' in the article occur after this point. The implication is clear – there is no way of imagining or talking about victimhood as other than 'passive'. It is also significant that the authors posit the habit of depicting women as passive victims as part of an ongoing dilemma for feminists even in 2007, despite what overwhelmingly emerges from the survey data – a resolute desire to move away from analyses which couch women's response to oppression in terms of victimhood, and a chorus of calls like this one to account for women's agency in all its specific, contextualised, and localised detail. The narrative here is not uncommon – the 'passive victim' looms as a crucial element in a threat which stands in constant need of resolution, as a representational habit which has not yet been 'overcome'. We could read the challenge offered by Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2005, 45) to 'the tendency to view women as women either as passive victims or as unrestricted agents' in a similar way – attention to understandings of victimhood is dispensed with once the limitations of this dichotomy are noted, references to 'agents' or 'agency' proliferate throughout the remainder of the discussion, and only the notion of agency is seen as open to the sorts of inflection (through 'specific temporal and structural-historical contexts') whose interrogation will enrich feminist scholarship.

This distribution of references to victimhood is repeated throughout the rest of the 'passive victim' dataset, in that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the mention of the

passive victim or victims is the only reference to anything to do with victimhood in the entire article. They are thus not contextualised within a broader discussion which might set up a more comprehensive meaning system within which to interpret the reference. I read this as a sign that the object 'passive victim' is taken to be an eminently recognisable one by all members of the knowledge community called to activate their social relations with each other at the moment this object is named. The texts give us no further information about how victimhood might be otherwise understood, so that we are more likely to accept that 'passive' victimhood stands for victimhood in general. Indeed, the set of qualifiers noted above which are often used in connection with the 'passive victim' align closely with those we observed to be integral to the definition of the victimhood paradigm – the victim *is* the passive victim, and the victim can therefore never also or elsewhere be the agent.

In some cases, references to victimhood include the standard associations as if they were integral characteristics of the category when their meaning is actually at odds with other evidence or statements in the article. However, these semantic pairings are allowed to stand as inviolate, needing no explanation either in their own right or with respect to their relationship to the more nuanced concepts of the victimised state which are presented alongside them. For instance, Gray (2004, 424) observes the following: 'Noting Hirsch's focus on identification with victimhood, Radstone calls for a reading against the grain of 'pure' victimhood'. Again, our interest here is not in the thrust of either Hirsch's, Radstone's, or indeed, Gray's arguments, but in the way Gray positions Radstone's view of Hirsch with respect to her own. Now, the appraisal of Hirsch that Gray (2004, 423-4) has given just prior to this seems to indicate that the central aspect of Hirsch's work is anything but an identification with victimhood, much less 'pure' victimhood. Gray has stated that Hirsch argues for a recontextualisation of past experiences which will '[prevent] over-identification or fixed identification' and for an openness to differentiated individual and collective perspectives on the past which will produce 'more ambivalent (dis)identifications'. Whilst from Gray's account we can see that Hirsch's discussion focuses on experiences of subordination, it does not appear that Hirsch is unaware of the way the apprehension of such experiences can and should be nuanced. Nevertheless, Gray presents Radstone's evaluation of Hirsch's work as defined by its focus on 'pure' victimhood as entirely self-explanatory. We must be able to bracket the information we

have just been given about the nuances Hirsch introduced into her account, and to understand how it is that, no matter how nuanced Hirsch's account of marginalisation might be, the fact that it is such an account must allow it to register as nevertheless incorporating elements of unacceptable homogeneity. Whatever the evidence to the contrary, an account of victimhood must be seen as naturally open to the charge of focusing on 'pure' victimhood, and we can accomplish that interpretation because we recognise the object named as 'victimhood', and we recognise it as admitting no degree of complexity. As usual, a concept of victimhood which is not 'pure' or monolithic is left without a clear framework for analysis.

In her model of the various perspectives it is possible to adopt in the face of oppression, Wendell (1990) invokes the 'passive victim' in a way which similarly assumes that its signifying power is immune from the impact of other information presented in the article. At a certain point, Wendell (1990, 27) uses a quote from Jane Flax to suddenly pivot her (and our) attention away from the issue at hand, which is that the 'perspective of the victim' has productive power: to incite effective opposition, to foster solidarity among the oppressed, to motivate towards co-operative political action, and to develop compassion towards other women (Wendell 1990, 26-7). Its disadvantage according to Wendell (1990, 27), is that this perspective *may* obscure the victim's awareness of the choices available to her, but it is Flax's quote that definitively eradicates it as a viable feminist perspective, one which must be normatively superseded by the perspective of the 'responsible actor' (Wendell 1990, 31):

Developing a 'feminist' consciousness of oneself as another link in the infinitely long chain of passive victims is more likely to induce a sense of hopelessness than a passionate need for a new self-definition. A woman who so totally lacks a sense of agency cannot take responsibility for herself or analyse her complicity with her own and other women's oppression (Flax, cited in Wendell 1990, 27).

There is much that is familiar here in Flax's framing of passive victimhood (which, it should be made clear, Wendell is referring to as a description of the victim perspective in general): the scare quotes that indicate that such a consciousness is *not* feminist at all, the total lack of agency, the failure to take personal responsibility, the impossibility of victims also being aware of their participation in oppressive practices, and the ahistoricism of conceptualisations of victimhood. We might also note the abrupt slide in Flax's reasoning from the suggestion that victim consciousness is only 'more likely' to result in hopelessness

to the uncompromising certainty that it entails a *total lack* of any sense of agency. However, what is especially relevant here to our study of the interpretive manoeuvres readers are called upon to execute is Wendell's assumption that such a view can remain coherent, despite the proximity of her own observations to the contrary. The galvanising effects she has just listed of recognising one's own victimhood offer a potent contradiction to Flax's warnings of hopelessness and inaction. The agency and incitement to action which Wendell saw as possible effects of the victim perspective have been erased, and the rationale by which we are meant to understand these contrasting effects in relation to each other is left unexplained. Nevertheless, our recognition of the familiar tropes that mark the 'passive victim' and of the outcomes which are customarily seen to follow from victim identification help to insulate the text against these inconsistencies. Flax's description of the passive victim carries an authority which assures us that at some point, and in some way, these outcomes will eventuate – we may not fully understand how the positives Wendell has noted could be so transmogrified, but we are aware that we are expected to be capable of doing the interpretive work which normalises the shift in the presentation of the victim perspective from one which carries a mix of advantages and disadvantages, to one which is now replete with 'grave dangers' (Wendell 1990, 28).

Similarly, the dual claims in Flew et al. (1999, 399) that it is obvious that 'women can be, and often are, victims of oppression' and that 'singling women out as a special case may also imply that women are particularly helpless victims in need of special assistance' are proposed as an unresolvable tension. Sequenced like this, the danger of being viewed as 'particularly helpless victims' trumps the need to draw attention to the reality of oppression. This need is framed as always likely to be offset or diminished by the insuperable problem of apparent helplessness. The dilemma could be posed as one of managing implications of helplessness in the face of the irreducibility of the reality of victimisation, but it is not. The invocation of the familiar trope of 'helpless victims' making special claims does much to justify this way of prioritising the problems. The imperviousness of the conceptual object signified and recognised as the 'helpless victim' seems to transfer itself to the threat of women being marked in this way, so that it is no more possible to deflect that threat than it is to sever the association of helplessness and victimhood. Once invoked, the spectre of the

‘helpless [victim]’ paralyses the capacity to speak simply of ‘victims’, free of qualifiers and value-loading.

Taylor (1999, 27) invokes this trope in a similar way, when she points to the way the postpartum depression movement ‘position[s] women as helpless victims of an uncaring medical establishment’. This is despite having just outlined the gains achieved by the movement, which has ‘[undermined] gender inequality by targeting the practices and logic of social institutions’ (Taylor 1999, 26) and has ‘increased women’s access to medical information and resources and even gained a small foothold in the construction of medical knowledge and practice with respect to post-partum illness’ (Taylor 1999, 26-7). These statements appear in the conclusion to the article. Prior to this, there has been no reference to victimhood, nor of the risk the movement runs in positioning women as helpless victims. In fact, Taylor (1999, 26) situates her own analysis as a *challenge* to the ‘usual feminist accounts’ of women’s self-help movements, which criticise their promotion of a ‘cult of victimhood’. Taylor has intended instead to highlight the productive and transformative capacities of such activism. It is therefore all the more surprising that her invocation of the ‘helpless victim’ occurs in the last ten lines of the article, out of harmony with her prior remarks and threatening to displace them because of its immutability as an integrated concept.

In introducing the potential for such a portrayal of women at this point, Taylor (1999, 27) also connects it to the larger problem which *has* occupied her throughout her discussion: the reliance by these social movements on essentialising assumptions of social and biological gender difference which tend to reproduce the conservative norms around which gendered institutions often discursively mobilise their power. The nature of the connection between the holding of these assumptions and the portrayal of women as helpless victims is not obvious, nor does Taylor see the need to clarify it. As readers, we must take up the task of closing this explanatory gap, to read as if it is not there. To do so, we must subscribe to the narrative whereby any framing of women’s experience which pits oppressed women against a powerful adversary can be contextualised as part of the pervasive risk of implying helpless victimhood, *and* be able to equate such an implication with essentialisation.

Taylor's mode of referring to this risk is one instance of a common rhetorical move which serves to anchor the 'helpless victims' portrayal as a component of analyses which appear to be extreme or over-simplified on other grounds as well. Where she sets her helpless victims against 'an uncaring medical establishment' (Taylor 1999, 27), Jacqueline Taylor (2006, 45) sees the representation of exploitation in 'sex tourism' as constrained by the model of 'passive victims and malicious victimizers'; Doezenia (2001, 18) notes that many third world feminists 'reject the image of 'third world women as helpless victims of either patriarchy or a 'crude, undifferentiated capitalism''; Andrijasevic (2007, 32) critiques the standard framing of sex-trafficking as 'young and innocent victims' exploited by 'malevolent traffickers who lure them into migrating abroad'; and Rothstein (1996, 97) asserts that the Mexican women in her study are not 'passive victims of some invariant and unchanging form of capitalism or patriarchy'. In these examples, the image of helpless or passive victims is delegitimised by its inclusion as part of a generally simplistic approach based on crudely-drawn binaries, whose crudeness is over-determined and consequently all the more convincing as a basis on which to dismiss such analyses as inadequate.

As a result of that over-determination, it is unclear which element(s) of such an analysis would be sufficient to change to render it more satisfactorily nuanced for these writers. Would it be more acceptable, for instance, to present women as helpless victims of a complex and well-understood capitalism or of a caring but misguided medical system, or as active victims of an over-arching patriarchy, or as not so innocent, but nonetheless suffering at the hands of a sex market from which traffickers benefit, malevolently or not? As it stands, the portrayal of the helpless or passive victim is entangled in a consolidated body of evidence of over-simplification, so that the 'victim' cannot be admitted unencumbered into the approaches which are proposed as more sophisticated in contrast. To accept these approaches as the only possible exits from those hopelessly illegitimate ones, we must suppress our imagination of alternative configurations of helplessness, passivity and agency on the one side, and power formations, including brute structural constraints, on the other.



## **5.2 Victimhood and its outcomes: ‘denying the antecedent’**

Having established the embeddedness of certain characteristics in the concept of victimhood, let us return at this point to the particular fallacy identified by Martin (1994) in her critique of the feminist prohibition on approaches labelled as essentialist. Martin (1994, 635) calls the illogic in question ‘the fallacy of denying the antecedent’, and it is relevant in considering one of the arguments often mounted against claiming victim status: that such claims necessarily entrain deleterious consequences for women. According to this fallacious reasoning, if it is identified that a particular phenomenon leads to a particular outcome, then negating that phenomenon will also negate the outcome which has been thought to follow from it. The fallacy lies in the fact that what has been perceived to be the outcome of the offending phenomenon may also be the result of other causes – there is not necessarily a one-to-one relationship between cause and effect. A further problem is that this fallacy leads us to dismiss certain ideas out of hand based on their perceived ill effects, when there is nothing which makes them intrinsically unsuitable for feminist theorising.

Given that Martin’s (1994) focus is on the question of defining concepts like ‘woman’ or ‘gender’, her aim is to defend neither the notion of a feminine essence nor anti-essentialism, but to point out that no necessary ‘conclusions about what ought to be the case follow directly from what is’ (Martin 1994, 634). Therefore, denying a feminine essence will not necessarily obviate the political and social subordination which has been grounded on women’s presumed biological inferiority, any more than a revalorisation of women’s essential nature be used to infer women’s moral superiority (Martin 1994, 633). The question of essence must be determined on its own merits without reference to its presumed consequences. The range of uses to which Martin’s reasoning can be put is open-ended – rejecting any concept on the basis of the suspect ends it appears to serve wrongly locates the problem within the concept itself. Applied to the concerns of this thesis, the foremost goal is likewise not to mount a defence of victim representations or identifications so much as to question the logic which grounds their elimination on the undesirable consequences which certain policy responses are thought to have for women. It is also to point out that making strategy decisions on this basis is sustainable only if those women

who do benefit from such policies are excluded from the equation, or if such benefits are considered as less compelling than perceived disadvantages<sup>2</sup>.

The way the fallacious logic identified by Martin (1994) works in the case of victim representations can be brought into relief by a couple of examples from our survey data. In the first example, Chetkovich's (2004) re-examination of Wendell's (1990) model of possible responses to oppression, the risk that redistributive measures may generate resentment against victim claimants is held to justify the conclusion that 'a challenge that does not ultimately transform the relevant community may simply reproduce victimhood' (Chetkovich 2004, 127). Here the victimhood that results from challenge to the established order carries the greater weight, diswarranting the initial claim of victimisation. Moreover, this secondary 'victimhood' is not interrogated for how it might differ in kind from the original, and demand different forms of redress. Instead, its apparent equation with the original victimhood – for it *reproduces* it – is the basis on which it cancels the validity of claiming victim status in the first place. For Chetkovich (2004, 128), effective change can come about only by enlisting the co-operation of the communities in which women are disadvantaged, and this is premised on 'avoiding the construction of women as victims'. The reader must be able to interpret such a construction as being distinct from recognising and challenging oppression, for Chetkovich (2004, 127) acknowledges that the latter is the prerequisite for improving women's circumstances. How the 'construction' differs in itself from the recognition of oppression is not made clear. Nevertheless, we are called on to disapprove of such constructions in general on account of the hostility occasioned by the particular victim claims described by Chetkovich, the case in point being the resistance encountered within the New York Fire Department by women fire-fighters who protest their erasure in media focus on the heroic, masculine rescuer at Ground Zero.

---

<sup>2</sup> Another point of resonance with our position is that Martin (1994, 630-31) is concerned about the disciplinary power that accusations of essentialism have to constrain theory and research, identifying certain concepts and topics as off limits. We identify a similar repressive climate around feminist criticism of the category of victimhood. In this case, the repression has less to do with the sort of outright confrontations described by Martin (1994, 630), but with the extent to which presumptions about what is still up for discussion and what debates are already settled seep into rhetorical constructs and modes of expression in ways that secure fealty to these congealing forms of knowledge. These are potent mechanisms for defining the rules of inclusion in the 'world-in-common' of academic feminism, and doubly problematic in this case, since assumptions about what is already agreed upon are naturalised by appeal to extra-textual meaning systems constructed within an anti-feminist discourse.

In fact, so convinced is Chetkovich of the causation that holds victim claims responsible for retaliation from the powerful that she takes this retaliation itself as warranting a retrospective rereading of the women's protest as issuing from the perspective of the victim, rather than that of the 'responsible actor' (Chetkovich 2004, 126). Here and throughout, Chetkovich (2004, 123) appeals approvingly to Wendell's (1990) model, which framed the perspective of the responsible actor as an improved, more developed feminist response to oppression than that of the victim. Chetkovich's discussion is therefore informed by a narrative of progress *from* being a victim *to* being responsible. The problem for Chetkovich about the hostility to the women's protest is that, following Wendell's model, a negative outcome is seen to flow more logically from a claim of victim status than from the exercise of agency. Furthermore, a negative outcome would normally allow us to draw the reverse inference that a victim perspective is its cause. Leaving aside for a moment the logical fallibility of this line of reasoning, such an inference is also contrary to the clear evidence in this case, for Chetkovich (2004, 126)) notes that the protestor in question is acting responsibly, and that it is difficult to see her as 'trapped in victimhood'. For Chetkovich (2004, 127), the possibility that 'responsible' protest should incur negative consequences exposes a limitation in Wendell's model, which needs to be adjusted to take account of the impact of relational factors on the potential for responsible action to be effective. Therefore, the task is framed as one of preserving the natural worthiness of responsible action which has been otherwise called into question by its initiation of the sorts of negative results normally expected to ensue from identifying as a victim.

What is interesting here is that the perspective of the responsible actor is not automatically invalidated by the negative outcomes it incurs, even though these are identical to the sorts of hostile responses which are seen to justify the elimination of victim constructions. Where retaliation appears to be a response to women presenting as victims, it is seen as 'reproduc[ing] victimhood' (Chetkovich 2004, 127). But where it is provoked by the actions of the responsible agent, it merely presents a theoretical problem which can be solved so as to revalidate the perspective of the responsible actor as the normative feminist stance. That perspective therefore remains inviolate, inherently more positive and developed than the perspective of the victim. Any model of behaviour under oppression must incorporate the need to transform communities so that the perspective of the

responsible actor can end up bearing the beneficial outcomes which are seen to be its natural desert. The perspective of the victim, on the other hand, remains theoretically irredeemable and irrevocably linked to negative outcomes for women, from which we must read off its ineffectiveness. Its demarcation from the perspective of the responsible actor is accepted as given, despite the gaps in the logic which reveal similarities between them in both expression and result. When Chetkovich (2004, 126) orients the reader to the issue at hand – the protestor ‘is acting with responsibility, but the result may be as if she had acted from the perspective of the victim’ – the ‘but’ carries the weight of organising the interpretive resources we bring to the text. It frames the two perspectives as inherently at odds, and asks us to recognise the apparent similarity between them as an aberrant and unexpected diminution of the ‘responsible’ perspective. This *apparent* similarity is meant to signal a potential crisis in the theory of the responsible actor perspective, since the similarity is to that perspective which is positioned as inherently problematic. The problem identified in Wendell’s model is not that her classifications do not satisfactorily account for the empirical evidence and should be contested, but that the evidence threatens the demarcation which establishes the responsible actor perspective as normatively preferable.

Chetkovich (2004, 129) is also concerned with the potential for policies aimed at addressing subordinating practices through prohibition to entrench a view of women as eminently victimisable. Her framing of this danger utilises an argument structure which is common throughout the data sample. She first notes that prohibitions on, say, sexual harassment can create more favourable working environments for women by eliminating sexually objectifying materials and attitudes. This is followed immediately by the counter argument: ‘Alternatively, though, a strict prohibition can foster a view of women as helpless victims [...]’. The effect of this structure, whilst appearing to present both sides of the issue, is to relegate whatever benefits accrue from victim representations to the position of being always annulable by their more compelling disadvantages, which remain insuperable and reason enough to disqualify such policies. Meanwhile, it is not entirely clear how Chetkovich’s (2004, 127) favoured alternative of transforming communities through ‘public policy and organized practice’ will be less coercive and more collaborative than the ‘victim construction’ model. To favour the first, we must co-operate with the view that the ‘victim construction’ model necessarily figures power differentials in simplistic

terms of helpless recipients on the one hand, and institutional prohibitions on the other. The text instructs us to consider the reduction of sexual intimidation in the workplace as a minimal and dispensable benefit in comparison to the disadvantages of victim claiming. This instruction is all the more questionable when it emerges what these so-called disadvantages include – being considered too vulnerable to be admitted into occupational communities where rough initiation rituals are the norm (Chetkovich 2004, 129). Where the transformative and enabling power of positioning women as victims of oppressive work environments is noted, the ‘advantage’ of not doing so is measured in terms of these intimidating environments remaining unchanged but more open to women, at least to those who are prepared and able to adapt to the masculinist status quo. The reader must do a fair amount of interpretive work to accept the latter strategy as offering enough benefits to women in general to displace the prohibition approach, but we must displace it in order to follow the broad critique of legal restriction that Chetkovich (2004, 127) mounts in this article. The invocation of the ‘helpless victim’, which has been encoded elsewhere as a repellent object, does much to deter the reader from aligning herself with that alternative, and to organise her perception of legal intervention as *essentially* restrictive and disabling.

To arrive at that perception, to ‘enter the circle of authorized subjectivity’ (Smith 1999, 152) constituted by the text, the reader must be able to bracket any awareness she has of women who either find an improvement in their working experience due to legal prohibitions, or are too inhibited by discriminatory practices to initiate the less formal kinds of conflict resolution favoured by Chetkovich (2004, 129). When Chetkovich (2004, 128) recommends ‘[fostering] inclusive communities’ and ‘giving voice to all’ as preferable alternatives to ‘the construction of women as victims’, we must perform the interpretive moves necessary to make sense of ‘all’ and ‘inclusive’. To do so, we must consider the exclusion from these communities of women who self-identify as (helpless) victims and feminists who highlight women’s victimhood as insignificant, if not impossible in the sense that the regime established by the text suggests that individuals with such intentions either do not, or should not, exist. What we have available to us extra-textually in conservative discourses and elsewhere in feminist writing (e.g. Guy 1996, 157; see also Haraway 1997, 65 note 7) to indicate the unreliability of self-identification as evidence of victimhood may be selected to support the presumption that the voices of such people are not worth hearing

and that the victimhood they claim does not exist. Consequently, the notion of excluding the victim-identified is paradoxical and does not impugn the call to inclusivity.

We must activate similar interpretive frameworks to preserve textual coherence in the second example to be considered in this context, Doezenia's (2001) critique of feminist campaigns against sex-trafficking which rely on images of the injured body of the third world trafficking victims. Like Chetkovich, Doezenia (2001, 19-20) is concerned about the potential for such images to perpetuate victimhood by reifying injury as identity, and specifically about the paradox that this reification presents for the emancipatory aims of these campaigns. It is argued that such interventions fix victim identity in the process of trying to end it, and also, by appealing to institutions to act on women's behalf, strengthen the very structures which have frequently been implicated in victimisation in the first place. Doezenia's concerns are shared by other authors in the dataset, who critique victim identification on the basis that it is a means to undesirable ends, or is reciprocally consolidated by measures aimed to address oppression (cf. Andrijasevic 2007; Chow 1999; Gilmore 2003; MacLeod 2002; Franks 2003). Like them, Doezenia points to such outcomes to ground the delegitimation of images of victimhood, especially as the emphasis on victimhood in this case has its historical roots in the instrumental use made of such framings in British imperial agendas to regulate prostitution in India (Doezenia 2001, 24-5; see also Haggis and Schech 2000, 388, 395). For Doezenia (2001, 17), contemporary use of the image of the 'third world trafficking victim' serves to '[advance] certain feminist interests, which cannot be assumed to be those of third world sex workers themselves'. Whilst Doezenia theoretically leaves open at this stage the possibility that these sets of interests *might* coincide – that is, the 'authorized subjectivity' (Smith 1999, 152) set up by the text does not yet completely exclude third world sex workers who might wish to represent their experience using images of the victimised body – subsequent modes of referring to these women contract that possibility. The offending images are said to be rejected by 'third world sex workers' and 'third world sex workers' organizations', and the adoption of the language of sex work by 'sex workers the world over' expresses 'a shared political vision' (Doezenia 2001, 29; see also 33). Complete closure is achieved when it is asserted that the authors of such campaigns restage imperialist power by '[denying] the subject the opportunity for self-representation' (Liddle and Rai 1998, 512, in Doezenia

2001, 28). The reader can make sense of this statement only if she completely eliminates the possibility that any third world prostitute would want to be represented in this way, and only if she subscribes to the view that eradicating such images constitutes an absolute expansion, rather than any diminution, of their capacities for self-expression.

The rejection of victim claiming and constructions based on outcomes in these writings presumes that these outcomes are unavoidable and necessary consequences of such constructions. A one-to-one relationship between cause and effect is assumed, such that a negative outcome allows the inference that an identification with victimhood is at its origin. As we saw in Chetkovich's (2004, 127-28) analysis, for example, the fact that the perspectives of the responsible actor and of the victim might lead to similar results is theoretically unsatisfactory only insofar as the first should correspond exclusively with a positive outcome and thus be categorically distinguishable from the second. The possibility that articulating victimhood might catalyse positive as well as negative outcomes, that these might translate as transformative public policy or cultural and structural readjustment, rather than simple regulation and prohibition, is not admitted. The attention to outcomes deflects the debate away from considerations about what constitutes victimhood per se, assuming that whatever disadvantages flow from claims of victimisation are a function of the intrinsic properties of the 'victim'.

### **5.3 Beware the 'passive victim'**

The foregoing discussion has sketched out the process by which the concept of victimhood becomes terminally infected by its association with a range of negative descriptors and analytical inadequacies. Various textual instructions operate to ensure that these associations are taken up as positioning paradigmatic victimhood as a negative when there is no necessity that they signify in that way. For example, Lau's (2006, 161 note 5) referral of the reader to 'a discussion of why South Asian authors may be positioning their female protagonists in positions of helplessness or weakness' poses these authors' habits as a conundrum in need of explaining. The puzzle centres on the issue of incomprehensible authorial motivation, and is not explicable in terms of authors' rational attempts to render faithfully women's situation. Wendell's (1990, 28) statement that '[fortunately], not everyone who benefits from taking the perspective of the victim gets stuck with that

perspective' introduces us to the notion that there is a threshold of tolerance in relation to the assumption of the victim perspective – there is a point at which it is considered appropriate to shift to another perspective, and beyond which one would be considered to be 'stuck'. This is despite the fact that there are evidently 'benefits' that flow from the victim perspective, and that it might seem counter-intuitive that it could be said of those who so benefit that it is fortunate that they are not 'stuck' with that which benefits them.

Even in the case of Flew et al. (1999, 399), who broadly defend attention to victimisation, there is a rhetoric in places which works against their arguments in favour of a more flexible conceptualisation of victimhood and a less automatically celebratory approach to agency. I have mentioned above (*supra* 190) the way their invocation of the 'helpless victim' (Flew et al. 1999, 399) works to position discussions of women's victimisation as fatally flawed, even when the fact of oppression is undisputed. In addition, their attempt to warn of the dangers of presuming women's agency and to revalorise the concept of victimhood nevertheless frames the victimhood approach as lesser. The assertion that '[it] can also be argued that the construct of women as victims may sometimes be strategically necessary to oppose a right-wing discourse that 'falsely proposes women's total freedom'', suggests that such constructions should be seen as temporary measures only, to be avoided under normal circumstances and deployed only under special conditions. And lastly, Morley's (1992, 524) reminder that '[w]omen's experiences can be interpreted as revealing positive virtues, rather than 'unrelenting victimisation'' (and, of course, the possibility of a framing of victimhood which is any more complex than 'unrelenting' is disallowed here) is a clear instruction to oppose 'victimisation' to what is 'positive'. Indeed, this phrasing goes close to equating interpretations which reveal victimisation, and even the fact of being a victim, with lack of virtue.

However, although we might be able to take up such instructions correctly, we still need to do substantial interpretive work to naturalise the orientations we are directed towards, to justify the negative coding attached to victimhood and its semantic associations. Significant logical gaps occur consistently across the survey data in the mode of referencing victimhood, which the texts themselves do not close. There is no logical necessity, for instance, for us to understand 'helpless' or 'innocent' as pejorative terms, to wish to distance ourselves from the spectre of helplessness rather than to consider it as, say,



likely to excite compassion. There may be nothing to object to in feminists' desire to see women galvanised to action rather than immobilised in the face of oppression, nor in their insistence that women are more often than not engaged in some form of resistance which may not be obvious and which it is our task to reveal. However, there is a problem with the way these anxious disclaimers of the image of the 'helpless victim' and the 'passive victim' cast these categories, and hence anyone who falls into them, as natural objects of repulsion.

That it is assumed that these categories signify diminishment is evident from the frequent deflections of images of women as 'merely', 'simply' or 'just' 'passive victims' (e.g. Ryan 2000, 90; Sorensen 1996, 609; Whitford 1991, 107; Man 2004, 146; Spalter-Roth 1990, 111; Yuval-Davis 1996, 22-3; Thorne 1987, 88; Mann 1989, 786; Jantzen 1994, 191; McNay 1991, 133; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2003a, 404; Markens 1996, 48; see also Kosambi 2001, 171). As readers recognising these named objects, we must agree to be repulsed, or at least to stand within the 'shared subjectivity' (Smith 1999, 151) of the repulsed, in order to accept these anxieties as normal. We must be able to process as coherent, for example, the sudden and isolated denials of passive victimhood within articles which otherwise make no reference to victims, and where such insertions seem without obvious purpose. We can only comprehend that purpose by contextualising it as part of an already-known and generally understood feminist priority, that of situating women's behaviour, in the first instance, along the agency continuum. The terrible possibility that women's response to oppression might be interpreted in terms of passivity is one which feminists are constantly on the alert to deflect, and we must take a posture towards the category of 'passive victim' which is convinced that this anxiety is valid.

Of course, if we accept the perfectly reasonable position that women are never 'passive victims', that women always act in some way in response to their subordination, then there does not seem to be anything particularly anti-feminist in repugning this category. But this assumes that the constitution of this category and of who might fall into it is well-defined, which is not the case. It also ignores the moral overtones, and consequent normative force, of the implied criticism of the 'passive victim' as refusing to exercise the agency which is always at her disposal. Recall also that the 'passive victim' tends to stand as emblematic of victimhood in general, so if 'passive victims' are repellent, then so are all victims, at least as imagined in their paradigmatic form. Indeed, the negative coding of the

‘passive victim’ (and by implication of all victimhood) often extends to delegitimising *any* attempt to highlight women’s oppressed state, even when that seems warranted. Hence, the reader must assume that this coding is considered robust enough to render that delegitimation sensible. Consider the following:

[Third World women] are seen as passive victims and objectified as poor, uneducated, in poor health, oppressed, exploited and powerless [...]. This conceptualization of Third World women denies their active role in the struggle both for basic needs and against oppression [...] (Danner et al. 1999, 255)

Chatterjee’s painstaking attention to detail pre-empts any attempt at reducing the women [...] to stereotypes of poor, passive victims of their patriarchal cultures (Chaudhry 2003, 489)

‘[In] radical feminist analyses, the terms ‘sexual exploitation’ and ‘sexual victimization’ tend to be conflated, and it is therefore hard to speak of any individual as ‘sexually exploited’ without also implying that they are downtrodden, pathetic and suffering. [...] (Taylor 2006, 45).

In the above, we are required to execute several interpretive moves to maintain textual coherence and to insulate the texts against some obvious questions. We need to approach these statements with the understanding already in place that ‘passive victim’ is a derogatory term. But, in the first example, we also need to understand the positioning of women as poor, uneducated, or in poor health as equally objectionable, and, in the third, to put ‘suffering’ on a par with ‘pathetic’. In addition, we must accept that noting the oppressed condition of Third World women actually *denies* their active role. And making sense of Chaudhry’s (2003) statement requires that the reader views arguments about cultures being patriarchal to be just as reductively stereotypical as she claims depictions of Bengali labouring women as ‘passive victims’ are<sup>3</sup>. Note also that Chaudhry draws here on

---

<sup>3</sup> In this context, I draw attention to an observation by Gill (1995, 183 note 5; emphasis in original), who confesses to be disturbed by a particular rhetorical construction she has encountered in her reading. One which assumes (and expects the reader to assume) ‘the *illegitimacy* of claiming that women are victims’ without justifying that assumption. She sees such constructions as supporting ‘the current trend for denying that even victims are victims – particularly when they happen to be women’. This is a niggling side issue for Gill which she must consign to a footnote (though a sizeable one) since it is peripheral to her main argument. The need to arrange her material in this way is symptomatic of precisely the sort of pressure which Smith sees readers to be under to co-operate with the assumptions needed to keep up with the textual flow. Gill knows how to interpret the quote which has disturbed her, but she confesses that it has taken her some time to work out why it bothered her so much – the processes by which we accomplish textual meaning do not always work at a entirely conscious level, even when we are aware that something is not quite right with the expectations the text is imposing on us. Having consciously recovered these interpretive processes, Gill must bracket her articulation of them from the field of her primary engagement with the material in which the quote is embedded so as not to disrupt the coherence of that material as it bears on her main discussion (cf. *supra* 78 note 9). In regard to Gill’s remark about particular sensitivity to women victims, note that the feminisation of victimhood also figures in the survey data as a reason to reject victimhood (e.g. Andrijasevic 2007, 26; Taylor

a well-used line of argument that poses as opposites the presentation of women as ‘passive victims’ and ‘painstaking attention to detail’. The next chapter takes up this point: representation as victims is not an allowable feature of analysis considered as thorough.

The definition of passivity in these contexts, and the criteria for determining who is and who is not passive, are by no means clear. In fact, we are left to deduce what constitutes passivity largely from indications of what it is not. While Honig (1996, 425) seems to identify ‘passive victims’ on the basis of the absence of observable agency, such as ‘militant acts of resistance’, concepts of agency elsewhere are much broader. Evidence for agentic behaviour which grounds disclaimers of the view of the women in question as ‘passive victims’ is found even in the most constrained circumstances: in the very strength of some women’s internalisation of male ideals of womanhood (Jantzen 1994, 191), in the act of enduring breast cancer (Bahar 2003, 1042), in young women in migrant Chinese families in Britain who derive satisfaction from surrendering their earnings for the benefit of the young males in the family (Lee et al 2002, 611), in responding to male supremacy by ‘joining in, letting it pass, and avoiding it’ (Hester 1990, 11), and in dropping out of school sports which force girls to appear unfeminine, thereby ‘[achieving] a more secure ‘feminine performance’’ (Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 658-9). In this last example, avoiding sport is defined as active resistance to the de-feminising power of PE culture, at the same time as participation in PE was the original resistance to oppressive norms of femininity. In this context, oppression and victimisation disappear, and all forms of action qualify as evidence of agency or resistance without reference to their significance in the overall organisation of power. In this and other cases, the very strength of compliance with dominant expectations constitutes an apparently satisfactory basis for authors to deny their subjects’ passivity.

There is a moral dimension to the question of passivity – we can understand the source of feminist anxiety about women being seen as ‘passive victims’ only if we envisage victimhood as other than the imposition of constraints which these women have no power to change. The location of passivity within individual psychology and personality, and its

---

2006, 45; Helms 2003, 27; Jacobson 2006, 505; Lau 2003, 377; Freeman 2001, 1015). This logic assumes the negative coding of victimhood as invariant, and argues from that the need to detach it from the feminine. As well, the attributes of the stereotypical victim match those of the stereotypical woman, the latter having been used to women’s disadvantage. However, where feminists have been keen to contest stereotypical femininity by presenting counter images, interrogating the category ‘woman’, and even revalorising feminine difference, they have not shown a corresponding willingness to nuance understandings of victimhood.

equation with moral lack, is sometimes made explicit – it is the opposite of being ‘courageous’ (Brereton 1998, 155) or ‘heroic’ (Bahar 2003, 1042), imputations of passivity show ‘a lack of respect for sex-trade workers’ (Smith 1993, 80), and Robyn Mason (2007, 306) argues that the exercise of agency is a ‘quality’ and endorses the statement that ‘a conscious sense of agency [...] is crucial to the breaking of the chains of victimhood’ (Lister, cited in R. Mason 2007, 306). One suspects, however, from the general tenor of feminists’ references to victimhood, that what is seen as ‘crucial’ here is also seen as sufficient – *thinking* against power counts as a viable form of resistance which eliminates victimhood, and is more worthy than passivity, irrespective of whether it actually expands opportunities.

If we look to references to victimhood in general (having argued that the ‘passive victim’ stands for victims at large), this location of victimhood as an internal quality is repeated elsewhere in the survey data (e.g. Watson 2002, 414; Taylor 2006, 52; Chetkovich 2004, 125; Lara 2003, 187; Morley 1992, 524). Of course, for Wendell (1990), the ability of women to progress from the perspective of the victim to the perspective of the responsible actor is central to her normative model of women’s response to oppression, and it is only in recognising victimhood as a state of mind which operates independently of external factors that we can make sense of what might otherwise seem to be tautological – ‘[the] perspective of the victim is probably the best perspective for someone who has recently been victimized’ (Wendell 1990, 26). The question of what is ‘best’ can only arise in the context of a moral dilemma about which perspective to take up or forego, and is separable from the fact of having been victimised. In fact, victimhood is a ‘role’ into which one can step, and from which one can presumably just as easily withdraw (e.g. Gangoli 2006, 536; Helms 2003, 27; Lau 2003, 369; Morley 1992, 523; Bumiller 1987, 433; Freeman 2001, 1015; Gilmore 2003, 706). It can be chosen (e.g. Chow 1999, 161; Patton and O’Sullivan 1990, 126; Reagan 2003, 378 note 55; Warner 2004, 501; Arens 1995, 52; Morley 1992, 523) and therefore also refused (e.g. Chun 1999, 126; Gilmore 2003, 707, 710; Bahar 2003, 1039; R. Mason 2007, 306; Wendell 1990, 28). The identification of an individual as a victim in the paradigmatic sense, then, especially as a ‘passive victim’, turns on evaluations of their moral fibre, not of the extent to which external factors may contribute to varying degrees of material obstruction or psychological inertia.

Since *any* level of agency, however directed, is incompatible with formulations of passive victimhood (and, as the above examples show, who cannot be said to *act* in some way at all times?), we must conceptualise this passivity as a virtual, irreducible residue of psychological inertia which cannot exist in fact, but which signifies a notional base of indisputable abhorrence in comparison with which favoured behaviours or representations automatically recommend themselves. References to the ‘passive victim’ invoke a hypothetical null state, the ‘not’ against which an array of laudable variations on agency are set out as valid forms of active response to oppression. These variations include partial acceptance (e.g. Roberts and Fraser 2002, 224), manoeuvring (e.g. Lan 2003, 42), negotiation (e.g. Atasoy 2002, 756; Yea 2005, 459; Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2005, 45; Mills 1992, 8; Pini 2007, 45), coping (e.g. Warren 2003, 679; Robertson 1988, 445), internalising norms of femininity (Jantzen 1994, 191), interaction with oppressive structures (Bacigalupo 2003, 51), managing participation in hegemonic cultural forms (Dewar 1987, 454), resisting male supremacy by joining in or avoiding it (Hester 1990, 11), and ‘unwittingly [reinforcing] gender inequality’ (Handler 1995, 236). How else are we to understand the observation that ‘[despite] women’s [...] continuing struggles to achieve social citizenship and the oppression they experience, women have not been passive victims but have exercised agency [...]’ (R. Mason 2007, 306), other than by imagining the category of ‘passive victim’ as a repellent, but empty kind of non-state, since the reference to ‘struggles’ seems to explicitly pre-empt any impression of passivity?

Certainly, the ‘passive victim’ emerges as existentially impossible (all women can exercise agency in some way), and even theoretically so – the activation of men’s control mechanisms presupposes women’s resistance (Hester 1990, 11). But, if that is the case, then what are we to make of the obvious and ubiquitous anxiety feminists show in their constant denials that women are ‘passive victims’, whatever impression might be given that this is so? Why the desire to resituate ‘joining in, letting it pass, and avoiding it’ as forms of resistance or fighting back against men’s control (Hester 1990, 11)? More to the point, whence the confidence that the reader, and the knowledge community into which her reading integrates her, will be primed to accept such a redefinition? Indeed, many of the references in the survey data can be classified as direct refutations of what their authors expect to be likely conclusions of passivity drawn by the average observer on the basis of

the evidence on offer (e.g. Ezekiel 2005, 240; 2006, 270; Stobie 2007, 210; Cheng 2003, 171; Gremillion 2002, 393; Walby 2001, 494; Hester 1990, 11; Kofman and Sales 1992, 35; Lee et al. 2002, 611; Man 2004, 146; Pini 2007, 45). These denials often use similar phrasings to relegate the 'passive victim', establish its exclusion from the range of possible interpretations, and bring forth the corrective as a pleasant surprise which rescues the research subjects from such damaging suspicions and restores the analysis to the body of work that foregrounds women's agency – women are 'not' victims, 'but' agents (e.g. Roberts and Fraser 2002, 224); Lutz 2002, 99; Lan 2003, 42; Segura and Pesquera 1992, 520; Bacigalupo 2003, 51), 'far from' being 'passive victims' (e.g. Valentine 1999, 152; Stobie 2007, 210), or agentic 'rather than' being passive (e.g. Brubaker 2007, 548; Markens et al. 2003, 463; Backus 1993, 829).

Nevertheless, although the category 'passive victim' seems to signify to all intents and purposes only a hypothetical null, its invocation is assumed to carry a rhetorical force capable of immediately validating states defined as its opposite. Despite its default emptiness, it stands ready as a container category to receive any behaviour or state which needs, for whatever purposes, to be invalidated or contrasted unfavourably with what is being promoted. In that context, and especially in view of the lack of clarity about the criteria for judging who warrants the label of 'passive victim', all of the oppressed occupy an equivocal position with respect to it. Bear in mind that those who apply these criteria are by definition not those who identify as victims, let alone 'passive victims'. The assignment of that label rests on the evaluation of others' subjective reactions to oppression, and as we have seen, victimhood is often figured as an internalised state and agency as a function of psychological activity. Attempting to interpret the psychological responses of others is a suspect enterprise in any case, but particularly so when the rules governing the recognition of the 'passive victim' are assumed to be beyond interrogation. According to what measure of passivity, for instance, does Ebaugh (1993, 400) claim that the image of women as 'passive victims' is thoroughly refuted and refutable, but immediately position studies of women's 'passive resistance' as part of the corrective? How is it possible to discern the invalid form of passivity which signifies victimhood from the valid one which signifies resistance?

The insistence that women at all levels of constraint are never passive may spring from benevolent motives, but we should question what political investments feminists endorse in framing passivity as moral lack and in locating the primary and crucial source of enablement within women's psyches. The establishment of the 'passive victim' category as a null threshold leaves no space for cases of actual immobilisation in the face of oppression, and exposes women in that situation to suspicion – since it is inconceivable that women are passive, those who appear so must be pretending in order to gain special consideration<sup>4</sup>. Let us not forget that feminists' anxiety to disavow passivity on behalf of other women arises precisely from the likelihood of such supposedly mistaken impressions – appearances suggest that women are often passive in the face of oppression, and are therefore often subject to having that appearance interpreted by outsiders. But there is no reason to think that feminists are any more immune to error in interpreting these appearances than others, especially when the code of the 'passive victim' operates so efficiently to legitimise on demand whatever is opposed to it. That is, feminists are just as likely to incorrectly ascribe passivity where they want to invalidate a position or behaviour, and to incorrectly intuit agency in the opposite case. Either way, these ascriptions serve agendas formed from the narrative position of the non-victim, and the truly immobilised or the simply misinterpreted are at the mercy of these agendas.

---

<sup>4</sup> Note that the concept of the 'innocent victim' operates in a similar way, though it is not quite as consolidated a category as the 'passive victim', which is regularly referred to using this actual pairing. Innocence is implicated in passivity and refusal to accept responsibility, and just as the 'passive victim' emerges as an impossibility, so does innocence, in that the certainty that agency can be exercised raises the possibility of complicity in one's own and/or others' victimhood, both of which are assumed to subtract from the sum of one's own victimisation (e.g. Adams 1989, 30; Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 665; Bray and Colebrook 1998, 35; Winter 1994, 965; Masse 1990, 680; Mankekar 1997, 40; Clegg 1999, 80; Gullickson 1991, 259; Warner 2004, 501; Helms 2003, 19). References to the 'innocent victim' therefore function ironically to signal the reverse - lack of innocence. No indulgence is extended to those who appear to assert their innocence, since this can only be interpreted, at best, as a failure to see one's own or others' agentic potential or, at worst, as a cynical ploy to gain the so-called benefits of victimhood. This is despite the burden placed on women to comply with the strict standards of innocence which will prove their victim status, especially in legal contexts (see Haag 1996, 60; Sweeney 2004, 469-70). This places women in a double bind – they must present as innocent in order to be acknowledged as victims, at the same time as such presentations attract suspicion, because that level of innocence is thought to be non-existent. As a result, the recognition of victim status which flows from it is also withheld. For an alternative semantic association which highlights the complex interpretive processes at work in recognising the 'innocent victim' for what she is, consider Warner's (2001, 115) use of the phrase 'guilty victims', for which she (unlike the above references) provides a more complete explanation (Warner 2001, 123) – and must do so, I suggest, in the absence of a readily available framework for interpreting this pairing.

This construction of the ‘passive victim’ also ignores the temporal dynamics of victimhood, that women may experience a range of reactions to oppression that vary over time between inertia and active engagement. The ‘passive victim’ is defined as passive now and for all time, and therefore, representations of women as passive must be avoided once and for all. Women either have been, or must be, rescued definitively from such representations, and the normativity of denying passive victimhood is sometimes made explicit in remarks to the effect that feminists as a whole are engaged in this repudiation effort. The view is that feminists are all equally suspicious of portrayals that focus on women’s victimhood (or at least on the pervasiveness of men’s domination<sup>5</sup>) and are building a body of scholarship which moves as one towards appreciation of the variety of women’s agentic responses to constraint. A closer examination of these remarks reveals, however, some uncertainty as to the timing of this moment of rescue and coming to better knowledge. These remarks typically fall into one of two categories – they either assert that feminists *have* already moved away from depictions of passive victimhood (e.g. Fraser 1987, 116; Thorne 1987, 88; McNay 1991, 133; Ebaugh 1993, 400; Deveaux 1994, 233-4; Handler 1995, 236; Griffin 1997, 18; Henwood and Wyatt 2000, 128), or that the need to do so is ongoing, that the possibility of feminist depictions of women being misconstrued poses a persistent risk (e.g. Jameson 1988, 782; Wendell 1990, 27; Mills 1992, 8; Park 1997, 43 note 46; Bray and Colebrook 1998, 35; Shehabuddin 1999, 1014; Fernandez-Kelly 2000, 1109; Fernandez-Kelly and Wolf 2001, 1244; Williams 2002, 101; Huisman and Hondagneu-Soletto 2005, 45; Yea 2005, 459; Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 49). Conflicting dual narratives run alongside each other here, telling of a problem either resolved or recalcitrant, but operating in both cases to legitimise the approach in question, whether this is framed as compliance with a normative trend towards greater analytical sophistication, or as a contribution to an as yet inadequate effort to eradicate depictions of women as ‘passive victims’. Note from the dates of publication of the references listed here that these narratives are indeed contemporaneous through the entire survey period. This

---

<sup>5</sup> For a convincing critique of the reluctance of academic feminists to name men’s domination as the source of women’s oppression, see Thompson (2001, 55ff.) Thompson’s arguments resonate strongly with those presented here. She notes that the objection to universalism and generalisation seems to operate only when it is the pervasiveness of patriarchy at issue (Thompson 2001, 56). This objection to universalism is transferred (for Thompson, illogically) to a critique of victimhood on the grounds that it is monolithic and inevitable (Thompson 2001, 57).



leads to the paradox whereby Fraser (1987, 116) and Thorne (1987, 88), on the one hand, were comfortable over twenty years ago in asserting, respectively, broad feminist suspicion of a focus on passive victimhood and the *fait accompli* of feminist revisioning of women as active subjects, and on the other, writers note well into the most recent decade that the presentation of women as ‘passive victims’ is an ongoing tendency which we need to ‘move beyond’ (Yea 2005, 459; Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 49). In all cases, of course, the ‘passive victim’ remains *persona non grata*.

Two points assert themselves here. Firstly, the internal contradictions here problematise the foundations of feminism’s teleological account of its own progress towards a more sophisticated knowledge of women’s behaviour under conditions of oppression. If recent writings still figure as a risk that which for the past two decades was thought to be comprehensively despatched, then we are driven to question just what evidence there is for the existence of such troublesome tendencies in feminist theorising, and at precisely what stage these manifested themselves. After all, these supposed inadequacies are often referred to in very general terms and their existence rarely supported by appeal to actual examples. Secondly, the fact that feminists are so anxious to distance themselves from these perceived inadequacies, even though the evidence of their existence is sketchy, suggests that such disclaimers carry a peculiar potency. They must be made, whether the historical contours of feminist thinking seem to warrant them or not, and feminists seem to know that. What the writer appears to think is an obvious requirement must also be perceived as such by the reader, for whom this apparent obviousness naturalises the random inclusion of these disclaimers. There is an important scholastic investment here. The positioning of an analysis within the teleological understanding of feminism’s passage from the so-called ‘woman-as-victim’ approach to that which is intent on recovering women’s agency emerges as a primary dimension by which it is judged, and the message is obvious – on no account allow your analysis to be evaluated in terms which would spell its immediate invalidation. As McDermott (1994, 124) has shown, this is a form of discipline which has real consequences, since journal editors and reviewers appear to apply this mode of evaluation at the preliminary stages of article selection. Within the survey data as well, Bhavnani (1993, 98) proposes that the question of whether an analysis will present the researched as ‘passive victims or as deviant’ is the *first* one that must be

answered before a project is undertaken, since to do so risks reinscribing dominant assumptions of powerlessness. What is neglected here is the extent to which feminist repulsion of the 'passive victim', especially as its definition and the purposes to which it is put are fairly elastic, risks replicating anti-feminist assertions about personal responsibility as a mechanism for erasing the need to address structural injustice.

The complex interpretive skills needed by feminists to navigate the meaning frameworks in which their work is produced and read are tellingly invoked when Park (1997, 36) states that an appropriate feminist philosophical response to *any* feminist issue '[needs] to be careful not to portray victims as mere victims, devoid of agency'. A little further on, she reminds us that 'victims of abuse and oppression are not mere victims but, indeed, agents with cognitive abilities and complex, sometimes unconscious, sometimes falsely conscious interests of their own [...]' To readers without an ability to differentiate between the semiotics of real victims suffering actual abuse, and paradigmatic 'mere victims', these statements would be completely nonsensical, and I suggest that the facility with which 'victims' and 'mere victims' are made to point to the same referent here makes these particularly potent examples of a distinction which is verging on unsustainable. By that I mean that these statements constitute an especially tough test of our skills at maintaining textual coherence. The concurrence across feminist theory of referential and paradigmatic invocations of the 'victim' already points to questionable assumptions about the reliability of the rules of application, but here we are asked to accept the possibility, even the inevitability (since we 'need to be careful'), of two different signifiers bearing quite contradictory meanings being applied to the *same* individuals by the *same* writers. Here we need to close quite a substantial interpretive gap, suppressing the obvious question of how it is that the same referent can slide so easily from acknowledged 'victim' to denigrated 'mere victim'. This is especially so as the text gives us no reliable grounds on which to distinguish between these two categories of victim, even in its own localised context. Indeed, it only compounds the confusion since, just as with the 'passive victim', here the category of 'mere victim' emerges as an ever-present threat of entrapment, though at the same time curiously impossible to fill, since the cognitive complexity which for Park is the mark of the 'victim' includes consciousness, unconsciousness and false consciousness, leaving the 'mere victim' as unimaginable non-subjectivity. There are patent

logical slippages here, but the text persists against them to maintain the existence of dual categories and our recognition of them, even when opportunities abound to contest the assumed necessity of constituting a separate object known as ‘mere victim’. Instead, the task as proposed here – for feminist philosophy in general (see also Park 1997, 43) – is to check what is seen, despite obvious logical problems, as the natural confusion between ‘victims’ and ‘mere victims’.

#### **5.4 The power of representation: victimhood as fiction**

As is evident from Park’s (1997) recommendations, and indeed in many of the examples discussed so far, a particular focus for feminists where victimhood is concerned devolves upon issues of representation, specifically the need to avoid constructing women as victims. This anxiety over representation often comes at the expense of attending to the reality of victimisation, more precisely to the complex intersubjective processes by which victim claims come to be collectively evaluated, substantiated, and recognised as objectively valid within a knowledge community. The anxiety persists even (or especially) when oppression is simultaneously remarked, since bearing witness to women’s subordinate status is considered to expose women unavoidably to the risk of sliding from the status of compassion-provoking ‘real’ victim to repulsive paradigmatic ‘victim’. Therefore, the representation of women as victims becomes less an activist instrument of epistemic intervention, whereby women’s experience of oppression is publicly rendered and reframed as a challenge to the hegemonic refusal to acknowledge their subordinated status, than a direct contradiction of feminist aims. Victim representations are thus discretionary, able and needing to be avoided, not an imperative which the indisputability of sexual inequality presses upon us. The implication is that such depictions impose false impressions of women on others and themselves that do not square with the real options available to them. This rupture of the connection between articulations of victimhood and the materiality of oppressive conditions allows the paradigmatic victim to assume a fictive or symbolic status, whose potency dictates that priority is given to what ‘images’, ‘narratives’, or ‘constructions’ feminists should use, as if these can operate independently of what is understood to be objectively real about victimisation.

