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Feminist Inquiry

*From Political Conviction to
Methodological Innovation*

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Gender as an Analytic Category

Chapter 6

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO use gender as an analytic category? How is an analytic category different from a universal explanation? What kinds of innovative research questions are raised by the feminist deployment of gender as an analytic category? What exactly does gender explain? What is the relation between sex and gender, sexuality and gender, the ideology of procreation and gender? How does gender as an analytical tool produce new understandings of power? What theoretical assumptions are imported into feminist research by the adoption of gender as a central analytical category? Can the reliance upon gender as a research tool create problems for feminist analysis? If so, when and under what conditions do these problems arise? Are there strategies to circumvent troublesome theoretical underpinnings of gender while preserving the innovative areas of inquiry it enables?

This chapter investigates the development of gender as an analytical tool within feminist scholarship, tracing the transformation of the concept from a grammatical class to a descriptor of particular modes of embodiment to a research guide or "heuristic" that illuminates new questions for feminist inquiry. To probe the theoretical assumptions embedded in conceptions of gender, the chapter compares and contrasts methodological deployments of gender within phenomenology, deconstruction, dialectical materialism, and ethnomethodology. Tracing some troubling presuppositions that surface in these diverse theoretical accounts of gender, the chapter concludes with the identification of particular uses of gender that feminist researchers should avoid, if they hope to preserve the emancipatory impulse that inspired the development of gender as an analytical category.

Gender: From Grammar to Embodiment to Analytic Category

In every day usage, there are multiple meanings of the term, gender, but the most common connotation conflates gender with sex. The "natural attitude" (Garfinkel

1967) toward gender encompasses a series of "unquestionable" axioms about gender including the belief that there are two and only two genders; the belief that gender is invariant; the belief that genitals are the essential sign of gender; the belief that the male/female dichotomy is natural; the belief that being masculine or feminine is natural and not a matter of choice; and the belief that all individuals can (and must) be classified as masculine or feminine—any deviation from such a classification being either a joke or a pathology. According to Harold Garfinkel, the beliefs constituting the natural attitude are "incorrigible" in that they are held with such conviction that it is near impossible to challenge their validity (Garfinkel 1967, 122–128).

Over the past three decades, the concept of gender has undergone a metamorphosis within feminist scholarship. Although originally a linguistic category denoting a system of subdivision within a grammatical class (Corbett 1991), feminist scholars adopted the concept of gender to distinguish culturally specific characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity from biological features associated with sex (male and female chromosomes, hormones, as well as internal and external sexual and reproductive organs). In early feminist works gender was used to repudiate biological determinism by demonstrating the range of variation in cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity. In subsequent works gender has been used to analyze the social organization of relationships between men and women (Rubin 1975; Barrett 1980; MacKinnon 1987), to investigate the reification of human differences (Vetterling-Braggin 1982; Hawkesworth 1990b; Shanley and Parnman 1991), to conceptualize the semiotics of the body, sex, and sexuality (Sullie 1985; de Lauretis 1984; Silverman 1988; Doane 1987), to explain the distribution of burdens and benefits in society (Walby 1986; Connell 1987; Boneparth and Stoper 1988), to illustrate the microtechniques of power (de Lauretis 1987; Bartky 1988; Sawicki 1991), to illuminate the structure of the psyche (Chodorow 1978), and to account for individual identity and aspiration (Butler 1990; Epperson 1988).

Interdisciplinary feminist scholars have used the concept of gender in markedly different ways. Gender has been analyzed as an attribute of individuals (Bem 1974, 1983), as an interpersonal relation (Spelman 1988), and as a mode of social organization (Firestone 1970; Eisenstein 1979). Gender has been defined in terms of status (Lopata and Thorne 1978), sex roles (Epstein 1971; Janeway 1971; Amundsen 1971), and sexual stereotypes (Friedan 1963; Anderson 1983). It has been conceived as a structure of consciousness (Rowbotham 1973), as triangulated psyche (Chodorow 1978), and as internalized ideology (Barrett 1980; Grant 1993). It has been discussed as a product of attribution (Kessler and McKenna 1978), socialization (Gilligan 1982; Ruddick 1980), disciplinary practices (Butler 1990; Singer 1993), and accustomed stance (Devor 1989). Gender has been depicted as an effect of language (Spender 1980; Daly

1978), a matter of behavioral conformity (Epstein 1971; Amundsen 1971), a structural feature of labor, power, and cathexis (Connell 1987), and a mode of perception (Kessler and McKenna 1978; Bem 1993). Gender has been cast in terms of a binary opposition, variable and varying continua, and in terms of a layering of personality. It has been characterized both as difference (Irigaray 1985a, 1985b) and as relations of power manifested in domination and subordination (MacKinnon 1987; Gordon 1988). It has been construed in the passive mode of seriality (Young 1994) and in the active mode, either as a process creating interdependence (Levi-Strauss 1969, 1971; Smith 1992) or as an instrument of segregation and exclusion. (Davis 1981; Hill Collins 1990). Gender has been denounced as a prisonhouse (Connell and Thurschwell 1986) and embraced as inherently liberating (Irigaray 1985b; Smith 1992). It has been identified as a universal phenomenon (Lerner 1986) and as an historically specific consequence of modernity's increasing sexualization of women (Laqueur 1990; Riley 1988).

As the interpretations of gender have proliferated in feminist scholarship, a number of feminist scholars have raised questions about the utility of gender as an analytic category. Susan Bordo identified two currents fueling the emergence of a new "gender skepticism" (1993, 216). One current flows from the experiences of women of color and lesbian feminists who have suggested that the "multiple jeopardy" characteristic of their lives raises serious questions about the validity of gender generalizations. If gender is always mediated by race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation, then an analytical framework that isolates gender or construes gender in terms of an "additive model" is seriously flawed and may serve only to mask the numerous privileges of white, middle-class feminists who have the luxury of experiencing only one mode of oppression. (Spelman 1988; King 1988; Higginbotham 1992; Brewer 1993). The second current flows from postmodern criticism which depicts gender narratives as totalizing fictions that create a false unity out of heterogeneous elements. In addition to questioning the binary opposition that fixes men and women in permanent relations of domination and subordination, postmodern critics have also challenged the "ground" of the sex/gender distinction. If gender was devised to illuminate the social construction of masculinity and femininity and naively took the sexed body as given, then it has little to offer in a postmodern world that understands the body, sex, and sexuality as socially constructed.

Acknowledging the importance of the issues raised by women of color, lesbian-feminists, and postmodern-feminists, several feminist scholars have offered a defense of feminist uses of gender; they suggest that a sophisticated conception of gender can incorporate the central points made by these critics. In an important and influential essay, Joan Scott defines gender as a concept involving two interrelated but analytically distinct parts. "Gender is a constitutive element

of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (1986, 1067). In explicating gender as a constitutive element of social relationships, Scott emphasizes that gender operates in multiple fields, including culturally available symbols that evoke multiple representations, normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of symbols, social institutions and organizations, and subjective identities (1067-1068). According to Scott, gender is a useful category of analysis because it "provides a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction" (1070). Noting that gender is always contextually defined and repeatedly constructed, Scott cautions that gender analysts must not replicate the mistakes of early feminist accounts which credited gender as a universal causal force. On the contrary, gender analysts must seek a "genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference" (1065). Scott demonstrates that problematic theoretical assumptions informing radical feminism, Marxist feminism, and psychoanalytic feminism gave rise to a variety of misapplications of gender as an analytic category, all of which resulted in ahistorical analyses, oversimplified and reductive explanations, universal generalizations impervious to change in history, exclusive fixation on the "subject," and to restrictive foci on the family or the household. Such flaws need not be endemic to gender analysis, however. Indeed, Scott argues that a self-critical deployment of gender analysis could provide meaningful explanations of historically and culturally specific relations obtaining between individual subjects and modes of social organization. If feminist scholars examine "how things happened in order to find out why they happened" (1067), then their analytical investigations will enable them to reverse and displace the binary and hierarchical construction of gender by refuting the naive belief that gender "is real or self-evident or in the nature of things" (1066).

Sandra Harding has also advanced a defense of gender as an analytic category. "The fact that there are class, race, and cultural differences between women and between men is not, as some have thought, a reason to find gender difference either theoretically unimportant or politically irrelevant. In virtually every culture, gender difference is a pivotal way in which humans identify themselves as persons, organize social relations, and symbolize meaningful natural and social events and processes" (1986, 18). The very pervasiveness of gender requires systematic feminist analysis. Thus Harding argues that feminists must theorize gender; they must conceive it as "an analytic category within which humans think about and organize their social activity rather than as a natural consequence of sex difference, or even merely as a social variable assigned to individual people in different ways from culture to culture" (17). Recognizing that gender appears only in culturally specific forms in no way mitigates the force of gender analysis. On the contrary, gender as an analytic category illuminates crucial cultural

processes. "Gendered social life is produced through three distinct processes: it is the result of assigning dualistic gender metaphors to various perceived dichotomies that rarely have anything to do with sex differences (gender symbolism); it is the consequence of appealing to these gender dualisms to organize social activity, dividing necessary social activities between different groups of humans (gender structure); it is a form of socially constructed individual identity only imperfectly correlated with either the reality or the perception of sex differences (individual gender)" (17-18). According to Harding, feminist investigations of gender symbolism, gender structure, and individual gender challenge the basic presuppositions of the natural attitude, thereby helping to dispel essentialized identities, while creating the possibility of a politics grounded in solidarities that cross the divisions of race, class, age, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation.

The defense of gender as an analytic category advanced by Scott and Harding suggests that the concerns of gender skeptics can be incorporated into a sophisticated conception of gender. Their defense also tends to mute concern about the multiplicity of meanings accorded gender in contemporary feminist scholarship. For they provide a coherent account of the intricate connections linking psyche to social organization, social roles to cultural symbols, normative beliefs to "the experience" of the body and sexuality. Indeed, they suggest that feminist research into such connections can undermine the mistaken beliefs informing the natural attitude. Thus their defense also provides a bridge linking feminist scholarship to feminist politics outside the academy. Feminist research designed to confound gender provides the analytic tools to loosen the strictures of the natural attitude and the oppressive social relations that the natural attitude legitimates.

Are Scott and Harding correct about the potential of gender as an analytic category? Can gender be deployed as an analytical tool that escapes (or dispels) the natural attitude? Can attention to the historicity of gender enable feminists to avoid universal causal claims, grand narratives, and totalizing accounts? How does the use of gender as an analytic category fit in with a thorough-going understanding of the social construction of the body?

To explore these questions, this chapter investigates four systematic efforts to deploy gender as an analytic category. Steven Smith's *Gender Thinking* (1992), Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), R. W. Connell's *Gender and Power* (1987), and Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna's *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Account* (1978). These four works are the most ambitious efforts that I have found to theorize gender in ways that connect psyche, self, and social relations. They also represent some major methodological approaches (phenomenology, postmodern deconstruction, dialectical materialism, ethnomethodology) currently vying for the allegiance of feminist scholars. Each account casts itself as a

systematic, feminist analysis of gender. Each examines the multiple domains of gender, ranging across cultural symbols, normative concepts, social institutions, and subjective identities. Each conforms to Scott's directive to focus on *how* in order to explain *why* gender works. Each starts from the premise that the body is socially constituted and culturally mediated. And each advances arguments that challenge fundamental presuppositions of the natural attitude. Emerging from and drawing upon different methodological traditions, each advances a markedly different explanation of gender. Yet, despite the richness and diversity of these accounts, each also constructs a tale of gender that is markedly unsettling.

Despite important differences in their approaches to and their conceptions of gender, these works construct a narrative that implicates gender in the "ideology of procreation," a conception of sexuality that reduces the erotic to reproduction (Barrett 1980, 62-77). In so doing, these texts illuminate presuppositions that replicate rather than undermine the natural attitude. That such troubling presuppositions surface in accounts of gender that grow out of very different theoretical projects should be of concern to feminist scholars, for the presuppositions that structure this narrative of gender stand in stark contrast to the emancipatory project of feminist scholarship. Excavating the assumptions in these works, then, can help to identify the danger points in certain deployments of gender, dangers that arise in a subtle shift from using gender as analytic tool to attributing to gender explanatory force. Interrogating the conceptual tools of feminist inquiry can help feminist scholars avoid these potential pitfalls. I offer this analysis in an effort to mark the dangers that lurk in uncritical deployments of gender as a mode of universal explanation, rather than as an analytic category. The next section explores the meaning of gender as an analytic category and introduces a number of conceptual distinctions that feminists have developed to challenge assumptions of the natural attitude toward gender.

Mapping the Conceptual Terrain

What does it mean to use gender as an analytic category? Neither Scott nor Harding explicitly addresses this question, but both seem to use the term in a semitechnical sense drawn from the philosophy of science. In this sense, an analytic category can be understood as a heuristic device that performs both positive and negative functions in a research program (Lakatos 1970). As a "positive heuristic," gender illuminates an area of inquiry by framing a set of questions for investigation. It need not (although it may) involve any explicit methodological commitment, merely identifying puzzles or problems in need of exploration or clarification, but it does provide concepts, definitions, and hypotheses to guide research. By demonstrating in their own work, the intricate interrelations of symbol systems, normative precepts, social structures, and subjective identities

subsumed under gender's rubric, Scott and Harding invite other scholars to probe these diverse domains to discover how culturally specific gender relations are created, sustained, and transformed. The very notion of a positive heuristic is tentative, which suggests a trial-and-error method of problem solving requiring the collective efforts of multiple scholars to advance the field. But the notion of a "negative heuristic" developed by Imre Lakatos also suggests a shared set of assumptions so central to a mode of analysis that they cannot be jettisoned (1970, 132). Given gender's original meaning in feminist discourse and the frequency with which feminist scholars reiterate this goal, the negative heuristic of gender analysis could be "to contest the naturalization of sex differences in multiple arenas of struggle" (Haraway 1991b, 131). The use of gender as an analytic category then would be intimately bound up with challenges to the natural attitude.

The terminology developed within feminist discourses on gender certainly suggests the centrality of efforts to challenge the natural attitude. Feminist scholars have introduced a number of important distinctions to illuminate the complexity of gender: sex, sexuality, sexual identity, gender identity, gender role, gender role identity. Virtually all scholars working in the field employ some of these distinctions; although all scholars do not use the terms in the same way. Sex, for example, can refer to biological features such as chromosomes, hormones, internal and external sexual and reproductive organs or to acts romantically characterized as love-making. Gender identity typically refers to the individual's own feeling of being a man or a woman, but this "feeling" may be defined in a rudimentary sense as having a conviction that one's sex assignment at birth was "anatomically and psychologically correct" (Stoller 1985, 11) or more expansively as a patterned subjectivity that bears some relation to cultural conceptions of masculinity/femininity. It should be noted that what is meant by "identity" in this formulation can also mean markedly different things. It can mean a psychological sense of "who I am," a sociological notion of a person qua agent prior to assuming specific social roles, a Foucauldian concept that captures an array of regulatory practices to produce the internal coherence of the subject, a philosophical concern with the individuation and unity of a person in the face of change, or a narrative construction the individual develops to make sense of his/her life.

Although usage varies from text to text, most feminist scholars would grant that there are important conceptual differences between sex construed in biological terms; sexuality understood to encompass sexual practices and erotic behavior; sexual identity referring to designations such as heterosexual, homosexual/gay/lesbian/queer, bisexual, or asexual; gender identity as a psychological sense of oneself as a man or a woman; gender role as a set of prescriptive, culture-specific expectations about what is appropriate for men and women; and gender

role identity—a concept devised to capture the extent to which a person approves and participates in feelings and behaviors deemed to be appropriate to his/her culturally constituted gender (Kessler and McKenna 1978, 7–11; Barrett 1980, 42–79). This terminology provides the analytic vocabulary that enables feminist scholars to challenge the natural attitude. Consider the distinction between gender identity and gender role identity, for example, which admits of the possibility that one can have a clear sense of oneself as a woman (or a man) while being thoroughly disaffected from and refusing participation in prevailing conceptions of femininity (or masculinity). This distinction breaks any connection between masculinity/femininity and sexed bodies by interpreting masculinity and femininity as culture-specific abstractions notoriously plagued by gender symbolism that mark a chasm between romanticized ideal and lived experience, attributed and actual, propaganda and practice.

Once feminists introduce conceptual distinctions that differentiate sex, sexuality, sexual identity, gender identity, gender role, and gender role identity, then critical questions emerge: What do these phenomena have to do with one another? How are they related? How do their complex interrelations pertain to gender as lived experience? The natural attitude postulates sex as the determinant of gender identity that flows naturally into a particular mode of (hetero)sexuality and that mandates certain rational gender roles embraced happily by individuals with uniformly positive gender role identities. In keeping with the negative heuristic of gender as an analytic category, feminist scholars have challenged each of these posited relations. Drawing upon linguistics, historical analysis, structuralism, deconstruction, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, phenomenology, existential and cognitive psychology, as well as dialectical materialism, feminists have advanced a variety of accounts not only of the relations that obtain among these diverse domains but also of how such complex social processes are naturalized. The following section examines four feminist accounts of the facticity of gender, which move from use of gender as an analytic category to an explanation of gender as lived experience.

Complementarity Models

GENDER WITHIN A FUNCTIONALIST FRAME

Gender initially existed as a grammatical category. Some attention to linguistics then may help illuminate the concept's appeal to feminist scholars. Etymologically, gender derives from the Latin, *genus*, via old French, *gendre*, roughly translated as "kind" or "sort." Designated "the most puzzling of grammatical categories, . . . genders are classes of nouns reflected in the behavior of associated words" (Corbett 1991, 1). Gender is puzzling for linguists precisely because it is not universal or invariant. In some languages gender is central and pervasive,

while in others it is totally absent. Corbett's examination of more than two hundred languages revealed that "the number of genders is not limited to three; four is common, and twenty is possible" (5). As the proliferation of genders in specific languages makes clear, gender need not have anything to do with sex. "In some languages, gender marks the distinction masculine/feminine/nonsexed; but in other languages the divisions animate/inanimate, human/nonhuman, rational/nonrational, male human/other, strong/weak, augmentative/diminutive, male/other, female/other function exactly as does the division into male/female" (Corbett 1991, 30). As the etymology suggests, grammatical gender is based on a wide range of "kinds" including "insects, non-flesh food, liquids, canines, hunting weapons, items whose lustrous surfaces reflect light. . . . The worldview of the speakers determines the categories" (Corbett 1991, 30–32). Given the enormous range of grammatical genders, the determining criterion of gender is agreement: genders are distinguished syntactically by the agreements they take. In some languages, adjectives and verbs show agreement; in others, adverbs, numerals and even conjunctions agree; but in all cases agreement is the way in which the genders are reflected in the behavior of associated words (Corbett 1991, 5).

Gender's conceptual appeal for feminists is closely tied to its versatility in linguistics. As a linguistic construction, the cultural origins and historicity of gender are unmistakable. Gender's relation to the belief systems of determinate peoples frees it from the specter of biological determinism. Moreover, linguistic gender is not inherently enmeshed in binary opposition. Yet another facet of gender's linguistic legacy should give feminists pause. If feminists were to draw an explicit analogy from grammatical gender, then they would conceive genders as categories of persons constituted in and through the behavior of associated others by emphasizing that the relevant behavior involves concord or harmony. Although this aspect of the grammatical heritage is seldom acknowledged in feminist accounts of gender, notions of agreement, harmony, complementarity surface obliquely and problematically in numerous feminist accounts of gender. Indeed, a close reading of some of the most intricate and sophisticated recent accounts of gender reveals that notions of agreement or complementarity form the secret core of the authors' efforts to explain gender and to use gender to explain other social relations. Explanations of this sort situate gender in a functionalist frame. Within this frame, gender is depicted as a cultural construct devised to promote particular social functions that bear a marked resemblance to the presuppositions of the natural attitude.

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF GENDER

Perhaps the most explicit version of this view can be found in Steven C. Smith's phenomenology of gender, *Gender Thinking* (1992). A philosopher steeped in

the continental tradition, Smith argues that an accurate analysis of gender must begin with an explication of the "life world," the fundamental structures of consciousness: "The first false move . . . is the identification of gender with sex, or sex-as-socially constructed, or sex role, when in fact ordinary talk of 'feminine' and 'masculine' is not necessarily or even most often about any of these things but instead has to do typically with intentional qualities and indeed, ideals" (xiv). Thus Smith seeks to illuminate how gender operates in the life world.

Defining gender as a "conventional formation of a plastic humanity," Smith describes "gendering as a cultural process: a cultivation of human nature determined by the vicissitudes of early childhood and the customs of one's community" (15). Rather than invoking the metaphor of cultivation to imply growth or development, Smith uses the term to convey the imposition of certain constraints on human potential. Thus he suggests that gendering "qualifies" our humanity. Indeed, it is one of two critical social forces that shape human potential. "Humanity is a generic nature that stands in two chains of mutually qualifying categories, one physical (which includes sex) and the other intentional (which includes gender)" (23). Physical and intentional constraints admit of a range of differentiation, hence the phenomenon of individuality, but according to Smith, there are "limits to our plasticity, to the range of differentiations possible" (27). On Smith's view, "there are observable human phenomena that give definite shape to our openness" (25), and sex is perhaps the most powerful of these limits. "The sexes have the status of physical fact, almost always instantly and unproblematically ostensible" (46). Although he refers to "the sexes" as almost unproblematically ostensible, Smith acknowledges that culture shapes what is perceived as a body. Through "embodiment," "the community stipulates what counts as a male/female body, what life will be like in a male/female body in relation to other bodies, what norms (and latitudes) of character and conduct are associated with these bodies, and who is male and female" (91). When culture takes up the task of molding human nature, then, its aim is to enhance its own construction of what is naturally given, to mark sex differentiations through language, character, roles. For this reason, gender always entails a "dual reference to sex and character for purposes of description and evaluation" (36).

For Smith, language is paradigmatic of the cultural desire to mark sex differences. "In grammar, genders are sex-related systems of syntactical concord . . . Human genders also work as systems of concord in so far as distinctive ways of speaking and acting are assigned to persons of different sexes" (43). Smith's mistaken claim that grammatical gender is exclusively sex-related enables him to suggest that the core content of the human gender system is not chosen but given. "Human gender schemes possess centers of meaning in (what are taken to be) sexed bodies" (44). Thus, cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity are not arbitrary. They are rooted in sex, which in turn has its own "center of

meaning rooted in reproduction: woman as egg-producer; man as sperm producer" (46). Starting with an overly restrictive account of grammatical gender, Smith links gender to sex to reproduction and hence to heterosexuality. "Confronting sex differences makes me realize that I need a partner to reproduce. . . . A gendered being teams with other gendered beings" (71, 55).

Smith's claim that gender merely marks differences and meanings given by sexed bodies does not rest comfortably with his acknowledgment of how much work gendering involves. He notes that "we are continually subjected to gender attributions in all phases of our lives and that this gendering scheme has more orienting force for most of us, most of the time, than any other human differentiation" (36). Gender involves a "fundamental shaping of selfhood" that produces not only differences in "attunement and appreciativeness" but also "a normative solicitation of our intentions" and "an already granted permission to think, feel, act, and appear in ways that everyone does not and cannot" (53, 55, 184). Lifelong subjection to such gendering makes the experiences of the genders partly incommensurable. Smith suggests that gender both "marks the limit of comprehension" between men and women and yet gives these gendered beings a reason to live together: "Gender's normative force consists of nothing other than its ability to answer the life-interpreting question of how intenders should live together" (53, 56). Gender creates sex-specific experience and cognition, makes men and women mysteries to each other, and thereby inculcates a desire for cohabitation. For it is the culturally constructed incommensurability that enables men and women to regard each other as complementary (80). Hence genders constitute "generic realities . . . complementary kinds of a kind" (49, 52).

Why does culture engage in the double effort to differentiate bodies through embodiment and gendering? If the center of sexual meaning is unproblematically reproduction, why is this double effort necessary? Smith's response is reminiscent of Levi-Strauss. "Culture and gender are both normative organizations of intention binding the group together" (68). Gender as "a culturally-engineered central meaning with a culturally-influenced physical base" is necessary because certain "functions (e.g., childbearing and fighting) are necessary and require that our lives be substantially adapted to them" (69, 73). Underlying the cultural creation of complementarity is the species demand for survival. "Since men and women have significantly different reproductive risks and opportunities in evolutionary terms, their guiding sex-related emotions must be sex-differentiated, that is, there must be different female and male sexual natures" (124). In a somewhat bizarre inversion of sociobiological premises, Smith suggests that species reproduction requires sexual differentiation; therefore, culture creates that differentiation to insure the perpetuation of the species but masks its role by attributing the original difference to sex itself. Hence, "heterosexuality's postulated

union of male and female specializations is the basic premise of the gender system" (80).

Returning to the theme of concord, Smith concludes his analysis by legitimating the cultural creation of difference with an appeal to a classical conception of the "natural." "Gender dualizing is humanly natural, if nature means that which satisfies conditions of harmonious adjustment. The adjustment in question is humans to themselves. Because humanity is a social reality, it has to be balanced within itself; the category of complementarity is bound to be invoked in the self-interpretation of beings who form their own environment. . . . Reciprocal dependency may take a number of forms, but duality is a preferred principle for elaborating such forms because of the nature of the problem of balancing" (247-248).

From a feminist perspective, the shortcomings of Smith's account of the intricate connections between sex, sexuality, gender, and gender role are numerous. He develops an enormously complex phenomenological analysis of "gender thinking" only to vindicate the natural attitude. Like Levi-Strauss (1969, 1971), Smith accepts a conception of culture as an elaborate mechanism devised to create interdependence and cooperation in the reproduction of the species. Yet culture's mission in inducing complementarity makes sense only if one presupposes an atomistic, asocial, or even antisocial conception of human nature, a conception with strong ties to capitalist ideology, but little validity as universal description. Smith tries to mask the inadequacy of his conceptions of culture and human nature by repeated references to sex construed in terms of "natural kinds," but none of the typical correlates of sex conform to the demands of that classification. Within philosophical discourses, a natural kind refers to a category that exists independent of the observer and that can be defined in terms of an essence, a set of properties common to all members of the kind. Feminist scholarship has repudiated the notion of any sexual essence precisely because "there are no behavioral or physical characteristics that always and without exception are true only of one gender" (Kessler and McKenna 1978, 1). Chromosomes, hormones, sperm production, and egg production, all fail to differentiate all men from all women or to provide a common core within each sex. "No matter how detailed an investigation science has thus far made, it is still not possible to draw a clear dividing line even between male and female" (Devor 1989, 1). If one moves from the natural sciences to the social sciences, efforts to identify behavioral differences that conform to the definition of a natural kind have again ended in failure. Attitudinal and behavioral "sex differences" attributed to men and women are mired in gender symbolism. Indicators of "biologically based femininity" typically include interest in weddings and marriage, preference for marriage over career, interest in infants and children, and enjoyment of childhood play with dolls. While indicators of "biologically based masculinity" include

high activity levels, self-assurance, and a preference for career over marriage (Devor 1989, 11-15). Psychological inventories of masculinity and femininity have fallen prey to the misogynist tendency to define socially valued traits as male (logical, self-confident, ambitious, decisive, knows way around world) and less valued characteristics as female (talkative, gentle, sensitive to others' feelings, interest in appearance, strong need for security) (Devor 1989, 32). Even with all the cultural bias built into such studies, they have not been able to clearly differentiate men and women in the cultures that produced them. "Normal femininity" of the psychological test variety may actually be a rare commodity. In one study of college-aged females, only 15 percent of the heterosexual sample tested as feminine on a widely accepted sex role inventory. The remaining 85 percent scored as either masculine or as some combination of masculine and feminine" (Devor 1989, 15). Differences cast in terms of averages, tendencies, and percentages do not meet the criteria of a natural kind. Nor do such cultural characterizations of masculinity and femininity constitute clear manifestations of "complementarity." If gender is to be judged by the standard Smith sets for it, the creation of reciprocal dependence, then much contemporary evidence (divorce rates, out-of-wedlock births, levels of domestic violence, numbers of "deadbeat dads") suggests that it fails dismally in its mission.

The main virtue of Smith's account is its graphic illustration of how gender, a category specifically devised to avoid biological determinism, covertly invokes the very biological ground it set out to repudiate. Smith's account, like many feminist analyses, like the natural attitude itself, operates within the confines of a "base/superstructure" model of the sex/gender distinction (Connell 1987, 50; Laqueur 1990, 124). Within this model, the body is assumed to provide the raw material which culture can refine in various, but limited ways. Gender is assumed to be "hard-wired," at least, in part. The presumed naturalness (understood as the absence of force or coercion) of gender turns on that presumption of hard-wiring. Thus discussions of gender seldom move far beyond presuppositions concerning inherent sex differences. R.W. Connell has attempted to explain this recurrent problem in feminist accounts of gender by suggesting that in our culture "the notion of natural sex difference forms a limit beyond which thought cannot go" (1987, 66). Similarly, Holly Devor describes biological determinism as the dominant cognitive schema in North America, that is, as the conceptual structure that organizes social experience on the basis of shared understandings (1989, 45-46). Thomas Laqueur (1990), Mary Poovey (1988), and Ludmilla Jorlanova (1989) have provided fascinating accounts of the emergence of the base/superstructure model of gender since the seventeenth century. According to Laqueur, "It is a sign of modernity to ask for a single, consistent biology as the source or foundation for masculinity and femininity" (61). Whatever the "cause" of this tendency toward biological determinism, it is an impossible ground for

feminist accounts of gender. As Smith's account makes clear, appeal to a biological ground traps gender in "the ideology of procreation," which construes sexuality and erotic practices only in relation to reproduction (Barratt 1980, 62-77), according women an essential maternal role mandated by culture and nature—a role undifferentiated by race, ethnicity, nationality, age, class, sexual orientation, or any mode of individuality.

Is there any escape from the base/superstructure model of the sex/gender distinction? Must feminist scholars incorporate functionalist assumptions about culture in their conceptions of gender? Although references to "limits beyond which thought cannot go" or to "dominant cognitive schemas" suggest quite pessimistic responses to these questions, attempts to locate the base/superstructure model of gender in the politics of modernity offer more optimistic possibilities. If this problematic conception of gender is rooted in modernity, then a post-modern feminist strategy specifically devised to abandon all binary oppositions should afford a conception of gender that escapes the traps of biological determinism. An examination of Judith Butler's complex and innovative analysis of gender in *Gender Trouble* may be instructive then in revealing the prospects for a feminist conception of gender beyond the functionalist frame.

A POSTMODERN INTERPRETATION OF GENDER

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) sets out to explain how the "naturalness" of sex, sexuality, and gender are "constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex" (x). She cautions at the outset that "being' a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible" (18). The binary oppositions male/female and masculine/feminine are incompatible with the continuous variability of human characteristics, constructing a false opposition between "the sexes" and an artificial coherence within each term of the binary. Stereotypical genders, then, must be understood as "ontological locales that are fundamentally uninhabitable" (146). Rejecting the "old dream of symmetry," Butler argues that gender must be understood, not as a noun, nor as a set of attributes, but as a "doing," a performative that constitutes the identity that it purports to be (24).

According to Butler, gender is the process that constructs the internal coherence of sex, (hetero)sexual desire, and (hetero)sexual practice within the modern subject. Gender is the mechanism that produces a notion of a "pre-social body" shaped by culture. And it provides the standard of intelligibility for persons that informs both the naturalistic paradigm and the authentic-expressive paradigm of the self. "Gender is the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (7). Gender performs this work of naturalization through the "stylized repetition of actions through

time" (141). The natural attitude is produced through the repetition of words, acts, and gestures. The sheer weight of these repetitions leads the actor to believe in and act in the mode of belief. Gender functions, then, as a regulatory fiction, "a fabrication, a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies" (136). Becoming gendered is a laborious process; bringing the self into belief in the natural attitude is arduous; yet the intensity of effort and the power relations that produce this effect are hidden by the very "naturalization" at the core of the gendering process.

Butler's account reverses the direction of causality presumed by the natural attitude: "gender designates the apparatus of production whereby sexes are established" (7). But Butler insists that gender itself is the effect of specific formations of power, of institutions, practices, and discourses that establish and regulate its shape and meaning. What practices produce gender? Butler identifies phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality as the discursive sites that produce gender. "The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine' understood as expressive attributes of 'female' and 'male'" (17). Like Smith, Butler appeals to the cultural creation of complementarity qua heterosexuality as the ultimate explanans of gender. Her route to this conclusion, however, is markedly different, relying upon a critical rereading of Freud and Lacan.

The incest taboo plays a central role in psychoanalytic accounts of the individual's relation to culture/civilization. It has been advanced as an explanation of the cost that civilization exacts from individuals in return for life-enhancing artifacts, as an explanation of the primary repression through which the individual enters culture, and as an explanation of the formation of gender identity. Butler suggests that the incest taboo itself naturalizes heterosexuality and masculine sexual agency. Through a close reading of Freud's discussion of the "sexual dispositions" that frame the Oedipal conflict, Butler demonstrates that the incest taboo that fuels the Oedipal conflict makes no sense without a prior prohibition of homosexuality. On Butler's reading, Freud's "polymorphous perversity" itself turns on a truncated conception of bisexuality. "The conceptualization of bisexuality in terms of *dispositions*, feminine and masculine, which have heterosexual aims as their intentional correlates, suggests that for Freud *bisexuality* is the *coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche*. . . . Within Freud's thesis of primary bisexuality, there is no homosexuality, and only opposites attract" (60-61, italics in the original). The absence of homosexuality in Freud's account attests to the power of culture's original prohibition. Culture produces two prohibitions that regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality: the first is the taboo against homosexuality, and the second is the taboo against incest. "The prohibitive law both produces sexuality in the form of 'dispositions' and appears disingenuously at a later point in time to transform these ostensibly 'natural'

dispositions into culturally acceptable structures of exogamic kinship" (64). Butler notes that the law qua prohibition is also productive: it creates that which it prohibits. Thus homosexuality and bisexuality cannot be understood as either "before" or "outside" culture, for they too are constructed within the terms of the constitutive discourse. "If the incest taboo regulates the production of discrete gender identities, and if that production requires the prohibition and sanction of homosexuality, then homosexuality emerges as a desire which must be produced in order to remain repressed. In other words, for homosexuality to remain intact as a distinct social form, it requires an intelligible conception of homosexuality and also requires the prohibition of that conception in rendering it culturally unintelligible" (77).