I do not mean to dispute the power of discursive practices to produce subjectivities, but I do question the relegation of the 'victim' to the fictive realm, where the label comes to signify an imaginary figure. As such, it is divested of its political charge and excluded from the space of discursive negotiation where lived experience can be the origin as well as the product of linguistic formation. My use of quote marks here mimics the way they are sometimes used in the surveyed articles to accomplish that relegation (e.g. Dutt, cited in Flew et al. 1999, 394; Bondi and Burman 2001, 22-3; Threadgold 2006, 235; Bahar 2003, 1039; Long, cited in Flint 2006, 517; Roberts and Fraser 2002, 224). The quote marks have the effect of implying that victims as referents do not exist – victims exist only at the level of the signified, and what is signified is exclusively conceptual and imagistic. For example, in Doezema's (2001) critique of Western feminist campaigns against sex-trafficking which highlight bodily suffering, she uses variously throughout her discussion, and always enclosed in quote marks, 'third world prostitutes', 'third world trafficking victim', 'trafficking victim', 'injured third world prostitute', 'third world prostitutes' suffering bodies', 'suffering third world prostitute', and 'third world prostitute/suffering victim', to signify the reified, fictive status of the image of the third world prostitute as victim. According to her, these images are used as symbols of wider abuses suffered by women in general (Doezema 2001, 18, 32), and as such, she invalidates their application to actual, individual referents. In contrast, she uses the term 'third world sex workers' without quote marks, from which we must presume that this expression is unproblematically referential. Doezema also locates 'injuries' throughout at the level of the textual and quotable, rather than the experiential. Although this is explainable in part by her deployment here of Wendy Brown's (1995) concept of injured identity and its inadequacy for challenging dominant structures, and as such, entextualises Brown's arguments, it confines the concept of injury to the realm of the symbolic and leaves us with no vocabulary for talking about actual physical suffering that stems directly from subordinating practices.

Andrijasevic (2007, 42; see also 27, 38, 40, 41) takes a similar critical view of anti-sex trafficking campaigns in post-socialist Europe, leaning heavily on the way images of victimised women reify women as Woman within a 'highly disabling symbolic register' by '[severing] the body from its materiality and from the historical context in which trafficking occurs'. Some of the images Andrijasevic has reproduced in the text do depict stylised

forms of injury, but because they are defined on that basis as quintessentially images of victimisation, because stylisation is seen as isomorphic with representing victimhood, we are left with the problem of how to convey realities of suffering without this being situated within the fictive<sup>6</sup>. And to share Andrijasevic's (2007, 28) objection to the lack of 'narrative progression' in the 'plot' told by the text accompanying the images on the basis that it implies (wrongly) that migration ends in immobility and entrapment is to assume that this is never the outcome of women's migratory aspirations.

There is also a double standard in relation to the way 'narratives' or 'constructions' of victimhood are understood compared with accounts that foreground women's agency. While the focus on agency is recognised as having a constructive capacity – indeed, that provides the rationale for preferring it to victim representations, which are believed to have such negative impacts on women's self-image – these two modes of representation can occupy different epistemic statuses in feminist theory. In keeping with the fictional nature of the victim paradigm, the construction of women as victims is seen to be a distorting or 'untrue' portrayal of women's experience, capable of obscuring the 'truth' that women's reserves of agency are always already there. In that sense, agency is more likely to figure as a sort of unmediated, pre-social fund of capability from which representations of victimhood subtract, and focusing on agency is rarely considered as an exercise in construction or narrative framing, and especially not as posing a risk to our ability to perceive correctly the existence of victimisation (but see Sweeney 2004, 474; (outside the survey data) Mahoney 1994, 62; more ambivalently, Minow 1993, 1427). Although it is recognised that the forms of expression that agency can take are conditioned by specific constraints, it nevertheless appears as an unquantifiably positive absolute, and the constraints less as forces of limitation than productive of particular opportunities for resistance. When the internal drivers of agentic behaviour are seen as unproblematically authentic and unmediated ways of acting in and on the world – agency as a 'sense' or natural 'quality' (e.g. Warner 2004, 501; Lister, cited in R. Mason 2007, 306; R. Mason

---

<sup>6</sup> This as also a problem in Grenz's (2001, 142) report of some feminists' aversion to the use of the term 'slavery' in the context of sex trafficking. She admits that it can convey the impact of bodily commodification, but 'it can also signify a fetishization of victimhood'. Here the fact of victimhood is seen as naturally predisposed to being fetishised, but it is as much our failure to open the concept of victimhood to greater complexity and fragmentation that underpins that predisposition. If the concept of victimhood is eminently fetishisable, then it has to be asked how much the insistence that representations of victimisation function only symbolically works to realise rather than simply reflect that state of affairs.

2007, 306) – self-identification as a victim is seen as the delusional failure to perceive available possibilities for agency, as the concealment of innate capacity by the fiction of victimhood.

Accordingly, Helms (2003, 16) posits as a problem the fact that ‘the construction of women in Bosnia [...] as passive victims of nationalism, wartime rape, and expulsion has remained largely intact’, a problem which her ‘exploration’ of Bosnian women’s ‘*active participation*’ (emphasis in original) will ‘complicate and illuminate’. And Flew et al. (1999, 398) see the construction of women everywhere as victims of universalised oppression as hampering our ‘understanding’ of the specificities of women’s resistant tactics, understanding which can be enhanced by ‘[considering] the meanings women make for themselves [...]’. In these examples, attention to agency is construed as that which will correct the misapprehensions installed by constructions of victimhood, and the field of ‘agency’ is assumed to be uncomplicatedly open to neutral interrogation. For Flew et al., although women must negotiate different oppressions and their conflicting allegiances to feminism and tradition, they make meanings ‘for themselves’, meanings which seem to spring here authentically and spontaneously from a space beyond social mediation, unlike those generated by victim representations. Logic demands that these meanings do not include self-identification as victims (a self-made meaning which is in any case not endowed with the same authenticity). Similarly, Mackie (2005, 211) describes Japanese feminists’ historical investigations into women’s experience in Japan from the late nineteenth century thus: ‘This group tried to go beyond narratives of victimhood and came to see women as complicit in supporting the actions of a militarist and imperialist government [...]’. Here, what these feminists ‘came to see’ is positioned as that which is discoverable in an immediate and incontestable way, and which has hitherto been concealed by a distorting ‘narrative’.

Finally, Patton and O’Sullivan (1990, 126) discuss the role of fantasy in adult women’s framings of ‘child sexual experiences’ as abuse, and their consequent claiming of victimhood. Although they stress the role of interpretation in articulating these memories – which theoretically leaves us able to view interpretations not based around victimhood as simply alternative constructions – it is the veracity of victim claims which is seen as much more open to doubt. These claims are viewed as the response (overly) encouraged by

feminists, they result from the failure to understand the interpretive control it is possible to have over past events, and we should not assume that they are ‘really true’. In the observation that ‘child sexual experiences are *rewritten* as narratives of victimization’ (emphasis added), ‘rewritten’ suggests an erasure of the truth (registered as the flat neutrality of ‘sexual experiences’) and a fictionalising of the past, where simply ‘written’ would suggest that all accounts of experience are in part constructed. Here, and in the above examples, the ‘constructions’ and ‘narratives’ of victimhood signify untruth where alternative accounts indicate greater enlightenment, and there is little acknowledgement of the social and discursive factors which authorise different framings, nor of the inter-subjective processes on which the recognition of shared ‘truths’ depends<sup>7</sup>.

That victim narratives belong to a fictional terrain is also implied by its frequently being said that these accounts ‘cast’ or place women in the ‘role’ of victim (e.g. Gangoli 2006, 536; Helms 2003, 27; Gilmore 2003, 706; Lau 2003, 369; Morley 1992, 523; Freeman 2001, 1015). And the fictional status of these accounts is made quite explicit by Chow (1999) in her objections to Susan Gubar’s (1998) critique of the enthusiasm in the academy for difference politics and its fragmentation of ‘woman’ as the grounding subject of feminism. At the risk of not giving due account of Chow’s cogent arguments, her discussion involves a demonstration of the way several fictional texts (Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, and Duras’ *Hiroshima mon amour*) adhere to similar narrative models, all of which function to confirm patriarchal and/or white superiority, either by eliminating the complication presented by the racialised ‘other’ woman, or by relegating non-white culture to the ‘semiotic ghetto’ of an opaque realism which is not worthy of attempts at radical disruption (Chow 1999, 160). Via this analysis, she accuses Gubar of attempting to monopolise victimhood for white women as part of a denial of their participation in the racist annihilation of the ‘other’ and their reincorporation into the status quo. Chow’s delegitimation of Gubar’s position depends in part on the positioning of Gubar’s account as fiction – a Victorian ‘tale’, a narrative about feminist criticism that is merely a variation on ‘the morphology of fictional elements’ Chow (1999, 163) has been discussing. Whilst it is true that Gubar (1998) herself recognises the role of construction in

---

<sup>7</sup> In the ‘passive victims’ dataset, Ezekiel (2005, 240; 2006, 270), Samuelson (2007, 845), Griffin (1997, 18), Bahar (1996, 120), Fraser (1987, 116), and Danner et al. (1999, 255) are also examples of this epistemological double standard: the fictional status of ‘victimhood’ in contrast to the revealed truth of ‘agency’.

her own historiography of feminist criticism, which she describes as a ‘turn-of-the-century melodrama’ (878), a ‘story’ or ‘tale’ (881), Chow firmly locates Gubar’s entire argument in the realm, not just of the interpretive, but of the fabricated as opposed to the real.

The rupture of the connection between the real, and representation as a project of producing the intelligibility of the real, allows a reversal to take place – representations of victimhood become a more compelling problem for women than identifiable, worldly oppression, and the question of what constitutes actual victimisation is displaced to the sphere of representation which begins to function as a proxy for the real. Therefore, when Rogoff (1992, unpaginated), announces the aim of her approach to exploring the life of artist Gabriele Munter as being ‘to unframe [Munter] from the constraints of victimhood’, we must read into ‘the constraints of victimhood’ that which has been elided: that the constraints referred to are those imposed by the usual representations of Munter as a victim of inadequate public affirmation compared to her partner Kandinsky, not the constraints which define the actual condition of being a victim (for Rogoff does allow that ‘it is entirely clear that she suffered greatly both in her relation to Kandinsky and in her rejection by Kandinsky’). The constraints imposed as a function of representation are referred to as if they are actually felt by Munter, and this collapse of the actual into the representational (unsurprising when Rogoff has ‘set [herself] the task of reading Munter as a discursive field’) is expressed as a project of ‘de-victimizing the Munter narrative’. Similarly, Andrijasevic (2007, 26) refers to the pictorial representation of bodily suffering used in anti-trafficking campaigns as ‘victimizing images’, and Cockburn (2000, 374) praises the book she is reviewing for ‘carefully [avoiding] ‘re-victimizing’ women’. In these examples, it is images or books that are directly victimising, rather than the events whose victimising effects they might potentially seek to represent (cf. *supra* 78 note 9).

The terminology of victimisation is co-opted in these cases, neutralising attempts to articulate material and physical constraint and relocating the real source of victimisation in these very articulations. To appreciate this reversal, we must overlook the paradox of what is being asserted – on the one hand, the invalidity of representing or articulating the original victimhood (a representation which is discretionary) and, on the other, the irreducibility of the secondary victimisation constituted by the effects of these representations. Encouraging us to denounce victim representations because they produce victims, or ‘re-victimise’,



paradoxically assumes that we are willing to prioritise victimhood, at least in this secondary form, as demanding resolution. Furthermore, these co-opting usages tend to conflate a number of different and unexplained senses in which images or narratives are to be understood as ‘victimizing’. Firstly, they accomplish a kind of shorthand conflation, firstly of the fact that these are images of women as victims and, secondly, of the view that they do harm – they *render* women as victims in the double sense of depiction and causing to become. And they cause women to become victims in several ways. They produce subjectivities in the Foucauldian sense, providing the framework within which women are able to identify themselves as victims in a broad sense (see Morley 1992, 523). This identification can also lead to specific self-restricting behaviours, where women can be seen as actual victims of the fear created by such images (e.g. Andrijasevic 2007, 26). Lastly, it is sometimes suggested that these representations do not only produce flow-on, residual effects which are damaging but nonetheless distinct from the original images, but they utilise the *same* associations for constructing women’s gendered bodies, and replicate the *same* harms, as the oppressive system these images are meant to challenge.

Thus, Andrijasevic (2007, 34ff.) objects to the use of the trope of the doll to depict the dehumanisation of being trafficked for sex, claiming that it locates the female body as the object of male voyeurism and reproduces ‘part of the patriarchal repertoire of Western culture’ which fantasises women’s malleability (Andrijasevic 2007, 38). According to this argument, all representation of women’s experience seems prone to immobilise ‘women’ as ‘Woman’ in symbolic orders not of their own making. This poses a problem for the translatability of women’s lived reality, one which Andrijasevic does not attempt to resolve. Andrijasevic (2007, 38) affirms that the images under discussion ‘do not convey so much the resemblance between ‘woman as experience’ and ‘woman and representation’ but rather [...] display the distance between the two’, a distance that, it is implied, can never be adequately crossed. Nevertheless her objections to these ‘victimizing images’ are themselves premised on a collapsing of that distance. They presuppose a parity of effects resulting from the representation of a phenomenon and the reality of that phenomenon. We might ordinarily assume that depicting or talking *about* a phenomenon occurs within a context and at a meta-level which are distinguishable from that where the phenomenon actually happens. However, for Andrijasevic, these images actually participate in the

production of that phenomenon in a way that is indistinguishable from its production in reality, and by utilising the same meaning systems which produce its subordinating effects in the real. In other words, the claim is that, in representing the damage done to the female body by sexual commodification, these images eroticise it in exactly the same way as it is eroticised within the voyeuristic practices of that commodifying system itself.

Her objections to these images are grounded in the assertion that '[the] representation of violence is thus itself violent' (Andrijasevic 2007, 42) and she displaces the responsibility for the 'wounding' of the trafficked body onto a style of representation which '*severs the body from its materiality*' (emphasis added). To make these claims, she must collapse any contextual differences between images produced in anti-trafficking campaigns, and as objects of male voyeurism (differences of motivation, intention, expected audience, methods of production and distribution, and the power structures within which that occurs). This enables her to equate actual violence and represented violence as identical in their effects. But if these differences are collapsible, if such images can be decontextualised, then her own reproduction of these images within the article might also be susceptible to the same complaint. Intuitively, we can see that this would not be reasonable – many analytical endeavours would be stymied if it were. But, to explain this intuition *and* accept Andrijasevic's argument about 'victimizing images', we would need to be able to answer questions about how the relationship between reality and representation allows one form of representation (within academic analysis) to appear as a relatively innocent rendition of an extra-textual reality and another more likely to reinforce the damaging effects it seeks to eradicate<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> Note that Brown (1995, 90ff.) made an argument similar to Andrijasevic's about MacKinnon's discussion of pornography, claiming that it rhetorically replicated pornography's effects by a process Brown (1995, 91) called 'the stylistic mirroring of its subject of critique'. Brown (1995, 90) pointed to the overstimulation produced by the 'pounding quality' and 'rhythmic pulses' of MacKinnon's rhetorical style and sentence structures, and accused MacKinnon of proffering her analysis 'as substitute for the sex she abuses us for wanting' (Brown 1995, 91). The issue of replicating images and/or text in the service of both academic arguments and activist protests is obviously complicated, but the point here is that bracketing Andrijasevic's reproductions – or indeed, Brown's (1995, 90) quoting of substantial excerpts from MacKinnon's prose for the *purpose* of demonstrating its pornographic character – from the problem does not resolve that complication. Nor does positing representation as either completely divorced from reality (as the symbolic images are claimed to be), or collapsed with it in terms of being able to produce comparable effects to the real (by eroticising women's bodies in the *same* way that prostitution does). The implication of both Brown's and Andrijasevic's arguments is that talking about/representing violence can participate in that violence, while talking about the 'talking about' does not, a distinction which may be unsustainable.

So potent is the power of the ‘victimising’ narrative seen to be that women need to be rescued from such representations. For Haag (1996, 61), this is accomplished best by the intricacy of poststructuralist approaches:

In reaction against the perceived rigidity and two-dimensionality of second-wave feminism, poststructuralists take the discursive invention of the body as a means to rescue the victim, or potential victim, from the sentimentality evident in statements of women’s ‘essential’ vulnerability or psychic susceptibility go acts of violence.

Here the conditions from which the victim needs rescue are not material or cultural, but those created by second-wave essentialist statements about women. In fact, poststructuralist interventions operate as pre-emptive strikes – they rescue women who are not yet victims, but only ‘potential [victims]’, since the ‘victim’ comes into being only by virtue of the sorts of representations poststructuralism will have already displaced. Contrast the honourable status accorded to *this* form of rescue with the criticism reserved for those who seek to intervene on behalf of women perceived to be directly endangered by patriarchal cultural practices. In those cases, the positioning of the victim by her advocates as in need of rescue is considered integral to the objectification of women as passive and helpless, a construction seen moreover to serve imperialist ends (e.g. Doezema 2001, 17; Thapar-Björkert and Ryan 2002, 306; Mankekar 1997, 26; Overs and Druce 1994, 120; Choo 2006, 579). The realisation of victimisation no longer functions to initiate a liberatory trajectory, but has become that from which women need to be liberated.

Indeed, the effects of victim representations are seen as so disabling and the label itself as constitutive of such pathological subjectivities that the term ‘survivor’ is often preferred, especially in the areas of rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Where ‘victim’ signifies passivity and entrapment in a one-dimensional identity, ‘survivor’ captures women’s active efforts to resist or come to terms with abuse. The labels are mutually exclusive – one is not normally described as both a victim and a survivor (Warner 2001, 131; Bahar 2003, 1025<sup>9</sup>) since, despite the fact that these two sets of individuals are

---

<sup>9</sup> Bahar cites Mahoney’s (1994) essay to support her observation that the feminist movement against domestic violence and abuse has substituted ‘survivor’ for ‘victim’ in order to foreground women’s agency and ‘[challenge] the image of the passive battered woman’. The lack of a precise reference risks giving the impression that Mahoney’s whole essay is devoted to endorsing this move. In fact, Mahoney (1994, 64) makes only one mention of ‘survivors’, and this is at the point where she does indeed note this terminological trend in domestic violence advocacy. But the thrust of Mahoney’s essay is rather the need to contest the dichotomisation of victimisation and agency in cultural and legal interpretations (see especially 62, 64). She points out that current conceptualisations of agency as being ‘*without oppression*’ (64; emphasis in original) can reinforce societal denial of subordination and prohibit women who see themselves as actors from

the same in terms of the victimisation they have experienced, they are assigned quite opposite psychologies (e.g. Gunn 1998, 179; Fernandes 1997, 544; Warren 2003, 679; Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 665; Menon 2006, 38; Marstine 2002, 639; Alcoff and Gray 1993, 261-2).

Sometimes the dichotomy is rationalised from a temporal perspective, because the ‘victim’ transforms herself into a ‘survivor’ according to a narrative of transition and progress (e.g. Gunn 1998, 179<sup>10</sup>; Alcoff and Gray 1993, 261-2; Menon 2006, 39; Warren 2003, 679; Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 665; for a meta-commentary on this rationale from outside the survey data, see Dunn 2005, 15). So, when Alcoff and Gray (1993, 261-2, emphasis added) note that speaking out about abuse serves to ‘empower victims to act constructively on *our* own behalf and thus make *the* transition from passive victim to active survivor’, they posit this transition as a normative model of self-actualisation, approved by the collective in which the reader is specifically included. They also semantically anchor the notion of victimhood to a state of pre-empowerment, and imply a threshold of empowerment beyond which victimhood is expunged. Thus, although the portrayal of victimised women as ‘survivors’ is considered as ‘essential for a progressive feminist politics’ (Menon 2006, 38), the fact that rigid dichotomies tend to inform the adoption of this terminology mean that it has not improved our understanding of the experience of victimisation ((outside the survey data) Gavey 1999, 78), and may have colluded with the backlash in denying the impact of oppression ((outside the survey data) Lamb 1999, 120; Mahoney 1994, 59).

The ways the two terms are used assume that particular interpretive frameworks are in place and readily deployable by skilled readers, so that each term will either be read as natural where it occurs, or call on the reader to actively naturalise it using their knowledge of the objectively recognisable understandings that inform it. The most noticeable difference between the two modes of usage, apart from the obviously contrasting

---

identifying their experience as connected to wider practices of oppression (62). Indeed, her essay practices the sort of rhetorical reinscription that is needed in relation to victimhood, since she uses the term ‘victim’ exclusively throughout her essay even in focusing on the myriad ways women exercise agency whilst living with domestic violence.

<sup>10</sup> Gunn (1998, 179) expresses this as ‘victimhood’ being transformed into ‘survivorship’, and the assignment of different suffixes to the two labels is instructive. The suffix ‘-hood’ indicates a static property, while ‘-ship’ denotes a property that is not static but rather a stage that the individual passes into/through (Aronoff and Cho (2001, 172-3). Accordingly, we understand the ‘survivor’ as engaged in a dynamic process of self-reconstitution.

connotations, is that ‘survivor’ is generally used referentially and without quote marks, except in cases where the usage itself is being discussed or its application actively contested (e.g. Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1993, 237; Goodey 2004, 34; Bahar 2003, 1026; Bondi and Burman 2001, 22-3). This signals assumptions about the lack of political investment in using ‘survivor’. As a rhetorical practice, it is an effort to make ‘real’ women’s natural status as agents, to entrench their agency in the realm of the uncomplicatedly referential in contrast to the object ‘victim’, which slides so easily towards the fictional and symbolic. Where readers are required to maintain dual sets of interpretive skills which allow them to differentiate paradigmatic from denotative references to the ‘victim’, no such requirement exists in the case of the ‘survivor’ category.

A potent example of these assumptions about the uncomplicated nature of ‘survivor’ terminology is Alcoff and Gray’s (1993) discussion of the potential for the confessions of abuse ‘survivors’ to operate subversively as intended, or to be recuperated by dominant discourses. The title of their article – ‘Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?’ – contains at first hand a fundamental ambiguity, at least for someone taking, as I am, a meta-critical posture towards the rhetoric technologies of our theory. One interpretation is that ‘survivor discourse’ refers to a discourse that utilises ‘survivor’ rather than ‘victim’ to talk about those who have experienced abuse. This interpretation seems especially credible in view of the question posed by the title, since it could certainly be applied to the issue of whether that discursive substitution lives up to its intent to transform disempowerment, or whether it confirms anti-feminist reluctance to recognise women’s victim status. This reading of the title phrase is in fact in line with the way Dunn (2005) used exactly the same phrase throughout her analysis of the transition from one usage to the other amongst domestic violence activists. However, it is soon clear that this is not what Alcoff and Gray (1993, 261; *emphasis added*) have in view – they are talking instead of ‘the discourse *of* those who have survived rape, incest, and sexual assault’. This ambiguity signals that the way in which Alcoff and Gray (1993) use ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ in their discussion cannot be viewed as devoid of political implications for both feminist politics and relations amongst feminists themselves.

This title, heralding as it does the authors’ cautionary discussion about the potential reframing of abuse victim/survivor accounts by expert discourses, implies an assurance that

their own discussion would avoid any such discursive recuperation. Indeed, they confirm their premise to be that speech acts do not operate autonomously in the discursive arenas into which they enter, being instead subject to the power relations and systems of meaning which are already at play in those arenas, and which shape the context and reception of all speech (Alcoff and Gray 1993, 265). However, despite this awareness being central to their argument, Alcoff and Gray themselves draw on a dominant discourse which is not value-free, reinscribing its problematic distinction between victims and survivors. Their rhetorical de-preferencing of the status of 'victim' thus performs its own recuperative work, annulling the transgressive potential that the terminology of victimisation has to name the source and effects of power. Just as expert discourses reinterpret the personal stories of abuse 'survivors', Alcoff and Gray reframe this process as a contest between the women's status as agentic 'survivors' and therapeutic interventions that attempt to turn them into passive 'victims': 'The survivors are reduced to victims, represented as pathetic objects who can only recount their experiences, and who offer pitiable instantiations of the universal truths the experts reveal' (1993, 277). It is one thing to object to the co-option of women's self-expression by expert discourses, but it is quite another to object on the grounds that this 'reduces' these women to victims, and pitiable and pathetic ones at that. The effect in these programs may certainly be to portray the 'confessing' women as passive recipients of therapeutic intervention in a way that denies their agency and complex subjectivity, but it is Alcoff and Gray who draw on the discourse of victimhood to characterise this as a diminution which is isomorphic with victim status. As readers, we have no way of knowing what terminology was used in situ to represent the women – victims, survivors, or neither. We are at the mercy of the authors' mediation of the raw scenario, so we must align our view with theirs as they organise the material for us. As it happens, they organise it according to a dominant interpretive schema, and one to which they expect the reader to respond in a way that will reinforce the sense of risk they are seeking to associate with the confessional process.

While it is true that Alcoff and Gray use both terms referentially in the course of their discussion, the distribution and context of these usages illustrates the way theoretical discourse works to embed certain frameworks of intelligibility. Firstly, they show a clear preference for 'survivor' over 'victim', the former occurring over five times more than the

latter. Secondly, 'victim' is reserved for contexts where it is set in opposition to 'perpetrator' (e.g. 265, 267, 273, 274), applied to those with psychological disorders (e.g. 277), or associated with passivity and helplessness (e.g. 262, 268, 281), diminishment and objectification (e.g. 277), or reification (e.g. 284). In contrast, 'survivor' is aligned with empowerment, autonomy and self-expression (e.g. 282, 283, 284). Alcoff and Gray make particular terminological choices in a discursive context that has already constructed 'victim' and 'survivor' with certain connotations, and their discourse does nothing to disrupt that. This is despite the fact that, from the authorial standpoint, 'victim' and 'survivor' apply to the same set of referents at a similar moment: women telling their stories of abuse in the confessional format of television talk shows, or confronting the psychiatric establishment. Therefore, the differential usage does not signal either a difference in individuals' responses to victimisation or different stages of a single individual's response<sup>11</sup>.

Despite the fact that abuse victims themselves self-describe as 'survivors' – as indeed do Alcoff and Gray (1993, 261) – this should not prevent us from interrogating the conditions under which such choices are made, especially as the premise of Alcoff and Gray's (1993) own argument is our lack of complete discursive autonomy. Although it is possible to conceive of making the radical and politically conscious choice to self-proclaim as a 'victim', the contemporary feminist theoretical climate is not one which is hospitable to that choice. Moreover, the speech acts that constitute feminist theoretical production insert themselves not just into the discursive arena circumscribed as feminist scholarship, but into an incalculably wider field of meaning generation and regulation. Thus, Alcoff and Gray's preference for 'survivor' and their use of its coding to support a narrative of progress and empowerment thwarted by institutionalised power which seeks to re-domesticate 'survivors' as 'victims' cannot be seen as having relevance only within the comparatively controlled context of feminist strategising. Our acceptance of the

---

<sup>11</sup> One example is particularly illustrative of the arbitrariness of this differential usage: 'We are not arguing that (nonsurvivor) experts cannot contribute to the empowerment and recovery of survivors' (Alcoff and Gray 1993, 284). Here the 'non' prefix draws a distinction between experts who have no direct experience of being victimised and the abused women who are subject to their intervention. That is, the distinction occurs at the moment of being victimised, not during the temporally unspecific period of 'survival'. However, 'nonsurvivor' is needed to balance the reference to 'survivors' (itself required by the focus on empowerment and recovery), and thus to avoid exposing the artificiality of the semantic differentiation between 'victims' and 'survivors'.

devaluation of the 'passive victim' and of the approval of the self-reliant 'active survivor' who '[acts] constructively on [her] own behalf' (Alcoff and Gray 1993, 261) draws its authorisation from whatever interpretive frameworks will facilitate that acceptance, and that includes anti-feminist discourses that deny the existence of power inequalities by appealing to the 'survivor' in all of us. These terms are not neutral, and Alcoff and Gray's (1993) choice of terminology is a loaded one, despite its presumed straightforwardness.

This invention of an alternative vocabulary or mode of referral is a social act that brings into view the community whose members share the skills to join in a concerted recognition of the same object. Smith's (1999, 122) comments on the production of new terminologies are here instructive:

Recognising the sequential grammar of identifying objects enables us to see how the social act of naming and referring brings into being the basis of community, as well as the potential for its destruction: an established 'terminology' could not survive a confrontation with what it could not properly name; [...] in the dissolution of a socially constituted object, the subjects who have been its sustaining community are put in jeopardy.

The adoption of 'survivor' can be read as a response to the confrontation of the terminology of the 'victim' with what it could not properly name – the victim who acts agentially, and whose behaviour registers a complex mix of impact and recovery. The established terminology consists of the sorts of connotations which we have shown to be inextricably linked to the concept of the 'victim'. These connotations have been marshalled within a discourse of victimhood which exists before and outside of each of the textual references we have reread and enumerated here; the 'victim' has been given 'prior discursive shape' (Smith 1999, 121) and each of these references is a local instantiation of the dialogue between that discourse and the individual textual moment of writing or reading, which Smith (1990, 163; 1999, 232 note 2) calls 'textually mediated discourse'.

My premise is that this prior shape may have been formed by what the reader knows from her previous encounters with similar references within feminist writing (depending on how many), but assuredly by the broader discourse of 'political correctness' which is part of the 'heteroglossia of society', the 'debris of meaning' (Smith 1999, 133) which gets tracked into discursive environments far removed from the site of origin. The substitution of 'survivor' for 'victim' is, following Smith, not a change which is limited to the terminological, but one which re-forms social relations. It re-constitutes and re-unifies the feminist community in the process of resolving the contradiction between the 'victim' as



routinely defined and the empirical evidence of the agency of oppressed women to which that definition cannot be applied. The resolution takes the form of the provision of two distinct objects of discourse, and the community of feminism expresses its unity in the practised deployment and recognition of ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ in their appropriate contexts. The cohesion of the community which comes together in these acts of recognition is no longer threatened by the confusion produced by the apprehension of unnameable objects (victims who are agents), and by having to confront the failure of its own discursive resources to account for all the objects the community purports to know.

### **5.5 Victimhood and subjectivity: representation as objectification**

The anxiety about representing women as victims and the resulting institution of alternative vocabularies flow directly from the certainty that such representations objectify women. The notion of objectification appears to be applied in two ways. Firstly, to represent as a victim is to represent literally as the object of violence or oppression – as ‘being done to [...]’ (Morley 1992, 523). Secondly, objectification is assumed to occur by virtue of the attributes which are essentialised as part of the definition of the symbolic victim – passivity, fixity, lack of complexity, and importantly, lack of subjectivity, or at least of a subjectivity which is not ‘hobbled’ or ‘distortive’ (Haag 1996, 60, 61; see also Andrijasevic 2007, 26; Mankekar 1997, 45, 54; Steinberg 2000, 148; Williams 2002, 102, 113; Flew et al. 1999, 398; Lau 2003, 378; Gilmore 2003, 707; Warren 2003, 679; Bacigalupo 2003, 51; Park 1997, 37; McCormick 1993, 660 and note 23; Danner et al. 1999, 255; Choo 2006, 579; Alcoff and Gray 1993, 277). These two sources of objectification are quite distinct, but tend to be conflated so as to be mutually legitimating, as we see if we complete Morley’s (1992, 523) remark – drawing attention to women’s subordination portrays them as ‘being done to/controlled/sealed up and stopped’. Defining victimhood in terms of being the target or object of oppression is intuitively reasonable, but it provides a basis on which to claim that victim representations construct a dichotomy between victim-objects and perpetrator-subjects (Flew et al. 1999, 398) and so to slide from conceptualising the victim as an object in the literal sense of being a target to being an object in the metaphysical sense of being a non-subject.

This has important ramifications for defining who can be included within the subjectivities feminists purport to represent, and the ‘circle of shared subjectivity’ (Smith 1999, 151) which is assumed to constitute the broad readership of feminist academic output. The desire to avoid objectifying women is surely well-meant, but it must be understood as a function of the unquestioning acceptance of the unchangeability of the concept of the victim, and as premised moreover on the certainty, the *absolute* certainty, that no woman wants to identify or be identified as a victim. If that certainty has not been established as absolute, then feminism has left itself open to charges of obvious exclusiveness. That is indeed the charge brought in this thesis, but the point here is that feminists consider themselves immune to that possibility, and that they have created a theoretical space which works to secure them against that view by positing the association of victimhood and subjectivity as contradictory. The semantic and rhetorical patterns in contemporary feminist theory have eradicated all space in which the fully-fledged subject might assert her victim status and be recognised as agentic, cognisant and multi-faceted. Labelling women as victims is seen as tantamount to positioning them as ignorant, irrational, unwitting, uneducated, or not fully conscious (e.g. Williams 2002, 113; Park 1997, 36; Danner et al 1999, 255; Mankekar 1997, 45; Wendell 1990, 26, 30; Lister, cited in R. Mason 2007, 306). In that context, any claim to victimhood is established as inherently unreliable. Remember that Wendell’s (1990, 30) model of responses to oppression positions the perspective of the responsible actor as more developed than that of the victim, since it requires ‘no ignorance or self-deception’ (and note that elsewhere Ayim (1991, 212, 213), in her generally supportive response to Wendell, refers to the perspective of the victim as one of the two ‘primitive’ perspectives in the model, a description that Wendell herself does not use).

Where the subjectivity of the victim *is* referred to, it is as the site of the victim’s idiosyncratic, uncommunicable perspective; it is that which isolates the victim, rather than qualifies her as a valid entrant into the social construction of shared perspectives. A person’s feelings of victimhood are not considered necessarily relevant to a political analysis of oppression. For example, Taylor (2006, 45) criticises radical feminist analyses of prostitution because ‘the terms ‘sexual exploitation’ and ‘sexual victimization’ tend to be conflated, and it is therefore hard to speak of any individual as ‘sexually exploited’ without

also implying that they are downtrodden, pathetic and suffering'. At this point, it is not entirely clear why we should object to the conflation of exploitation and victimisation at a conceptual level (leaving aside the derogatory connotations of the latter). The clarification comes a little later, to the effect that exploitation is detected as a function of an imbalance of power, where the exploited does not 'necessarily subjectively *feel* victimized, violated or exploited' (Taylor 2006, 52; emphasis added). Exploitation, then, is defined in terms of objectively recognised structural disadvantage, and victimisation in terms of subjective response to external conditions. According to this view, where those who feel victimised are a subset of those who are exploited, their self-identification as victims is legitimate, but subsumed and made redundant by the recognition of power imbalances as objectively real and exploitative. On the other hand, feelings of being victimised which exceed the objective identification of exploitation as defined here are ignored, since in themselves, they are considered to be invalid markers of exploitation. In any case, the prospect that such feelings would need to be articulated has already been cast as remote by the equation of victimhood with being downtrodden and pathetic. In those terms, who would want to admit to feeling victimised? That said, the possibility that individuals sometimes do *feel* victimised, and that these feelings *can* coincide with objective confirmation of exploitation, has been allowed. However, the questions that surface in relation to that – what is the connection between subjective feelings and objective legitimation, and how is one translated to the other? – are left to one side. Taylor raises an important issue in suggesting that the fact of exploitation can be determined independently, and without the proof, of the subjective feelings of *all* those who are deemed to be exploited, a proposal which could help feminists respond to women's own denial of their subordination. But the reverse also needs to be considered – feelings of victimisation can be present as a response to conditions which are as yet unnamed and unrecognised as exploitative, and the process by which that naming comes about continues to be a central feminist political issue.

Taylor (2006) posits a disconnection between the subjective apprehension of victimisation and the objectively recognised structural exploitation which properly motivates political action, and used it to render the former irrelevant. In contrast, Chetkovich (2004), in keeping with her deployment of Wendell's model of individual response to oppression, privileges the subjective experience of subordination, but

nevertheless also invalidates feelings of victimisation. In fact, Chetkovich (2004) identifies the presence or absence of those feelings as the determining factor in assessing the merits of the response to oppression, irrespective of the impact of that response on systemic discrimination. In her analysis of women's experiences within the New York Fire Department, she approves of the behaviour of one case (Maria) over another (Sandra) on the basis that Maria 'didn't feel a personal sense of victimization', where Sandra had a 'strong identification with victimhood' (Chetkovich 2003, 125). Maria was 'ultimately the most successful woman in the group' (Chetkovich 2004, 124) and came closest to the 'most balanced' strategy for an individual woman (Chetkovich 2004, 126). On the other hand, the resistance mounted by Sandra in response to her feelings of victimisation evoked the hostility of her co-workers, which inhibited her professional effectiveness (Chetkovich 2003, 125). By Chetkovich's standards, Sandra's response is unsuccessful, despite the fact that Sandra directly challenged systemic masculinism by objecting to nude pin-ups and sexual innuendo, and filing a sex discrimination complaint. Maria had no effect on the wider subordination which she acknowledged did exist, adopting instead a strategy of simply ignoring the masculinist culture or explaining it as the inadequacies of particular individuals when it did impact her directly. In comparison to Taylor's focus on the determination of structural conditions, Chetkovich's approach is distinctly privatised and apolitical, but both writers invalidate the subjectivity of the victim. Taylor does so on the basis that private feelings of victimisation are irrelevant to political questions of structure. Chetkovich does so, not because she privileges addressing oppression at the level of structure or wider cultural semiotics, as her evaluation of Sandra shows, but because she measures the validity of the individual perspective simply in terms of the degree to which it enables personal success and self-improvement, the exclusive province of the non-victim identified.

That victim-subjects should be excluded from the feminist project of knowledge production is made explicit by Haraway (1997, 65 note 7) in her praise of Hartsock's version of standpoint theory:

Standpoint theories are not private reservations for different species of human beings, innate knowledge available only to victims, or special pleading. Within feminist theory in Hartsock's lineage, standpoints are cognitive-emotional-political achievements, crafted out of located social-historical-bodily experience – itself always constituted through fraught, non-

innocent, material, collective practices – that could make less deluded knowledge for us all more likely.

Because the knowledge held by victims is accused of being untranslatable to non-victims, Haraway can position the perspectives of those labelled as ‘victims’ as irredeemably marginal to the complex processes which lead to particular feminist standpoints – standpoints which represent not just differences within a plurality of perspectives, but knowledge which is ‘less deluded’ as a function of this exclusion. These are the processes which establish the link between the ‘emotional’, the ‘cognitive’ and the ‘political’, whereby subjective, situated experience is eventually translated into the objective knowledge of the collective. Haraway (1997, 47) makes this clear at the point in the text on which this note expanded:

A standpoint is not an empiricist appeal to or by ‘the oppressed’, but a cognitive, psychological and political tool for more adequate knowledge judged by non-essentialist, historically contingent, situated standards of strong objectivity.

The quote marks signal Haraway’s distancing from those who identify as ‘the oppressed’ and position their empirical claims as unverifiable and therefore disqualified from entry into the political process. Moreover, ‘victims’ are defined here as (fraudulently) weak in opposition to the ‘non-innocent’, robust heroism of those who struggle for hard-won knowledge. This replays conservative ridicule of the ‘hurt feeling’ movement’ (Klatt 2003, 44), which discredited victims’ subjective experience of injury on the basis that non-victims would not be offended in similar situations. Whilst Haraway’s (1997, 48) assertion that ‘[objectivity] is less about realism than it is about intersubjectivity’ is entirely unobjectionable, I question the limitations she imposes on the subjectivities that may enter into the intersubjective determination of what counts as objective knowledge. That exclusion has been authorised by the conflation in feminist theory of victimhood with passivity and subjectivity with agency which I have outlined (see also Mardorossian 2002b, 789), but if we look to a broader definition of subjectivity as ‘who we are, who we think we are, how we think, how we act’ (Lamb 1999, 132), then there is no basis on which to invalidate the subjectivity of ‘the oppressed’, or to privilege certain kinds of subjectivity as better qualified for the production of ‘more adequate knowledge’.

In an important attempt to disrupt this equation of victim status with non-subjectivity, McLeer (1998) seeks to recover the terminology of the ‘victim’ for the purpose of re-establishing a global sisterhood based around the experience of oppression. McLeer deals

only tangentially with issues of representation, but her analysis of the relationship between victimhood and subjectivity is highly relevant to our discussion at this point, since it is the assumed objectifying power of attributing victim status which leads feminists to eschew victim representations. McLeer (1998, 42, 50) turns to the discipline of victimology to develop the view that suffering, the felt experience of certain practices, should be taken as the common measure of victimhood, irrespective of cultural differences in the way women are positioned by patriarchal power. Taking the example of Indian sati, McLeer (1998, 42, 48-50) poses the problem in need of address as one of how to attribute victim status to those who resist or willingly choose sati, given that such evidence of agentic subjectivity would normally disallow defining the sati in these cases as a victim. Given that in victimology 'suffering is considered to constitute part of the victim's subjectivity' (McLeer 1998, 50), and that the sati will suffer whether she chooses her sati or not, McLeer (1998, 51) is able to conclude that 'the sati is a victim because she is a woman living in a specific system of patriarchal oppression'. In this way, the agentic sati can be defined as both victim and subject.

Whilst McLeer's aim of recuperating the language of the victim is extremely appealing, we might have reservations about some aspects of her approach. McLeer (1998, 53 note 2) justifies feminist objections to the language of victimhood by pointing to conservative and media constructions of the 'victim', which void the victim of subjectivity. She also she addresses herself to the risk of homogenising women's diversity by attributing victim status across cultural boundaries (McLeer 1998, 42, 45). On these bases, she embarks on her quest to find an alternative theoretical entry point into thinking about victims, and she finds it in the separate discipline of victimology. My objection to this is that McLeer formulates a theoretical solution to what I believe are respectively discursive and logical problems. She takes the media construction of victimhood to be unchallengeable at the discursive level. And she chooses not to point out that it is simply logically unsustainable to equate the representation of women as victims with the homogenisation of their diversity, in the sense that designating a plurality as victims does not make any commitments about the nature of that victimhood, any more than asserting that women always act agentially erases the variety of that agency. Instead, she positions these as real problems to be taken at face value, and which her analysis is motivated to

address. Secondly, her recourse to victimology suggests that there is no *feminist* way of approaching the issue. This seems to ignore one of the primary achievements of second-wave feminism – to redefine certain normalised practices as oppressive according to the subjective suffering of the women who experienced them. In short, the premise of that project was that women’s subjectivity and victimhood were perfectly coincident with each other, and the claim of victimisation was a radical assertion of a hitherto unacknowledged subjective position. McLeer’s (1998, 42) desire to reclaim the language of victimhood so that ‘the oppressor can be named and identified and the reality of the oppression exposed’ seems simply to restage earlier feminist endeavours without acknowledging them.

Finally, McLeer’s principal aim seems to be to recover the ability to attribute victim status to those we have been accustomed by contemporary constructions to see as subjects (either resisters, or those who willingly choose sati). The effort, therefore, goes into reattaching victim attributions to the (active) subject, into reconstructing the concept of subjectivity to include the victim redefined in terms of suffering. Consequently, it specifically leaves ‘helplessness and lack of resistance’ outside this concept of active subjectivity, whose positive connotations are instrumental in reprivileging the terminology of victimhood (McLeer 1998, 51). The impulse is to redefine those we would normally consider to be subjects as victims, but not all victims, including helpless or unresisting ones, as subjects. Therefore, the status as subjects of victims who *are* helpless and unresisting is still left in doubt, and the standing of these victims not re-elevated as a result.

Concern about opening spaces for the revelation of subjectivities is therefore behind feminist anxiety about representing women as victims, but it is based on a suspect and exclusionary logic to do with the function of representation. Moreover, there is a disturbing magisterialism in this preoccupation with matters of representation – firstly, in the presumption that no woman wants to be represented as a victim, and then in the assumption of the power we have as academic feminists both to represent women in whatever way we deem appropriate and to produce effects so pronounced that we hesitate before the prospect of our own impact. These expressions of hesitation do nothing to mitigate that power; instead they entrench it by taking for granted its immutability. They privilege that power as the central problem to be solved in the relationship between representer and represented. Whether it is Morley’s (1992, 523) caution about allowing a group culture of victim

identification to develop in Women's Studies courses, or Bahar's (2003, 1025) opening emphasis on the fact that '[feminist] theory and practice are constantly confronted with the question of how to represent sexual oppression' and with where next to '[shift] attention', or Chetkovich's (2004, 128) assumption that avoiding the construction of women as victims' is part of 'giving voice to all', the focus is on the representer as the main variable of the representational dilemma. With her rests the power to 'revictimize' or 'devictimize' via her choice of representational mode. Whatever might be able to be envisaged as the objective truth of women's experience, indeed the capacity of women to self-define, gives way before feminist representers' decisions about what aspects of women's experience it is best to foreground now. In Rogoff's (1992) alternative framing of Munter's life and artistic contributions, the representer emerges as the central player in an exercise dedicated to 'unframing, un-coupling, and de-victimizing the Munter narrative'. Rogoff's aim has nothing to do with establishing the 'truth' of Munter's life – and nor should it in the sense that such a truth is not obtainable by the art historian interpreting archival material from her own historically situated perspective. That said, there is something troubling about the way Rogoff's endeavour becomes as much about resolving her own 'scholastic mortification' at the rejected, nagging, put-upon persona that emerges from Munter's letters, as it is about Munter. Rogoff's alternative, de-chronologised reading of the archival material is meant to '[allow] [Munter] a place from which to speak something we have not yet heard and do not know how to hear'. Munter is let speak, but in the language given to her by Rogoff's reconstructive ministrations, which nurture the new Munter to life – for Munter's sake we are to presume, but for Rogoff's we know.

The assumption that to avoid representing women as victims is to rescue them from objectification is facilitated, as I have said, by the literal fact of what it means to be the object of oppression, and by the constructed semantics of victimhood. This ignores the fact that *all* representation is a form of objectification, because it positions women as being spoken for or about in the absence of their direct participation. Quoting Edward Said, Behar (1990, 231; emphasis in original) observes that 'the act of representing [...] 'almost always involves violence of some sort to the *subject* of the representation,' using as it must some degree of reduction, decontextualization, and miniaturization'. Behar invokes Said here to support objections to the framing of Third World women as 'passive victims' as a



mechanism for sustaining the idea of the superiority of the West. But if what Said says is true (and Behar obviously subscribes to it), then we must conclude that representations which *choose* to focus on women's agency and resistance can be similarly violent and reductive. The charge that non-Western women have historically been allowed to speak, 'but only in certain ways' (Haggis and Schech 2000, 394), that is, in ways that express their victimhood, can be turned around to suggest that the erasure of victimhood as a viable subject position in feminist theory has not solved that problem – it has merely replaced one form of limitation on speaking with another. In a similar vein, Lau (2003, 378) criticises the writings of diasporic South Asian novelists who reinstall orientalism by depicting their non-Western protagonists as victims of cultural practices or economic conditions – 'even benevolently motivated objectification needs to be challenged'. The message here is that benevolence is no guarantee either of avoiding objectification or of a beneficial outcome, a message which applies equally to representations which foreground women's agency, where benevolent intentions are amply on display.

Where the construction of non-Western women as victims is described as a tool for 'othering' them and establishing their difference and inferiority (e.g. Doezema 2001, 17 *passim*; Flew et al. 1999, 394; Fernandes 1999, 133, 136-7), the solution proposed to this 'othering' is to recognise their sameness to us – they are no more victims than we are. This leaves out those women who are irretrievably 'othered' by this solution – those who want to articulate their victimhood, whether they be non-Western or not. To presume that women are 'othered' by being represented as victims presupposes particular conceptions of victimhood and of our relationship as feminists to that category. In forming those conceptions and governing that relationship, feminist representers currently hold all the cards. The power they invest in representation locates the arbitration of victimhood in their (non-victim) hands, and self-identified victims are denied a space in and from which to speak. Smith's (1999, 152) experience of exclusion as she read Giddens is instructive: 'There is repression here. Whatever way I turned, my collection of stories from people who do not feel free could not engage with the text or enter the circle of authorized subjectivity it constitutes.' A little further on, she notes 'I learned in the process just how the particular text I had chosen blocked any avenue I could discover of making it responsive to those

whose voices I used to interrogate it. [...] At every turn, their experience had to be denied' (Smith 1999, 155).

The aim throughout this chapter is to illustrate the rhetorical mechanisms which achieve the blocking out of the voices of victims from feminist theory, and to demonstrate how we must participate in this denial to preserve the coherence of both the meaning of individual texts, and the over-arching narrative of an inclusive and empowering feminist project. That endeavour is facilitated by a constructed logic which turns the potential for such exclusion into a contradiction, since such a notion presupposes that there are candidates for exclusion – and this logic says that those who want to articulate a victim position simply do not exist. I suggest that the preoccupation should be less with the magisterial power of representation in the hands of feminists, but with adopting rhetorical practices which open a space in which the plurality of women could hypothetically represent themselves if they were here at the site of feminist theorising. We should certainly concern ourselves with how we speak about and for women, but also with how we speak *to* them and allow them to speak to us.

## **5.6 From victim to 'victim': the invisible transition**

Thus far I have focused on the mechanisms by which the construction of the paradigmatic victim has been legitimised and rendered coherent in feminist theory. I have argued that this legitimisation is furnished by extra-textual interpretive frameworks which the reader is skilled in deploying to reseal potential ruptures in textual logic, and that this extra-textual field includes the discourse of 'political correctness' and its invalidation of the self-proclaimed victim. Backgrounding that discussion, however, has been the question of the relationship between the referential use of 'victim' terminology in academic feminist writing – signalling as it does the acknowledgement of the objective reality of victimhood – and the invocation of the paradigmatic victim as an object of feminist disdain.

These two modes of referencing 'victims' present a profound contradiction, and one which threatens to disrupt the foundations of feminist antipathy to the paradigmatic victim. In this section, I argue that there is an implied explanation provided for this contradiction in feminist theory, and that this explanation is based on a certain logic of excess. That is, there is a point at which claims or representations of victimhood are deemed to pass beyond what

is deemed legitimate and become exaggerations or reifications of the victim as a symbol. Paradigmatic victimhood, then, is figured as a sort of excess, as standing apart from and able to be bracketed from what can be recognised as the reality of oppression. There is a point at which the victim or her advocates transition to an unacceptable stage, go too far, or become stuck in or overly focused on victimhood. At this point, (self-)representation as a victim can also pass from the articulation of identifiable oppression to the fictional realm of the symbol or narrative. At the same time, the lexical definition of the victim gives way to a corresponding excess of meaning and association which overflows the precise bounds of the referential and constitutes the paradigm of victimhood. As I have already argued, it is assumed that the rules by which this transition into excess is apprehended are known, though they are not stated. Indeed, the logic of transition as a resuturing of the apparent disconnect between ‘real’ victims and fictional ones is usually only implied. However, I suggest that the same logic which informed the discourse of ‘political correctness’, where the outlandishness of victim claims was regularly invoked and the crossing of a threshold of reasonableness therefore assumed, occurs in more or less sublimated form in feminist theory.

Its less sublimated form is evident in accounts which point literally to the exaggeration of the extent of victimhood, as in Haag’s (1996, 61; see also 60) criticism of ‘feminists of identity politics [who] stylize the victim, exaggerating her vulnerabilities and indignities to enshrine her as a singularly damaged subject who deserves cultural and legal redress’. Haag attributes some deliberateness to this exaggeration, as a ploy to accrue the institutional benefits that flow to formally recognised victims (see also Doezeema 2001, 20; Chow 1999, 160-61; C. Mason 2007, 108), an approach she slates as ‘an intellectually bankrupt ‘victimology’ from which feminists have been struggling to find egress. In doing so, she deploys the code of ‘victimology’ in much the same way as conservative critics of ‘political correctness’ did – to discredit a focus on the plight of victims without having to be precise about what constitutes the exaggeration in victim claims or why such a focus is unjustified (see also Gourevitch, cited in Dean 2003, 97; Steinberg 2000, 148; Mankekar 1997, 40, 55; James 1998, 1045; Wise and Stanley, cited in Koskela and Tani 2005, 428; but see McLeer 1998; Copp 2003, 648; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2003b, 601; McDermott 1995, 669; Kozol 1995, 648, 649; Mardorossian 2002a, 766; (outside the survey data) Walklate

2003, 29-30, 34ff.; Newburn and Stanko 1994, 153). Similarly, Morley (1992, 523) is concerned that women's studies courses develop a culture 'based on victim identity [which] can [...] create a type of safety and justification for nurturing the hurt and damaged self', implying that the sense of victimhood is deliberately prolonged in this setting, exceeding what is considered proportional to the original experience of victimisation. And complaints about the 'false homogeneity' that feminists of identity politics supposedly claimed in relation to women's subordination (Munt 1992, 285; see also Flew et al. 1999, 398), and 'the presumptive saturation of contemporary culture in an identity-based rhetoric of victimization' (Gilmore 2003, 706) assume a spatial excess in the focus on victimhood – there are too many claims of victimisation in an absolute sense and too many women are included in the claims.

The logic of excess is central to Wendell's (1990) normative model of response to oppression – the perspective of the victim is an evolutionary stage which is 'more realistic' than, and has many epistemic, psychological, moral, and political advantages over, the perspective of the oppressor (Wendell 1990, 26), but it is a perspective in which it is also possible to '[get] stuck' (28). We need to '[move] beyond' and 'relinquish' the perspective of the victim to that of the responsible actor, which is 'more practical [and] forward-looking' (29), and Wendell describes the enlightened state which allows the oppressed person to 'more easily make the transition' (28). Thus, there is a point where the galvanising effects of realising one's victim status cease to validate the perspective of the victim. If the perspective of the victim is 'probably the best perspective for someone who has recently been victimized' (26), 'recently' indicates the temporal limitations on the viability of that perspective without being precise about how to identify that limit.

In fact, the logic of excess breaks down under scrutiny at every turn, since neither the distinction between the perspectives of the victim and the responsible actor, nor the conditions of transition from one to the other, are clearly delineated. The normative credentials of Wendell's model rely on the fact that everyone can exercise choice and responsibility no matter how constrained their circumstances, but Wendell fails to establish the solidity of that assumption. The defining feature of the perspective of the victim is that it 'recognizes little or no responsibility of the victim for her/his victimization', but Wendell (1990, 26) allows that '[this] is sometimes an accurate representation of the situation and

sometimes a falsification of it'. Already two points of failure present themselves. Firstly, the victim who exercises only a 'little' responsibility is still classified within the perspective of the victim, so how much responsibility needs to be demonstrated in order to graduate to the more advanced perspective (bearing in mind also that attributing too much responsibility to oneself for one's victimisation places one in the perspective of the oppressor (24), the one which is least evolved and entirely incompatible with feminism (23))? Secondly, it is stated that sometimes the victim is correct in interpreting her situation as beyond her own capacities to change, so it is impossible for her to follow Wendell's normative program. According to the options presented within this model of progress, this individual will still be made to fall in with those who have either refused, or have not evolved enough, to take responsibility. Wendell's model can stand only if the lines of demarcation between the two perspectives are clear-cut, if the conditions for qualification in each case are obvious, and if it is theoretically possible for all individuals to fulfil those conditions. Absent these conditions and the coherence of her model is threatened.

Furthermore, Wendell sees the attribution of blame for oppression as a feature of both the perspective of the victim and of the responsible actor. She accepts that blame has a positive function in publicly expressing moral standards and thereby working to eliminate oppression. However, 'indulging in too much blame [...] exposes [the blamer] to the worst dangers of the perspective of the victim' (29) and, if the blamer happens to have achieved the perspective of the responsible actor, 'indulging in very much blame' can cause a 'regression' to the perspective of the victim (32). The terminology of indulgence indicates that it is definitely a matter of excess here, but the point at which excess is reached is obviously extremely precise – just as taking only a little responsibility is not enough to warrant being considered as a responsible actor, blaming too much is a measure of having exceeded the utility of the victim perspective and being exposed only to its dangers and to none of its galvanising force. Who might be in a position to judge whether the responsibility taken is too little or the blame attributed too much is a question which is left moot. Since Wendell (1990, 16) frames the problem and her solution as they pertain to 'us specifically as feminists', all members of the 'we' in which the reader sees herself included are expected to be able to apply this model to her own behaviour and that of others, and to accept and be competent in the logic of threshold and excess which underpins it.

In the end, the perspectives of victim and responsible actor share many of the same attributes, such as the allocation of blame, and anger at oppression (Wendell 1990, 32). And, where ignorance and self-deception are among the necessary and sufficient attributes of the perspective of the victim (30), the responsible actor can also be ‘not well-informed’ (30) and subject to self-deception, either because of her innate fallibility or because a sexist society misrepresents women’s choices to her (31). Again, it is a question of staying within an acceptable threshold of ignorance – the responsible actor may be limited in her ability to discern the choices available, but she does ‘not systematically over- or under-estimate them’ as less advanced perspectives do. This raises yet another decision point in this increasingly complex classification process, as how many instances of ‘over-estimation’ might constitute a *systematic* error-proneness is again only notional, even though crucial. What really differentiates the perspective of the responsible actor for Wendell (1990, see 30-31) is the individual heroism and moral superiority with which she imbues it, and on which she must rely to carry its normative significance, given the logical weaknesses of the model. Importantly, people with this perspective ‘*never* [obscure] who or what is responsible for any restriction of choices’ (30; emphasis added). While ‘never’ finally sounds a definitive note in the delineation of the two perspectives, this certainty is dissolved by Wendell’s (1990, 31) subsequent disclaimers about the constraints on achieving this level of clear-sightedness.

It is true that Wendell (1990, 23) begins by emphasising the provisional nature of her framework, and the fluidity of the divisions between the various perspectives. Not everyone with a particular perspective exhibits the same behaviours and characteristics, and people move between multiple perspectives in different situations – ‘at any given time many of us are in transition between perspectives, subscribing to some components of one perspective and some components of another’. If it is the case that there is such a degree of fluidity, then her consolidation of what are essentially disparate features into these particular perspectives is far from innocent, and its political implications far from insignificant. Why is it, for example, that she does not define the position she mentions here, which combines components of different perspectives, as a separate category? If transition and lack of definition is the normal state, and settlement in one perspective abnormal, why obfuscate the details of that state, and why imply such sensitive thresholds for passing from one

supposedly clearly demarcated perspective into another? And, particularly in light of the admission that having a particular perspective can be involuntary, it is all the more problematic to claim that some of the perspectives are not only epistemically but *morally* superior to others (Wendell 1990, 23), and consequently to install a normative model of *personal* behaviour under oppression.

Despite these profound logical gaps in Wendell's model, well over a decade later Chetkovich (2004) still considers it to be a very serviceable one for evaluating the strategies of women fire-fighters negotiating the masculinist culture of the New York Fire Department. This speaks to the capacity to reseal these gaps and to accept the normativity of Wendell's recommended program of personal development under oppression. Nevertheless, the logical inadequacy of the model does cause problems for Chetkovich, as we have seen (*supra* 194ff.). It fails to account for the main case in Chetkovich's (2004, 126) study, where responsible action leads to outcomes normally associated with the perspective of the victim. But Chetkovich is so confident in the basic soundness of the model, that this failure does not indicate any fundamental deficiency. The corrective, when it is offered, is additive only, urging the recognition that responsible action happens in the context of a community which may or may not be receptive to the changes it projects (Chetkovich 2004, 127). As such, it supplies what is 'incomplete' about Wendell's model, and adds a component that allows the rest of the model to hold good<sup>12</sup>. Chetkovich's (2004, 126; emphasis in original) conclusion about the best strategy to adopt frames it in the same heroic terms as Wendell's promotion of the perspective of the responsible actor – '[the] most balanced and complex strategy for an individual woman is one in which she acknowledges the reality of sexism but *acts* as if it were not a limiting factor in her own success'. This implies that a woman can *act* in this way, even if the reality of sexism *is* a

---

<sup>12</sup> In fact, Wendell (1990, 32) does address this issue to some degree: the perspective of the responsible actor involves making decisions about how much to expect others to take responsibility for their part in the victimisation. This assumes quite exceptional prescience about these others' subjectivities on the part of the responsible actor, who must make judgements about 'how much they know about their choices, how good they are at making choices, how likely it is that they can carry out their intentions in the situation, and whether they are likely to be overwhelmed by unrealistic fears or compulsive desires'. The responsible actor must also anticipate how others will react to being asked to take responsibility, since these others, unlike the evolved exemplar of this perspective, may not be eager to embrace that responsibility, even becoming anxious or breaking down. This extraordinary omniscience about the subjectivity of others is at odds with what Wendell (1990, 31) has just asserted about the limitations on people with this perspective being able to realistically assess their own options and situation, including the extent of their own self-deception.

limiting factor for her, requiring a level of self-deception that seems out of place in the context of the model being applied.

Even more disturbing is the parallel we might draw between these versions of what counts as the proper response from the oppressed and D'Souza's (1992a, 243) gratification at the spectacle of the struggling victim quoted earlier (*supra* 101):

Victimhood may provoke sympathy, but it does not, by itself, produce admiration. Being historically oppressed is nothing to be ashamed of, but neither is it an intrinsic measure of social status or moral worth. What evokes admiration is the spectacle of oppressed victims struggling against their circumstance, heroically, despite the odds. In this way victimhood can pave the way for greatness. Yet the current victim psychology makes it impossible for them to be relieved of their oppression. [...]

Here also, it is a perspectival problem which is the main inhibitor in mounting the appropriate response to oppression. Whether oppressive structures change as a consequence of this response is less important than whether the response can qualify as morally worthy in the eyes of observers, according to a set of criteria established by them. After all, by Wendell's (1990) reading, the perspective of the victim is marked by a degree of blindness which would render it incapable of being the source of an evaluative framework such as hers. Indeed, she confesses to be writing from the perspective of the observer/philosopher, from which 'we can attain the most objectivity we are capable of' and which is the perspective occupied by most feminists during the act of theorising (Wendell 1990, 33). Wendell's phrasing leaves those feminist theorists who fall outside 'most' in limbo and their status as legitimate participants in the feminist political and theoretical project in jeopardy, considering that observer/philosophers are 'honest' and 'self-critical' and 'seek to understand everything about how oppression works and how it affects women, and [...] have feminist commitments to ending oppression'. By implication, the victim-aligned are also excluded from the political process of negotiating the public evaluation of victim status, even within the bounds of acceptability that Wendell allows for that perspective – while it can motivate to action, it is always marked by a limited capacity for knowledge in some absolute sense. It leaves feminist theorists in the magisterial position of being both non-victims (since victims by definition do not have critical detachment) and the adjudicators of what is a legitimate assertion of victimhood. On their side, the victim-identified are relegated to the status of irresponsible non-actors by the nomenclature of the model.



Both Wendell and Chetkovich invoke the delicate balance that feminists must strike, so that the necessary recognition of victimisation does not spill over into the illegitimate terrain of excess. Wendell (1990, 28) acknowledges that ‘victimization is very real and all around us’, and should not be denied or underestimated, and for Chetkovich (2004, 128; see also 135), the question of how to recognise and remedy oppression is a central to issue of policy. However, the latter must be achieved ‘without perpetuating the construction of women as victims’, and we must be able to bracket such an ongoing construction as something unrelated to, and not justified by, the ongoing oppression that is being named and tackled at the policy level. Why we should be willing to so bracket it is not clear, but it is assumed that the community of readers will be familiar with and adept at accomplishing that manoeuvre. Indeed, Chetkovich (2004, 130, 132) herself is happy to use the word ‘victim’ referentially where she focuses on particular policy responses to sexual subordination – that is, outside of her explicit discussion of Wendell’s model, where it can sit within a less loaded context and where the premise is the facticity of victimisation. But if naming women as victims is appropriate here, what is it over and beyond that which constitutes the disproportionality of ‘constructing’ women as victims, and how is it that Chetkovich’s reference to women’s victimhood here does not participate in the temporal excess of ‘perpetuating’ such constructions?

The problem of maintaining a balance between highlighting victimhood and allowing a space for women’s agency to emerge is referred to throughout the surveyed articles. The fact that there is understood to be a constant tension between these two foci is something I will address in the next chapter, since there is no *a priori* reason why we should assume that they are incompatible. But the point to be made here is that there is a pervasive underlying anxiety about the propensity for acknowledgements of victimhood to become disproportionate – any emphasis at all on victimisation is seen within this over-arching metaphor of balance to be teetering on the brink of spilling into excess, even while the reality and ubiquity of victimisation is noted (e.g. Hammonds 1997, 36; Morley 1992, 523; Williams 2002, 102; Flew et al. 1999, 399; Bahar 2003, 1025; Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 49). Our reading requires us to reserve a space of extremity holding forms of victimhood or its construction judged to be illegitimate. This can be so even in cases where the writer’s main intention is to challenge the broad condemnation of victimhood. For

example, Bulbeck (2001b, 154) concludes her critique of the narrative which refers to the articulation of structural disadvantage as ‘victim feminism’ by indicating a point she does not wish to cross – though she challenges the individualist rhetoric that downplays structural constraint, she does not want her students ‘to embrace victimhood’. It is assumed that even in a discussion aimed at reinstating the terminology of victimisation, we will not be disconcerted by the suggestion that it is possible to ‘embrace victimhood’ – that is, to (deliberately) overdo things, with the implication that it would presumably be obvious to observers when this occurs.

Our conceptualisation of this reserved space enables us to accept, for instance, the bracketing of ‘reactionary victimhood’ from the recognition that we differentially experience ‘multilayered forms of oppression’ (Cleage, cited in White 1999, 92), and that the ‘cult of victimhood’ (Kaminer, cited in Sered 1994, 502) which develops within the context of the self-help groups and recovery movements is an unacceptably parodic form of the identification within political collectives of women as ‘[victims] of structural oppression’ (Sered 1994, 501; for a challenge to Kaminer’s view, see Taylor 1999, 26). Note that these last two examples involve embedded quotes, an appeal to the words of others to support, or even to act as the proxy articulator of, the notion of an unacceptable extreme. Quoting such as this is obviously routine in academic writing, and is a particular subset of the entextualisation that is central to feminist theorising, as views are taken up, interpreted, paraphrased, and integrated into the arguments of others. However, I suggest that this form of entextualisation has especially potent effects in terms of the social relations and processes of knowledge formation unleashed by reading activity. These effects are proportional to the interpretive labour we are asked to do in working out what sort of clarification the primary author intends by deploying the quote. Recall that the discomfiture reported by Gill (1995, 183-4 note 5) at being required to share assumptions about the illegitimacy of victim representations was occasioned by an embedded quote. Gill was disturbed not just by the substance of that quote, but by its unalloyed endorsement by the primary author.

We might understand why if we consider how embedded quotes work in the context of reading practice as a site of the activation of social relations. The acts of referral to and recognition of named objects involved in writing and reading organise a ‘community of

attention' (Smith 1999, 119) which coalesces on the basis of its shared knowledge of the named object. These acts are social, in that they constitute the object as known independently of individual perception (Smith 1999, 118). My argument is that the effects of this concerting of attention become much more salient where embedded quotes are used in the way that both Sered and White do here. In reading Sered's (1994, 502) quoting of Kaminer, we are not only called upon to recognise the object named by Kaminer as the 'cult of victimhood', but we are witnesses to Sered's recognition of that object as well. Moreover, we see how Sered is confident that Kaminer's comment supports her own view of the dynamics of self-help groups. Indeed, Sered is so confident that the reader will apprehend Kaminer's words as illustrative of her own views that she does not feel the need to explain the apparent shift in register from commending, as Sered (1994, 501) does, the identification of individuals within certain collectives as '[victims] of structural oppression' to denigrating as Kaminer (cited in Sered 1994, 502) does the 'cult of victimhood' in others. Thus, the act of recognising the 'cult of victimhood' and its parodic excess does not just bring into our *imaginary* view the community which can read as we do; here we actually observe one of that community (Sered) performing that act of recognition and naturalising the use of a particular terminology in that naming. We watch Sered read Kaminer in a particular way, we see what she thinks does not need explaining, we see Sered assume that we will understand Kaminer as she does. We become voyeurs as well as participants in the social act of reading, and as such, the outsider status which threatens us if we fail to understand Kaminer, or are discomfited as Gill was at what is assumed, comes into sharper relief. The community which we are required to join here is visible; we are witnesses to its members in the process of understanding each other in their invocation of what differentiates the 'cult of victimhood' from its more legitimate equivalent.

Often the logic of excess underpins the relegation of paradigmatic victimhood to the representational realm – the fiction stands apart from reality, and its reliance on symbol disconnects it from the bounded particularities of the real in a way that definitively excludes it from the social and political field. So we understand Threadgold's (2006, 235) reference to the 'victim' in her discussion of anti-asylum seeker discourses as pointing to a form of media hyperbole that bears no relationship to anyone we might find in reality:

This is [...] an objectifying story where the asylum seeker is first localised (a success story here in Britain, not someone with a right to speak and be because of who s/he was in that

other global place s/he came from), represented only as a ‘victim’ in that other shadowy place, without agency.

The quote marks signal Threadgold’s detachment and imply doubt about the existence of actual referents for the signifier ‘victim’, positioning it as a pure abstraction. Whatever the victimisation suffered by these people (and as asylum-seekers, we can assume that they have so suffered), the media construction of them as ‘victims’ is made to stand apart from that. We can collude in that bracketing if we understand that ‘victim’ here (and the quote marks work to signal which interpretive framework we should call on) draws forth a particular set of caricatural associations which cannot be matched to the complex experience of real people. The media representation is seen to *reduce* the complex subjectivity of the asylum-seeker to victimhood, but only by virtue of the amplification of certain characteristics or experiences at the expense of others. And that representation is something other than whatever account of victimisation (if indeed this framing still keeps that open as a possibility) might emerge from the asylum-seeker who is allowed the ‘right to speak and be’<sup>13</sup>.

Similarly, only by knowing how to deploy the interpretive framework that has representations of victimhood as always threatening to be excessive (a threat kept alive by the lack of clarity about how to judge just when that occurs) can we entertain Doezema’s (2001, 32) critique of the way anti-trafficking campaigns present ‘the kidnapped, raped, beaten, ill ‘third world prostitute’’ as symbolic of women’s sexual subordination. The implication is either that such cases do not exist, or that a discourse of victimisation is inappropriate to describe them. Having crossed the threshold of excess, there is no retreat allowed to a supposedly more reasonable position on victimisation – all such representations must be viewed as unacceptable, even when applied to the sorts of injury just described. The intended irony in Doezema’s (2001, 33) summary of western feminist interventionist views of the third world trafficked woman – ‘[her] victimhood, established by over a century of feminist, abolitionist and colonialist discourse, is indisputable’ – forecloses discussion of aspects of prostitution that are truly victimising. And while Doezema’s own choice of the terminology of ‘sex worker’ (used referentially, innocently,

---

<sup>13</sup> Of course, this phrasing deploys the kind of technology of exclusion discussed earlier (*supra* 105, 197, 234), whereby the exclusion of victims is a contradiction in terms. The argument that media representations of asylum seekers as victims ignore their right ‘to speak and be’ holds up only if we already know that no-one wants ‘to speak and be’ as a victim.

without quotes) over the language of prostitution and trafficking is an attempt to open the possibility that these women are unharmed by the work they do, her dismissal of claims of sexual victimhood as extravagant closes down another.

By navigating the distinction between forms of victim representations that are within permissible limits and those that are not, we can understand statements like this: 'For Menchu, many of these people are dead, victims of atrocities carried out against indigenous peoples in Guatemala. But the violence done to them (and to Menchu and her family) does not result in her self-representation as victim' (Gilmore 2003, 707). Here, pointing to the objective particularity of being 'victims of atrocities' is legitimate, but engaging in a generalised, unbounded 'self-representation as victim' by Menchu is framed as justifiably refused, even though it is stated that she is part of the group already designated as victims. It is the amorphism of self-representing 'as victim', where the absence of the indefinite article indicates a lack of individuation, that seems to be the problem, and it is the excess signified by this formlessness that grounds the antipathy to victim 'identity' (e.g. Haag 1996, 24; Gourevitch, cited in Dean 2003, 97; Morley 1992, 523; Munt 1992, 285; Gray 2004, 424; Gilmore 2003, 706; Haraway 1997, 47; Chow 1999, 162; Doezema 2001, 19ff.; Flew et al. 1999, 395). In these readings, 'identity' signifies excess because it absorbs complexity and blurs the discreteness of particular, situated responses to specific conditions, plugging the gaps between them and replacing what is deemed to be appropriately dynamic and political engagement with a pre-political, programmatic stance towards presumed universality.

So, following Wendy Brown's notion of 'injured identity' as a condition that becomes artificially reified (and therefore prolonged to the point of excess) by the institutional mechanisms intended to resolve it, Doezema (2001, 21) notes that '[Brown] argues that we need to develop new spaces in which to decide politically, collectively, what is good, just and right, derived not from identity-based notions of 'who I am' but from a new ethics of 'what I want for us'[...]'. This political negotiation of standards of justice replaces the moral assumptions that ground 'injury', and the observable purchase of instantiated political action replaces the amorphous excess of static notions of being. However, a concept of identity is already embedded in the notion of 'what I want for us', since 'what I want for us' already contains assumptions about what it is about 'us' that binds 'me' to it

and makes it sensible to see certain outcomes and not others as beneficial to us all. Doezeema (and Brown) object to the situation that requires the injury to be maintained in order for the identity targeted by correctives to be maintained, but it is also true that the collective that comes together to decide ‘what is good’ does not cease to exist once that good is achieved – for as long as it remains a good, the collective for whom it is a good continues to be joined and defined by the fact that it experiences this as a good on an ongoing basis. In other words, the collective exists in some way outside of particular instances of political engagement, and I suggest that the distinction between the fixity of identity and the continual movement of forming and dissolving coalitions is made out to be more rigid than it really is.

The concept of identity as a threshold crossed is more obvious in Haraway’s (1997, 47) discussion of the difference between approaches that assume identity as an ontological given and knowledge that is achieved through practical coalition: ‘feminist knowledge is rooted in imaginative connection and hard-won, practical coalition – which is not the same thing as identity, but does demand self-critical situatedness and historical seriousness’. She draws a distinction between having a ‘pre-determined’ or ‘pre-set’ position, and approaching with an attitude which is ‘a mode of practical and theoretical attention, a way of remaining mindful and accountable’ (Haraway 1997, 39). In her reading of feminist standpoint, she repeatedly privileges knowledge based on practice and situatedness over that assumed to be innate and unconditioned. Recall the contrast she sets up between feminist standpoint as the already-given, non-negotiable knowledge claimed by ‘victims’ and standpoint as the result of locatable intersubjective exchanges – ‘cognitive-emotional-political achievements, crafted out of located social-historical-bodily experience’ (Haraway 1997, 65 note 7). However, just as Wendell’s (1990) framing of the passage from the perspective of the victim to that of the responsible actor involved the crossing of thresholds that were incredibly sensitive but only vaguely defined, the point at which coalition gives way to identity here is decisive but its existence and location only heuristically assumed. Similarly, ‘taking sides’ in a predetermined way’ is unacceptable, but the maintenance of moral and political commitments is permissible (Haraway 1997, 39), but in what sense is a commitment not a stance that precedes and exceeds each episode of political negotiation in the same way that identity is accused of doing? For Haraway (1997, 47), the standards by

which feminist knowledge is produced should be understood as ‘historically contingent [and] situated’, and situatedness means specificity, although not parochialism or localism (a threshold which applies in the opposite direction). We do not know what the allowable dimensions of ‘specificity’ are – how long the historical moment, how expansive the political, social or cultural context can be before the standpoint it generates spills into stasis – but we must hold to the logic that there are such boundaries, and that ‘identity’, and here specifically victim identity, falls outside them. The logic which brackets ‘identity’ as the debased form of coalition corresponds to that by which legitimate victims pass beyond an unspecified limit into the excess of victimhood.

## Conclusion

This chapter has been devoted to a close textual reading of a subset of feminist theoretical writing, with specific regard to modes of reference which express contemporary feminism’s negative posture towards the concept of victimhood. In the process, it has noted the multitude of logical gaps in the way that posture is articulated. Intuitively at least, these gaps should threaten the coherence of that posture and expose points of disruptibility, and part of my intention has certainly been to problematise the grounds on which consensus appears to be assumed about the appropriateness of that negativity. However, my reading has been less deconstructive, in the sense of seeking to recover what the purported intentions and meanings of the texts conceal, than on remarking how it is that these texts *maintain* their coherence despite these gaps. After all, their coherence is underwritten by the format in which they appear – the journal editorial and peer review frameworks guarantee that these texts make sense *as they are*, and they do so for the articles’ entire predicted readership. The logical failures are of interest less in themselves than insofar as they act as triggers to interrogate the means by which readers can ignore or repair these failures in the process of realising a text’s meaning.

That interrogation reveals two issues of concern, and these arise directly from approaching texts as Smith does – as the sites where the local practice of reading, understood as an iterative practice undertaken by individual readers in isolation, intersects with non-local discursive networks which organise meaning into replicable and objectively understood forms. As such, writing and reading are social practices which organise social

relations according to which interpretive frameworks the text requires to be activated, and where readers in particular, as the site where this process is repeatedly set in motion, stand in terms of their competence and willingness to perform those activations. The relations in question are not only (and least of all) those between writer and reader, but those between the reader and all other readers she imagines can perform the same reading task she can, and importantly, '[between] reading subjects [and] those others of whom the text does – or [...] does not – speak' (Smith 1999, 52).

So, the first issue of concern is the sort of social relations that get (re)constituted during that practice. Individual readers understand their admission to the 'circle of shared subjectivity' (Smith 1999, 151) addressed by the text depends on their willingness to suppress knowledge that does not conform to the sense which the text intends. This positions her in a particular relation to her feminist academic peers who compose the 'community of attention' (Smith 1999, 119) which notionally comes together alongside the reader at each reading iteration. This community is defined by the text's expectation that it will be apprehended by its intended readers as building meaning coherently, and that the objects it names – whether it is the 'passive victim', or the 'helpless victim', or the 'innocent victim' – will be reliably recognised in the extra-textual environment. In that sense, the feminist theoretical endeavour becomes disciplinary in more ways than one, as readers operate the organising rules that both allow them to comprehend the text and dictate membership of their knowledge community. As I have shown, entry to that community presupposes a consensus that representing women as victims is anathema to the feminist project. These rules also inscribe the sorts of subjectivities admitted to the world the text takes to be its extra-textual reference point, and that world does not recognise the theoretical and political input of victims as viable subjects. This represents a specific, but naturalised, limitation both on whom the text speaks to, and on whom it posits as necessary to speak for or about.

The second issue of concern is the source of the interpretive schema which is deployed to naturalise these limitations. Following Bakhtin, Smith (1999, 136) asserts that each iteration of speech or writing is part of the successive reworking of terms that have been given meaning elsewhere. In the context of her attention to the discursive practices of her own discipline, she notes that '[sociology] pulls other forms of language in to do its



discursive work, language that trails with it a debris of meaning from its original site' (Smith 1999, 133). The feminist texts in question do not supply in themselves all the defining details of, say, the 'passive victim', much less fully justify presumptions of its repulsiveness and its lack of correspondence to any legitimate feminist subject. When they name the 'passive victim', they point to an object constituted elsewhere, and index an entire apparatus of meaning already associated with it which helps to fill explanatory gaps. I have suggested that this interpretive apparatus has been constructed and drawn on in conservative attacks on 'political correctness', which sought to discredit the subjectivities of self-proclaimed victims and especially to disempower feminists. Once the text directs the reader outside itself to accomplish the recognition task, it has no control over what resources the reader enlists to do so. Thus, discourses hostile to feminism which supply organising capabilities that answer to readers' interpretive needs always risk being imbricated in the dialogic process of reading activity and the social relations between feminists (and others) that it mediates. This compromises the supposedly empowering effects of highlighting women's agency under conditions of oppression, since the process of interpreting the references to victimhood which structure these arguments appeals to meaning schema which also supported the denial of power inequalities.

Not only does this mode of referencing paradigmatic victims utilise what already exists in the extra-textual field, but it shapes the terms of what can be said in future about victims (see Smith 1999, 136). There are two determinants at play here – the disciplinary context in which readers apprehend the normative requirements for inclusion in her knowledge community, and the way the compulsory recourse to particular interpretive frameworks consolidates the objectivity of the meanings they organise. In the next chapter I take up the issue of the flow-on effects of the posture contemporary feminist theory demands of its readers towards the 'victim' category. I argue that there is a synergy between the way the 'victim' has been defined as fixed and monolithic, and the classification of 'victim politics' as an antiquated and unsophisticated feminist strategy. In the contemporary context of general endorsements of notions of the subject which emphasise its situatedness and fluidity, and of knowledge as similarly and perpetually conditioned, it is hard to imagine a space for the supposedly universalised victim with her ontologised, extra-political identity. I go on to suggest that the disqualification of the

‘victim’ from feminist political theory as we know it today plays out in the mutual exclusion of victimhood and agency, and in the correspondence of agency with complexity and victimhood with over-simplification. In that way, the designation of the field of agency as the only one which will support analyses of acceptable intricacy supports a teleological narrative which documents feminist progress from the naivety of second-wave to the refined insights of postmodernism.

## **6 No Victims, No Oppression? Agency And The Erasure Of Victimhood**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I pointed to the mechanisms by which the refusal to utilise victim representations is rhetorically established as normative for feminism, and conformity to that standard secured. There my fundamental concern was with two things – firstly, the exclusionary implications of this apparent consensus, and secondly, the resemblance between the interpretive frameworks which authorised these exclusions and overtly anti-feminist constructions of the ‘victim’. In the course of that discussion I gestured towards the dichotomous understanding of victimhood and agency that was ubiquitous throughout the survey data. In this chapter, I will consider the broader implications of this dichotomy in terms of the burgeoning feminist literature on women’s agency and resistance. That women’s agency should be celebrated by feminists seems natural enough, but my reservation about our posture towards this concept stems from my claims about the coercion involved in our successful recognition of the unworthy victim. If we are rhetorically disciplined to refuse victim representations, then we are also disciplined to prefer their polar opposite – the exploration of agency.

I argue that, in line with the negative coding of victimhood within this binary, agency comes to assume a positive moral value in itself, regardless of its nature or effectiveness in transforming subordinating relations. If representing women as victims ‘revictimises’ them (and what could be more diametrically opposed to feminist goals?), then revealing their agency is more than an academic exercise: it becomes a feminist moral imperative, even when that agency is not obviously transformative. Victimhood ceases to be a viable field of feminist analysis – studies which focus on victimhood are denigrated as simplistic and universalising, while agency can reveal the complexity worthy of a mature theoretical endeavour. By virtue of the binary, however, this complexity cannot accommodate states of victim identification, even though the agency in question is a response to prevailing conditions of oppression; hence, victimhood disappears from our theoretical view. This denigration of victim representations and the corresponding privileging of studies of agency

synchronises with a wider narrative about feminism's progress. According to this narrative, the crudeness of second-wave and radical feminist approaches to women's subordination has given way to the sophistication of contemporary, especially poststructuralist, views of women's responses to the network of power relations in which they are variously and complexly positioned.

The quarrel here is not with the fact of the growing abundance of analyses of agency, for these do without doubt contribute enormously to our understanding of how women respond to the constraints of their particular situations. However, I express discomfort about the normativity of the teleological account, which relegates particular sorts of analyses to obsolescence and disciplines against their recovery. This moral stricture against retrieving 'victim' terminology operates in tandem with the reality that the epistemological ground of poststructuralism is inhospitable to the distinctly modernist framework in which 'victimhood' is currently intelligible. Contemporary assumptions about situated, shifting and fragmented subjectivity cannot accommodate the subject position of 'victim', when victimhood is defined as a fixed, monolithic identity. And power conceived as multi-layered, capillary and productive in its operation cannot position the subject as 'done to', especially when being 'done to' is constructed as a perpetual and exclusive state. These incompatibilities are a direct product of the definition of victimhood that circulates widely in feminist theoretical writing and to which readers are asked to subscribe.

The positive moral and intellectual value that is assigned to agency in feminist theory encourages a much greater tolerance of the explanatory inadequacies of poststructuralist ideas than that which is extended to arguments focusing on the subjective experience of victimhood and the continuities of oppression. Indeed, these inadequacies are sometimes addressed by the unacknowledged return to more conventional notions of power and the subject. I therefore question not just the disinterestedness of the motivations behind feminist enthusiasm for an epistemology that privileges enactment and multiple positioning over states of being, but the theoretical validity of positing a rupture between contemporary feminist approaches and those which have been consigned to the past. The assumed disconnect between victimhood and agency, and between the inadequacy of past models of power and the sophistication of current ones, authorises a lack of attention in these accounts to the felt effects and relatively static nature of power at points where it is not being

resisted, or where it does not respond to resistance. The question of agency permeates contemporary analysis, and the attraction of poststructuralist accounts of power and subjectivity is their alleged capacity to theorise the possibility of agency under conditions of constraint. But, whatever the political, theoretical and strategic contribution these studies of agency make to the feminist project, this contribution remains contaminated by the repressive rhetoric that disciplines against theorising victimhood. It should also be noted that the narrative that constructs poststructuralism as the legitimate theoretical ascendant itself positions poststructuralism within a binary historiography which defines it in opposition to the deficiencies of the past. This sits oddly with the thrust of much poststructuralist thinking, which aims specifically to deconstruct these sorts of binaries.

### **6.1 Agency and victimhood: dichotomies and double standards**

By the mid-1980s, a number of feminist legal theorists (e.g. Schneider 1986, 222; 1993, 389, 396; Abrams 1995, 361; Mahoney 1994, 63-4; Connell 1997, 118; Picart 2003, 97-8) had begun to focus their attention on the dichotomous understandings of victimhood and agency that informed both feminist work and legal responses to women who experienced domestic violence or sexual assault. The legal framework could not accommodate a victim who was not wholly incapacitated by her experience, so that any exhibition of agency by women in the process of coping with their situation diminished the severity of the abuse and correspondingly their victim status in the eyes of the law (e.g. Picart 2003, 1999; Abrams 1995, 361). Alternately, these coping mechanisms failed to register as forms of agency, because the woman's victim status definitively positioned her as passive and helpless (e.g. Mahoney 1994, 63, 69ff.; Connell 1997, 118). Most of these writers (e.g. Schneider 1993, 391ff.; Mahoney 1994, 59, 61; Abrams 1995, 305ff.; Picart 2003, 97) contextualised this problem within both wider critiques of feminism as overly preoccupied with victimisation and the simplistic understandings of victimhood that underpinned them. In that context, more nuanced feminist analysis of how victimhood and agency were intertwined was especially urgent. Yet, despite these early and ongoing attempts to problematise the dichotomy, my analysis of the survey data suggests that Mahoney's (1994, 64) suspicion that '[this] all-agent or all-victim conceptual dichotomy will not be easy to escape or transform' was quite prescient: the assumption that 'victimhood' and 'agency' are

mutually exclusive states remains entrenched in feminist theory and persists across the survey period<sup>1</sup>.

In the growing feminist literature on the subject of 'agency', the assumption remains to all intents and purposes that women's agency is manifested against a backdrop of prevailing conditions of oppression. However, this expansion of our understanding of agency remains firmly underwritten by the assumptions outlined so far: that victimhood is defined as being irremediably associated with helplessness, passivity and naivety, and categorically unable to accommodate attributes which speak to women's status as active and knowing subjects. It has been established as a condition of our attention to agency that the vocabulary of victimhood is disqualified. And, as the analysis in the previous chapter has shown, our collusion in that disqualification is enlisted by rhetorical constructions which discipline us towards utilising particular interpretive schema. The coercion and exclusions which are therefore entailed in our understanding of the relationship between victimhood and agency taint the otherwise creditable interest in working out the theoretical complexities of agency. I have noted the routine opposition of the 'passive victim' to the 'active agent' within the surveyed articles. It seems unobjectionable to contrast 'passive' to 'active', and the intuitive acceptability of that contrast legitimises attention to women's agency as an antidote to images of women's passivity. However, the way these constructs are routinely used establishes a parity of grammatical function between them. As 'active' stands to 'agent' as an inherent and defining feature, so 'passive' stands to 'victim'. In this way, the 'agent' is dichotomised from the 'victim', whose passivity has been constructed as integral to her victimhood. Moreover, I have shown how the 'passive victim' operates as a spectral category from which women at all costs must be defined as excluded via

---

<sup>1</sup> Although these scholars all provided extremely useful elaborations of this problem, their strategies also often exhibited the same failing as some of the counter-challenges to the 'prodigal daughters' discussed in Chapter 5: the disruption of the dichotomy took the form of retrieving the agency of the women defined as 'victims', privileging agency as the marker of moral worth and leaving the helpless or passive victim in a dubious position (e.g. Abrams 1995, 325-6, 354; Schneider 1993, 389). A slightly different objection might be made to the approaches of Connell (1997) and Picart (2003). Both writers took a set of legal case studies to illustrate how plaintiffs fared depending on whether they satisfied the court's expectations that they present as 'victims' or 'agents' in particular situations. While the aim was to point out the law's role in reifying dichotomous constructions of victimhood and agency, the authors did as much to organise our perceptions in line with these constructions as to disrupt them. That is, they used a circular argument, defining plaintiff's behaviours as being either of the 'victim' or of the 'agent', using that designation to pull these cases into the discussion, and then interpreting the courts' responses as instrumental in entrenching the dichotomy of terms whose meaning they have themselves defined in this way.

ceremonial registrations of diverse sorts of behaviours as proof of agency. Attention to the concept of agency, therefore, emerges as more than a relatively dispassionate scholastic endeavour.

Indeed, victimhood is *explicitly* opposed to agency in many cases within the primary dataset even without the specific attribution of passivity (e.g. Threadgold 2006, 235; Kosambi 2001, 171; Rogoff 1992; Andrijasevic 2007, 26; Taylor 2006, 45; Warner 2004, 501; Chetkovich 2004, 127-8; Flax, cited in Wendell 1990, 27; R. Mason 2007, 306; Morley 1992, 524; Flint 2006, 527; Gilmore 2003, 707, 710; Throsby 2004, 142; Davis 2002, 24; Moghadam 2007, 939; Franks 2003, 148). As Warner's (2004, 501) article exemplifies, it is only by using our prior knowledge of this dichotomy that we can make any logical connection between the following two statements: 'At this stage in the process the women had not yet sacrificed their innocence or traded in their cloak of victimhood for the mantle of responsibility. Without a sense of agency, the only relationships that are possible are ones based on dependencies.' It is only by equating 'victimhood' with '[w]ithout a sense of agency' that we as readers can reconstruct a sensible segue. The supposition throughout the articles analysed is that there is a fundamental and irreducible tension between victimhood and agency, and that it is a struggle for feminists to keep both in view. The substitution of the terminology of 'survivor' for that of 'victim' testifies to the assumption that it is paradoxical to consider the 'victim' as having the potential to exercise agency. A notable exception within the survey data to the acceptance of this unresolvable tension is Sweeney (2004, 478), who redefines in terms of agency the 'active, resilient efforts [of incarcerated women] to give shape and name to [...] experiences [of victimization]'. Here, the very act of claiming victimhood is a manifestation of agency, not its denial. It is also incidentally a counter to 'theorists' increasing tendency – given the risk of reifying female victimhood – to underaddress questions of victimization' (Sweeney 2004, 478), a tendency which this thesis confirms.

In fact, to be deemed innocent and therefore legitimate, the 'victim' must be able to expunge all suggestion of agentic capacity to avoid suspicions of complicity or participation in either their own or others' subordination (see Mackie 2005, 211; Davis 2002, 24; Wendell 1990, 26; Flax, cited in Wendell 1990, 27; Helms 2003, 27; see also Bondi and Burman 22-3). Where complicity with dominant norms always counts as

evidence of the moral guilt of the conniving, self-proclaimed ‘victim’, it is recoded when the announced focus is on agency. In these cases, complicity is framed as simply part of the complex array of women’s agency and interesting in its own right. At best, complicity-as-agency is seen as a positive source of control, whereby women manipulate dominant expectations to their advantage or even derive benefits from them. The acknowledgement of constraint in these cases is not assumed to reduce the positive value of agency in demonstrating women’s resilience and resourcefulness. However, where evidence of participation is set against an assumed claim of victimisation, the language of ‘complicity’ is calculated to undermine that claim by invoking the guilt of the impostor-victim who has failed the test of innocence. Where the valorisation of agency is not mitigated by evidence of oppression, the merest hint of agency is enough to detract from the legitimacy of identifying as a ‘victim’. A particular economy ordains that the value of agency is not normally reducible, where the sum of victimhood is always prone to be eroded by evidence of what is taken to be its polar opposite<sup>2</sup>.

That agency is normally allowed to reveal itself as unconditionally positive is, I suggest, at the root of Lau’s (2003, 373; emphasis in original) bemusement at the trend for diasporic South Asian women fiction writers to depict their protagonists as ‘*natural* victims’ of the social and cultural strictures within their communities of origin. Lau (2003, 369, 376) seeks to explain why, despite celebrating the spiritedness of their characters, these writers end up relegating them to victim status by showing how they suffer as a result of either conforming to or rebelling against dominant expectations. Of interest here is Lau’s framing of the plots in these novels as suggestive of the inevitability of victimhood, despite the fact that the characters in the stories are shown to agentially respond to oppression. The scenario presented by Lau is not substantially different from that which we can see commonly described in analyses which take agency rather than victim status as their object of scrutiny. In those cases, as in these novels, agency can be exercised towards a variety of ends: to activate and therefore reinforce dominant norms, to actively resist norms in one

---

<sup>2</sup> Again, Sweeney’s (2004, 478) article constitutes an exception to this model, in that it asserts the validity of the efforts of incarcerated women to articulate their experiences as ‘victims’, and to pose these efforts as not incompatible with their having committed violent crimes against others, clear evidence of both their agency and guilt.



location but not in another, or even to utilise them in one location in order to make gains elsewhere.

Lau (2003, 369) reads the fictional plots as being framed in the opposite way, as taking women's victimisation as their main focus, and as such they present a 'curious' phenomenon which needs to be explained. I suggest that Lau imposes this frame because these stories bring out agency's potential to fail to mitigate oppression<sup>3</sup>. According to this reading, Lau can interpret these fictional plots as problematic on the basis that they portray women as '*natural* victims', when to argue that they are portrayed as 'natural agents' – which, from Lau's (2003, 373) own account of these stories, the protagonists clearly also appear to be – would risk exposing the reality that natural agency does not necessarily lead to more self-determined outcomes. These stories go against the customary economy of agency and victimhood, because agency, whether in the form of rebellion or conformity, is shown to be valueless against the power of oppressive expectations. And the stock of victimhood – as a function of external constraints – remains unreduced by exhibitions of agency. Indeed, Lau's (2003, 373) argument that the protagonists are portrayed as '*natural* victims' appears to be an attempt to deflect the implications of this unpalatable scenario by suggesting that the novelists have, inadvertently or otherwise, relocated the origins of oppression to within the characters' personal propensities. Persistent victimhood becomes a function of personal character, not of persistent oppression. Where the impotence of agency emerges, it is not as an inherent feature, but as a kind of karmic failure that '*natural* victims' inevitably attract to themselves.

By projecting that portrayal as the authors' doing, Lau legitimises her objection to it, despite providing ample evidence of the real depth and breadth of constraints on women in South Asian societies (Lau 2003, 370-72). This reality might constitute an obvious explanation for the way these writers fictionalise women's lives in their birth cultures, but Lau is impelled to find an alternative account for their apparent predilection for revealing agency's inadequacies. She finds it in these authors' diasporic positioning, which encourages them either to abide by the demands of Western publishing houses which deem

---

<sup>3</sup> As noted in the previous chapter (*supra* 194ff.), a similar conundrum motivated Chetkovich's (2004) reappraisal of Wendell's (1990) 'perspective' model: the actions of the 'responsible actor' led to negative outcomes, when these were normally associated intrinsically and exclusively with the perspective of the victim.

such stories more marketable in the West, or to capitalise on their difference and exotic status (Lau 2003, 373). As for the latter, we are left to assume that non-Western women's victimhood is one of the 'symbols of [...] difference' which diasporic writers are prepared to 'flaunt [...] in whichever form would enable them to best use it as a means to their ends', since Lau provides no other rationale for connecting this observation to the problem as she has posed it. To make sense of Lau's conclusions, we must assent to two assumptions. Firstly, we must accept the logic that representing women as victims is more readily explained in terms of these authors' self-interested motives than by the reality of constraint which Lau has herself documented, and we must join in disqualifying those representations on that basis. Secondly, to understand that non-Western women's victimhood can function as a symbol of difference we must position ourselves as Western non-victims.

Lau's framing of both the problem and its explanation is ordained by an argument that has by now been broadly well-received within Western feminism – Mohanty's (1991, 57ff.; emphasis in original) critique of the recolonising tendencies of Western feminist 'construction of 'third world women' as a homogeneous 'powerless' group often located as implicit *victims* of particular socioeconomic systems'<sup>4</sup>. Lau (2003, 378) does appeal to Mohanty's view, and in line with it, positions diasporic writers depicting their own cultures as part of the 'West', and as conditioned by the normalisation of Western middle-class values (see Mohanty 1991, 52, 55; Lau 2003, 373). To do so, both Mohanty and Lau must be selective about what parameters they will use to establish sameness and difference. For Lau (2003, 373), socio-geographical location trumps nationality and ethnicity, and allows her to position diasporic writers as more of the West than of their own cultures, and for Mohanty (1991, 52, 55), class location outweighs other dimensions, so that third world scholars writing from within their own cultures and geographies about their own people are

---

<sup>4</sup> My ensuing discussion of Mohanty's essay moves us outside the survey datasets, and I will at times continue to extend my analysis to consider the ways in which the framing of victimhood as evidenced within the survey data has wider implications for feminist theorising. I will, however, endeavour to make it clear whether or not I am referring to the core research data. As an aside, I draw attention to the implications of Mohanty's much-quoted essay (published originally in one of the journals under review) falling outside our search criteria. I have defended the necessity for settling on search protocols that would generate workable results, but one of the unavoidable consequences is that seminal articles like this one, which focus heavily on the issue of victim representations but do not contain the search parameters, are not retrieved. The point to be made here is that the articles under review in this study constitute a subset of similar modes of referring to victims elsewhere in feminist writing, and that the sorts of effects I am analysing may be infinitely reproduced in spheres well beyond what can be adequately addressed here.

also categorised as Western, and therefore just as objectifying of more powerless groups in their environment.

This differential positioning of women of third world origin presumes a mobility of identification which is available to and exercised by certain third world women and not others. Mohanty appears to have no expectation, for instance, that being working class might be a basis on which third world women might identify with Western women who are similarly located, while the middle class position of third world scholars is the ground on which they are classified with their Western equivalents. It also presumes that this mobility is more likely to be exercised in particular directions – for Mohanty (1991, 52), from a geographical and ethnic location in the third world towards the West, and for Lau (2003, 373), from a geographical location in the West away from ethnic and national origins. The argument that casting third world women as victims restages Western imperialism can be sustained only if the third world writers who also do so are separated out and resituated as Western. That manoeuvre also entails the immobilisation of the remaining third world women within their cultural, ethnic, and geographical locations and identifications, and as therefore colonisable by the ‘West’. The complaint that less powerful third world women are objectified by the *imperialising* effects of victim representations locates the particular potency of the problem as a function of these women’s ‘world’ standing with respect to the West. But the validity of the complaint itself relies on defining as immutable their position as third world women, at the same time as the prospect of such immutability is thrown into question by the strategic categorisation of other third world women as not of the third world for the purposes of this argument<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> Although Mohanty (1991, 55; emphasis added) remarks that she is ‘dealing with feminists who *identify themselves* as culturally or geographically from the ‘West,’ as mentioned earlier [...]’, the earlier passage to which she refers makes it clear that the categorisation of writers as Western or not is one *she* is generating based on comparisons *she* is making between their analytical strategies (see Mohanty 1991, 52).

Here it is also worth comparing Mohanty’s argument in this essay with Chow’s (1999, 160ff.) critique of Susan Gubar’s (1998) analysis of what ails contemporary feminism, in terms of the way they each frame Western feminist claims about victimhood. In Chow’s reading of Gubar’s complaint about the decimation of the feminist subject of ‘woman’ by poststructuralism, Gubar’s desire to maintain the integrity of ‘woman’ entails the need to continue the right to participate in the victim identity shared by all women so as to insulate white feminists from the knowledge that they also participate in the subordination of non-white men and women. The claim to victimhood thus becomes the mechanism for sustaining a false *sameness* between Western feminists and racialised others. In Mohanty’s argument, claims about the victimhood of third world women by Western feminists are the mechanism by which the latter define the *difference*, or otherness, of the former. In both readings, victim claims are seen to function to homogenise constituencies at different points of aggregation, but the relationships established between Western feminists and other-raced women as a

There are two further points to foreground about Mohanty's (1991) argument that are of particular relevance to the issue of how feminist theorising of victimhood reverberates across the conceptualisation of and posture towards agency. The following statement from Mohanty (1991, 71-2; emphasis in original) neatly shows how these points are connected:

[The] application of the notion of women as a homogeneous category to women in the third world colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class and ethnic frameworks; in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political *agency*.

Firstly, Mohanty has a particular objection to the homogenising effects of Western feminist representations of third world women, but furthermore, consistently explains this homogenisation as a function of their depiction as victims (Mohanty 1991, 54, 56, 57, 59, 61, 71, 84 note 9; see also Lau 2003, 373, 378). By this reasoning, the objections to homogenisation and to victim portrayals are therefore inseparable. On the contrary, there are two issues here which are quite distinguishable – the study of women as victims is no more inherently unable to account for the complexities of their different locations than is the study of their agency. It is a logical error to reject depictions of victimhood on the basis that these are by nature universalising, even if it were true that some such depictions have lacked nuance in the past.

In this respect, it is also fair to question the validity of Mohanty's (1991, 52; emphasis in original) deflection of any potential charge of homogenisation on her own part – what could be interpreted as such in her characterisation of 'Western feminism' she reframes as the tracing of 'a coherence of *effects*'. Thus, she legitimises both her selection of particular characteristics as evidence of similarity across the diverse manifestations of 'Western feminism' (which she acknowledges as being 'neither singular nor homogeneous in its goals, interests, or analyses') and her privileging of these as the definitive markers which

---

consequence are quite contradictory in each case. Chow invalidates the empathic identification that would supposedly ground Gubar's claim to sameness of victimisation with those who are not Western and white. On the other hand, Mohanty critiques the attribution of victim status to third world women precisely on the basis that it operates as a way of defining their irrevocable otherness with respect to more privileged and less subordinated Western women. Western feminist claims of victimhood (their own and others) therefore emerge as the mechanism by which both the sameness and difference of Western women is erroneously established with respect to racialised others. My point here is not that this presents a no-win situation for Western feminists, on whose account we should certainly shed no tears, but that there are subtleties in the logic of, and the effects produced by, attacks on victim claims. That these sometimes expose contradictions highlights the ease with which such attacks are expected to elicit automatically negative reactions to victim claims in whatever context they are presented. Whatever the variations in the ends such reactions are intended to serve, the assumption is that victim representations can be relied upon to stand as the guilty mechanism by which all manner of ills have apparently been accomplished.

designate its difference and distance from the perspectives of third world women. The charge that victim portrayals are homogenising is fundamental to the criticism that such depictions fail to acknowledge third world women as variously located subjects with differing experiences and perceptions of their situations. But, Mohanty's tactic here begs the obvious question of why representations of various collectives of women as victims cannot also be envisaged as the benign revelation of a 'coherence of effects' within otherwise recognised diversity.

The second point is that as long as victim representations are associated with homogenisation, and as long as victimhood is perceived to be so resolutely contra agency, then agency is correspondingly associated with complexity and the recognition of the true diversity of women's experience, as indeed it is here. In saying that focusing on the oppression of third world women and universalising them in the process 'ultimately robs them of their historical and political *agency*', Mohanty repeats the manoeuvre I identified in the previous chapter as a common one in criticisms of victim depictions in the survey data – she locates the site of tangible effects of such depictions at the level of the representational, where these women are *actually* 'robbed' of their agency. But many other writers share her belief in the particularly potent capacity of victim representations to *obliterate* awareness of women's agency. Within our survey data, the assumption that focusing on victimisation obscures, ignores or otherwise completely disables our ability to perceive or simultaneously discuss agency is widespread (e.g. Rogoff 1992; Andrijasevic 2007, 26; Riessman 2000, 116; Chetkovich 2004, 127-8), as is the view that the image of third world women as victims needs to be rejected in the process of analysing the complexities of agency (e.g. Doezenia 2001, 18; Moghadam 2007, 939; see also Throsby 2004, 142; Davis 2002, 24; Flint 2006, 527; Choo 2006, 579; Wendell 1990, 27; Samuelson 2007, 845; Danner et al. 1999, 255; Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 665). On this point, we might return to Lau's (2003) discussion to raise a question about the extent to which agency is *actually* absent from representations which are critiqued as too victim-oriented. As noted, Lau framed the fictions she was analysing as telling the story of women's 'natural' victimhood, despite the rebellion of some of the fictional protagonists. She saw these representations as exemplifying a well-established feminist argument about the tendency for third world women's victimhood to be foregrounded at the expense of their agency, but it was Lau who

seemed reluctant to acknowledge the agency demonstrated by the fictional characters. I suggested this was partly because agency was not given its due in these stories – it always failed to transform the protagonists' situation. This suggests that what critics of victim representations read as an obscuring of agency might be, at least in some cases, simply an insistence on the reality that some kinds of oppression are impervious to some kinds of agency.

Nevertheless, the belief in the obscuring effects of victim representations remains relatively secure in feminist writing, and in this respect, images of victimisation appear to be endowed with a much greater power than images of agency to conceal alternative views. Although it is sometimes acknowledged that celebrating agency can deflect attention from oppression (e.g. Ray 2000, 714; Riessman 2000, 114, 129; Davis 2002, 24; Flew et al. 1999, 399; Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 662), this reservation clearly does not translate into a normative rejection of analyses of agency in the same way that has occurred in the case of victim representations. As argued in the last chapter, whatever concessions are made to the victim perspective, the substance of these acknowledgements is often undercut by a reminder of its insuperable and more serious risks. We can see, for example, how the 'but' clause operates in Davis' (2002, 24) statement that a 'knee-jerk celebration of [...] agency misleads, but its disavowal in the name of victimhood leads to dangerous blind spots'. Here that which 'misleads' seems open to corrective, where 'dangerous blind spots' suggests a state of unrecoverable delusion. In any case, the 'but' establishes the problems of highlighting victimhood as being far more pressing than those of celebrating agency, whatever disadvantages that may have and however ill-considered that may be (but see Sweeney 2004, 474 for an alternative emphasis).