Butler's account of the formation of gender identity illustrates the complex relations of prohibition, production, and naturalization. Drawing upon Freud's notion of melancholia, a process of identification through which the ego incorporates attributes of a lost loved one to minimize the pain of the loss, Butler construes gender identity as a kind of melancholia. The incest taboo's prohibition of the maternal body triggers an identification with the prohibited object. Abjuring the language of internalization, Butler suggests the process of identification is better understood as a mode of incorporation or "encrypting." As a technical psychological term, incorporation refers to an "antimetaphorical activity [that] literalizes the loss on or in the body and so appears as the facticity of the body, the means by which the body comes to bear 'sex' at its literal truth. The localization and/or prohibition of pleasures and desires in given 'erotogenic' zones is precisely the kind of gender-differentiating melancholy that suffuses the body's surface" (68). The incest taboo's prohibition produces gender identity as a process that minimizes loss through identification's complex disavowal of loss. The systemativity of this disavowal erodes the conditions of metaphorical signification resulting in encrypting, a literalizing fantasy that deadens the body, even as it masks its genealogy, producing a body experienced as "natural fact." Becoming a gender is becoming naturalized. The taboo against homosexuality in conjunction with the taboo against incest differentiates bodily parts and pleasures on the basis of gendered meanings, as melancholia deadens some organs to pleasure and brings others to life (68-70).

Butler's psychoanalytic account accords primacy to compulsory heterosexuality both as an explanation of culture's production of complementarity and as an explanation of gender's production of a naturalized body. Where Smith endorses cultural mechanisms that "harmonize" human relations and foster social integration, Butler denounces the modes of power that produce homosexuality as necessary, yet prohibited; within culture, yet marginalized. Butler is careful to note that homosexual/heterosexual is itself a problematic discursive formation, a binary relation premised upon a false opposition and a fraudulent unity within

each term of that binary. Indeed, in criticizing Monique Wittig's radical disjunction between homosexuality and heterosexuality, Butler insists that there are "structures of psychic homosexuality within heterosexual relations, and structures of heterosexuality within gay and lesbian sexuality and relationships" (121). And in criticizing Lacan, Butler cautions against totalizing conceptions of identity that follow from too efficacious and univocal a conception of "the Law." She calls instead for a recognition that "multiple and coexisting identifications produce conflicts, convergences, and innovative dissonances within gender configurations which contest the fixity of masculine and feminine placements with respect to the paternal law" (67). The very possibility of such multiple identifications are central to Butler's strategy for confounding gender. Arguing that power can never be escaped, only redeployed, Butler endorses parody as a tactic designed to subvert "the real" or the "sexually factic." Strategies of subversive repetition can dispel belief in the illusions of the "natural" body/desire/sexuality, thereby rendering gender incredible (141, 146).

As a postmodern critic, Butler's genealogy of gender is designed to probe what is left out of discursive formations that construe sex/gender/desire as natural. She points out that homosexuality as a legitimate mode of sexuality is omitted from naturalistic accounts. Given the pervasiveness and persistence of the natural attitude, it makes sense to attribute its production to powerful cultural forces. In Butler's analysis, gender as performativity becomes the cultural force that produces belief in the naturalness of heterosexuality. Gender is no longer an analytical tool used to illuminate a variety of asymmetries in culture, but rather the process that naturalizes and justifies a particular asymmetry. The "effect of compulsory heterosexuality," gender reproduces a "natural" heterosexual world.

Why does gender act as such a helpful handmaiden of her progenitor (rather than as a rebellious adolescent)? Butler's response is telling: "gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end, the term strategy better suggests the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs. Hence, as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (139). Butler's first formulation casts gender in the service of cultural survival. This does not explain why gender performs its designated cultural function, it merely redescribes the function. The second formulation, gender as a strategy of survival within a compulsory system, suggests that gender must perform its function to avoid punishment, a punishment presumably imposed by culture. But why does culture insist upon heterosexuality? In a discourse that explicitly eschews any sociobiological explanation, the options seem to be limited to either a simple notion that culture is a self-replicating system (begging the question of the origin of the cultural preference for heterosexuality) or a Freudian notion that renunciation of homosexual desire is the sublimation that civilization demands. The first option follows from Butler's

characterization of gender as performativity, yet it has conservative implications Butler is unlikely to embrace. Butler defines performativity as repetition of words, acts, gestures. This definition is virtually indistinguishable from J.G.A. Pocock's conception of tradition, "an indefinite series of repetitions of an action," introduced both to vindicate the authority of tradition and to eliminate unhelpful and potentially destabilizing queries about origins (1973, 237). Such a conservative project is diametrically opposed to Butler's stated objectives as a genealogist. If Butler's account of gender is not to fall prey to a static conception of cultural self-replication, then her appeal to "cultural survival" must be interpreted in a Freudian vein. Sexuality is offered as the explanans of culture.

Butler's analysis drives a wedge between sex and sexuality, thereby avoiding biological determinism. The belief that sexuality "follows" from sex can be understood only as a relation of political entailment. But what is required to understand culture as "following" from compulsory heterosexuality? Can all of culture's complex domains plausibly be construed as emanating from or mandated by compulsory heterosexuality? Butler tends to conflate culture with phallogocentrism thereby privileging the Symbolic system over science, industry, engineering, or other more palpable cultural constructs. Phallogocentrism captures feminist concerns about male domination in history and culture, but it does so at an exacting cost. For by construing culture in terms of a Symbolic system that itself privileges the Phallus, Butler perpetuates women's invisibility, underestimating their role as cocreators of culture and miring them in victimization. Phallogocentrism fails to provide a sufficiently exhaustive account of culture. Moreover, it indulges a form of anthropomorphism that sustains discussions of what might be called "the cunning of culture" (Tucker 1974), the ingenious means by which culture insures its own survival through the production of organizational practices and structures independent of the needs or intentions of individuals. Such a reification makes culture appear at once omniscient, seamless, and unassailable, a markedly unhelpful point of departure for those aspiring to feminist transformation. There is also a certain irony in Butler's positing of compulsory heterosexuality as the explanans of culture. Foucault cautioned against the trap of conceiving sex (qua sexuality) as the secret of being, suggesting that such beliefs implicate the subject in ever deeper modes of subjugation. It is unlikely that a Foucauldian gesturing toward sexuality as the secret of culture can escape that trap.

What does Butler's discursive construction of gender leave out? By interpreting gender in terms of the cultural production of heterosexual desire and psychoanalytic production of gender identity, Butler's account makes gender too much a matter of the self—a self that appears peculiarly unmarked by race, class, ethnicity, or nationality. Her account privatizes gender, restricting the utility of the concept. Butler's conception offers little prospect for unraveling gender symbolism

or for addressing gender structures beyond the psyche. The operation of gender in social, political, and economic institutions disappears as the psychodrama of the desiring self is played out. This occlusion of gender as an organizational feature of social life that is itself mediated by race and class may explain why Butler's reliance on parody as a transformative mechanism rings so hollow. While parody might help subvert the naturalization of desire, it is unlikely to make inroads against the economic and political forces that circumscribe women's lives.

Butler's postmodern account of gender succeeds in escaping biological determinism, but it still proffers a functionalist explanation of gender. Moreover in positing heterosexuality as the explanans of culture, Butler's account of gender comes far too close to Smith's account for comfort. Allusions to compulsory heterosexuality do nothing to dispel the ideology of reproduction that sustains the natural attitude. Despite the virtuosity of Butler's account of gender as performativity, it does not provide a conception of gender that breaks definitively from the problematic presuppositions of the ideology of procreation.

A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER

R.W. Connell's *Gender and Power* (1987), which blends strains of Marxism, essentialism, and poststructuralism in developing its account of gender, is richly deserving of close examination. Connell advances a "systematic social theory of gender" that strives to account for the historicity of gender, the dynamic role of gender in economic, political, sexual and psychological domains, the relation between personal agency and social structure in gender formation and reproduction, as well as the turbulence and contradictions pertaining to gender as lived experience. Attuned to the problems associated with conceptions of gender that construe women as perennial victims, Connell develops a "practice-based" theory of gender, attentive to both the constraining power of gender and the myriad struggles people engage against those constraints. In addition, Connell provides a cogent critique of all modes of biological determinism. Noting that the body is never experienced without cultural mediation, he defines gender in terms of the cognitive and interpretive practices that "create, appropriate, and recreate reproductive biology" (79).

According to Connell, gender as a social practice is more than a mere marking of the human body, "it is the weaving of a structure of symbols which exaggerate and distort human potential" (79). Repudiating various versions of mind/body dualism, Connell insists that "the practical transformation of the body in the social structure of gender is not only accomplished at the level of symbolism. It has physical effects on the body, the incorporation is a material one" (87). Connell is also careful to point out that the social practices constituting gender bear no direct relation to what might be considered "functional" for human reproduction. The patterns of posture, movement, dress, adornment,

body shape, body image, sexuality, intonation, speech, skilling, and de-skilling associated with cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity may not be at all conducive to reproduction. Arguing that the "logic" that drives gender is autonomous, Connell rejects all theories that attempt to derive gender from natural differences, biological reproduction, the functional needs of society, or the imperatives of social reproduction. Indeed, he insists that functionalist arguments must be viewed with extreme suspicion: they serve only to mask the power underlying these cultural symbolizations in order to justify inequitable distributions of social burdens and benefits.

In developing his account of the historicity of gender, Connell delineates a conception of human practices in relation to social structures informed by the works of Marx and Sartre. On this view, practices are the daily actions of human beings who appropriate and transform nature in order to satisfy their needs; in the process they transform themselves by producing new needs and new practices. Practices are inherently dynamic transformations of the natural world that open up new possibilities as well as new risks and pressures. Practices can also become solidified, entrenched, institutionalized, thereby creating a degree of intractability in the social world that limits the freedom of future practices. Connell defines social structure in terms of such limits. A social structure is a pattern of constraint on practice inherent in social relations. Operating through the complex interplay of power and institutions, "structure" specifies the way practices (over time) constrain practices" (95). Although structures mark the fixity of the social world, the sedimentation of past practices that limit present action, the dimension of collective life that exists beyond individual intention, they are not impervious to change. "Practice can be turned against what constrains it. . . . Structure can deliberately be the object of practice. But practice cannot escape structure, it cannot float free of its circumstances" (95). According to Connell, gender can best be understood as an interrelated set of social structures that define men and women in terms of their reproductive role and organize social life around sex and sexuality. On this view, gender is far more than an attribute of an individual or a characteristic of a social collectivity; it is the active process that reduces people to, and conceives social life in terms of, reproductive function, thereby constraining individual potential (97, 140, 245).

Taking issue with feminist accounts that construe gender structure in terms of a monolithic male domination, Connell argues that gender must be conceived in terms of very specific structures tied to particular social practices of labor, power, and cathexis. He insists that gender is not an "ideological addendum" to social structures rooted in race or class, but rather an autonomous structure constitutive of these fields. As a constraint upon labor, gender structures the allocation of particular types of work, the organization of domestic activity, the division of paid versus unpaid labor, the segregation of labor markets, patterns of

production and consumption, wage levels, opportunities for employment and promotion, and even the conditions and terms of labor exchange. Within the domain of power, gender structures authority, control, and coercion by establishing hierarchies in public and private sectors, creating a virtual male monopoly on institutional and interpersonal violence, and promoting particular modes of domestic and sexual asymmetries. Defining cathexis in terms of practices constructing emotionally charged relations with others, Connell notes that gender structures identities of desiring subjects and designation of desirable objects, patterns of desire, sexual practices, as well as terms and conditions for sexual exchange.

Connell notes that these diverse gender structures exist in complex interrelationship but insists that it is a mistake to characterize that relationship as either a logical or systemic unity. Even the notion of an "historical unity" tends to convey more coherence and internal consistency than may exist; the notion masks tensions, uneven developments, and internal contradictions among these structures that can precipitate crises crucial to their transformation. Connell prefers the term, "historical composition," to capture the human agency that creates the imperfect and incomplete orderliness linking diverse gender structures. As a historical composition, gender is "a linking concept. It is about linking other fields of social practice to modal practices of engendering" (140). Its central tools are the principles of separation, division, and unequal integration (97).

Human agency is essential to creating and transforming gender, yet the natural attitude sees gender as fixed by nature. Connell suggests that the apparent fixity of gender structures is maintained by "sexual ideology." Describing his approach to sexual ideology as "more akin to the sociology of knowledge than to contemporary theories of discourse," Connell suggests that ideology must be understood as "a practice, ontologically on a par with other practices and equally involved in the constitution of social interests" (244-245). Connell identifies two fundamental practices constitutive of sexual ideology, naturalization, and cognitive purification. Naturalization collapses social structure into nature to legitimate social practices and insulate them from change. "Naturalization is not a naive mistake about what biology can or cannot explain. At a collective level, it is a highly motivated ideological practice which constantly overrides biological facts" (246). Cognitive purification involves the production of ideological representations devoid of any of the messy complexity of lived relations. Shallow stereotypes, romantic narratives, "squeaky clean" sociobiological images of women as nurturers and men as providers—these are the stock-in-trade of cognitive purification.

Gender and Power presents a remarkably insightful and systematic analysis of gender. Like Smith and Butler, Connell moves from a description of gender as

analytic category to an account of gender as an active process structuring multiple domains of social life. He offers a "modest" justification for his approach, "this framework is serviceable for understanding current history" (97). He might also have said that his theory accounts for virtually every feminist usage of "gender" over the past several decades and relates them in a multilayered whole.

At the level of conceptualization, however, there is some slippage in his theorization of gender. For Connell, gender is the process that relates all the rich and varied levels of human activity to biological reproduction. Gender is an active force that makes us think constantly in terms of sex. And it is precisely this reductionism that enables gender to constrain so many dimensions of social organization. Yet when Connell so deftly identifies the gender structures operative in the domains of labor and power, it is not at all clear that they gain their force by dragging the mind back to reproductive biology. Do women really earn less because they are capable of bearing children? Does gender make us think so? Is job segregation in clerical work, fast-food industries, primary and secondary education, or nursing really related to women's gestational ability? Are women subjected to domestic violence because of their reproductive role?

Connell notes that "the practices of sexual reproduction are often quite remote aspects of social encounters in which gender is constructed and sustained" (81). But if this is so, how does gender work? Connell introduces Sartre's distinction between a practico-inert series and an intentionally mobilized group to explain gender's operative mechanisms. According to Sartre, a series is a mode of collective unity structured by external social or material circumstances or what might be called the "logic of the situation." Because the commonality that unites the series is imposed by external objects or the actions of others, seriality is passive, implying no conscious awareness on the part of those who make up the series. Sartre used the example of people waiting for a bus to illustrate his conception of the series: they have certain things in common by virtue of their situation even though they may not be consciously aware of any common ties. In contrast, a group is a collection of persons who consciously acknowledge a bond uniting them, whether it be a collective identity, a common project, or shared values.

According to Connell, sex can be understood as a series. The biological differentiation of men and women in reproduction imposes an external logic upon individuals on the basis of a parallel situation. Thus women share a passive commonality by virtue of their reproductive capacity, as do men. In keeping with Sartre's description of seriality as practico-inert (that is, a product of human action that constrains), Connell notes that construing sex as a series does not imply any awareness of the postulated commonality, any incorporation of the seriality into one's identity, nor any identification with those others who share the situation. By describing gender in terms of a Sartrean group, Connell suggests

that gender's task is to create a conscious awareness of reproductive capacity as the basis for solidarity. "To construct the social category 'man' or 'woman,' with a common identity and interest, requires a negation of the serial dispersion characteristic of the array of parallel situations constructed by biological categories. This is done in practices that create and assert the solidarity of the sex (or of a group within it)" (81, 137). For gender to accomplish its mission, then, it must negate the passive experience of the body and create a notion of commonality embraced by members of the group, thereby mobilizing women and men as distinctive groups. But how can gender simultaneously negate the biological ground of the series and mobilize reproductive biology as the basis of a shared identity? And if certain social expectations about the sexed body constitute sex as a practico-inert series, structuring the logic of situation in terms of reproduction, then how does gender differ from those initial social expectations? The sex/gender distinction seems to collapse into a vortex of reproduction.

Sartre conceives of the group as a collection of persons whose conscious awareness of shared characteristics serves as the basis for united action, for the initiation of a collective project. But Connell's conception of gender cannot begin to carry men and women that far, for he explicitly acknowledges the deficiencies of any construction of men and women as internally undifferentiated categories. And he is keenly aware of the social cleavages rooted in race, class, ethnicity, age, and homophobia that preclude any collective identification, much less collective action. Thus the group/series explanation of how gender accomplishes its work founders in both its account of sex as series and its account of gender as group. And despite Connell's numerous caveats, it appears to accord primacy to reproduction in cultural constructions of sex as well as gender.

The limitations of Connell's attempt to define gender as a process linking diverse fields of social relations to reproductive biology also surface in his discussion of sexual ideology. It is not at all clear how gender differs from sexual ideology. Both are described as cognitive and interpretive practices, as symbolizations that naturalize social constructions and impose untenable sex distinctions on men and women. Is gender after all, a matter of belief more than a structure of social forces? In what precise ways does it differ from sexual ideology? Connell uses sexual ideology to discuss literature, film, and modes of cultural production that do not fit into his categories of labor, power, and cathexis. But if we are to take seriously his discussions of the role of beliefs in constituting social practices and his rejection of simplistic base/superstructure models, what is the purpose of the distinction between gender and sexual ideology? In devising a conception of sexual ideology "akin to the sociology of knowledge," Connell is able to discuss the role (conservative versus radical) of intellectuals in ideological production and to introduce a conception of social interests (male hegemonic) served by

naturalization. Both of these moves allow Connell covertly to introduce functionalist premises that he had explicitly renounced earlier in his analysis.

Connell offers several functionalist speculations about why belief in gender persists despite all the philosophical arguments and scientific evidence that demonstrate the defects of the natural attitude. "There is a logic to paradoxes such as gross exaggerations of difference by social practices of dress. . . . They are part of a continuing effort to sustain the social definition of gender, an effort that is necessary precisely because the biological logic, and the inert practice that responds to it, cannot sustain gender categories" (81). But if gender is doing its cultural work successfully, what explains the perceived necessity to shore up gender? Connell's account is startling: "The solidarity of the heterosexual couple is formed on the basis of some kind of reciprocity rather than on the basis of common situation or experience. . . . Sexual difference is in large part what gives erotic flavor to relationships. It is emphasized as a means of heightening and intensifying pleasure, hence, the systematic exaggeration of gender differences" (113). Despite the enormous complexity of Connell's account, despite his repeated cautions against functionalist explanation, the complementarity thesis undergirds his analysis. It provides the fundamental explanation of why gender persists.

Connell's book is remarkably sensitive to heterosexism, but the notion that "sexual difference" heightens erotic pleasure depends on heterosexist presuppositions. Eve Sedgwick (1990) has pointed out that the heterosexual/homosexual opposition allows equivocation in the meaning imputed to 'homo'/sexual. As one moves from notions of one sex, to same sex, to self-same, to sameness, an enormous range of differences is elided. And this elision sustains Connell's assumption that there is greater difference, hence greater potential erotic pleasure, across genders than within genders. "The new calculus of homo/hetero . . . owes its sleekly utilitarian feel to the linguistically unappealable classification of anyone who shares one's gender as the 'same' as oneself, and anyone who does not share one's gender as Other" (Sedgwick 1990, 160). But Sedgwick points out that even the most cursory examination of human beings will reveal that being of the same gender cannot guarantee "similarity" anymore than being of "opposite" genders can guarantee difference. Moreover, the belief that the gender of one's sexual partner is the crucial difference determining pleasure (rather than differences pertaining to positions, acts, techniques, zones or sensations, physical types, symbolic investments, relations of power, and so on) will not withstand serious scrutiny. Thus, there appears to be a suppressed procreationist premise in Connell's allusion to the best means to heighten erotic pleasure. Once again, the "cunning of culture" seems to insert a procreationist agenda into an explanation of gender.

Connell's attempt to describe gender as a reductionist process linking divergent social fields to sexual reproduction does not adequately account for all the

modes of injustice women experience, although it certainly identifies a wide range of feminist concerns. Ultimately it founders on the complementarity thesis as the rationale for the cultural imposition of gender. No longer in the service of species or cultural survival, Connell's appeal to complementarity serves hedonistic ends. Gender is posited as a mechanism for heightening the intensity of pleasure. But whether the function attributed to gender is the production of heterosexuality or erotic pleasure, functionalist explanation leads feminists to a dead end. For feminists theorizing gender within a functionalist frame cannot escape the specter of biological determinism or the ideology of reproduction. Once again an insightful deployment of gender as analytic category slips into problematic claims about gender as explanans.

AN ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF GENDER

In a remarkable and insightful approach to the study of gender, Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna attempt to bracket ontological claims about gender in order to explore gender attribution, the instantaneous process by which one person classifies another as a man or a woman. Their explicit goal in *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (1978) is to explain how gender attribution works. Their exposition of how the process operates does, however, sustain certain speculations about the larger question "why."

Kessler and McKenna begin their investigation by noting several factors concomitant to gender attribution: the urgency that governs gender attribution in daily life (we feel we need to know if we are interacting with a man/woman, boy/girl), the conviction that every individual can be categorized as a man/woman, and the uneasiness that surrounds "ambiguous" cases. Linking the "need" to classify people by gender to the natural attitude, Kessler and McKenna provide a comprehensive demonstration that the assumptions informing the natural attitude are systematically flawed. Yet they note that the fact that the natural attitude rests upon a number of mistaken beliefs in no way mitigates its hold. On the contrary, each time particular beliefs informing the natural attitude are refuted, new ones seem to replace them. Thus, they note that the absence of any physical or behavioral grounds for a dichotomous classification of men and women has led to the emergence of a new "scientific" concern with gender identity, the individual's psychological sense of being a male or a female, as a firmer foundation for a "fixed dichotomy." "Transsexual is a category constructed to relieve ambiguity, to avoid the kinds of combinations (male genitals and female gender identity) that make people uncomfortable because they violate basic rules about gender. Since genitals can now be changed, gender identity is now seen as a less flexible criterion; thus marking the triumph of surgeons over psychotherapists in the rush to restore gender to unambiguous reality" (120).

What fuels this incessant replenishing of the natural attitude? Kessler and McKenna argue that sexual dimorphism is not given in nature, but imposed upon nature by the perceiver. "Gender is a social construction, a world of two sexes is the result of the socially shared, taken-for-granted methods which members use to construct a world" (vii). The perceiver's expectation that there are two genders leads to the perception of two genders by forcing all perceived phenomena into the posited dichotomous categories. Anomalies are hidden and ambiguities masked, allowing the perceived phenomenon to conform to and thereby confirm the validity of the original expectation. According to Kessler and McKenna, the selective perception that sustains gender attribution in daily life also shapes the socially accredited perceptions of scientists, whose work is then taken as incontrovertible proof of the validity of the perceptual categories.

Scientists construct dimorphism where there is continuity. Hormones, behavior, physical characteristics, developmental processes, chromosomes, and psychological qualities have all been fitted into dichotomous categories. Scientific knowledge does not inform the answer to the question, "What makes a person a man or a woman?" Rather it justifies (and appears to give grounds for) the already existing conviction that a person is either a man or a woman and that there is no problem differentiating between the two. Biological, psychological, and social differences do not lead to our seeing two genders. Our seeing two genders leads to the 'discovery' of biological, psychological, and social differences. (163)

Kessler and McKenna's goal is to discern how gender attributions are made. For once a person has been classified as a man/woman, his/her actions and intentions are interpreted on the basis of culturally specific gender expectations that have pervasive life consequences. In accordance with the modernist assumption that biology provides the foundation for masculinity and femininity, most people believe that the genitals provide the ultimate criterion for gender attribution. But Kessler and McKenna point out that in daily practice, attribution is almost always made in the absence of any information about genitals. Sex assignment at birth typically follows from the delivering physician's inspection of genitalia, but in social interactions, the decision to categorize another as male/female seldom turns on such direct inspection. The recent emphasis on gender identity as the ground for the dichotomous classification of men and women makes gender identity a possible basis for gender attribution. But as the psychological sense of being a man/woman, gender identity is not immediately perceptible. Kessler and McKenna note that the only way to ascertain someone's gender identity is to ask the individual a direct question, and such queries are not typically made prior to gender attribution.

How then is gender attributed? Kessler and McKenna argue that gender attribution depends upon cues given by the perceived which facilitate categorization on the basis of socially constructed, gender-specific norms. The dimensions of the presentation of self that provide cues for gender attribution include: modes and content of speech; styles of dress, adornment, posture, and movement; and the construction of a narrative history that conforms to gender stereotypes (126-128). For gender attribution that depends exclusively upon visual encounters, "tertiary sexual characteristics"—nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions, movement, body posture—are the predominant gender markers. Kessler and McKenna introduce the term "cultural genitals" to characterize these culture-specific appearances that sustain inferences about gender. Gender attribution is dependent upon "genital attribution," but genital attribution "takes place irrespective of biological genitals on the basis of 'cultural genitals'—that are assumed to be there" (153-154). People believe that sound inferences about biology can be made on the basis of stylized gender cues, and this belief fixes gender symbolization in the body. "The relationship between cultural genitals and gender attribution is reflexive. The reality of 'gender' is proved by the genital which is attributed and at the same time the attributed genital only has meaning through the socially shared construction of gender attribution" (155).

Kessler and McKenna insist that gender categories are culturally specific. To demonstrate that dichotomous classification is not the only alternative, they discuss the "berdache"—people who receive social sanction to become a gender other than that to which they were originally assigned—as a "third gender" recognized by certain Native American peoples. How then are culture-specific gender categories constructed? Because psychology treats gender as a "way of seeing," Kessler and McKenna review psychoanalytic, social learning, and cognitive development theories for clues to the construction of gender categories. They argue persuasively that none of these approaches can explain adequately either the individual's acquisition of gender categories or the social construction of gender categories. They turn instead to the idea of a cognitive schema to explain the organizing expectations that shape perception. "A categorizing scheme is not dependent on any particular cue, nor is it a rule followed by robots. Rather it is a way of understanding . . . a method of applying information" (158, 161). In keeping with their ethnomethodological approach, they suggest that these categorizing schemas arise from the incorrigible propositions of specific cultures; they bracket questions concerning the origins of the incorrigible propositions themselves. Unfortunately, such a bracketing removes from consideration some difficult questions about the nature of, and possibilities for change in, categorizing schema, and this severely limits Kessler and McKenna's prescription for escaping the life-constraining force of dichotomous gender.

Kessler and McKenna suggest that the key to transforming gender lies in changing our incorrigible propositions. They suggest that this can be done by "confronting the reality of other possibilities (e.g., the *berdache*), as well as the possibility of other realities" (164). Enhancing awareness of other cultures could then serve to liberate people from the natural attitude. In addition, they suggest marshalling logical arguments and empirical evidence to demonstrate the deficiencies in incorrigible beliefs as a means of dispelling them. Kessler and McKenna recognize, for example, that the complementarity thesis undergirds sociobiological accounts of gender. A clear understanding of gender attribution should therefore help dispel the erroneous belief that gender differentiation saves the species from extinction by enabling "sperm-producers" and "egg-producers" to recognize each other. Their study demonstrates that gender attribution is based upon "cultural genitals," which can provide no certainty whatsoever about who might be a suitable reproductive partner. Thus, gender fails in its "evolutionary mission," a failure so significant that it should be sufficient to undermine sociobiological claims.

Despite the lucidity of their argument, the reliance upon rational argument to expunge such errors confronts a problem. If incorrigible beliefs are as impervious to evidence as their definition suggests, then this strategy is doomed to failure. And if categorizing schema routinely screen out anomalies to the extent that Kessler and McKenna claim, then it is unlikely that culture-bound individuals will be able to perceive the evidence that other cultures afford. The very presuppositions of ethnomethodology undermine the possibility of freeing people from gender by an appeal to evidence. For that evidence is theoretically constructed within a particular cultural frame, and, according to Kessler and McKenna, "ultimately there is no way to determine the truth of theoretical formulations. Theories may be more or less useful, aesthetically pleasing, or 'in vogue,' but their claim to truth is, in some sense, a matter of faith in basic assumptions" (100). And reason is no match against faith.

What is important about Kessler and McKenna's conception of gender is not merely their insightful account of the mechanics of gender attribution, but their subtle shift of gender's terrain. Gender moves from a stylization of the body to a category of the mind. It is, in an important sense, an immaterial substance—an intangible idea with palpable consequences, an a priori category that structures the phenomenal world. The notion of cognitive schema invoked in this work is seriously undertheorized. It is not clear whether such a mental category has more in common with Hume's notion of a "habit of the mind," with Kant's conception of a "category of the mind," or with cognitive psychology's version of "prototype theory." Each of these acknowledges the active role of the knower in constructing the object of knowledge, but they differ in their accounts of the origins of such categories, the role of tradition/reason/language in structuring these

categories, and in their assessments of how coherent, ubiquitous, and persistent such categorizations may be. Feminists who describe gender as a lens (Bem 1993), a way of seeing, or a cognitive category may not mean to invoke the full force of the Humean or Kantian conceptions, but they should proceed with extreme caution. Hume, for example, links "habits of the mind" to constant conjunction of empirically observed phenomena; this suggests that, where the eye perceives two things happening together, the mind imposes a "necessary connection." Extrapolating the Humean model to gender produces an account that locks cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity to sexed bodies with a degree of necessity that is nearly impossible to break. According to Kant, categories of the mind constitute the precondition of cognition. If gender is construed as a category of the mind, then no thinking subject can escape its grip. For those who would eradicate gender-based injustice, there are dire implications in the displacement of gender from external world to internal/mental terrain. It is not at all clear that one can change a "category of the mind." Within a social constructionist frame, cognitive schema may serve merely to mark the social constitution of consciousness. But if this is what is meant, then culture resurfaces in this discourse without any clear explication of why particular cultures cause dichotomous perceptions of gender. Biological determinism may be avoided in this account, but the natural attitude remains entrenched, as the cunning of culture structures the basic categories of the mind.

Gender as Analytic Category Versus Gender as Explanans

Gender as an analytic category illuminates a range of questions for feminist investigation and provides a framework for those investigations that challenge androcentric and heteronormative assumptions. A sophisticated understanding of gender as an analytical tool can enable feminist scholars to identify important issues pertaining to social institutions, relations, and symbols, as well as individual identities, which can be investigated within particular cultures and subcultures at particular historical moments. Developing conceptual distinctions that differentiate sex, sexuality, sexual identity, gender identity, gender role, gender role identity can enable feminist scholars to deploy gender as an analytical device, illuminating power relations and engaging questions that confound the natural attitude, thereby contributing to progressive feminist goals.

If feminist scholars are to use gender as an analytical category that fosters emancipatory projects, however, there are crucial pitfalls to avoid. The foregoing analysis of a number of feminist efforts to theorize gender locates one danger in the construction of a narrative that links gender to the cunning of culture operating in the interests of reproduction. These efforts to explain the function of gender replicate problematic assumptions of the ideology of procreation rather

standpoint, feminist standpoint as an analytical tool requires the collection and interrogation of competing claims about the same phenomenon. Rather than succumb to relativist notions that truth involves the sum of conflicting accounts, standpoint analysis critically engages contentious theoretical assumptions to demarcate valid from flawed accounts. In marked contrast to social science methodologies that naively claim value-neutrality, feminist standpoint analysis acknowledges that claims about the world are theoretically mediated and value-laden—constructed in relation to a range of partial perspectives and determinate interests. Thus feminist standpoint as an analytical tool offers a methodology markedly suited to the post-positivist recognition of the role that theoretical presuppositions play in cognition. By expanding the sphere of research to encompass the theoretical frameworks that support competing empirical claims, feminist standpoint analysis affords new mechanisms to help resolve seemingly intractable disputes. Attuned to the impact of particular theories on the selection of evidence, comparative standpoint analysis can provide reasons for doubting questionable assumptions, stimulate recognition of the intricacy and complexity of events, identify relevant criticisms of overly simplistic accounts, and produce more sophisticated analyses. Attentive to the multiple sources of error that can impede knowledge production, feminist standpoint analysis encourages researchers to interrogate that which seems least contestable. As an analytical tool, then, feminist standpoint theory provides feminist scholars with a methodological strategy to engage complexity, plurality, and fallibility.