And because of the dichotomous definition of victimhood and agency, and of the assumption that focusing on the former will conceal other factors, studies of agency cannot be additive or complementary, cannot be the 'respectful supplementation of dominance theory' aspired to by Abrams (1995, 354). To have any purchase at all, they must *displace* attention to victimhood, else women's agency is unable to be revealed. The only option is to move *beyond* narratives of victimhood and their definitive theoretical inadequacy, not develop our understanding of its complexities alongside our exploration of agency (e.g. Mackie 2005, 211; Riessman 2000, 116; Hernandez 1999, 562; Williams 2002, 101;

Fernandes 1999, 140; Gray 2004, 424; Jameson 1988, 782; Yea 2005, 459; Griffin 1997, 18; Henwood and Wyatt 2000, 128). On that basis, 'agency' alone emerges as the field of analysis for the future, and although the complexity that is honoured in its name should theoretically be able to include the widest possible array of perspectives, even of victims and their representatives, the perception of victimhood as antithetical to, and concealing, agency ensures that it does not.

## 6.2 Agency and the virtues of complexity

In this section, I take up this issue of how it is made sensible in feminist writing that what is defined as complex must exclude the analysis of victimhood and the perspectives of the victim-identified, even though it is counter-intuitive for limits to be imposed where a plurality of perspectives is the ostensible goal. I stress that the aim of the following textual readings is not to undermine aspirations towards agency, nor the attempts to better understand women's engagement with patriarchal power, including the ways in which women *act* to reinforce it. Academic feminist goals are obviously furthered by the continual supplementation of our knowledge about all aspects of women's confrontation with power.

However, there is a difference between saying what we want for women, and positing that which we want as not just politically and socially desirable, but morally as well. And there is a difference between asserting the scholastic *value* of analyses which expand our knowledge of women's experience and asserting their scholastic, even ethical, *superiority* over other sorts of analyses which are categorised as hopelessly inadequate for feminist purposes and therefore excluded from the work of collective knowledge production. The search for more complete and 'truer' knowledge guides all academic endeavours (even, at some level, poststructuralist ones), and normatively defining certain analyses as less 'true', even 'untrue', traduces their integrity as well as their theoretical adequacy in the sense that they are positioned as (deliberately?) not participating in the shared emancipatory program. The following textual analyses are therefore quite detailed, but the purpose is to firmly ground my reservations about the context in which our otherwise highly useful discussions of agency and resistance are set. The concern is that the expansion of our understanding of agency and power does not occur within an open and disinterested environment of academic inquiry.

In the course of various discussions in the previous chapter, I pointed to the common understanding of victimhood as a monolithic state, and of studies that highlight it as therefore correspondingly simplistic. And I referred to the way explorations of agency are attributed with the sort of complexity and sophistication we now require from our research endeavours. Recall, for instance, Haraway's (1997, 65) dismissal of victims' assumed claims to 'innate knowledge', in contrast to the 'less deluded' knowledge crafted by the non-victim-identified who are fully alert to the intersubjective, political aspects of knowledge production. Similarly, Andrijasevic (2007, 38) called for the development of new representations of subjectivity for '[women] as historical beings' to replace the stereotypical, symbolic images of the trafficked victim. Here, as elsewhere, the vocabulary of historicisation, particularisation, multiplicity, specificity, situatedness, and location is repeatedly used to establish a separate semantic space for such perspectives, where they are coded as distinct from and superior to the homogenising assumptions of victim representations (see also Krasniqi 2007, 2, 3<sup>6</sup>; Gray 2004, 424; Segura and Pesquera 1992, 520; Warren 2003, 679; Shaheed 1994, 998; Haraway 1997, 65; Fernandes 1999, 127; Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2005, 45; Pini 2007, 45; Moghadam 2007, 939; Flew et al. 1999, 398; Chow 1999, 162; Gustaffson-Larsson et al. 2007, 49). For Andrijasevic, the image of sex-trafficked women as exaggerated victims is central to her claims about stylisation, over-simplification, and detachment from the complexities of real women's lives. The claim that women are stereotyped *as victims* relies on a fixed and essentialised view of the definition of 'victim', the stability of which allows Andrijasevic to assert that women are immobilised at the level of the symbolic by being portrayed according to that definition. So, where there is a more or less explicit call here to displace 'Woman' and reinstate 'women' at the centre of the analysis, there *can be no* similar call here to reinstate space for more complex representations of victimhood, since victimhood needs to remain

---

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Krasniqi's (2007) critique of existing work on post-war Kosova manages not just to de-authorise analyses of victimhood, but rhetorically to disappear them altogether. Krasniqi (2007, 2) notes that '[t]he gender dimension has not only been neglected; it has, almost exclusively, been analysed through two kinds of lenses: that of victimhood and rapes [...] and of [...]'. The only way we can succeed in making the sense here is to reconcile the surface contradiction whereby, on the one hand, gender has been neglected, and, on the other, analysed through studies of victimhood and rapes. We can do so (and it is obviously expected that this will be readily achieved) if we resituate the analysis of victimhood and rapes as part of the 'neglect' of the gender dimension of the war and its aftermath. This is a simple interpretive task for those skilled in the categorisation of analyses of victimhood as too unsophisticated to be counted as viable contributions to Krasniqi's field of study.



stable in its over-simplification to provide a platform from which more complex resignifications will depart.

I also made mention (*supra* 186-7) of two arguments by Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2005, 45) and Gustafsson-Larsson et al. (2007, 49), particularly with respect to the way 'agency' as a legitimate object of analysis survived the call to complicate the binary categorisation of women as either passive victims or active/unrestricted agents, where victimhood did not. Where 'agency' was able to be qualified in different ways to make it more applicable to the diversity of women's responses, passivity was an inherent marker of victimhood and rendered the concept too inflexible to be adapted to any useful theoretical purpose. On this point, it is useful now to expand our prior discussion of Gray's (2004) framing of the respective work of Hirsch and Radstone. This will demonstrate how the validity of emulating Hirsch's style of analysis, once it is defined by Gray as being victim-focused, is gradually eroded, and its approach bracketed outside the more fluid and open positions it is recommended that feminists adopt in the future.

As we saw earlier (*supra* 188-9), during the course of her discussion of how the memorialising of Irish emigrant experience informs present day discourses about immigration to Ireland, Gray (2004, 424) authorises Radstone's objection to Hirsch's 'focus on identification with victimhood'. In doing so, Gray subscribes to Radstone's call to 'read against the grain of 'pure' victimhood'. I have already pointed out that Gray's own account of Hirsch's work, which details its explicit rejection of fixed identification, gives the lie to this suggested lack of nuance, but that this suggestion is expected to hold up once Hirsch is accused of being preoccupied with victimhood. This marks the beginning of a rhetorical process whereby analyses like Hirsch's are excluded definitively from what is prescribed as adequately complex<sup>7</sup>. This happens despite Gray's apparent even-handedness in recommending an approach that will recover 'the more complex difficult [sic] and

---

<sup>7</sup> Steinberg (2000, 148) executes a similar move to Gray when she criticises the approach taken in the book she is reviewing because it attempts to foreground 'diversities among women, but primarily as objects of oppressive practices'. Here again, the 'but' works to devalue this attention to diversity on the basis that it is a matter only of diversity of oppressed experience. Moreover, so entrenched is the assumption that focusing on oppression is diametrically opposed to accounting for complexity that, for Steinberg, the book's claim to document the *differential* effects on women of oppressive instruments (in this case, abortion law) betrays a fundamental incoherence: the book offers 'an anti-essentialism contradictorily grounded in an add-on victimological construction of multiple oppressed women'. For Steinberg, the contradiction arises because an analysis which concentrates on oppressed experiences, multiple or not, cannot lay a claim to be anti-essentialist.

equivocal identifications' that attended Irish emigration, by '[reading] it in the 'gray zone' where neither pure victimhood nor pure perpetration would hold sway'. While the sentence structure here innocently positions 'pure victimhood' and 'pure perpetration' as equally weighted extremes of simplification outside the privileged 'gray zone', Gray has already constructed a frame for understanding these which completely counters that apparent equivalence.

For a start, she has colluded with Radstone in registering Hirsch's discussion, for all its urging towards 'more ambivalent (dis)identifications', as an account of 'pure' victimhood, once again relegating analyses of victimisation to the category of the under-nuanced. In contrast, she has positioned Radstone's insights about how witnesses to the exercise of authority can identify with the perpetrators as well as the objects of that authority as part of the corrective to Hirsch's more limited perspective. This insight forms part of Radstone's 'engagement with the ambiguity, unsettlement, and multiplicity of identification' that occurs in the memorialising of emigrant experience, and is thus categorised as part of the critical engagement with the complexities of memory and identification that Gray concludes is required of 'an ethical feminist approach to the cultural politics of migration'. Gray seems to endorse Radstone's assertion that witnessing the operation of power can induce a variety of identifications, 'especially those of perpetration', which 'exceed an empathic identification with victimhood' (Radstone, cited in Gray 2004, 424). It is difficult to envisage the possibility of analysing identification with victimhood as part of this new feminist ethical engagement with complexity, since it is here framed as a reduction of the variability which that engagement is aimed at understanding. Identification with perpetration, on the other hand, is ranged within the set of complex responses that 'exceed' empathy with victimhood. As a result, identification with perpetration is readmitted as a legitimate object of study even though 'pure perpetration' has been disallowed, while analysing identification with victimhood, 'pure' or not, remains disqualified.

Furthermore, it should be noted that 'pure victimhood' functions as a stock phrase in a way that 'pure perpetration' does not. The latter is a localised, incidental semantic combination generated for the immediate purpose, while the former invokes a well-established interpretive framework that draws in a wide set of delegitimizing associations.

The two phrases are therefore not as rhetorically balanced as this pairing suggests. As well, there is a slippage in the use of 'pure' which the apparent equivalence tends to disguise, but which works to devalue Hirsch's focus above all. Applied to 'perpetration', 'pure' must be interpreted here as meaning merely 'unmitigated', and because of the binary construct, we attempt to transfer this sense also to its application to 'victimhood'. However, 'pure' has already been used with victimhood in pointing out the limitations of Hirsch's perspective, complete with quote marks at that point to signal that there is something special or not quite referential in its meaning. Indeed, combined with 'victimhood', we cannot detach 'pure' from its association with the pretence of innocence and moral purity which is alleged of victim claimants and which grounds our distrust of them. This construct pretends an even-handedness in the way 'pure victimhood' is to be interpreted in relation to 'pure perpetration'. However, its rhetoric conceals the process by which Gray's sequencing of her treatment of these two writers – with Radstone superseding Hirsch and providing a corrective – combines with the interpretive framework which informs our reading of 'pure' to delegitimise Hirsch's analysis more than Radstone's. Those analyses which can be categorised as focusing on 'pure victimhood' – and, as we see with Hirsch's discussion, this can be done regardless of the nuances in the approach to oppression – are much more susceptible to being discredited and excluded from the sort of complexity we seek as part of a normative feminist ethics.

Similarly, Matthews (2002) examines how young Asian women in Australia participate in the discursive formation of Asian femininity in that context. Like Gray, Matthews (2002, 207) wants to avoid extremes in her presentation of these women, refusing to position them as passive victims or active agents or vanguard resisters. Nevertheless, there is a clearly stated prejudice against interpretations framed around victimhood. For example, emphasising 'racism' (understood as discrimination, abuse, exclusion, etc.) as opposed to 'racialisation' (the process by which subjects are discursively called into being as racially different) is defined as problematic because it 'tends to amplify victim status' (Matthews 2002, 215). And although 'active agents' and 'vanguard resisters' are also rejected as equally over-simplified position descriptors, this does not mean that the concepts of agency and resistance remain irrelevant in Matthews' discussion.

Agency is allowed to be qualified and reinscribed as complex – ‘not invariably tied to active intention or purpose but [working] more problematically in precarious ambivalence’ (Matthews 2002, 208). And Matthews (2002, 213) is keen to redefine as resistant responses which would normally not be classified as such, thus seeking to expand the utility of the concept of resistance in line with our sensitivity to the ambivalence that marks the exercise of agency under constraint. Resistance is a ‘nuanced and complex affair’ (Matthews 2002, 213), it varies according to the ways Asian femininity is differently feminised, and is ‘necessarily complicated’ because of its utilisation of Western femininity to gain access to the benefits of whiteness (Matthews 2002, 214). The analysis of resistance is shown to be alert to the nuances of locale and historical and social specificity, but not so local that it becomes irrelevant – Matthews (2002, 217) does not want to generalise her findings about the processes of racialisation to all young Asian women, but maintains that they are applicable beyond the one local school she has studied. Thus, she allows the concept of resistance to accommodate a happy balance between the specificity required of any serious contemporary analysis and the applicability that preserves its pertinence for larger feminist interests.

As a working concept, then, ‘resistance’ is viewed by Matthews as expandable, redefinable, and able to illuminate a variety of positions and responses – something that the victim perspective is not. The concept of ‘agency’ is similarly rescued from any initial association with lack of nuance by Dellinger and Williams (1997, 153). They assert that the task for feminists is to avoid positioning women as ‘either oppressed victims or freewheeling agents’, as ‘completely passive victims of beauty norms or as unsituated agents of resistance’ (Dellinger and Williams 1997, 175), but devote their discussion to complicating only the ‘agency’ pole of these dichotomies. Here again agency survives intact as the legitimate field of analysis: it can lose its over-simplifying descriptors, ‘freewheeling’ and ‘unsituated’, without itself being invalidated as an analytical framework, while victim representations remain attached to lack of complexity. The terminology of victimhood having been disqualified, ‘agency’ becomes the concept capable of explaining that women’s knowing participation is fundamental to the activation of patriarchal ideologies (here compliance to beauty norms) (Dellinger and Williams 1997, 152, 153, 168, 175). Although the constraints imposed by expectations of beauty are

recognised, the language of victimhood cannot be used to describe them once ‘agency’ has been allowed to fill the analytical space. Thus, although the stated aim is to disrupt simplistic, dichotomous framings of women’s engagement with dominant norms, the discussion works to reinstate the impossibility of retaining victim terminology when exploring women’s agency, even when this agency is directed towards the reproduction of gender inequality. As emphasised above (*supra* 266-7) in relation to the binary construct used by Gray (2004, 424), these propositions do not occur in a discursive void. The interpretive skills we bring to bear in delineating the ‘passive victim’ and ‘pure victimhood’ make these particularly recognisable objects, with a disproportionate connotative weight compared to the language used to name the opposite, supposedly equally unacceptable, term of the binary.

We can see this process at work also in Rickard and Storr’s (2001) introduction to a special journal issue devoted to the reassessment of sex work. As in our other examples, they want to create a space where contributors can disrupt the binary understanding of sex work – as either emblematic of victimhood or as a valid form of occupation and/or sexual expression (Rickard and Storr 2001, 1) – so as to increase our appreciation of the ‘complexity, tension and diversity’ in the lives of sex workers. The victim perspective at this stage is not theoretically erased from view, especially as the authors stress that both these positions may be evident, along with others, in the same person’s life (Rickard and Storr 2001, 2). However, where they state that the issue is intended to reflect ‘the rich diversity of experiences’ of sex workers and ‘challenge fixed ideologies’ (Rickard and Storr 2001, 2), what is invoked by ‘fixed ideologies’ stands in a particular relation to the idea of sex work as victimisation, as opposed to sex work as work. There is already a well-established narrative that posits victim representations as a form of theoretical rigidity, and this narrative applies in all areas of feminist debate, not just that pertaining to sex work. In searching for the sort of ‘fixed ideologies’ to which the authors refer, we can instantly bring to mind the one term of the binary whose connection to the idea of fixity is very familiar, and which has already been positioned elsewhere as needing to be eliminated from feminist theorising. It seems probable that the view of sex work as a form of self-determination via labour might still find a hospitable place within the richer and more complex perspectives

the authors want to encourage, but the meanings customarily associated with a victim perspective make its continued inclusion much more unlikely.

In fact, the article by Doezema (2001) which has figured heavily in our analysis appears in the special issue in question. Doezema resisted the portrayal of third world sex workers as victims and foregrounded the occupational character of sex work, preferring the language which expressed the capacity of these women (and men) to organise politically around their shared status as workers over the language of prostitution. The occupational status of sex work and the benefits that can flow from it as paid labour are also heavily emphasised in the same issue (though not in our sample) by Kempadoo (2001, 40, 48), for whom attention to the specificities of sex work roles is obligatory in ‘a world characterized by heterogeneity, diversity, and multiple forms of domination’ (Kempadoo 2001, 57). Such attention is an antidote to ‘the production of grand, universalizing notions about prostitution as the quintessence of women’s oppression’ (Kempadoo 2001, 57), a perspective which ‘*obscures* other dimensions of the everyday lives of [...] sex workers in the region, such as their own *agency* and *subjectivity* [...]’ (Kempadoo 2001, 41; emphasis added). Thus, although Kempadoo makes no direct reference to ‘victimhood’, she sets up a particular order of meaning in which concepts of agency, subjectivity, diversity and complexity are arranged together, and the concept of oppression aligned with essentialism and universalism. And these semantic groupings remain discrete, with the vocabulary of oppression defined as inapplicable within analyses which take account of the undeniable reality that women’s experiences are, at some level at least, always heterogeneous and locally specific.

Thus, although Rickard and Storr’s (2001, 1) oversight of this special issue was articulated in terms of encouraging the disruption of entrenched assumptions about prostitution – including the view of sex work as ‘valid work and meaningful sexual expression’ – both Doezema’s and Kempadoo’s contributions strongly validate parts of that view while delegitimising the view of prostitution as a symptom of an oppressive masculinist hegemony. Nevertheless, the arguments of these two contributions remain embraced within the overarching narrative of greater nuancing as the organising principle of the issue. Indeed, in her own contribution to the issue, Rickard (2001, 115) focuses on the aspects of sex workers’ stories which ‘relate to the theme ‘sex work as a job’’,

considering sex work as the accumulation of skills which are analogous to those necessary in other kinds of employment (Rickard 2001, 123). The point here is not that it is invalid to focus on the occupational character of sex work, nor even on the material and emotional advantages that may accrue from it for some individuals. What is being brought into view is the way the space for interpreting sex work as oppressive or victimising has contracted, and how that has been accomplished by bracketing this interpretation from the cumulatively built complexity of perspectives on sex work.

Various rhetorical moves are required to normalise this kind of illogical exclusion. The dichotomous definition of victimhood and agency remains intact and ensures that if attention to agency is to be normatively a feature of feminist inquiry on the basis that it is central to understanding the complexity of women's responses to power (both resistant and compliant), then attention to victimisation will also normatively be invalidated. While some conceptualisations of agency are identified initially as also not qualifying for inclusion in that complexity, representing women as victims is a practice which is irretrievably associated with over-simplification. It is these analyses only that are impossible to revise and reincorporate into the style of approach deemed adequately sensitive towards what is ubiquitously coded in terms of specificity, diversity, and multiplicity. Finally, this normalisation is helped along by the common wisdom that women either are not victims, or do not want to be represented as such. Making a space for marginalised others to articulate their perspectives as complex subjects has been equated to negating the space in which they have previously been heard as 'only' victims, the role to which they have been 'reduced' by the powerful (e.g. Rogoff 1992; Haggis and Schech 2000, 394; Thorne 1987, 88; Threadgold 2006, 235; Doezeema 2001, 17). If it is accepted that it is not 'true' that women are victims, or that leaving a space for women to speak as victim-subjects is a contradiction in terms, then the imperative to include within our normative theoretical frame the possibility of interpreting women's experience in terms of victimhood disappears.

### **6.3 Poststructuralism and feminist progress: back to the future?**

Having drawn on the survey data to indicate how analyses of victimhood have been positioned as terminally lacking in complexity, I will now sketch out how this framing is enmeshed within a wider narrative of feminist progress there and elsewhere. The earlier

feminist movement is commonly depicted as naïve in its analysis of oppression, an analytical failing that is tied to its focus on victimisation. So, when Munt (1992, 285) accuses feminism of the 1970s and early 1980s of being ‘eager to create false homogeneity through common oppression, validating victimhood through a litany of labels’, she frames the contemporary *devaluation* of victimhood as an understandable corrective to the suspect assumption of moral capital she projects onto earlier feminists. It is also taken for granted here that the contemporary feminist subject occupies a knowing position from which it is possible for her to assert without reservation that feminists of the past were blindly engaged in pursuits that were ‘false’. From this knowing position, feminists narrativise their newly acquired sophistication and complexity of approach compared to the naivety (and excesses) of theory to date.

This narrative often plays out around a contrast between the essentialism of second-wave feminism, and the supposedly more sophisticated conceptions of power and subjectivity in poststructuralist approaches in particular<sup>8</sup>. This teleological narrative is the focus of Hemmings’ (2005, 115) interest in the mechanisms by which our subscription to such a version of feminist history is secured, despite the obviously artificial temporality it imposes on past feminist interventions and its negation of the progenitive role played by earlier feminist thinking (see also Shands 1999, 22). This story postulates a rupture between poststructuralism and the past, on the other side of which poststructuralists emerge heroic and clear-sighted, having cast off the shackles of second-wave (and especially radical feminist) immaturity. We have seen how this is mirrored in the credentialising that takes place around claims to have moved the analytical focus ‘beyond’ victimhood and the regular denials that women are ‘passive victims’. These denials ritualistically define the

---

<sup>8</sup> I use the term ‘poststructuralist’ here as synonymous with ‘postmodernist’ (see Weedon 1997, 170), and take its meaning to be reliably coded for contemporary readers of this thesis. There is a fairly recognisable set of theoretical precepts generally associated with poststructuralism – the discursive constitution of the subject and the subject’s consequent fragility and lack of fixity (contra Enlightenment assumptions of the unitary subject), relativist conceptions of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ which challenge the place of notions of objectivity and neutrality in the construction of knowledge, and a concept of power which emphasises its mesh-like structure and its saturation of the social body at the micro-level, in contrast to the hierarchical model of power that sees it invested in particular institutions and social structures (see Weedon 1997, 19ff.). I also note that the poststructuralist influence on feminist analyses translates more often than not specifically as Foucauldian – ‘one of the male thinkers [...] to whom feminists have turned much more frequently and much more readily than to other French writers and thinkers’ (Bartkowski 1988, 51).



rupture between the present of our more advanced understanding of women's positioning within power and the past in which such a misconception supposedly held sway.

Haag (1996, 61) makes this teleology explicit when she asserts that poststructuralist approaches to the issue of violence, which 'are nothing if not intellectually and politically intricate', offer the exit we seek from the 'intellectually bankrupt 'victimology'' of second-wave. Outside our sample, Haraway (1990, 199) uses the invention of the cyborg feminist to stand in for the dissolved category of the essentialised 'woman', and to arrest the damage wrought by identification with innocent victimhood, and for Sawicki (1986, 30), Foucault's theory of resistant subjectivity 'opens up the possibility of something more than a history of constructions or of victimization'. In a further homage to Foucault, Kerfoot and Knights (1994, 69) see in his ideas an 'escape' from the essentialist model of power assumed by radical and Marxist feminists, and which 'imputes a passivity to all women' (Kerfoot and Knights 1994, 70). Mills (1997, 42; see also ) adheres to a similar normative logic in noting that the Foucauldian model of power/resistance has 'helped' feminists to move away from the simplistic 'victim/oppressor' model, enabling the redefinition of apparently submissive behaviour as agentic (Mills 1997, 92). Mills (1997, 86; emphasis added) explicitly positions the reader as colluding with this version of feminist progress – 'we can see how drawing on the notion of discourse is a significant improvement from earlier feminist theorising, which [...] cast women as passive victims of oppression'. The break between present and past modes of theorising is assumed to be insuperable, since the more complex and productive insights generated by discourse analysis have despatched the past to definitive obsolescence (see Mills 1997, 30, 42, 78)<sup>9</sup>.

Feminists have been particularly interested in the agentic possibilities that appear to be opened up by Foucault's definition of power as that which operates on free subjects, and always presupposes resistance (e.g. Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 56; Healey 1999, 50; Grimshaw 1993, 57; Sawicki 1986, 29; Abu-Lughod 1990, 42; Bordo 1993, 192; Mahoney

---

<sup>9</sup> Mills (1997, 30, 86, 92) uses the 'passive victim' trope a number of times as a kind of code to metonymically evoke the range of negative aspects she associates with the earlier model of oppression, relying on the reader's interpreting this trope in a way which is coherent with postulating the inferiority of earlier theories. As such, Mills' (1997) discussion is a good example of the 'special competence of theory' (Smith 1999, 150): readers are oriented towards accepting dominant conceptual frameworks at the same time as the title of Mills' book announces the task to be precisely the unpacking of the mechanics of discursive power. By taking 'discourse' as its object of analysis, Mills' text deflects attention away from the ways in which it also operates discursively.

and Yngvesson 1992, 62). Assuming, as Faith (1994, 55) does, that '[feminist] resistance is the antithesis of female-victim identity', then the invocation of Foucault often works to encode the difference between a theory of power that can be fruitfully turned to reveal opportunities for feminist agency, and earlier feminist conceptions of power as held within patriarchal institutions, a view which supposedly foreclosed such possibilities. This is certainly what Foucault signifies for Faith (1994, 55-6; emphasis added), for whom 'privileging of the victim was one of the *unintended* early outcomes of second-wave feminist writing and activism'. To suggest that such an outcome was 'unintended' completely dismisses the purposiveness of second-wave struggles to redefine certain structures and practices as victimising, and to use the category of 'victim' to gain public recognition of women's differential status and to activate for change. But conformity to the narrative of poststructuralism's superior theoretical heft and sophistication demands that second-wave feminism be framed in a way that establishes the clear requirement for a radical corrective. Under such a corrective, it would not be possible to retrieve a theory of the victim since this narrative defines such a retrieval as a temporal and developmental regression. Positioning the privileging of the victim as the unanticipated consequence of a certain lack of alertness and foresight on the part of second-wave feminists obviates the need to respectfully *supplement* theories of dominance in line with Abrams' (1995, 354) suggestion. They can and should be dispensed with, and poststructuralist theories can and should reign supreme.

Within the survey data, this generational construction of the contest between feminist poststructuralism and radical feminist interest in victimhood comes to the fore in Chow's (1999, 160ff.) critique of Gubar's (1998, 886) objection to the dissipation of the notion of 'woman' – and therefore of communion across difference – brought about in the name of postmodernism. Applying Hindess' (2007, 328) insight that rhetorical consignment of the currently existing to the past is a means of implying, not just lack of development, but also moral and intellectual failure, consider Chow's (1999, 161) strategy in the following:

Once the lingering power of captivity is understood, the complaints we hear from time to time from second-wave feminist critics about the current theoretical climate in the academy can be seen as part and parcel of an endeavour to keep the cultural capital of victimhood on the side of white feminism.

Here, Chow relegates Gubar to the period designated by 'second-wave', despite the fact that Gubar's article pre-dates her own by only a year, and is therefore a contemporary

contribution to what Gubar considers to be a contemporary problem. Not only Gubar, of course, but all feminists who make similar criticisms of the ‘current theoretical climate’ are positioned as speaking from the past, and against the consensus which is signified by that currency, and to which ‘we’ have allegiance. The ‘we’ includes the reader in the collective of the more intellectually advanced, who, once having understood ‘the lingering power of captivity’, know how to dispose of the complaints of those who as yet do not share that understanding. The irrationality of these complainants is such that they object to any challenge to the integrity of ‘woman’, ‘however historically reasoned’ such challenges may be (Chow 1999, 162). And moral failure joins intellectual failure in the charge that Gubar ‘fails or *refuses* to see’ (Chow 1999, 162; emphasis added) that the new avenues of intellectual inquiry reinvigorate, rather than enfeeble, feminist criticism. Failure to see we might excuse as the theoretically limiting, but nevertheless involuntary, naivety we are used to associating with victim-oriented second-wavers, but we have no choice but to impugn a *refusal* to see, which can stem only from deliberate self-delusion or intellectual dishonesty.

A prominent protagonist in this historiography as it is broadly written by feminists is MacKinnon, who emerges for contemporary academic (especially poststructuralist) feminists – just as she did for the ‘prodigal daughters’ and other conservative critics of ‘political correctness’ – as the emblematic ‘victim feminist’ or ‘dominance theorist’ (e.g. Abrams 1995, 308 note 17, 325 note 79; Harding 1986, 193 note 38; Schneider 1993, 391; Leys 1992, 197; Brown 1995, 94; Flax 1990, 258 note 90; for observations of this pattern, see Mardorossian 2002a, 744; Ebert 1996, 305-6 note 3; Atmore 1999a, 200). The regularity of feminist criticism of MacKinnon’s work serves as a point of contrast for the accommodations feminists are prepared to make for the theoretical inadequacy of some poststructuralist arguments, especially Foucault’s. In arguments which recall Paglia’s (1994, 108) claim that MacKinnon ‘locked onto Seventies-era feminism and never let go’, MacKinnon’s views are seen as belonging to the past, and as therefore irrelevant to contemporary debates. Her theory about the production of the social meaning of gender and sexuality through the eroticisation of (male) dominance and (female) submission (MacKinnon 1983, 635; 1989, 316) ‘inevitably reinforces a politically *retrograde* stereotype of the female as a purely passive victim’ (Leys 1992, 168; emphasis added).

And in keeping with the narrative which opposes the insightfulness of poststructuralists to the theoretical immaturity of radical feminists, Brown (1995, 94) presents herself as the wise interpreter of a historical dynamic, of which MacKinnon, seeking refuge as she supposedly is from 'the throes of a theoretical and political crisis', is ignorant. In Brown's framing, postmodernists stand heroically ready to confront the uncertainties of the post-positivist age, while totalising theorists like MacKinnon cravenly cling to regulatory instruments to temper the excesses of a domination which for them has no foreseeable end. Alternatively, these theorists resort to identity politics in order to reinvent the integrated subjectivity of modernism 'without requiring profound comprehension of the world in which one is situated' (Brown 1995, 35). In a paradoxical rhetorical move, then, Brown (1995, 94) grounds her critique of MacKinnon's failure to embrace the anti-progressivist, anti-teleological foundations of the postmodern conception of human history by assuming a stance within history from which she can intuit the misguided motives of those who are too deluded to recognise them correctly for themselves<sup>10</sup>.

A number of prominent feminists (e.g. Cornell 1991, 11, 130; Harding 1986, 193 note 38; Allen 1998 25-6; 2001, 515; Haraway 1990, 200-01; Grimshaw 1993, 57; Brown 1995, 41, 89, 91-2, 95) concur in their evaluation of MacKinnon's thinking as essentialist, totalising, overly preoccupied with women's sexual subordination, and theoretically incapable of showing a way out of the relentless constitution of women's subjectivity by male sexual dominance. This chorus of authoritative feminist objections to MacKinnon's position creates a potent sense of disciplinary consensus about her place in contemporary feminist thinking, and one which is more than merely apparent, as an anecdote from Ebert (1996, 305-6 note 3) indicates. Ebert reports the editorial rejection of her contribution to a special issue on feminism and postmodernism for the reason that she had used MacKinnon's statistics on rape, these being 'embedded in a highly polemical argument' based on 'essentialising premises'. For Ebert, this constitutes an obvious and troubling example of the blanket discrediting of what is actually a committed and carefully argued

---

<sup>10</sup> Indeed Brown (1995, 116 note 38) later admits that she cannot quite dispense with the notion of a progressive historiography, adherence to which makes intelligible her relegation of MacKinnon to the past and her advocacy of the intellectual superiority of a postmodern position, but undermines the coherence of the terms of that position.

position on MacKinnon's part. We might also, recalling Smith (1999, 49; also 75-9), interpret Ebert's rejection as the materialised social practice that ensues from the progressive organisation of feminist knowledge and from the particular social relations activated between feminists during reading encounters with these sorts of routine framings of MacKinnon's work.

In contrast, and exemplifying what Martin (1994, 651) notes as 'our cordial treatment of the men's theories and our punitive approach to the women's', feminists have mined Foucault's work enthusiastically for what it might tell us about the relationship between power and resistance, and the status of the female subject within that dynamic. Where MacKinnon is often invoked to point to what is outmoded, references to Foucault encode an analytical posture that is sophisticated and anti-essentialist (Sawyer 2002, 450; cf. Hemmings 2005, 124-5). This is despite a lack of clarity about the capacities for agency and resistance in Foucault's discursively constituted subject, and vision of a social body utterly saturated with the operation of power – '[i]t seems to me that power *is* 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in' (Foucault 1980, 141), and further, 'power is co-extensive with the social body; there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of its network' (Foucault 1980, 142). At issue here is not whether feminist accounts of Foucault's ideas are correct or not, but the extent to which feminists are prepared to paper over ambiguities in their own explanations of Foucault's ideas, especially when there is evidence of a disinclination to extend the same indulgence to so-called 'victim feminists' like MacKinnon. It is not within our scope to treat exhaustively either Foucault's theory of power or feminist interpretations of it. But a cursory glance at some feminist applications of Foucault's ideas indicates a willingness to ignore logical inconsistencies, and even to put a Foucauldian gloss on otherwise fairly conventional understandings of power and oppression. These remarks will serve as a backdrop to our observations of a similar trend within the survey data.

Foucault's view of power as expressed above might well be thought to be just as depressing and theoretically unable to accommodate an emancipatory vision as MacKinnon's so-called 'totalising' theory, in which women's consciousness is so thoroughly produced as an effect of male domination that there is no space in which to

independently visualise a state of freedom (see Allen 1998, 25; Brown 1995, 92; Cornell 1991, 11, 131). Haraway (1990, 201) complains that MacKinnon's reasoning 'constructs a nonsubject, a nonbeing'<sup>11</sup>, and thereby makes the feminist project a theoretical impossibility, if that project is taken to be, as she assumes it is by MacKinnon, the articulation of women's experience – 'the self-knowledge of a self-who-is-not'. Yet, feminists have liberally deployed Foucault's notion of 'docile bodies' which self-regulate in line with dominant norms to explain the disciplinary effects of precisely the sort of comprehensive colonisation of women's self-image that MacKinnon appears to outline (e.g. Bartky 1990, 65; Bordo 1988, 90; Kerfoot and Knights 1994, 82-3; see also Deveaux 1994, 225; Sawicki 1996, 164). Where the concept of the disciplinary 'gaze' is detected in MacKinnon's view of male power, it prompts an objection to the implication that women's social reality is so irreducibly defined (e.g. Cornell 1991, 120), but where it translates Foucault's theory of surveillance, it is taken to be a productive explanation of the forces that shape women's experience of their gender (e.g. MacCannell and MacCannell 1993, 214ff.; Heyes 2007, 57; Jordan and Aitchison 2008, 332-3; see Ramazanoglu 1993, 22).

The point here is not the defensibility of MacKinnon's position in terms of its capacity to theorise agency, but her differential standing in feminist circles in comparison to Foucault, despite the fact that resistance is inadequately elaborated in his work as well – 'everywhere present in the text but rarely discussed' (Bartkowski 1988, 44; see also Howarth 2000, 83; Sarup 1993, 82)<sup>12</sup>. Feminists seem predisposed to rescue Foucault for

---

<sup>11</sup> If one takes an important poststructuralist focus to be the investigation of the nature of subjectivity, then this terminology is a deft way of signalling MacKinnon's marginalisation from contemporary theoretical concerns.

<sup>12</sup> An alternative, account of MacKinnon's place in the developmental trajectory of feminism is provided by Bernick (1992). She compares it to Parmenides' legacy in Greek philosophy – metaphysical conclusions about the nature of being that seemed 'absolutely unassailable but equally inconceivable', a conundrum which 'stopped Greek thought in its tracks' and which followers like Plato set about attempting to resolve (Bernick 1992, 5-6). Bernick (1992, 6-7) suggests that MacKinnon's articulation of the view that the activity of sex is the central organiser of social relations constitutes a similar watershed moment in feminist theorising, one which *should* have stopped feminism in its tracks – in terms of the theoretical unassailability of her conclusions about the totality of male domination on the one hand, and on the other, the resulting dissipation of the possibility of generating a feminist imaginary. However, in contrast to the seriousness with which Parmenides' successors registered the irresistible logic of his thinking by engaging with the paradox of his conclusions, MacKinnon's critics 'have in the main simply walked around her as if she were not there' (Bernick 1992, 8), using a variety of techniques to dismiss her arguments without succeeding in refuting them at the level of their logic (Bernick 1992, 9). For Bernick (1992, 3), 'until post-MacKinnon feminists take her work as seriously as post-Parmenidean Greeks took his, feminist theory cannot progress further'. As shown above, some contemporary feminists have nonetheless managed to formulate a developmental account of feminist poststructuralism's relationship to second-wave by positing a rupture with the views of feminists like

feminist purposes from apparent theoretical cul-de-sacs. For example, Sawicki (1996, 164) notes a concept of disciplinary power that is widely accepted in feminist applications of Foucault – ‘forms of power that insinuate themselves within subjects so profoundly that it is difficult to imagine how we might alter them’. Despite the limited prospects for effective resistance such a view of power seems to offer, Sawicki devotes the rest of her essay to recovering the theoretical coherence of resistance in Foucault’s thinking. Her conclusion is that the repudiation of the transcendent subject does not necessarily invalidate the notion of ‘relatively autonomous subjects capable of resisting the particular forms of subjection that Foucault has identified in modern society’ (Sawicki 1996, 169-70). The question of whether relative autonomy is a contradiction in terms is elided. For Sawicki’s purposes at least, it provides a conceptual counter to the apparently totalising character of Foucauldian power. How ready is Sawicki to salvage the possibility of resistance from Foucault’s own ‘holistic rhetoric and sometimes shrill condemnation of the carceral society’ (Sawicki 1996, 164), and how unwilling are some contemporary feminists to mine MacKinnon’s analysis of patriarchal society despite what are often claimed to be its ‘holistic’ or ‘shrill’ aspects?

Foucault’s particular geometry of power, which emphasises its horizontal, varied and fractured nature, has allowed feminists to posit the existence of interstices or contradictions between particular instances of power’s effects – be they subject positions or discourses – which mobilise subjects to resist. In these accounts, the idea of the socially constructed subject happily coexists alongside explanations of the various ‘choices’ of subject positions, forms of resistance and potential for self-transformation available to women. In other words, these discussions often appeal to more traditional epistemologies, without this being flagged as a fundamental contradiction. For example, in attending particularly to Foucault’s work, Weedon (1997, 121) maintains that

Although the subject in poststructuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also a subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available.

---

MacKinnon, one which authorises the lack of engagement recommended by Bernick. Indeed, lack of engagement becomes the mark of progress. According to this account, it is appropriate that the analysis of oppression be displaced – not supplemented – by a focus on agency and resistance. In this context, the particular logic of MacKinnon’s (1989, 326) position – that women’s agency (both resistance and complicity) is proof positive of their victim status – can only be ‘walked around’.

What status ‘thinking’ and ‘reflection’ have in the subject who does not appear to be detachable from its discursive constitution is not explained (see also Lloyd 1996, 247; Hekman 1995, 203). A similar ambivalence about the Foucauldian subject’s relation to discourse causes Kerfoot and Knights (1994, 82-3) to suggest that subjects can be both habituated to self-surveillance *and* able to ‘exercise power in positioning themselves within [...] competing discourses, rather than merely being ‘positioned by’ them’ (Kerfoot and Knights 1994, 70). By all these accounts, the subject slips without explanation between discursive constitution and the occupation of an extra-discursive space where discourse selection and self-positioning take place, the same sort of illusory space supposedly occupied by the invalidated modernist subject. These writers adhere to the narrative of poststructuralism’s epistemological rupture from previous modes of theorising, despite the obvious disruptibility of their own logic. In the process, feminism’s own intellectual achievements are diminished (De Lauretis 1994, 7-8; Bordo 1992, 167; Bartky 1995, 190).

Bearing these criticisms in mind, Faith’s (1994) appeal to a Foucauldian ontology as a means to illuminate various aspects of feminist activism seems redundant. Indeed, her use of a terminology of oppression and ‘power abuse’ (39) is not coherent from a Foucauldian perspective – in Foucault’s formulation, power is normatively neutral; it both constrains and enables, and on this basis, there is nothing inherently abusive about it (Fraser 1989, 31). It is not clear that Faith’s appeal to Foucault’s ideas has helped her to explicate the micro-workings of patriarchal power and the local variations on resistance that it invites in ways that she could not have done otherwise. Indeed, it is a distinctly second-wave concept that provides the theoretical apparatus for parts of Faith’s (1994, 39; emphasis added) argument:

Whether or not a response of counter-force to power abuse is planned and intentional, it is within this realm of the body that *the personal becomes political* and the individual becomes the collectivity [...] It is especially within the realm of sex, the most private intimacy, that power is made most public and resistance most socially engaged.

Faith posits a variety of different types of resistance, ranging from instinctual and visceral ‘primitive act[s] of survival’ to ‘a strategic play of forces’ (Faith 1994, 39). Whether the discursively constituted subject can act in ‘instinctual’ and ‘primitive’ ways is questionable, especially as ‘spaces of primal liberty’ within power have been disallowed (Foucault 1980, 142). While Faith enlists Foucault to support her analysis of resistance, the assumptions she



makes here about the specifics of resistance are not necessarily underwritten by Foucault. If resistance can be ‘instinctual’ (immediate) or ‘strategic’ (delayed), then how does Faith understand the precise nature of the reciprocity of power and resistance in Foucault’s work? If resistance is strategic, or if its reach is not perfectly commensurate with that of the power to which it is responding, then how might we theorise the subject who bears the imprint of power but has not offered immediate or adequate resistance? It is noteworthy that Faith (1994, 39) must recover the terminology of victimhood to do so: the subject who strategically withholds resistance until a more potent challenge can be mounted is described as a ‘willing victim’, who ‘know[s] the experience of being in charge even as she is liable to the disciplines which claim her subjection’. It is indeed ironic that it is under the auspices of Foucault that the concept of the victim becomes respectable, and that, under his authority, it is possible to formulate a victim who is active and knowing, but nonetheless subjected.

Against this broadly sketched backdrop, the survey data reveals a similar tendency to invoke Foucault to authorise a particular approach or signal an intellectual affiliation when it is not clear what Foucault’s insights add to the analysis. For instance, in their study of girls’ participation in school PE culture, Cockburn and Clarke (2002, 656) draw on Foucault’s attention to the body as the site of both the operation of disciplinary practices of normalisation and resistance to those regimes. However, they also assert the need to view women’s actions from a perspective ‘that originates *outside* dominant discourses’ (Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 662; emphasis in original), and which interprets resistance according to a view of power as physical and organisational, rather than discursive. They thus selectively apply elements of quite contradictory epistemologies, without attempting to resolve those contradictions. The Foucauldian framework does appear to have loosely ordained the rescue of their research subjects from the ‘passive victim’ category (Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 658-9), by allowing both participation with PE and its avoidance to be viewed as equally valorised forms of resistance to different operations of power. Thus, the young women resist feminine norms by complying with a masculinised sporting culture, but also resist masculine norms by refusing to participate, and achieving in the process a more secure performance of their feminine identity (Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 659).

In this, the authors appeal to the prevailing theoretical temper, which seems to be loosely informed by poststructuralist (Foucauldian, deconstructive) tenets, even where they are not explicitly stated, or only very loosely referred to, as they are here. Cockburn and Clarke (2002, 653, 656) refer to Foucault only secondarily, and issues of technologies of the body (Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 656) and of discursive practice (Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 653) are collapsed as part of a generalised nod to Foucault, when these may be seen as disparate elements of his theory (see Sawyer 2002, 434-5). In a Foucauldian context, power is everywhere and extremely complicated in its operation, and this seems to translate into an inert fascination with the way our agency is involved in our own submission – inert but nonetheless unobjectionable because agency is coded as an absolute positive in contrast to victimhood. This is evident in the flattening of forms of resistance we see in Cockburn and Clarke's discussion of the girls' varied responses to the of PE culture, which hold no promise of real emancipation from hegemonic forces. Participation in sport involves the disruption of their feminised identity, but absorption into a masculinised culture which is largely inhospitable to physically active and aggressive females, and techniques of refusal involve an intensified performance of femininity in line with hegemonic gender norms.

In the end, it is not clear what posture we are expected to take towards resistance. On the one hand, taking control of the body is presented optimistically as a form of resistance that is 'the basis of the potentially empowering 'transformative change' that feminism strives for' (Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 656). On the other, the conclusion is that these young women ultimately occupy a disempowered position in the cultural and institutional organisation of sport, which will be transformed only with assistance from the 'powers that be' (Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 662). In other words, the authors return us to a quite conventional and prosaic notion of power and possible correctives. While the gesture towards the idea of transformation through bodily practices briefly offers a political motivation for analysing the girls' behaviour through the lens of 'resistance', the conclusion undercuts that – resistance is futile. Analysing it therefore appears to serve a documentary purpose only, and one which is not necessarily directed towards disrupting hegemonies and their effects via a better understanding of our engagement with them, for it seems clear that real progress does not lie down the path of individual resistance. In any case, the virtues of such a documentary undertaking are contaminated in my reading by the

authors' assertion that 'the girls who 'comply' with emphasized femininity appear to be no more 'passive victims' than those who comply with the demands of sporting and PE culture' (Cockburn and Clarke 2002, 658-9). The quote marks indicate that the 'passive victim' is taken to be a known object that pre-exists, and is readily recognisable outside, the limits of this text. It is a trope entextualised from elsewhere, signifying a category which operates as a standard benchmark against which to assess the behaviours of our research subjects. And something urgent in the phrase 'no more [...]' suggests this is an exercise as much about pre-empting an objectionable interpretation of the girls' situation and demarcating this analysis from an outmoded feminist approach as it is about refining our view of the way power and resistance are intertwined.

In some cases, the appeal to Foucault is only an isolated, passing reference, where it provides a loosely legitimating framework rather than makes a robust contribution to our understanding of the nature of resistance. For example, in her documentation of Indian childless women's resistance to cultural stigma, Riessman (2000, 130) professes only towards the end of her article to adopt a Foucauldian notion of capillary power which succeeds through self-surveillance. This notion is explained only via a secondary quote which (it is to be assumed) paraphrases Foucault's position. But the paraphrase does introduce the association between power (conceptualised as capillary and micro-active) and the opening out of a correspondingly large array of possible points of resistance. As such, it serves Riessman's purpose, which is to illuminate the varied 'everyday' responses of women to the stigma of infertility, and to define these as forms of resistance when this definition might be otherwise open to challenge (Riessman 2000, 111, 131). But having thus flagged her intellectual affiliation, Riessman nevertheless subscribes to a conventional understanding of power as repressive, and of resistance as the transformative impulse against that repression. So, although discipline in the Foucauldian sense has been described as operating through self-surveillance (Riessman 2000, 130), Riessman does not explain how these women manage to deflect the internalisation of shame through 'resistant thinking', which it is stated occurs in the private, hidden realm of consciousness beyond the reach of oppressive norms of family (Riessman 2000, 123). The late reference to Foucault appears, therefore, to be at best gratuitous and at worst to disrupt her logic.

Similarly, Gustafsson-Larsson et al. (2007, 56) belatedly refer to Foucault in their conclusion for no other apparent purpose than to authenticate their definition of rural women's networking as resistance. This appeal to Foucault takes place in the context of the power in question being described as 'dominant, male structures' which limit women's agency. This is a strictly repressive view of power which is contrary to Foucault's (1980, 97) idea of power as both subjecting and subjectifying, as constituting subjects, but constituting them in particular ways and not others according to specific disciplinary regimes. Leaving aside the reservation that resistance cannot be readily identified as such, much less automatically viewed as a positive, within such a morally neutral model of power (Fraser 1989, 29), Foucault's comment about the prevalence of resistance is often used optimistically, as it is here, to point to the potentially transformative effects of modestly oppositional behaviours. Such a transformation is not guaranteed by Foucault's theory of productive power, but he is nevertheless called upon to lend *gravitas* to the documentation of resistance and agency when he appears not to offer any real theoretical heft to the task at hand.

Finally, Pini (2007, 41) examines the standing of women who marry into farming families by framing 'daughter-in-law' as a subject position constructed by powerful discourses that establish the 'truth' of women's inability to contribute effectively to agriculture. She enlists Foucault to underwrite her emphasis on the material effects of discourse (Pini 2007, 45) and to poststructuralism generally to inform her analysis of the discursively constituted subject (Pini 2007, 41). However, Pini's (2007, 41) designation of the various subject positions available to women in this context – daughter-in-law, farmer, farmer's wife, farm women – performs the definition of these as discrete moments of subjectivity at the same time as it purports to simply reflect the way discourse works to constitute subjects. Far from demonstrating the intrinsic discontinuity of the subject that Pini (2007, 41) takes as her ontological base, this formulation sets up within the article what supposedly pre-exists it. The available subject positions having been thus defined, the liberation from the constraints of the position whose attributes are here inscribed under the label of 'daughter-in-law' can be interpreted as the transition to some other disconnected subject position, thereby bearing out the assumption that subjectivity is not unitary.

In addition, even while placing great importance on the regulatory power of discourse, Pini (2007, 41) attempts to retain a potentially contradictory concept of agency whereby it is possible to act both within and beyond discourse. There is an unresolved ambivalence in Pini's (2007, 41) approach about the relationship between poststructuralist views of subjectivity and discursive power on the one hand, and conventional notions of the autonomous subject capable of choosing and refusing identities while dealing with various structural (not discursive) impediments along the way. If new discourses of gender and agriculture have emerged along with women's increased political participation (Pini 2007, 41, 45), this suggests institutional power is the decisive variable in moderating women's engagement in the world of agriculture, and discourse is a relatively weak determinant in this respect. This runs counter to the assertion here of its power to so naturalise knowledge as to make it difficult to think and act outside it (Pini 2007, 45). The poststructuralist orientation of Pini's discussion sits uncomfortably with the recourse to a traditional notion of the subject acting under and resisting material constraints. As such, it does not demonstrably add anything to our understanding of the nature of agency and resistance beyond that available in conventional analyses of the unitary subject struggling against material power towards self-actualisation. Indeed, Pini (2007, 45) retreats to the standard disclaimer when she repudiates the idea that women are 'passive victims of discourse', a phrase which combines elements from quite conflicting epistemological ancestries. If discourse is productive of subjectivity – and it is Pini (2007, 45) who invoked Foucault in relation to her conception of discourse – then it makes no sense to talk about being a victim of discourse. The rebuttal of the 'passive victim' label appears to be more a genuflection to the requirements of the time, so normalised that it can be included with impunity even though it is not particularly relevant or epistemologically coherent.

Here, as in the examples from outside the survey data, the underlying ontology '[remains] imprisoned on the terrain of Enlightenment thought' (Hartsock 1996, 43) even whilst the theoretical limitations of the latter are assumed. It is certainly the case, at least to all intents and purposes, that what we might call the discourse of postmodernism – those precepts commonly taken to mark its difference from modernist assumptions of the unitary subject, repressive power, and so on – presents significant theoretical impediments to recovering the concept of victimhood under its auspices. As a result, it presides over the

exclusion of that vocabulary even when it is only weakly invoked as a broad analytical framework. In so far as victimhood has been defined as a monolithic, static, and consuming state of being, then its terminology has no place in a theory that proposes that subjectivity is fractured and shifting, and a function of positioning within multiple and contradictory discourses. Indeed, the emphasis on the subject as a prime ontological category within postmodernism legitimises inattention to victims, who, as we have seen, are positioned by this very label as non-subjects<sup>13</sup>.

For Foucault power circulates throughout the entire social body, is constitutive of all social relations, and is defined as operating on free subjects whose resistance is assumed (Foucault 1991, 60-61; 1980, 142). In this respect, Foucault distinguishes the exercise of power from force or domination, 'whose opposite pole can only be passivity' (Foucault, cited in Deveaux 1994, 233). It also does not operate repressively in the sense of detracting from the base freedom of the autonomous subject. Instead power *produces* disciplinary regimes and the subject positions provided for within those regimes. Subjects are constrained in that they can be only this subject and no other in this regime, but the language of constraint and limit is hardly intelligible in the sense that the degree to which subjects have an awareness which is independent of that regime, and hence of a lack which that regime imposes, is unclear. Even if we could speak of subjection as limit or negation, it is inseparable from the process which makes us subjects in the first place – whatever repressive capacity we might still wish to attribute to power (and this view of power seems difficult to dislodge in many poststructuralist accounts), its constitutive, productive character is not in doubt. So, women are at once 'active subjects and subjects of domination', but being a subject of domination is not synonymous with being a 'victim', since 'subject' encompasses the constant slippage between subjection and the process of coming into being as a subject (MacLeod 1992, 534). If it is only force, not power, that confronts passivity in its object, and if individuals are never only the 'inert' targets of power (Foucault 1980, 98), then analysis of victimhood – equals passivity, equals inertia – does not properly belong in the realm of contemporary feminist political theory, when that naturally takes power as its object of analysis.

---

<sup>13</sup> In fact, in her discussion of whether Foucault's theory accommodates a notion of agency in a form which is helpful for feminism, Bartky (1995, 190 note 1) treats 'agent' and 'subject' as synonymous.