To explore the potential uses of feminist standpoint analysis, the following two sections gather and analyze multiple and competing views concerning affirmative action and welfare "reform." Each section provides an example of how to use standpoint analysis to guide research. The first step is to construct alternative "standpoints" by collecting and synthesizing as many competing views of the subject under investigation as possible. Standpoint analysis imposes a responsibility on the researcher to engage as comprehensive an array of claims as time and feasibility allow. Precisely because it starts from an acknowledgment of the partiality and contentiousness of competing claims and relies upon systematic comparison of alternative views as a method for identifying errors, standpoint analysis recognizes that omission of critical perspectives can seriously distort research findings. To avoid such distortion in discussions of affirmative action and welfare "reform," I have collected arguments advanced by scholars and activists in order to construct a "composite" conservative standpoint, liberal-feminist standpoint, socialist-feminist standpoint, black-feminist standpoint, and postmodern-feminist standpoint. By comparing the theoretical assumptions as well as the empirical claims within these conflicting accounts, I hope to illuminate the potential contributions that standpoint analysis offers for understanding pressing political issues. I also suggest that feminist standpoint analysis can address some

problems pertaining to objectivity discussed in chapter 3, particularly those linked to intersubjective corroboration of truth claims, which traditional social science methods have been unable to address successfully. Feminist standpoints used as an analytical tool, then, may contribute to the construction of an objective account of political life, although not in the way that Nancy Hartsock originally suggested.

To reap the benefits of standpoint analysis, the researcher must examine alternative views fairly and in depth. In presenting competing policy stands on affirmative action and welfare "reform," I have tried to avoid caricature by using the words of the proponents of each view and tracing their arguments from most basic theoretical assumptions to constructions of evidence to generation of policy prescriptions. Juxtaposing the competing accounts is itself a way of gaining knowledge, for it allows the contentious frameworks that inform these views to become visible. As the following examples show, when the values central to these policy stances are made evident, feminist scholars can evaluate problematic claims about the social world with far more sophistication. In the next two sections I explicate five competing standpoints concerning contemporary policy debates. Standpoints on affirmative action are explored first, followed by a survey of competing claims concerning welfare policy. Once the alternative standpoints for each policy area have been contrasted, the final section of the chapter considers ways to adjudicate conflicting claims and possible benefits of standpoint analysis for feminist political engagement, knowledge production, and conceptions of objectivity.

Comparing Standpoints on Affirmative Action

THE CONSERVATIVE CRITIQUE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Although the radical zeal of early, second-wave feminism sustained the illusion that certain "malestream" views were uniquely the products and perspectives of men (Daly 1978, O'Brien 1981), the increasing ranks of articulate antifeminist women destroy that naive vision. Phyllis Schlafly, Linda Chavez, Lynne Cheney, Beverly LeHaye, Anita Blair, Barbara Ledeen and Laura Ingraham constitute a vocal conservative force who advance arguments concerning the evils of affirmative action and welfare that rival the views of Charles Murray, Lawrence Mead, and Paul Weyrich. Conservative women deny that their views bear any relation to "backlash." On the contrary, their opposition to affirmative action and welfare stems from a deep conviction that life in the contemporary United States conforms to the fundamental promise of the doctrine of equal opportunity. They believe that the system operates as a meritocracy in which all have an equal opportunity to compete in a process designed to reward individual talent, initiative, and hard work.

Conservative women, like their male counterparts, deny that discrimination in hiring, wage scales, promotion, and admissions currently exists in the United States. While they acknowledge that African Americans and Latinos earn less than whites, and that women earn less than men, and that both minorities and women constitute a smaller percentage of managerial and professional workers than of the general population, they deny that the explanation of these facts lies in deliberate discrimination. They suggest that a combination of personal choices made by individuals of their own free will and objective forces over which discrete individuals have no control, provide a more adequate explanation of these phenomena.

Demonstrating a sophisticated grasp of issues in the philosophy of social science, conservative women cite a cardinal principle in statistical interpretation: correlation cannot prove causation. Thus they point out that statistical data concerning the relative distribution of minorities and women in particular jobs is not sufficient to prove that intentional discrimination has occurred. Statistics cannot "prove" discrimination because proof of discrimination requires a demonstration of intentional exclusion of particular individuals by particular individuals. As a descriptive indicator that operates at the aggregate level, statistics can provide no information at all about individual intentions. Thus, any conclusion concerning the existence of discrimination in admissions, hiring, promotions, or pay drawn from statistical data, involves an unwarranted inference.

Conservative women suggest that the problem of underrepresentation does not reflect discrimination against qualified applicants, but rather reflects the fact that women and minorities lack the requisite qualifications for certain positions; therefore, they either fail to apply or upon application are rightly rejected. The problem is primarily one of inadequate supply of qualified women and minority applicants, not one of demand hampered by willful discrimination. Lack of qualifications—not discrimination—impairs the employment potential of women and minorities. And the lack of qualifications among women and minorities relates to individual choices, for which ultimately individuals themselves are responsible. Women and minority individuals freely choose career patterns that differ from those of white males, and this crucial element of individual choice is routinely ignored in arguments that move from statistical underrepresentation to allegations of exclusion or discrimination. For this reason, conservatives suggest, affirmative action is clearly a misguided and inappropriate policy.

Affirmative action is designed as a social policy to end intentional discrimination in admission, employment, and promotion. Because any underrepresentation that currently exists is not related to any deliberate policies of discrimination, the disease and the cure are mismatched. The basic lack of correspondence between problem and solution stems from the failure to draw an important

distinction between problems caused by deliberate individual actions, which are susceptible to solutions aimed at specific individuals, and problems caused by impersonal/objective social forces for which no individual can justly be held accountable.

Having diagnosed the cause of underrepresentation as an insufficient supply of qualified women and minority applicants, conservative women insist that affirmative action is synonymous with reverse discrimination: government policies necessitate the use of "quotas," the hiring of less qualified candidates, the obliteration of merit as a criterion of desert and consequently, the sacrifice of creative, hardworking individuals. Because qualified women and minority applicants are not available according to this analysis, it follows that school administrators and employers must engage in all these abuses in order to increase the number of women and blacks in their institutions as a demonstration to the government of their "good faith." Giving less qualified women and minority group members "preference" in admissions, hiring, and promotion can only result in new forms of discrimination that will entail the erosion of the principles of merit, scholarly quality, and integrity. Thus, affirmative action makes a mockery of the principle of desert, which itself provides the legitimation for denunciation of past discriminatory practices (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997).

Affirmative action arbitrarily imposes responsibility for a collective problem upon specific individuals. It requires preferential treatment for "unqualified" women and minority group applicants; consequently, affirmative action discriminates in reverse against the "best qualified" candidates who just happen to be nonminority men. Such reverse discrimination is all the more intolerable because it undermines competition while allowing government bureaucrats to impose their subjective vision of the good upon the society at large. Bureaucratic intervention places universities and employers in the position of having to placate federal officials under penalty of loss of federal grants and contracts vital to their very survival. Thus bureaucratic whim becomes a tyrannical task master which strips would-be federal contractors of their autonomy and their fidelity to standards of pure meritocratic excellence (Ladovsky 1995).

In the absence of deliberate discriminatory policies in the contemporary United States, the only possible moral justification for the government's policies is compensatory justice for groups. Affirmative action was initially developed as an effort to make reparation to blacks for a history of injustice. Yet, according to conservative women, this concept of compensatory justice to groups for past injustices suffered by them as groups is completely incompatible with individual rights afforded by the U.S. Constitution.

From the perspective of conservative women, affirmative action provides blanket preferential treatment for certain persons on the basis of race, even if those persons did not personally suffer past injustices. Thus, preferential treatment for

groups as a social policy is notoriously overinclusive. But it is simultaneously underinclusive, for, in providing compensation only for African Americans, it ignores the claims of other individuals (for example, Irish-Americans, Jews) who have personally suffered injustice yet who are not members of the groups targeted for compensation. Furthermore, reverse discrimination imposes the cost of compensation upon individuals who did not perpetrate the injustice and who cannot fairly be dubbed beneficiaries of the injustice: they neither sought the benefit nor had the opportunity to reject it. Put simply, reverse discrimination imposes the cost of compensation upon innocent parties. Thus reverse discrimination can be faulted as both arbitrary in the distribution of benefits to the disadvantaged and in the assignment of the costs of compensation. Such rampant arbitrariness seriously impairs any moral justification for affirmative action.

Reverse discrimination substitutes concern with "abstract groups" and their purported rights for concern with living individuals. Focusing solely upon individuals who "make themselves," conservative women reject any notion of a legacy of group injury, just as they reject any notion of collective guilt on the part of the group who historically imposed the suffering. Any policy of preferential treatment for groups subordinates individuals' rights to equal treatment to the broader social aim of making amends for a past injustice, which contemporary individuals did not perpetrate—a clearly unconstitutional policy. According to conservative women, justice can require nothing more than the use of neutral principles, such as nondiscrimination, in admissions and employment. Because deliberate discrimination is not a contemporary problem, the use of neutral principles promotes meritocratic decisions while simultaneously according justice to individuals regardless of the group to which they happen to belong; such neutrality allows each individual to "make it" on his or her own.

LIBERAL FEMINIST VIEWS ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Taking conservative arguments at face value, liberal feminists have mobilized to present a different account of "equal opportunity" in the contemporary United States. In the 1990s, feminist scholars launched the Committee of One Hundred to join established groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), the Feminist Majority, the Women's Equity Action League, and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to present a compelling case that discrimination on the basis of race and gender persists in contemporary society and can be demonstrated. Rather than assuming that the United States represents a just and primarily nondiscriminatory society, liberal feminists suggest that empirical evidence documents widespread, albeit subtle, discrimination.

The Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), for example, found that although white men constituted only 37 percent of the American population, they held 95 percent of the top managerial jobs in Fortune 1000 corporations. If one looks

beyond the realm of senior management, 8.5 percent of working women held jobs that are classified as executive/managerial, compared to 20 percent of working men, while 60 percent of women worked full time outside the home in clerical and service-sector jobs, compared to 15 percent of working men. The situation for African Americans is even more bleak. There was only one black CEO in the Fortune 1000 corporations. Although African Americans then constituted 12.9 percent of the American population, they held 0.6 percent of the senior management positions and 3 percent of executive/managerial positions in the United States. In 1990, 3.2 percent of American physicians were African American (down from 4 percent in 1970); 3 percent of all lawyers were African American (up from 1.5 percent in 1970); and 4.5 percent of university professors were African American (no change since 1970) (Hacker 1992).

Acknowledging that statistics cannot provide definitive indicators of discrimination, liberal feminists yet insist that the pervasiveness of statistical underrepresentation of women and minorities in higher education, in higher-paying employment and in positions of prestige and power is sufficient to establish a *prima facie* case of discrimination. But liberal feminists do not rest their arguments concerning the persistence of discrimination upon a demonstration of underrepresentation alone, for, as conservatives have argued, any number of variables can be introduced to explain such underrepresentation. Instead, they emphasize "underutilization" in an effort to explode the myth that the principle cause of underrepresentation is the inadequate supply of qualified women and minority applicants. Underutilization is defined as having fewer women/minorities actually employed in a job category than would reasonably be expected from their availability in the labor pool. In universities, for example, the Ph.D. is a legitimate prerequisite for employment. In 1993, 45 percent of all the doctorates awarded to U.S. citizens went to women, but women constituted only 35 percent of the new hires in universities (American Council on Education 1995). The phenomenon to be explained then, is not the dearth of minority or female professionals per se, but the dearth of such professionals given the availability of a certain percentage of qualified minority and female candidates. The pervasive underutilization of qualified women and minorities in the United States renders suspicious any explanation that emphasizes personal choice. For it seems unlikely that individuals who have invested great effort to become qualified for certain careers should suddenly choose not to pursue those professions.

Moving beyond statistics of underrepresentation and underutilization, liberal feminists have also examined the evidence from controlled experiments to document persistent discrimination. A 1991 Urban Institute study, for example, demonstrated pervasive racial discrimination in hiring by conducting job "audits" that paired black job candidates with identically qualified white candidates in a range of job competitions. Although possessing equal grade point averages and

work experience, blacks were unable to advance as far in the hiring process as whites 20 percent of the time and were denied jobs offered to equally qualified whites 15 percent of the time. As the skill level of the job increased, so too did the tendency to discriminate (Turner, Fix and Struyk 1991).

Nearly thirty years of research in social psychology has documented a persistent and pervasive gender and race bias in evaluation. Psychologists have documented that given identical qualifications or performances, a general tendency gives men more favorable evaluations than women and gives whites more favorable evaluations than minorities. Moreover, ample evidence indicates that performance by women and minority group members is systematically downgraded by employers and school teachers and evaluated more positively when race or sex is unknown to the evaluator (Nieva and Gutek 1980; Rosen and Jerdee 1974; Shaw 1974; Haefner 1977; Gutek and Stevens 1979). Thus, women and minorities experience a form of discrimination that exists over and above the problems of underrepresentation and pay differentials (Hughes 1975, 26). Women and minorities are treated as beings less worthy of respect than the average white male, not because of any individual weakness or failing but simply because they are members of a particular group.

The disrespect shown to women and minorities on the basis of their sex, race, or ethnicity highlights the fact that the competition for educational and economic opportunities is neither neutral nor fair, for women and minorities are judged by standards irrelevant to the competition. A tacit pro-white, pro-male bias in admissions, hiring, and evaluation procedures constitutes a form of discrimination that continues to harm women and minorities not because of their individual characteristics but because of their membership in particular groups.

On this view, one great benefit of affirmative action's insistence on good faith efforts to recruit women and minority candidates lies precisely in its ability to help "whites recognize that their own advantages are, in significant measure, group benefits, rather than individual achievements and that their own success has been, in part, a matter of their own superior group opportunities, purchased at the expense of opportunities for non-whites" (Livingston 1979, 182). Recognition of the role played by race and gender privilege in decisions concerning admissions, hiring, and promotion procedures also demonstrates that neither the criteria employed in these decisions nor the individuals employing them are "neutral" or "impersonal." The market's "Invisible Hand" does not determine applicants' merit and prospects for success; decisions of fallible administrators serving as gate-keepers to the positions of power and privilege in contemporary society do.

Given their diagnosis of the problem as ongoing discrimination in the form of antiminority, antifemale bias, liberal feminists argue that affirmative action is a fair and appropriate remedy. As a mechanism for the cultivation of a recognition

of the talent of all persons in society, affirmative action does not jeopardize principles of merit or standards of excellence. It simply prohibits situations in which the only ones allowed to demonstrate their merit are white males. Through the establishment of fair hiring practices and competition open to public inspection, affirmative action ensures that white men "compete fairly on the basis of merit, not fraternity, on demonstrated capability, not assumed superiority (Pottinger 1971). By focusing attention on admitting, hiring, and promoting members of particular target groups, affirmative action draws attention to both the consequences of historic racism and sexism and to the extent, the gravity, and the immediacy of the injuries still experienced by minorities and women in the United States.

Liberal feminists acknowledge that affirmative action causes white males to lose certain advantages, yet they deny that the loss constitutes a violation of individual rights. On the contrary, liberal feminists stress that white men currently occupying favored positions in existing organizations have themselves been the beneficiaries of some preferential treatment: "they are members of a group of persons who have been privileged in hiring and promotion in accordance with normal practices of long-standing, persons who have been offered better educational preparation than others of the same basic talents, persons whose egos have been strengthened more than members of other groups" (Held 1975, 34). Because these white males did not deserve such preferential treatment, because they had no right to the advantages afforded by a racist and sexist society, no rights are being violated by the removal of those advantages. Policies to promote justice for the victims of injustice may require that white men lose their unwarranted privilege in society but they do not strip these individuals of legitimate rights.

SOCIALIST FEMINIST AMBIVALENCE ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Socialist feminists are profoundly ambivalent about affirmative action. As a policy developed within the bourgeois state to advance the interests of the privileged, affirmative action poses no threat to capitalism, to class hierarchy, or to the status quo. Indeed, affirmative action lends an air of credibility to capitalist patriarchy by erroneously suggesting that it can promote the interests and equality of women and people of color. It thereby situates discussions of racial and gender justice within the narrow and restrictive compass of "equal opportunity." By suggesting that discrimination is the primary problem that women and people of color face in contemporary society, affirmative action policies obscure and deny the structural and institutional framework of capitalist oppression. From a socialist feminist standpoint, policies that mask the complex dimensions of oppression are deeply problematic. "If one focuses on discrimination as the primary wrong groups suffer, then the more profound wrongs of exploitation,

marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence that we still suffer go undiscussed and unaddressed" (Young 1990, 196-197).

Long before affirmative action came under attack, socialist feminists offered a range of principled objections to this mode of liberal reformism. Affirmative action neither challenges nor transforms the hierarchical division of labor in the capitalist workplace. It merely seeks to change the racial and gender composition of the elite. In eliminating racist and sexist hiring and admissions practices, affirmative action benefits the "most privileged" of the formerly disadvantaged, that is, the well-educated, middle-class women and people of color. As prominent "tokens" like Clarence Thomas, Linda Chavez, and Lynne Cheney make clear, there is no reason to believe that even a substantial increase in the representation of racial and gender groups in positions of power and prestige would benefit women and minorities in general. Indeed, the votes of Clarence Thomas on the Supreme Court in cases such as *Adarand v. Peña* make it painfully clear that the career advances of some "tokens" can have disastrous consequences for the oppressed. Thus the critical issue is not more women and minorities in power *per se*, but using power for progressive/socialist/feminist political ends. Neither race nor gender constitutes a guarantee of progressive political inclinations (Barrett 1985, 242).

Socialist feminists have also pointed out that those who endorse affirmative action on the belief that women and people of color can work within the system to benefit the oppressed fail to recognize the power of institutional resistance to subversion from within and the likelihood of cooptation. On this view, feminist efforts to infiltrate hierarchies of power inevitably succumb to "careerism," to feminist accommodation to the status quo, or to the development of policies that heighten institutions' control over the oppressed (Barrett 1985, 244).

Any socialist feminist effort to defend affirmative action illuminates this problematic. To defend affirmative action is to endorse a policy that reinforces a range of myths about the market's "just distribution" of jobs on the basis of "merit." Advocates of affirmative action promise that the elimination of race and gender bias creates the possibility for "true merit hiring." They trust that the notion of individual "qualifications" poses no insurmountable problems. They believe that it is "possible to measure, compare, and rank individual performance of job-related tasks using criteria that are normatively and culturally neutral" (Young 1990, 193). Moreover, they accept the hierarchical organization of society, as well as the scarcity of positions of high income, power, and prestige, asking only that these positions be distributed on the basis of merit. The defense of affirmative action coopts feminists into endorsing an inequalitarian competition in which the vast majority of competitors are destined to lose.

Socialist feminists have pointed out that "even if strong affirmative action programs existed in most institutions, they would have only a minor effect in

altering the basic structure of group privilege and oppression in the United States. Since these programs require that racially or sexually preferred candidates be qualified, indeed highly qualified, they do nothing directly to increase opportunities for Blacks, Latinos, or women whose social environment and lack of resources make getting qualified nearly impossible for them" (Young 1990, 199). To avoid being coopted and to make significant contributions to the struggle for equality, feminists would be better off fighting the myth of a market-based meritocracy, challenging the justice of any hierarchical division of labor, and changing "the overall patterns of racial and gender stratification in our society [which] would require major changes in the structure of the economy, the process of job allocation, the character of the social division of labor and access to schooling and training" (Young 1990, 199).

Although the logic of socialist feminist arguments concerning affirmative action is not changed by recent conservative attacks on affirmative action, the horizon of progressive political struggle has been constricted. Thus socialist feminists have joined coalitions to defend the small gains made through such reformist strategies. They bring to these coalitions important concerns about the meaning of the conservative attack on liberal policies and the ideological functioning of the "war" against women and people of color. From a socialist feminist standpoint, it is a mistake to construe these issues solely in terms of partisan electoral politics. For the conservative vilification of women and the poor serves as a diversionary tactic that focuses attention on society's disadvantaged while masking structural transformations within capitalism. On this view, conservative arguments concerning the erosion of merit standards under affirmative action and conservative claims concerning the erosion of individual responsibility under welfare programs share crucial ideological affinities. Both reinforce individualist premises that structure policy debates in terms of individual success and failure, which blinds the public to the possibility that social problems and economic crises can only be systematically addressed when treated structurally and collectively.

BLACK FEMINIST EFFORTS TO DEBUNK RACIST CODES IN POLICY DISCOURSES

The experiences of African Americans in the contemporary United States provide a markedly different framework within which to analyze public policy. Both the attack on affirmative action and the war against poor women have been widely interpreted as racist codes, grounded in white supremacy, that reinforce racial stratification. Within this framework, race constitutes a "metalinguage" that reinscribes the master/slave relation in the policy discourses of the liberal welfare state (Higginbotham 1992). Policies that appear to be reversals or "backlash" from a white feminist standpoint, are perceived within a Black feminist

frame as perpetuation and consolidation of white privilege, a prophylactic against any systemic gains for African Americans.

From a black feminist standpoint, racially coded policy discourse, operating at the boundaries of consciousness, mystifies the power dynamics of contemporary racial oppression and suggests levels of black affluence and success and degrees of white victimization altogether inconsistent with any examination of prevailing social relations (Carby 1987; Abel 1993). Only within the framework of racial codes can one make sense of polls such as that sponsored by the *Washington Post*, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University which found that a majority of whites believe that blacks are as well off or better off than whites: 46 percent of whites said that blacks on average held jobs of equal quality to those of whites, 6 percent said that blacks had jobs that were "a little better" than those held by whites, and another 6 percent said blacks had jobs that were "a lot better" than those held by whites. "The overwhelming majority of whites said that blacks have an equal chance to succeed, that whites bear no responsibility for the problems blacks face today, and that it is not the government's role to ensure that all races have equal jobs, pay, or housing" (Morin 1995, A6). Only within the framework of racial codes can one comprehend how, contrary to all empirical evidence, young white Americans have come to believe that they are more likely to be victims of reverse discrimination than African Americans or Latinos are to suffer from racial bias (Chideya 1995). By inverting prevailing power relations, racial codes insulate whites from the glaring evidence of racial inequality in our nation. Racial codes render Census Bureau statistics "unbelievable." Within racially coded discourse, Rush Limbaugh's wild imaginings have greater credibility than social science reports that document growing racial inequality. Consider, for example, data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2002, which demonstrate that the enormous wealth gap between white families and black and Latino families continues to grow. "White households had a median net worth of greater than \$88,651 in 2002, 11 times more than Latinos and more than 14 times that of Blacks" (Armas 2004, A10). While the white median net worth increased by 17.4 percent from \$75,482 in 1996 to \$88,651 in 2002, Latino median net worth increased by 14 percent from \$6,961 to \$7,932 during the same period. African American household median net worth plummeted 16.1 percent during this time frame, falling from \$7,135 to \$5,988. Comparable growth in racial inequality has been documented with respect to percentages of children living in poverty, adult and teenage unemployment rates, and distributions of income (Rowan 1995). Convinced by racially coded discourses that blacks are receiving "special" preferences, whites cannot comprehend that more black families were living in poverty in 1990 (37 percent) than in 1970 (34 percent) (Hacker 1992).

From a black feminist standpoint, the myth of preferential treatment for blacks makes sense only within a framework that presupposes white superiority.

Reinforced by the "scientific" racism of Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve* and Dinesh D'Souza's *End of Racism*, many white Americans accept a vicious logic: blacks are intellectually inferior to whites, thus the only way they can attain positions of high pay, power, and prestige is through preferential treatment which necessarily entails hiring "unqualified" blacks for positions that qualified whites "deserve." The language of reverse discrimination thus consolidates the conviction of white superiority, while denigrating the talents of successful African Americans, sustaining the "stigma" associated with affirmative action that is so lamented by black conservatives. It also provides a soothing balm to the egos of thoroughly mediocre whites who can convince themselves that their failure to secure desired employment is the "fault" of blacks rather than the consequence of their own limited abilities.

POSTMODERN FEMINIST DISRUPTIONS OF THE TERMS OF DISCOURSE

The premises of postmodern-feminism make the construction of "a postmodern-feminist standpoint" problematic. Arguing that "women's experience is thoroughly constructed, historically and culturally varied, and interpreted without end," postmodern feminists caution that feminists must be wary of those who speak for women in terms that totalize and exclude (W. Brown 1995, 41). Calling instead for a politics of voice within a space of contestation, postmodern feminists insist that we must attend to "who speaks for whom as much as to what is said" (Yeatman 1994, 15). In the words of Wendy Brown: "When the notion of a unified and coherent subject is abandoned, we . . . cease to be able to speak of woman or for women in an unproblematic way . . . dispensing with the unified subject does not mean ceasing to be able to speak about our experiences as women, only that our words cannot be legitimately deployed or construed as larger or longer than the moments of the lives they speak from" (1995, 40-41).

Recognizing such concerns for the particularity of individual perspective, this section takes up the view of just one postmodern feminist, one view that affords a vista markedly different from those considered to this point. In *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Wendy Brown offers an interpretation of recent policy contestations in terms of the normalizing practices of the disciplinary state fueled by the psychological force of Nietzschean *ressentiment*. To capture the full meaning of Brown's argument, it is important not to conflate *ressentiment* with the English word, resentment, for Nietzschean *ressentiment* engages a markedly different psychological register. As characterized in *The Genealogy of Morals*, *ressentiment* encompasses envy, spite, vengefulness, vindictive hatefulness, and self-abasement that pervade the psyche of the "weak," all of which cause them to question that which is inherently good and noble and to celebrate values produced by their own subjugation.

Seeking to illuminate a number of paradoxes of contemporary politics, Brown emphasizes that the Right's antigovernment discourse has masked a steady expansion of state powers and retrenchment of citizen rights over the past twenty years. While antistatist rhetoric diverts attention from increasing state domination, it also incites liberal and leftist protectiveness toward the state.

As the powers constituting late modern configurations of capitalism and the state have grown more complex, more pervasive, and simultaneously more difficult to track, both critical analyses of their power and a politics rooted in such a critique have tended to recede. Indeed Western leftists have largely forsaken analyses of the liberal state and capitalism as sites of domination and have focused instead on their implication in political and economic inequalities. At the same time, progressives have implicitly assumed the relatively unproblematic instrumental value of the state and capitalism in redressing such inequalities. (W. Brown 1995, 10)

According to Brown, this obliviousness to state domination locks progressive efforts that appeal to the state to remedy inequalities into a reactionary cycle that "reinstates rather than transforms the terms of domination that generated them" (7). In appealing to the state for rights, African Americans, Hispanics, Jews, women, gays, and lesbians seek a legal protection that "discursively entrenches the injury-identity connection it denounces . . . codify[ing] within the law the very powerlessness it seeks to redress . . . discursively collud[ing] with the conversion of attribute into identity, of historical effect of power into presumed cause of victimization" (21). Failing to recognize that politicized identity is itself a regulatory production of a disciplinary society, those who appeal to the liberal state for redress of injuries fail to comprehend that hard-won rights "imprison us within the subject positions they are secured to affirm and protect" (120).

Brown argues that rather than contributing to an emancipatory project, contestations over rights privatize and depoliticize, mystifying and reifying "social powers (property and wealth, but also race, sexuality, and gender) as the natural possessions of private persons" (123). In so doing, rights do not liberate us from relations of class, sexuality, gender, or race; on the contrary, they obfuscate power relations by creating a fictive equality of sovereign subjects before the law. According to Brown, precisely this conversion of social problems into matters of individualized, dehistoricized injury and entitlement gives rise to claims of reverse discrimination.

Within the framework of Nietzschean *ressentiment*, a peculiar affinity emerges between the reverse discrimination claims of white men and the claims of sexual and racial discrimination advanced by women and people of color. Both are incited by "the moralizing revenge of the powerless, 'the triumph of the weak as

weak'" (67). According to Brown, "this incitement to *ressentiment* inheres in two related constitutive paradoxes of liberalism: that between individual liberty and social egalitarianism, a paradox which produces failure turned to recrimination by the subordinated, and guilt turned into resentment by the 'successful'; and that between the individualism that legitimates liberalism and the cultural homogeneity required by its commitment to political universality, a paradox which stimulates the articulation of politically significant differences on the one hand, and the suppression of them on the other" (67).

From this Nietzschean perspective, the political tactics of both the proponents and opponents of affirmative action are fueled by the same desire to inscribe past and present injury in the law. As such, the tactics of both sides conform to the same impetus to avenge hurt and redistribute pain. In both instances, *ressentiment* "produces an affect (rage, righteousness) that overwhelms the hurt; and it produces a site of revenge to displace the hurt (a place to inflict hurt as the sufferer has been hurt). Together these operations both ameliorate (in Nietzsche's term 'anaesthetize') and externalize what is otherwise 'unden-urable'" (68).

Comparing Standpoints on Welfare "Reform"

THE CONSERVATIVE CRITIQUE OF WELFARE POLICY

Concern with the value of self-reliance and the development of social policies that hold individuals responsible for their own actions fuels conservative women's attack on welfare. Accepting that the market economy affords employment opportunities to all who seek them, conservative women understand the causes of poverty in terms of the attitudes, the psychology, and the behavior of the poor. On this view, the problem to be addressed is a direct consequence of existing welfare policies that produce a class of people who adopt welfare as a way of life, who intentionally waste their skills and talents by willfully refusing to work.

Conservative women point to stories of individual upward mobility and success (for example, Clarence Thomas, Condoleezza Rice) as proof that high rates of unemployment among disadvantaged groups cannot be explained by appeals to lack of jobs, discrimination, or other social conditions over which the disadvantaged have no control. The poor remain poor because they are unwilling to accept the jobs available to them. The underdevelopment of the work ethic is the fundamental problem of the poor, a problem attributable to welfare programs that provide benefits to recipients while expecting nothing in return. In direct contrast to the market which reinforces the work ethic in individuals by relating rewards to individuals' investments of effort and contributions to society, welfare undermines the value of such reciprocity by severing the connection between

benefits and obligations. To rectify this problem, welfare programs should include a mandatory work requirement. Work must replace welfare in order to ensure the future prosperity of the currently disadvantaged members of society. Moreover, to facilitate recipients' integration into the mainstream of American life, an absolute lifetime limit (two to five years) should be placed on receipt of welfare benefits (Kondras 1995).

Once poverty is understood in terms of particular debilitating attitudes held by the poor, welfare-to-work programs emerge as an appropriate social policy designed specifically to alter individual attitudes toward work. Conservative women suggest that mandatory work requirements will generate a host of benefits for both individual welfare recipients and society. Requiring welfare recipients to work on a regular basis will help them to cultivate a work "habit" while simultaneously overcoming their fears of not being able to compete in a job market. On-the-job experience in public service projects will increase welfare recipients' feelings of self-worth and self-confidence as they realize they are contributing something of value to their communities. The dependency bred by reliance upon government hand-outs will be supplanted by a growing sense of self-sufficiency as participants gain a sense of mastery in their job assignments. The gradual accrual of job experience will enhance the marketable skills and hence the employability of welfare recipients. Over time the regular exposure to the world of work, coupled with the newfound confidence and the acquisition of marketable skills, will facilitate the individual's transition from welfare to permanent paid employment in the private sector. Thus, in the long term, state and federal expenditures for welfare will be reduced as the total number of recipients is reduced through job placements. State and federal governments will also realize immediate reductions in their welfare expenditures as those recipients who are unwilling to assume their work responsibilities are terminated from the welfare rolls. Work requirements also produce an additional residual benefit: reduction in the stigma associated with welfare. As the rolls are purged of welfare "cheats," welfare workers will encounter a new respect as the American public recognizes that the poor "have earned" the benefits that they receive.

Conservative proposals to return control of welfare to the states were designed to end any notion of "entitlement" to public assistance. These proposals called for significant reductions in expenditures for welfare. States were allowed to cut welfare allotments by 20 percent from the 1994 benefit levels. Federal contributions through block grants were also reduced during a seven-year period. Benefits to recipients necessarily fell as a consequence. Reducing benefits while simultaneously requiring recipients to work off the benefits received was designed to deter people from seeing welfare as an alternative to work. The image of welfare as a "prepaid lifetime vacation plan," in the words of Ronald Reagan, would be permanently replaced by a conception of welfare as minimal subsistence

support, administered with a sufficient degree of harshness and limitation in benefits that people who could work would be happy to get off and those who did work would stay off.

Like the "carrot and stick" of the market system (high wages as positive incentive, fear of unemployment as negative incentive), conservative women envision a revised welfare system that includes positive and negative incentives. As a positive incentive, work placement for welfare recipients affords the opportunity for the poor to develop work skills and habits, self-esteem and confidence, as well as a basic "marketability." The assignment of individuals to menial jobs without pay as a condition for the receipt of minimal subsistence benefits and termination of benefits after a fixed number of years constitute the negative incentive. Each aspect of the "reform" proposals is central to their appeal; in combination they help restore the value of self-reliance, the discipline of capitalism, and the role of the market in the determination of merit.

LIBERAL FEMINIST VIEWS ON WELFARE

In their efforts to engage the "war against poor women," liberal feminists have launched a barrage of facts to counter persistent misrepresentations of the poor in conservative political rhetoric. Contrary to pernicious stereotypes, poor women do not see welfare as a desirable way of life. They do not "get pregnant" to qualify for or increase welfare benefits. Indeed, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients had a lower fertility rate than other American women of childbearing age. The typical welfare recipient seeks assistance during a crisis caused by illness, unemployment, domestic violence, or divorce, relies upon public assistance for less than two years, and returns to the labor force at the earliest opportunity (S. L. Thomas 1994).

Conservative stereotypes of the poor routinely invoke the "pathological theory of poverty," which attributes the cause of poverty to the characteristics or "defects" of the poor themselves (Handler 1972, 3). Assuming that the market economy places success within the reach of any hardworking individual, conservatives assert that individual effort is all that stands between the rich and the poor. Thus, the poor are peculiarly responsible for their own fate. Those who choose to live in ignominious conditions by willfully refusing to take advantage of the opportunities that the free market affords are morally reprehensible. On this view, "laziness" or unwillingness to work is a form of moral defect for which the poor should be held strictly accountable.

Liberal feminists have pointed out that the pathological theory of poverty does not fit the facts of American poverty. An examination of the demographic characteristics of the poor suggests that the pathological theory is fundamentally flawed. In the early 1990s when the federal government began exploring policy changes to abolish welfare entitlements, "the poor" in the United States were a

large and diverse group. Many of the "officially poor," that is, those who live below the "poverty line" set by the U.S. government, work full-time outside the home (Levitan and Shapiro 1987; Spalter-Roth et al. 1995). In 1995, a full-time employee working for minimum wages earned \$2,000 a year less than the poverty line for a family of three (Chideya 1995). Of the "officially poor," only 38 million Americans received government assistance. Far more received Supplemental Security Income (for the elderly, blind, and disabled) than received Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). More than two-thirds of recipients of public assistance were unable to work because of age, disability, or caretaking responsibilities for preschool age children. Of households with pre-transfer incomes below the poverty line 48 percent were headed by individuals aged sixty-five or older, another 12 percent were headed by disabled individuals, and 7 percent were headed by women with children under the age of six. Of the remaining households receiving public assistance, 7.5 percent were headed by persons who work full-time year round but whose incomes are insufficient to meet family subsistence needs, 20.4 percent were headed by persons who were employed but not on a full-time basis, and 5 percent were headed by students (Danziger and Gottschalk 1983, 1993; Edin and Lein 1997).

Studies of AFDC recipients (the subset of the poor most frequently characterized in terms of the pathological theory of poverty) indicate that the belief that AFDC household heads do not work or will not work is simply mistaken. Although 63 percent of the four million women receiving AFDC benefits in 1995 had children under the age of five (Mink 1996), 70 percent of AFDC households had at least one earner during the years on welfare. In 40 percent of these households, the head of household earned the income; in the remainder, the earnings were those of older children within the household (Rein 1982; Spalter-Roth et al. 1995). In direct contrast to popular stereotypes, black women receiving AFDC worked far more often than white women. There was also much greater movement between welfare and work than the pathological theory suggests. Only 2 percent of households receiving public benefits remained on welfare for eight years or more (S. L. Thomas 1994). The vast majority resorted to welfare to upgrade their total income because their earnings from work were inadequate or because their earning capacity had been temporarily undermined through unemployment.

A number of studies of the attitudes of the poor toward work also challenge the pathological theory's accuracy. In answer to the question "Do the poor want to work?" research on the work orientations of the poor has concluded that the poor do indeed want to work. The work ethic is upheld strongly by AFDC recipients and work plays an important role in their life goals. Indeed, results from comprehensive studies of the attitudes of the poor toward work "unambiguously indicate that AFDC recipients, regardless of sex, age or race, identify

their self-esteem with work as strongly as do the non-poor. . . . Despite their adverse position in society and their past failures in the labor force, these persons clearly upheld the work ethic and voiced strong commitments toward work" (Berkeley Planning Associates 1980, 92; see also Goodwin 1972; Schiller 1973; Goodale 1973; Kaplan and Tausky 1972; Gueron and Pauly 1991; Tienda and Stier 1991; Handler 1995; Edin and Lein, 1997).

From the liberal feminist standpoint, the pathological theory of poverty that underlies conservatives' demands for "welfare reform" rests upon a number of misconceptions. Contrary to the pathological view, the able bodied poor share the American commitment to the work ethic, and they do work. Their problem is not one of attitude but one of inadequate pay or inadequate employment opportunities (Handler 1995; Edin and Lein 1997). The market economy has not afforded these individuals the mythologized avenues of upward social mobility. Moreover, some economic research suggests that even in an expanding economy, the market will not provide an escape from poverty for these individuals in the future. "The evidence from the recent past suggests that economic growth will not raise the earnings of the poor enough to enable many of them to escape poverty without government assistance. The major factor contributing to the reduction of poverty since 1966 seems to have been the growth in government transfers, which offset increases in poverty resulting from demographic changes and high unemployment rates. Economic growth *per se* seems to have had little effect" (Danziger and Gottschalk 1983, 750).

The great majority of welfare recipients who have been involved with "workfare" and those who are now involved in welfare-to-work programs have been placed in low-level maintenance and clerical positions. Jobs such as cutting grass, picking up trash, washing dishes, mopping and waxing floors, driving senior citizen vans, moving furniture, childcare, and general office work have been typical (Linden and Vincent 1982; Burtless 1995; Edin and Lein 1997). Evaluation studies note that program administrators have made no effort to offer participants jobs that utilize work skills that they already possess, nor have administrators made placements that enable participants to acquire marketable skills. Moreover, assignments tend to be in unskilled jobs, precisely the kind of jobs which are prone to elimination during periods of economic recession (Briggs, Rungeling and Smith 1980; Rosen 1980; Friedman and Hausman 1975; Danziger and Gottschalk 1993; DeParle 1997). Several evaluation studies suggest that placing welfare recipients in jobs that require few job skills actually lessens their chances of obtaining employment which affords sufficient income to escape poverty. A welfare recipient who succeeds in finding a job in the workforce equivalent to the welfare work assignment earns too little to support a household (Bernstein and Goodwin, 1978; Edin and Lein 1997; DeParle 1997).

Liberal feminists situate debates about welfare "reform" in the context of partisan politics. The increasingly vitriolic attack on poor women, which emerged in Reagan's 1970 gubernatorial campaign and has been a staple of Republican political rhetoric ever since, was reinvigorated in the 1994 congressional elections in the form of the "Contract With America." California Governor Pete Wilson launched his attack on affirmative action as a tactic to advance his presidential aspirations; Senator Robert Dole introduced legislation to abolish all federal affirmative action programs for much the same reason. Consciously devising a "southern strategy," Republican politicians relied on racism and sexism to help them secure the votes of the "social conservatives" and thereby break the Democratic party's hold on the South (Melich 1996).

To fight this political mobilization of race and gender bias, then, liberal feminists took their arsenal of facts to the public forum. They took out full page ads in and submitted letters to the editors of the major national newspapers. They formed a formidable lobby in Washington. They staged vigils at the White House. They conducted letter writing campaigns, held press conferences, developed networks, and circulated information to groups across the country. They organized sophisticated e-mail distribution mechanisms to orchestrate grassroots mobilization when critical votes were pending in Congress. Under the banner, "A War Against Poor Women is a War Against All Women," liberal feminists sought to build solidarity among women in their fight to secure the minimal provisions of the American welfare state. Toward that end they launched a massive public education and voter registration campaign—"Freedom Summer '96"—to double the voter registration among eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds and to encourage Americans to vote in order to save women's rights and civil rights (De Wirt 1996).

SOCIALIST FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF WELFARE "REFORM"

From a socialist feminist standpoint, the attack on poor women under the guise of "welfare reform" involves ideological distortions that cannot be grasped within a framework of partisan politics. Indeed, both the Democratic and the Republican parties made commitments to "end welfare as we know it." Bill Clinton advanced the slogan during his 1992 bid for the presidency, and the Republicans incorporated the idea into their "Contract with America" during the congressional elections in 1994. Both parties cooperated to pass legislation to replace AFDC entitlements with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which was signed into law by President Clinton in August 1996. According to socialist feminists, relentless harangues against the poor in both parties' campaign rhetoric have produced systemic misperceptions in American politics. "A poll of 1994 voters found that one of five believed that welfare was the largest federal government expense, larger than the military budget. The reality is

that AFDC spending since 1964 has amounted to less than 1.5 percent of federal outlays" (Sklar 1995, 23).

While American voters are whipped into a frenzy of resentment against the "undeserving poor," the structural forces that threaten their fragile economic security go largely unnoticed. Changes in tax policy have produced the highest income inequality in the United States since 1929. During the past two decades, the share of the nation's income received by the top 5 percent of Americans increased nearly 25 percent, from 18.6 percent to 24.5 percent, while the share of income received by the poorest 20 percent fell by nearly 25 percent, from 5.7 percent to 4.3 percent. The richest quintile of Americans "earned" 46.9 percent of the nation's total income, while the middle 60 percent of the population earned 49.4 percent and the poorest quintile earned 3.8 percent (Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy 1995). As corporate profits have soared since 1979, many white-collar, high-paying positions, as well as many unionized manufacturing jobs, have been eliminated through "downsizing," while newly created jobs are concentrated in the far less lucrative service sector. "The sting is in the nature of the replacement work. Whereas 25 years ago the vast majority of the people who were laid off found jobs that paid as well as their old ones, Labor Department numbers show that now only about 35 percent of laidoff workers end up in equally remunerative or better paid jobs" (Uchitelle and Kleinfeld 1996, 1, 14). As the prospect of secure employment becomes increasingly rare, so too does the hope of earning a living wage. When adjusted for inflation, workforce-wide hourly wages fell 14 percent between 1973 and 1993. For those in the lowest ranks of the income pyramid, the loss in earning power has been much greater. "An unforgiving labor market, in recession and recovery alike, has hammered young, less-educated women. . . . Between 1979 and 1989, hourly wages plummeted for these women, falling most rapidly for African American women who didn't finish high school. This group's hourly wages, adjusted for inflation, fell 20 percent in that 10 year period" (Tilly and Albelda 1994, 9). Welfare recipients have fared no better: the median AFDC payment, when adjusted for inflation, has been slashed 47 percent since 1970 (Sklar 1995, 22).

From a socialist feminist standpoint, "impooverished women don't create poverty any more than slaves created slavery. But they are primary scapegoats for illegitimate economics" (Sklar 1995, 21). They provide a handy focal point for a vicious politics of resentment, while corporate greed escapes all public scrutiny. They provide the ideological camouflage for the

fiscal doctrine of unlimited, unending deficit reduction [which] is not aimed at stable prices, full employment, and greater private investment. Rather, the motivations are to reduce the size of government, to disassemble the U.S. system of social insurance, and to maintain unyielding

downward pressure on the price level. The implied economic policy is one of stagnation: a disproportionate weight is put on low inflation to the detriment of employment, investment, and general economic growth. The policy is also counter-redistributive: it favors wealth holders at the expense of wage-earners, the elderly, and the poor. If stated outright, these goals would be manifestly unpopular, so the sales pitch for extreme deficit reduction has to focus elsewhere—on creating and perpetuating misconceptions or downright superstitions about the federal budget and the public debt. (Sawicky, cited in Sklar 1995, 23–24)

For socialist feminists, capitalism remains the underlying problem of the liberal democratic state. Vitriolic policy debates manage to mask the increasing concentration of wealth by scapegoating African Americans, women, and the poor. As such, these diversionary debates must be understood as a brilliant strategic move in the "new class war," which will be systematically addressed only when the underclasses mobilize effectively to expropriate their expropriators.

BLACK FEMINIST ANALYSES OF RACIST WELFARE DISCOURSES

Black feminists point out that racially coded policy discourse is thoroughly mystifying. Indeed, its commodification of otherness allows opposites to embrace (hooks 1992). The very same whites who believe that blacks are *flourishing* during the era of corporate downsizing also believe that blacks are the pathological poor, who must be disciplined by the strictures of the market, forced from the welfare rolls (Bond 1996). The rhetoric of "welfare reform" artfully reconfigures poverty as a "social/cultural/psychological pathology, corroborated by a public discourse of deficiency and remediation" (Polakow 1993, 3). In projecting the image of "welfare cheats" as the fundamental problem of poverty policy, racially coded policy discourse constructs a poverty population of wanton, voraciously sexual, black adults, who pose a threat to American "family values." The distortions in this stereotype again eclipse the facts: ten million of the fourteen million AFDC recipients at the time that welfare was abolished were children under the age of eighteen, and the majority of welfare recipients were white; these facts disappear in the tunnel vision of white supremacist "solipsism" (Spelman 1988, 116; Edin and Lein 1997).

Interrogating these ideological distortions, black feminists have situated the debate on "welfare reform" in the unrelenting history of racist practices of the American state. On this view, the war against poor women must be understood in relation to the long tradition of white hegemony that gave birth to slavery, the "separate but equal" doctrine, disenfranchising electoral practices, and the exclusion of domestics and agricultural laborers (black-dominant occupations) from social security provision. Within this tradition, the attack on welfare can

be construed as a "women first" strategy in the Republican war against "big government" (G. Mink 1996), a war that includes incursions against the economic gains made by African Americans who have found employment with the federal government. More than one-third of all African American lawyers and 30 percent of all black scientists work for the federal government (Hacker 1992). Employment in the federal bureaucracy, often in the "redistributive agencies" of the welfare state, has been the primary route to middle-class existence for many African American women. "Great society programs in the 1960s heightened the importance of social welfare employment for all groups, particularly women. Between 1960 and 1980, human services accounted for 41 percent of the job gains for women compared with 21 percent for men. Among women, there were significant differences in the importance of human services employment for whites and blacks. For white women, the social welfare economy accounted for 39 percent of the job gain between 1960 and 1980; for black women, an even more dramatic 58 percent" (Eric, Rein and Wiget 1983, 103). "Downsizing" the government, then, places the economic security, the precondition for autonomous citizenship, at risk for millions of African Americans.

Although welfare "reformers" construct themselves as the defenders of the American family, their racially coded diatribes against pregnant teens suggest that childbearing and childrearing are not rights secured to all citizens by the U.S. Constitution (Roberts 1997). On the contrary, the recent welfare "reform" creates a class of women required by law to work outside the home, a move that denies the value of work involved in mothering, while infringing intolerably upon individual choices concerning childbearing and childrearing (Mink 1996). Once again differential rights are accorded to Americans on the basis of race and economic duress. Patricia Hill Collins (1995) has suggested that the family must be understood as a discursive site of belonging that envelops issues of space, territory, and home. When blacks are constructed as a fundamental threat to American "family values," such racist codes can be translated in various vernaculars: there is no space for racial harmony; there is no room for racial integration; blacks have no home in white America; they are simply not welcome here.

Beverly Guy-Sheffall (1995) has noted that the idealized nuclear family, with the male breadwinner and the homemaker mother, is a bourgeois Eurocentric norm that bears little resemblance to family relations allowed slaves by their masters. When this norm is invoked by white Americans in the late twentieth century, it must be understood as a hegemonic move designed to eradicate a perceived threat. In 1995, 60 percent of black children were raised in women-headed families. The love that black mothers afford their children by providing a sense of self-esteem that withstands the trials of racism and the onset of puberty, and the shared solidarity networks that foster collective responsibility among "othermothers" within the black community do indeed challenge the

white bourgeois insistence that families must be heterosexual, nuclear, and male-dominant. Within this context, the castigation of welfare mothers and black teenage pregnancy (when black teenagers constitute less than 12 percent of unmarried mothers) function as a racist code that discursively constructs black families as a symbol of what must not be (P. H. Collins 1990, 1995; Uslansky 1996). When Norplant implants for black teenagers in Baltimore high schools are added into the equation, the specter of Margaret Sanger's eugenic agenda seems far too close for comfort. Welfare "reform" becomes a guise for new social control mechanisms devised to ban poor black women from reproducing (Roberts 1997). Incorporated into the policies of a racist state, "welfare reform" has a complex agenda: coercively enforcing white norms of feminine dependency, sexuality, morality, and family; eliminating the economic security essential for equal citizenship; controlling the fertility of poor black women and thereby contributing to racial engineering; and reiterating the demand, unchanged since slavery, that black women be the "mules of the world" (Hurston 1978, 29).

From a black feminist standpoint, racially coded policy discourses concerning affirmative action and "welfare reform" are symptoms of resurgent white supremacy. Although resistance must be mounted at these sites of contemporary oppression, these local struggles must be understood in the context of a larger campaign against racist hegemony. Success in securing a decent standard of living for poor women or in repulsing the conservative attack on affirmative action must be supplemented by systematic extirpation of the racism which is their root cause.

POSTMODERN FEMINIST CAUTIONS: POVERTY, DEPENDENCY, AND RESENTMENT

In the case of antipoverty policy, as in the case of affirmative action, Wendy Brown seeks to contest shared assumptions concerning the state as a reliable ally in emancipatory projects. The discursive construction of impoverished women as "dependents," an idiom that conveniently links images of addiction with images of childhood, also resonates with the reactionary, victim-blaming politics of *resentment*. Moreover, state interventions to "assist" the poor have been and continue to be the disciplinary practices that produce dependent state subjects. Within this frame, policy "solutions" that appeal to the state for redress are deeply problematic. Thus Brown questions feminist tactics that would expand women's relationships to state institutions. Rather than empowering women, these "expanding relationships produce regulated, subordinated, and disciplined state subjects . . . reconfigur[ing] compulsory motherhood . . . intensifying the isolation of women in reproductive work, ghettoiz[ing] women in service work . . . exchanging dependence upon individual men for regulation by contemporary institutionalized processes of male domination" (Brown 1995, 173).

Understanding welfare rights discourses in terms of resentment and the disciplinary practices of the state makes the identification of progressive political practices enormously complex. Brown notes that her critique of liberal rights discourses relevant to both the affirmative action debate and antipoverty policies "does not build toward policy recommendations or a specific political program" (W. Brown 1995, 173). Nevertheless, she does suggest that to reconceptualize freedom in order to contest contemporary antidemocratic configurations of power, we must move beyond the political economy of perpetrator and victim that cedes political ground to moral and juridical ground thereby reducing politics to punishment (27). To the extent that a politics fixed upon revenge is mired in the past injury that produced it, an emancipatory strategy must be oriented toward the future. Brown cautions that the centrality of "erased histories and historical invisibility" to the pain of "subjugated identities" mitigates against any embrace of "Nietzsche's counsel on the virtues of 'forgetting'" (74). Instead, she suggests we begin a new political conversation in which the demand for revenge is supplanted by the demand for recognition. Within this radically democratic discourse, the ontological defensiveness of politicized identity would be replaced by contestation among "unwieldy and shifting pluralities adjudicating for themselves and their future on the basis of nothing more than their own habits and arguments" (37). Within this mode of political speech, designed to "destabilize the formulation of identity as fixed position, entrenched history, mandated moral entrapment," agonistic practices discursively forging an alternative future would banish the dispersion of blame for an unlivable present (75-76).

Assessing the Merits of Standpoint Analysis

As an analytical tool, feminist standpoint theory encourages researchers to attend to competing accounts of the same phenomenon. But once multiple views have been collected, what is the analyst to do with them? How useful is the comparison of competing standpoints? Can incompatible claims be adjudicated? Are there criteria for determining the comparative merits of alternative accounts? How does comparative analysis of alternative standpoints contribute to feminism's transformative objectives?

Judith Grant has suggested that feminist standpoint theory can be reinterpreted as a "self-consciously derived theoretical tool in service of a politics" (1993, 119). On her view, conceiving feminist standpoints as an analytical tool shifts the focus from epistemological issues to feminist politics. Within this frame, the central question concerning the utility of standpoint analysis is whether it makes policy debates more intelligible and more actionable. If comparisons of alternative accounts illuminate the forces fueling debates, such as the debates over affirmative action and welfare "reform" considered in this chapter, then they can

help feminists devise political strategies that empower women to resist oppression. Within this context, then, the utility of standpoint analysis can be gauged by answering two basic questions. Does comparative standpoint analysis enable us to comprehend the complexity of the debates over affirmative action and welfare "reform"? Does that heightened comprehension help us to chart emancipatory political interventions in these policy domains?

The criteria Grant identifies for assessing the merits of comparative standpoint analysis are closely tied to her concern to foster democratic politics in an increasingly bureaucratic and technocratic age. Standpoint analysis, valuable because it expands the terms of political discussion, airs claims too frequently silenced in the contemporary political fray. On this view, crucial differences among these views cannot and ought not be resolved at a theoretical level. They must be resolved through an open political struggle in which we as a people decide what kind of a political community we wish to be.

While such an account of the utility of standpoint theory has much to commend it, in certain respects it does not reap the full benefit of comparative analysis of contentious theoretical presuppositions. It retreats too quickly from theoretical analysis to majority rule and in so doing replicates the subjectivist premises so characteristic of contemporary politics (MacIntyre, 1981). How are political participants to choose between the political prescriptions of conservative women, liberal feminists, socialist feminists, black feminists, and postmodern feminists? Is it all to be a matter of politics, interest accommodation, or the manipulative ploys of wiles and wills? If so, is there any hope for justice for disempowered groups?

If the experiences of situated knowers are identified as the grounds for the construction of competing standpoints, how can feminists avoid forms of subjectivism, which sustain both an unshakable conviction in the veracity of one's own experience and relativist resignation concerning the impossibility of adjudicating incompatible, experience-based claims? As pointed out in chapter 2, competing appeals to "experience" acknowledge no criteria for choosing between incompatible accounts. In the absence of good reasons to sustain preference for one view over another, politics cannot help but become manipulative and rancorous (MacIntyre 1981).

I would like to suggest that there is another way to understand the utility of standpoint analysis. Post-positivist conceptions of knowledge emphasize that theoretical presuppositions structure perception, the definition of an appropriate research question, the nature of acceptable evidence, data collection and analysis, and the interpretation of research findings. A methodology that requires investigation of multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon helps to illuminate the theoretical assumptions that frame and accredit the constitution of facticity within each explanatory account. By engaging competing theoretical

frameworks, feminist standpoint analysis can make visible social and political values in need of critical assessment. Juxtaposing incompatible accounts forces the analyst to engage questions concerning the adequacy and internal consistency of the theoretical presuppositions, the standards of evidence and the models of explanation accredited by the competing accounts (Hawkesworth 1988).

The values informing the five standpoints compared in this chapter construe the social world very differently. A notion of an unfettered individual who is free to pursue his/her interests without interference structures the conservative analysis of affirmative action and welfare reform. While liberal feminists share a commitment to individualism, their understanding of the power of racism and sexism enables them to perceive forms of discrimination at the hands of individual decision-makers that conservatives do not acknowledge. Tracing the problem of race, gender, and class bias to individuals, however, allows liberal feminists to remain optimistic about the possibility for state intervention to redress such bias. Socialist feminists call this optimism into question, pointing out structural constraints on individual choice and action that flow from the intricate interrelations of capitalism and liberal democratic states. Black feminists suggest that structural constraints emanate from systemic racism, as well as from economic relations within capitalism, and that failure to recognize and address the operation of racist codes sanctions modes of social amnesia destructive to the lives of people of color. Working within Nietzschean and Foucaultian frames, postmodern feminist Wendy Brown not only challenges notions of neutral state apparatus, which can be deployed for progressive purposes, but also calls attention to the putative role of *ressentiment* in fueling contemporary contestations over rights. Once made visible, the values that inform these competing accounts can be subjected to critical scrutiny.

Consider, for example, the contradictory claims of conservative women and liberal feminists concerning the adequacy of the pathological theory of poverty. While these claims cannot be resolved by appealing to the experiences of the women who advance them, theoretical critiques of atomistic and methodological individualism, in conjunction with aggregate economic data and survey research involving poor women, can provide ample evidence of the flaws of the pathological account of poverty (Edin and Lein 1997). Given the pervasive evidence against the pathological account, standpoint analysis not only enables feminist scholars to demonstrate the defects of conservative claims, but also to probe the appeal of the problematic conceptions of individualism. Thus standpoint analysis can raise important issues pertaining to evidence blindness, sanctioned ignorance, and social amnesia.

As pointed out in previous chapters, standpoint theory as an epistemic doctrine tends to appeal either to conceptions of ideology or to the sociology of knowledge to explain individual belief. But this also raises important theoretical

issues. Many women who espouse conservative, liberal feminist, socialist feminist, black feminist, and postmodern feminist views come from remarkably similar class backgrounds and engage in similar kinds of intellectual labor. How then are we to explain their acceptance of such radically divergent views? Determinist and reductionist explanations simply cannot account for the diversity of political perspectives presented in this chapter.

All the proponents of the varying views presented here claim to be dispelling distortions and mystifications. Conservative women argue that claims concerning racial and sexual discrimination distort the functioning of imperial market forces. Liberal feminists, socialist feminists, and black feminists argue that conservative claims concerning reverse discrimination mystify relations of power and privilege in contemporary society. And postmodern feminist Wendy Brown argues that both gender-based and race-based discrimination claims and reverse discrimination claims mystify and mask the "slave morality" from which they emerge. No enumeration of the particular characteristics of individual knowers or the class background of academic women explains these divergent beliefs. But a shift of focus from subjective knowers to analysis of the adequacy of divergent theoretical accounts of contemporary social life might help us to see how different theoretical frameworks structure perception, accord credit evidence, and provide the rhetorical force for particular arguments and, in so doing, help us to assess the comparative merits of competing claims.

Consider, for example, the presumption of racial and sexual superiority that fuels conservative arguments that white men have "rights" to certain educational and employment opportunities that are "violated" when women and minorities are admitted or hired. Can this conviction persist once the premise of white-male superiority is subjected to systematic critique? Can the assumption of a "right" to certain employment opportunities coexist with conservatives' acceptance of the market's premise that no one ever has a right to a job?

Consider the comparative merits of other competing claims: socialist feminists claim that a politics of resentment against the "undeserving" poor is strategic camouflage for the oppressive practices of late capitalism, while Wendy Brown claims that a "victim-blaming politics of resentment" must be understood in relation to the moralizing revenge of the powerless, who wish to inscribe their injuries into law. Does an appeal to Nietzschean resentment place claims of reverse discrimination on the same plane as centuries of racial oppression? Does the invocation of "slave morality" as the common source of resentment create a false equivalence between the conjured injuries of privileged whites and the continuing harms experienced by people of color in this country? Does the depiction of identity politics as "recrimination produced by failure" implicitly discredit liberal meritocratic myths, which construct the marginalized as "failures," cruelly presuming that their quest for political rights derives from psychological

drives induced by "failure"? Can socialist feminist critiques of capitalism adequately address the racial coding of contemporary policy debates? Can liberal feminist electoral strategies adequately engage the economic and racial dimensions of these contentious policy debates?

To answer any of these questions, it is necessary to analyze and assess the theoretical presuppositions that structure contradictory observations and make divergent interpretations meaningful. In taking up such an evaluative research agenda, feminist standpoint analysis has particular strengths. Comparative analysis of competing standpoints illuminates problems that theoretical and empirical research must engage, problems masked by myths of value-free inquiry. Juxtaposing and examining competing standpoints reveal contentious theoretical assumptions and problematic prescriptions, as well as lacunae that follow from them.

As the comparison of competing views of affirmative action and welfare "reform" makes clear, all perspectives are not equally insightful. Conservative women and liberal feminists operate within the same parameters of classical liberal theory. Within this theoretical framework, liberal feminists provide cogent arguments for rejecting the erroneous claims of conservatives. But precisely because they operate within the contours of the capitalist market, liberal feminists are markedly insensitive to the structural forces that undermine the promise of equal opportunity for a very large segment of the population. Socialist feminists raise important challenges to the moral legitimacy of a hierarchical division of labor and a mode of social organization that viciously punishes the "losers," whom it both produces and requires. But socialist feminists cannot account for the distortions that racism introduces to the operations of a capitalist market. Black feminists make visible the virulence and persistence of racism, but they fall back upon liberalism or socialism for economic analysis and tactics for political transformation. Postmodern feminist Wendy Brown reminds us that the state is not a neutral instrument and that normalizing practices threaten to ensnare emancipatory projects, but her call for a free space of contestation provides little direction for feminist praxis currently under threat from reactionary forces.

Theoretical analysis is no substitute for politics. Developing a systematic critique of competing theoretical standpoints will neither determine the outcome of the next election nor translate directly into a transformed policy agenda. Nonetheless, theoretical analysis can help feminist scholars and activists become aware of the theoretical underpinnings and implications of our political arguments. It can help move feminist political debates beyond impasses created by *ad hominem* arguments, emotivist exchanges, and the devastating damage to coalition politics that flows from appeals to the authority of individual experience. If the adoption of standpoint theory as an analytical tool contributes to this end, then it makes good on Hartsock's promise to play a liberatory role, although not precisely in the way that Hartsock envisioned.

Feminist standpoint analysis also provides resources for achieving objectivity as reconceptualized by feminist scholars. The juxtaposition of competing theoretical accounts illuminates the role of social values in cognition, an illumination that has important implications for an adequate understanding of objectivity, as noted in chapter 3. Traditional methods in the social sciences are premised upon the assumption that the chief threat to objectivity is idiosyncrasy. Notions of replicability and intersubjective verification presume that the central obstacle to objectivity lies in the emotional and perceptual quirks of the subjective self that distort, confuse, and interfere with objective apprehension of the external world. Recognition of the theoretical constitution of facticity challenges the myth of radical idiosyncrasy and the optimistic assumption that intersubjective agreement can suffice to accredit knowledge once the bias of individual observers has been purged. If social values incorporated in a theoretical framework structure perceptions of the world, then intersubjective corroboration within that framework simply insulates those values from interrogation. Rather than functioning as the equivalent of objectivity, intersubjective consensus can shield shared values from critical reflection, truncate inquiry, and entrench error within intersubjectively "verified" theories. One virtue of feminist standpoint analysis is that it requires engagement of competing claims and competing theoretical frameworks. By examining the tacit presuppositions of alternative accounts, feminist standpoint analysis helps make visible potential sources of error masked by mainstream social science methods. Attuned to the complex interaction between theoretical assumptions, social values, and discipline-specific methods in the constitution of facticity, feminist standpoint analysis affords greater awareness of potential sources of error and a commitment to heightened interrogation of precisely that which is taken as unproblematic in competing accounts. As such, feminist standpoint analysis helps us confront the contentious assumptions most deeply entrenched in our conceptual apparatus by fostering sustained critique of problematic assumptions that impair an objective grasp of the complex issues confronting contemporary political life.

Chapter 8 Intersectionality

DOES FEMINIST RESEARCH generate truths about race and gender that mainstream scholarship has missed? If so, do these truths challenge dominant accounts of social institutions and practices? How do innovative feminist analytic tools make visible processes of racialization and gendering that have been naturalized by research methodologies accredited within the natural sciences and the social sciences? How can feminist methodological innovations that foreground social processes through which inequalities of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality are produced and maintained contribute to a critical reinterpretation of institutions central to liberal democratic governance?

To answer these questions, the final chapter of this book focuses on "intersectionality," the analytical tool developed by feminists of color in their continuing struggle to correct the omissions and distortions in feminist analysis caused by failure to investigate the structuring powers of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality. The chapter begins by tracing the emergence of the concept of intersectionality from the analyses of the simultaneity of oppressions advanced by African American women in the nineteenth century and considers a range of questions for investigation opened up by this important analytical tool. The chapter then turns to an extended case study, which demonstrates how the deployment of intersectionality as an analytical tool contributes to an understanding of power relations in the United States, which are rendered invisible by mainstream research methods in the social sciences.

The case study in this chapter draws together arguments and illustrates themes developed throughout the book. In keeping with the feminist goal to "denaturalize" relations of racial and gender power, it shows how innovative feminist analytical tools can challenge biological reductionism by showing in concrete instances how race and gender hierarchies are produced and maintained.

Is Science Multicultural?



POSTCOLONIALISMS,
FEMINISMS,
AND EPISTEMOLOGIES

Sandra Harding



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it is not just these new science and technology studies that possess all the valuable epistemological resources for the worlds of multicultural, postcolonial, global, and new gender relations that lie before us. The European scientific and epistemological legacy also can continue to make valuable contributions to these worlds. This may seem to many readers to be a naive and patronizing comment to make about modern European sciences and epistemologies. However, post-World War II science and technology studies are often understood to produce only a critical posture to the European legacy. My point here is that their critical posture also is accompanied by an appreciation of the power and value of this scientific and epistemological legacy—albeit one that differs in significant respects from conventional appreciations. The analyses here will try to locate epistemological implications of the post-World War II schools of science studies firmly within still valuable aspects of the European legacy. The question should be not how to preserve as if carved in stone or else to completely reject the European legacy, but rather how to update it so that it, like many other “local knowledge systems,” can be perceived to provide valuable resources for a world in important respects different from the one for which it was designed.

These analyses can also more clearly sort out just what the epistemic implications are of the new science and technology studies. Are the post-World War II, post-Kuhnian, feminist, and postcolonial accounts of nature and social relations supposed to be “truer” than the familiar, supposedly value- and interest-neutral ones? What happens once cultural elements in sciences and technologies are understood to consist not just of “values and interests,” but, more extensively, of culturally distinctive interests, discursive resources, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge? On what grounds can anyone persuasively support one of several competing accounts of nature or of the history of science if there are no longer plausible transcultural standards for justifying our beliefs? Must all knowledge, including of the laws of nature, find support only as a local point of view? If so, is all knowledge, including our best scientific claims, only relatively valid? Are there any uses left for such concepts as objectivity, rationality, good method, and the universal validity of scientific claims? And what about this very account itself—the account in this book? On what grounds should readers find it more satisfactory than its competitors? What are its limitations? What forms of reflexivity fit with the other epistemological concepts developed in these new kinds of science studies?

This chapter focuses on the notion of objectivity, proposing ways to extract it from its contexts and projects that are no longer regarded as viable, and to strengthen it so that it can function effectively in the world created by post-World War II social, economic, and political histories and the science and technology studies with which they have co-evolved.