This broad view of power informs much contemporary feminist analysis of agency and subjectivity (e.g. (in the survey data) Fassin 2007, 18; Riessman 2000, 130; Pini 2007, 41; Pomerantz et al. 2004, 549; Millsted and Frith 2003, 463-4; Ruddy 2006, 87; Dellinger and Williams 1997, 152; (elsewhere) Kesby 2005, 2041; Friedman and Alicea 1995, 433; MacLeod 1992, 534; Kerfoot and Knights 1994, 71; Hekman 1995, 205; Mohanty 1991, 73; Faith 1994, 55; McNeil 1993, 167; Allen 2001, 520; Mack 2003, 158; Ringrose 2007, 269; Butler 1992, 12; Lloyd 1996, 245; Ahearn 2001, 112-4; Sawicki 1986, 28; Fraser 2003, 32). In addition, the organisation of power is complicated, historically specific and sometimes uneven in its operation and effects. Resistance against one regime might constitute reinforcement of another (e.g. Matthews 2002, 214; Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2005, 62; Ruddy 2006, 87), or conversely, compliance may have liberating consequences (e.g. Bordo 1993, 192-3; Dellinger and Williams 1997, 174-5). Indeed, the very effects of subjugating processes might themselves become the means of exercising power, in that power might inhere in what appears to be a subordinate subject position. So, for example, the young women in Cockburn and Clarke's (2002, 659) study strengthen their performance of stereotypical femininity to resist the masculinist framework in which participation in sport is made available.

Where power is conceptualised in this way, a semantics that signifies only subordination is unintelligible. For Foucault (1980, 98), 'individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application'. In that context, it makes no sense to designate a position in a power relation, to arrest the attention on the operation of power at a particular point, since positions within power are always shifting and ambiguous. And in so far as the contemporary emphasis is on the constructive, not the referential, functions of discourse and language, the integrity of inner consciousness tends to dissipate. On that basis, the potential for the attribution of labels like 'victim' to act as the site where individual experience comes to be authenticated as social reality is diluted. Indeed, the constructive power of language is precisely the basis on which the representation of women as victims has been disallowed – that the act of definition creates victims, rather than names a pre-existing reality. For poststructuralists, the subject is overwhelmingly a subject who *acts* in its engagement with power relations, and these acts are themselves shaped and made possible by the those relations; the semantics of what subjects *are* become irrelevant.

Individuals are the opaque moving parts of the motor of power; how to define the experience of *being* at the 'point of application' of power has been defined as an unintelligible question in this epistemology.

The set of poststructuralist precepts, then, constitutes a discursive regime which regulates the sayability of statements about power and subjectivity, establishing the terminology of victimhood and hierarchically consolidated power as incoherent within its ontological framework. The fact that conventional notions of power continue to inform some analyses which avow their poststructuralist affiliation might signal the violability of the regime's integrity, but it is also evidence of the desire to be a discursive participant in the new regime even when it appears to be inappropriate to the purpose. It signals the loss of confidence in the validity of articulating an alternative model of power, when that alternative is couched as obsolete and meaningless within this regime's terms of reference. Indeed, it is precisely the lack of violation of this discursive regime, at least where violation might consist of a readiness to recover the language of victimhood for feminist purposes, that has been the focus of this and the previous chapter. Within the discourse of poststructuralism, the knowledge of and about victims therefore seems to qualify as one of the 'subjugated knowledges' that Foucault's own genealogical project aimed to excavate – forms of knowledge that 'have been disqualified as inadequate to their task, or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges located low down in the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity' (Foucault, cited in Sawicki 1986, 30). It is ironic that appeals to Foucault and a broadly poststructuralist temper should frequently ordain precisely the kind of disqualification that these theoretical moves were intended to address. There is further irony in the fact that feminists often disqualify the victim perspective on account of precisely the sorts of characteristics that recommend for Foucault the recovery of marginalised forms of knowledge: reputed naivety and theoretical inadequacy. Poststructuralism's own categories and definitions are politically contaminated by the extent to which the voices of victims must be suppressed in order for them to retain their validity and coherence as explanations for the way power and subjectivity operate.



#### 6.4 Questioning the ontological primacy of agency

Our discussion of feminism's generally positive posture towards poststructuralism has led us to concentrate on the particular appeal that Foucault's formulation of the resistant subject has exercised for feminists. In terms of the broader framework of this chapter, we might understand resistance as a specific manifestation of agency, that which is clearly oppositional to power (Mahmood, cited in Mack 2003, 158; Ahearn 2001, 115). However, this distinction between resistance and agency is not always observed, especially as even poststructuralist theorists remain wedded to the prospect of a generative, transformational subject. That is to say, the line between agency and resistance can become blurred (e.g. Pomerantz et al. 2004, 549; Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 56) because evidence of agency is evidence of a capacity which power has failed to completely regulate, even when the agency in question seems to bring no identifiably feminist benefit. As such, agency is always at best essentially emancipatory, and at worst still potentially transformational if one views active processes of engagement with power, including compliance and adaptation, as part of a continuum of conscious decision-making about how to respond to subordination. Broadly speaking though, however the nature of agency is understood, postmodernism has helped to position the investigation of agency as a fundamental component of contemporary theoretical debates (Ahearn 2001, 110; Nelson-Kuna and Riger 1995, 169; McNay 2000, 1-2; Gardiner 1995, 1; Wilson 2007, 129-30). Furthermore, its imaginary of specificity, historicisation and contextualisation informs discussions of agency which do not profess any particular poststructuralist affiliation. The purpose in this chapter has not been to attempt a comprehensive outline of the prolific feminist literature about agency, but to remark on the terms within which that proliferation has occurred. In the light of the prohibition on discussing oppression from the victim perspective, I am particularly interested in the way in which the words 'agency' and 'resistance' themselves operate as tags which categorise the discussion in question as analytically legitimate and developmentally advanced.

Both within our survey data and elsewhere, the concept of agency is extremely unstable. The notion of agency as an unmediated 'quality' or 'sense' which the individual develops internally as they emerge from victimhood persists in Robyn Mason's (2007, 306) use of the concept to explain the refusal of rural women to accept their subservience, and in

Chetkovich's (2004) application of Wendell's model of agency as the taking of responsibility for self-actualisation under conditions of oppression. This concept of agency as essentially emancipatory persists in some analyses which observe a poststructuralist orientation towards the local and contextual. In these cases, a specific set of circumstances is seen to create the conditions for agency, in a weak observance of the Foucauldian ethos that agency is enabled by, is a function of, subjection. However, this observance often fails to translate into anything more than the idea that agency is limited by circumstances which subtract from it as a base fund by shaping it in kind and extent. In that sense, 'agency' is still understood conventionally as a capacity of rational individuals to struggle against any impediment to their maximisation of their own interests (e.g. Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 56; Dellinger and Williams 1997, 175; Jacobson 2006, 507; Denov and Gervais 2007, 904; Bailey 1993, 115).

In other instances, an attempt is made to move away from the implicitly self-willed agent and to maintain a stricter adherence to the rule of productive power. So Mack (2003, 152-3), having noted that a concept of the essential self lurks behind a variety of theories of agency that profess to dispense with the notion of identity, wants to displace that with a definition of agency as 'a capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable' (Mahmood, cited in Mack 2003, 158; emphasis in original). And Fraser (2003, 32; emphasis in original) wants to relocate agency as external to the individual, who 'is *produced through* those forms of agency available in culture at any given moment'. These interpretations sorely test the logic of attempting to rebel against that which subordinates us, when that also forms us as agentic subjects. What feminist purpose is exactly served by interrogating the operation of such a neutralised agency? Even in these cases, 'agency' seems to retain a positive connotation, one which is not without benefit since it legitimises an analytical effort which might otherwise seem futile from a feminist political perspective. The ostensible neutrality of these approaches positions 'agency' as simply an analysable phenomenon, but the maintenance of the disinterested stance required by this epistemology is compromised by the prohibitions that have been established against that which defines agency by mutual exclusion.

The success of these approaches in justifying their move away from the semantics of victimhood and oppression is limited. In Mack's reading (2003, 158-9), for instance, the

agency enabled by the constraint of religious observance is precisely the renunciation of agency – a kind of willed docility, the purposive endurance of burdensome practices. Here, the question of whether and how oppressive religious expectations of femininity should be dealt with hardly arises. Indeed, this constraint is reframed as unthreatening, even edifying, by the relabelling of pain and forbearance as ‘struggle, effort, exertion, and achievement’ (Mahmood, cited in Mack 2003, 158). The objection here is not to Mack’s attempt to nuance our understanding of women’s religiosity, nor necessarily to her framing of these responses as forms of agency. The reservation has to do with drawing attention to the agentic possibilities of religious observance in the absence of a discourse of victimhood which carries equal ethical and analytical legitimacy, and which would enable a correspondingly critical view of, say, the conditions which are framed here as enabling Muslim women to exercise agency by cultivating modesty (see Mack 2003, 158).

The absence of this discourse, together with the privileging of agents and representations of agency, carries the risk that we will be compelled to view the subordinating conditions that enable agency as not just of academic interest, but as laden with opportunity. If feminist writers are disciplined to renounce the victim perspective, and therefore to embrace the agent’s as its polar opposite, then assertions that approaches like these intend to frame agency ‘in other than triumphalist terms’ (Asad, cited in Mack 2003, 157) are less than convincing. Agency does not have to be shown to be of the autonomous, transformative variety for its elaboration to align the analysis automatically with what has been established as an intellectually superior approach. Moreover, the survey data is replete with examples where the ‘truth’ of women’s agency is asserted as a triumph for feminist clear-sightedness over the misconception of their passive victimhood. References to agency do not occur in innocent isolation from this context.

In the absence of a legitimate vocabulary of victimhood, ‘agency’ thus expands semantically and conceptually to encompass all possible responses to oppression. Logically and theoretically it must because the experience of oppression can no longer be articulated in the language of victimhood, and existentially it also must because it is repeatedly denied that this experience includes passivity. So, MacLeod (1992, 534) points to the ‘complex and ambiguous agency’ manifested by women in response to power, as they ‘accept,

accommodate, ignore, resist, or protest – sometimes all at the same time’<sup>14</sup>. Thus, while agency might only be understood as a function of forces which constrain, shape, or enable it (depending on the epistemological starting point), it tends to be lauded for its own sake as a mark of women’s infinite resourcefulness in negotiating their situations.

In some instances, the documentation of women’s agency in historically, culturally and geographically precise situations appears to serve an anthropological interest only, a bearing of witness to women’s non-passivity. The political or strategic motivation in identifying agency in such cases is sometimes unclear, so the assumption is that the value of such testimonies is self-explanatory – which we can accept only if we subscribe to the project of eradicating victim representations from feminist theory. At other times, the motivation for documenting agency is more or less explicit – writers situate their contribution within a growing literature on women’s agency which is working to disrupt ‘past’ narratives of victimisation (e.g. Denov and Gervais 2007, 885; Gerami and Lehnerer 2001, 558; Koskela and Tani 2005, 418). In these cases, the ceremonial acknowledgement of agency is assumed to serve a legitimate purpose in itself, even when the resulting expansion of our understanding of agency as it is manifested in precise contexts militates against transferability or incorporation into concrete strategies (e.g. Denov and Gervais 2007, 887; Jacobson 2006, 508). As if in recognition that more solid justification is needed, some writers do close their accounts with fairly weak assertions about the wider implications of their findings about precise situations (e.g. Denov and Gervais 2007, 905-6; Koskela and Tani 2005, 428), or the cumulative value of small, localised disruptions to the gender order (e.g. Todorova and Kotzeva 2003, 142; Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 57). Oldenburg (1990, 283) goes further by suggesting that her interpretation of the sexual

---

<sup>14</sup> As another example of the trend discussed above (*supra* section 6.2), MacLeod’s (1992, 534) attempt to explode the binary depiction of women’s apparent submission to power as being either ‘passive victimization [or] active acceptance’ succeeds in complicating only one pole of the dichotomy: ‘acceptance’ still gets to be categorised as part of an ambiguous agency, while victimisation disappears. Incidentally, note how the construct ‘passive victimization’ does not make sense at face value – the perpetration of victimising acts or situations is by definition not ‘passive’. Of course, our familiarity with the ‘passive victim’ construct helps us to slide past this apparent irregularity: we understand perfectly well that ‘passive’ applies to the victim and not to the victimisation. This turn of phrase collapses the externality of ‘victimization’ back into the victim to become of a piece with her passivity, fusing the resulting state of victimhood with the victim’s personal qualities or behaviour in a rhetorical move in which we are well versed. Other examples within the survey data of similar grammatical slippages or looseness around references to victimhood include Robinson (1995, 103), Blake (1994, 676); Jacobson (2006, 505), and Andrijasevic’s (2006, 26, 41) use of the term ‘victimizing images’ to describe the images of entrapped bodies displayed in anti-trafficking campaign material.

control exercised by the courtesans of Lucknow as an inversion of the patriarchal gender norms of the wider society has ‘timeless, transcultural resonance’. Note how the unlimited generalisability of findings about resistance is offered here as a recommendation for the analysis, where the so-called universalisation of women’s victimhood is elsewhere critiqued in contrast as evidence of theoretical inadequacy. In other examples, however, the emphasis is the reverse: on the complexity of agency’s embeddedness in specific power relations and the contextuality of findings (Riessman 2000, 130; Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2005, 45; Millsted and Frith 2003, 463), implying that localisation and, consequently, lack of transferability are guarantees of analytical legitimacy.

Clearly, there is wide variation in the sort of political significance ascribed to the documentation of agency and resistance, but any confusion about motives for foregrounding agency tends to be subsumed by the moral legitimacy of doing so. For example, Talcott (2003, 467-8) mounts a laudable argument about the need to co-ordinate development projects which, pursued in fragmented fashion, can act to the detriment of some women while benefiting others. This co-ordination would also establish interconnections between differently located resistances which would enable their effects to be optimised. This argument stands on its own account, but Talcott (2003, 474-5 note 5) also emphasises the moral validity of her task – the feminist ethical imperative to frame the women in question as resistant. Citing Bhavnani, Talcott points to the *requirements* of ‘feminist objectivity’, which involve the renunciation of dominant representations of socially subordinate groups – ‘[as] such, central to my analysis is the finding that [...] flower cultivators and child-care workers persistently resist exploitation in their daily practices’<sup>15</sup>. Talcott, therefore, does not just position her argument as sensible on its own merits, but affirms her credentials as an ethical (and objective) researcher of subordinate groups by drawing attention to her focus on resistance (see also Acevedo, cited in Freeman and Murdock 2001, 434). Whether representing women as resistant is any more objective

---

<sup>15</sup> Talcott does not see the need to be explicit here about what constitutes a ‘dominant representation[ ]’ in this context. Bhavnani (1993, 98, 99, 100) *is* explicit – researchers should not reinscribe the powerlessness of marginalised groups by portraying them as victims – but Talcott relies on our ability to already know what constitutes ‘dominant representations’ and therefore, to understand how representations of resistance are necessarily opposed to them. Note also that we must accept a certain epistemological variation in the standing of these respective representations – portraying as victims produces powerlessness by constructing that which it identifies, while Talcott’s (2003, 475) representation of these women as resistant is a ‘finding’ that reveals the truth of their experience.

(and less objectifying) than representing them as victims is another question which I will return to later, but for the moment, the point is that documenting women's agency and resistance is seen to accord with a normative morality which establishes it as a worthy enterprise in itself both in the absence and presence of clearer justifications. Convincing us of the transformative potential of agency and resistance often seems to be less of a priority than establishing the fact that they can be identified – hence the apparent urgency with which Oldenburg (1990, 261; emphasis in original) enlists our agreement to the view that '[it] would be no exaggeration to say that [the courtesans'] 'life-style' *is resistance to rather than a perpetuation of patriarchal values*'.

In order to incur this legitimacy, the behaviours being analysed must be able to be defined as agentic or resistant. Doing so allows writers to situate their discussion within a valid set of contemporary concerns, establishing their membership of a particular intellectual community whose ongoing preoccupations they take up and elaborate (e.g. Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 48; Mihelich and Storrs 2003, 405; Riessman 2000, 114; Denov and Gervais 2007, 887). Sometimes, noticeable effort is expended in justifying the description of action as resistance, when this appears to serve no particular analytical purpose other than to establish this intellectual affiliation, or to accomplish the ceremonial acknowledgement of women's agency as noted above. This is especially so where action cannot be certified as intentionally resistant (e.g. Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 56; Riessman 2000, 131; Healey 1999, 56), or where research subjects explicitly repudiate that framing of their behaviour (e.g. Mihelich and Storrs 2003, 408).

Where hesitation is expressed about the motivations of research subjects, it does not have to prevent the researcher from persisting with this definition. So, for instance, Gustafsson-Larsson et al. (2007, 56) insist that 'women's networking could be interpreted as acts of resistance against male domination and oppression', and they belatedly enlist Foucault's authority to validate that conclusion – where there is power, there is resistance, so wherever women act to enhance the liveability of their condition, this can be defined as resistance, despite its very localised nature. And Mihelich and Storrs (2003, 410) must adjust their definition of 'resistance' when the validity of framing the behaviour of their research subjects in these terms is threatened. They expand their conceptualisation of resistance to include 'unwitting' opposition when their original hypothesis that Mormon

women would pursue higher education as a conscious form of resistance against the Church's gendered norms is proven wrong. In other words, their hypothesis was flawed only insofar as their definition of resistance was flawed, but not so flawed as to require the conclusion that these women were not resisting at all. The authors' refusal to let the resistance framework go is explained by their reluctance to attribute changes in the Church to pressures from wider society, an interpretation that 'runs the risk of rendering the agency of women invisible' (Mihelich and Storrs 2003, 418). Here, we are trusted to understand what that risk entails, and also to recognise that seeking to identify women's agency is a desirable end in itself. And, as with Talcott's (2003, 475) 'finding' of resistance, agency here is framed as a fact innocently existing independently of representation. It merely waits to be made visible by conscientious researchers, or obscured by alternative, supposedly fallacious accounts, as the case may be.

In both articles, settling on a definition of resistance which allows the analysis to still be framed in those terms is a way of supporting assertions about the potentially transformative effects or strategic utility of analysed behaviours (Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 56; Mihelich and Storrs 2003, 409). This confers a certain imprimatur on both the behaviour and the analysis, identifying the latter's political purpose, and privileging women as pivotal drivers of change, even when transformation is far from guaranteed as is certainly the case with the Church structures studied by Mihelich and Storrs. Since the women interviewed consistently frame their pursuit of education as not oppositional to the Church, and as in fact preparing them better for the roles of wife and mother expected of them (Mihelich and Storrs 2003, 416 *passim*), the Church appears to be in the felicitous position of appearing to respond to wider social demands for women's emancipation, while not having its internal culture and operations threatened at all. The labelling of behaviour as resistant seems to put it in a moral space beyond criticism (see Mihelich and Storrs 2003, 420), even when that resistance reinforces dominant norms, a possibility they admit (Mihelich and Storrs 2003, 414). Applying this label does not in itself add to our understanding of the multiple factors, including possibly women's actions directed to quite contrary ends, that propel incremental improvements in external conditions.

In this respect, we might rephrase one of the questions which opened Riessman's (2000, 111) discussion of Indian childless women's reaction to stigma – '[what] strategies

can legitimately be theorized as resistance [...]?’ – to ask what drives our need to identify behaviours as resistant or not in the first place, and why this is the ground on which we want to base our analyses? The focus appears to be not on what behaviour or strategies can be shown to be transformational and therefore instructive, but on the virtuous properties that can be attributed to women themselves. Certainly, a number of writers (including, to some extent, Riessman 2000, 131) question the indiscriminate application of the label, and the benefits for a progressive politics of identifying endless evidence of agency and resistance in women’s micro-engagement with power (e.g. Bordo 1993, 194-5; Weitz 2001, 670; Wilson 2007, 132; McNay 2000, 4, 10; Abu-Lughod 1990). Weitz (2001, 684), for example, points out that, if there is nothing that necessitates acts of protest being socially interpreted as resistance, these protests run the risk of being considered merely ‘as personal aberrations devoid of any political meaning’.

The corrective proposed by Weitz (2001, 670; emphasis in original) is to narrow the definition of resistance to ‘actions that not only reject subordination but do so *by challenging the ideologies that support that subordination*’. She has already subscribed to a definition of subordination as ‘any ideas, practices, and systems that devalue one social group relative to another and place the first group under the domination of the second’ (Weitz 2001, 670). By Weitz’s reading therefore, it seems that situating resistance entails a reconfiguration of power as hierarchical and arranged in such a way that the meaning and relative impact of manifestations of power and resistance can be evaluated depending on where they occur in the arrangement. Her definition also requires that, for action to qualify as resistance, it should ideally be engaged publicly at the level of the collective, and its motivation visible, especially to the powerful who are being challenged (Weitz 2001, 670). We could read her solution as the recovery of a quite traditional model of power and political activism, the elaboration of which is readily available in earlier iterations of feminism. However, Weitz frames her approach to defining subordination and resistance as an attempt to offer a *new* solution to a *new* problem (the loosely defined and over-applied label of resistance). Support might be found in Hemmings’ (2005, 130) thoughts on the teleological narrative that underpins feminist accounts of their intellectual history to suggest that Weitz maintains the integrity of this narrative by pointing to an *emerging* problem in the contemporary theoretical environment, to which she ‘discovers’ a fresh



solution. Her proposed model of power as one whose arrangement is objectively intelligible to the extent that various points of subordination and resistance could be quantitatively assessed with respect to each other is a significant departure from the horizontal, infinitely complicated one to which analysts now generally subscribe. But to acknowledge the origins of such a concept in modernism or second-wave feminism would be to advocate a regression to what has been firmly established as an incommensurable and developmentally inferior stage of feminist thinking.

In contrast to the thoroughly constructive view of language that grounds the critique of victim representations (labelling women as victims produces them in, and confines them to, that position), these hesitations over the validity of describing behaviour as resistant gesture to the authority of an objective set of definitional criteria which stand apart from researchers and research subjects alike. With such a possibility in view, we are no longer simply effects of discourse, but explicitly seek to consolidate by agreement the meaning content of a signifier, and subsequently, the validity of assigning this signifier to particular referents. This appears to preserve the subjectivity of those we research, who can still remain immune from the definitional enterprises of academic researchers – we know that research subjects may not agree with our formulation, but, with respect, we will utilise it for our own intellectual purposes. As researchers, our intentions appear therefore to be relatively benign, and our power to name and frame is made to appear innocuous by reference to definitions which can be applied separately from the representational powers of individual researchers. The argument here is not with the aim of opening debates about definitions and their application, for this is a legitimate part of a feminist discursive politics. Nor do I suggest that the act of naming can ever be viewed as either wholly neutral or wholly pernicious. The question is rather why such debates are pursued in relation to definitions of ‘resistance’ and ‘agency’, but are considered irrelevant in the case of ‘victim’.

Appearing to respect the subjectivity of the researched while defining it in certain ways is nevertheless a difficult balance to sustain in ethnographic research involving the categorisation and interpretation of interview data. Here, the subjective perspectives of interviewees are translated (and perforce distorted) for the express purpose of contextualising them within an already-existing framework of theoretical concerns to do

with agency and/or resistance (e.g. Gustafsson-Larsson et al. 2007, 49-51; Mihelich and Storrs 2003, 409-10; Denov and Gervais 2007, 902; Gerami and Lehnerer 2001, 571; see Riessman 2000, 131-2; Healey 1999, 50). Despite this potential for representational violence, this process is sometimes validated as an exercise precisely in opening a space for the subjectivities of the less powerful to be expressed. For example, Denov and Gervais (2007, 905) disclaim their own mediation of the research process by stating that their intention was 'to project the voices of the girls so that they could relate their own stories'. This motive should be interpreted in the context of the authors' wish to differentiate their analysis from traditional approaches to studying women in conflict zones: 'although men have been perceived as the primary agents in war, women have been rendered largely as silent and invisible victims' (Denov and Gervais 2007, 885). The assumption is, of course, that allowing the women to speak is to allow them to speak as agents and resisters, not as victims, for to speak as a victim is a contradiction in terms. Let us also note the difference in the way Denov and Gervais frame the men's agency and the women's victimhood at this point: women have been 'rendered' as victims by the active intervention of 'depictions and representations', while men's agency has been more benignly simply 'perceived' and is by definition capable of being directly sensed.

Consider this double standard as it applies to naming women as victims or agents in the light of the distinction made by MacCannell and MacCannell (1993, 216-7) between the philosophical and social functions of naming. This discussion will revisit from a slightly different angle the question of objectification through representation raised in the previous chapter (*supra* 232-3). From a philosophical viewpoint, naming a subject in any way constitutes a violation of the subject, irrespective of the social valorisation of the label, since her integrity is fragmented by consignment to a single category. Within social practice, however, naming has an entirely different function which turns on the meaning and value of the label, and on the subject's identification with it. Derogatory or abusive labels are intended to violate the subject by undermining her own capacity to self-name. This social violence can be reversed by the subject's reclamation of the right to name her own experience, and have others name it similarly. Naming in this way constitutes an expansion of subjectivity, the opposite of social violence. Viewed philosophically, then, naming women as either victims or agents is equally tendentious – both acts of naming

constrain by categorisation, and deny the subject's opportunity to express her uniqueness by privileging only that which she is defined as sharing with other members of that category. As a social act, on the other hand, the perceived violence of naming women as victims stems from the negative connotations of victimhood (it is 'name-calling'), and from the assumption that no subject would want to name herself as a victim. On the other hand, naming a subject an agent or resister is not a social violence, because such a label is thought to coincide with the subject's own self-view; it enhances the opportunities for her subjectivity to become visible.

With this in mind, it can be argued that the assumed social benevolence of representing women as agents mitigates, even conceals, the philosophical violence of doing so. Especially in the cases of definitional hesitation above, where that violence is recognised, this mitigation might operate to assist writers to overcome their reservations. But, as Taylor (1993, 58; see also 63) points out, 'dominance does not subvert itself by theorizing agency or resistance for Others'. As outside evaluators and wielders of narrational power, the agency of non-narrating research subjects is allowed to appear only by virtue of its correspondence with the evaluative frameworks we bring to the research. This does not accomplish any expansion of the narrational space available to these others, nor illuminate their experience of agency for us (Taylor 1993, 63)<sup>16</sup>. In this light, we can revisit Mohanty's (1991, 55) criticism of Western feminists' homogenising representations of Third World women, which she suggests are a particular example of misused discursive power:

As a matter of fact, my argument holds for any discourse that sets up its own authorial subjects as the implicit reference, i.e. the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural Others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse.

---

<sup>16</sup> Thus far, I am totally in accord with Taylor's argument. However, I take issue with the fact that Taylor still takes the revelation of agency to be the normative goal, and agency itself to be a normative ontological category. The thrust of Taylor's corrective is the creation of a space which enables forms of agency to appear that are currently rendered invisible by academic conventions (Taylor 1993, 74). I argue that such projects of inclusion should extend as much concern to allowing space for victimhood to be articulated in ways that are not constrained by the definitions that are now in place. There is considerable slippage in how Taylor would position victims in this new dialogical space. On the one hand, she states that '[her] argument as a whole criticizes the characterization of oppressed Others as victims' (Taylor 1993, 74-5 note 3), echoing the common view that to label others as victims is, by definition, to deny their agency. At other times, as in her critique of Wendell's model of the victim perspective, she seems to argue very strongly for a reconceptualisation of the victim position which assigns a capacity to victims to speak as subjects, and *as victims* (Taylor 1993, 59-60).

Of course, the precise target of Mohanty's (1991, 57) objection is victim representations, and she approves of those analyses which depict the agency and resistance of Third World women (e.g. Mohanty 1991, 65, 72-3, 75 note 5, 76 note 7). Indeed, Mohanty (1991, 76 note 7) claims that it is the historical complexity of power differences and resistance to them that '[constructs] African women as 'subjects' of their own politics'. As usual, depicting women as victims disappears their subjectivity, while describing their agency (otherwise concealed in that objectifying process) allows subjects to reveal themselves as they truly are, or at least as exercising a kind of proxy control over their representation. This neglects the extent to which the concepts of agency and resistance have been established as privileged ontological categories in feminist theory, and operate themselves as 'yardsticks by which to encode and represent cultural Others'. The privileging of these concepts is produced in opposition to the denigration of victimhood, and entails the disabling of victim voices. It is on the basis of this disablement of victim subjectivities that Third World women are supposedly visibilised as valid subjects, by analysts whose ethical and scholarly credentials are signalled in the process.

The problem of philosophical violence is inherent in the feminist academic enterprise, but it is approached differently in the case of the 'victim' and 'agent' labels because of the social meanings attached to them. Where the violence of representing unsuspecting and (in the context of their access to the academy) usually voiceless women as agents/resisters is concealed or excused by the assumption that such naming is a benevolently provided conduit for the subjectivity of the researched, the critique of victim representations collapses philosophical and social violence. As we have seen, such representations are accused of objectifying women both by denying their subjectivity, especially vis-à-vis the powerful subject-narrator (a philosophical violence), and by constructing them as objects in accordance with the particular associations of that signifier – being done to, fixed, and lacking in psychological complexity (a social violence). The assumption is that the assumed social violence of this naming entails or is indistinguishable from philosophical violence.

For example, in Ferguson's (1998, 102) critique (with which I otherwise broadly agree) of poststructuralist and deconstructive discourse as itself essentialising a particular concept of power as its ontological starting point, she notes the following:

[Escobar's] own poststructuralist critique comes perilously close to continuing the tradition of presenting non-academic women, like peasants, as victims of this power/knowledge [i.e.

modernist development discourse], and therefore as objects of knowledge, rather than subjects of resistance.

This phrasing sets up an equivalence between ‘objects of knowledge’ and ‘subjects of resistance’ which allows them to be directly opposed as alternatives that are similar in kind but mutually exclusive. This is not the case – women become ‘objects of knowledge’ when they are presented *either* as victims *or* as ‘subjects of resistance’. Calling them ‘subjects’ does not obviate the philosophical violence done to the subject by categorisation; it merely assigns them a label which has a superior social value in terms of the meanings feminists have assigned to victims and agents/resisters respectively. Blurring the distinction between the two sorts of representational violence allows the philosophical violence of rendering women as ‘objects of knowledge’ to be apparently resolved by addressing it as a problem of social violence and relabelling philosophical objects as social subjects. Taylor (1993) pointed to the paradox inherent in the attempt to expand the visibility of the agency of subordinated people by adjusting the terms within which it can appear, when those terms remain nonetheless under the control of the dominant. Paraphrasing Taylor’s (1993, 64) critique, we could say that, when Ferguson offers the representation ‘subjects of resistance’ as a corrective to ‘objects of knowledge’, the former term ‘remains a subject’s name for a concept it needs to evaluate objects it would like to regard as subjects’. The act of ascribing agency to women thus incurs a moral and social legitimacy that, philosophically, it does not deserve.

## Conclusion

In summarising Peter Dews’ (1987) objections to Foucault’s theory of power, Bartky (1995, 183) states that power conceptualised as so ubiquitous and so productive gives rise to ‘a vague metaphysical monism, a night in which all cows are black’. If it were possible to invent an equally pithy metaphor to describe the opposite – a monism of unrelieved positivity – it could apply to the status of agency in contemporary feminist theoretical writing. Agency is indeed everywhere, endowed with a self-explanatory centrality in academic feminism’s normative set of preoccupations, and also discoverable at every turn in the demeanour of the women feminism takes as its object of analysis. In the universe towards which contemporary academic feminist orients us, women only *act*.

And whatever the understanding of agency, as varied as it is, it is premised on the delegitimation or erasure of the victim perspective. Oppressive conditions might ‘shape’ or ‘frame’ the ways in which agency can be manifested, but do not challenge the assumption that women have a natural orientation to express their agency no matter how adverse their circumstances. That this may be true as it stands is not the issue here. The issue is the rhetorical coercion which has produced a semblance of consensus about a number of related issues: the disablement of the possibility of speaking from the victim position, the definition of agency in opposition to victimhood, the establishment of ‘agency’ as the privileged field of analysis, and the corresponding evacuation of a language in which the experience of oppression which conceptually falls outside ‘agency’ can be expressed. The contention here is that these precursors seriously compromise the analysis of agency and resistance in contemporary academic feminist writing. In the context of feminists’ rejection of the victim perspective, the task of ‘charting the routes of resistance available to women even when they are most deeply jeopardised’ (Cockburn 2000, 374) assumes a heroic character, the bearing of witness to the fact that, whatever else may be said of them, they are not ‘passive victims’.

Even cases which ostensibly observe a Foucauldian neutrality towards the entrammelling of resistance within power’s enabling operations are compromised in my view by the moral privileging of agency and agency-centred analyses set up by feminist rhetoric. Agency has been defined as not just that which we desire for women from a political perspective, but the concept through which we distinguish the legitimate subject from those who are ‘stuck’ in the victim perspective. Moreover, it has become the fetishised analytical category whose invocation differentiates ethical researchers, as the instruments for women’s agency and subjectivity to be revealed, from those who objectify the oppressed through reductionist accounts of their victimhood. As I have discussed above, this latter distinction is secured not just by the rhetorical technologies which I have problematised, but by a theoretical error in the way the objectifying potential of representation is conceptualised.

Particularly in poststructuralist analyses, an oppositional posture towards the subordination which enables agency borders on untenable. But in more traditional approaches to power as well, the celebration of the resilience of women as agents despite

constraint inhibits the study of how systemic subordination may *stop* women from acting. The possibility that women cannot act, or feel immobilised, is suppressed. The extent to which this general orientation serves to support rather than disrupt hegemonic systems has been noted (e.g. Bordo 1993, 194-5; Wilson 2007, 130-1). The desire to channel the agency of research subjects simply relabels the effects of these systems as sites where women exercise ‘choice’, rather than seek to survive amongst limited opportunities. This thesis concurs with these objections, and points out that contemporary readings of agency have their roots in formulations of victimhood which activate conservative discourses aimed specifically at eroding feminism’s political rationale.

The orientation to testify to women’s perpetual agency leads to the designation of psychic space as also a realm of action. So, for example, Riessman (2000, 123) identifies the ‘resistant thinking’ of stigmatised women, Bartky (1995, 178) defines agency as, amongst other things, the *contemplation* of action, and Faith (1994, 39) describes a state of latent resistance, in which the subject feels in charge while she strategically awaits her moment for action. Despite the resignification here of a lack of observable action as a form of agency, I suggest that we can see registered in these definitions momentary suspensions of the incessant movement of action and effect, the gesturing towards spaces of experience and cognition that ‘agency’ and ‘resistance’, though stretched here to apply to these spaces, do not encapsulate. It is these spaces which require a language to express the stillness of suffering, the irreducible living through of oppression, or indeed, the naming of one’s oppression as a radical political act in itself – precisely the language that has been erased. Proponents of poststructuralism have been important contributors to this erasure, dismissing as a figment of the modernist imagination these sorts of psychic spaces where the continuity of the subject persists outside the spasmodic motion of subjectification (e.g. Hekman 1995, 202; Fraser 2003, 32; but see MacCannell and MacCannell 1993, 212; Cain 1993, 89, 90-1, 94; Flax 1990, 231; Deveaux 1994, 235). The discourse of poststructuralism thus positions the perspective of the victim as theoretically incoherent, augmenting feminism’s own story about the existential paradox of the notion of a victim-subject.

The last two chapters have been devoted to excavating the rhetorical mechanisms by which feminist attitudes to victimhood, and by extension, to agency have been formed and

disciplined. In the process of showing how feminist references to victimhood draw some legitimacy from anti-feminist hostility to the victim, I have applied Smith's (1990; 1999) thoughts on the role of reading practice in the objectification of knowledge and the organisation of social relations. In this sense, the preceding discussion has also been aimed at giving some substance to the loosely understood concept of discourse, by attending to the detailed practicalities of how the virtuality of 'discourse' is materialised in the writing of texts. I have suggested, following Smith, that the mechanisms of discourse activation and knowledge formation through the disciplining of readers occur at the micro-level of rhetorical practice. In line with that, I will go on to conclude that the corrective to the exclusions and repressions that underpin our understandings of victimhood and, consequently, of agency must therefore also be located at the level of rhetoric.



## **CONCLUSION**

### **Conclusion: Navigating Discursive Intersections**

The twin problems of concern for this thesis arose from a recognition that feminist thought has become entangled with a seemingly all-pervasive discourse that was from its inception, overtly hostile to the cause of feminism, and indeed continues to be so. This means that within the heart of feminist theory lurks a latent anti-feminism. I have demonstrated this through an exploration of the discursive deployment by feminist theorists of the terms ‘victimhood’ and ‘passive victim’, and of the implications this has for feminist framings of the concepts of agency and resistance. The first problem was that academic feminist modes of referencing what I (and others, less ironically) have called the ‘paradigmatic’ victim require readers to suppress alternative, conflicting understandings of victimhood, and to adopt a critical attitude towards victims’ assumed passivity, helplessness, and avoidance of responsibility. This repressive move stands out more sharply in the context of a parallel mode of referencing the ‘victim’ which adheres to what we might loosely call its referential or lexical meaning, and which requires no particular moral stance on the part of the reader. The reader needs to have the interpretive competency to decide which meaning of ‘victim’ she is meant to deploy in each case. Where the ‘victim’ is named, she needs to be able to recognise which conceptual object outside the text is being referred to, and this brings us to the second key problem.

When the individual text names the ‘passive victim’, for instance, it assumes that the object it names is already known, and that its negative coding can be taken up with ease. The text does not elaborate its features, nor validate the intelligibility of this noun-adjective/object-attribute combination. The reader derives this knowledge from outside the immediate text, and I have argued that the discourse of ‘political correctness’ constructs a particularly coherent and widely understood set of negative associations around the ‘paradigmatic’ victim. This comprehensive construction is available for ready activation in the absence of other intra-textual information. In other words, a discourse which was specifically directed at the erosion of feminist claims about the subordination of women is regularly activated in the process of realising the meanings intended by the texts of academic feminist theory.

Just as a map-reader (to borrow Smith's (1999, 125-6, 129) metaphor) repeatedly looks from map to streets and back again seeking correspondences between the symbols on the map and physical landmarks, so the reader of the text scans the extra-textual world looking for the objects named in the text. When she finds them, the map/text is confirmed as a reliable representation of physical/social actualities, *and* she conceptualises her physical/social environment according to the features the map/text has chosen to make important. For our purposes, the object or feature named as 'victim' in the paradigmatic sense exists as a discursive construction outside the immediate text. The text or map always sends its reader to the world 'beyond-the-map' (Smith 1999, 129), so references to the devalued victim within feminist theoretical texts will inevitably find a matching object in the discourse of 'political correctness' during the scanning process such references initiate. In turn, the reader's navigation of her social world is directed according to the framework provided by the text, which divides social actors into marginalised, paradigmatic victims and worthy others.

Drawing on this approach, I have shown that the suppressions entailed in the interpretive enterprise are not optional or idiosyncratic phenomena, but are necessary if readers are to reconstruct the coherence of the text. Underpinning the text is the expectation that readers will have both the interpretive skills to achieve this coherence and the willingness to assume the postures the text requires towards the entities it names. The reader approaches the text, knowing that it is meant to be readily understood by all readers like her. This knowledge makes present to her the feminist community to whom this text addresses itself: one whose members can fulfil this expectation, and which shares a consensus position about the status of victims. This works to discipline even those readers who might be disposed to contest the devaluation of victimhood, as they are drawn into the virtual collective of all other readers – past, present, and future – who are similarly able to recognise the kind of victim named in these references. The reader must position herself within this collective, ranged as it is against self-identified victims and their advocates, whose exclusion from participation in the debates of this collective is presented as self-evidently defensible.

The act of reading therefore engages the reader in a particular formation of social relations between herself, the writer and the virtual feminist community of similarly

positioned readers. I have pointed to these relations as a potent instrument for securing the co-operation of feminist theorists in the systematic repudiation of the paradigmatic victim. The regularity of this stance across feminist academic writing marks a complete reversal of earlier feminist strategies aimed at gaining public acknowledgement of claims that women were victims of structural and cultural discrimination. These struggles were undertaken in the face of dominant constructions of women's experience which naturalised, and therefore implicitly denied, their subordinate status. Even more remarkably, the devaluation of the victim category is consistently sustained despite the obvious logical flaws in the supporting narratives. I have outlined these flaws in my discussions of, for example, the reification by feminists of 'victim feminism' as an existing, recognisable form of feminism, and of the ritualistic ostracising of the 'passive victim', despite the lack of evidence that representatives of either category actually exist.

Furthermore, the concept of 'agency' is repeatedly and explicitly defined in contradistinction to the state of being a victim. This compromises what is a valid postmodern inquiry into the ontological status of the subject and its capacity to act. It is difficult to separate 'agency' as the neutral object of philosophical analysis from the overtones of moral superiority which it carries by virtue of standing as an antidote to the personal inadequacy of victimhood. By extension, there is a sort of moral legitimacy conferred on the analyses themselves, so that the victimhood/agency binary impels feminist research in particular directions, determining what counts as valid areas of inquiry and forming the lens through which certain aspects of women's social and political life come to be more clearly visible than others. So, while the normative preference for highlighting women's agency over their victimisation might be read as the product of an emancipatory impulse in feminism, its liberatory possibilities are constrained by the conservatively inspired terms of this emancipation. As victimhood has come to be defined as a function of personal failure, so the manifestation of agency under conditions of oppression carries a stamp of approval, irrespective of whether its examination is presented as merely an interesting and therefore intellectually productive way of framing women's experience.

Thus far, I have loosely referred to the narrative mechanisms by which readers are positioned with respect to the paradigmatic victim as feminists' rhetorical practice. By 'rhetorical', I have meant to direct attention to *how* feminist writers put words and

sentences together – how this sets in train a particular interpretive process, and situates the reader in social relations with her peers – rather than to the propositional content of what is written (see Kennedy 1999a, 68 note 3; Geisler 2004, 16; Young 2002, 64-5). In other words, I am less interested in how feminist modes of referral to victimhood function as straight assertions about the undesirability of pressing women's victim status, than in how embedded assumptions about this undesirability work to objectify feminist knowledge about victimhood as settled and held in common. Having critiqued these rhetorical practices as repressive and indeed anti-feminist, I am obliged to indicate briefly whether a more ethical and strategically useful mode of reference might be adopted, one which both opens a discursive space for those currently excluded and works disruptively against the anti-feminist code of 'political correctness'.

Such a possibility relies on two assumptions. Firstly, the overlap between feminist suspicion of victimhood and the discourses of ostensibly opposing factions on this issue is inevitable. It is not possible for feminists to insulate or decontextualise their discursive tactics – 'we are all increasingly implicated in one another's logic' (Atmore 1999a, 190; see also 1999b, 92). This imbrication has been assumed as fundamental in my analysis of the interpretive processes set in train by feminist treatments of victimhood. However, such overlaps need not register as an unavoidable sameness against which we are discursively powerless. The inability of any discourse to escape the intertextual field forms the very basis on which the refusal of coded meanings, the lack of match between the object named in the text and certain candidate entities outside the text, becomes obvious and can work politically.

In the wake of the success of the 'political correctness' trope, any reference to victimhood will unavoidably invoke the code as a *possible* way of understanding the reference; it will figure among the objects we scan outside the text as we seek to recognise that which the text names. An effective rhetorical practice in this context would be to cultivate a mode of reference which would ensure the failure to achieve such a recognition. In this scenario, the conceptual object found to be the one that allows the text's meaning to be realised would not be that which has been constructed via a concerted anti-feminist discourse because discrepancies in the objects' features would disallow recognition. The 'victim' described in that discourse would not correspond to the one held up for communal

recognition by the text. Such an approach is effective because it actively disrupts the 'political correctness' code at the point of its replicability, where it has been relatively impervious to challenges pitched at its factual accuracy. In other words, feminists repeatedly continue to distance themselves from victim representations, however much that position can be shown to be logically flawed, so an alternative means of short-circuiting the processes by which this obedience is secured needs to be discovered. Imagining a feminist rhetorical counter strategy is also an attempt to go further than the typical deconstructive analysis which stops once the operation of discursive technologies has been unpacked.

The mounting of such a strategy relies on a second assumption – that it is possible intentionally to manipulate discursive codes and the processes of interpretation which they enact in one's readers. This assumption flies in the face of much of the wisdom which underpins contemporary discourse approaches, where the tendency is to emphasise the rather chaotic but glorious unpredictability of the interpretive process (e.g. Coyle 2000, 264-5; see also Fairclough 1992, 60-1; Threadgold 2006, 235; Blommaert 2005, 42, 44-5; Weedon 1997, 160). For some writers, this unpredictability is the very ground on which the subversion of discourse is possible. For example, Butler (1997, 15-7) points out that the effectiveness of hate speech can be blunted by a reaction from the addressee which prevents it from accomplishing its intended injury. The way in which a speech act is received is not a property of the words themselves, but a function of contextual factors and the power relations in which the participants are embedded, and is largely out of the control of the speaker.

To complicate matters, the notion of discourse itself can be conceived as embracing extra-linguistic elements of discursive production (e.g. Angus and Langsdorf 1993, 14), so that rhetorical intervention can by implication also take material forms like the insertion of female bodies/speakers into traditionally masculine speaking spaces, or other physical expressions of protest (e.g. Kennedy 1999a; 1999b; Greene 2004; Koerber 2006, 98; Geisler 2004, 10-11). For Butler (1997, 11-12, 152), too, speech acts *are* bodily acts in which meaning is mediated *in situ* by the physical comportment of speaker and addressee, and the performance of gendered identity is the site for the reiteration or disruption of the discursive attributes of femininity (Butler 1990, 24-5, 33). These understandings of the discursive are of little help to evaluate the way meaning is generated and taken up during

the comparatively cerebral project of feminist theory production. Textual analysis throws us back to the essentially linguistic nature of discourse, as a particular arrangement of signs which are themselves capable of initiating meanings in the absence of the extra-linguistic mediating factors mentioned above. In fact, Butler (1997, 152) recognises that the embodied nature of speech imposes a volatility which makes it crucially different from writing. This is especially so in the case of academic writing, which is premised on the suppression of the idiosyncratic and ambiguous, on the desire to make an argument, and on the probability that the meaning of statements made in the service of that argument will be directly apprehensible by any reader. Assuming this practical reality, whatever transformative effects we might wish to have on the discursive production of feminist knowledge must be possible at the level of rhetorical manipulation and be independent of non-linguistic factors peculiar to individual communicative events.

Whether the writer/subject can in fact act rhetorically to effect social transformation by changing discourse and hence the knowledge it constructs is made questionable in a postmodern context, where the subject is viewed as constituted by discourse, rather than as a creative agent of discursive change. At the same time, however, proponents of postmodernism insist that there is space for subjects to navigate actively the conflicting discourses which also, paradoxically, constitute their subjectivity (e.g. Weedon 1997, 121; Sawicki 1996, 169-70; Lloyd 1996, 247). Butler, also, maintains a contradictory position in regard to the creative possibilities of the subject – able to operate strategically to recontextualise and resignify linguistic terms towards foreseeable ends, but also having no sovereign power over its utterances or their effects (Magnus 2006, 89-90). The potential for the subject's conscious reflection on her discursive positioning obviously awaits further elucidation, and it is an issue which has preoccupied critical rhetoricians interested specifically in confirming the rhetor as an agent of social and discursive change (e.g. Bizzell 1997; Biesecker 1992; Geisler 2004; Greene 2004; Koerber 2006; McKerrow 1993; Phillips 2002; Turnbull 2004; Young 2008; Bruner 1996). These writers overwhelmingly retain the conviction that rhetorical activism and a form of conscious control over discursive practice are possible, and are even central assumptions of critical rhetorics (see especially Geisler 2004, 12; Mackey 1997, 65) This is so even if deference to

postmodernism sometimes makes their claims in this regard somewhat modest (e.g. Biesecker 1992, 361).

In what follows I explore what shape such a conscious, strategic rhetorics might take in resignifying victimhood in less exclusionary ways, and in ways that are directed to realisable ends in terms of predictably initiating one interpretive process over another. Now is not the moment to launch a thorough discussion of the theoretical implications of this course. However, I close this thesis with some modest suggestions for new ways of thinking about our own written output in its discursive context, indicating related theoretical complications as I go. I do so on the assumption that, however much we might concede the patriarchal origins of the proprietary approach to intellectual production (see Lunsford 1999, 530; also Carroll 1990), the practical reality of the way academic feminists work and write every day is that they do so as named authors, who are to be professionally held to account as the originators of particular arguments and linguistic formations. Moreover, I suggest that the ontological status of the writing subject's control over their text and its interpretation is less important for us here than the fact that this control *is* assumed by the participants in this academic process. Academic feminists write, and they write for a purpose, and our focus has been on the directions in which writers deploy that control – what ideas and discourses are privileged as targets of our transformative efforts, and which are tacitly accepted as unchangeable or unworthy of change?

The theoretical possibility of hazarding recommendations for a consciously directed rhetorics is already provided for in part by my appeal to Smith's views on the way knowledge is objectified through reading practice. Specifically, Smith (1999, 150 *passim*) points to the conscious, but not necessarily willing, adoption by the reader of the text's terms of reference, which is necessary if she is to make sense of the text<sup>1</sup>. In this way, the text's organisational framework can have an insidious effect on the reader's consciousness, perhaps even inducing her to propagate it subsequently as a mode of social perception which is apparently common practice in her discourse community. But the reader is not

---

<sup>1</sup> While Smith speaks here and elsewhere (e.g. Smith 1990 121, 223) in terms of *textual* intentions which necessitate certain processes of interpretive activity, she also explicitly or implicitly distances herself from approaches which insist that meaning is produced independently of *authorial* intention (e.g. Smith 1993, 185; 1999, 99ff.). And even where the text's 'intentions' are the focus, the text's author is obliquely acknowledged as the origin of those intentions: '[the] text [...] should [...] be understood as having been produced to intend the interpretive practices and usages of the succeeding phases of the relation' (Smith 1990, 223).



completely blind to the exclusions and suppressions she has accomplished during this process, not entirely captive to the meanings she is forced to recover to realise the text's intention. She must collude with its agenda, but she nonetheless does so with varying levels of conscious awareness. As we have seen, Hemmings (2005, 117) provides her own anecdotal experience of this phenomenon, pondering why she has found herself repeating the 'common-sense gloss' of poststructuralism's radical inventiveness and pre-eminence, despite having found ample evidence in her own reading to dispute this account of feminist history.

In this scenario, the 'common-sense gloss', the received wisdom repeatedly held up for recognition in feminist writing, is universally understood in the same way, but readers may differ in their reactions to that understanding. In other words, all readers arrive at the same textual meaning by the same route, but what that meaning means *for* them may vary. Fish (1980, 51-2) makes the same point when he distinguishes between the act of interpretation and the reading response – what appear to be differences in interpretation are actually differences in 'the response to the response'. On these grounds, we could therefore object to Butler's view that hate speech has a fragile claim to effectiveness, considering the control the addressee has over the reception and success of its intent to wound. Our rebuttal would be that the meaning of hate speech, the threat it carries, and the discursive framework which allows it to mean and threaten in that way, are all apprehended in the same way by those it targets. This is irrespective of the actual level of its affective impact on the addressee, or of whether her performative response works against the hate speech by making a demonstration of the speech's failure to injure. Indeed, it is only the stability of such speech being understood in a particular way by all the participants that a response can operate as unexpected or subversive.

This conceptualisation of the mechanisms of knowledge consolidation therefore leaves open the possibility of disruption by the conscious intervention of readers who are also writers. Hemmings' (2005) analysis, at the same time as it recognises the sway exercised over the feminist collective by certain narratives, foregrounds the complexity of the relation between the statements of individual feminists and the dominant 'stories'. It assumes that the individual within the collective is not a blank, unknowing instrument of transmission for the hegemonic knowledge which is the property of that collective. The

urge to submit to what passes for feminist ‘common sense’ in the course of prioritising more pressing concerns is obviously compelling, but the space where such authorial decisions are made is not totally irretrievable from the unconscious, as Hemmings’ (2005, 117) bemusement at her own narrative choices shows. And despite Hemmings’ (2005, 118) adoption of a citation format in this article to reflect her conviction that feminist knowledge production and the propagation of the stories that underpin it is a collaborative process, it is the individual author who is charged with implementing her correctives. These take the form of changing citational habits to reflect both the diversity and continuities in feminist historical influences (Hemmings 2005, 130-1) and reinstating the responsibility of the storyteller for stories’ effects rather than deflecting it by appealing to a supposed consensus about their content (Hemmings 2007, 72). It must therefore be theoretically possible to endow the individual theorist with sufficient autonomy over her rhetorical practice to accomplish these interventions. This theoretical possibility is implied both by Hemmings’ argument, and by Smith’s (1990; 1999) broader elaboration of the role the reading experience plays in general in the objectification of knowledge.

Their approaches move us forward from those adopted in two other analyses we have consulted because they share our interest in intervening in discursive patterns across a body of feminist texts. Both Gallop (1992) and Shands (1999) appeal to the notion of a collective feminist (un)consciousness as the vehicle for the dissemination of these regularities across multiple texts. For Gallop (1992, 7, 8), this is ‘a collective subject, the academic feminist critic’ or the ‘collective unconscious’, and for Shands (1999, 29), the ‘trans-, or intersubjective textual subject of feminism’. As for Hemmings (2005), this collective subject is distinct from, and potentially out of harmony with, the postures and intentions of actual, individual authors (Gallop 1992, 7-8; Shands 1999, 28-9). But in emphasising that textual symptomaticity is a collective dynamic and accomplishing in the process a disconnection between real authors and the collective one, both Gallop and Shands make it difficult to formulate a credible interventionist strategy. Indeed, they contradict the premise of their own anxieties about recurrent discursive patterns, which is that they are readily transmissible through individual, real, and otherwise disparate and unpredictable subjects. The locus of that transmission can be none other than the individual psyche and given that,

then its variance from the collective subject of feminism for which it acts as proxy must be accounted for in our formulation of that transmission process.