8



Recovering Epistemological Resources: Strong Objectivity

What kinds of theories of knowledge will serve as reliable guides in the world revealed through postcolonial, feminist, and post-Kuhnian science and technology studies? The old theories insisted upon the possibility and desirability of a culturally neutral science that was to be insured by its distinctive method; to be exercised in the context only of justification; to produce one uniquely universally valid perfect reflection of nature's order; to be discovered by communities of expert knowers who could be isolated in their scientific work from the social currents flowing through their public (and “private”) life. This dream of a single, perfect model of knowledge has been lost forever under the rigorous gaze of the various schools of post-World War II science studies discussed in earlier chapters. Though it no longer represents state-of-the-art history, philosophy, or other approaches to understanding and explaining science and technology, this internalist epistemological vision still exerts a powerful hold on the imaginations of most people outside these disciplines and some who are inside them.¹ This dream remains especially compelling for people in professional and administrative classes around the globe who have received great benefits from modern scientific and technological change. Of course it is hard for anyone to bring the most rigorous critical examination to bear on ideals that so powerfully support the legitimacy of one's favorable circumstances.

But does giving up this dream require rejecting the epistemology of modern science completely? As indicated in earlier chapters, the answer here to this question is a resounding “no.” This chapter and the next three focus on how new ways of thinking about epistemological issues that have emerged from post-World War II historical, sociological, ethnographic, and philosophic studies of sciences and technologies can be used to retrieve and make functional again some important insights that stimulated the now archaic “dream.” To put the point another way,

Let us begin by noting some features of the new context within which any questions about objectivity must interact, whether or not we who ask such questions have such contexts in mind.³

1. *Science, society, and the new "objectivity question."*⁴ As the last five decades of science and technology studies have made clear, observations are theory laden; our beliefs form a network such that none are in principle immune from revision; and theories remain underdetermined by any possible collection of evidence for them. There are always many additional possibly plausible hypotheses about any state of affairs that have not yet been proposed, or have been considered but perhaps prematurely dismissed, and thus remain untested at any given moment in the history of science. Some small subset of them undoubtedly would fit the existing data just as well as whichever one is favored at present. After all, sciences produce new theories continually. As one analyst has put the point, many scientific theories can be consistent with nature's order, but no one can be uniquely congruent with it.⁵ In short, there is enough slack in scientific belief sorting to permit social values and interests, discursive resources, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge not just to leave their traces on otherwise culturally neutral results of research, but to constitute scientific projects in the first place.

This is not to say that science "makes up" its results of research, or that science is "nothing but politics by other means," of course, as familiar internalist epistemological approaches invariably interpret such findings of post-World War II histories, sociologies, ethnographies, and philosophies of science and technology. Rather, scientific and technological projects co-evolve with other elements of their particular historical social formation—new forms of local and global economic relations, of the state, of educational systems, of religious practice, of gender relations, of child-rearing, and so on. The whole social formation, including its scientific and technological projects, is "constrained" by nature's order, as these accounts make perfectly clear.

Most importantly, this co-evolution of sciences and the rest of their social formations turns out not just to limit the growth of knowledge, as it always does in one way or another, but also simultaneously to be a resource for its growth, enabling different cultures, and different historical eras in the same culture, ever to detect yet more aspects of nature's order. Such processes permit more than one theory to fit any set of observations, more than one interpretation of any theory to be reasonable, and, consequently, the growth of science in ever new directions, as two philosophers put the point.⁶

Moreover, modern so-called European scientific and technological projects and those of other cultures, past and present, are in important respects on a continuum and these days usually part of one single global knowledge system.⁷ Most obviously since 1492 and the beginnings of

five centuries of European Voyages of Discovery, the growth of modern sciences and technologies in Europe and the relative decline of other cultures' knowledge systems have been causally related. So-called development processes since World War II continue to "turn the world into a laboratory for European sciences" in many respects,⁸ though at the same time one can see how in many parts of the world, including the North, modern sciences in fact depend upon the continued production and reproduction of other local knowledge systems for their legitimacy and continued growth.⁹

One consequence of such skepticism about the older internalist theories of knowledge appears in the shift from the old to the new objectivity question. The old one asked "Objectivity or relativism? Which side are you on?"¹⁰ The new one takes this question itself to be a topic of discussion—a historic and epistemic problem to be explained. The new one still is directed toward many of the concerns addressed by the older question: Which of the competing grounds for claims about nature and social relations should we prefer? How can we block "might makes right" in the realm of knowledge production? How can we systematically identify widespread cultural assumptions about both nature and social relations, and the social projects that generate them, which have distorted so much of what heretofore has passed as universally valid scientific knowledge? However, the new objectivity question takes the status and underlying assumptions of the old objectivity question also to be one of its problems. It asks, what should be rejected and what saved of the older objectivism?¹¹ How can the notion of objectivity be updated so that it is more useful for contemporary attempts to understand nature and social relations?

Some readers may well think that now is none too soon to define what objectivity is for the purposes of this discussion. However, this urge should be resisted or, rather, approached in another way. One problem is that the term has no single reference in the prevailing discussions. For example, it has been applied to at least four kinds of entities. Objectivity, or the incapacity for it, has been attributed to individuals or groups of them, as in "women (or feminists, Marxists, environmentalists, blacks, 'Orientals,' welfare recipients, patients, etc.) are more emotional, less impartial, too politically committed, and thus less capable of objective judgments." Second, it has been attributed to knowledge claims, to statements, where it does not seem to add anything to claims to truth or closeness to truth, or to claims to sufficient evidence. Here, an objective claim is simply one that is better supported by evidence—more accurate, closer to the truth—than its competitors. Third, the notion is also attributed to methods or procedures that are thought to be fair: statistical, experimental, or repeated procedures (in the law, ones appealing to precedents) are more objective because they maximize standardization,

impersonality, or some other quality assumed to contribute to fairness. Fourth, objectivity is attributed to the structure of certain kinds of knowledge-seeking communities—in historian Thomas Kuhn's account, the kind characteristic of modern natural science.¹² In other accounts, these are specified as communities of experts, or ones that include members of different classes, races, and/or genders (or that exclude them), or that maximize adversarial relations of rigorous criticism of ideas and claims,¹³ or that maximize ideal speech conditions, and so on. Though distinct, these different referents of "objective" clearly are not totally independent in people's thinking. Most obviously, the other three should generate results of research that are less false.¹⁴

But noting these four distinct references for the term is only the beginning of mapping its convoluted outlines. This chapter cannot take space to continue that mapping here, but this project can be pursued through two recent, highly acclaimed histories of the notion. In one of them, Peter Novick shows that objectivity

is not a single idea, but rather a sprawling collection of assumptions,

attitudes, aspirations and antipathies. At best it is what the philosopher W. B. Gallie has called an "essentially contested concept," like "social justice" or "leading a Christian life," the exact meaning of which will always be in dispute.¹⁵

Some elements in the notion originate in Aristotle's thought; others have arisen in the last few decades. However, "older usages remain powerful"¹⁶ and are called up today whenever people are struggling to determine the place that science, or reason more generally, should have in society. As Robert Proctor, the author of the other history, puts the point about the neutrality ideal that both he and Novick see as historically always required of anything deserving the label "objective," "The ideal of value-neutrality is not a single notion, but has arisen in the course of protracted struggles over the place that science should have in society."¹⁷

Both Novick and Proctor point out that asserting objectivity sometimes has been used to advance and sometimes to retard the growth of knowledge, and the same can be said of assertions of relativism. Neither position automatically claims the scientific or rational high ground. Nor does either assure the political high ground: each has been used at some times to block social justice and at other times to advance it. As Proctor puts the point, neutrality, the central requirement of the conventional notion, has been used as "myth, mask, shield and sword."¹⁸

The concerns here are primarily with scientific procedures and methods. Such concerns arise from a widespread observation found in feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial, environmentalist, and other movements for social justice. Such analysts point out that some of the sexist, racist, or other kinds of systematically distorted results of research that have

been identified in the natural and social sciences certainly are the consequence of carelessness and inadequate rigor in following existing methods and norms for maximizing objectivity in research practices, as the conventional objectivist accounts always argued. However, a certain range of them is the consequence of something else: of inadequacies in how those methods and norms are conceptualized in the first place. The prevailing standards for good procedures for maximizing objectivity are *too weak* to be able to identify the kinds of culture-wide assumptions that shape the selection of those procedures as good ones in the first place, they argue.

This chapter explores one line of response to the new objectivity question's concern with what can be saved from the older internalist notion of objectivity. That is the program for "strong objectivity" which draws on standpoint epistemologies to provide a kind of method for maximizing our ability to block "might makes right" in the sciences.¹⁹ Maximizing objectivity is not identical to maximizing neutrality, as conventional understandings have assumed. Nor, it can be seen, does it always require it; in a certain range of cases, maximizing neutrality is an obstacle to maximizing objectivity. Though these insights have been developed in the way presented here in feminist theory, they have also been articulated far more broadly. For example, earlier chapters showed this kind of argument widely expressed in the postcolonial science studies.

2. *Weak objectivity, or when is neutrality an obstacle to maximizing objectivity?* The historical co-evolution of modern ideals of objectivity along with changing modern economic and state forms is described by two well-known biologists in the following way:

In some ways, the fate of science parallels that of bourgeois democracy: both were born as exuberant forces for liberation against feudalism, but their very successes have turned them into caricatures of their youth. The bold, antiauthoritarian stance of science has become docile acquiescence; the free battle of ideas has given way to a monopoly vested in those who control the resources for research and publication. Free access to scientific information has been diminished by military and commercial secrecy and by the barriers of technical jargon; in the commoditization of science, peer review is replaced by satisfaction of the client as the test of quality. The internal mechanisms for maintaining objectivity are, at their best—in the absence of sycophancy toward those with prestige, professional jealousies, narrow cliques, and national provincialism—able to nullify individual capricious errors and biases, but they reinforce the shared biases of the scientific community. The demand for objectivity, the separation of observation and reporting from the researchers' wishes, which is so essential for the development of science, becomes the demand for separation of thinking from feeling. This promotes moral detachment in scientists which, reinforced by specialization and bureaucratization, allows

them to work on all sorts of dangerous and harmful projects with indifference to the human consequences. The idealized egalitarianism of a community of scholars has shown itself to be a rigid hierarchy of scientific authorities integrated into the general class structure of the society and modeled on the corporation. And where the pursuit of truth has survived, it has become increasingly narrow, revealing a growing contradiction between the sophistication of science in the small within the laboratory and the irrationality of the scientific enterprise as a whole.²⁰

Can the kind of revision of philosophic ideals, such as objectivity, play a role in improving this situation? If scientific ideals (and ideas) and social formations co-evolve, as these authors and many others argue, then critically re-evaluating the ideals should be able to make a contribution to critically re-evaluating the discouraging contemporary relations between sciences and society that Levins and Lewontin describe. Ideals can have "material effects," through which they contribute to changing the course of history.

*Two politics of science.*²¹ Has the philosophy of science conceptualized either politics or maximizing objectivity richly enough to meet the widespread criticisms of contemporary sciences and their philosophy that are represented in the passage above? One problem is that the kinds of politics that most threaten the objectivity of science these days escape conceptualization in the conventional internalist philosophies of science.

There are two kinds of politics with which philosophies of science must be concerned. One kind is the older notion of politics as the overt actions and policies intended to advance the interests and agendas of so-called special interest groups. This kind of politics intrudes into "pure science" through consciously chosen and often clearly articulated actions and programs that shape what science gets done, how the results of research are interpreted, and, therefore, scientific as well as popular images of nature and social relations. This kind of politics is conceptualized as acting *on* the sciences from outside, as politicizing a science that was otherwise free of politics—or, at least, of that particular politics.²² This is the kind of relationship between politics and science against which the ideal of objectivity as neutrality—objectivism—works best though not perfectly, as Levins and Lewontin point out. It makes sense to think of these interests and values as intruding into science from outside it, and as held by less than (sometimes none of) the group of individuals who constitute legitimate members of the scientific community. In at least many cases, it also is plausible to think of these interests and values as an obstacle to the growth of knowledge. Nazi science, Lysenkoism, or creationist biology are the kinds of examples of such threats to the neutrality of science by political "irrationalism" that the defenders of objectivism have in mind. They do not have in mind the "intrusion" into

sciences of forces for maximizing objectivity and enlarging democratic tendencies; any and all "politics" are made to appear equally pernicious to the growth of scientific knowledge in the familiar internalist accounts.

However, sciences are always also shaped by a different kind of politics. Here power is exercised less visibly, less consciously, and *not on but through* the dominant institutional structures, priorities, research strategies, technologies, and languages of the sciences—through the practices and culture that constitute a particular scientific episode. Paradoxically, this kind of politics functions through the depoliticization of science—through the creation of "normal" or "authoritative" science.²³ Thus, a typical standard example that the neutrality enthusiasts cite to demonstrate the bad effects of politicizing science (and they are not wrong about this) can also, paradoxically, be understood as a paradigmatic example of the bad effects of *depoliticizing* science. Robert Proctor describes this example as follows:

It is certainly true that, in one important sense, the Nazis sought to politicize the sciences. . . . Yet in an important sense the Nazis might indeed be said to have "depoliticized" science (and many other areas of culture). The Nazis depoliticized science by destroying the possibility of political debate and controversy. Authoritarian science based on the "Führer principle" replaced what had been, in the Weimar period, a vigorous spirit of politicized debate in and around the sciences. The Nazis "depoliticized" problems of vital human interest by reducing these to scientific or medical problems, conceived in the narrow, reductionist sense of these terms. The Nazis depoliticized questions of crime, poverty, and sexual or political deviance by casting them in surgical or otherwise medical (and seemingly apolitical) terms. . . . Politics pursued in the name of science or health provided a powerful weapon in the Nazi ideological arsenal.²⁴

The institutionalized, normalized politics of eurocentrism and racism, male supremacy, and class exploitation have only here and there been initiated through the kind of violent politics practiced by the Nazis. Nevertheless, they similarly depoliticize northern scientific institutions and practices in ways that shape our images of natural and social worlds and legitimate exploitative policies. Thus, feminist critics have focussed on how gender-coded concepts of the scientist, the "man of professional wisdom," rationality, mechanistic models, "master molecule" models, and so on, escape standard procedures for producing value-neutrality because they have in the first place constituted the scientific institutions and practices that select neutrality-detecting procedures. Androcentric interests, discursive resources, and ways of organizing research constituted modern sciences.²⁵ And the postcolonial science and technology theorists have pointed out how much of modern science was organized for projects of European expansion. Eurocentric interests, discursive

resources, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge also constituted much of modern sciences in the first place.²⁶ Post-Kuhnian science studies provide many more examples of how religious, or national, or other local values, interests, discourses, and methods constituted modern scientific projects from their beginnings in early modern Europe.²⁷ In contrast to "intrusive politics," this kind of institutional politics does not force itself into purportedly pre-existing pure sciences; it has already constituted their natures and projects in the first place and on a continuing basis. State-of-the-art modern sciences always draw on local cultural resources in formulating their projects—for both better and worse.

Neutrality: From solution to problem. In this second case, where social relations help to constitute scientific projects as they together evolve, the neutrality ideal provides no resistance to the production of systematically distorted results of research, as we shall shortly see in more detail. But to put the matter this way is too mild a criticism of it. The neutrality ideal is not just useless in these circumstances; worse, it becomes part of the problem. Objectivism defends and legitimates the institutions and practices through which the distortions and their often exploitative consequences are generated. It certifies as value neutral, normal, natural, and therefore not political at all the policies and practices through which powerful groups can gain the information and explanations that they need to advance only their priorities—ones that usually conflict with others'.

Such information and explanations may well "work" in the sense of enabling prediction and control. However, this obvious fact does not provide evidence that the representation of nature's order in such a science is free of culturally local values and interests. A scientific account of one set of nature's regularities may at the same time obscure or draw attention away from other regularities and their causes, and from ones that would suggest other possibilities for human projects of organizing nature and social relations. One can get information about nature's order that makes possible building bigger bombs, accessing energy sources that are more toxic, or performing more expensive surgeries. Or one can get information that makes possible the equitable distribution of means to satisfy basic human needs for food, shelter, health, work, and just social relations of the world's economically and politically most vulnerable groups.

Moreover, the regularities of nature that make possible healing a body, charting the stars, or mining ores may be explained in ways permitting extensive (though not identical) prediction and control within radically different and even conflicting, culturally local, explanatory models. After all, Ptolemaic astronomy predicted perfectly well many of the movements in the heavens. Indeed, such observations have been

retained in modern astronomy. Farmers in radically different cultures can predict equally well a large range of weather patterns and their effects, just as health care workers in these cultures can predict when illness will occur and how to cure it. The richness of cultural resources for grasping nature's regularities and their underlying causes is not exhausted by those favored in the modern North, as earlier chapters showed. Moreover, the kinds of explanations favored by modern science have not always been the most effective ones for all projects—for example, for maintaining environmental balance or preventing chronically bodily malfunctions. "It works" is no guarantee of cultural neutrality; nor do claims to cultural neutrality always accompany the best-working sciences and technologies.

The neutrality ideal functions more through what its normalizing procedures and concepts implicitly prioritize than through explicit directives. This kind of politics requires no informed consent by those who exercise it, but only that scientists be "company men" (and women), following the prevailing rules of scientific institutions and their intellectual traditions. This normalizing politics frequently defines the objections of its victims and any criticisms of its institutions, practices, or conceptual world as agitation by special interests that threatens to damage the neutrality of science and its promotion of social progress. This kind of politics makes visible just why it is that when sciences are already in the service of the mighty, scientific neutrality ensures that "might makes right."

It is many decades since it has been reasonable to think of modern natural and social sciences as small-scale, weak, guerrilla warfare projects for truth, struggling courageously against the evil empires of ignorance and superstition—Davids against the Goliaths. We need a concept of objectivity, and methods for maximizing it, that enable scientific projects to escape containment by the values, interests, discursive resources, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge characteristic of the kinds of powerful social tendencies identified by Levins and Lewontin. Objectivism's reliance on the neutrality ideal cannot do it. Such an analysis leads to one obvious possibility: to separate the goal of maximizing objectivity from the neutrality requirement in order to identify the knowledge-limiting values and interests that constitute projects in the first place. This possibility has been hinted at again and again in the literature without ever being formulated as a systematic program.

Before turning to examine such a program, let's examine in another way what is problematic about objectivism's only weak objectivity.

"Weak objectivity" cannot identify paradigms. From this perspective, the conventional notion of objectivity that links it to the neutrality ideal appears too weak to do what it sets out to do. That it is too weak is only

one way in which it is inadequate. But I use the term to acknowledge the usefulness of standards for objectivity-tied-to-neutrality in detecting the subset of distorting interests and values that do differ between individuals in the scientific community.

It is method that is supposed to "operationalize" neutrality and, thus, achieve objectivist standards, but method is conceptualized too narrowly to permit achievement of this goal. For one, method—in the sense in which students take methods courses or a research report describes its methods—is conceptualized as functioning only in the context of justification.²⁸ It comes into play only after a problem is identified as a scientific one, after central concepts, a hypothesis, and research design have already been selected. It is only after a research project is already *constituted* that methods of research, in the usual narrow sense of the term, start up. Moreover, the availability of a research technology that was itself selected in earlier contexts of discovery and found productive frequently helps select which scientific problems will be interesting to scientists and to funding agencies.

However, as critic after critic has pointed out, it is in the context of discovery that culture-wide assumptions shape the very statement and design of the research project, and therefore select the methods. Of course in the "mangle of practice"²⁹ during scientific research, hypotheses, nature, and research technologies are adjusted to each other such that a certain element of objectivity is produced without the promise of total neutrality. Nature constrains our beliefs without uniquely confirming them. The most science can hope for is results that are *consistent* with "how nature is," not ones that are uniquely *coherent* with it, as the objectivist goal intended.³⁰ Even the U.S. National Academy of Sciences—certainly not a den of wild-eyed radicals—now argues that the notion of research method should be enlarged beyond its familiar meaning of techniques to

include the judgments scientists make about interpretation or reliability of data, . . . the decisions scientists make about which problems to pursue or when to conclude an investigation, . . . the ways scientists work with each other and exchange information.³¹

Thus, methods for maximizing objectivism have no way of detecting values, interests, discursive resources, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge that first constitute scientific problems, and then select central concepts, hypotheses to be tested, and research designs.

Let us approach the issue another way. One point of repeating observations, through experimental or other techniques, is so that variations in the results of observations can be scrutinized for the traces of social elements which would distort the image of nature produced by science. Any community that *is* a community, including the community of a

laboratory or discipline as well as other kinds of cultural communities, shares values, interests, discursive traditions, and tendencies to relate to each other—to work together—in one way rather than another. But if all observers share a particular such cultural element, whether this arrives from the larger society or is developed in the group of legitimated observers, how is the repetition of observations by these like-minded people supposed to reveal it? It is not individual, personal, "subjective" error to which feminist and other social critics of science have drawn attention, but widely held androcentric, eurocentric, and bourgeois assumptions that have been virtually culture-wide across science. The assumptions of Ptolemaic astronomy, Aristotelian physics, or an organicist worldview were not fundamentally properties of individuals. Assumptions that women's biology, moral reason, intelligence, contributions to human evolution, or to history or present-day social relations are inferior to men's are not idiosyncratically held beliefs of individuals but widespread assumptions of entire cultures. The same is true for assumptions that non-European cultures are not capable of producing valuable sciences and technologies, that they are backward, and permeated by savagery and superstition, and that European cultures have largely developed with no significant contributions from any non-European cultures. Such assumptions have constituted whole fields of study, selecting their preoccupying problems, favored concepts, hypotheses, and research designs; these fields have in turn lent support to androcentric and eurocentric assumptions in other fields. The issue is not that individual men (and women) hold false beliefs, but that the conceptual structures of disciplines, their institutions, and related social policies make less than maximally objective assumptions.

In reflecting on how so much scientific racism and sexism could be produced by the most distinguished—and, in some cases, politically progressive—nineteenth-century scientists, historian of biology Stephen Jay Gould puts the point this way:

I do not intend to contrast evil determinists who stray from the path of scientific objectivity with enlightened antideterminists who approach data with an open mind and therefore see truth. Rather I criticize the myth that science itself is an objective enterprise, done properly only when scientists can shuck the constraints of their culture and view the world as it really is. . . . Science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity. It progresses by hunch, vision, and intuition. Much of its change through time does not record a closer approach to absolute truth, but the alteration of cultural contexts that influence it so strongly.³²

When a scientific community shares assumptions, there is little chance that more careful application of existing scientific methods will detect them.³³

unbeknownst to themselves, should want or know how to be more critical or engage in dialogue of the sort that would benefit the politically and economically most vulnerable.

So where might one find a *method* for maximizing objectivity that has the resources to detect, first, values, interests, discourses, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge that constitute scientific projects; second, ones that *do not* vary between legitimated members of research communities; and third, the difference between those cultural elements that enlarge and those that limit the adequacy of our descriptions and explanations of nature and social relations? This is where standpoint theory has provided useful resources that are not available—or, at least, not easily available—from other epistemologies.

Standpoint epistemology has been briefly described in earlier chapters and will be explored in greater detail in section 4 below and in the next chapter. First we turn to the special issues that arise for marginalized groups—issues beyond those discussed above—when notions such as objectivity, rationality, or good method are said to depend upon maximizing neutrality. We take women as an example of such a marginalized group.

3. *Can women be objective?*³⁶ We noted above that objectivity has been attributed to several distinct components of the research process. One of these was potential researchers: members of some races, classes, ethnicities, and genders have been claimed to be capable of greater objectivity than others. Not all groups have been thought capable of following the rules of scientific method equally rigorously. Manliness has been claimed to be more productive of objectivity than womanliness. Indeed, in so-called modernizing cultures, manliness has often been not just correlated with but defined in part through its capacity for the neutrality regarded as necessary for objectivity. Consequently, the results of men's research, and the processes used to arrive at them, have been able to bask in the beneficial status conferred on them precisely by their isolation from communities of women and their interests, discourses, and ways of organizing the production of knowledge. Critics point out that this is often the case regardless of the empirical or theoretical adequacy of such research results or the reasonableness of the methods used to arrive at them.³⁷

The problem here may lie in the requirement that maximizing objectivity requires the maximization of neutrality. That is, insofar as objectivity is identified with neutrality, it appears impossible for women ever to be perceived as objective. This perception seems to persist regardless of how many women score high on mathematics tests or win Nobel Prizes. Briefly, objectivity has been thought to require neutrality; neutrality is coded masculine; and masculinity as individual identity and

Moreover, Gould's reflection makes clear that not all cultural elements ("contexts") retard the growth of knowledge. Some advance it, he is saying: science has often progressed because of changes in its cultural contexts. So it is problematic that objectivism is supposed to eliminate *all* cultural elements. Weak objectivity is unable to discriminate between these aspects of culture that enlarge our understanding and those that limit it.

Are relativism and/or moral exhortations the only alternatives? The preceding section has identified some of the main features that make objectivism only "weak objectivity." When confronted with such issues, one apparent solution has been to turn to objectivism's Other, relativism,³⁴ sometimes with a kind of resignation that undermines both the critique of objectivism and turn to relativism, at other times with the project of transforming relativism into a useful epistemological tool.³⁵ Excellent arguments both against objectivism and for relativism or subjectivism have been put forth by those who turn to this strategy. They are illuminating, and their arguments should not be undervalued. However, we need not examine them further in order to spot one great disadvantage that they have: relativism/subjectivism is the weak term in the objective/relative pair. Since, as the historians pointed out, appeals to these epistemological notions are primarily made as part of political struggles to claim this or that position for science in society, the weak term is unlikely to be attractive for these engagements. For those working in or close to the sciences, jurisprudence, or public policy, it will be very expensive to give up appealing to standards of objectivity and, instead, talk about the subjective or relative grounds for justifying beliefs, claims, and policies. Moreover, as we turn shortly to note, one cause of this weakness may well be that such alternatives to the neutrality of objectivism have been symbolized as feminine. Cultural definitions of manliness are at issue in turning away from objectivity-as-neutrality.

Yet another response has been to retain the neutrality criterion for maximizing objectivity, but to settle for moral exhortations that natural and social scientists should be more critical and that they should engage in dialogue with those protesting their exclusion from scientific authority. It is certainly better to have such moral gestures than not, since they can establish principles for belief and behavior that encourage movement toward blocking "might makes right." However, postcolonialism, feminism, and the other democracy-advancing social movements want and need more than this. It is unclear why women or the economically vulnerable citizens of developing societies should feel all that optimistic that the very groups whose interests and values were constituting distorting and oppressive research projects in the first place, sometimes

concerned at all with trying to recover the notion of objectivity? Quite apart from the answers to this question proposed in this chapter and in previous ones—the value of elements in the European epistemological legacy, the reliance of the law, social policy, and so many other modern institutions and their self-images on such notions of objectivity as fairness, and so on—this line of thinking goes, the great power of “weak objectivity” was precisely its contradictoriness, its only selective functionality. By disabling the legitimacy of critically evaluating the broadest conceptual frameworks within which scientific issues are raised, it was possible for those benefitting most from dominant institutions and their discourses to practice “might makes right” while attributing the politicizing of knowledge projects only to the critics of current power-knowledge relations. From this perspective, producing a coherent notion of objectivity misses the point of such ideals, for it is precisely their contradictory nature that makes them useful. The notion of strong objectivity loses the benefits of such incoherence.

This is an illuminating insight. Indeed, all three schools of post-World War II science and technology studies shaping the arguments of this book have emerged precisely from the gaps in modern sciences’ self-understanding. The workings and histories of modern sciences remain incomprehensible if one asks of them only the kinds of questions that internalist epistemologies have sanctioned. Those epistemologies delegitimated important kinds of questions that historians and sociologists think it appropriate to ask of every other social institution, its cultures and practices. The resulting mysteriousness of science is partly responsible for the quasi-religious status it achieves, as numerous commentators have recognized. So the “strong objectivity” project is part of this attempt to bring modern science within the domain of the kind of understanding we expect to be able to have of every other social institution. If the achievement of that goal makes rhetorical appeals to objectivity—“weak” or “strong”—less useful, so be it.

5. *Truth.* One more consequence of the demise of the neutrality ideal should be noted in closing this discussion. If more than one theory can reasonably be supported by any set of observations, and if every theory is reasonably open to more than one interpretation, is it still useful to invoke the notion of truth in conceptualizing an ideal relationship between our best knowledge claims and the natural and social relations that they are intended to describe, explain, or interpret? When the ideal results of research could be assumed to be socially neutral, truth or truth-approaching could appear to be a reasonable way to conceptualize the relationship. The best knowledge claims should be true of the world in the sense of reflecting without distortion the way the world is, of corresponding to a reality that is “out there” and unchanged by human

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evant to advancing the growth of knowledge; starting from the lives of, say, left-handed people—a devalued position in some cultures—may possibly reveal a little, but probably not much, about nature’s order.

What we can do is look historically and cross culturally to see which kinds of shifts in the social climate, as Gould put the point, have enabled the detection of distorting, culture-wide social elements in patterns of knowledge. One important set of enabling social elements are those that resist “hiding” the most telling evidence against themselves. If women, the poor, and racial and ethnic “colonies” are kept illiterate, not permitted or encouraged to speak in public, and excluded from the design of the dominant institutions that shape their lives, they do not have the chance to develop and circulate their own politically and scientifically produced perspectives on nature and social relations. They do not have the chance to provide what could possibly be the most trenchant critiques of the dominant institutions and their discourses. Keeping the hypotheses that are most critical of the favored ones from ever getting to the starting line of a scientific research process obviously benefits the dominant groups. Clearly, the relations between the expansion of knowledge and the expansion of democratic social relations—always off-handedly claimed to be mutually supported by sciences’ public discourses—need to be explored in greater detail. This democratic discourse of science conflicts with authoritarian practices such as those that have favored only weak standards for objectivity.

The next chapter explores further the research methods proposed by standpoint epistemologies for maximizing objectivity. Any suggestions for maximizing objectivity without neutrality could not provide a perfect solution to the “objectivity question” old or new, for there is no such solution that will do everything the liberatory social movements wanted of the older notion, and yet that will not seem strange and counterintuitive. We can recognize that what had seemed intuitively reasonable has become too problematic to retain; but acknowledging that fact does not lessen the strangeness of proposed alternatives. Our situation is similar in some ways to that of Galileo’s culture. “Where did the crystal spheres go?” people asked. “How will God find us if we are not located in the center of his universe?”⁴⁶ Most likely, our questions will share the fate of these. Some will never be answered—at least not in the terms in which we pose them. Others will be answered within new theories of knowledge. The proposal here for standards for “strong objectivity” does solve some of the problems that plagued the older notions, even if it cannot answer all the questions the older epistemologies thought important to ask. Moreover, it captures intuitive insights of the post-World War II science studies projects.

Yet one more question may bother some readers. Why should we be

study of it. Claims that satisfied the requirements of knowledge (that constitute "justified true belief") would bear a unique relationship to the world.

Yet science always promised something better than truth. It has always been understood that what makes a claim a scientific one, and not a matter of political dogma or religious faith, is that it is in perpetuity held open to revision on the basis of future, possibly disconfirming, observations and/or of revisions in the conceptual frameworks of the sciences. The abandonment in scientific circles of the concept of the crucial experiment in the late nineteenth century reflected the recognition that no empirical observations could prove a hypothesis true; (at most) they could only show it to be less false than its known competitors. Subsequently, Popper's deductivist logic and all the logical positivist focus on "verisimilitude" depended upon the assumption that truth could still function as a useful ideal as long as absolute falsifiability was possible. However, dreams of absolute falsifiability have proven unrealistic, also.⁴⁷

Since facts—accepted empirical observations—are picked out as relevant ones by the theory they are supposed to be testing (including all of the background beliefs that support it) and by methods that are relatively inseparable from the theories that lead to their selection, facts can hardly stand as independent, value-, interest-, discourse-, and method-neutral tests of the empirical adequacy of the theory, as this chapter noted in opening. Observations are method- and theory-laden no less than theories are observation-laden, one could say. Historians have pointed out various kinds of situations where it was reasonable to retain a hypothesis in the face of apparent falsification. For example, as Kuhn's well-known account argued, it often makes good sense for young theories to be retained in the face of occasional or even frequent falsifying observations until they have developed more robust means of showing their empirical adequacy. Moreover, favored older theories turn out to be reasonably retained in spite of accumulating empirical evidence against them until there is an alternative available that appeals to the scientific community. In short, falsity is assigned to a theory not on the basis of some theory-neutral standard of the theory's inadequate fit with nature, but, instead, on the basis of a complex calculation by "the scientific community" as to when the potential benefits outweigh the potential losses in abandoning a hypothesis or theory.⁴⁸

We can console ourselves by noting that abandonment of appeal to the truth of our knowledge claims does not commit us to relativism. After all, the procedures of the sciences (at their best) do generate claims that are validly and usefully regarded as "less false" in a limited (not absolute) but meaningful way: the hypothesis passing empirical and theoretical tests is less false than all (and only) the alternatives consid-

ered, though that judgment, too, must be held always only provisionally. Of course its status relative to hypotheses not yet tested is unknown.⁴⁹ And Gould pointed out the necessity of shifting social climates to enable vigorously critical alternative hypotheses to emerge.⁵⁰

Thus, we could say that holding truth as an ideal for scientific claims as well as truth-maximizing procedures are not just unachievable but incoherent. What could it mean to imagine that all possible future observations and conceptual frameworks are available now for our critical scrutiny—that there is a finite supply of possible maps that cultures reasonably would find valuable to guide their interactions with the world, and that all such maps can be made not just consistent, but coherent with each other? The achievement of truth would mark not only the end of science, but also of history. Of course there are other criteria of truth; however, it is this correspondence criterion, paradoxically, that has most often been invoked in defense of modern sciences and their philosophies.

Truth claims are a way of closing down discussion, of ending critical dialogue, of invoking authoritarian standards. They deny the possibility of continuing processes of gaining knowledge in the future. We do not need them, for "less false" than the alternatives considered, tentatively held, will more accurately describe processes that have in fact resulted in the great achievements of modern sciences and those of other knowledge traditions.⁵¹

6. *Conclusion.* The notion of objectivity can be extracted from the neutrality requirement that has blocked its competence at advancing the growth of knowledge with respect to an important range of cases. When cultural elements constitute conceptual frameworks in the first place as sciences and their social orders co-evolve, one must start off thought from outside those frameworks in order even to identify them. Then the project still remains to figure out which of these cultural elements are at this particular historical moment advancing and which blocking the growth of knowledge. Adhering to the neutrality ideal in such cases insures only blind loyalty to unexamined cultural elements. It turns such elements into hidden evidence for the results of research so produced. We could reject the neutrality requirement as a nostalgic reminder of an innocent epistemological world that is gone from us forever.

pean term to refer to all such systematic knowledge, whether or not their creators conceptualized it in that way. And of course it is only a late European term; Newton and Boyle did "natural philosophy" according to their peers. The three schools of post-World War II science studies have had the effect of shifting the meanings and referents of what used to be uncontroversially and unambiguously referred to as "science" and as "ethnoscience" or "local knowledge systems." Although significant differences between modern sciences and other local knowledge systems exist, the familiar ways of marking those differences no longer are regarded as accurate or useful. These issues were discussed in an earlier chapter.

21. They are useful reasons because it is valuable to be able to see how such sciences as physics, chemistry, and theoretical biology, purportedly most immunized against carrying social values and interests, nevertheless necessarily invariably do so.

22. This is a main feature of recent social studies of science, for example, in Latour, *Pasteurization*, and Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan*, as cited earlier. But it is also a central focus of the "science and empires" analyses in postcolonial science studies. See, e.g., Goonatilake, *Aborted Discovery*; Nandy, *Science*; and Petitjean et al., *Science and Empires*.

23. In post-Kuhnian northern science studies, Shapin is especially interesting on this point in his *Social History*. For mathematics, see Morris Kline, *Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty* (New York: Oxford, 1980), where he points out that many of world's leading mathematicians hold that the ultimate test of the adequacy of a mathematical statement is whether it works to do what mathematicians intend it to do, which is a matter of social negotiation. See also Restivo, *Mathematics in Society*, where he proposes that mathematicians are workers, like any others, who transform the initially everyday objects into more abstract ones, and then they work on the new abstract objects to create even more abstract ones, and so forth, in processes that successively obscure the nevertheless real relations of their work to the everyday world. Social negotiations are necessary throughout such processes.

24. The analysis of this chapter appears in a somewhat different form in *Hypatia* 13.2 (1998).

8. Recovering Epistemological Resources

1. It is "internalist" because it attributes the successes of science to science's internal epistemological features—its distinctive method, standards for objectivity, and so on. In contrast, the post-internalist studies attribute the successes also in large part to larger social formations—the historical eras—within which modern scientific projects and their epistemologies co-evolved. This is not an "externalist" epistemology because science and society are co-producing each other in these newer accounts. They are inextricably intertwined as they historically co-evolve. See, for example, Lucile H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanical Gardens* (New York: Academic, 1979); Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Patrick Petitjean et al., eds., *Science and Empires: Historical Studies about Scientific Development and European Expansion* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992); and Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) for just a few examples of how this worked at significant moments in the history of northern sciences.

2. The "values and interests" framework acknowledges only the pre-1960s

liberal and Marxist concerns. It does not yet conceptualize the full extent of what historian Thomas Kuhn signaled as the "integrity of sciences with their historical era." Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

3. This chapter draws on a number of earlier writings on this topic. Its arguments for the desirability of what eventually came to be called "strong objectivity" were explored in a number of papers and edited collections in the 1970s and early 1980s and structured the argument of Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). The most extensive accounts of the notion on which this chapter directly draws are in chapter 6 of Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); "After the Neutrality Ideal: Science, Politics, and 'Strong Objectivity,'" *Social Research* 59 (1992), 567-87, reprinted in *The Politics of Western Science*, ed. Margaret C. Jacobs (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1993); "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. L. Alcoff and E. Potter (New York: Routledge, 1992); "Can Feminist Thought Make Economics More Objective?" *Feminist Economics* 1:1 (1995), 7-32; "Strong Objectivity": A Response to the New Objectivity Question," *Synthese* 104:3 (1995), 1-19.

4. Earlier versions of this section and the next appear in "Strong Objectivity."

5. N. Katherine Hayles, "Constrained Constructivism: Locating Scientific Inquiry in the Theater of Representation," in *Realism and Representation*, ed. George Levine (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

6. Bas Van Fraassen and Jill Stigman, "Interpretation in Science and in the Arts," in *Realism and Representation*, ed. Levine.

7. "So-called" since earlier chapters revealed how much of the scientific and technological traditions of other cultures modern European sciences had incorporated, and continue to do so today through "development" projects. Modern European science is already in this respect multicultural.

8. The phrase is a paraphrase of R. K. Kochhar, "Science in British India," in *Current Science* (India), part I: 63:11 (1992), 689-94; part II: 64:1 (1993) 55-62.

9. This issue was developed in chapters 2 and 3.

10. Or, in the nineteenth-century formulation that has left problematic residues in contemporary epistemology: "objectivity or subjectivity? . . ." as Robert Proctor points out in *Value-Free Science? Purity and Power in Modern Knowledge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). Today, referring to all values and interests as subjective ones obscures the all-important difference between those that are idiosyncratically held by individuals and those that are culture-wide, such as ideologies, worldviews, and so on. Androcentrism, racism, eurocentrism, and so on, are fundamentally properties not of individuals' but of cultures/belief systems. They are examples of social, institutional, and civilizational or philosophic ethnocentrism, not of intentional or unintentional individual "prejudice." See James J. Scheuich and Michelle D. Young, "Coloring Epistemologies," *Educational Researcher* 26:3 (1997), 4-16, for this kind of analysis of social, institutional, and civilizational racism.

11. Following the practice of Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), and others, this chapter will use "objectivism" to refer to the conventional concept that takes neutrality to be a requirement for maximizing objectivity. The term "objectivity" will be reserved for the "strong objectivity," shorn of the neutrality requirement, proposed below.

12. Kuhn, *Structure*.

13. See Janice Moulton's arguments about the limitations of such a model of good thinking in "A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka (Dordrecht: Reidel/Kluwer, 1983).

14. For reasons to be recounted below, claims to less falsity are preferable to those for truth or verisimilitude. See Alan Megill, "Rethinking Objectivity," *Annals of Scholarship* 8:3 (1991) for a related account of four senses of objectivity prevalent in the history of philosophy: absolute objectivity (i.e., realism), disciplinary consensus, dialectical objectivity (where objects are constructed through the interactions between subjective and objective processes), and procedural objectivity (i.e., an impersonal method). The strong objectivity developed below is different from all four, though it includes elements of both dialectical and procedural objectivity. See also Lisa Lloyd, "Science and Anti-Science: Objectivity and Its Real Enemies," in *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Lynn Hankinson Nelson and Jack Nelson (Boston: Kluwer, 1996), 217-59.

15. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.

16. *Ibid.*, 2.

17. Proctor, *Value-Free Science?* 262.

18. *Ibid.*

19. The standpoint epistemologies referred to here will be discussed more extensively in the next chapter.

20. Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin, "Applied Biology in the Third World," from their *The Dialectical Biologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); reprinted in *The "Racial" Economy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 315-16. Similar arguments, though considerably more skeptical about the progressive effects of early modern science on anyone but Europeans in the dominant classes, can be found in other feminist and postcolonial accounts. See, e.g., Susantha Goonatilake, *Aborted Discovery: Science and Creativity in the Third World* (London: Zed, 1984); Ashis Nandy, ed., *Science, Hegemony, and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford, 1990); Ziauddin Sardar, ed., *The Revenge of Athena: Science, Exploitation, and the Third World* (London: Mansell, 1988), and the references below to the discussion of the masculinity of neutrality.

21. The account of the following few pages appeared in "After the Neutrality Ideal."

22. Even if one thinks no sciences are "pure" of all social values and interests, they can at designated historical moments be pure of particular ones. For example, particular configurations of racist and sexist assumptions entered biology during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as historians have pointed out. See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981); Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), and *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon, 1993).

23. See Andrew Pickering, ed., *Science as Practice and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Joseph Rouse, *Knowledge and Power: Toward a Political Philosophy of Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Steven Shapin and Simon Shaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). Some have said "authoritarian" science; cf. Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: New Left, 1975).

24. Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 290, 293.

25. Kathryn Pyne Addelson, "The Man of Professional Wisdom," in *Discovering Reality*, ed. Harding and Hintikka; Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1990); Alison Jaggar, "Love and the Emotions," in *Body/Knowledge*, ed. Susan Bordo and Alison Jaggar (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Keller, *Reflections*; Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Catharine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State," *Signs* 7:3 (1982); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

26. See, e.g., Lucille H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanical Gardens* (New York: Academic, 1979); Goonatilake, *Aborted Discovery*; Pettijean et al., eds., *Science and Empires: Revenge*, ed. Sardar.

27. See Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989); John A. Schuster and Richard R. Yeo, eds., *The Politics and Rhetoric of Scientific Method: Historical Studies* (Dordrecht: Reidel/Kluwer, 1986); Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan*. Some analyses listed here in one or another of the post-Kuhnian, postcolonial, or feminist categories should also appear in the others; these three distinctive tendencies in post-World War II science and technology studies have often interacted and overlapped.

28. This is not to say that no other good advice for successful research is given out in "methods" courses.

29. Andrew Pickering, "Objectivity and the Mangle of Practice?" in *Annals of Scholarship*, 8:3 (1992), ed. Alan Megill.

30. Hayles, *Constrained Constructivism*.

31. National Academy of Sciences, *On Being a Scientist* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1989), 5-6.

32. Gould, *Mismeasure*, 21-22.

33. Some might think this problem can be resolved by adding members of excluded groups into the community, or by building more conflict into scientific processes. Efforts in these directions can be helpful, but reflection on Gould's discussion makes clear that success at such strategies requires massive political changes. Won't those "included" be only the well socialized, least critical of the excluded? What kind of severe criticism should one expect to arise, and be taken seriously, from junior colleagues who are members of devalued gender, racial, ethnic, or class groups? See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and Moulton, "A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method," on limitations of the adversarial model for advancing knowledge.

34. Or, sometimes, subjectivism; see note 1.

35. See, e.g., the adoption of a disabling relativism in David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); of a subjectivist epistemology in Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); and the strengthening of relativist epistemologies in Paul Feyerabend, "Notes on Relativism," in his *Farewell to Reason* (New York: Verso, 1987). Of course other analyses have been called relativist though they do not espouse such a position.

36. This section and the next two draw have appeared in similar forms in my "Can Feminist Thought Make Economics More Objective?"

37. For example, the essays in *Feminism and Methodology*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Hubbard, *Politics*; Keller, *Reflections*.

38. Bordo, *Flight*, 451.

39. Lloyd, *Maid of Reason*.

40. Genevieve Lloyd, "Maleness, Metaphor, and the 'Crisis' of Reason," in *A Mind of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. Louise Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder: Westview, 1993).

41. Keller, *Reflections*, 75. She cites Karen Horney's quotation from Simmel in Horney's, "The Flight from Womanhood," in *Women and Analysis*, ed. J. Strouse (New York: Dell 1975), 199-215.

42. Catharine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," *Signs* 8:4 (1983), 658.

43. See Phyllis Rooney, "Recent Work in Feminist Discussions of Reason," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31:1 (1994), 1-21, for a thorough review of the U.S. feminist literature on the related issue of rationality.

44. Harry Brod, ed., *The Making of Masculinities*, 2d ed. (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1995).

45. We should at least consider the possibility that while there may well be lots of other good reasons to balk at such a delinking, at least one source of resistance to it may be fear of the loss of the masculinity of science, philosophy of science, and epistemology. Philosophies of objectivity, rationality, and science that do not proclaim their distance from, their transcendence of, their unaccountability to, the messy moral and political demands of the social order may not be as attractive to people seeking affirmations of their masculinity through practicing in such fields. Objectivity without neutrality may for them have the odor of social work.

46. At least as imagined by the playwright Bertolt Brecht in *The Life of Galileo*, trans. Howard Brenton (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981).

47. Sandra Harding, ed., *Can Theories Be Refuted? Essays on the Duhem-Quine Thesis* (Dordrecht: Reidel/Kluwer, 1976); W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).

48. Cf. Peter Galison, *How Experiments End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Kuhn, *Structure*; Feyerabend, *Against Method*. Here is where scientific communities especially benefit from looking beyond their currently legitimated borders for guidance.

49. This is pointed out by Hayles in "Constrained Constructivism" and by Van Fraassen and Sigman in "Interpretation."

50. Gould, *Mismeasure*.

51. See Sandra Harding, "Are Truth Claims Dysfunctional?" in *Philosophy of Language*, ed. Andrea Nye (New York: Blackwell, 1998).

9. Borderlands Epistemologies

1. Langdon Winner made this point in his "The Gloves Come Off: Shattered Alliances in Science and Technology Studies," *Social Text* 46-47 (1996), 81-92.

2. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 1. Kuhn was by no means the only stimulant to the new science and technology studies, as has been discussed in earlier chapters. Historical changes in global social and economic relations; the rise of various science and technology social movements focussed on, for example,

antimilitarism, environmentalism, labor conditions, black health and women's health; the rise in racist and sexist deterministic biological theories; the increasing accomplishments of the social history that had emerged in the 1930s; and new projects already under way in the sociology, ethnography, and philosophy of science were some of the other changes that helped to fuel the post-World War II science and technology studies. Kuhn's book is used here simply as a convenient marker for the take-off of these new approaches.

3. See, e.g., W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in his *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953). See chapter 15 of Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) for a good overview of the historical changes and intellectual ferment of the post-World War II period that produced and surrounded the emerging "epistemological crisis of the modern West," including major streams of the science and technology studies examined here. Richard Bernstein's *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) and Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) were two immensely influential books by philosophers that diagnosed how "the crisis" was emerging across broad swaths of European and North American natural and social sciences and their philosophies.

4. As noted in earlier chapters, these three streams of science and technology studies are by no means entirely separate; they have interacted and their arguments often coincide. Some writers and writings, such as the latest stages of the gender and sustainable development debates and Donna Haraway's work, for example, clearly have been shaped by all three tendencies. Nevertheless, most of the post-World War II science and technology writings have not drawn on this full range of analyses; they are still constrained by pre-Kuhnian, eurocentric and/or androcentric understandings of modern science.

5. The idea is Michel Foucault's. See, for example, his *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77*, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Random House, 1980).

6. As I have argued in a somewhat different context, in this respect they are as conservative as the internalists, who agree that there is no reasonable epistemological alternative to their own program. See my chapter 7, "Feminist Epistemology in after the Enlightenment," in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

7. Interestingly, historians of science evidently have felt less need to enter this fray, though their illuminating accounts of the history of science as social and cultural history, as well as intellectual history, have in fact usefully created a lot of the trouble. Kuhn's *Structure*, for example, explicitly framed an epistemological account as challenging the dominant epistemology of modern science. Peter Galison and David J. Stump's *The Disunity of Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) presents many historians and philosophers proposing not just to fix up or reject internalist epistemologies, but rather to radically transform them.

8. My use of the term *borderlands* in this chapter is indebted to Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Spinners/Aunt Lute Press, 1987). I have discussed standpoint epistemologies in many earlier publications. For some of the most extensive of these discussions, see *The Science Question in Feminism*; (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*; "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. L. Alcoff and E. Potter (New York: Routledge, 1992); and "How Social Disad-

Methodological Essentialism, False Difference, and Other Dangerous Traps

Jane Roland Martin

AT MEETINGS, WORKSHOPS, and conferences in the 1980s, feminist scholars became accustomed to hearing women accuse one another of essentialism. In the literature of that period, one regularly read of sightings of feminists in or near the essentialist trap (e.g., Echols 1983, 1984; Eisenstein 1983, xvii-xix; Jones 1985, 367; Alcoff 1988, 411; see also Smitrow 1990, 17; Berg 1991). I use the term *accuse* advisedly. If I had called your work or you had called mine essentialist, you or I would not merely have been offering criticism, as we would if we had called that work sketchy or unconvincing or disorganized or badly written or even false (see, e.g., Spelman 1988, 159; Fraser and Nicholson 1990, 20). Of course, not everyone who used the term *essentialist* intended it as a condemnation. Nevertheless, the net effect was to place on the work a seal of disapproval. When in a 1989 conversation about feminist criticism Nancy Miller said, "You don't like to feel in a rank of things racist or sexist," Jane Gallop asked her, "Do they feel worse or better than being accused of being an essentialist?" (Gallop, Hirsch, and Miller 1990, 353; see also de Lauretis 1990, 255). In an interview published in a special issue of *Differences* on essentialism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak said, "What I am very suspicious of is how anti-essentialism, really more than essentialism, is allowing women to call names and to congratulate ourselves" (Spivak 1989, 128-29).

Just as a chilly classroom climate can have a profound negative impact on women's academic and career development (Hall and Sandler 1982), a chilly research climate can adversely affect the development of feminist

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theory and research. I am very worried that the accusations of essentialism that feminist scholars directed at one another—and also of ahistoricism, false generalization, and their variants—may have had precisely this result. I am also concerned about the methodological advice given to scholars who sought to avoid these traps.

Those of us who are white academic feminists have recognized the terrible mistake we made in assuming that all the individuals in the world called "women" were exactly like us. Paradoxically, though, our acts of unmasking the differences among women and reveling in them became occasions for imposing a false unity on our research. Condemning essence talk in connection with our bodies and ourselves, we came dangerously close to adopting it in relation to our methodologies.¹ In our determination to honor diversity among women, we told one another to restrict our ambitions, limit our sights, beat a retreat from certain topics, refrain from using a rather long list of categories or concepts, and eschew generalization. I can think of no better prescription for the stunting of a field of intellectual inquiry.

One reason for this regimen of self-denial is that in attempting to steer clear of the traps of essentialism, ahistoricity, and false generalization, feminist theorists fell into opposite but equally dangerous ones. In overcompensating for our failure to acknowledge the differences of race, class, and ethnicity, we tended a priori to give privileged status to a predetermined set of analytic categories and to affirm the existence of nothing but difference. In other words, in trying to avoid the pitfall of false unity, we walked straight into the trap of false difference. Overreacting to the historical gaps in feminist scholarship, we concluded that every scholar must be her own historian, which is to say that in trying to circle around the ahistorical trap we landed in the trap of compulsory historicism. Meanwhile, rejecting one kind of essence talk but adopting another, we followed a course whose logical conclusion all but precludes the use of language.

Ironically, we unwittingly created for ourselves a research climate in which we imposed on our investigations the very thing we condemned—false unity. Equally ironically, in this chilly climate we came to judge women's scholarship by a harsher standard than the one we applied to men's. Furthermore, the routes we charted around the traps of essentialism, ahistoricism, and false generalization exposed us to new pitfalls,

¹ I use the pronouns *we* and *ours* intentionally. To do otherwise would amount to falsely distancing myself, as a white academic feminist, from my subject matter. My usage should not, however, be taken to mean that I assume that all feminist theorists are white academics, that all white academic feminist theorists subscribe to the same views, that all white academic feminists have fallen into one or more of the traps under discussion, or that all those who have flagged the traps share the same views. I do not.

nition or meaning of the terms *justice*, *truth*, and *piety*.³ They also explain my own long-standing distrust of essence-talk on whatever level it occurs.

To my everlasting regret, my philosophical training did not inform me that Western culture's thought about women has been premised on essences. The arguments that proceed from assertions about women's nature to conclusions about our subordinate place in society and our domination by men are by now so well-known as to require little comment. Reading back onto our nature the social programs they then claimed to derive from it, philosophers, theologians, and other rational animals have used essence talk to justify their own rule in both the family and the state.

I take it that in discussing "reactionary tendencies" in feminism under the heading "The Politics of Feminist Theory: Against the New Essentialism," Hester Eisenstein in *Contemporary Feminist Thought* was making implicit reference to this discredited project of arguing from our nature to our place in society; that in referring to "a new biologism" according to which "women are superior beings to men, by virtue of their physical identity as female" (1983, xviii), she was pointing out that some feminist theorists have now turned the tables on the men. Whereas proponents of "the old essentialism" attributed to women essential properties very different from and inferior to those possessed by men, these feminist thinkers see women as possessing essential properties different from and superior to men's. And just as the men claimed to derive women's moral, social, and political subordination from the inferior nature they mapped onto us, the women claim to derive our moral, social, and political superiority from the superior nature they assign us. I also understand Eisenstein to say that even though the content of the argument from women's nature has been changed, women are still the ones who stand to suffer. Not only does the historical association between attributions of a female essence and women's imprisonment in the domestic "sphere" raise the specter of a revival of the traditional Western view of women's proper place, but also the discoveries of women's essence that feminists claim to have made are used to support social and political programs inimical to women.

The question remains of whether the new essentialism is as disabling as Eisenstein and others have claimed. Quite clearly, anyone who tries to derive moral, social, political, and cultural conclusions from her new readings of women's essential nature runs the standard risks of *de re* essentialism, namely, attributing to women properties that not all women

³ See, e.g., Boyd 1980 for a discussion of *de re* and *de dicto* accounts of necessity or essential properties. See also the discussion of real versus nominal essences by Fuss 1989, 4–5.

methodological dangers that beg for critical examination. At meetings, workshops, and conferences in the 1990s one is told that the debate about essentialism is dead. Yet such pronouncements are troubling insofar as they are made without consideration of the methodological questions at issue or the functions the debate may have served.

The trap of essentialism and the pitfall of proscribed categories

Old and new essentialisms

There may be an intellectual and cultural tradition that views essentialism quite differently from the way my philosophical training taught me to see it.⁴ It is fair to say, however, that in Western thought the search for essences goes back at least to Socrates. When he asked, What is justice? What is truth? What is piety? he did not want the answer to take the form of an isolated illustration—for instance, justice is paying your debts—or even a list of examples. He was looking for a general account or definition that would hold true for all cases of justice or truth or piety past, present, and future and for nothing else. Even if it met the requirements of generality, a statement might not be acceptable, however. When Socrates asked a "What is X" type of question, he wanted to know the nature or essence of X, be it justice, truth, or piety, and not merely some accidental property of X.

The troubling epistemological and metaphysical issues surrounding the search for essences have long been recognized and so has the fact that the accidental/essential distinction is unclear. Supposing one discovers a property that all those things that fall into the category justice or into that philosophical favorite, man, have in common, how does one know that the property is essential and not simply accidental? And assuming it is essential, what is its ontological status? Men change over time but man's essence is said to be fixed; every man dies but man's essence is considered eternal. But then, what kind of thing is an essence and what is the relationship between the thing that has an essence, be it justice or man, and particular instances in the real world?

At least in Anglo-American philosophy, long before the postmodern turn, these thorny matters contributed to a retreat from what have been called *de re* accounts of necessity—ones that attribute essential properties directly to things—to *de dicto* accounts that tie attributions of essences to linguistic conventions: that is, from metaphysical inquiries into the nature of justice, truth, and piety to linguistic investigations of the defi-

⁴ For rather different analyses of essentialism from the one that follows see, e.g., Fuss 1989; Schor 1989; and de Lauretis 1990. For a critique of Fuss, see Kuykendall 1991.

process of the mistaking accidental properties for essential ones.⁴ In addition, like those men who claimed to derive women's place in society from our nature, Eisenstein may be mapping onto our bodies or our psyches or both the very conclusions she wishes to draw—a form of circular reasoning and a risky project in that it might well encourage others to do likewise. Even if she is not committing this error, her reasoning will be faulty: the argument from women's nature to our social and political superiority—or even to our equality—is no more valid than the one to our social and political subordination.

No programmatic statements—no policies, recommendations, calls to action, or the like—follow from claims about women's essential nature because no conclusions about what ought to be the case follow directly from what is.⁵ Thus, if cultural feminism or some other stance that appeals to essences is dangerous for women, the source of the problem is not the essence talk *per se* but the uses to which it is put.

Biologism

The same can be said of biological talk. Given that both male and female thinkers have attributed to women an essential nature rooted in biology, one might conclude that the search for essences is necessarily a biological quest. But Socrates would not have undertaken his inquiries into the essence of justice and truth if this were the case. Moreover, most Western thinkers who have maintained that rationality is the essence of man have believed in the separation of mind and body. Claiming that reason belongs to the domain of mind and that mind is not material, they have been committed to the view that rationality is not a biological property. Indeed, these thinkers were able to place women beneath men in the Great Chain of Being precisely because they affirmed that men's essential nature is spiritual whereas ours is “merely” biological.

Just as essence talk is not necessarily about biology, biological talk is not necessarily about essences. Insofar as the biological attribute of having blue eyes is not shared by all women, it cannot be considered a defining or essential property of women. And even if all women were blue-eyed, being blue-eyed might be deemed an accidental property. This logical gulf between biological and essence talk contains two important lessons. First, because essences can be attributed to human inventions such as justice and piety, those who say that even our bodies and our sexuality are social constructions are not automatically guaranteed a safe

⁴ They also face the metaphysical problems mentioned above. It should be noted that new approaches to *de re* essences such as that employed by Morris 1986 have been designed to try to get around these.

⁵ Unless, of course, the programmatic conclusion is smuggled into the statement of essence itself.

journey around the trap of essentialism. Second, one does not have to purge one's theories of all references to biology in order to avoid it.

To determine which social constructionists and which users of biological talk have actually fallen into the essentialist trap, each case has to be examined on its own merits. But feminist theorists object to biologism—or biological determinism—not principally because it makes reference to biology. They consider it damaging because it purports to derive harmful moral, social, and political conclusions about women from statements about our biology.⁶

Feminist theorists who have expressed concern about the new essentialism have had relatively little to say about the invalidity of inferences from women's essence to our fates (see, however, Pierce 1983 and Trenchicot 1983). They have also paid scant attention to the logical pitfall known as the fallacy of denying the antecedent, which takes the form: if p then q , and not p , therefore not q . Suppose one grants that feminist claims about women's essential nature are false, indeed, that there is no such thing as women's essential nature. It does not follow that the program or programs that supposedly have been derived from our essence are thereby invalidated, for the possibility remains open that they are warranted on other grounds. In committing the fallacy of denying the antecedent, we are not merely being illogical, however. Insofar as we judge either the whole or some part of cultural feminism or any other position invalid without a close examination of its doctrines and their practical implications, we deprive ourselves a priori of access to ideas and programs that might in fact serve us well (see also Schor 1989, 50).

In directing attention to the trap of denying the antecedent, I do not mean to endorse the woman-centered perspective that Eisenstein warned us against or the cultural feminism that according to Linda Alcoff “is founded on a claim of essentialism that we are far from having the evidence to justify” (1988, 421). These may be every bit as dangerous to women as “antiessentialist” feminist theorists have been saying. My point is simply that the cases for or against these stances need to be made in their own right, for the rejection of female essences does not in itself constitute rejection of them.

Masking difference

While some of the criticisms of essentialism focus on the support that essences seem to lend programs and policies considered inimical to women, others single out the denial of difference or diversity on which essences rest and the consequent illusion of uniformity (e.g., Spelman

⁶ There may be other reasons too. See, e.g., Spelman 1988 and the discussion of “normatophobia” (126–32).

might be called—is a quest for unity or commonality. Socrates wanted to know what all the disparate actions that everyone agrees are just have in common. Whether the subject is justice, truth, piety, man, or woman, *de re* essence talk—in fact, all essence talk—focuses on sameness. Indeed, the concern for uniformity is often so pronounced that the diversity that first gives rise to the essence quest is forgotten. It is assumed that if all instances of, for example, justice or woman have one property or a small set of properties in common, they are alike in all respects. This reasoning is obviously invalid, the unity it posits clearly false; it also undermines the very point of essence talk—to locate uniformity in diversity. After all, it is the existence of differences among things that we group together and label that motivates the search for essences in the first place.

There may be occasions when an assumption of total uniformity does not matter. When, however, the subject is woman, false unity can definitely be—undoubtedly has already been—harmful. As the denial by male scholars of differences within the category of human beings has led to the perception that women fall short of the norms of morality and mental health, to cite but two examples, the denial by female scholars of differences among women can cause some women to perceive other women as below standard or abnormal. Damaging self-confidence and destroying trust, the *de re* essentialist trap easily can undermine efforts that aim at united action.

Feminist scholarship unquestionably stands to gain—already has gained—from the reminder that essence talk masks differences and that this masking can be destructive. Yet the truth of the matter is that this danger is present even when talk of womanhood or woman “as such” is assiduously avoided (see also Riley 1988). Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson have criticized those who “rely on essentialist categories such as gender identity” (1990, 32). Others have suggested that both women and gender are essentialist concepts or categories. Insofar as the concern is that these obscure diversity, however, all general terms need to be flagged. Any naming or categorizing tends to call attention to similarities and to neglect differences. In other words, the use of any general term, be it *chick*, *dog*, *vulture*, *mother*, *family*, *male dominance*, or *women’s subordination*, easily can give rise to the very consequence that feminist scholars have attributed to essence talk. But this, in turn, is to say that the masking of difference or diversity is built into language itself.

One response of feminists to their realization that talk about women masks difference has been to recommend that we substitute talk about specific kinds of women: black women, white women, Asian women, Hispanic women; lesbians, heterosexual women, bisexual women; and so forth. Another response has been to recommend that our categories “be

inflected by temporality,” that instead of using categories such as gender identity, mothering, or reproduction, we use historically specific ones such as the modern, restricted, male-headed nuclear family (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, 34). Both responses highlight at least some differences, yet in each case the problem of masking diversity recurs at the more specific level of discourse.

Although talk about black women differentiates them from white, Hispanic, and Asian women, it can serve to mask the considerable diversity among black women. And although talk of a historically specific family form differentiates it from other historically specific forms, it too masks diversity.

Granted, the specific terms or categories that feminist theorists recommend mask fewer differences than the general terms they replace.⁷ But the argument that more specific categories are therefore better than more general ones can be used against the very terms that feminist theorists have advocated. Just as the category of women masks everything the category black women does and more, the category black women masks everything black Caribbean women does and more. The same is true of the category black Caribbean women in relation to black Jamaican women, of the category black Jamaican women vis-à-vis twentieth-century black Jamaican women, and so on.

Taken to its logical extreme, the argument against general categories like women, gender, mothering, reproduction, and family leaves feminist scholars in the lurch. If categories exist that do not conceal difference, they will be so specific as to stultify intellectual inquiry. Even when a category is so hedged around with qualifications that only one individual falls within it, difference will still be masked: as postmodernism informs us, an individual is different from one time to the next—even from moment to moment—and from one place to another.

Obviously, feminist scholars do not have to travel to the extreme. Acknowledging that whatever categories we use will mask some differences, we can decide to use ones that uncover the differences we consider most important and that best fit our practical and theoretical purposes. *Deconstruction* and *choice* become key words here, for feminist theory and research are practical activities that carry with them heavy responsibilities. While a person engaging in feminist scholarship is guided by both political and intellectual purposes and values, these no more dictate one’s theoretical categories than do one’s data. Just as different sets of categories will be consonant with a given body of data, alternate conceptualizations will be compatible with a given set of values and purposes. The question

⁷ In this connection, the problem of how to individuate or count differences does arise, however.

of which categories we should choose cannot be answered in advance of inquiry or decided upon once and for all because the contexts of our investigations change over time and so do our interests and purposes. Further, everyone need not choose the same categories. Indeed, if the categories that feminist theorists have been recommending seem to fit some research interests and purposes, the general categories that feminist theorists have told us to shun may turn out to be appropriate to other projects.

Essentialist and nonessentialist definitions

Feminist theorists have rejected those categories they call essentialist not merely because existing difference and diversity are obliterated, however. Although women's experiences and social practices differ from culture to culture and across historical periods, the offending categories seem to presuppose some fixed core that all members of the relevant class possess.

The a priori assumption that things that go by the same name share all or even some properties is mistaken. Yet it is equally a mistake to ban categories a priori—to deprive ourselves, in advance of inquiry, to access to conceptual frameworks and ideas that might be fruitful. Denying the existence of different kinds of definitions—or different approaches to definition—the category-banning policy assumes that a concept or category or term that has been given an essentialist definition must always and everywhere be defined in that way. This represents a faulty view of language.

There is no doubt that many of those philosophers who replaced the *de re* search for the essence of things, for example, justice, with a search for definitions of, for example, the term *justice*, assumed that all uses of a given term have something in common. This explains the countless attempts to discover a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions under which terms such as *justice* are used. But although this *de dicto* enterprise might be said to repeat on the linguistic level features of the Socratic quest for essences, it does not constitute the only valid approach to definition. Consider the proceedings that we call "games," Ludwig Wittgenstein said. "Similarities crop up and disappear" as we move from one group of games to the next, the result being that "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (Wittgenstein 1953, par. 66). He called these "family resemblances" (par. 67). Needless to say, Wittgenstein's approach to language does not replicate the *de re* search for essences—nor do approaches to definition that bear a family resemblance to Wittgenstein's.⁸

⁸ See, e.g., Block 1954 and Achinstein 1968. I use "property talk" in relation to definitions broadly here so as to include definitions in terms of relations between or among things.