If textual patterns are to be disrupted, as is the stated intention (e.g. Gallop 1992, 4; Shands 1999, 2), then the writer cannot be the vehicle for the collective *unconscious*, stuck within and blinded to her role as proxy by her positioning within a particular historical formation (Gallop 1992, 8-9), nor can such patterns be ‘mediators of unconscious meanings [...] speaking of something that has been repressed in the author’s mind’ (Shands 1999, 27; see also 31). Gallop (1992, 9) insists that she is as prone as anyone to the ‘blindness’ inherent in ‘[speaking] from within history’. But in doing so, she begs the question of what sort of insights the individual analyst might bring forth to enable us to think outside and beyond the historical moment which shapes the range of our perceptions as knowing subjects. And, importantly for the coherence of an interventionist strategy, she discounts the possibility of the individual speaking against history. In her account, historical positioning trumps ‘idiosyncratic perception’ and differences in individual psyches in terms of what we can know (Gallop 1992, 8-9).

Having said that, however, Gallop does not always explain the positional factors that have precipitated changes in her own mode of perception. For example, she examines the contrasting receptions given to the ideas of Cheri Register and Elaine Showalter by academic feminists – contrasting to the extent that Showalter is now a pre-eminent feminist literary critic and Register no longer an academic (Gallop 1992, 118). Gallop frames this difference as a function of the historical moment – ‘Register spoke out of turn and was dismissed; Showalter has an exquisite sense of timing’ (Gallop 1992, 118), and the title of the chapter dedicated to this discussion suggests that Register’s idea was ‘presented before its time’. Gallop (1992, 103) describes her own participation in the mockery of Register, which ended abruptly ‘[in] 1987’ when Gallop suddenly became suspicious of the unanimity of this contempt. Unless we can tease out the interaction between idiosyncratic psyches and historically dominant norms of perception, then we cannot begin to answer the obvious questions that Gallop’s story of spontaneous realisation entails – why then, and why Gallop?

The problem of envisaging a sensible intervention is particularly acute for Shands (1999), whose corrective is to replace spatial metaphors that construct binary

understandings of movement and stillness, travel and dwelling, with ones that reintegrate these opposites into a vision of ‘embracing, parabolic space’ where neither is privileged (Shands 1999, 110; see also 2, 128). The trouble is that Shands insists throughout on the way metaphor operates to convey unconscious messages, revealing ‘anxieties or contradictions passed over by the conscious mind’, and articulating ‘the equivocal and indistinct’ in ways that counter the ostensible message of the text (Shands 1999, 31). If this is the case, then Shands is asking us, paradoxically, to engage in the *intentional* manipulation of *unconsciously* produced metaphors which, having been suitably adjusted at the conscious level, then sink back to the realm of the unconscious to resume their work (now more fruitfully, but nonetheless subliminally) of structuring feminist argument. The power of metaphor for Shands (1999, 27) derives precisely from its ability to ‘[address] areas outside of Reason’, to connect to ‘an understanding beyond intellectualism’. The suggestion is almost that the apprehension of such meanings might collapse if metaphor were subjected to too much conscious scrutiny. Therefore, the extent to which it is open to strategic manipulation, where the power of metaphor might give way to the power of the author, is questionable. This is especially so since the knowing manipulators must then resubmit to that power, allowing themselves to be propelled towards ‘unknown futures’ (Shands 1999, 129) by these new metaphorical configurations, despite the latter having been supposedly directed towards specific and better ends.

The ambiguity of Shands’ (1999) position on the status of metaphor is further intensified by her own abundant use of metaphor (also often spatial) to support her analytical argument. Examples abound in her text (e.g. Shands 1999, 12, 13, 27, 31, 128-9), but I draw attention to her reliance on metaphor at the point where she clarifies her methodology: ‘[My] method involves a double strategy of mixing postcritical faith and a suspicious, distancing move to the outskirts of mainstream feminism, a ‘place’ where feminism can be represented as a dominant discourse with its own master metaphors’ (Shands 1999, 32). Here Shands attempts to resolve the epistemological problem associated with simultaneously critiquing and participating in a discourse by figuring ‘mainstream feminism’ as a geophysical and bounded space wherein certain points (‘the outskirts’) are topographically different from others, and afford a clearer view of the various complex elements cluttering its busier areas. We are asked to accept that scholarly ‘space’ has the

same properties as physical space, and that, as such, it is possible to occupy a position still within, and potentially alongside other occupants of the space, but one which nevertheless authorises one's perceptions as more complete or more objective than theirs. The intuitive acceptability of the notion that physical relocation changes what one can see is used to resolve what Shands (1999, 32) assumes to be the fundamental tension between '[her] own immersion in the middle of feminism' and her capacity for critical detachment. However, the recourse to metaphor here mystifies rather than clarifies her epistemological position by encouraging us to paper over the difficult detail of that position – how can we identify what 'mainstream feminism' is, let alone where its boundaries lie, or whether it makes any sense to assert that the intellectual endeavour of feminism has a 'middle' which is differentially placed with respect to its 'outskirts'? Shands uses metaphor in this case to shore up the theoretical validity of her epistemological claims, suggesting, contra her general argument about the role of metaphor but in favour of her corrective, that metaphor can indeed be consciously manipulated for rational ends. But, by the same token, our acceptance of her explanation of her positioning in feminism relies on us not interrogating the analogy too closely – the power of the metaphor does indeed collapse as soon as we start to press the points of similarity it uses to make the comparison intuitively sensible. So, while Shands urges the controlled deployment of metaphor for rationally identified ends, she herself must hope in this case that her readers temporarily suspend their rational faculties and surrender to the intuitive attraction of her analogy.

Assuming, then, that, in contrast to the approaches of Gallop and Shands, we have theoretically accounted for a writing subject who is conscious of, and can manipulate, the effects of her discursive practice, let us now turn to examining what form such a manipulation might take. Feminist calls for ethical forms of rhetorical practice are not new. For example, Foss and Griffin (1995) advocate a style which they term 'invitational rhetoric', and which they define in opposition to classical understandings of rhetoric's purpose as essentially persuasive and therefore dominating. The invitational rhetor creates a non-adversarial communicative situation, one that does not impose the rhetor's values on the audience, nor denigrate others' perspectives (Foss and Griffin 1995, 5-6). Similarly, Young (1996; 2002) calls her recommended rhetorical practice 'communicative democracy'. While part of her argument for an inclusive democracy centres on the need to

revalue different communicative styles as legitimate forms of public participation (Young 1996, 123-4; 2002, 56-7), her remarks in regard to precise rhetorical modes are pertinent to our concerns:

We should [...] ask whether the major contributions to a political debate show discursive signs that they are addressing all those who should be included in the debate. One sign of the absence of such greeting is that a public debate across mass society refers to persons or social segments only in the third person, never addressing them in the second person. If a social segment rarely if ever appears as a group to whom deliberators appeal, and if there are few signs that participants in public debate believe themselves accountable to that social segment among others, then that social segment has almost certainly been excluded from discussion (Young 2002, 62).

Feminist modes of referring to the paradigmatic or self-identified victim which we have outlined would certainly fail Young's test of an inclusive public debate – the invisibilising of victims' points of view, and non-victims' assumption of the authority to assess victims' psychology and the legitimacy of their claims have been fully described. But we cannot attribute this exclusion simply to a continual third-person mode of address, which is the norm in an endeavour organised around the representation and analysis of women's social and political situation. As we have seen, the collective feminist posture of openness and approval towards those designated as agents contrasts with the repudiation of the victim category. Although *all* representation objectifies through categorisation, feminist framings of agency as morally positive in comparison to victimhood nevertheless open lines of access into their discourse community which are unavailable to self-identified victims and their advocates (see also Taylor 1993, 59-60). At least as relevant as who is actually excluded by the use of the third person (all who are referred to that way) is how feminists define and enact their own rules of inclusion and exclusion. This is because these rules have the potential at least to be utilised by non-academic feminist women to move from talked about third person on the outside to the position of spoken to/speaking person on the inside. The task of a rhetorical praxis as we see it here is not the impossible one of completely eradicating the violence of representation, but to keep open as many points of access for as many different kinds of subjects as possible into the feminist community and its debates (see Bruner 1996, 196).

Let us begin by formulating our improved rhetorical praxis in quite prosaic terms, knowing full well the sorts of protests on theoretical grounds that this formulation might attract. These protests will be addressed in due course. Opening the communicative space

to victim-subjects obviously involves reviewing assumptions of their defective status. These assumptions have worked, amongst other things, to deflect charges of exclusion by framing the victim category as empty in any case – women would not want to classify themselves as so morally lacking or politically impotent, hence, there is no need to be accountable to its members because none exist. To disrupt these assumptions, we need to dismantle the accretion of negative attributes that has solidified around the concept of victimhood. The coagulated nature of this set of associations operates synecdochically to enable us to recognise and devalorise what is sometimes specifically referred to as the paradigm of victimhood (e.g. Bahar 2003, 1025; Fernandes 1999, 141) when any of its elements are invoked. When, for instance, the ‘passive’ or ‘helpless’ victim is mentioned in derogatory tones, we scan outside the confines of the text to find a match for that object, and we find it in anti-feminist framings of victimhood which construct passivity or helplessness along with other supposedly undesirable qualities as all essential and inseparable characteristics of this kind of individual<sup>2</sup>. Intentionally expanding and making unpredictable the range of qualifiers attached to the ‘victim’ establishes these to be accidental, rather than inherent, attributes of victimhood. Warner’s (2001, 115) reference to ‘guilty victims’ works in this way – it is not a customary semantic combination, and we have no prior frame of reference that allows us to recognise guilt and victimhood as coherently conjoined in a single object. In the absence of that extra-textual frame of reference, Warner (2001, 123) is obliged to provide a full explanation *within* her own text to make this combination sensible. We might describe Warner’s unexpected combination in the terms Biesecker (1992, 357) uses to imagine a rhetorical application of Foucault’s notion of resistance as:

those practices that do not make sense within the available lines of intelligibility or discernment. That is, they do not signify (which is to say, make meaning) because they cannot be referenced within the field. Hence, resistant practices are gestures that defy translation, throw sense off track, and, thus, short-circuit the system through which sense is made.

And we could see it similarly as a case of what Foss and Griffin (1995, 9) call ‘re-sourcement’, where the rhetor ‘deliberately draws energy from a new source – a source

---

<sup>2</sup> An adjunct process in this rhetorical program would of course also entail relieving the notion of passivity of its *necessarily* negative connotations. This means weakening feminist commitment to various automatic assumptions about both the origins and effects of passivity – that it is a symptom of actual moral failure, that its appearance must be repudiated lest the impression of such a failure be given, or that it is categorically and always an incorrect representation of women’s response to dominant norms.

other than the individual or system that provided the initial frame for the issue'. There is a refusal of the available frame of reference in Warner's usage, which is brought into view as we test the discourse of 'political correctness' and its construction of victimhood for correspondences to the object named as 'guilty victim' and find them lacking.

A corollary of this strategy to 'throw sense off track' by detaching expected attributes and adding new ones is the distillation of a core meaning of 'victim' which is closer to its lexical origins, and which is separable from the semantic combinations in which it appears. Indeed, we are thrown back to lexical meanings of terms by Warner's (2001, 115) usage – the only frame of reference to which we can retreat is the one by which we understand the 'literal' meanings of 'guilty' and 'victim'. Our knowledge of these literal meanings is certainly not enough to enable us to interpret completely and correctly Warner's sense, as the requirement for her explanation makes clear, and I will return to the status of lexical or referential usage in a moment. Such a distilling move has been explicitly advocated by Coates and Ridley (2009, 109), who argue for the reclamation of the term 'victim' 'to indicate that a wrong was done against another person'. Mardorossian's (2002a, 766) suggestion that the term 'victim' should be scrutinised for 'what it encompasses' also implies a move in this direction. Note also that her urging of feminists to reappropriate the word and its meanings comes as an explicit protest at the conflation of victimhood and passivity (Mardorossian 2002b, 789). That is, the reappropriation she recommends entails a rupturing of the concept from the negative attributes which have been normalised as part of its essential substance, and the reconstruction of an alternative core definition (however provisional we might insist that has to be).

I am aware that this is the point at which many contemporary feminists might be most inclined to abandon my proposal, given the general acceptance of the postmodern aversion to fixing meaning, indeed of the idea that such fixity is impossible. I address these objections by reconsidering the notions of core meanings and lexical or referential language use from two angles. First, I will discuss Butler's remarks about nouns and adjectives in relation to notions of core gender identity and gender attributes as they bear on the distillation of a core definition for 'victim'. Secondly, I will contest a tendency within critical rhetorics to preserve a distinction between lexical/referential language and rhetoric. I will argue that deployments of referential language can also be seen as a specific kind of



rhetorical activism, and are not simply an attempt to retreat from discursive instability to the haven of settled language use.

For Butler (1990, 24), what we think of as the ‘abiding substance’ of gender, the coherence of masculinity and femininity referred to by the nouns ‘man’ and ‘woman’, is actually ‘the compulsory ordering of attributes into coherent gender sequences’. That is, there is no prior substance or integrity in gender identity; the concept of stable gender identity is instead a fiction constructed around the collection of attributes we have incorporated into the core definition of what constitutes ‘man’ and ‘woman’. This ‘hierarchizing grammar’ of nouns and adjectives gives the impression that the noun (gender identity) is the abiding substance to which adjectives (attributes) are subsequently appended, enabling us to explain dissonant noun-adjective combinations as accidental aberrations from the norm, rather than as threats to the coherence of a gender ontology. But, argues Butler, the very possibility of these dissonant features exposes gender identity to be an arbitrary construction. The end point of this line of argument is that, if the noun/identity is sensible only as the sum of a particular set of attributes (even if this set may change over time to accommodate attributes previously thought to be aberrations), then the status of the noun and its assumption of ‘the ontology of substances’ are ‘not only [...] artificial effect[s], but essentially superfluous’. The exposure of the void of gender identity allows Butler (1990, 33, 140-1) to figure gender as constituted through iterative performance, not as a prior essence – gender is *done*, and is the effect, rather than the origin, of this doing. Given that, gender identity evaporates as a source of entrapment for women (and men) and is open to subversive performances and ‘resignification’ (Butler 1990, 33, 138; 1992, 16) via the physical and discursive adoption of previously unthought behaviours and attributes.

This type of resignification is in line with our proposal to dissolve the set of associations that have come to form part of the ‘abiding substance’ of the ‘victim’ by conscientiously reattaching a variety of unpredictable descriptors, as Warner has done. But Butler’s insistence that the arbitrariness of the distinction between essential and accidental attributes proves the absence of ‘abiding substance’ in the noun form seems to bode ill for our desire to reinstate a core, denotative function for the term ‘victim’, one which remains once connotation has been stripped away. However, Butler (1992, 17) is also clear that her exposure of this lack of substance does not entail the negation of nominal terms:

If a deconstruction of the materiality of bodies suspends and problematizes the traditional ontological referent of the term, it does not freeze, banish, render useless, or deplete of meaning the usage of the term; on the contrary, it provides the conditions to *mobilize* the signifier in the service of an alternative production.

The irreducibility of the body provides the canvas on which the parody of gender is expressed, but it is not an entirely blank one. We can never retreat to a state of non-meaning; *re*-signification is not written over nothing, and a certain stability and precision of meaning is necessary if the new signification is to mark its opposition to the old one. This is particularly so of the adjectives/attributes through whose infinitely varied deployment the noun loses its capacity to entrap its referents<sup>3</sup>.

But it appears that Butler also allows that even the meaning of noun forms can undergo a positive process of stabilisation during resignification. In speaking of the possibility of deflecting the potential injury of hate speech by a refusal to take up its intended meaning, Butler (1997, 15) states that ‘the interval between instances of utterance not only makes the repetition and resignification of the utterance possible, but shows how words might, through time, become disjoined from their power to injure and recontextualized in more affirmative modes’. This suggests that ‘words’ themselves may acquire properties of their own, albeit as a result of particular usages and contextualisations, which are relatively stable. These properties may not be strictly speaking intrinsic to the word, but the effect is that a stability of function in the normal performance of that word creates an anticipated meaning for it, and hence one which is *apparently* prior to subsequent deployments. That this happens ‘through time’ indicates a prolonged process of meaning consolidation, which is as much the source of optimism and transformative possibilities as is the fluidity which she sees as an essential element of speech acts. It is also worth noting incidentally that Butler’s hopes for transformation of meanings through resignification rest on the possibility of words being used for targeted ends, towards effects

---

<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the emptiness of core meaning does not apply to all grammatical parts of speech – fluidity of meaning in the noun is inversely proportional to fixity of meaning in the adjective. If not all words can and should be fluid to satisfy Butler’s plan for resignification, is it possible that not even all noun forms can be seen as nothing but the arbitrary accretion of attributes? The noun forms in which she is primarily interested – those designating identities or *states* – are of a different order to nouns like ‘victim’ which designate a position or relation, in that the definition of states can be none other than a descriptive one. This is not to ignore the fact that the choice of attributes assigned as essential to ‘woman’ is motivated by the need to define her in contradistinction to ‘man’, and that relational factors also come into play in these cases, but it is to note that there is no other way to define ‘victim’ (in the sense we want to use it) other than in relation to a source of harm.

which can be predicted on the basis that interpretation will accord with intended meanings (see Magnus 2006, 89).

There is therefore some ambivalence in Butler's views which means that she does not quite close out the possibility, indeed the desirability, of words acquiring a semblance of internal properties, however provisional. In other words, they may acquire something like a core meaning which encompasses the affirmative as well as, if not instead of, the power to injure. 'Core' in this sense does not necessarily point to a doomed impulse to 'purify' language of its constant negotiability, as some writers (e.g. Cameron 1998, 963; Torfing 1999, 286; Bohman 1988, 193; Butler 1997, 38) would suggest. Rather, it denotes a position of stability in the ceaseless work of (re)signification. That stability coincides with the meaning that has entered the lexicon. It is the meaning to which we must fall back in the absence of resignifying factors, the ground from which repetition or resignification is launched. In Smith's terms, the lexicon that records this core meaning would constitute one possible interpretive framework among others, and there are cases where it is useless for making sense of a text. Where the 'passive victim' is devalued, for instance, the lexicon provides no mechanism for understanding the basis of this devaluation, nor for interpreting passivity to be one of the victim's essential characteristics.

The lexical meaning, then, should not be understood as overseeing all usages from a position of unchangeability outside context. As Mackey (1997, 53) argues in summarising I.A. Richards' work on rhetoric, '[what] we usually call the 'proper' or 'literal' meaning of a word is simply the meaning it takes from the contexts that recur most frequently in our discursive practice'. In that sense, what we have referred to as lexical or core meanings are really meanings that occupy the most stable end of a continuum of provisionality, positioned there because of a regularity in their contextual placement. Communicative acts are not an exercise in aggregating a series of words with prior, fixed meanings like building a mosaic, where each individual element remains unchanged by the aggregation. If that were the case, Warner's (2001, 115) reference to the 'guilty victim' would succeed in meaning as it is, in isolation. Words take on meaning only in context, arrived at 'only through the interplay of the interpretive possibilities of the whole utterance' (Richards, cited in Mackey 1997, 57; see also 52).

One of the fundamental arguments of this thesis has indeed been that readers of academic feminist writing need to be able to interpret contextual features to know whether to appeal to the lexicon or to other ‘resignifications’ of victimhood to realise the meaning of individual references. It assumes, therefore, that the accomplishment of meaning is not ensured by, because completely contained within, the term itself. The corrective is not so much to fix the meaning of ‘victim’ at the point of stability represented by its lexical definition as to be cognisant of which interpretive schema are called upon when we name ‘victim’. Hence, a proposal that recommends a revaluation of and recourse to lexical usage should not be dismissed as motivated by a naïve faith in the capacity of language to be fixed and a desire to flee the actually inescapable cut and thrust of postmodern discursive instability. If all word usage is indeed contextually mediated, then a usage where what we know as the lexical or referential function of the word is applicable is as much a linguistic performance with particular effects as any other. It is as much in a dialogic relationship with context as other less referential usages of the word, and the fact that it is not (can never be) outside the (re)signification process makes the effects of this kind of usage worthy of our attention.

This brings me to the second point noted above (*supra* 320). Critical rhetoricians (including, and sometimes especially, feminist ones) tend to emphasise that all language is rhetorical, that communication always involves something other than the transmission of propositional content via utterances composed of words with univocal meanings (e.g. Collins 1999, 546; Young 2002, 63; Bohman 1988, 186; Biesecker 2000, 95). This view is frequently stated in opposition to the Habermasian ideal of communicative rationality, on the basis that no communicative act is ever oriented solely to generating understanding and language is never solely a vehicle of rational thought (e.g. Biesecker 2000, 87; Butler 1997, 86-7; Bohman 1988, 193; Bizzell 1997, 37). What I have said to this point is perfectly in accord with that view, since my appeal to the potential advantages of recovering the lexical meaning of ‘victim’ is inspired by the performative effects of this usage, and not by the internal capacities of the lexical definition to mean in its own right. Part of the motivation for this view appears to be an understandable desire on the part of rhetoricians to revalue rhetoric, to relieve it of its classical reputation as essentially an instrument for audience manipulation, and as therefore something which should ideally be excised from public

discourse (e.g. Young 1996, 130; 2002, 64; Ede et al. 1995, 403; Biesecker 2000, 85). Feminist rhetoricians are particularly interested in contesting the denigration of rhetorical (emotional, figurative, stylistically idiosyncratic) modes of communication because it specifically excludes from democratic participation those unskilled in the universalised deliberative norms that have their origins in a masculinist polity (e.g. Young 1996, 124-5; Pajnik 2006, 394; Ede et al. 1995, 422; but see Foss and Griffin 1995). My argument with the way this position sometimes plays out is that the desire to reprivilege the role of rhetoric often blunts the initial assertion that all language is rhetorical by reinstating the distinction between rhetorical and so-called rational or non-strategic language.

The argument that rhetoric is an inevitable feature of all linguistic acts is used justifiably to protest against the bracketing of the rhetorical dimension from the development of criteria for legitimate styles of democratic communication. So, for example, Young (2002, 64) points out that ‘any discursive content and argument is embodied in situated style and rhetoric’, even that which purports to be neutral and dispassionate. Her concept of ‘rhetoric’ refers to the ‘affective, embodied, and stylistic aspects of communication’, including the use of figures of speech and visual symbols, and the emotional tone of language. Even speech that is supposedly dispassionate has a particular emotional character, that of calmness and detachment (Young 2002, 65). However, having asserted the ubiquity of rhetoric, Young goes on to focus only on the positive contribution *particular* forms of rhetoric – those conventionally marked as rhetorical as opposed to communication normally thought to be coolly argumentative and non-rhetorical – can make to democracy. For example, she advocates impassioned and emotionally charged language as ways to get issues on the political agenda, and the particularisation of a linguistic presentation through idiom and symbol to appeal to the interests of a localised audience (Young 2002, 66ff.). In emphasising these aspects as uniquely rhetorical, Young leaves aside the question of how speech normally marked as non-rhetorical actually does work rhetorically. She therefore falls back on the distinction she has just dissolved as part of establishing the imperative to attend to rhetoric as a normal feature of political expression (Young 2002, 64). This reading is borne out when she asserts that political debate does not end ‘with a well-founded proposition, account, or set of principles’; on the contrary, it is the ‘situated, figured, and effective appeal of rhetoric’

which can decide audiences and differentiate between proposals that ‘are roughly equivalent in their rational acceptability’ (Young 2002, 69-70). This suggests, contrary to her earlier position, that ‘well-founded proposition[s]’ have no intrinsically rhetorical nature, that rhetorical modes of expression are overlaid on propositional assertions which pre-date that intervention and can exist distinct from it in a rhetoric-free zone.

Similarly, though recognising that all texts are rhetorical, Collins (1999, 546-7) limits the definition of rhetoric for the purposes of her discussion to language that aims to persuade or effect a particular outcome. She thereby suggests that it is easy to distinguish between texts that are persuasive or use language effectively from those that do not, which are redefined by implication in her terms as non-rhetorical. And Bohman (1988, 189) maintains that Habermas’ distinction between communicative and strategic (rhetorical) speech cannot be preserved when applied to the case of the social critic, whose communicative intentions are always allied with the goal of eliciting self-reflection in the audience, and consequently their cooperation in bringing about social change. Instead, the social critic engages in a hybrid form of communication that Bohman (1988, 188-9) calls ‘emancipatory speech’. His motivation is in part to salvage the reputation of rhetoric as having ‘a secondary, derivative, and yet menacing status’ (Bohman 1988, 185), and to find a legitimate place for rhetoric in theories of communicative action (Bohman 1988, 193). But if communication can be truly hybrid in this case – must be, according to Bohman (1988, 193), for the discursive activity of the social critic to be explained coherently – this suggests that it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the communicative from the rhetorical function of all the social critic’s statements, even those that lack obvious stylistic flourishes. Nevertheless, this hybridity for Bohman (1988, 199-200) takes the form of conventionally rhetorical features (irony, metaphor, artistic representation) overlaid on or additional to ‘direct communication’, which remains distinguishable from those features. Again, the goal of dissolving the distinction between the two communicative functions for the purposes of recuperating rhetoric ends up leaving what we think of as directly communicative statements undisturbed in the category of non-rhetoric.

In contrast to the trajectory followed in these analyses, but subscribing to the view that all communication has a rhetorical dimension, I want to focus on the rhetorical function of lexical or referential uses of the term ‘victim’, and of its pairing with other

lexical signs in inventive semantic combinations. The purpose is to resituate the denotative within the sphere of rhetorical action and resignification, and to ask what *effect* it has in the context of other constructions of victimhood. If we take the statement that ‘women are victims of oppression’ as a meta-statement of the kinds of usage I have in mind, the task is to ask what rhetorical work – and, by extension, what consciously strategic and political work – is performed by this statement. According to the terms of much critical rhetorics, such a statement would be placed in the category of those that are geared towards understanding, that are ‘coolly and purely argumentative’, and therefore outside the domain of the rhetorical (Young 2002, 64). Its function appears to be primarily to convey propositional content. That is not to say that its assertion is uncontentious, but it utilises no particular stylistic mechanisms of persuasion. And its capacity to provoke disagreement relies on the stability of the meanings of the terms it uses, and therefore of the predictability with which its content will be understood. What I argue here is that this sort of statement, which falls outside the interest of even those rhetoricians who assert the ubiquity of rhetoric, can be interrogated for the effects it has at the discursive level, quite apart from questions of the veracity of its claim.

The operative assumption for the theorists referred to above has been that apparently neutral language is blind to its own rhetorical dimension (e.g. Young 2002, 65) – that its neutrality conceals, denies or speaks to an unawareness of its rhetorical function, or is a deliberate ploy to deflect attention from its political investment. But we can reposition this neutrality as itself an expression of political interest, not in the sense that this interest lurks beneath a dispassionate veneer and uses that veneer to hide its ulterior motive, but that it embodies that interest, is itself an affirmative use of rhetoric, to use Young’s (2002, 63) term. The aim in highlighting the positive effects of this usage is not to de-rhetorise the term ‘victim’ by immunising it from the sort of discursive ‘play’ that has paired it with resignifying attributes (like ‘passive’ and ‘helpless’) that exceed its lexical definition. The aim is to position such usage as a form of active intervention, performing a specific function, *in* the field of (re)signification, not as an evacuation of that field. The issue here is not one of language ‘purification’, of paring back or divesting language of its unwanted elements. In my formulation, this reduction becomes a *positive* absence, an absence which

is intended to be noticed as a positive refusal of interpretive frameworks invoked by other usages.

This argument emphasises that referential usages of ‘victim’ (with or without instances of an unspecified array of qualifiers) do not have or gain meaning in isolation. When the reader encounters any instance of this sort of usage, the anti-feminist construction of victimhood presses its candidature on the reader as she does the work of meaning-making. The political effect of a referential usage is that this construction must be actively refused by the reader, who finds it wanting as a way of maintaining the coherence of textual meaning, since it bears no correspondence to the cartographic symbols of the text. Each such refusal renders that construction temporarily impotent. The referential usage derives its political force from the fact that it is possible to deploy other usages which can appeal to other interpretive schema. The immediate value of a recourse to the lexical is therefore not that it is a defensive move, one calculated to expunge the danger of paradigmatic usages, but that it is a political engagement with those usages. The signifying power of the lexical term is not contained solely within the term; it is a function of its standing in a relation to the discursive context which contains other ways of making ‘victim’ mean. In that sense, our interest in the lexical term has nothing to do with attributing a transcendental meaning to it. Rather, it is in the emphatically historicised nature of how the lexical term can mean in the context of the discourse of ‘political correctness’. In this historical moment, using ‘victim’ referentially – and still bearing in mind the provisional nature of all definitions, including lexical ones – is a particular rhetorical move, where that usage means differently from what it did before that discourse emerged, and no doubt from what it will at some stage in the future.

The benefits of such a strategy are twofold. Anti-feminist constructions of victimhood are disturbed, but not by feminist discourse taking a defensive position in direct opposition to it. The studied neutrality of the lexical usage and/or the unpredictability of semantic combinations dares a challenge from dominant discourses that would deny women’s subordinate status, but is not directed towards inviting such a confrontation directly. The presumptiveness of the lexical usage, the confidence in the veracity of the claim which it indicates, presents a teflon face to this hostile construction, allowing no access for it to insert its challenge. In other words, it operates in much the same way as Giddens’ text did



on Smith (1999, 147ff.), making no room for readers to present elements that might disrupt its narrative. Of course, the ‘passive’ or ‘helpless’ victim may still appear, for there is an infinite array of possibilities in the qualifiers we might now append to ‘victim’, but the point is that this is not the only sort of victim we can then imagine – nor, by implication, is there only one sort of agent imaginable. Indeed, the second benefit of this strategy is that commitment is suspended as to what a ‘victim’ *is* like, and what stance we are to adopt towards her. And that openness will admit those whom the paradigmatic invocation of ‘victim’ worked to exclude. In this way, feminists retain some autonomy over their own (re)signification of victimhood, short-circuiting that given by fiat from elsewhere.

Our rhetorical strategy is therefore emphatically not a misguided aspiration towards ‘the utopia of completely transparent communication’, the basis of Foucault’s (1997, 298) criticism of Habermas. It is not a Habermasian attempt to foster the circulation of ‘games of truth’ outside power relations (Foucault 1997, 298), for it is a politically interested strategy, directed specifically at disrupting an anti-feminist construction of victimhood. But, given that power will always be an element in rhetorical endeavours, it does aspire to create a discursive environment wherein we ‘play these games of power with as little domination as possible’ (Foucault 1997, 298), at least with respect to our sisters. Claims of victimisation are fundamental statements about the distribution of power in our society (Bickford 1997, 126). To project diminished status onto these claimants as a function of making these very statements is to debar them from initiating the sorts of discussions about justice that animate feminist politics. There is always a violence in representation, in naming women as victims, but not because by doing so, we exclude the possibility of them being agents. It is because at that moment it speaks more loudly to other discursive communities and serves our political purpose better to choose that name from among the myriad other identifications women might simultaneously have. If our proposal for an altered rhetoric is at all utopian, it is not because it is impelled by a belief in the possibility of ‘transparent communication’. It is because, if feminists are to remain true to an ethics of inclusiveness and plurality, then their rhetorical practice must be one which invites self-identified victims and their advocates into the feminist conversation. A practice such as this will enact an awareness that the academic feminist work of writing is not just about how to speak, but also about how to listen.

## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix 1

### List of surveyed journals

(Journal descriptions from publisher/journal internet home pages)

#### ***SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (US)**

‘Recognized as the leading international journal in women's studies, *Signs* has since 1975 been at the forefront of new directions in feminist scholarship.

*Signs* publishes pathbreaking articles of interdisciplinary interest addressing gender, race, culture, class, nation, and/or sexuality either as central focuses or as constitutive analytics; symposia engaging comparative, interdisciplinary perspectives from around the globe to analyze concepts and topics of import to feminist scholarship; retrospectives that track the growth and development of feminist scholarship, note transformations in key concepts and methodologies, and construct genealogies of feminist inquiry; and new directions essays, which provide an overview of the main themes, controversies, and approaches in recent scholarship in particular fields and introduce this work and its theoretical and conceptual innovations to an interdisciplinary audience. Special issue and symposia topics cover a broad range of geopolitical processes, conditions, and effects; cultural and social configurations; and scholarly and theoretical developments.

*Signs* challenges the boundaries of knowledge concerning women's and men's lives, gender relations, sexualities, raced and gendered practices, institutions, cultural productions, theoretical concepts and frameworks, and understandings of the past and present as well as possibilities for the future.’

The editorial vision for the journal is as follows:

‘Since the publication of the first issue of *Signs* in 1975, the world has been dramatically transformed. The past thirty years have witnessed geopolitical transformations such as the gendered and gendering processes associated with the end of the Cold War, globalization and democratization, regional and imperial wars, the AIDS pandemic, global terrorism, and national and transnational responses to it. At the same time, feminism and feminist scholarship have become transnational ventures linking local, regional, national, and global networks and agendas. Developing sophisticated theoretical frameworks and analytical tools, feminist scholars have forged epistemic communities to interrogate disciplinary, interdisciplinary, national, and imperial modes of knowledge production. Deploying gender, intersectionality, and other theorizations of difference, feminist scholars have challenged traditional disciplines and raised new research questions and approaches.’

[At <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/page/signs/brief.html>]

#### ***Feminist Studies* (US)**

For reasons of copyright, text from the journal website that appeared in the original version of the thesis has been removed, but can be accessed at <http://www.feministstudies.org/aboutfs/history.html>

*differences: a journal of feminist cultural studies* (US)

For reasons of copyright, text from the journal website that appeared in the original version of the thesis has been removed, but can be accessed at <http://www.dukeupress.edu/differences/>

*Gender and Society: Official Publication of Sociologists for Women in Society* (US)

For reasons of copyright, text from the journal website that appeared in the original version of the thesis has been removed, but can be accessed at <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsProdDesc.nav?prodId=Journal200793>

***Hypatia: a journal of feminist philosophy* (US)**

For reasons of copyright, text from the journal website that appeared in the original version of the thesis has been removed, but can be accessed at <http://depts.washington.edu/hypatia/>

***Feminist Review* (UK)**

‘When *Feminist Review* first appeared in 1979 it described itself as a socialist and feminist journal, a vehicle to unite research and theory with political practice, and contribute to the development of both. After more than 30 years of publishing and amidst a plethora of specialist feminist journals, *Feminist Review* sustains its unique role as an interdisciplinary, agenda-setting publication. Situated outside traditional disciplinary boundaries *Feminist Review* insists on the theoretical and strategic centrality of gender in all its complexity.’

[At <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/fr/index.html>]

Journal ‘Aims and Scope’ are as follows: ‘*Feminist Review* is a peer reviewed, interdisciplinary journal setting new agendas for the analysis of the social world. Currently based in London with an international scope, FR invites critical reflection on the relationship between materiality and representation, theory and practice, subjectivity and communities, contemporary and historical formations. The FR Collective is committed to exploring gender in its multiple forms and interrelationships. As well as academic articles we publish experimental pieces, visual and textual media and political interventions, including, for example, interviews, short stories, poems and photographic essays.’

[At <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/fr/about.html>]

(Copyright © 2011 Feminist Review. Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.)

***Australian Feminist Studies (Australia)***

For reasons of copyright, text from the journal website that appeared in the original version of the thesis has been removed, but can be accessed at <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/08164649.asp>

***Women's Studies International Forum (formerly Women's Studies International Quarterly) (UK/International)***

For reasons of copyright, text from the journal website that appeared in the original version of the thesis has been removed, but can be accessed at [http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws\\_home/361/description#description](http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/361/description#description)

## Appendix 2

### Details of access to surveyed journals

Journal title	Period available/surveyed	Retrieval source/medium	Comments
<i>Signs: Journal of women in culture and society</i>	1987-2004	JSTOR	Published from 1975
	2004-2007	LBGT Life with Full Text	
<i>Feminist Studies</i>	1987-2003	JSTOR	Published from 1972
	2004-2007	Academic Search Premier	
<i>differences: a journal of feminist cultural studies</i>	1994-2007	Academic Search Premier	Published from 1989; issues from 1989-1993 unavailable for survey (in either soft or hard copy)
<i>Gender and Society: Official Publication of Sociologists for Women in Society</i>	1987-2005	JSTOR	Published from 1987
	2006-2007	SAGE Premier	
<i>Hypatia: a journal of feminist philosophy</i>	1987-2003	JSTOR	Published from 1986
	2004-2007	Academic Search Premier	
<i>Feminist Review</i>	1987-2005	JSTOR	Published from 1979
	2006-2007	IngentaConnect	
<i>Australian Feminist Studies</i>	1987-1993	Hardcopy	Published from 1985
	1994-March 2007	Australian Public Affairs Full Text	
	April 2007-Dec 2007	Academic Search Premier	
<i>Women's Studies International Forum</i>	1987-1994	ScienceDirect Social Science Backfile	Formerly <i>Women's Studies International Quarterly</i> , published from 1978-81; from 1982 [...] <i>Forum</i>
	1995-2007	ScienceDirect Freedom Collection	

### Appendix 3

#### Articles containing 'victimhood' in text listed by journal

##### *Signs*

- Bahar, Saba. 2003. "'If I'm One of the Victims, Who Survives?': Marilyn Hacker's Breast Cancer Texts.' *Signs* 28(4): 1025-52.
- Blake, C. Fred. 1994. 'Foot-Binding in Neo-Confucian China and the Appropriation of Female Labor.' *Signs* 19(3): 676-712.
- Bumiller, Kristin. 1987. 'Victims in the Shadow of the Law: A Critique of the Model of Legal Protection.' *Signs* 12(3): 421-39.
- Fernandes, Leela. 1999. 'Reading India's 'Bandit Queen': A Trans/national Feminist Perspective on the Discrepancies of Representation.' *Signs* 25(1): 123-52.
- Flint, Kate. 2006. 'Women and Reading.' *Signs* 31(2): 511-36.
- Freeman, Carla. 2001. 'Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization.' *Signs* 26(4): 1007-37.
- Gilmore, Leigh. 2003. 'Jurisdictions: *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, *The Kiss*, and Scandalous Self-representation in the Age of Memoir and Trauma.' *Signs* 28(2): 695-718.
- Moeller, Robert G. 1998. "'The Last Soldiers of the Great War' and Tales of Family Reunions in the Federal Republic of Germany.' *Signs* 14(1): 129-45.
- Schaeffer-Grabiel, Felicity. 2006. 'Planet-Love.com: Cyberbrides in the Americas and the Transnational Routes of U.S. Masculinity.' *Signs* 31(2): 331-56.
- Sengupta, Shuddhabrata. 2006. 'I/Me/Mine – Intersectional Identities as Negotiated Minefields.' *Signs* 31(3): 629-39.
- Sieg, Katrin. 2002. 'Sexual Desire and Social Transformation in 'Aimee and Jaguar'.' *Signs* 28(1): 303-31.
- Watson, Julie. 2002. 'Charlotte Salomon's Memory Work in the "Postscript" to "Life? or Theatre?".' *Signs* 28(1): 409-20.

##### *Feminist Studies*

- Davis, Simone Weil. 2002. 'Loose Lips Sink Ships.' *Feminist Studies* 28(1): 7-35.
- Garrison, Ednie Kaeh. 2000. 'U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave.' *Feminist Studies* 26(1): 141-70.
- Gude, Olivia, and Beatriz Santiago Munoz. 1994. 'Two Women on the Street.' *Feminist Studies* 20(2): 301-17.
- Gullickson, Gay L. 1991. 'La Pétroleuse: Representing Revolution.' *Feminist Studies* 17(2): 241-65.
- Ray, Raka. 2000. 'Masculinity, Femininity, and Servitude: Domestic Workers in Calcutta in the Late Twentieth Century.' *Feminist Studies* 26(3): 691-718.
- Reagan, Leslie J. 2003. 'From Hazard to Blessing to Tragedy: Representations of Miscarriage in Twentieth-Century America.' *Feminist Studies* 29(2): 356-78.
- Sweeney, Megan. 2004. 'Prison Narratives, Narrative Prisons: Incarcerated Women Reading Gayl Jones's "Eva's Man".' *Feminist Studies* 30(2): 456-82.



- Tambe, Ashwini. 2000. 'Colluding Patriarchies: The Colonial Reform of Sexual Relations in India.' *Feminist Studies* 26(3): 587-600.
- Warner, Sara L. 2004. 'The Medea Project: Mythic Theater for Incarcerated Women.' *Feminist Studies* 30(2): 483-509.

### *differences*

- Castelli, Elizabeth A. 2007. 'Persecution Complexes: Identity Politics and the 'War on Christians'.' *differences* 18(3): 152-80.
- Chow, Rey. 1999. 'When Whiteness Feminizes...: Some Consequences of a Supplementary Logic.' *differences* 11(3): 137-68.
- Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. 1999. 'Unbearable Witness: Towards a Politics of Listening.' *differences* 11(1): 112-49.
- Dean, Carolyn J. 2003. 'Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering.' *differences* 14(1): 88-124.
- Fassin, Eric. 2007. 'Sexual Violence at the Border.' *differences* 18(2): 1-23.
- Hammonds, Evelyn M. 1997. 'Whither Black Women's Studies. Interview.' *differences* 9(3): 31-45.
- Jenkins, Fiona. 2007. 'Toward a Nonviolent Ethics: Response to Catherine Mills.' *differences* 18(2): 157-79.
- Rogoff, Irit. 1992. 'Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History.' *differences* 4(3): 38-65.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. 1997. 'La Querelle des Femmes' in the late Twentieth Century.' *differences* 9(2): 70-92.

### *Gender and Society*

- Caputi, Jane. 1989. 'The Sexual Politics of Murder.' *Gender and Society* 3(4): 437-56.
- Choo, Hae Yeon. 2006. 'Gendered Modernity and Ethnicized Citizenship: North Korean Settlers in Contemporary South Korea.' *Gender and Society* 20(5): 576-604.
- Hernandez, Marcia. 1999. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 13(4): 562-63.
- Macleod, Catriona. 2002. 'Economic Security and the Social Science Literature on Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa.' *Gender and Society* 16(5): 647-64.
- Moghadam, Valentine M. 2007. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 21: 938-40.
- Riessman, Catherine Kohler. 2000. 'Stigma and Everyday Resistance Practices: Childless Women in South India.' *Gender and Society* 14(1): 111-35.
- Sered, Susan Starr. 1994. 'Ideology, Autonomy, and Sisterhood: An Analysis of the Secular Consequences of Women's Religions.' *Gender and Society* 8(4): 486-506.
- Taylor, Verta. 1999. 'Gender and Social Movements: Gender Processes in Women's Self-help Movements.' *Gender and Society* 13(1): 8-33.
- White, Aaronette M. 1999. 'Talking Feminist, Talking Black: 'Micromobilization Processes in a Collective Protest against Rape.' *Gender and Society* 13(1): 77-100.

### *Hypatia*

- Arens, Katherine. 1995. 'Between Hypatia and Beauvoir: Philosophy as Discourse.' *Hypatia* 10(4): 46-75.
- Bickford, Susan. 1997. 'Anti-anti-identity politics: Feminism, Democracy and the Complexities of Citizenship.' *Hypatia* 12(4): 111-131.
- Chetkovich, Carol. 2004. 'Women's Agency in a Context of Oppression: Assessing Strategies for Personal Action and Public Policy.' *Hypatia* 19(4): 120-41.
- Franks, Mary Anne. 2003. 'Obscene Undersides: Women and Evil between the Taliban and the United States.' *Hypatia* 18(1): 135-56.
- Gunn, Janet Varner. 1998. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Hypatia* 13(3): 177-81.
- Hurtado, Aida. 1998. 'Sitios y Lenguas: Chicanas Theorize Feminisms.' *Hypatia* 13(2): 134-61.
- Lara, María Pía. 2003. 'In and Out of Terror: The Vertigo of Secularization.' *Hypatia* 18(1): 183-96.
- Mason, Carol. 2007. 'Miscegenation and Purity: Reproducing the Souls of White Folk.' *Hypatia* 22(2): 98-121.
- McCaughey, Martha. 1993. 'Redirecting Feminist Critiques of Science.' *Hypatia* 8(4): 72-84.
- Rowe, Aimee Carrillo. 2007. 'Feeling in the Dark: Empathy, Whiteness, and Miscegenation in *Monster's Ball*.' *Hypatia* 22(2): 122-42.
- Thomas, Sue. 1994. 'Difference, Intersubjectivity, and Agency in the Colonial and Decolonizing Spaces of Hélène Cixous's 'Sorties'.' *Hypatia* 9(1): 53-69.
- Williams, Christine L. 2002. 'Sexual Harassment and Sadomasochism.' *Hypatia* 17(2): 99-117.

### *Feminist Review*

- Andrijasevic, Rutvica. 2007. 'Beautiful Dead Bodies: Gender, Migration and Representation in Anti-trafficking Campaigns.' *Feminist Review* 86: 24-44.
- Bondi, Liz, and Erica Burman. 2001. 'Women and Mental Health: A Feminist Review.' *Feminist Review* 68: 6-33.
- Bott, Esther. 2006. 'Pole Position: Migrant British Women Producing 'Selves' Through Lap-Dancing Work.' *Feminist Review* 83: 23-41.
- Clegg, Christine. 1999. 'Feminist Recoveries in 'My Father's House'.' *Feminist Review* 61(Spring): 67-82.
- Cole, Alyson. 2000. 'Victims No More (?).' *Feminist Review* 64(Spring): 135-38.
- Davidson, Julia O'Connell. 2006. 'Will the Real Sex Slave Please Stand Up?' *Feminist Review* 83: 4-22.
- Doezema, Jo. 2001. 'Ouch!: Western Feminists' 'Wounded Attachment' to the 'Third World Prostitute'.' *Feminist Review* 67: 16-38.
- Eisenstein, Zillah. 1997. 'Women's Publics and the Search for New Democracies.' *Feminist Review* 57: 140-67.
- Goodey, Jo. 2004. 'Sex Trafficking in Women from Central and East European Countries: Promoting a "Victim-Centred" and "Women-Centred" Approach to Criminal Justice Intervention.' *Feminist Review* 76: 26-45.
- Grenz, Sabine. 2001. 'Conference Report: The Globalization of Sexual Exploitation.' *Feminist Review* 67: 142-44.

- Guy, Camille. 1996. 'Feminism and Sexual Abuse: Troubled Thoughts on Some New Zealand Issues.' *Feminist Review* 52(Spring): 154-168.
- Haraway, Donna. 1997. 'The Virtual Speculum in the New World Order.' *Feminist Review* 55: 22-72.
- Krasniqi, Vjollca. 2007. 'Imagery, Gender and Power: The Politics of Representation in Post-War Kosova.' *Feminist Review* 86: 1-23.
- NextGENDERation Network. 2004. 'Refusing to be 'The Women's Question'... Embodied Practices of a Feminist Intervention at the European Social Forum 2003.' *Feminist Review* 77: 141-51.
- Patton, Cindy, and Sue O'Sullivan. 1990. 'Mapping: Lesbians, AIDS and Sexuality.' *Feminist Review* 34: 120-33.
- Rickard, Wendy, and Merl Storr. 2001. 'Editorial: Sex Work Reassessed.' *Feminist Review* 67: 1-4.
- Robinson, Hilary. 1995. 'Irish/Woman/Artwork: Selective Readings.' *Feminist Review* 50: 89-110.
- Taylor, Jacqueline Sanchez. 2006. 'Female Sex Tourism: A Contradiction in Terms?' *Feminist Review* 83: 42-59.
- Throsby, Karen. 2004. 'Review of "Reading Birth and Death: A History of Obstetric Thinking" by Jo Murphy-Lawless.' *Feminist Review* 76(1): 141-42.
- Warner, Sam. 2001. 'Disrupting Identity Through Visible Therapy: A Feminist Post-structuralist Approach to Working with Women Who Have Experienced Child Sexual Abuse.' *Feminist Review* 68: 115-39.

#### *Australian Feminist Studies*

- Gibbs, Anna. 1998. 'Eaten Alive/Dead Meat: Modern Cannibalism and the Death of Diana.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 13(27): 11-17.
- Haggis, Jane, and Susanne Schech. 2000. 'Meaning Well and Global Good Manners: Reflections on White Western Feminist Cross-cultural Praxis.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 15(33): 387-99.
- Kosambi, Meera. 2001. 'A Prismatic Presence: The Multiple Iconisation of Dr Anandibai Joshee and the Politics of Life-Writing.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 16(35): 158-73.
- Mackie, Vera. 2005. 'In Search of Innocence: Feminist Historians Debate the Legacy of Wartime Japan.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 20(47): 207-17.
- Spongberg, Mary. 1997. 'Mother Knows Best? Bridging Feminism's Generation Gap.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 12(26): 257-63.
- Threadgold, Terry. 2006. 'Dialogism, Voice and Global Contexts: Asylum, Dangerous Men and Invisible Women.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 21(50): 223-44.

#### *Women's Studies International Forum*

- Bulbeck, Chilla. 2001. 'Articulating Structure and Agency: How Women's Studies Students Express Their Relationships with Feminism.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 24: 141-56.

- Cockburn, Cynthia. 2000. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Women's Studies International Forum* 23: 374-75.
- Dwyer, Claire. 2000. 'Negotiating Diasporic Identities: Young British South Asian Muslim Women.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 23: 475-86.
- Flew, Fiona, Barbara Bagilhole, Jean Carabine, Natalie Fenton, Celia Kitzinger, Ruth Lister, and Sue Wilkinson. 1999. 'Introduction: Local Feminisms, Global Futures.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22: 393-403.
- Gangoli, Geetanjali. 2006. 'Engendering Genocide: Gender, Conflict and Violence.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 534-38.
- Gray, Breda. 2004. 'Remembering a 'Multicultural' Future through a History of Emigration: Towards a Feminist Politics of Solidarity across Difference.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 413-29.
- Helms, Elissa. 2003. 'Women as Agents of Ethnic Reconciliation? Women's NGOs and International Intervention in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26: 15-33.
- Ifekwunigwe, Jayne O. 2004. 'Recasting 'Black Venus' in the New African Diaspora.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 397-412.
- Jacobson, Ruth. 2006. 'Mozambique and the Construction of Gendered Agency in War.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 499-509.
- Kitzinger, Jenny. 1995. 'I'm Sexually Attractive but I'm powerful': Young Women Negotiating Sexual Reputation.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 18: 187-96.
- Lau, Lisa Ee Jia. 2003. 'Equating Womanhood with Victimhood: The Positionality of Women Protagonists in the Contemporary Writings of South Asian Women.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26: 369-78.
- Lau, Lisa Ee Jia. 2006. 'The New Indian Woman: Who is she, and what is 'New' about her?' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 159-71.
- Luibhéid, Eithne, and Ronit Lentin. 2004. 'Introduction.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 293-300.
- Mason, Robyn. 2007. 'Building Women's Social Citizenship: A Five-point Framework to Conceptualise the Work of Women-specific Services in Rural Australia.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 30: 299-312.
- Morley, Louise. 1992. 'Women's Studies, Difference, and Internalised Oppression.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 15: 517-25.
- Munt, Sally. 1992. 'Is There a Feminist in this Text? Ten Years (1979-1989) of the Lesbian Novel: A Retrospective.' *Studies International Forum* 15: 281-91.
- Pomerantz, Shauna, Dawn H. Currie, and Deirdre M. Kelly. 2004. 'Sk8er Girls: Skateboarders, Girlhood and Feminism in Motion.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 547-57.
- Ruyters, Jann. 1993. 'Something to Suit all 'Viewpoints': Feminist Magazines in the Netherlands.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 16: 427-36.
- Thapar-Björkert, Suruchi, Karen Morgan, and Nira Yuval-Davis. 2006. 'Framing Gendered Identities: Local Conflicts/Global Violence.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 433-40.
- Wang, Lihua. 1999. 'The Seeds of Socialist Ideology: Women's Experiences in Beishadao Village.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22: 25-35.

Wilkinson, Sue, and Celia Kitzinger. 1993. 'Whose Breast is it Anyway? A Feminist Consideration of Advice and 'Treatment' for Breast Cancer.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(3): 229-38.

## Appendix 4

### Articles containing 'passive victim[s]' in text listed by journal

(N.B. Articles marked with [\*] itemise the 122 special cases referred to above (*supra* 185).)