It is ironic, to say the least, that in keeping their distance from the *de re* essentialist trap—the trap of attributing essences to phenomena such as women, gender, reproduction, and mothering—feminist theorists have fallen into another essentialist pitfall. In labeling certain categories essentialist they have committed themselves to essentialism at the definitional level—what I will call *de definitione* essentialism.⁹

Different kinds of definition are available. Thus, supposing that feminist scholars have been defining *woman*, *gender identity*, *mothering*, and so forth, in essentialist ways, it does not follow that the rest of us must. For instance, if, as Fraser and Nicholson have said (1990, 30), Nancy Chodorow mistakenly attributed a common core to all cases of gender identity wherever and whenever they may be found—and I leave open the question of whether she did—we have the choice of eschewing the concept of gender identity as those who fall into the *de definitione* essentialism trap advise or of trying to redefine the concept in a nonessentialist manner. To be sure, no guarantee exists that an adequate definition of a given category or term can be constructed. But the possibility of failure in this endeavor does not vindicate a blanket rejection of the attempt.

The question remains of whether *de definitione* essentialism harms women. Some may also wonder if I am not falling into an essentialist trap by attributing negative properties to all forms of essentialism (see also Fuss 1989, 9). This is not the place to explore the issue of whether essentialism is ever a good policy (Rabine 1989; Spivak 1989) nor to review the claims made by some feminist theorists that certain forms of essentialism are benign (Fuss 1989; Spivak 1989; de Lauretis 1990). Certainly, however, we can expect the *de definitione* essentialist trap to have harmful effects in the long run insofar as it results in the proscription of certain concepts. In any field imagination is at a premium. In a relatively new area, which feminist research is, the free play of imagination is especially important. In addition, in a field as young as ours, the development of diverse and even radically divergent research programs is desirable. I can think of no better way to dampen the creative spirit or to reduce interpretive diversity than to draw up a list of concepts to be avoided at all costs.

⁹ Whereas, e.g., the *de re* variety attributes essential properties to women and the *de dicto* variety attributes essential properties to the definition of the term women, the *de definitione* variety attributes essential properties to definitions themselves. *De definitione* essentialism can be considered a special case of *de re* essentialism, with definition being the thing to which essential properties are attributed. Alternatively, it can be considered a special case of *de dicto* essentialism, with *definition* the term to which essential properties are attributed. It seems important for analytic purposes, however, to distinguish it from the other two categories.

The ahistorical trap and the pitfall of compulsory historicism

Hiding history

When Fraser and Nicholson recommended that categories like reproduction and mothering be abandoned, they were taking history into account. Historical specificity was their concern, not specificity per se. Calling these categories "ahistorical" and expressing concern that feminist theorists have discussed societal practices such as reproduction and sexuality without investigating their origins, Fraser and Nicholson portrayed ahistoricity as a pitfall every bit as disabling for feminists as essentialism (see also Alcoff 1988; Scott 1988).

Charges of ahistoricity rest on the extraordinarily important insight that phenomena that traditionally have been considered natural, and therefore fixed, are social constructs with histories. The trouble with an ahistorical approach to sexuality, reproduction, gender, mothering, domesticity, and the family, then, is not simply that the resulting account will be incomplete but that findings that actually hold for one time period are apt to be projected onto other or even all time periods.

The warnings to avoid ahistoricity that feminists have posted alongside those about essentialism are by no means redundant. Ahistoricism and essentialism are separate traps: a piece of feminist theory or research can be ahistorical without being essentialist or, conversely, essentialist without being ahistorical. In telling feminist scholars to keep clear of the ahistorical pitfall by using concepts inflected by temporality, feminist theorists, however, have stepped into the *de definitive* essentialist trap. The reasons that have been given for turning our backs on categories such as sexuality, mothering, family, reproduction, and gender identity are by now familiar: because the individual phenomena, practices, institutions—call them what you will—that fall into these categories change over time, no basis or justification exists for referring to them by the same name (see, e.g., Fraser and Nicholson 1990). Assuming that the definitions of general terms can only be essentialist, feminist theorists have turned the flight from ahistoricity into a retreat from a particular set of concepts. Premised as it is on *de definitive* essentialism, such self-denial is unnecessary (see also Rabine 1989, 111). "Transhistorical" uses of concepts need not commit one to *de re* essentialism. To be sure, many past and present human activities bear so slight a resemblance to those things we call, for example, family or mothering that we would not count them as such. Nevertheless, time per se does not determine whether a given categorization is appropriate. We cannot know in advance if some past phenomenon is so similar to or so different from the diverse things we label, for example, family, that the label does or does not apply. Historical research is needed.

Insofar as feminist theorists have decided that certain concepts or categories are unacceptable without undertaking the relevant historical inquiries, they have fallen into the very ahistorical trap that they have been telling us to avoid. Some feminist scholars may well have attributed essential unchanging properties to sexuality, mothering, or other interesting phenomena precisely because they have treated their subject matter ahistorically. Others may by dint of ahistoricity have walked straight into the essentialism *de dicto* pitfall of defining central terms or concepts by reference to a set of necessary conditions. Nevertheless, to determine whether feminist scholars have been ahistorical, one must do more than note which categories they employ. One must see how these are used.

Like nontemporally inflected categories, temporally inflected ones mask diversity. Thus, for example, the category of the modern, restricted, male-headed, nuclear family masks historical change within the modern time period. Moreover, one who uses it could leap recklessly to the conclusion that all modern, restricted, nuclear families are alike or else that they all have been male-headed. Granted, one can defend such concepts by saying that in using them feminists must neither overgeneralize nor make invalid inferences. But this defense can be given in reference to nontemporally inflected categories too. Thus, instead of telling us not to use family, reproduction, mothering, and sexuality because they are ahistorical categories, feminist theorists merely might have told us not to abuse them.

Every woman her own historian

The strategy of deploying temporally inflected categories is actually one of three paths that feminist theorists have charted around the ahistorical trap.¹⁰ The theorist pursuing the second course traces the history—narrates the story—of whatever her object of inquiry may be, thereby exposing change to view and illuminating the differences this change entails while keeping a respectful distance from the essentialist traps. In contrast, one who follows the third course does not construct narratives but places her objects of study in their historical context by relating them to, for example, contemporaneous institutions, practices, and ideologies. Although this type of historical inquiry no more exposes change to view than does the use of temporally inflected concepts, like the second course, it does help to fill some of those gaping holes in our knowledge.

Yet while we are sorely in need of historical knowledge, the advice that every woman write history delivers us up to the trap of compulsory

¹⁰ In distinguishing three quite different recommendations, I do not mean to suggest that any given person subscribes to all of them or that one or more of them is endorsed by all those who have flagged the ahistorical trap.



in which I am a pitfall that does a disservice to the field of feminist theory and research. It is surely important for someone like me who is not a historian to position myself: to acknowledge that as a white, middle-class, heterosexual academic woman I write and think at a particular time from within a particular tradition. But to put the writing of history into the hands of one who probably does not have the knowledge or skill or mind-set to do it well encourages a kind of amateurism that we can ill afford. Worse still, by privileging one disciplinary source of illumination and insight into the phenomena we study, this policy gives short shrift to others and places those trained in disciplines other than history at a definite disadvantage.

Perhaps, however, that women, gender, and other phenomena of interest to most of us are social constructs with histories of their own makes it imperative that every feminist scholar give her work a historical dimension. Yet if something has a history it does not mean that everyone must study it from a historical point of view or that it can only be understood—or only “really” understood—historically. After all, the phenomena that interest us also have biological, linguistic, psychological, sociological, political, economic, and aesthetic dimensions. If we can detach our objects of study from other contexts, why not from the historical? Why, to put it bluntly, is *abistorical* a term of disapprobation but not *psychological*, *asociological*, *aphilosophical*? Of course, in the name of consistency one could maintain that besides being a historian, every woman must henceforth be her own psychologist, sociologist, philosopher, and so forth. Yet no one has the time, the skills, the education to do it all, and in any case, there always will be more approaches to a given topic of study than are presently dreamed of.

One could also argue that the various perspectives are not all of a piece: that history has a special status in the explanation and understanding of human affairs; indeed, that a historical perspective is so vital to genuine understanding that it must be considered an essential ingredient of all feminist research. The thesis that in the case of social life a historical approach is necessary itself has a history (see, e.g., Rickman 1964). Rather than trace it here, let me just point out that it is one thing to say that historical research into the phenomena that interest feminist scholars is vitally important and that a lot more needs to be done, and quite another to say that there can be no understanding without it. To insist on this latter is to embrace another form of essentialism.¹¹

¹¹ I am not taking a stand here on whether one or another feminist theorist actually holds this position. My purpose is not to report sightings of those who have fallen into this trap but to show that there is such a trap.

At issue regarding what may be called the trap of methodological essentialism is “the” nature of understanding—a controversial topic if there ever was one. Although many Western philosophers have claimed to know “the” way in which inquiry must proceed and to discern “the” nature of understanding, as I understand understanding, it takes no one single form (Martin 1970, 143–67). Any phenomenon, hence any human or social phenomenon, can be understood in countless different ways. Setting, for example, a practice such as mothering in its historical context is one way of understanding the practice, and tracing its history is another. But perfectly good nonhistorical questions can also yield understanding—for instance, about economic or political or cultural functions mothering serves at the present time, about relationships that obtain between and among the various elements or aspects of mothering now, about ways in which participants in the practice of mothering think, and so on.¹² Of course, none of these ways yields complete or total understanding but, then, neither do historical ways.

Because one can understand a given thing—admittedly, incompletely—without doing historical scholarship, and the cost of compulsory historicism is the loss of valuable kinds of illumination, I conclude that methodological essentialism is a trap best avoided by feminist scholars. I do not mean to minimize the significance and importance of a historical approach. What is not essential can still be vital. Unfortunately, when the historical approach is deemed essential, other equally important ones are all too likely to be sacrificed. It is ironic that at the very moment in history when feminist theorists are reminding feminist scholars to broaden the scope of their research so as to include people unlike themselves, these same feminist theorists are becoming exclusionary in regard to methodology. Instead of encouraging us to tap as diverse a range of potential sources of illumination as possible, they would have us adopt one preferred source.

A pluralistic conception of understanding is surely more consistent with feminism’s respect for diversity than an essentialist one. Indeed, even if social phenomena can only be understood if they are set in their historical context or if their histories are traced, or both, it does not follow that every feminist scholar must do such tracing or setting in context. So that our field gains understanding of its objects of study, some of us would be required to do it, but not all—provided we are engaging in a cooperative enterprise. To think otherwise is to fall into the logical pitfall

¹² The point I make here does not rule out the possibility that the various functions a practice serves, the relationships that obtain in it, or the ways in which participants think, themselves have histories.



to decide if the routes that feminist theorists have designed around this deadly trap are safe, scholars need to know just where in relation to the traps of essentialism the trap of false generalization is located. Although they both deal in generalizations, false generalization and essentialism are distinct phenomena. No doubt one who falsely generalizes may claim to have discovered some essence. But attributions of essential properties need not rest on this mistake; all members of a given class may indeed share some characteristic that can justifiably be said to define them. Moreover, those who generalize falsely need not be committed to essences at all, given that essence talk specifically allows for generalizations that capture nonessential or accidental properties.

I take the reports published in 1974 by anthropologists Michelle Rosaldo and Sherry Ortner of the discovery of cross-cultural universals to have been of this latter sort (Ortner 1974; Rosaldo 1974). Although Rosaldo and Ortner generalized about all known cultures, they made it clear that no necessity was at work, that it was perfectly consistent with their discoveries that cultures could once have existed or might exist in the future in which men did not dominate women, in which public and domestic spheres were not separate and gender specific, in which women were not perceived of as close to nature. I am not qualified to say if their extrapolations were justified. Supposing, however, that they were, these generalizations did not commit Rosaldo and Ortner to essences. And if the generalizations were false, a search for better ones would not have to be essentialist either.

One might think that an obvious way for a feminist scholar to avoid the trap of false generalization would be to improve her sample so that it was more representative. One might also wonder if feminist scholars who conduct empirical investigations could not exercise greater care in the way they report the results of their research, for instance, by the repeated flagging of statistical conclusions. Feminist theorists have, however, given the impression that any attempt to replace a false generalization with a true one—or, rather, any attempt to replace an unwarranted extrapolation with a warranted one—would be misguided.¹³ Concluding her book with a discussion of the directions in which feminist theory should be moving, Eisenstein wrote, "First among these would be a retreat from false universalism, and a sensitivity to the diversity of women's experiences and needs" (1983, 141). Fraser and Nicholson ended their essay by saying, "Postmodern-feminist theory would be nonuniversalist" (1990, 34). And according to Alcoff, "Universalist conceptions of female or male experiences and attributes are not plausible in the context of such a complex network of relations" (1988, 412). The burden of messages

¹³ Actually, degrees of warrant would be involved here.

known as the fallacy of division. For even if historical study is after all essential for understanding our subject matter, a division of scholarly labor would be quite compatible with carrying out that study.

The trap of false generalization and the pitfalls of false difference and predetermined categories

The affirmation of diversity

The ahistorical trap is disabling not only because history is an important route to understanding. The danger is that we who fall into it will falsely generalize across historical periods. False generalization or universalization does not stem only from ahistoricity, however. In the classic textbook cases there is not even a factor: an inquirer simply generalizes about a whole population on the basis of an unrepresentative sample. This, of course, is what psychologists of the past did when they drew conclusions about human development from all male subjects. It is also what white middle-class women like me do when we assume that our own experiences represent all women's.

According to Eisenstein, by focusing on experiences that participants had in common while deemphasizing the participants' differences, the consciousness-raising groups of the late 1960s and early 1970s led women directly into the pitfall of false generalization (1983, 137). Among the notable feminist thinkers she identified as having been trapped there are Jean Baker Miller, Susan Brownmiller, Mary Daly, and Robin Morgan. Others have reported seeing Shulamith Firestone and Carol Gilligan fall into the same trap and have spotted Chodorow in its vicinity.

That false generalization can be disabling for women is not to be doubted, for racism can be both a cause and a consequence. In *Am't I a Woman*, bell hooks said, "While it is in no way racist for any author to write a book exclusively about white women, it is fundamentally racist for books to be published that focus solely on the American white woman's experience in which that experience is assumed to be *the* American woman's experience" (1981, 137). In rendering other women invisible, this practice reduces their status "to that of non-person" (hooks 1981, 140) even as it reinforces the view that white women represent the norm. As if this in itself were not sufficiently damaging to both groups of women, the practice is politically harmful in that it separates women who might otherwise form fruitful alliances. hooks is surely right that when, even implicitly, theory and research represent one group of women as (Other, the rhetoric of sisterhood will not be capable of binding women together.

like these is that to avoid the false generalization trap, feminist scholars must abandon any impulses to universalize we may have even if they are statistical in spirit.

What should feminist scholars be doing instead of generalizing? The advice we have been given is that through the medium of particularistic studies ranging from historical narratives of other times and anthropological reconstructions of other cultures to autobiographies, oral histories, and other accounts of personal experience, we should be focusing on difference and diversity. Twenty years ago no one would have guessed that difference would emerge as the privileged perspective in feminist theory and research and that any attempt to find commonalities among women would be condemned out of hand. After all, in the early phase of the late twentieth-century women's movement it was the discovery that the experience of others was so like one's own that was at once comforting, illuminating, and energizing. Sadly, it has turned out that this presumed discovery was a mere invention. Not only were we generalizing from too homogeneous a sample; we also were assuming that those who are alike in some respects are alike in all. No one can say, however, that having found out how wrong we were, we have been impenitent. Overgeneralizing from the existence of some differences among women to the existence of nothing but difference, we have set a brand new trap for ourselves and have insisted on walking into it.

Susan Bordo has written brilliantly, if briefly, about the a priori affirmation of difference by contemporary feminist theorists. She might have added that from a methodological point of view, no trap is more dangerous for women than the self-made trap of false difference. Cutting us off from the developmental insights of feminist psychologists and denying us the chance to discover even limited cross-cultural and temporal commonalities, it encourages us to construct not just other times and places but also other women as utterly Other.

Of course, black and white women, middle-class and working-class women, Irish and Arab women are different. But just as no two individuals and no two circumstances are alike in every respect, no two are different in every respect; the question of whether all women have one or more attributes or circumstances in common cannot be answered in advance of investigation.¹⁴ Supposing that similarities are found, there is of

¹⁴ "As anyone who has taught courses in gender knows, there are many junctures at which, for example, women of color and white women discover profound commonalities in their experience, as well as differences," Bordo commented (1990, 150). In my experience, however, the trap of false difference has placed even the most profound commonalities at risk of being overlooked. In a faculty seminar I attended in the 1980s, no one seemed to see—or else no one was brave enough to acknowledge aloud—the very obvious commonality between the experiences reported by a black woman scientist and a

course no guarantee that they will be important. Nevertheless, as long as there might be commonalities among all women—or among women such as blacks and whites who are now considered to be entirely different—it is at the very least perverse to deny ourselves access to knowledge of them, and quite possibly self-defeating.

Recurrences of essentialism

Philosophers are often criticized for doing armchair social science. Feminist theorists indulge in this discredited occupation when in rejecting false generalizations about women they conclude that the differences of race, class, and perhaps ethnicity result in nothing but difference. They also engage in it when, in another act of self-denial, they assume without conducting the necessary inquiries that race, class, and ethnicity are the critical differences for women.

After remarking on "the coercive, mechanical requirement that all enlightened feminist projects attend to 'the intersection of race, class, and gender,'" Bordo asked, "What happened to ethnicity? Age? Sexual orientation?" (1990, 139). One might dispute Bordo's assumption that ethnicity and sexual orientation were not on the approved list of variables, but her point is well-taken that the list is incomplete. This is not its only troubling aspect, however. Prior to investigation, how can we be so sure that in a woman's case being a rape victim does not matter as much or more than her race or class? How do we know that, for us, difference does not turn on being fat or religious or in an abusive relationship?

Rightly responsive to charges of racism and classism and accordingly intent on avoiding the pitfall of false generalization, we have constructed alongside the trap of false difference the trap of predetermined categories. That race and class have been considered fundamental variables in research about men scarcely entitles these concepts to the privilege they now enjoy in the study of women. Indeed, just as historical study has been treated as an essential ingredient of good feminist methodology, these constructs are perceived to be essential elements of feminist investigations. To be sure, empirical inquiry may yet prove race and class to be *the* fundamental variables in our case. Because, however, the very categories that we have been assuming a priori to be definitive of our differences may in fact be less significant than some others, we need to find a way between the pitfalls of false generalization and false difference that does not lead into this essentialist trap. We should be looking for one that does not cut us off from the illumination that other categories of analysis might yield.

white woman scientist. At a feminist colloquium no one objected when the renowned speaker answered a black woman's question by saying that they both knew that she, the speaker, being white, could know nothing about her interrogator's experience.

I am also sure that such research might never have been undertaken if undertaken, might not have been published—if in response to charges of false generalization white academic feminist scholars had not acknowledged their mistakes. It is not one or the other kind of scholarship but the either-or approach to understanding social life that I reject here. As long as feminists refuse to accept the underlying premise of those claims that there is something that qualifies as "the" proper mode of understanding or investigating human beings, we can comfortably engage in both ideographic and generalizing projects. That these latter will most likely be statistical, in the broadest sense of this term, goes without saying.¹⁵ I hope it is also clear by now that generalizing projects need not commit us to essentialism.

Improving the climate and revitalizing our methodology

"So what's at stake in these attacks?" Marianne Hirsch asked when Nancy Miller reported that at a conference on feminist theory she had felt denounced and publicly dismissed (Gallop, Hirsch, and Miller 1990, 352). The students in my feminist theory class asked the same question after reading some recent articles in feminist theory.

Remarking that it is not accidental "that feminists are questioning the integrity of the notion of 'female reality' just as we begin to get a foothold in those professions which could be most radically transformed by our (historically developed) Otherness," Bordo asked, "could feminist gender-skepticism . . . now be operating in the service of the reproduction of white, male knowledge/power?" (1990, 151). I have no doubt that if feminist scholars en masse take the routes around essentialism, ahistoricism, and false generalization that feminist theorists have been mapping, we will reproduce white male knowledge/power and the other varieties of white male power. Rather than explore this eventuality, however, I want to talk about the damage that a chilly climate of feminist research can do and why it is important to honor diversity in the methodological realm as we already honor it in other areas.

In positing a chilly research climate I put forward a hypothesis derived from my own experience and my admittedly limited observations. Let it be thought that I am falsely generalizing, let me say that I take as empirical the question of just how widespread the phenomenon is. I do not for a moment mean to suggest that the atmosphere in the past decade turned chilly for all feminists. It certainly became far more comfortable than it was for those scholars whose lives and experiences were ignored

¹⁵ In this category I include probabilistic statements, tendency statements, loose regularities, statements with a *ceteris paribus* clause, and the like.

most research must always and everywhere attend to race and class, said Bordo, "is the (often implicit, sometimes explicit) dogma that the only correct perspective on race, class, and gender is the affirmation of difference" (1990, 139). Actually, however, even as feminist theorists have been telling us to lay bare the diversity that exists within the category of women, they have been masking difference and manufacturing unity within the more specific racial and class categories. Regarding being black, for example, as "the" defining property of black women—in other words, falling once again into the *de re* essentialist trap—feminists have lost sight of the myriad ways in which black women differ from one another. Worse still, reasoning that if one property—for example, being black or Asian—is held in common by women, then all properties are, they have compounded the invalid inference that all black or Asian women are utterly different from all white women by the equally fallacious one that all black or all Asian women are absolutely alike.

The reification of difference between recognized categories of women and the inattentiveness to differences within these categories are definitely dangerous for women, for these policies actually construct women who belong to another race or class from oneself as the Other. They also legitimate an analogue in feminist scholarship to the old Separate but Equal segregationist policy. When, not long ago, the male bias of men's scholarship was revealed, feminists responded that once women are brought into the disciplines of knowledge, new narratives and theories have to be constructed. Now that feminist scholarship itself has been charged with race and class bias, our response has been different. Proclaiming in advance the impossibility of constructing adequate "integrated" theories and narratives, feminist theorists have opted for a "different but equal" policy.

Assume that black and white women or middle-class and working-class women are radically different and then there is no point in telling a feminist scholar who has fallen into the trap of false generalization to improve her sample. For given this premise, no matter what she does, the only generalizations she can come up with will be false. The assumption of absolute difference is untenable, however, and the best that can be said about the presumption that when the missing women are finally brought into feminist research scholars must treat them separately—that, in effect, there should be no intermingling of races or classes—is that it is intellectually stifling.

In urging that we do not cut ourselves off from generalizing research I am not condemning studies of difference or indicting ones that segregate categories of women for the purpose of study. On the contrary, I firmly believe that our field has been greatly enriched by work of this very sort.

nists should not strive to establish a warm and welcoming research climate for all. Thus, one must ask in this case, as one should when fear is used to bring children into line, if better ways do not exist to achieve what is wanted. One must also ask what is sacrificed in the process. Where intellectual inquiry is concerned, fear often produces timidity and self-censorship. If in the world of the coeducational college classroom this too frequently translates into a woman's inability to speak up, her increased disposition toward self-doubt, and even a tendency to drop out academically, we can expect it to have analogous consequences in the realm of feminist research.¹⁶

But suppose that the accusations stop—as, indeed, they now may have. The research climate will not improve if we continue to embrace a double standard. Right now we look tolerantly upon the gravest mistakes and omissions of a Michel, a Jacques, a Jean-François, even as we denounce works by women that contain far less egregious errors. Take Foucault. Does this master's inattention to women, to male domination, to the genderization of power, discourse, reason, knowledge lead feminist theorists to dismiss his work? On the contrary, they quite rightly tell us that it is a rich source of understanding and empowerment (Diamond and Quinby 1988). Take Lyotard. Does this man's utter neglect of women and of the workings of gender in both society and social criticism cause feminist theorists to condemn his work? No; they wisely want us to learn from it (Fraser and Nicholson 1990).

Feminists can learn much from Foucault and the others. We need to do some soul-searching, however, about the discrepancy between our cordial treatment of the men's theories and our punitive approach to the women's (see, e.g., Berg 1991, 51).

Many prominent feminist scholars have been accused of essentialism or ahistoricism or false generalization or all three, but perhaps no one has so frequently and from so many quarters been charged with falling into all three traps as Gilligan (see, e.g., Kerber 1986; Nicholson 1986, 105; Scott 1988, 40; Fraser and Nicholson 1990, 32–33; Stacey 1990, 540). I cite the case of Gilligan for illustrative purposes only (see also Bordo 1990, 148–49; Gallop, Hirsch, and Miller 1990, 364). My interest is not in whether Gilligan has fallen into traps but in the double standard by which her work has been judged. For the record, let me also say that I do not for a moment mean to imply that those who have criticized Gilligan's

¹⁶ I wish I could specify these consequences here, but by the very nature of the case I cannot. I do not mean to say that one can never know what would have been done had things been different. But it would surely require sophisticated research techniques of a sort I do not pretend to possess to find out: what inquiries have not been undertaken; what papers have not been written—or, if written, have not been published or, if published, have not been reviewed; what studies have not been pursued—or, if pursued, have not been funded; and so forth.

are misrepresented in the research of the 1970s and 1980s. I am also aware that some scholars who all along have found the climate hospitable have felt no drop in the temperature. Still, a surprising number of people in the audiences to which I have read an earlier version of this article told me—often privately and in highly emotional language—that they had indeed suffered because of the accusations and the acrimony. The comments of some well-known feminist scholars also lend credence to the supposition that many feminist scholars have been experiencing the chill of which I speak.

In a discussion of the detection feminist theory has taken, Evelyn Fox Keller said, "It is almost as if we have sought to defuse the force of external censorship by becoming our own harshest critics" (Hirsch and Keller 1990, 384). But we have not merely become too hard on ourselves. "I feel like a lot of conversations are getting cut off by using the 'club' words—essentialism and things like that," Hirsch said to Miller and Gallop (Gallop, Hirsch, and Miller 1990, 350). "What revisionism, not to say essentialism, was to Marxism-Leninism, essentialism is to feminism: the prime idiom of intellectual terrorism and the privileged instrument of political orthodoxy. Borrowed from the time-honored vocabulary of philosophy, the word essentialism has been endowed within the context of feminism with the power to reduce to silence, to excommunicate, to consign to oblivion," Naomi Schor wrote in the Summer 1989 issue of *differences* (1989, 40).

I do not doubt that it is possible to conduct creative scholarship in an atmosphere of recrimination. I am sure that some women are courageous—or foolhardy—enough to continue to pursue their research programs after being publicly denounced. But, as Nancy Miller's own experience taught her, with accusation comes fear: "I also learned to fear other women in a way I hadn't done until that point. If I was polemical, my polemic was with men. In my mind I was writing *for* women against some establishment—institution, theory—that was male. For the first time I thought, 'I am now in a situation where *women* are not going to like what I'm saying'" (Gallop, Hirsch, and Miller 1990, 352).

Some might say that the fear of being given a negative label can be a good thing. Just as it prevents at least some men from harassing women or making sexist or racist remarks, fear may serve to keep white, middle-class feminists from promulgating racist, classist, and other malicious forms of theory. I agree that white, middle-class feminists need constant reminders and close monitoring if we are to stop using the tools of the master. It is also imperative to realize that even as the research climate has been discouraging certain kinds of scholarly work, the attention to differences has allowed other equally important forms to flourish. But I know of no law saying that to make room for one type of feminist scholarship, it is necessary to repudiate other types, no reason why femi-

their findings actually gave historical support to Gilligan's hypothesis, in their conclusion they told readers that "her moral theory remains without historical and political context" (297).¹⁸

"The question I really want to come back to," Hirsch insisted toward the end of the conversation with Gallop and Miller, "is whom does criticism, divisiveness, really hurt? What's the risk?" (Gallop, Hirsch, and Miller 1990, 364). Remarking that "there is no direct relation between being trashed and having career difficulties, suffering in your career," Gallop said, "I can't feel sorry for Carol Gilligan because despite it no longer being cool or sophisticated, Gilligan has an enormous impact. Her books have sold a lot. She's on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine*. All kinds of people who are not on the cutting edge of feminist theory continue to be influenced by her, to use and accept her" (Gallop, Hirsch, and Miller 1990, 365).

Focusing on the damage that Gilligan's career did or did not suffer, the parties to this conversation forgot to ask about the chilling effects the accusations and application of the double standard could have had on her subsequent research and perhaps did have on that of others such as Smith and Valenze. Hirsch stopped to wonder if "the hysteria around her work has prevented many from grappling with the radical potential it has in spite of its problems" (Gallop, Hirsch, and Miller 1990, 365). But the more general topic of the hobbling consequences of a policy that places a *Keep Away!* sign on certain women's research programs, thus shutting feminist theory and research off from ideas, concepts, methodologies—from intellectual possibilities, if you will—was not addressed.

In the event, the accusations and the application of a double standard after the publication of *In a Different Voice* did not cause Gilligan to abandon her research program. Expanding her database and developing an ever more sensitive methodology, she continued to ask the kinds of questions and to use the categories that exercised so many feminist theorists. In *Mapping the Moral Domain*, Gilligan and her colleagues presented a refined hypothesis that girls and women speak in a different voice along with additional confirming data (Gilligan, Ward, and Taylor 1988; see also Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer 1990). Needless to say, a great many questions remain. Did our foremothers speak in that voice? Is that voice so constituted by late-twentieth-century thinking that it was inaccessible to an earlier age? Do rural girls, Chicanas, lesbians, older women speak in it? In Asian and African societies is what Gilligan calls a different voice actually the dominant one? That these questions have

¹⁸ In contrast, Katzenstein and Lavin 1987 made the case that "Gilligan's portrayal of the female mode of moral reasoning is in part confirmed by the very history and rhetoric of feminist politics" (262).

words have historically used a double standard. For that matter, Gilligan's critics and those who are tolerant of the mistakes of male thinkers are not necessarily the same individuals. My point is, simply, that a double standard has emerged and that it is not a healthy development.

Upon realizing that the original samples leading to Gilligan's discovery of a different voice (Gilligan 1982) were limited, her readers had ample reason to conclude that she had not demonstrated that women of all races and classes spoke in that different voice. Feminist critics instead convicted her of essentialism and false unity. Knowing that Gilligan was a psychologist, not a historian, readers also had excellent grounds for judging that she had not shown that the different voice existed in historical periods other than our own. Feminist theorists instead condemned her for being ahistorical. Pointing to the various ways in which Gilligan's discovery had still to be confirmed or disconfirmed, feminist scholars could have treated it as a hypothesis. Instead, they left the impression that further research was unnecessary. They implied, if they did not actually say, that Gilligan's ahistorical approach demonstrated the nonexistence of the different voice in other times and that her limited sample proved that the voice was uniquely white and middle class.¹⁷

Irene Diamond and Lee Quimby have offered the possibility of friendship between feminism and Foucault. Considering his theory illuminating but incomplete, in their introduction to *Feminism and Foucault* they proposed that we explore and fill in the gaps (1988, ix). Compare this constructive approach based on a belief in the possibilities of mutual correction and a fuller understanding with the one feminist theorists have taken toward Gilligan's work.

As an example, in the introductory section of an essay on the moral thinking and behavior of working-class women in nineteenth-century England, Ruth L. Smith and Deborah M. Valenze cited Gilligan only to distance themselves from her research. Claiming that the moral behavior of the women they studied "starkly contrasts with the autonomous moral agent central to liberalism" (1988, 277), that for these women "'self' was often expressed and experienced as 'jointness' rather than 'oneness' and as mutual rather than atomistic" (278), that the women "risked their reputations and safety in order to satisfy substantive needs for their families and communities" (287), and that in their eyes "dependence—and independence—were closely tied to interdependence" (289), Smith and Valenze might have turned to Gilligan's research for illumination. Or they might have convinced of themselves as exploring and filling in a historical gap in hers. Instead, they were so loath to acknowledge any kinship that although

¹⁷ According to information supplied by Gilligan, the original sample included black middle class women and white working-class women.

how we have been abstracted, however, does not mean that their answers will disconfirm Gilligan's hypothesis. To suppose that they will is to engage in armchair social science. I fear that in response to the research of many feminist scholars besides Gilligan, many of us have been doing just this. According to Fraser and Nicholson, "Feminist scholars have come to regard their enterprise more collectively, more like a puzzle whose various pieces are being filled in by many different people than like a construction to be completed by a single great theoretical stroke" (1990, 32). I wish I could agree. But my vision of a collective enterprise is of a research community governed by an open welcoming spirit, one that is as inclusionary on the methodological level as on the personal. It is of people who hold up high standards for themselves and each other but do not demand perfection. And it is of scholars from different backgrounds and with quite different kinds of training who are expert enough to see the mistaken assumptions and the gaps in other women's research, generous enough to give constructive criticism and to recognize the positive contributions contained in the work of others, and wise enough to know that their way of doing research is not the only right way—indeed, that there probably is no single right way or even a short list thereof.¹⁹

The chilly research climate, whose existence I can vouch for even though its extent remains to be determined, is far from being a welcoming one for diverse methodologies and divergent thought. But let me repeat that I am as concerned about the methodological advice that feminist theorists have been giving one another as about the accusatory language and the double standard. A product of a priori thinking that is itself the product of untenable dualisms, this advice promotes a kind of dogmatism on the methodological level that we do not countenance in other contexts. It rules out theories, categories, and research projects in advance; prejudices the extent of difference and the nonexistence of similarity; and arbitrarily privileges one type of methodology. Happily, to avoid the essentialist traps it is not necessary to eschew general categories or concepts. To steer clear of the ahistorical pitfall we do not have to endorse universal compulsory historicism. To navigate around false generalizations we need not engage generalizations. In each case there are at least two alternative paths that we can take:

Alternative paths around the well-marked pitfalls do exist and we need to know about them. It would be too cruel an irony if, just when white academic feminists have realized that many of our theories and concepts have excluded other women or masked the diversity among women—and just when we have sought to make amends—we allowed our creative impulses to be stunted and our interests to be redirected by an unwar-

¹⁹ The three anonymous readers of this article for *Signs* and assistant editor Kate Lyell seemed to me to exemplify this process beautifully.

anted accusation of methodological essentialism. So that ours can be an inclusive and collective enterprise it behooves us to find ways to keep out of the methodological traps and at the same time remain open to intellectual possibilities and receptive to different ideas.

Because my primary concern is the bad advice we have been given, I am deeply disturbed that the "essentialism/antiesentialism debate" is already being regarded as past history and even as something of a bore. For if the debate is laid to rest without critical examination of its presuppositions, the methodological mistakes of the parties to it will all too likely be repeated. If no clear routes around the traps of essentialism, ahistoricism, and false generalization are discerned, some of us will continue to fall into opposite and equally dangerous pitfalls while others of us, thinking we have no choice, will deliberately step into one or another essentialist trap. In addition, although the debate's demise may make the atmosphere less acrimonious, if the faulty advice given is not corrected, generalizing integrative research will continue to be dismissed out of hand.

Besides, we need to ask ourselves if the focus on theory and methodology that characterized discussions about essentialism was an adequate response to the charges of racism and classism that had been leveled against us. Maria Lugones has rightly said that in interpreting the "problem of difference" as a problem for feminist theory, white feminist theorists have made theory, instead of racism, their main concern (1991, 41). Theory, as hooks has pointed out, can be used "to promote an academic elitism that embraces traditional structures of domination" (1989, 36). "In shifting the focus of crucial feminist concerns about the representation of cultural diversity from practical contexts to questions of adequate theory," Bordo wrote, we are "diverted from attending to the professional and institutional mechanisms through which the politics of exclusion operate most powerfully in intellectual communities" (1990, 136; see also Spelman 1988, 183). Before we put the discussions of essentialism behind, it behooves us to find out whether, and to what extent, they may have functioned as one more form of resistance to the sharing of our power and privilege.

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55. These arguments for retaining the notion of objectivity draw on ones I have made several times before, most recently in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* p. 157–61.

56. The National Academy of Sciences recommends such an expansion, as indicated earlier.

57. For example, Smith and Hartsock, cited in note. 5.

4

Marginality and Epistemic Privilege

Bat-Ami Bar On

I.

Since the early days of the current wave of the women's movement, feminists have claimed that experience is not gender-neutral in societies in which gender matters because it is the experience of gendered persons. Feminists have accumulated plenty of empirical data in support of this claim¹ and have deployed it strategically to legitimate demands for attention to what women, and feminists as their spokeswomen, have to say about discrimination against and oppression of women. The claim has served feminists especially well in the academy, where curricula and pedagogy alike have come under feminist scrutiny and have been found lacking because of the exclusion of women's voices.

The claim that experience is gender-specific implies that gender is a constitutive element of experience, and one of the tasks undertaken by feminist epistemologists has been to explore why and how gender constitutes experience.² In addition, feminist epistemologists have been investigating the epistemological significance of the constitution of experience by gender.³

The constitution of experience by gender is asserted to be epistemologically significant by most Western second-wave feminists, including ethnic feminists. Although for some feminists all that this assertion means is that knowledge claims based on the experience of one gender are partially true, for other feminists it means that not only is all knowledge perspectival but also that some perspectives are more revealing than others. These are the perspectives of members of groups that are socially marginalized in their relations to dominant groups—for example, women or subgroups thereof, such as African-American women or lesbians.⁴

One can find traces of this feminist position in early second-wave feminist essays. Thus in 1969, Mary Ann Weathers claimed in "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force" that Black women "are clearly the most oppressed minority in the world, let alone the [USA]" and are the best agents of their own liberation.⁵ And in 1977, the Combahee River Collective reiterated and clarified this position in "A Black Feminist Statement":

We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. . . . We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in black women's lives as are the politics of race and class. . . . We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual.⁶

In "Goodbye to All That," written in 1970, Robin Morgan stated that "it seems obvious that a legitimate revolution must be led by, *made* by those who have been most oppressed: black, brown and white *women*—with men relating to that the best they can." And in 1971, Vivian Gornick wrote in "Woman as Outsider":

In every real sense woman . . . is an outsider. . . . Only a brief look at the cultural and religious myths and the literary projections of woman that surround the female existence . . . will instantly reveal the essential *outsiderness* of woman: her distance from the center of self-realized life, the extremity of her responses to experience, her characteristic femaleness incorporating . . . a distillation of human behavior that grows directly out of the excluded nature of her destined life.⁸

Also in 1971, Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love made this observation in "Is Women's Liberation a Lesbian Plot?":

Lesbians are the women who potentially can demonstrate life outside the male power structure that dominates marriage as well as every other aspect of our culture. Thus, the lesbian movement is not only related to women's liberation, it is at the very heart of it.⁹

Finally in 1975, Charlotte Bunch reiterated and clarified this position in "Not for Lesbians Only":

[The] analysis of the function of heterosexuality in women's oppression is available to any woman, lesbian or straight. Lesbian-feminism is a political analysis not "for lesbians only." . . . Since lesbians are materially oppressed by heterosexuality daily, it is not surprising that we have seen and understood its impact first—not because we are more moral,

but because our reality is different—and it is a materially different reality.¹⁰

II.

The attribution of epistemic privilege to socially marginalized subjects is not a feminist innovation. In the West, second-wave feminists appropriated the idea from the New Left who, although rejecting Marx's attribution of epistemic privilege to the proletariat alone, nonetheless continued to believe that subjects located at the social margins have an epistemic advantage over those located in the social center. The descent from Marx is most obvious in the writings of socialist-feminists like Ann Ferguson and Nancy Hartsock, who explicitly model their claims about women on Marx's claims about the proletariat.

In "Women as a New Revolutionary Class in the United States," Ann Ferguson relies on Marxist methodology and discussions of class to identify general criteria that allow her to show that women are not only a class but a revolutionary class, that "women are unlike Marx's characterization of peasants and like his characterization of the working class."¹¹ In Ferguson's essay the epistemic advantage conferred by occupying a certain class position is only implicit; in Hartsock's essay, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," the epistemic advantage is brought into focus:

I set off from Marx's proposal that a correct vision of class society is available from only one of the two major class positions in capitalist society. . . . By setting off from the Marxian meta-theory I am implicitly suggesting that this, rather than his critique of capitalism, can be most helpful to feminists. I will explore some of the epistemological consequences of claiming that women's lives differ structurally from those of men. In particular, I will suggest that like the lives of the proletarians according to Marxian theory, women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of the phallogocentric institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy.¹²

In the process of critically generalizing from the marxist models and then critically applying them to women, both Ferguson and Hartsock transform Marx's conceptualization of the relation of social marginality to epistemic privilege. For Marx, social marginality alone is not a necessary and sufficient condition for epistemic privilege; if it

were, he could have not claimed exclusive epistemic privilege for the proletariat, which, though socially marginal, is not the only socially marginal group in a capitalist society. Thus, Marx declares in *The Communist Manifesto*:

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. . . . The lower middle classes: the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. . . . If by chance they are revolutionary. . . they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat. The "dangerous class," the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of revolutionary intrigue.¹³

Marx's proletariat differs from the lower middle classes in part by having no vested interests in capitalist society because it is a propertyless class. Yet the class that Marx refers to in the *Manifesto* as the "dangerous class," the class of the chronically unemployed, is also propertyless. The proletariat differs from this class by being usually employed in the exploitative ways that make it crucial to the capitalist mode of production.

Marx's proletariat occupies two places in capitalist society. It is socially marginal in relation to the capitalist class, which occupies center stage by virtue of an economic power that enables it to have enormous political and cultural influence and even control. At the same time it is the proletariat that is at the center stage of capitalist production because it is the living creative force of production that is appropriated by the capitalist class and transformed into the capital that gives the capitalists their power.

Indeed, in the case of Marx's proletariat, social marginality is a function of economic centrality. The economic relations between the capitalist class and the proletariat are exploitative, and this exploitation of the proletariat by the capitalist class is the cause of its alienation and material impoverishment, which maintain the power of the capitalist class over society.

Were one to model claims about women's social marginality on Marx's claims about the proletariat's social marginality, one would have to identify some social system in which women are central as a gender or sex-class and are socially marginal due to this centrality. According to both Ferguson and Hartsock, the system in which women are socially marginal as a gender or sex-class is patriarchy;

the patriarchal division of labor is gender- or sex-based, and the kind of labor that women usually do (Ferguson calls it *sex/effective labor*) has unique characteristics and requires special skills, whether done for a wage or in a household. Moreover, according to Ferguson, women's sex/effective labor is exploited. Yet neither Ferguson nor Hartsock claim that women's social marginality is a function of women's centrality in a systemically organized relation with men taken as a gender or sex-class.

Because they sever the relation between social marginality and centrality, Ferguson and Hartsock have to conceptualize the relation between social marginality and epistemic privilege differently than Marx. What they share with him is a reliance on a class-based (in their case, a sex class-based) interest or disinterest in maintaining an oppressive system. But as Marx pointed out in the case of the chronically unemployed—the "dangerous class" of the capitalist system—social marginality alone does not assure the kind of disinterest needed for a revolutionary and thus liberatory vision. For Marx, the proletariat's disinterest is a function of its subjection to capital, a subjection that transforms the proletariat and the social relations among its members in such a way that proletarian social relations do not resemble capitalist ones and the proletariat has no loyalties to capitalist society.

III.

Of course, one need not go Marx's way in conceptualizing the relation between social marginality and epistemic privilege. Bell Hooks presents marginality as the space of radical possibility and hence the center for the production of a counterhegemonic discourse. She makes the following point in "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness":

Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for is lost.¹⁴

What Hooks offers as a response to Marx's suspicion of a marginality that is not at the same time a centrality is a different sense of marginality. What her claims imply is that conceiving of marginality in Marx's way denies marginal subjects agency. Although her claim is a move in a reverse discourse, she locates this move in what she takes

as the empirical reality of lived oppression, which as a lived experience is not only an experience of powerlessness but also an experience of agency in the form of resistance to victimization.

Hooks's move echoes earlier feminist moves. Toward the end of the 1970s, Western second-wave feminists began to reconceive women's sociopolitical situation and retell it not as a story of victimization but as a story of survival.¹⁵ Feminist historians in particular began recreating women's history along this line, realizing, as Hooks does, that an important form of a resistance that is at the same time the creation of a counterhegemonic discourse is a construction of the self through the creation of a memory of a past that either precedes oppression or is a memory of other resisting voices. Thus Hooks says in "On Self-Recovery":

Social construction of the self in relation would mean . . . that we would know the voices that speak in and to us from the past. . . . Yet, it is precisely these voices that are silenced, suppressed, when we are dominated. . . . Domination and colonization attempt to destroy our capacity to know the self, to know who we are. We oppose this violation, this dehumanization, when we seek self-recovery, when we work to unite fragments of being, to recover our history.¹⁶

In addition, Hooks's move fits with the reconceptualization of power under the influence of and in critical response to postmodern critics. According to theoreticians like Foucault, power has multiple and not necessarily systemically related forms, all operating on individuals to inscribe and determine them. Feminists responding to this position reject the implication of overdetermination because it suggests the loss of agency. As Nancy Hartssock comments in "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?":

[R]ather than getting rid of subjectivity or notions of the subject as Foucault does and substituting his notion of the individual as an effect of power-relations, we need to engage in the historical, political, and theoretical process of constituting ourselves as subjects as well as objects of history. We need to recognize that we can be the makers of history as well as the object of those who have made history.¹⁷

IV.

The attribution of agency to a marginality that is not at the same time a centrality problematizes the attribution of epistemic privilege to the socially marginalized subjects. The source of the problem is the

existence of multiple socially marginalized groups; is any one of these groups more epistemically privileged than the others, and if that is not so—if they are all equally epistemically privileged—does epistemic privilege matter?

When one among a multiplicity of socially marginalized groups is claimed to be epistemically more privileged than the others, the usual criterion for justifying such a claim is the extent to which the group in question is peripheralized. Epistemic privilege then becomes a function of the distance from the center. Presumably the more distant one is from the center, the more advantageous is one's point of view.

An example of a claim for an epistemic privilege based on distance is Marilyn Frye's claim for epistemic privilege for lesbians. In "To Be and Be Seen: The Politics of Reality," Frye first cites from a 1978 paper on lesbian epistemology by Sarah Hoagland:

In the conceptual schemes of phallogracies . . . there is no such thing as a lesbian. This puts a lesbian in the interesting and peculiar position of being something that does not exist, and this position is a singular vantage point with respect to the reality which does not include her.¹⁸

She next goes on to show that the lesbian is excluded from phallogratic conceptual schemes in three different ways, whereas woman, though excluded in some ways, is generally included in these schemes.

Another example is Gayle Rubin's claim for epistemic privilege for women whose sexual practices are more transgressive than what Pat Califia calls "vanilla" lesbian-feminist practices. In "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," Rubin describes the distance as a function of what she calls the "anti-sex" variant of feminism:

Proponents of this viewpoint have condemned virtually every variant of sexual expression as anti-feminist. Within this framework, monogamous lesbianism that occurs within long-term, intimate relationships and which does not involve playing with polarized roles, has replaced married, procreative heterosexuality at the top of the value hierarchy. Heterosexuality has been demoted to somewhere in the middle. Apart from this change, everything else looks more or less familiar. The lower depths are occupied by the usual groups and behaviors: prostitution, transsexuality, sadomasochism, and cross-generational activities.¹⁹

While Frye and Rubin see distance in terms that are analogous to the conceptualization of physical distance, distance can also be conceptualized as a function of multiple oppression. Some individuals are subjected in more than one way and thus are members of more than

one socially marginalized group. If the multiple ways in which a person can be socially marginalized can be seen as cumulative, then they can be seen as creating further distances from the center.

An example of a claim for epistemic privilege that is built on the notion of distance as a function of multiple oppressions can be found in statements like the following one by Barbara Smith:

Third World women are forming the leadership in the feminist movement because we are not one dimensional, one-issued in our political understanding. Just by virtue of our identities we certainly define race and usually define class as being fundamental issues that we have to address. The more wide-ranged your politics, the more potentially profound and transformative they are.²⁰

Consider a similar statement by her sister Beverly Smith:

We are in the position to challenge the feminist movement as it stands to date and not out of any theoretical commitment. Our analysis of race and class oppression and our commitment to really dealing with those issues, including homophobia, is something we know we have to struggle with to insure our survival. It is organic to our very existence.²¹

Frye's, Rubin's, and Barbara and Beverly Smith's conceptions of distance and its relation to epistemic privilege suggest two different ways of conceiving epistemic privilege as a function of distance. According to one, which is a conception grounded in a single oppression and the identity and practices of those identified by it, epistemically privileged, socially marginalized subjects are horizontally distanced from the center and placed in a "liberated" space. The other, grounded in multiple oppressions and the identity and practices of those identified by them, locates epistemically privileged, socially marginalized subjects at a point distant from the center and intersected by many axes. This too is a sort of a "liberated" space.

Although they differ in their description of the space inhabited by epistemically privileged, socially marginalized subjects, both conceptions assume a single center and both ground the epistemic privilege of the specified group of socially marginalized subjects in their identity and practices. In the latter respect they resemble other feminist conceptions of epistemic privilege, such as those developed by some feminist philosophers of science. Thus, for example, Hilary Rose argues that a better science—a science responsive to the needs of the people—will be based in forms of practice derived from women's domestic practices.²² Evelyn Fox-Keller suggests in her discussion of Barbara McClintock's work in genetics that it was because McClintock was

not a man that she had to develop a nonmasculinist practice of science:

In a science constructed around the naming of the object (nature) as female and the parallel naming of the subject (mind) as male, any scientist who happens to be a woman is confronted with an a priori contradiction in terms. This poses a critical problem of identity. . . . Only if she undergoes a radical disidentification from self can she share masculine pleasure in mastering nature cast in the image of woman as passive, inert, and blind. Her alternative is to attempt a radical redefinition of terms. . . . This is not to say that the male scientist cannot claim similar redefinition. . . . but, by contrast to the woman scientist, his identity does not require it.²³

V.

Both the assumption of a single center from which the epistemically privileged, socially marginalized subjects are distanced and the grounding of their epistemic privilege in their identity and practices are problematic. Although the latter resonates with ideas of the New Left, the former was even then questionable. Since the 1960s and the dawn of a recognition that racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not merely individually held bad attitudes but rather institutionally and systemically entrenched structures, there has been a movement away from theorizing power as located in one center.

Western second-wave feminists, especially socialist-feminists, debated one aspect of this issue of power at length from the end of the 1970s through the beginning of the 1980s.²⁴ This debate seems to have resulted in a tacit theoretical agreement that there are multiple oppressive systems that interrelate in various ways that may either enhance or undermine each other. The question of power is currently debated among (and with) postmodern feminists.²⁵ This debate also seems to lead away from a theoretical positioning of a single, central power from which all the oppressed are similarly distanced through their social marginalization.

Iris Young's work on power, which combines socialist-feminist and postmodern-feminist insights, is quite instructive here.²⁶ Young begins with the brute fact of multiple social groups, each conceiving itself as oppressed in relation to some other privileged group. Instead of attempting to unify the oppressed by providing a theoretical framework that will explain each and every kind of oppression and order the different kinds of oppressive relations, she provides a theoretical framework that explains why one should resist the impulse to unify

and how to go about politics in a heterogeneous world. While Young believes that historically situated and contextualized analyses may reveal some connections between forms of oppression, she does not assume an all-inclusive structure or system with a single, central power operating on all the oppressed in connected ways and thus unifying them. For Young, unity is possible only as a function of a political process in which, among other things, the possibility of unity is explored openly and sincerely.

The problem of grounding epistemic privilege in the identity and practices of socially marginalized subjects is not derivative to the problem of theorizing a single, central power from which these subjects are distanced. Such a theory does not merely recover the agency of socially marginalized subjects but valorizes it in such a way that even if the theory does not essentialize agency, it always idealizes it, abstracting from the actual lived practices and generalizing from normatively approved ones.

The kind of idealization that is entailed by valorization is problematic because rather than working from a conception of practices as heterogeneous, it includes some while excluding others, presupposing that there are practices that in one way or another are more authentically expressive of something about the oppressed group. Two kinds of practices have been identified by feminist authors as authentic—practices that are generally associated with the group (in the case of women, for example, nurturing, domestic practices) and practices of resistance.

The construal of women's agency in nurturing, domestic terms has led to the idealization of a certain set of women's dispositions, especially the disposition to care or love and in particular its manifestation in the mother-child relationship. The following examples of feminist writings about the mother-child relationship show the process of idealization at work.

Sara Ruddick, after noting that "maternal love is said to be gentle and unconditional when, in fact, it is erotic, inseparable from anger, fierce, and fraught with ambivalence,"²⁷ nonetheless appeals to maternal thinking as the source of a gender-based disposition to non-violence and thus as a gendered kind of moral agency. Virginia Held, after noting that in actuality parents may not care for their children in just the right ways, similarly proceeds to use an idealized maternal care as a model for moral motivation in "Feminism and Moral Theory":

We should not glamorize parental care. Many mothers and fathers dominate their children in harmful ways, or fail to care adequately for them.

But, when the relationship between "mother" and child is as it should be, the caretaker does not care for the child (nor the child for the caretaker) because of universal moral rules. The love and concern that one feels for the child already motivates much of what one does.²⁸

Like Ruddick, Held recognizes that women's practices vary. Some women care for their children; some neglect and even harm them. She maintains that this recognition should restrain us from glamorizing parental care. Yet, this does not stop her from doing just what she has advised against by introducing the normative "should" once again, this time postulating care as what should be the case, a move that frees her to claim a moral agency based in and motivated by care.

By conceiving agency in relation to care, both Ruddick and Held link it to specific women's practices. These practices are related to women's identity as defined within the system that oppresses them. But agency has also been conceptualized as resistance, which seems to purge any oppressive content from agency because the equation of agency with resistance divides the practices of socially marginalized subjects into two groups. One is the group of practices that are acted upon by oppressive forces, like nurturing or domestic practices, which embody choices delimited by the values of one's oppressors. The other group of practices—practices of resistance—is free from the operation of oppressive forces.

Two kinds of practices have been suggested as candidates for practices of resistance. One kind consists of practices claimed to belong to a culture that either precedes the beginning of the marginalizing oppression, such as a patriarchal culture, or is produced in the context of oppression and yet is somehow untouched by oppressive forces, such as a women's culture.²⁹ The other kind consists of practices that respond to oppression and show that the socially marginalized subjects are not powerless, that they can set limits on or subvert the oppressive forces, and that they can be creative and go beyond the boundaries set for them by their oppression.³⁰

The two kinds of practices of resistance are not necessarily separated from each other. Thus, for example, in "La conciencia de la mestiza: Toward a New Consciousness,"³¹ Gloria Anzaldúa appeals to the possibility of both kinds of practices of resistance and in one place in her essay anticipates the reconstruction of a culture preceding and resisting oppression:

Seeing the Chicana anew in light of her history, I seek an exonerating, a seeing through the fiction of white supremacy, a seeing of ourselves in our true guise and not as the false racial personality that has been given to us and that we have given to ourselves.³²

Elsewhere in this essay Anzaldúa talks about practices through which she challenges oppression:

I am cultureless, because as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet.³³

Although oppression does not necessarily erase all the practices of a culture that precedes it, the traces of the practices that are left do not retain their original meaning but change through their interaction with the practices of the oppressive system.³⁴ They are, therefore, necessarily tainted by oppression. Also tainted are the practices that may be said to belong to something like a women's culture because they too acquire their meaning in the context of oppression. Practices of resistance are just as tainted, and to believe otherwise lacks irony as it is understood in postmodernism, an irony that stems from the recognition that even critique is complicitous because it is inevitably entangled with power and domination.³⁵

In addition, the very division of the practices of socially marginalized subjects into submissively passive and resistant classifications through the equation of the latter with agency reproduces a normative dualism that Western second-wave feminists have tried to overcome. They have objected to this obviously masculinist dualism because submissiveness and agency have been associated with women and men, respectively, and agency has been normatively prioritized.

VI.

The theorized dispersion of power among multiple centers makes it hard to attribute epistemic privilege to just one of the many socially marginalized groups cohabiting in one society. And the problems of grounding epistemic privilege in the practices of socially marginalized subjects suggest to me that even if it were possible to identify one socially marginalized group as special, it would be hard to make an attribution of epistemic privilege to this group that does not idealize its practices.

What should follow from this is a recommendation to give up epistemic privilege. Yet the claim for epistemic privilege has served to empower movements of oppressed people in important ways.

Taken quite generally, the claim of epistemic privilege in the realm

of sociopolitical theory mostly justifies claims for authority, specifically the authority of members of socially marginalized groups to speak for themselves, which is an authority they do not have if everyone is equally capable to know them and their situation. Through this justification they grant themselves the authority to produce their own self-defined description of themselves and the world. And they demand that their voices, voices that have been excluded through the process of social marginalization, be given the respectful attention given to the voices of socioculturally hegemonic experts.

The importance of the process of authorization can be seen, for example, in Patricia Hill Collins's discussion of the authority of African-American feminist knowledge:

Black feminist thought, like all specialized thought, reflects the interests and standpoint of its creators. . . . Black feminist thought as specialized thought reflects the thematic content of African-American women's experiences. . . . While Black women can produce knowledge claims that contest those advanced by the white male community, this community does not grant that Black women scholars have competing knowledge claims based in another knowledge validation process.³⁶

Given this understanding of the strategic uses of the claim to epistemic privilege, it seems that what members of socially marginalized groups do by claiming epistemic privilege is to constitute themselves as socially differentiated, rather than individuated, Enlightenment subjects. In the case of second-wave Western feminism, this self-construction is problematic not merely due to the postmodern flight from subjectivity, which fractures identities so much so as to cast suspicions on the belief that there are genders and that their relations are systemic,³⁷ but also because the Enlightenment subject of various forms of feminism in the West tends to be not an Enlightenment rational being, but a neo-Romantic subject.³⁸ As such, it is an emotional subject whose rationality is not formulaic. It is a subject that is not separated from its objects in a dualistic relation that gives the subject the power to dominate the objects. It is also a subject in a special relation to nature and the production of use-values.

Put differently, Western second-wave feminist claims for epistemic privilege entangle feminists in the Enlightenment sociopolitical liberatory project of legitimizing the voices of the many, as narrowly as this might have been understood in specific historical times and places. Initially this project was based in the struggle against the authoritarianism of rulers and churches. With socialists, especially Marx, the project changed somewhat, and the struggle became a struggle of

socially marginalized groups against the authority of socially dominant ones, in which marginality and dominance had material grounding in the workings of a political economy. In the West, feminists are among those who, since the 1960s, have been shifting this project a little more by multiplying the socially marginalized groups whose voices are legitimized.

But, the Enlightenment sociopolitical liberatory project is not the only project in which feminists are entangled. At least in the West, feminists are also entangled in the postmodern project, which is one of the contributors to what I called earlier a neo-Romantic subjectivity. The construction of this subjectivity is a project that, like the Romantic project, responds to the Enlightenment by emphasizing what the Enlightenment deemphasized, such as emotionality and the irrational, and seeking solutions to the problems created by the Enlightenment writ large, by its instrumental rationality, exclusionary practices, and modes of subjection.

Because feminists are entangled in both the Enlightenment project and the neo-Romantic project, the feminist situation seems contradictory—a situation in which contradictory forces push and pull feminist sociopolitical theorizing. Although I do not know how to disentangle feminist sociopolitical theorizing from this contradictory situation, in light of all the problems that I have raised and in light of a few to follow, I would like to recommend that we rethink the project of authorizing the speech of marginal subjects.

In "On Authority: Or Why Women Are Not Entitled to Speak," Kathleen B. Jones argues that the very concept of authority should be suspected by feminists because "the very institution of authority as a set of practices . . . lies at the root of the separation of women from the process of 'authorizing,'"³⁹ a process that she shows to be rather masculinist. Jones's point about the exclusion of women through the process of authorization can be generalized to say that authorization is an exclusionary practice, a practice designed to both silence and command obedience to the authorized voice.

A socially marginalized group does not have the power to exclude, silence, and command obedience from a dominant group. Its claims for epistemic privilege, lacking a social power on which to base them, cannot yield the same results as the self-authorizing claims of a dominant group and are, therefore, merely normative, compelling only for those who are theoretically persuaded by them, usually members of the socially marginalized group who find them empowering. Although the empowerment of its own members is an important goal for every marginalized social group, by claiming an authority based in epistemic privilege the group reinscribes the values and practices

used to socially marginalize it by excluding its voice, silencing it and commanding its obedience to the voice of the dominant group.

Audre Lorde says in the title of one of her speeches that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."⁴⁰ Although the claim to epistemic privilege as a tool may seem to be a claim of the oppressed, due to some of its history, it nonetheless reveals itself also as a master's tool. There are no tools that can replace it, nor are any needed, because when the oppressed feel a need to authorize speech, they are acting on feelings that are a function of their oppression. Speech needs to be authorized only where silence is the rule. This is an oppressive rule. It need not be obeyed, and the justification of disobedience in this case is not a special kind of expertise guaranteed by epistemic privilege but rather by the demands of justice.

Notes

1. For an early example see Marcia Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter, eds., *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life and Social Science* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1975). Later examples include Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1982); and Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
2. The most commonly used explanatory schema of why and how gender constitutes experience is found in Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). According to Chodorow, girls having to grow up and become women and mothers in a heterosexual, patriarchal society distance themselves from their mothers only partially and develop permeable ego boundaries, whereas boys having to grow up and become nonwomen and nonmothers distance themselves from women in ways that result in the formation of rigid ego boundaries. Some explanatory schemas, such as Nancy Hartsock's in *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), even when relying on Chodorow's work, place greater emphasis on certain aspects of women's labor in the context of the gender-based division of labor in a heterosexual, patriarchal society, such as its sensuality, than does Chodorow.

3. Among the recent contributions to this endeavor is Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know?: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).
4. In *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), Sandra Harding refers to feminists who merely assert the perspectival nature of experience as empiricists and classifies the feminists who not only assert the perspectival nature of experience but also valorize the perspectives of members of socially marginalized groups as standpoint theorists. According to her, at least some postmodern feminist theorists also valorize the perspectives of members of socially marginalized groups.
5. Mary Ann Weathers, "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force," in Leslie B. Tanner, ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation* (New York: New American Library, 1970), 303-7.
6. The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in Zillah R. Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review, 1979), 365.
7. Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," in Leslie B. Tanner, ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation* (New York: New American Library, 1970), 269.
8. Vivian Gornick, "Woman as Outsider," in Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran, eds., *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness* (New York: New American Library, 1972), 128-29.
9. Sidney Abbot and Barbara Love, "Is Women's Liberation a Lesbian Plot?" in Gornick and Moran, *Woman in Sexist Society*, 620.
10. Charlotte Bunch, "Not for Lesbians Only," in *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 178.
11. Ann Ferguson, "Women as a New Revolutionary Class," in Pat Walker, ed., *Between Labor and Capital* (Boston: South End, 1979), 279-309.
12. Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1983), 284.
13. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *Collected Works*, 6 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 6:494-95.
14. Bell Hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End, 1990), 150-51.
15. An influential discussion of this is Kathleen Barry, "Victims and Survivors," chapter 3 in *Female Sexual Slavery* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1979), 33-42.

16. Bell Hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End, 1989), 31.
17. Nancy Hartsock, "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?" in Linda Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 170-71.
18. Marilyn Frye, "To Be and Be Seen: The Politics of Reality," in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansberg, New York: Crossing, 1983), 152-53.
19. Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" in Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 301.
20. Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue" in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone, 1981), 127.
21. Ibid.
22. Hilary Rose, "Hand, Brain and Heart: A Feminist Epistemology for the Natural Sciences," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9(1) (1983): 73-90.
23. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 174-75.
24. See, for example, the essay in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (Boston: South End, 1981).
25. See, for example, essays in Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, eds., *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); and Nicholson, *Feminism/Postmodernism*.
26. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1990).
27. Sara Ruddick, "Remarks on the Sexual Politics of Reason," in Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987), 246.
28. Virginia Held, "Feminism and Moral Theory," in Kittay and Meyers, *Women and Moral Theory*, 118.
29. Cultural feminists tend to appeal to patriarchal practices and symbols more than other feminists. Two examples are Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987); and Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). The idea of a women's culture, on the other hand, is quite widespread and is usually associated with gender-specific practices.
30. In this respect see, for example, Ann Ferguson, "Is There A Lesbian

Culture?" in Jeffner Allen, ed., *Lesbian Philosophies and Culture* (Albany N.Y.: State University of New York, 1990), 63-88.

31. Gloria Anzaldúa, "La conciencia de la mestiza: Toward a New Consciousness," in Gloria Anzaldúa, ed., *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1990), 377-89.

32. *Ibid.*, 385-86.

33. *Ibid.*, 380.

34. An example of a work that shows an awareness of this is Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1968).

35. The recognition of complicity as an element of postmodernism is emphasized by Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989).

36. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 201-4.

37. See, for example, Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?" *Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

38. What I call here a neo-Romantic subjectivity is not a uniquely feminist subjectivity. Rather, feminists are among the contributors to a movement as widespread as Romanticism was. Some of the interesting examples of what I call here a feminist neo-Romantic subjectivity can be found in the writings of feminists of color. Two such examples are Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987); and Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1989).

39. Kathleen B. Jones, "On Authority: Or, Why Women Are Not Entitled to Speak," in Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, eds., *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1988), 120.

40. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider* (Fremont, Calif.: Crossing, 1984).

Subjects, Power, and Knowledge: Description and Prescription in Feminist Philosophies of Science

Helen E. Longino

I. Prologue

Feminists, faced with traditions in philosophy and in science that are deeply hostile to women, have had practically to invent new and more appropriate ways of knowing the world. These new ways have been less invention out of whole cloth than the revival or reevaluation of alternative or suppressed traditions. They range from the celebration of insight into nature through identification with it to specific strategies of survey research in the social sciences. Natural scientists and laypersons anxious to see the sciences change have celebrated Barbara McClintock's loving identification with various aspects of the plants she studied, whether whole organism or its chromosomal structure revealed under the microscope. Social scientists from Dorothy Smith to Karen Sacks have stressed designing research for rather than merely about women, a goal that requires attending to the specificities of women's lives and consulting research subjects themselves about the process of gathering information about them. Such new ways of approaching natural and social phenomena can be seen as methods of discovery, ways of getting information about the natural and social worlds not available via more traditional experimental or investigative methods.

Feminists have rightly pointed out the blinders imposed by the philosophical distinction between discovery and justification; a theory of scientific inquiry that focuses solely on the logic of justification neglects the selection processes occurring in the context of discovery that limit what we get to know about. Methods of discovery, or heuristics, are in effect selection processes that present for our consideration certain sorts of hypotheses and not other sorts. Feminists have