#### *Signs*

- Abel, Emily K. 1994. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Signs* 19(3): 758-61. [\* 761].
- Alcoff, Linda, and Laura Gray. 1993. 'Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?' *Signs* 18(2): 260-90.
- Backus, Margot Gayle. 1993. 'Judy Grahn and the Lesbian Invocational Elegy: Testimonial and Prophetic Responses to Social Death in 'A Woman is Talking to Death'.' *Signs* 18(4): 815-37. [\* 829].
- Bahar, Saba. 2003. 'If I'm One of the Victims, Who Survives?': Marilyn Hacker's Breast Cancer Texts.' *Signs* 28(4): 1025-52. [\* 1042].
- Bray, Abigail, and Claire Colebrook. 1998. 'The Haunted Flesh: Corporeal Feminism and the Politics of (Dis)Embodiment.' *Signs* 24(1): 35-67. [\* 35].
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1989. 'The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought.' *Signs* 14(4): 745-73. [\* 747].
- Faderman, Lillian. 1992. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Signs* 17(4): 820-24.
- Fernandes, Leela. 1999. 'Reading India's 'Bandit Queen': A Trans/national Feminist Perspective on the Discrepancies of Representation.' *Signs* 25(1): 123-52.
- Fernandez-Kelly, Patricia. 2000. 'Reading the Signs: The Economics of Gender Twenty-Five Years Later.' *Signs* 25(4): 1107-12. [\* 1109].
- Fernandez-Kelly, Patricia, and Diane Wolf. 2001. 'A Dialogue on Globalization.' *Signs* 26(4): 1243-49. [\* 1244].
- Fisher, Sue. 1998. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Signs* 24(1): 250-54. [\* 252].
- Gere, Anne Ruggles, and Sarah R. Robbins. 1996. 'Gendered Literacy in Black and White: Turn-of-the-Century African American and European-American Club Women's Printed Texts.' *Signs* 21(3): 643-78.
- Gremillion, Helen. 2002. 'In Fitness and in Health: Crafting Bodies in the Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa.' *Signs* 27(2): 381-414. [\* 393].
- Jameson, Elizabeth. 1988. 'Toward a Multicultural History of Women in the Western United States.' *Signs* 13(4): 761-91. [\* 782].
- Joshel, Sandra R. 1995. 'Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire: Tacitus's Messalina.' *Signs* 21(1): 50-82. [\* 56].
- Mann, Susan A. 1989. 'Slavery, Sharecropping, and Sexual Inequality.' *Signs* 14(4): 774-98. [\* 786].
- Mardorossian, Carine. 2003. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Signs* 29(1): 265-69.
- Masse, Michelle A. 1990. 'Gothic Repetition: Husbands, Horrors, and Things that go Bump in the Night.' *Signs* 15(4): 679-709.
- McCormick, Richard W. 1993. 'From 'Caligari' to Dietrich: Sexual, Social, and Cinematic Discourses in Weimar Film.' *Signs* 18(3): 640-68. [\* 660].

- McDermott, Patrice. 1995. 'On Cultural Authority: Women's Studies, Feminist Politics, and the Popular Press.' *Signs* 20(3): 668-84.
- Samuelson, Meg. 2007. 'The Disfigured Body of the Female Guerilla: (De) Militarization, Sexual Violence, and Redomestication in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*.' *Signs* 32(4): 834-56. [\* 845].
- Shaheed, Farida. 1994. 'Controlled or Autonomous: Identity and the Experience of the Network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws.' *Signs* 19(4): 997-1019. [\* 998].
- Shehabuddin, Elora. 1999. 'Contesting the Illicit: Gender and the Politics of Fatwas in Bangladesh.' *Signs* 1011-44. [\* 1014].
- Shohat, Ella. 2001. 'Area Studies, Transnationalism, and the Feminist Production of Knowledge.' *Signs* 26(4): 1269-72. [\* 1269].
- Sieg, Katrin. 2002. 'Sexual Desire and Social Transformation in 'Aimee and Jaguar'.' *Signs* 28(1): 303-31.
- Talcott, Molly. 2003. 'Gendered Webs of Development and Resistance: Women, Children, and Flowers in Bogotá.' *Signs* 29(2): 465-89. [\* 474].
- Tinsman, Heidi. 2000. 'Reviving Feminist Materialism: Gender and Neoliberalism in Pinochet's Chile.' *Signs* 26(1): 145-88. [\* 182].
- Walby, Sylvia. 2001. 'Against Epistemological Chasms: The Science Question in Feminism Revisited.' *Signs* 26(2): 485-509. [\* 494].
- Winter, Bronwyn. 1994. 'Women, the Law, and Cultural Relativism in France: The Case of Excision.' *Signs* 19(4): 939-74. [\* 965].

### *Feminist Studies*

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2001. 'Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies.' *Feminist Studies* 27(1): 101-13.
- Alaimo, Stacey. 1994. 'Cyborg and Ecofeminist Interventions: Challenges for an Environmental Feminism.' *Feminist Studies* 20(1): 133-52.
- Behar, Ruth. 1990. 'Rage and Redemption: Reading the Life Story of a Mexican Marketing Woman.' *Feminist Studies* 16(2): 223-58. [\* 231].
- Deveaux, Monique. 1994. 'Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault.' *Feminist Studies* 20(2): 223-47. [\* 234].
- Evans, Sara M. 2002. 'Review: Re-viewing the Second Wave.' *Feminist Studies* 28(2): 258-67.
- Ezekiel, Judith. 2006. 'French Dressing: Race, Gender, and the Hijab Story.' *Feminist Studies* 32(2): 256-78. [\* 270].
- Fernandes, Leela. 1997. 'Beyond Public Spaces and Private Spheres: Gender, Family, and Working-Class Politics in India.' *Feminist Studies* 23(3): 525-47. [\* 544].
- Freeman, Carla, and Donna F. Murdock. 2001. 'Review: Enduring Traditions and New Directions in Feminist Ethnography in the Caribbean and Latin America.' *Feminist Studies* 27(2): 423-58. [\* 434].
- Gardiner, Judith Kegan, and Nancy Hewitt. 1999. 'Preface.' *Feminist Studies* 25(3): 529-36.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. 1993. 'Review: New Perspectives on Latina Women.' *Feminist Studies* 19(1): 193-205.

- Lan, Pei-Chia. 2003. 'Working in a Neon Cage: Bodily Labor of Cosmetics Saleswomen in Taiwan.' *Feminist Studies* 29(1): 21-45. [\* 42].
- Marstine, Janet. 2002. 'Challenging the Gendered Categories of Art and Art Therapy: The Paintings of Jane Orleman.' *Feminist Studies* 28(3): 631-54.
- Morantz-Sanchez, Regina. 2000. 'Negotiating Power at the Bedside: Historical Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Patients and their Gynecologists.' *Feminist Studies* 26(2): 287-309. [\* 302].
- Petchesky, Rosalind Pollack. 1987. 'Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction.' *Feminist Studies* 13(2): 263-92. [\* 279].
- Vicinus, Martha. 1992. "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity.' *Feminist Studies* 18(3): 467-97.

### *differences*

None found.

### *Gender and Society*

- Acosta-Belen, Edna, and Christine E. Bose. 1990. 'From Structural Subordination to Empowerment: Women and Development in Third World Contexts.' *Gender and Society* 4(3): 299-320. [\* 312].
- Atasoy, Yildiz. 2002. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 16(5): 755-56. [\* 756].
- Brubaker, Sarah Jane. 2007. 'Denied, Embracing, and Resisting Medicalization: African American Teen Mothers' Perceptions of Formal Pregnancy and Childbirth Care.' *Gender and Society* 21(4): 528-52. [\* 548].
- Brush, Lisa D. and Mimi Schippers. 1991. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 5(2): 269-72. [\* 270].
- Chaudhry, Lubna Nazir. 2003. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 17(3): 488-89. [\* 489].
- Cheng, Shu-Ju Ada. 2003. 'Rethinking the Globalization of Domestic Service: Foreign Domestic Workers, State Control, and the Politics of Identity in Taiwan.' *Gender and Society* 17(2): 166-86. [\* 171].
- Dellinger, Kirsten, and Christine L. Williams. 1997. 'Makeup at Work: Negotiating Appearance Rules in the Workplace.' *Gender and Society* 11(2): 151-77. [\* 175].
- Ebaugh, Helen Rose. 1993. 'Patriarchal Bargains and Latent Avenues of Social Mobility: Nuns in the Roman Catholic Church.' *Gender and Society* 7(3): 400-14. [\* 400].
- Ferree, Myra Marx. 1994. "'The Time of Chaos was the Best': Feminist Mobilization and Demobilization in East Germany.' *Gender and Society* 8(4): 597-623.
- Gottfried, Heidi. 1987. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 1(2): 220-23.
- Handler, Lisa. 1995. 'In the Fraternal Sisterhood: Sororities as Gender Strategy.' *Gender and Society* 9(2): 236-55. [\* 236].
- Huisman, Kimberly, and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. 2005. 'Dress Matters: Change and Continuity in the Dress Practices of Bosnian Muslim Refugee Women.' *Gender and Society* 19(1): 44-65. [\* 45].



- Jenness, Valerie, and Kendal Broad. 1994. 'Antiviolence Activism and the (In)visibility of Gender in the Gay/Lesbian and Women's Movements.' *Gender and Society* 8(3): 402-23.
- Markens, Susan. 1996. 'The Problematic of 'Experience': A Political and Cultural Critique of PMS.' *Gender and Society* 10(1): 42-58. [\* 48].
- Markens, Susan, C. H. Browner, and H. Mabel Preloran. 2003. "'I'm Not the One They're Sticking the Needle Into': Latino Couples, Fetal Diagnosis, and the Discourse of Reproductive Rights.' *Gender and Society* 17(3): 462-81. [\* 463].
- McCormack, Karen. 2005. 'Stratified Reproduction and Poor Women's Resistance.' *Gender and Society* 19(5): 660-79. [\* 677].
- Murray, Susan B. 1996. "'We all Love Charles': Men in Child Care and the Social Construction of Gender.' *Gender and Society* 10(4): 368-85. [\* 368].
- Richards, Patricia. 2005. 'The Politics of Gender, Human Rights, and Being Indigenous in Chile.' *Gender and Society* 19(2): 199-220. [\* 205].
- Rothenberg, Bess. 2003. "'We Don't have Time for Social Change': Cultural Compromise and the Battered Woman Syndrome.' *Gender and Society* 17(5): 771-87. [\* 780, 782].
- Rothstein, Frances Abrahamer. 1996. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 10(1): 94-97. [\* 97].
- Schmidt, Elizabeth. 1987. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 1(4): 481-83. [\* 483].
- Segura, Denise A., and Beatriz M. Pesquera. 1992. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 6(3): 519-22. [\* 520].
- Sorensen, Pernille. 1996. 'Commercialization of Food Crops in Busoga, Uganda, and the Renegotiation of Gender.' *Gender and Society* 10(5): 608-28. [\* 609].
- Spalter-Roth, Roberta M. 1990. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 4(1): 111-13. [\* 111].
- Thorne, Barrie. 1987. 'Re-visioning Women and Social Change: Where are the Children?' *Gender and Society* 1(1): 85-109. [\* 88].
- Warren, Alice E. Colon. 2003. Puerto Rico: Feminism and Feminist Studies.' *Gender and Society* 17(5): 664-90. [\* 679].
- Wong, Yuk-Lin Renita. 1997. 'Dispersing the 'Public' and 'Private': Gender and the State in the Birth Planning Policy of China.' *Gender and Society* 11(4): 509-25. [\* 519].

### *Hypatia*

- Bacigalupo, Ana Mariella. 2003. 'Rethinking Identity and Feminism: Contributions of Mapuche Women and Machi from Southern Chile.' *Hypatia* 18(2): 32-57. [\* 51].
- Bahar, Saba. 1996. 'Human Rights are Women's Right: Amnesty International and the Family.' *Hypatia* 11(1): 105-34. [\* 120].
- Beldecos, Athena, Sarah Bailey, Scott Gilbert, Karen Hicks, Lori Kenschaft, Nancy Niemczyk, Rebecca Rosenberg, Stephanie Schaertel, and Andrew Wedel. 1988. 'The Importance of Feminist Critique for Contemporary Cell Biology.' *Hypatia* 3(1): 61-76.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1987. 'Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation.' *Hypatia* 2(1): 103-21. [\* 116].
- Hausman, Bernice L. 2006. 'Contamination and Contagion: Environmental Toxins, HIV/AIDS, and the Problem of the Maternal Body.' *Hypatia* 21(1): 137-56. [\* 151].

- Jantzen, Grace M. 1994. 'Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics.' *Hypatia* 9(4): 186-206. [\* 191].
- Kruks, Sonia. 2005. 'Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Privilege.' *Hypatia* 20(1): 178-205. [\* 196].
- Lister, Ruth. 1997. 'Dialectics of Citizenship.' *Hypatia* 12(4): 6-26. [\* 10].
- McNay, Lois. 1991. 'The Foucauldian Body and the Exclusion of Experience.' *Hypatia* 6(3): 125-39. [\* 133].
- Mills, Sara. 1992. 'Discourse Competence: Or How to Theorize Strong Women Speakers.' *Hypatia* 7(2): 4-17. [\* 8, 10].
- Nelson, Julie A. and Paula England. 2002. 'Feminist Philosophies of Love and Work.' *Hypatia* 17(2): 1-18. [\* 14].
- Park, Shelley M. 1997. 'False Memory Syndrome: A Feminist Philosophical Approach.' *Hypatia* 12(2): 1-50. [\* 36].
- Porter, Elisabeth. 2006. 'Can Politics Practice Compassion?' *Hypatia* 21(4): 97-123. [\* 103].
- Wendell, Susan. 1990. 'Oppression and Victimization: Choice and Responsibility.' *Hypatia* 5(3): 15-46. [\* 27].
- Whitford, Margaret. 1991. 'Irigaray's Body Symbolic.' *Hypatia* 6(3): 97-110. [\* 107].
- Williams, Christine L. 2002. 'Sexual Harassment and Sadomasochism.' *Hypatia* 17(2): 99-117. [\* 101].
- Young, Iris Marion. 2003. 'Feminist Reactions to the Contemporary Security Regime.' *Hypatia* 18(1): 223-31. [\* 230].

### *Feminist Review*

- Adams, Mary Louise. 1989. 'There's no Place like Home: On the Place of Identity in Feminist Politics.' *Feminist Review* 31: 22-33. [\* 30].
- Archer, Louise. 2002. 'It's Easier that You're a Girl and that You're Asian': Interactions of 'Race' and Gender between Researchers and Participants.' *Feminist Review* 72: 108-32.
- Brereton, Bridget. 1998. 'Gendered Testimonies: Autobiographies, Diaries and Letters by Women as Sources for Caribbean History.' *Feminist Review* 59: 143-63. [\* 155].
- Brown, Jeffrey A. 2005. 'Class and Feminine Excess: The Strange Case of Anna Nicole Smith.' *Feminist Review* 81: 74-94. [\* 86].
- Coppola, Manuela, Lidia Curti, Laura Fantone, Marie-Hélène Laforest, and Susanna Poole. 2007. 'Women, Migration and Precarity.' *Feminist Review* 87: 94-103.
- Griffin, Christine. 1997. 'Troubled Teens: Managing Disorders of Transition and Consumption.' *Feminist Review* 55: 4-21. [\* 18].
- Henwood, Flis, and Sally Wyatt. 2000. 'Persistent Inequalities?: Gender and Technology in the Year 2000.' *Feminist Review* 64: 128-31. [\* 128].
- Hunt, Margaret. 1990. 'The De-Eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social Purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Sheila Jeffreys.' *Feminist Review* 34: 23-46. [\* 23].
- Innes C. L. 1994. 'Virgin Territories and Motherlands: Colonial and Nationalist Representations of Africa and Ireland.' *Feminist Review* 47: 1-14. [\* 13].

- Kabeer, Naila. 1991. 'The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh.' *Feminist Review* 37: 38-58. [\* 54].
- Lister, Ruth. 1997. 'Citizenship: Towards a Feminist Synthesis.' *Feminist Review* 57: 28-48. [\* 35, 42].
- Lutz, Helma. 2002. 'At Your Service Madam! The Globalization of Domestic Service.' *Feminist Review* 70: 89-104. [\* 99].
- Meekosha, Helen, and Leanne Dowse. 1997. 'Enabling Citizenship: Gender, Disability and Citizenship in Australia.' *Feminist Review* 57: 49-72.
- Menon, Jisha. 2006. 'Rehearsing the Partition: Gendered Violence in *Aur Kitne Tukde*.' *Feminist Review* 84: 29-47.
- Morris, Jenny. 1993. 'Feminism and Disability.' *Feminist Review* 43: 57-70. [\* 63].
- Overs, Cheryl, and Nel Druce. 1994. 'Sex Work, HIV and the State: An Interview with Nel Druce.' *Feminist Review* 48: 114-21.
- Ruddy, Karen. 2006. 'The Ambivalence of Colonial Desire in Marguerite Duras' 'The Lover'.' *Feminist Review* 82: 76-95. [\* 90].
- Ryan, Louise. 2000. "'Drunken Tans': Representations of Sex and Violence in the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21)'. *Feminist Review* 66: 73-94. [\* 90].
- Scharf, Emily, and Sue Toole. 1992. 'HIV and the Invisibility of Women: Is There a Need to Redefine AIDS?' *Feminist Review* 41: 64-67.
- Smith, Anna Marie. 1993. "'What is Pornography?': An Analysis of the Policy Statement of the Campaign against Pornography and Censorship.' *Feminist Review* 43: 71-87. [\* 80].
- Stobie, Cheryl. 2007. 'Review: *Letting Them Die*: Why HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs Fail.' *Feminist Review* 86: 209-11. [\* 210].
- Taylor, Jacqueline Sanchez. 2006. 'Female Sex Tourism: A Contradiction in Terms?' *Feminist Review* 83: 42-59.

#### *Australian Feminist Studies*

- Diprose, Rosalyn. 2002. 'Writing in Blood: Response to Helen Keane and Marsha Rosengarten, 'On the Biology of Sexed Subjects'.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 17(39): 279-82. [\* 281].
- Ezekiel, Judith. 2005. 'Magritte Meets Maghreb: This is not a Veil.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 20(47): 231-43. [\* 240].
- Mackinnon, Alison. 2006. 'Girls, Society and School: A Generation of Change.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 21(50): 275-88.
- Matthews, Julie. 2002. 'An Ambiguous Juncture: Racism and the Formation of Asian Femininity.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 17(38): 207-19. [\* 207].
- Roberts, Celia, and Suzanne Fraser. 2002. 'Generating Knowledges: Resources for Teaching and Studying Science and Feminism.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 17(38): 221-27. [\* 224].
- Valentine, Kylie. 1999. 'Thematic Reviews.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 14(29): 150-53. [\* 152].

- Adisa, Opal Palmer. 1992. 'Undeclared War: African-American Women Writers Explicating Rape.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 15(3): 363-74. [\* 372].
- Amy, Lori E. 1999. 'Contemporary Travel Narratives and Old Style Politics: American Women Reporting after the Gulf War.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(5): 525-41. [\* 531].
- Bhavnani, Kum-Kum. 1993. 'Tracing the Contours: Feminist Research and Feminist Objectivity.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(2): 95-104. [\* 98].
- Bradby, Barbara. 1999. 'Will I Return or Not?: Migrant Women in Bolivia Negotiate Hospital Birth.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(3): 287-301. [\* 287].
- Cockburn, Claudia, and Gill Clarke. 2002. '“Everybody's Looking at You!": Girls Negotiating the 'Femininity Deficit' They Incur in Physical Education.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 25(6): 651-65. [\* 658-9].
- Danner, Mona, Lucía Fort, and Gay Young. 1999. 'International Data on Women and Children.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(2): 249-59. [\* 255].
- Dewar, Alison M. 1987. 'The Social Construction of Gender in Physical Education.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 10(4): 453-65. [\* 454].
- Dodd, Kathryn. 1990. 'Cultural Politics and Women's Historical Writing: The Case of Ray Strachey's *The Cause*.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 13(1/2): 127-37. [\* 132].
- Dwyer, Claire. 2000. 'Negotiating Diasporic Identities: Young British South Asian Muslim Women.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 23(4): 475-86. [\* 480].
- Giles, Judy. 1993. 'A Home of One's Own: Women and Domesticity in England 1918-1950.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(3): 239-53. [\* 251].
- Griffen, Arlene. 1995. 'Book Reviews.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 18(4): 507-08. [\* 507].
- Gustafsson-Larsson, Susanne, Britt-Marie Thurén, Lars Dahlgren, and Göran Westman. 2007. 'Bun-baking Mums and Subverters: The Agency of Network Participants in a Rural Swedish County.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 30: 48-58. [\* 49].
- Helms, Elissa. 2003. 'Women as Agents of Ethnic Reconciliation? Women's NGOs and International Intervention in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(1): 15-33. [\* 16].
- Hester, Marianne. 1990. 'The Dynamics of Male Domination using the Witch Craze in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century England as a Case Study.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 13(1/2): 9-19. [\* 11].
- Hopkins, Leekie. 1999. 'Fighting to be Seen and Heard: A Tribute to Four Western Australian Peace Activists.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(1): 79-87. [\* 80].
- Kelan, Elisabeth K. 2007. '“I Don't Know Why” – Accounting for the Scarcity of Women in ICT Work.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 30: 499-511.
- King, Marjorie. 1990. 'American Women's Open Door to Chinese Women: Which Way does it Open?' *Women's Studies International Forum* 13(4): 369-79.
- Kofman, Eleonore, and Rosemary Sales. 1992. 'Towards Fortress Europe?' *Women's Studies International Forum* 15(1): 29-39. [\* 35].
- Koskela, Hille, and Sirpa Tani. 2005. '“Sold Out!” Women's Practices of Resistance against Prostitution Related Sexual Harassment.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 28: 418-29. [\* 428].

- Laitinen, Irmeli, and Elizabeth Ettore. 2004. 'The Women and Depression Project: Feminist Action Research and Guided Self-Help Groups Emerging from the Finnish Women's Movement.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 203-21. [\* 218].
- Lee, Maggy, Anita Chan, Hannah Bradby, and Gill Green. 2002. 'Chinese Migrant Women and Families in Britain.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 25(6): 607-18. [\* 611].
- Lentin, Ronit. 2004. 'Strangers and Strollers: Feminist Notes on Researching Migrant M/others.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 301-14.
- Man, Guida. 2004. 'Gender, Work and Migration: Deskillling Chinese Immigrant Women in Canada.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 135- 48. [\* 146].
- Mason, Robyn. 2007. 'Building Women's Social Citizenship: A Five-point Framework to Conceptualise the Work of Women-specific Services in Rural Australia.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 30: 299-312. [\* 306, 307].
- McGauran, Anne-Marie. 2000. 'Vive la Différence: The Gendering of Occupational Structures in a Case Study of Irish and French Retailing.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 23(5): 613-27. [\* 625].
- Millsted, Rachel, and Hannah Frith. 2003. 'Being Large-Breasted: Women Negotiating Embodiment.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(5): 455-65. [\* 464].
- Nam, Jeong-Lim. 1994. 'Women's Role in Export Dependence and State Control of Labor Unions in South Korea.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 17(1): 57-67. [\* 58, 65].
- Pini, Barbara. 2007. 'Always an Outlaw: Daughters-in-law on Australian Family Farms'. *Women's Studies International Forum* 30: 40-47. [\* 45].
- Rivera-Fuentes, Consuelo, and Lynda Birke. 2001. 'Talking With/In Pain: Reflections on Bodies under Torture.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 24(6): 653-68. [\* 665].
- Robertson, Claire C. 1988. 'Never Underestimate the Power of Women: The Transforming Vision of African Women's History.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 11(5): 439-53. [\* 445].
- Ruby, Tabassum F. 2006. 'Listening to the Voices of Hijab.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 54-66. [\* 64].
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. 2003. 'Liberating Voices: The Political Implications of Palestinian Mothers Narrating their Loss.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(5): 391-407. [\* 404].
- Thapar-Björkert, Suruchi, Karen Morgan, and Nira Yuval-Davis. 2006. 'Framing Gendered Identities: Local Conflicts/Global Violence.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 433-40.
- Thapar-Björkert, Suruchi, and Louise Ryan. 2002. 'Mother India/Mother Ireland: Comparative Gendered Dialogues of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 25(3): 301-13. [\* 306].
- White, Caroline. 1993. '"Close to Home" in Johannesburg: Gender Oppression in Township Households.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(2): 149-63. [\* 149].
- Wilkinson, Sue, and Celia Kitzinger. 1993. 'Whose Breast is it Anyway? A Feminist Consideration of Advice and 'Treatment' for Breast Cancer.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(3): 229-38.
- Yea, Sallie. 2005. 'Labour of Love: Filipina Entertainer's [sic] Narratives of Romance and Relationships with GIs in US Military Camp Towns in Korea.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 28: 456-72. [\* 459].

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1996. 'Women and the Biological Reproduction of 'The Nation'.'  
*Women's Studies International Forum* 19(1/2): 17-24. [\* 22-3].

## Appendix 5

### Articles containing 'victimolog[\*]' in text listed by journal

#### *Signs*

- James, Stanlie M. 1998. 'Shades of Othering: Reflections on Female Circumcision/Genital Mutilation.' *Signs* 23(4): 1031-48.
- Kozol, Wendy. 1995. 'Fracturing Domesticity: Media, Nationalism, and the Question of Feminist Influence.' *Signs* 20(3): 646-67.
- McDermott, Patrice. 1995. 'On Cultural Authority: Women's Studies, Feminist Politics, and the Popular Press.' *Signs* 20(3): 668-84.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. 2003. 'Reexamining Femicide: Breaking the Silence and Crossing 'Scientific' Borders.' *Signs* 28(2): 581-608.

#### *Feminist Studies*

- Minnich, Elizabeth Kamarck. 1998. 'Feminist Attacks on Feminism: Patriarchy's Prodigal Daughters.' *Feminist Studies* 24(1): 159-75.

#### *differences*

- Bauer, Dale M. 1999. "'In the Blood': Sentiment, Sex, and the Ugly Girl.' *differences* 11(3): 57-75.
- Dean, Carolyn J. 2003. 'Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering.' *differences* 14(1): 88-124.
- Haag, Pamela. 1996. "'Putting Your Body On the Line': The Question of Violence, Victims, and the Legacies of Second-Wave Feminism.' *differences* 8(2): 23-67.

#### *Gender and Society*

- Copp, Martha. 2003. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 17: 647-48.

#### *Hypatia*

- Cudd, Ann E. 1998. 'Multiculturalism as a Cognitive Virtue of Scientific Practice.' *Hypatia* 13(3): 43-61.
- McLeer, Anne. 1998. 'Saving the Victim: Recuperating the Language of the Victim and Reassessing Global Feminism.' *Hypatia* 13(1): 41-55.
- Zita, Jacquelyn N. 1988. 'A Review Essay: The Feminist Question of the Science Question in Feminism.' *Hypatia* 3(1): 157-68.

*Feminist Review*

- Goodey, Jo. 2004. 'Sex Trafficking in Women from Central and East European Countries: Promoting a 'Victim-Centred' and 'Women-Centred' Approach to Criminal Justice Intervention.' *Feminist Review* 76: 26-45.
- Mankekar, Purnima. 1997. "'To Whom Does Ameena Belong?': Towards a Feminist Analysis of Childhood and Nationhood in Contemporary India.' *Feminist Review* 56(Summer): 26-60.
- Steinberg, Deborah Lynn. 2000. 'Bodies of Knowledge: Shifting Iconographies of 'Maternal-Fetal Conflict': Review of Colker (1994; Merrick and Blank (1993) and Boling (1995).' *Feminist Review* 64: 147-52.

*Australian Feminist Studies*

None found.

*Women's Studies International Forum*

- Edwards, Rosalind. 1990. 'Connecting Method and Epistemology: A White Woman Interviewing Black Women.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 13(5): 477-90.
- Held, Jane. 1988. 'The British Peace Movement: A Critical Examination of Attitudes to Male Violence within the British Peace Movement, as Expressed with Regard to the 'Molesworth Rapes'.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 11(3): 211-21.
- Koskela, Hille, and Sirpa Tani. 2005. "'Sold Out!' Women's Practices of Resistance against Prostitution Related Sexual Harassment.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 28: 418-29.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. 1999. 'Towards a Cultural Definition of Rape: Dilemmas in Dealing with Rape Victims in Palestinian Society.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(2): 157-73.



## REFERENCES

## References

- Abrams, Kathryn. 1995. 'Sex Wars Redux: Agency and Coercion in Feminist Legal Theory.' *Columbia Law Review* 95(2): 304-76.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990. 'The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women.' *American Ethnologist* 17(1): 41-55.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2001. 'Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies.' *Feminist Studies* 27(1): 101-13.
- Acker, Joan, Kate Barry, and Joke Esseveld. 1983. 'Objectivity and Truth: Problems in doing Feminist Research.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 6(4): 423-35.
- Adair, Vivyan C. 2005. 'Class Absences: Cutting Class in Feminist Studies.' *Feminist Studies* 31(3): 575-603.
- Adams, Mary Louise. 1989. 'There's no Place like Home: On the Place of Identity in Feminist Politics.' *Feminist Review* 31: 22-33.
- Adler, Jerry. 1990. 'Taking offense: is this the new enlightenment on campus or the new McCarthyism?' *Newsweek* 116 (26): 48-54.
- Adler, Mortimer J. 1992. 'Multiculturalism, Transculturalism, and the Great Books.' In *Beyond PC: Toward a Politics of Understanding*, ed. Patricia Aufderheide. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press.
- Ahearn, Laura M. 2001. 'Language and Agency.' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 109-37.
- Alcoff, Linda. 1988. 'Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory.' *Signs* 13(3): 405-36.
- Alcoff, Linda, and Laura Gray. 1993. 'Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?' *Signs* 18(2): 260-90.
- Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin. 1994. 'The Great Backlash.' In *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, ed. Sarah Dunant. London: Virago Press.
- Allan, James. 2008. 'Our Misgoverned Universities.' *Quadrant* 52(10): 56-60.
- Allen, Amy. 1998. 'Rethinking Power.' *Hypatia* 13(1): 21-40.
- Allen, Amy. 2001. 'Pornography and Power.' *Journal of Social Philosophy* 32(4): 512-31.
- Altheide, David L. 1987. 'Reflections: Ethnographic Content Analysis.' *Qualitative Sociology* 10(1): 65-77.
- Amy, Lori E. 1999. 'Contemporary Travel Narratives and Old Style Politics: American Women Reporting after the Gulf War.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(5): 525-41.
- Andrijasevic, Rutvica. 2007. 'Beautiful Dead Bodies: Gender, Migration and Representation in Anti-trafficking Campaigns.' *Feminist Review* 86: 24-44.
- Angus, Ian, and Lenore Langsdorf. 1993. 'Unsettled Borders: Envisioning Critique at the Postmodern Site.' In *The Critical Turn: Rhetoric and Philosophy in Postmodern Discourse*, eds. Ian Angus and Lenore Langsdorf. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Annette, John. 1994. 'The Culture Wars on the American Campus.' In *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, ed. Sarah Dunant. London: Virago Press.

- Arens, Katherine. 1995. 'Between Hypatia and Beauvoir: Philosophy as Discourse.' *Hypatia* 10(4): 46-75.
- Aronoff, Mark, and Sungeun Cho. 2001. 'The Semantics of -ship Suffixation.' *Linguistic Inquiry* 32(1): 167-73.
- Atasoy, Yildiz. 2002. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 16(5): 755-56.
- Atmore, Chris. 1999a. 'Victims, Backlash, and Radical Feminist Theory (or The Morning after They Stole Feminism's Fire).' In *New Versions of Victims: Feminists Struggle With the Concept*, ed. Sharon Lamb. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Atmore, Chris. 1999b. 'Sexual Abuse and Troubled Feminism: A Reply to Camille Guy.' *Feminist Review* 61: 83-96.
- Aufderheide, Patricia. ed. 1992. *Beyond PC: Toward a Politics of Understanding*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press.
- Auty, Giles. 2009. The left is killing religion. *Australian*. 1 July. p.18.
- Ayim, Maryann. 1991. 'In Praise of Clutter as a Necessary Part of the Feminist Perspective.' *Hypatia* 6(2): 211-15.
- Bacchi, Carol. 2005. 'Discourse, Discourse Everywhere: Subject 'Agency' in Feminist Discourse Methodology.' *NORA: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 13(3): 198-209.
- Bacigalupo, Ana Mariella. 2003. 'Rethinking Identity and Feminism: Contributions of Mapuche Women and Machi from Southern Chile.' *Hypatia* 18(2): 32-57.
- Backus, Margot Gayle. 1993. 'Judy Grahn and the Lesbian Invitational Elegy: Testimonial and Prophetic Responses to Social Death in 'A Woman is Talking to Death'.' *Signs* 18(4): 815-37.
- Bahar, Saba. 1996. 'Human Rights are Women's Right: Amnesty International and the Family.' *Hypatia* 11(1): 105-34.
- Bahar, Saba. 2003. "'If I'm One of the Victims, Who Survives?': Marilyn Hacker's Breast Cancer Texts.' *Signs* 28(4): 1025-52.
- Bailey, Cathryn. 1997. 'Making Waves and Drawing Lines: The Politics of Defining the Vicissitudes of Feminism.' *Hypatia* 12(3): 17-28.
- Bailey, M. E. 1993. 'Foucauldian Feminism: Contesting Bodies, Sexuality and Identity.' In *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, ed. Caroline Ramazanoglu. London and New York: Routledge.
- Baker, Paul. 2006. *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Bartkowski, Frances. 1988. 'Epistemic Drift in Foucault.' In *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, ed. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1990. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1995. 'Agency: What's the Problem?' In *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Behar, Ruth. 1990. 'Rage and Redemption: Reading the Life Story of a Mexican Marketing Woman.' *Feminist Studies* 16(2): 223-58.
- Bendle, Mervyn F. 2008. 'Hijacking Terrorism Studies.' *Quadrant* 52 (9): 34-41.
- Bennett, David. 1993. 'PC Panic, The Press and the Academy.' *Meanjin* 52 (3): 435-461.

- Bennett, James T. 2007. *The Politics of American Feminism: Gender Conflict in Contemporary Society*. Lanham, Maryland; Plymouth: University of America Press.
- Berman, Paul. ed. 1992. *Debating PC: The Controversy Over Political Correctness on College Campuses*. New York: Dell Publishing.
- Bernick, Susan E. 1992. 'The Logic of the Development of Feminism: Or, is MacKinnon to Feminism as Parmenides is to Greek Philosophy?' *Hypatia* 7(1): 1-15.
- Bhavnani, Kum-Kum. 1993. 'Tracing the Contours: Feminist Research and Feminist Objectivity.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(2): 95-104.
- Bickford, Susan. 1997. 'Anti-anti-identity politics: Feminism, Democracy and the Complexities of Citizenship.' *Hypatia* 12(4): 111-31.
- Biesecker, Barbara. 1992. 'Michel Foucault and the Question of Rhetoric.' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25(4): 351-64.
- Biesecker, Barbara. 2000. *Addressing Postmodernity: Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric, and a Theory of Social Change*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Bizzell, Patricia. 1997. 'The Prospect of Rhetorical Agency.' In *Making and Unmaking the Prospects for Rhetoric*, eds. Theresa Enos and Richard McNabb. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Blackmore, Jill. 1997. 'Disciplining Feminism: A Look at Gender-Equity Struggles in Australian Higher Education.' In *Dangerous Territories: Struggles for Difference and Equality in Education*, eds. Leslie G. Roman and Linda Eyre. New York and London: Routledge.
- Blake, C. Fred. 1994. 'Foot-Binding in Neo-Confucian China and the Appropriation of Female Labor.' *Signs* 19(3): 676-712.
- Blommaert, Jan. 2005. *Discourse: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bohman, James F. 1988. 'Emancipation and Rhetoric: The Perlocutions and Illocutions of the Social Critic.' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 21(3): 185-204.
- Bondi, Liz, and Erica Burma. 2001. 'Women and Mental Health: A Feminist Review.' *Feminist Review* 68: 6-33.
- Bordo, Susan. 1988. 'Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture.' In *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Foucault*, eds. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Bordo, Susan. 1992. 'Review: Postmodern Subjects, Postmodern Bodies.' *Feminist Studies* 18(1): 159-75.
- Bordo, Susan. 1993. 'Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body.' In *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, ed. Caroline Ramazanoglu. London and New York: Routledge.
- Boyte, Harry C. 1992. 'The Politics of Innocence.' In *Beyond PC: Toward a Politics of Understanding*, ed. Patricia Aufderheide. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press.
- Bray, Abigail, and Claire Colebrook. 1998. 'The Haunted Flesh: Corporeal Feminism and the Politics of (Dis)Embodiment.' *Signs* 24(1): 35-67.
- Brereton, Bridget. 1998. 'Gendered Testimonies: Autobiographies, Diaries and Letters by Women as Sources for Caribbean History.' *Feminist Review* 59: 143-63.
- Bressey, Caroline. 2008. 'It's Only Political Correctness – Race and Racism in British History.' In *New Geographies of Race and Racism*, eds. Claire Dwyer and Caroline Bressey. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate.

- Brown, Wendy. 1995. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Brubaker, Sarah Jane. 2007. 'Denied, Embracing, and Resisting Medicalization: African American Teen Mothers' Perceptions of Formal Pregnancy and Childbirth Care.' *Gender and Society* 21(4): 528-52.
- Bruner, M. Lane. 1996. 'Toward a Poststructural Rhetorical Critical Praxis: Foucault, Limit Work, and Jenninger's 'Kristallnacht' Address.' *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 14(2): 167-96.
- Brustein, Robert. 1993. 'Dumbocracy in America.' *Partisan Review* 60(4): 526-34.
- Bulbeck, Chilla. 2001a. 'Feminism by Any Other Name?: Skirting the Generation Debate.' *Outskirts: feminisms along the edge* 8.
- Bulbeck, Chilla. 2001b. 'Articulating Structure and Agency: How Women's Studies Students Express Their Relationships with Feminism.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 24(2): 141-56.
- Bumiller, Kristin. 1987. 'Victims in the Shadow of the Law: A Critique of the Model of Legal Protection.' *Signs* 12(3): 421-39.
- Burman, Erica. 1990. 'Differing with Deconstruction: A Feminist Critique.' In *Deconstructing Social Psychology*, ed. Ian Parker and John Shotter. London and New York: Routledge.
- Burman, Erica. 1991. 'What Discourse is Not.' *Philosophical Psychology* 4(3): 325-41.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1992. 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'.' In *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1997. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Cahill, Damien. 2004. The Radical Neo-Liberal Movement and its Impact upon Australian Politics. Refereed paper presented to the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, Adelaide, 29 September – 01 October.
- Cain, Maureen. 1993. 'Foucault, Feminism and Feeling: What Foucault Can and Cannot Contribute to Feminist Epistemology.' In *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, ed. Caroline Ramazanoglu. London and New York: Routledge.
- Cameron, Deborah. 1994. "'Words, Words, Words': The Power of Language.' In *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, ed. Sarah Dunant. London: Virago Press.
- Cameron, Deborah. 1998. 'Gender, Language, and Discourse: A Review Essay.' *Signs* 23(4): 945-73.
- Carroll, Berenice A. 1990. 'The Politics of 'Originality': Women and the Class System of the Intellect.' *Journal of Women's History* 2(2): 136-63.
- Casement, William. 2001. 'Percentage Plans and College Admissions.' *Academic Questions* 14(4): 8-28.
- Chaudhry, Lubna Nazir. 2003. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 17(3): 488-89.
- Cheek, Julianne. 2004. 'At the Margins? Discourse Analysis and Qualitative Research.' *Qualitative Health Research* 14(8): 1140-50.

- Cheng, Shu-Ju Ada. 2003. 'Rethinking the Globalization of Domestic Service: Foreign Domestic Workers, State Control, and the Politics of Identity in Taiwan.' *Gender and Society* 17(2): 166-86.
- Chetkovich, Carol. 2004. 'Women's Agency in a Context of Oppression: Assessing Strategies for Personal Action and Public Policy.' *Hypatia* 19(4): 120-41.
- Choo, Hae Yeon. 2006. 'Gendered Modernity and Ethnicized Citizenship: North Korean Settlers in Contemporary South Korea.' *Gender and Society* 20(5): 576-604.
- Chow, Rey. 1999. 'When Whiteness Feminizes...: Some Consequences of a Supplementary Logic.' *differences* 11(3): 137-68.
- Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. 1999. 'Unbearable Witness: Towards a Politics of Listening.' *differences* 11(1): 112-49.
- Clegg, Christine. 1999. 'Feminist Recoveries in 'My Father's House'.' *Feminist Review* 61(Spring): 67-82.
- Coates, Linda, and Penny Ridley. 2009. 'Representing Victims of Sexualized Assault.' In *Victim No More: Women's Resistance to Law, Culture and Power*, eds. Ellen Faulkner and Gayle MacDonald. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing.
- Cockburn, Cynthia. 2000. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Women's Studies International Forum* 23(3): 374-75.
- Cockburn, Claudia, and Gill Clarke. 2002. "'Everybody's Looking at You!': Girls Negotiating the 'Femininity Deficit' They Incur in Physical Education.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 25(6): 651-65.
- Cole, Alyson. 1999a. "'There are no Victims in this Class': On Female Suffering and Anti-'Victim Feminism'." *NWSA Journal* 11(1): 72-96.
- Cole, Alyson. 1999b. "'Are There Sisters in this Class?': A Response to 'Sisterly Critics'." *NWSA Journal* 11(1): 110-14.
- Cole, Alyson. 2000. 'Victims No More (?).' *Feminist Review* 64: 135-38.
- Cole, Alyson. 2007. *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the War on Welfare to the War on Terror*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press.
- Colebatch, Hal G. P. 2007. 'Multiculturalism: An Idea Whose Time has Gone.' *Quadrant* 51 (12): 44-6.
- Collins, Vicki. 1999. 'The Speaker Respoken: Material Rhetoric as Feminist Methodology.' *College English* 61(5): 545-73.
- Connell, Patricia. 1997. 'Understanding Victimization and Agency: Considerations of Race, Class and Gender.' *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 20(2): 115-43.
- Copp, Martha. 2003. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 17(4): 647-48.
- Cornell, Drucilla. 1991. *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Coyle, Adrian. 2000. 'Discourse Analysis.' In *Research Methods in Psychology*, ed. Glynis M. Breakwell, Sean Hammond and Chris Fife-Schaw. London: Sage Publications.
- Crawford, Curtis. 2001. 'Rescuing the Concept of Discrimination.' *Academic Questions* 14(3): 47-64.
- Cummings, Nicholas A. 2005. 'Preface.' In *Destructive Trends in Mental Health: The Well-Intentioned Path to Harm*, eds. Rogers H. Wright and Nicholas A. Cummings. New York and Hove: Routledge.
- Cummings, Nicholas A. and William T. O'Donohue. 2005. 'Psychology's Surrender to Political Correctness.' In *Destructive Trends in Mental Health: The Well-Intentioned*

- Path to Harm*, eds. Rogers H. Wright and Nicholas A. Cummings. New York and Hove: Routledge.
- Danner, Mona, Lucía Fort, and Gay Young. 1999. 'International Data on Women and Children.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(2): 249-59.
- Dasenbrock, Reed Way. 1995. 'We've Done it to Ourselves: The Critique of Truth and the Attack on Theory.' In *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy*, ed. Jeffrey Williams. New York and London: Routledge.
- Davis, Mark. 1997. 'Crying in Public Places: Neoconservatism and Victim-Panic.' In *Bodyjamming: Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life*, ed. Jenna Mead. Sydney: Vintage.
- Davis, Simone Weil. 2002. 'Loose Lips Sink Ships.' *Feminist Studies* 28(1): 7-35.
- Day, Mark. 2008. 'Nannyism is throwback to political correctness.' *Australian*. 6 October. p. 40.
- Dean, Carolyn J. 2003. 'Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering.' *differences* 14(1): 88-124.
- Dean, Jodi. 1994. 'Coming out as an Alien: Feminists, UFOs, and the 'Oprah Effect'.' In *'Bad Girls, Good Girls': Women, Sex, and Power in the Nineties*, eds. Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. 1994. 'The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain.' In *The Essential Difference*, eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Delbanco, Andrew. 1993. 'The Politics of Separatism.' *Partisan Review* 60(4): 534-42.
- Dellinger, Kirsten, and Christine L. Williams. 1997. 'Makeup at Work: Negotiating Appearance Rules in the Workplace.' *Gender and Society* 11(2): 151-77.
- Dench, Geoff. 2000. 'The Roots of Political Correctness.' *Policy Winter*: 46-8.
- Denfeld, Rene. 1995. *The New Victorians: A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order*. New York and Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Denov, Myriam, and Christine Gervais. 2007. 'Negotiating (In)security: Agency, Resistance, and Resourcefulness among Girls Formerly Associated with Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front.' *Signs* 32(4): 885-910.
- Dent, George W. 1999. 'Political Discrimination in the Curriculum.' *Academic Questions* 12(2): 24-31.
- Deveaux, Monique. 1994. 'Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault.' *Feminist Studies* 20(2): 223-47.
- Devine, Miranda. 2007. 'Victims of political correctness.' *Sydney Morning Herald*. 13 December. p. 11.
- Dewar, Alison M. 1987. 'The Social Construction of Gender in Physical Education.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 10(4): 453-65.
- Dews, Peter. 1987. *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*. London and New York: Verso.
- Diamond, Sara. 1995. 'Managing the Anti-PC Industry.' In *After Political Correctness: The Humanities and Society in the 1990s*, eds. Christopher Newfield and Ronald Strickland. Boulder, Co. and Oxford: Westview Press.
- Dickstein, Morris. 1993. 'Correcting PC.' *Partisan Review* 60(4): 542-49.
- Dimen, Muriel. 1984. 'Politically Correct? Politically Incorrect?' In *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance. Boston and Melbourne: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Doezema, Jo. 2001. 'Ouch!: Western Feminists' 'Wounded Attachment' to the 'Third World Prostitute'.' *Feminist Review* 67: 16-38.
- Donnelly, Kevin. 2008a. 'Getting the Schools back to Basics.' *Quadrant* 52(6): 33-9.
- Donnelly, Kevin. 2008b. 'Chairman Rudd's Education Revolution.' *Quadrant* 52(12): 5-11.
- Donnelly, Kevin. 2008c. 'The Dubious Quest for a National Curriculum.' *Quadrant* 52(9): 42-8.
- Drakich, Janice, Marilyn Taylor and Jennifer Bankier. 1995. 'Academic Freedom Is the Inclusive University .' In *Beyond Political Correctness: Toward the Inclusive University*, eds Stephen Richer and Lorna Weir. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.
- D'Souza, Dinesh. 1992a. *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*. New York: Vintage Books.
- D'Souza, Dinesh. 1992b. 'The Visigoths in Tweed.' In *Beyond PC: Towards a Politics of Understanding*, ed. Patricia Aufderheide. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press.
- D'Souza, Dinesh. 1996. 'Relativism, Racism, and a Dysfunctional Culture.' *Academic Questions* 9(4): 69-76.
- DuBois, Ellen C., Dunlap, Mary C., Gilligan, Carol J., MacKinnon, Catharine A. and Menkel-Meadow, Carrie J. 1985. 'Feminist Discourse, Moral Values and the Law - A Conversation.' *Buffalo Law Review* 34: 11-87.
- Dunant, Sarah. 1994. 'Introduction: What's in a Word?' In *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, ed. Sarah Dunant. London: Virago Press.
- Dunn, Jennifer L. 2005. "'Victims' and 'Survivors': Emerging Vocabularies of Motive for 'Battered Women who Stay'." *Sociological Inquiry* 75(1): 1-30.
- Dunn, Jennifer L. 2010. *Judging Victims: Why We Stigmatize Survivors, and How They Reclaim Respect*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Dwyer, Claire. 2000. 'Negotiating Diasporic Identities: Young British South Asian Muslim Women.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 23(4): 475-86.
- Ebaugh, Helen Rose. 1993. 'Patriarchal Bargains and Latent Avenues of Social Mobility: Nuns in the Roman Catholic Church.' *Gender and Society* 7(3): 400-14.
- Ebert, Teresa L. 1996. *Ludic Feminism and After: Postmodernism, Desire, and Labor in Late Capitalism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ede, Lisa, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea Lunsford. 1995. 'Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism.' *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 13(4): 401-41.
- Epstein, Joseph. 1989. 'The Joys of Victimhood.' *New York Times Magazine* 2 July: 20-1, 39-41.
- Ermarth, Elizabeth. 2000. 'What Counts as Feminist Theory?' *Feminist Theory* 1(1): 113-18.
- Ezekiel, Judith. 2005. 'Magritte Meets Maghreb: This is not a Veil.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 20(47): 231-43.
- Ezekiel, Judith. 2006. 'French Dressing: Race, Gender, and the Hijab Story.' *Feminist Studies* 32(2): 256-78.
- Faderman, Lillian. 1992. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Signs* 17(4): 820-24.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.



- Fairclough, Norman. 2003. 'Political Correctness': The Politics of Culture and Language.' *Discourse and Society* 14 (1): 17-28.
- Faith, Karlene. 1994. 'Resistance: Lessons From Foucault and Feminism.' In *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, ed. H. Lorraine Radtke and Henderikus J. Stam. London: Sage Publications.
- Faludi, Susan. 1992. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Farred, Grant. 1995. 'Take Back the Mike: Producing a Language for Date Rape.' In *After Political Correctness: The Humanities and Society in the 1990s*, eds Christopher Newfield and Ronald Strickland. Boulder, Co. and Oxford: Westview Press.
- Farrelly, Elizabeth. 2008. 'Doing the right thing is worth money in the bank.' *Sydney Morning Herald*. 27 November. p.13.
- Fassin, Eric. 2007. 'Sexual Violence at the Border.' *differences* 18(2): 1-23.
- Faulkner, Ellen, and Gayle MacDonald. eds. 2009a. *Victim No More: Women's Resistance to Law, Culture and Power*. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing.
- Faulkner, Ellen, and Gayle MacDonald. 2009b. 'Preface.' In *Victim No More: Women's Resistance to Law, Culture and Power*, eds. Ellen Faulkner and Gayle MacDonald. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing.
- Faulkner, Ellen, and Gayle MacDonald. 2009c. 'Agency and Resistance: Debates in Feminist Theory and Praxis.' In *Victim No More: Women's Resistance to Law, Culture and Power*, eds. Ellen Faulkner and Gayle MacDonald. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing.
- Faulkner, Ellen, and Gayle MacDonald. 2009d. 'Introduction.' In *Victim No More: Women's Resistance to Law, Culture and Power*, eds. Ellen Faulkner and Gayle MacDonald. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing.
- Faulkner, Ellen, and Gayle MacDonald. 2009e. 'The Politics of Resistance.' In *Victim No More: Women's Resistance to Law, Culture and Power*, eds. Ellen Faulkner and Gayle MacDonald. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing.
- Faust, Beatrice. 1994. *Backlash? Balderdash! Where Feminism is Going Right*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Ferguson, Ann. 1998. 'Resisting the Veil of Privilege: Building Bridge Identities as an Ethico-Politics of Global Feminisms.' *Hypatia* 13(3): 95-113.
- Fernandes, Leela. 1997. 'Beyond Public Spaces and Private Spheres: Gender, Family, and Working-Class Politics in India.' *Feminist Studies* 23(3): 525-47.
- Fernandes, Leela. 1999. 'Reading India's 'Bandit Queen': A Trans/national Feminist Perspective on the Discrepancies of Representation.' *Signs* 25(1): 123-52.
- Fernandez-Kelly, Patricia. 2000. 'Reading the Signs: The Economics of Gender Twenty-Five Years Later.' *Signs* 25(4): 1107-12.
- Fernandez-Kelly, Patricia, and Diane Wolf. 2001. 'A Dialogue on Globalization.' *Signs* 26(4): 1243-49.
- Fish, Stanley. 1980. *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Flax, Jane. 1990. *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Flew, Fiona, Barbara Bagilhole, Jean Carabine, Natalie Fenton, Celia Kitzinger, Ruth Lister, and Sue Wilkinson. 1999. 'Introduction: Local Feminisms, Global Futures.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(4): 393-403.

- Flint, Kate. 2006. 'Women and Reading.' *Signs* 31(2): 511-36.
- Fonow, Mary Margaret, and Judith A. Cook. 1991. 'Back to the Future: A Look at the Second Wave of Feminist Epistemology and Methodology.' In *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship and Lived Research*, ed. Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Fonow, Mary Margaret, and Judith A. Cook. 2005. 'Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy.' *Signs* 30(4): 2211-36.
- Foss, Sonja K. and Cindy L. Griffin. 1995. 'Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric.' *Communication Monographs* 62: 2-18.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1991. 'Truth and Power.' In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. London: Penguin.
- Foucault, Michel. 1997. 'The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom.' In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003 [1972]. *Archaeology of Knowledge*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Franks, Mary Anne. 2003. 'Obscene Undersides: Women and Evil between the Taliban and the United States.' *Hypatia* 18(1): 135-56.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1987. 'Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation.' *Hypatia* 2(1): 103-21.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1989. *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fraser, Suzanne. 2003. 'The Agent Within: Agency Repertoires in Medical Discourse on Cosmetic Surgery.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 18(40): 27-44.
- Freeman, Carla. 2001. 'Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization.' *Signs* 26(4): 1007-37.
- Freeman, Carla, and Donna F. Murdock. 2001. 'Review: Enduring Traditions and New Directions in Feminist Ethnography in the Caribbean and Latin America.' *Feminist Studies* 27(2): 423-58.
- Freeman, Melissa, Kathleen deMarrais, Judith Preissle, Kathryn Roulston, and Elizabeth A. St. Pierre. 2007. 'Standards of Evidence in Qualitative Research: An Incitement to Discourse.' *Educational Researcher* 36(1): 25-32.
- Friedman, Jennifer, and Marisa Alicea. 1995. 'Women and Heroin: The Path of Resistance and its Consequences.' *Gender and Society* 9(4): 423-49.
- Friedman, Marilyn and Jan Narveson. 1995. *Political Correctness: For and Against*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Frow, John. 1985. 'Discourse and Power.' *Economy and Society* 14(2): 193-214.
- Gallop, Jane. 1992. *Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gallop, Jane, Hirsch, Marianne and Miller, Nancy K. 1990. 'Criticizing Feminist Criticism.' In *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gangoli, Geetanjali. 2006. 'Engendering Genocide: Gender, Conflict and Violence.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 534-38.
- Gardiner, Judith Kegan. 1995. 'Introduction.' In *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Garner, Helen. 1995. *The First Stone: Some Questions about Sex and Power*. Sydney: Picador.
- Garrison, Ednie Kaeh. 2000. 'U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave.' *Feminist Studies* 26(1): 141-70.
- Gavey, Nicola. 1999. 'I Wasn't Raped, but...': Revisiting Definitional Problems in Sexual Victimization.' In *New Versions of Victims: Feminists Struggle With the Concept*, ed. Sharon Lamb. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Geisler, Cheryl. 2004. 'How Ought we to Understand the Concept of Rhetorical Agency? Report from the ARS.' *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 34: 9-17.
- Gerami, Shahin, and Melodye Lehnerer. 2001. 'Women's Agency and Household Diplomacy: Negotiating Fundamentalism.' *Gender and Society* 15(4): 556-73.
- Gill, Rosalind. 1995. 'Relativism, Reflexivity and Politics: Interrogating Discourse Analysis from a Feminist Perspective.' In *Feminism and Discourse: Psychological Perspectives*, eds. Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger. London: Sage.
- Gilmore, Leigh. 2003. 'Jurisdictions: *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, *The Kiss*, and Scandalous Self-representation in the Age of Memoir and Trauma.' *Signs* 28(2): 695-718.
- Ginsberg, Elaine, and Sara Lennox. 1996. 'Antifeminism in Scholarship and Publishing.' In *Antifeminism in the Academy*, eds. Vève Clark, Shirley Nelson Garner, Margaret Higonnet, and Ketu H. Katrak. New York and London: Routledge.
- Glick, Elisa. 2000. 'Sex Positive: Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Politics of Transgression.' *Feminist Review* 64: 19-45.
- Goodey, Jo. 2003. 'Migration, Crime and Victimhood: Responses to Sex Trafficking in the EU.' *Punishment and Society* 5(4): 415-31.
- Goodey, Jo. 2004. 'Sex Trafficking in Women from Central and East European Countries: Promoting a 'Victim-Centred' and 'Women-Centred' Approach to Criminal Justice Intervention.' *Feminist Review* 76: 26-45.
- Gottfried, Heidi. 1987. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 1(2): 220-23.
- Grant, Linda. 1994. 'Sex and the Single Student: The Story of Date Rape.' In *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, ed. Sarah Dunant. London: Virago Press.
- Grasswick, Heidi. 2004. 'Individuals-in-Communities: The Search for a Feminist Model of Epistemic Communities.' *Hypatia* 19(3): 85-120.
- Gray, Breda. 2004. 'Remembering a 'Multicultural' Future through a History of Emigration: Towards a Feminist Politics of Solidarity across Difference.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 413-29.
- Greene, Ronald Walter. 2004. 'Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor.' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37(3): 188-206.
- Greenfield, Cathy and Peter Williams. 2001. 'Howardism' and the Media Rhetoric of 'Battlers' vs 'Elites'.' *Southern Review* 34 (1): 32-44.
- Gremillion, Helen. 2002. 'In Fitness and in Health: Crafting Bodies in the Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa.' *Signs* 27(2): 381-414.
- Grenz, Sabine. 2001. 'Conference Report: The Globalization of Sexual Exploitation.' *Feminist Review* 67: 142-44.
- Griffin, Christine. 1997. 'Troubled Teens: Managing Disorders of Transition and Consumption.' *Feminist Review* 55: 4-21.

- Grimshaw, Jean. 1993. 'Practices of Freedom.' In *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, ed. Caroline Ramazanoglu. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gubar, Susan. 1998. 'What Ails Feminist Criticism?' *Critical Inquiry* 24(4): 878-902.
- Gullickson, Gay L. 1991. 'La Pétroleuse: Representing Revolution.' *Feminist Studies* 17(2) : 241-65.
- Gunn, Janet Varner. 1998. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Hypatia* 13(3): 177-81.
- Gustafsson-Larsson, Susanne, Britt-Marie Thurén, Lars Dahlgren, and Göran Westman. 2007. 'Bun-baking Mums and Subverters: The Agency of Network Participants in a Rural Swedish County.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 30: 48-58.
- Guy, Camille. 1996. 'Feminism and Sexual Abuse: Troubled Thoughts on Some New Zealand Issues.' *Feminist Review* 52(Spring): 154-168.
- Haag, Pamela. 1996. "'Putting Your Body On the Line': The Question of Violence, Victims, and the Legacies of Second-Wave Feminism.' *differences* 8(2): 23-67.
- Haggis, Jane, and Susanne Schech. 2000. 'Meaning Well and Global Good Manners: Reflections on White Western Feminist Cross-cultural Praxis.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 15(33): 387-99.
- Hall, Stuart. 2001. 'Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse.' In *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates. London: Sage Publications.
- Hammer, Rhonda. 2002. *Antifeminism and Family Terrorism: A Critical Feminist Perspective*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Hammonds, Evelyn M. 1997. 'Whither Black Women's Studies. Interview.' *differences* 9(3): 31-45.
- Handler, Lisa. 1995. 'In the Fraternal Sisterhood: Sororities as Gender Strategy.' *Gender and Society* 9(2): 236-55.
- Hantzis, Darlene M., and Devoney Looser. 1995. 'Of Safe(r) Spaces and 'Right' Speech: Feminist Histories, Loyalties, Theories, and the Dangers of Critique.' In *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy*, ed. Jeffrey Williams. New York and London: Routledge.
- Haraway, Donna. 1990. 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s.' In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson. New York and London: Routledge.
- Haraway, Donna. 1997. 'The Virtual Speculum in the New World Order.' *Feminist Review* 55: 22-72.
- Harding, Sandra. 1986. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Hartsock, Nancy. 1996. 'Postmodernism and Political Change: Issues for Feminist Theory.' In *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, ed. Susan Hekman. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Hawkesworth, Mary E. 1989. 'Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth.' *Signs* 14(3): 533-57.
- Healey, Lucy. 1999. 'Gender, Power and the Ambiguities of Resistance in a Malay Community of Peninsular Malaysia.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(1): 49-61.

- Hekman, Susan. 1995. 'Subjects and Agents: The Question for Feminism.' In *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Helms, Elissa. 2003. 'Women as Agents of Ethnic Reconciliation? Women's NGOs and International Intervention in Postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(1): 15-33.
- Hemmings, Clare. 2005. 'Telling Feminist Stories.' *Feminist Theory* 6(2): 115-39.
- Hemmings, Clare. 2007. 'What is Feminist Theory Responsible for? Response to Rachel Torr.' *Feminist Theory* 8(1): 69-76.
- Hemmings, Clare. 2011. *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Henwood, Flis, and Sally Wyatt. 2000. 'Persistent Inequalities?: Gender and Technology in the Year 2000.' *Feminist Review* 64: 128-31.
- Hernandez, Marcia. 1999. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 13(4): 562-63.
- Heru, Alison M. 2001. 'The Linkages Between Gender and Victimhood.' *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 47(3): 10-20.
- Hester, Marianne. 1990. 'The Dynamics of Male Domination using the Witch Craze in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century England as a Case Study.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 13(1/2): 9-19.
- Heyes, Cressida J. 2007. 'Normalisation and the Psychic Life of Cosmetic Surgery.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 22(52): 55-71.
- Hindess, Barry. 2007. 'The Past is Another Culture.' *International Political Sociology* 1: 325-38.
- Hoffman, John. 1998. 'Is There a Case for a Feminist Theory of the State?.' *Contemporary Politics* 4(2): 161-76.
- Hoffman, John. 2007. *A Glossary of Political Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hoffman, John, and Paul Graham. 2006a. *Introduction to Political Concepts*. New York: Longman/Pearson Education.
- Hoffman, John, and Paul Graham. 2006b. *Introduction to Political Theory*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education.
- Hollander, Paul. 1994. '"Imagined Tyranny"? Political Correctness Reconsidered.' *Academic Questions* 7(4): 51-73.
- Hollander, Paul. 1996. 'Reassessing the Adversary Culture.' *Academic Questions* 9(2): 37-48.
- Honig, Emily. 1996. 'Women at Farah Revisited: Political Mobilization and its Aftermath among Chicana Workers.' *Feminist Studies* 22(2): 425-52.
- Hook, Derek. 2001. 'The "Disorders of Discourse".' *Theoria* June: 41-68.
- hooks, bell. 1994. 'Dissident Heat: *Fire with Fire*.' In *'Bad Girls, Good Girls': Women, Sex, and Power in the Nineties*, eds. Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Horowitz, Irving. 1995. 'Are the Social Sciences Scientific?' *Academic Questions* 9(1): 53-59.
- Howarth, David. 2000. *Discourse*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Hughes, Robert. 1993. *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America*. New York: Warner Books.

- Huisman, Kimberly, and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. 2005. 'Dress Matters: Change and Continuity in the Dress Practices of Bosnian Muslim Refugee Women.' *Gender and Society* 19(1): 44-65.
- Iannone, Carol. 1993. 'Sex and the Feminists.' *Commentary* 96(3): 51-54.
- Iannone, Carol. 2000. 'Either Feminism or Humanity.' *Academic Questions* 14(1): 27-41.
- Jacobson, Ruth. 2006. 'Mozambique and the Construction of Gendered Agency in War.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 499-509.
- James, Stanlie M. 1998. 'Shades of Othering: Reflections on Female Circumcision/Genital Mutilation.' *Signs* 23(4): 1031-48.
- Jameson, Elizabeth. 1988. 'Toward a Multicultural History of Women in the Western United States.' *Signs* 13(4): 761-91.
- Jantzen, Grace M. 1994. 'Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics.' *Hypatia* 9(4): 186-206.
- Jardine, Alice. 1995. 'Illiberal Reporting.' In *After Political Correctness: The Humanities and Society in the 1990s*, eds Christopher Newfield and Ronald Strickland. Boulder, Co. and Oxford: Westview Press.
- Jayarathne, Toby Epstein, and Abigail J. Stewart. 1991. 'Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences: Current Feminist Issues and Practical Strategies.' In *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship and Lived Research*, eds. Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Johnson, Carol. 2000. *Governing Change: From Keating to Howard*. St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press.
- Jones, Nancy Baker. 1994. 'Confronting the PC 'Debate': The Politics of Identity and the American Image.' *NWSA Journal* 6(3): 384-412.
- Jordan, Fiona, and Cara Aitchison. 2008. 'Tourism and the Sexualization of the Gaze: Solo Female Tourists' Experiences of Gendered Power, Surveillance and Embodiment.' *Leisure Studies* 27(3): 329-49.
- Kaiser, David. 2000. 'My War With the AHA.' *Academic Questions* 13(2): 70-77.
- Keefer, Michael. 1996. *Lunar Perspectives: Field Notes from the Culture Wars*. Concord, Ont.: Anansi.
- Kelly, Liz, Sheila Burton and Linda Regan. 1996. 'Beyond Victim or Survivor: Sexual Violence, Identity and Feminist Theory and Practice.' In *Sexualizing the Social: Power and the Organization of Sexuality*, eds. Lisa Adkins and Vicki Merchant. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Kempadoo, Kamala. 2001. 'Freelancers, Temporary Wives, and Beach Boys: Researching Sex Work in the Caribbean.' *Feminist Review* 67: 39-62.
- Kendall, Gavin and Wickham, Gary. 1999. *Using Foucault's Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kennedy, Kristin. 1999a. 'Hipparchia the Cynic: Feminist Rhetoric and the Ethics of Embodiment.' *Hypatia* 14(2): 48-71.
- Kennedy, Kristin. 1999b. 'Cynic Rhetoric: The Ethics and Tactics of Resistance.' *Rhetoric Review* 18(1): 26-45.
- Kerfoot, Deborah, and David Knights. 1994. 'Into the Realm of the Fearful: Power, Identity and the Gender Problematic.' In *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, ed. H. Lorraine Radtke and Henderikus J. Stam. London: Sage Publications.
- Kersten, Katherine. 1991. 'What do Women Want?' *Policy Review* 56: 4-13.
- Kesby, Mike. 2005. 'Rethorizing Empowerment-through-Participation as a Performance in Space: Beyond Tyranny to Transformation.' *Signs* 30(4): 2037-65.

- Kessler-Harris, Alice. 1992. 'The View from Women's Studies.' *Signs*, 17(4): 794-805.
- Kimball, Roger. 1990. *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Kimball, Roger. 1993. 'Sex in the Twilight Zone: Catharine MacKinnon's Crusade.' *New Criterion* 12(2): 11-16.
- Kitzinger, Celia and Alison Thomas. 1995. 'Sexual Harassment: A Discursive Approach.' In *Feminism and Discourse: Psychological Perspectives*, eds Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger. London: Sage.
- Klatt, Heinz-Joachim. 2003. 'Political Correctness as an Academic Discipline.' *Academic Questions* 16(2): 36-45.
- Klein, Ellen R. 1998. 'Can Feminism be Rational?' *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10 (1/2): 17-29.
- Kocan, Peter. 2002. 'In the Groves of Their Academy.' *Quadrant* 46 (12): 28-30.
- Koerber, Amy. 2006. 'Rhetorical Agency, Resistance, and the Disciplinary Rhetorics of Breastfeeding.' *Technical Communication Quarterly* 15(1): 87-101.
- Kofman, Eleonore, and Rosemary Sales. 1992. 'Towards Fortress Europe?' *Women's Studies International Forum* 15(1): 29-39.
- Kosambi, Meera. 2001. 'A Prismatic Presence: The Multiple Iconisation of Dr Anandibai Joshee and the Politics of Life-Writing.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 16(35): 158-73.
- Koskela, Hille, and Sirpa Tani. 2005. "'Sold Out!' Women's Practices of Resistance against Prostitution Related Sexual Harassment.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 28: 418-29.
- Kozol, Wendy. 1995. 'Fracturing Domesticity: Media, Nationalism, and the Question of Feminist Influence.' *Signs* 20(3): 646-67.
- Kramer, Hilton. 1992. 'The Prospect Before Us.' In *Debating P.C.: The Controversy Over Political Correctness On College Campuses*, ed. Paul Berman. New York: Dell.
- Kramer, Hilton. 1993. 'Confronting the Monolith.' *Partisan Review* 60(4): 569-73.
- Krasniqi, Vjollca. 2007. 'Imagery, Gender and Power: The Politics of Representation in Post-War Kosova.' *Feminist Review* 86: 1-23.
- Kress, Gunther. 1985. 'Ideological Structures in Discourse.' In *Handbook of Discourse Analysis: Volume 4. Discourse Analysis in Society*, ed. Teun A. van Dijk. London: Academic Press.
- Lamb, Sharon. 1996. *The Trouble with Blame: Victims, Perpetrators, and Responsibility*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Lamb, Sharon. 1999. 'Constructing the Victim: Popular Images and Lasting Labels.' In *New Versions of Victims: Feminists Struggle With the Concept*, ed. Sharon Lamb. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Lambert, Catherine. 2008. 'Saving the male.' *Sunday Herald Sun*. 7 September. p.88.
- Lan, Pei-Chia. 2003. 'Working in a Neon Cage: Bodily Labor of Cosmetics Saleswomen in Taiwan.' *Feminist Studies* 29(1): 21-45.
- Langton, Marcia. 2001. 'Pauline as the Thin End of the Wedge.' In *The Retreat from Tolerance: A Snapshot of Australian Society*, ed. Phillip Adams. Sydney: ABC Books.
- Lara, María Pía. 2003. 'In and Out of Terror: The Vertigo of Secularization.' *Hypatia* 18(1): 183-96.

- Lau, Lisa Ee Jia. 2003. 'Equating Womanhood with Victimhood: The Positionality of Women Protagonists in the Contemporary Writings of South Asian Women.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(4): 369-78.
- Lau, Lisa Ee Jia. 2006. 'The New Indian Woman: Who is she, and what is 'New' about her?' *Women's Studies International Forum* 29: 159-71.
- Lee, Maggy, Anita Chan, Hannah Bradby, and Gill Green. 2002. 'Chinese Migrant Women and Families in Britain.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 25(6): 607-18.
- Lehman, David. 1993. 'The Reign of Intolerance.' *Partisan Review* 60(4): 598-603.
- Lehrman, Karen. 1992. 'The Feminist Mystique.' *New Republic* 206(11): 30-34.
- Lemke, Jay L. 1995. *Textual Politics: Discourse and Social Dynamics*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Letherby, Gayle. 2003. *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Leys, Ruth. 1992. 'The Real Miss Beauchamp: Gender and the Subject of Imitation.' In *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York and London: Routledge.
- Lloyd, Moya. 1996. 'A Feminist Mapping of Foucauldian Politics.' In *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, ed. Susan Hekman. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Logan, Mary Ellen, and Helen Huntley. 2001. 'Gender and Power in the Research Process.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 24(6): 623-35.
- Lopez, Mark. 2008. 'The Education Counter-Revolution.' *Quadrant* 52(10): 99-103.
- Loudermilk, Kim A. 2004. *Fictional Feminism: How American Bestsellers Affect the Movement for Women's Equality*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Loury, Glenn C. 1993. 'Self-Censorship.' *Partisan Review* 60(4): 608-30.
- Lukas, Carrie L. 2006. *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Women, Sex, and Feminism*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing.
- Lunsford, Andrea Abernethy. 1999. 'Rhetoric, Feminism, and the Politics of Textual Ownership.' *College English* 61(5): 529-44.
- Lutz, Helma. 2002. 'At Your Service Madam! The Globalization of Domestic Service.' *Feminist Review* 70: 89-104.
- MacCannell, Dean, and Juliet Flower MacCannell. 1993. 'Violence, Power and Pleasure: A Revisionist Reading of Foucault from the Victim Perspective.' In *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, ed. Caroline Ramazanoglu. London and New York: Routledge.
- Mack, Phyllis. 2003. 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism.' *Signs* 29(1): 149-77.
- Mackey, Louis. 1997. 'Theory and Practice in the Rhetoric of I.A. Richards.' *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 27(2): 51-68.
- Mackie, Vera. 2005. 'In Search of Innocence: Feminist Historians Debate the Legacy of Wartime Japan.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 20(47): 207-17.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. 1983. 'Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence.' *Signs* 8(4): 635-58.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. 1984. 'Reply to Miller, Acker and Barry, West, and Gardiner.' *Signs* 10(1): 184-88.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. 1989. 'Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: 'Pleasure Under Patriarchy'.' *Ethics* 99(2): 314-46.



- MacLeod, Arlene Elowe. 1992. 'Hegemonic Relations and Gender Resistance: The New Veiling as Accommodating Protest in Cairo.' *Signs* 17(3): 533-57.
- Macleod, Catriona. 2002. 'Economic Security and the Social Science Literature on Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa.' *Gender and Society* 16(5): 647-64.
- Magnet, Myron. 1995. 'The National Prospect: A Symposium.' *Commentary* 100(5): 83-85.
- Magnus, Kathy Dow. 2006. 'The Unaccountable Subject: Judith Butler and the Social Conditions of Intersubjective Agency.' *Hypatia* 21(2): 81-103.
- Mahoney, Martha R. 1994. 'Victimization or Oppression? Women's Lives, Violence, and Agency.' In *The Public Nature of Private Violence: The Discovery of Domestic Abuse*, eds. Martha Albertson Fineman and Rozanne Mykitiuk. New York: Routledge.
- Mahoney, Maureen A., and Barbara Yngvesson. 1992. 'The Construction of Subjectivity and the Paradox of Resistance: Reintegrating Feminist Anthropology and Psychology.' *Signs* 18(1): 44-73.
- Man, Guida. 2004. 'Gender, Work and Migration: Deskillling Chinese Immigrant Women in Canada.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 135-48.
- Mandle, Joan. 1999. 'Sisterly Critics.' *NWSA Journal* 11(1): 97-109.
- Mankekar, Purnima. 1997. "'To Whom Does Ameena Belong?' Towards a Feminist Analysis of Childhood and Nationhood in Contemporary India.' *Feminist Review* 56(Summer): 26-60.
- Mann, Susan A. 1989. 'Slavery, Sharecropping, and Sexual Inequality.' *Signs* 14(4): 774-98.
- Manne, Robert. 1996. 'The Demidenko Affair: Free Speech and Political Correctness.' *Quadrant* June: 8-15.
- Mardorossian, Carine M. 2002a. 'Toward a New Feminist Theory of Rape.' *Signs* 27(3): 743-75.
- Mardorossian, Carine M. 2002b. 'Theory, Experience, and Disciplinary Contentions: A Response to Janice Haaken and Beverly Allen.' *Signs* 27(3): 787-91.
- Mardorossian, Carine. 2003. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Signs* 29(1): 265-69.
- Markens, Susan. 1996. 'The Problematic of 'Experience': A Political and Cultural Critique of PMS.' *Gender and Society* 10(1): 42-58.
- Markens, Susan, C. H. Browner, and H. Mabel Preloran. 2003. "'I'm Not the One They're Sticking the Needle Into': Latino Couples, Fetal Diagnosis, and the Discourse of Reproductive Rights.' *Gender and Society* 17(3): 462-81.
- Marstine, Janet. 2002. 'Challenging the Gendered Categories of Art and Art Therapy: The Paintings of Jane Orleman.' *Feminist Studies* 28(3): 631-54.
- Martin, Jane Roland. 1994. 'Methodological Essentialism, False Difference, and Other Dangerous Traps.' *Signs* 19(3): 630-57.
- Martin, Jane Roland. 1996. 'Aerial Distance, Esotericism, and Other Closely Related Traps.' *Signs* 21(3): 584-614.
- Martin, Jerry L. 1993. 'The Postmodern Argument Considered.' *Partisan Review* 60(4): 638-54.
- Martin, Jerry L. and Anne D. Neal. 2002. *Defending Civilization: How our Universities are Failing America and What Can be Done About It*. Washington DC: American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

- Mason, Carol. 2007. 'Miscegenation and Purity: Reproducing the Souls of White Folk.' *Hypatia* 22(2): 98-121.
- Mason, Robyn. 2007. 'Building Women's Social Citizenship: A Five-point Framework to Conceptualise the Work of Women-specific Services in Rural Australia.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 30: 299-312.
- Masse, Michelle A. 1990. 'Gothic Repetition: Husbands, Horrors, and Things that go Bump in the Night.' *Signs* 15(4): 679-709.
- Matthews, Julie. 2002. 'An Ambiguous Juncture: Racism and the Formation of Asian Femininity.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 17(38): 207-19.
- McCaffrey, Dawn. 1998. 'Victim Feminism/Victim Activism.' *Sociological Spectrum* 18: 263-84.
- McCaskill, Barbara, and Layli Phillips. 1994. 'We are All 'Good Woman!': A Womanist Critique of the Current Feminist Conflict.' In *'Bad Girls, Good Girls': Women, Sex, and Power in the Nineties*, eds. Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- McCauley, Patrick. 2008. 'Australian Rules Football as Secret Men's Business.' *Quadrant* 52 (9): 30-3.
- McClay, Wilfred M. 1995. 'The National Prospect: A Symposium.' *Commentary* 100(5): 80-82.
- McCormick, Richard W. 1993. 'From 'Caligari' to Dietrich: Sexual, Social, and Cinematic Discourses in Weimar Film.' *Signs* 18(3): 640-68.
- McDermott, Patrice. 1994. *Politics and Scholarship: Feminist Academic Journals and the Production of Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- McDermott, Patrice. 1995. 'On Cultural Authority: Women's Studies, Feminist Politics, and the Popular Press.' *Signs* 20(3): 668-84.
- McElroy, Wendy. 1996. *Sexual Correctness: The Gender-Feminist Attack on Women*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland.
- McKerrow, Raymie E. 1993. 'Critical Rhetoric and the Possibility of the Subject.' In *The Critical Turn: Rhetoric and Philosophy in Postmodern Discourse*, eds. Ian Angus and Lenore Langsdorf. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- McLeer, Anne. 1998. 'Saving the Victim: Recuperating the Language of the Victim and Reassessing Global Feminism.' *Hypatia* 13(1): 41-55.
- McNay, Lois. 1991. 'The Foucauldian Body and the Exclusion of Experience.' *Hypatia* 6(3): 125-39.
- McNay, Lois. 2000. *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McNeil, Maureen. 1993. 'Dancing with Foucault: Feminism and Power-knowledge.' In *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, ed. Caroline Ramazanoglu. London and New York: Routledge.
- Mead, Jenna. 1997. 'Introduction: Tell it Like it is.' In *Bodyjamming: Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life*, ed. Jenna Mead. Sydney: Vintage.
- Menon, Jisha. 2006. 'Rehearsing the Partition: Gendered Violence in *Aur Kitne Tukde*.' *Feminist Review* 84: 29-47.
- Messer-Davidow, Ellen. 1993. 'Manufacturing the Attack on Liberalized Higher Education.' *Social Text* 36: 40-80.

- Mihelich, John, and Debbie Storrs. 2003. 'Higher Education and the Negotiated Process of Hegemony: Embedded Resistance among Mormon Women.' *Gender and Society* 17(3): 404-22.
- Mills, Sara. 1992. 'Discourse Competence: Or How to Theorize Strong Women Speakers.' *Hypatia* 7(2): 4-17.
- Mills, Sara. 1995. *Feminist Stylistics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Mills, Sara. 1997. *Discourse*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Mills, Sara. 2003. 'Caught between Sexism, Anti-sexism and 'Political Correctness': Feminist Women's Negotiations with Naming Practices. *Discourse and Society* 14 (1): 87-110.
- Millsted, Rachel, and Hannah Frith. 2003. 'Being Large-Breasted: Women Negotiating Embodiment.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(5): 455-65.
- Minnich, Elizabeth Kamarck. 1998. 'Feminist Attacks on Feminism: Patriarchy's Prodigal Daughters.' *Feminist Studies* 24(1): 159-75.
- Minow, Martha. 1993. 'Surviving Victim Talk.' *UCLA Law Review* 40: 1411-45.
- Moghadam, Valentine M. 2007. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 21: 938-40.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1991. 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.' In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Mooney, Carolyn J. 1988. 'Conservative Scholars Call for a Movement to 'Reclaim' the Academy.' *Chronicle of Higher Education* 35 (13): A1, A11.
- Morgan, Jenny. 1997. 'Sexual Harassment: Where did it go in 1995?' In *Bodyjamming: Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life*, ed. Jenna Mead. Sydney: Vintage.
- Morgan, Jenny. 2005. 'Priggish, Pitiless, and Punitive or Proud, Passionate, and Purposeful? Dichotomies, Sexual Harassment, and 'Victim Feminism'.' *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 17(1): 219-32.
- Morley, Louise. 1992. 'Women's Studies, Difference, and Internalised Oppression.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 15(4): 517-25.
- Morris, Meaghan. 2001. 'Sticks and Stones and Stereotypes: What are Speech Codes for?' In *The Retreat from Tolerance: A Snapshot of Australian Society*, ed. Phillip Adams. Sydney: ABC Books.
- Morrison, Zoe, Mary Bourke, and Caroline Kelley. 2005. "'Stop Making it Such a Big Issue': Perceptions and Experiences of Gender Inequality by Undergraduates at a British University.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 28 (2-3): 150-62.
- Munt, Sally. 1992. 'Is There a Feminist in this Text? Ten Years (1979-1989) of the Lesbian Novel: A Retrospective.' *Studies International Forum* 15(2): 281-91.
- Munt, Sally. 1997. "'I Teach Therefore I Am': Lesbian Studies in the Liberal Academy.' *Feminist Review* 56: 85-99.
- Nelson-Kuna, Julie, and Stephanie Riger. 1995. 'Women's Agency in Psychological Contexts.' In *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Newburn, Tim and Elizabeth A. Stanko. 1994. 'When Men Are Victims: The Failure of Victimology.' In *Just Boys Doing Business? Men, Masculinities and Crime*, eds. Tim Newburn and Elizabeth A. Stanko. London and New York: Routledge.
- Newfield, Christopher, and Ronald Strickland. eds 1995a. *After Political Correctness: The Humanities and Society in the 1990s*. Boulder, Co. and Oxford: Westview Press.

- Newfield, Christopher, and Ronald Strickland. 1995b. 'Introduction: Going Public.' In *After Political Correctness: The Humanities and Society in the 1990s*, eds. Christopher Newfield and Ronald Strickland. Boulder, Co. and Oxford: Westview Press.
- Nurka, Camille. 2002. 'Postfeminist Autopsies.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 17(38): 177-89.
- Oakley, Ann. 1998. 'A Brief History of Gender.' In *Who's Afraid of Feminism?: Seeing Through the Backlash*, eds. Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Offen, Karen. 1988. 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach.' *Signs* 14(1): 119-57.
- Offen, Karen. 1989. 'Reply to Cott.' *Signs* 15(1): 206-09.
- Oldenburg, Veena Talwar. 1990. 'Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow, India.' *Feminist Studies* 16(2): 259-87.
- O'Sullivan, Sue. 1995. 'Camille Paglia's *Sex, Art, and American Culture*.' *Feminist Review* 49: 108-14.
- Overs, Cheryl, and Nel Druce. 1994. 'Sex Work, HIV and the State: An Interview with Nel Druce.' *Feminist Review* 48: 114-21.
- Paglia, Camille. 1992. 'Wolf Pack.' *New Republic* 206(15): 4-5.
- Paglia, Camille. 1994. *Vamps and Tramps: New Essays*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Pajnik, Mojca. 2006. 'Feminist Reflections on Habermas's Communicative Action: The Need for an Inclusive Political Theory.' *European Journal of Social Theory* 9(3): 385-404.
- Park, Shelley M. 1997. 'False Memory Syndrome: A Feminist Philosophical Approach.' *Hypatia* 12(2): 1-50.
- Parker, Ian. 1990. 'Discourse: Definitions and Contradictions.' *Philosophical Psychology* 3(2/3): 189-202.
- Partington, Geoffrey. 2000. 'Political Correctness Reconsidered.' *Quadrant* June: 29-34.
- Patton, Cindy, and Sue O'Sullivan. 1990. 'Mapping: Lesbians, AIDS and Sexuality.' *Feminist Review* 34: 120-33.
- Perry, Ruth. 1992. 'A Short History of the Term 'Politically Correct'.' In *Beyond PC: Toward a Politics of Understanding*, ed Patricia Aufderheide. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press.
- Phillips, Kendall R. 2002. 'Spaces of Invention: Dissension, Freedom, and Thought in Foucault.' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 35(4): 328-44.
- Phillips, Melanie. 1994. 'Illiberal Liberalism.' In *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, ed. Sarah Dunant. London: Virago Press.
- Picart, Caroline, Joan (Kay) S. 2003. 'Rhetorically Reconfiguring Victimhood and Agency: The Violence Against Women Act's Civil Rights Clause.' *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6(1): 97-126.
- Pini, Barbara. 2007. 'Always an Outlaw: Daughters-in-law on Australian Family Farms'. *Women's Studies International Forum* 30: 40-47.
- Pomerantz, Shauna, Dawn H. Currie, and Deirdre M. Kelly. 2004. 'Sk8er Girls: Skateboarders, Girlhood and Feminism in Motion.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 27: 547-57.
- Potter, Jonathan and Wetherell, Margaret. 1990. 'Discourse: Noun, Verb or Social Practice?' *Philosophical Psychology* 3(2/3): 205-18.

- Potter, Jonathan and Wetherell, Margaret. 2001. 'Unfolding Discourse Analysis.' In *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates. London: Sage Publications.
- Prokhovnik, Raia. 2004. 'Third Wave Feminism and Post 'Post-Ideological' Politics.' Paper prepared for European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Workshop 3 'Working with Ideology in a 'Post-Ideological' Age', ECPR Joint Sessions, Uppsala, 13-18 April.
- Ramazanoglu, Caroline. 1993. 'Introduction.' In *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism*, ed. Caroline Ramazanoglu. London and New York: Routledge.
- Ramazanoglu, Caroline (with Janet Holland). 2002. *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices*. London: Sage Publications.
- Ravitch, Diane. 1992. 'Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures.' In *Debating P.C.: The Controversy Over Political Correctness On College Campuses*, ed. Paul Berman. New York: Dell.
- Ravitch, Diane. 2005. 'The Scars and Trophies of a Reformer.' *Academic Questions* 18(2): 7-19.
- Ray, Raka. 2000. 'Masculinity, Femininity, and Servitude: Domestic Workers in Calcutta in the Late Twentieth Century.' *Feminist Studies* 26(3): 691-718.
- Reagan, Leslie J. 2003. 'From Hazard to Blessing to Tragedy: Representations of Miscarriage in Twentieth-Century America.' *Feminist Studies* 29(2): 356-78.
- Reinharz, Shulamit. 1992. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rhode, Deborah. 1995. 'Media Images, Feminist Issues.' *Signs* 20(3): 685-710.
- Rich, Ruby. 1986. 'Review Essay: Feminism and Sexuality in the 1980s.' *Feminist Studies* 12(3): 525-61.
- Richardson, Heather S. 1991. 'The Politics of Virtue.' *Policy Review* 91(58): 18-23.
- Richer, Stephen and Lorna Weir. eds 1995a. *Beyond Political Correctness: Toward the Inclusive University*. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.
- Richer, Stephen and Lorna Weir. 1995b. 'Introduction: Political Correctness and the Inclusive University.' In *Beyond Political Correctness: Toward the Inclusive University*, eds Stephen Richer and Lorna Weir. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.
- Rickard, Wendy, and Merl Storr. 2001. 'Editorial: Sex Work Reassessed.' *Feminist Review* 67: 1-4.
- Ricketson, Matthew. 1997. 'Helen Garner's *The First Stone*: Hitchhiking on the Credibility of Other Writers.' In *Bodyjamming: Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life*, ed. Jenna Mead. Sydney: Vintage.
- Riessman, Catherine Kohler. 2000. 'Stigma and Everyday Resistance Practices: Childless Women in South India.' *Gender and Society* 14(1): 111-35.
- Ringrose, Jessica. 2007. 'Troubling agency and 'choice': A Psychosocial Analysis of Students' Negotiations of Black Feminist 'Intersectionality' Discourses in Women's Studies.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 30: 264-78.
- Rivera-Fuentes, Consuelo, and Lynda Birke. 2001. 'Talking With/In Pain: Reflections on Bodies under Torture.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 24(6): 653-68.

- Roberts, Celia, and Suzanne Fraser. 2002. 'Generating Knowledges: Resources for Teaching and Studying Science and Feminism.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 17(38): 221-27.
- Robertson, Claire C. 1988. 'Never Underestimate the Power of Women: The Transforming Vision of African Women's History.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 11(5): 439-53.
- Robinson, David. 2001. 'Harassment, Fairness and Academic Freedom.' *Academic Questions* 14(3): 25-36.
- Robinson, Hilary. 1995. 'Irish/Woman/Artwork: Selective Readings.' *Feminist Review* 50: 89-110.
- Rodgers, Gillian, and Linda Semple. 1990. 'Who Watches the Watchwomen? Feminists Against Censorship.' *Feminist Review* 36: 19-24.
- Rogoff, Irit. 1992. 'Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History.' *differences* 4(3): 38-65.
- Roiphe, Katie. 1993. *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Rose, Damaris. 2001. 'Revisiting Feminist Research Methodologies: A Working Paper.' Available at <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/SW21-142-2001E.pdf> (accessed 30/03/2009).
- Rothstein, Frances Abrahamer. 1996. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 10(1): 94-97.
- Ruddy, Karen. 2006. 'The Ambivalence of Colonial Desire in Marguerite Duras' 'The Lover'.' *Feminist Review* 82: 76-95.
- Ryan, Louise. 2000. '“Drunken Tans”: Representations of Sex and Violence in the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21).' *Feminist Review* 66: 73-94.
- Samuelson, Meg. 2007. 'The Disfigured Body of the Female Guerilla: (De) Militarization, Sexual Violence, and Redomestication in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*.' *Signs* 32(4): 834-56.
- Sandell, Jillian. 1994. 'Adjusting to Oppression: The Rise of Therapeutic Culture in the United States.' In *'Bad Girls, Good Girls': Women, Sex, and Power in the Nineties*, eds. Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Sarup, Madan. 1993. *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press.
- Sawer, Marian. 1997. 'A Defeat for Political Correctness.' In *The Politics of Retribution: The 1996 Australian Federal Election*, eds Clive Bean, Scott Bennett, Marian Simms and John Warhurst. St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin.
- Sawicki, Jana. 1986. 'Foucault and Feminism: Toward a Politics of Difference.' *Hypatia* 1(2): 23-36.
- Sawicki, Jana. 1996. 'Feminism, Foucault, and 'Subjects' of Power and Freedom.' In *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, ed. Susan J. Hekman. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Sawyer, Keith. 2002. 'A Discourse on Discourse: An Archeological History of an Intellectual Concept.' *Cultural Studies* 16(3): 433-56.
- Scalmer, Sean. 1999. 'The Battlers versus the Elites: The Australian Right's Language of Class.' *Overland* 154: 9-13.

- Schneider, Elizabeth M. 1986. 'Describing and Changing: Women's Self-Defense Work and the Problem of Expert Testimony on Battering.' *Women's Rights Law Reporter* 9(3/4): 195-222.
- Schneider, Elizabeth M. 1993. 'Feminism and the False Dichotomy of Victimization and Agency.' *New York Law School Law Review* 38: 387-99.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. 1995. 'The Campaign Against Political Correctness: What's Really at Stake.' In *After Political Correctness: The Humanities and Society in the 1990s*, eds. Christopher Newfield and Ronald Strickland. Boulder, Co. and Oxford: Westview Press.
- Seale, Clive, and David Silverman. 1997. 'Ensuring Rigour in Qualitative Research.' *European Journal of Public Health* 7(4): 379-84.
- Searle, John. 1999. 'Politics and the Humanities.' *Academic Questions* 12(4): 45-60.
- Segura, Denise A., and Beatriz M. Pesquera. 1992. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 6(3): 519-22.
- Sengupta, Shuddhabrata. 2006. 'I/Me/Mine – Intersectional Identities as Negotiated Minefields.' *Signs* 31(3): 629-39.
- Sered, Susan Starr. 1994. 'Ideology, Autonomy, and Sisterhood: An Analysis of the Secular Consequences of Women's Religions.' *Gender and Society* 8(4): 486-506.
- Shaheed, Farida. 1994. 'Controlled or Autonomous: Identity and the Experience of the Network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws.' *Signs* 19(4): 997-1019.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. 2003a. 'Liberating Voices: The Political Implications of Palestinian Mothers Narrating their Loss.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(5): 391-407.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. 2003b. 'Reexamining Femicide: Breaking the Silence and Crossing 'Scientific' Borders.' *Signs* 28(2): 581-608.
- Shands, Kerstin W. 1999. *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Shea, Victor. 1995. 'Framing the 'Western Tradition' in Canadian PC Debates.' In *Beyond Political Correctness: Toward the Inclusive University*, eds Stephen Richer and Lorna Weir. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.
- Shehabuddin, Elora. 1999. 'Contesting the Illicit: Gender and the Politics of Fatwas in Bangladesh.' *Signs* 1011-44.
- Siegel, Deborah L. 1997a. 'The Legacy of the Personal: Generating Theory in Feminism's Third Wave.' *Hypatia* 12(3): 46-75.
- Siegel, Deborah L. 1997b. 'Reading Between the Waves: Feminist Historiography in a 'Postfeminist' Moment.' In *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, eds. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake. Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Smith, Anna Marie. 1993. "'What is Pornography?': An Analysis of the Policy Statement of the Campaign against Pornography and Censorship.' *Feminist Review* 43: 71-87.
- Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. *Texts, Facts, and Femininity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Smith, Dorothy. 1995. "'Politically Correct: An Ideological Code.' In *Beyond Political Correctness: Toward the Inclusive University*, eds Stephen Richer and Lorna Weir. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.
- Smith, Dorothy E. 1999. *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Sommers, Christina Hoff. 1994. *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Sorensen, Pernille. 1996. 'Commercialization of Food Crops in Busoga, Uganda, and the Renegotiation of Gender.' *Gender and Society* 10(5): 608-28.
- Sorensen, Rosemary. 2009. 'Crusaders of the keyboard.' *Weekend Australian*. 24 January. p.10.
- Soriso, Carolyn. 1997. 'A Tale of Two Feminisms: Power and Victimization in Contemporary Feminist Debate.' In *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, eds. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake. Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Spalter-Roth, Roberta M. 1990. 'Review.' [untitled]. *Gender and Society* 4(1): 111-13.
- Sparrow, Robert. 2002. 'Talking Sense about Political Correctness.' *Journal of Australian Studies* 26(73): 119-31.
- Spongberg, Mary. 1997. 'Mother Knows Best? Bridging Feminism's Generation Gap.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 12(26): 257-63.
- Stacey, Judith. 2000. 'Is Academic Feminism an Oxymoron?' *Signs*, 25(4): 1189-94.
- Steinberg, Deborah Lynn. 2000. 'Bodies of Knowledge: Shifting Iconographies of 'Maternal-Fetal Conflict': Review of Colker (1994; Merrick and Blank (1993) and Boling (1995).' *Feminist Review* 64: 147-52.
- Stobie, Cheryl. 2007. 'Review: *Letting Them Die*: Why HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs Fail.' *Feminist Review* 86: 209-11.
- Stringer, Rebecca. 2009. 'Rethinking the Critique of Victim Feminism.' In *Victim No More: Women's Resistance to Law, Culture and Power*, eds. Ellen Faulkner and Gayle MacDonald. Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Publishing.
- Strossen, Nadine. 1993. 'A Feminist Critique of 'the' Feminist Critique of Pornography.' *Virginia Law Review* 79(5): 1099-190.
- Suhr, Stephanie and Sally Johnson. 2003. 'Revisiting 'PC': Introduction to Special Issue on Political Correctness.' *Discourse and Society* 14 (1): 5-16.
- Suleri, Sara. 1992. 'Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition.' *Critical Inquiry* 18(4): 756-69.
- Sweeney, Megan. 2004. 'Prison Narratives, Narrative Prisons: Incarcerated Women Reading Gayl Jones's 'Eva's Man'.' *Feminist Studies* 30(2): 456-82.
- Sykes, Charles. 1992. *A Nation of Victims: The Decay of American Character*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Talcott, Molly. 2003. 'Gendered Webs of Development and Resistance: Women, Children, and Flowers in Bogotá.' *Signs* 29(2): 465-89.
- Taylor, Anthea. 2007. 'Feminists 'Misreading'/ 'Misreading' Feminists.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 22(52): 73-88.
- Taylor, Carole Anne. 1993. 'Positioning Subjects and Objects: Agency, Narration, Relationality.' *Hypatia* 8(1): 55-80.
- Taylor, Jacqueline Sanchez. 2006. 'Female Sex Tourism: A Contradiction in Terms?' *Feminist Review* 83: 42-59.
- Taylor, Stephanie. 2001. 'Locating and Conducting Discourse Analytic Research.' In *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates. London: Sage.
- Taylor, Verta. 1999. 'Gender and Social Movements: Gender Processes in Women's Self-help Movements.' *Gender and Society* 13(1): 8-33.



- Taylor, Verta and Leila Rupp. 1993. 'Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism.' *Signs* 19 (1): 32-61.
- Thapar-Björkert, Suruchi, and Louise Ryan. 2002. 'Mother India/Mother Ireland: Comparative Gendered Dialogues of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 25(3): 301-13.
- Thompson, Denise. 2000. 'What Counts as Feminist Theory? Pure Tolerance Revisited.' *Feminist Theory* 1(3): 371-74.
- Thompson, Denise. 2001. *Radical Feminism Today*. London: Sage.
- Thorne, Barrie. 1987. 'Re-visioning Women and Social Change: Where are the Children?' *Gender and Society* 1(1): 85-109.
- Threadgold, Terry. 1997. *Feminist Poetics: 'Poiesis', Performance, Histories*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Threadgold, Terry. 2006. 'Dialogism, Voice and Global Contexts: Asylum, Dangerous Men and Invisible Women.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 21(50): 223-44.
- Throsby, Karen. 2004. 'Review of 'Reading Birth and Death: A History of Obstetric Thinking' by Jo Murphy-Lawless.' *Feminist Review* 76(1): 141-42.
- Todorova, Irina L. G., and Tatyana Kotzeva. 2003. 'Social Discourses: Women's Resistive Voices: Facing Involuntary Childlessness in Bulgaria.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 26(2): 139-51.
- Tonkiss, Fran. 1998. 'Analysing Discourse.' In *Researching Society and Culture*, ed. C. Seale. London: Sage Publications.
- Torring, Jacob. 1999. *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Torr, Rachel. 2007a. 'Charting Intellectual Fields: Sampling Methods.' *Methodological Innovations Online* 2(1) (unpaginated). Available at [http://erdt.plymouth.ac.uk/mionline/public\\_html/viewarticle.php?id=41&layout=html](http://erdt.plymouth.ac.uk/mionline/public_html/viewarticle.php?id=41&layout=html) (accessed 30/03/2009).
- Torr, Rachel. 2007b. 'What's wrong with *aspiring* to find out what has really happened in academic feminism's recent past? Response to Clare Hemmings' 'Telling Feminist Stories'.' *Feminist Theory* 8(1): 59-67.
- Tsiolkas, Christos, Gideon Haigh and Alexis Wright. 2008. *Tolerance, Prejudice and Fear*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin.
- Turnbull, Nick. 2004. 'Rhetorical Agency as a Property of Questioning.' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37(3): 207-22.
- Valentine, Kylie. 1999. 'Thematic Reviews.' *Australian Feminist Studies* 14(29): 150-53.
- Valverde, Mariana. 1999. 'Identity Politics and the Law in the United States.' *Feminist Studies* 25(2): 345-61.
- Vance, Carol and Snitow, Ann Barr. 1984. 'Toward a Conversation about Sex in Feminism: A Modest Proposal.' *Signs* 10(1): 126-35.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. 2001. 'Multidisciplinary CDA: A Plea for Diversity.' In *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer. London: Sage Publications.
- Vicinus, Martha. 1992. '"They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity.' *Feminist Studies* 18(3): 467-97.
- Virtanen, Tuija. 2009. 'Discourse Linguistics Meets Corpus Linguistics: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in the Troubled Relationship.' In *Corpus Linguistics*:

- Refinements and Reassessments*, eds Antoinette Renouf and Andrew Kehoe. Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi.
- Walby, Sylvia. 2001. 'Against Epistemological Chasms: The Science Question in Feminism Revisited.' *Signs* 26(2): 485-509.
- Walklate, Sandra. 2003. 'Can There be a Feminist Victimology?.' In *Victimisation: Theory, Research and Policy*, eds. Pamela Davies, Peter Francis and Victor Jupp. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wallace, Jo-Ann. 1995. 'Fit and Qualified': The Equity Debate at the University of Alberta.' In *Beyond Political Correctness: Toward the Inclusive University*, eds Stephen Richer and Lorna Weir. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.
- Walter, Natasha. 1999. *The New Feminism*. London: Virago Press.
- Walter, Natasha. 2010. *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*. London: Virago Press.
- Walters, Suzanna Danuta. 1995. *Material Girls: Making Sense of Feminist Cultural Theory*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press.
- Walters, Margaret. 1998. 'American Gothic: Feminism, Melodrama and the Backlash.' In *Who's Afraid of Feminism?: Seeing Through the Backlash*, eds. Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Wark, McKenzie. 2001. 'Free Speech, Cheap Talk and the Virtual Republic.' In *The Retreat from Tolerance: A Snapshot of Australian Society*, ed. Phillip Adams. Sydney: ABC Books.
- Warner, Sam. 2001. 'Disrupting Identity Through Visible Therapy: A Feminist Post-structuralist Approach to Working with Women Who Have Experienced Child Sexual Abuse.' *Feminist Review* 68: 115-39.
- Warner, Sara L. 2004. 'The Medea Project: Mythic Theater for Incarcerated Women.' *Feminist Studies* 30(2): 483-509.
- Warren, Alice E. Colon. 2003. Puerto Rico: Feminism and Feminist Studies.' *Gender and Society* 17(5): 664-90.
- Watson, Julie. 2002. 'Charlotte Salomon's Memory Work in the 'Postscript' to 'Life? or Theatre?'. ' *Signs* 28(1): 409-20.
- Weedon, Chris. 1997. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Weir, Lorna. 1995. 'PC Then and Now: Resignifying Political Correctness.' In *Beyond Political Correctness: Toward the Inclusive University*, eds. Stephen Richer and Lorna Weir. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press.
- Weitz, Rose. 2001. 'Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power Through Resistance and Accommodation.' *Gender and Society* 15(5): 667-86.
- Wendell, Susan. 1990. 'Oppression and Victimization: Choice and Responsibility.' *Hypatia* 5(3): 15-46.
- White, Aaronette M. 1999. 'Talking Feminist, Talking Black: 'Micromobilization Processes in a Collective Protest against Rape.' *Gender and Society* 13(1): 77-100.
- Whitford, Margaret. 1991. 'Irigaray's Body Symbolic.' *Hypatia* 6(3): 97-110.
- Wilkinson, Sue, and Celia Kitzinger. 1993. 'Whose Breast is it Anyway? A Feminist Consideration of Advice and 'Treatment' for Breast Cancer.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(3): 229-38.
- Will, George F. 1991. 'Curdled Politics on Campus.' *Newsweek* 117(18): 72.
- Will, George F. 1992a. 'Literary Politics.' In *Beyond PC: Toward a Politics of Understanding*, ed Patricia Aufderheide. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press.

- Will, George F. 1992b. 'Radical English.' In *Debating P.C.: The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses*, ed. Paul Berman. New York: Dell Publishing.
- Williams, Christine L. 2002. 'Sexual Harassment and Sadomasochism.' *Hypatia* 17(2): 99-117.
- Williamson, David. 1996. 'Political Correctness.' *Sydney Papers* Autumn: 113-17.
- Willis, Ellen. 1994. 'Villains and Victims: 'Sexual Correctness' and the Repression of Feminism.' In *'Bad Girls, Good Girls': Women, Sex, and Power in the Nineties*, eds. Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Wilson, John K. 1995. *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Wilson, Kalpana. 2007. 'Agency.' In *The Impact of Feminism on Political Concepts and Debates*, eds. Georgina Blakeley and Valerie Bryson. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Wilson, Rebecca. 2009. 'Girls, this ain't equal.' *Advertiser*. 7 February. p.118.
- Windschuttle, Keith. 2001. 'September 11 and the End of Ideology.' *Quadrant* 45(12): 21-30.
- Winter, Bronwyn. 1994. 'Women, the Law, and Cultural Relativism in France: The Case of Excision.' *Signs* 19(4): 939-74.
- Winter, Bronwyn. 2000. 'Who counts (or doesn't count) what as feminist theory? An Exercise in Dictionary Use.' *Feminist Theory* 1(1): 105-11.
- Wodak, Ruth. 2001. 'The Discourse-historical Approach.' In *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer. London: Sage Publications.
- Wolf, Naomi. 1992. 'Feminist Fatale.' *New Republic* 206(11): 23-25.
- Wolf, Naomi. 1993. *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change The 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Wright, Rogers H. 2005. 'Introduction.' In *Destructive Trends in Mental Health: The Well-Intentioned Path to Harm*, eds. Rogers H. Wright and Nicholas A. Cummings. New York and Hove: Routledge.
- Wright, Rogers H. and Nicholas A. Cummings. eds. 2005. *Destructive Trends in Mental Health: The Well-Intentioned Path to Harm*. New York and Hove: Routledge.
- Yea, Sallie. 2005. 'Labour of Love: Filipina Entertainer's [sic] Narratives of Romance and Relationships with GIs in US Military Camp Towns in Korea.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 28: 456-72.
- Young, Amanda. 2008. 'Disciplinary Rhetorics, Rhetorical Agency, and the Construction of Voice.' In *Rhetoric in Detail*, eds. Barbara Johnstone and Christopher Eisenhart. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Young, Cathy. 1994. 'Untainted by Testosterone.' *Commentary* 98(3): 56-58.
- Young, Iris Marion. 1996. 'Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy.' In *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2002. *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1996. 'Women and the Biological Reproduction of 'The Nation'.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 19(1/2): 17-24.
- Zur, Ofer. 2005. 'The Psychology of Victimhood.' In *Destructive Trends in Mental Health: The Well-Intentioned Path to Harm*, eds. Rogers H. Wright and Nicholas A. Cummings. New York and Hove: Routledge.