Recent volumes include:

Key Concepts in Social Research
Geoff Payne and Judy Payne

Key Concepts in Medical Sociology
Jonathan Gabe, Mike Bury and Mary Ann Elston

Forthcoming titles include:

Key Concepts in Leisure Studies
David Harris

Key Concepts in Critical Social Theory
Nick Crossley

Key Concepts in Urban Studies
Mark Gottdiener

JANE PILCHER AND IMELDA WHELEHAN

Gender Studies

SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

© Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan 2004

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission in writing from the Publishers.

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B-42 Panchsheel Enclave
Post Box 4109
New Delhi 100 017

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7619 7035 4
ISBN 978 0 7619 7036 1 (pbk)

Library of Congress control number available

Typeset by M Rules
Printed in Great Britain by
The Cromwell Press Ltd, Trowbridge, Wiltshire

contents

Acknowledgements vii

Introduction: Everywhere and Somewhere: Gender Studies, Feminist Perspectives and Interdisciplinarity ix
Imelda Whelehan and Jane Pilcher

Androcentrism 1
Backlash 3
Body 6
Citizenship 10
Class 13
Consciousness Raising 17
Cyborg 20
Dichotomy 24
Difference 27
Domestic Division of Labour 30
Double Standard 34
Equality 37
Essentialism 41
the Family 43
Feminisms 48
First Wave Feminism 52
Gender 56
Gendered 61
Gender Order 59
Gender Segregation 64
Heterosexism 68
Identity Politics/the Politics of Identity 72
Ideology 75
Lesbian Continuum 79

within lesbianism were debated hotly. Some, like Sheila Jeffreys, averred that any engagement with butch/femme posturing was a fetishisation and re-enactment of patriarchal power. This can be set against the passionate fiction and essays of Joan Nestle who became the key champion of the eroticisation of difference asserting that 'Butch-femme relationships, as I experienced them, were complex erotic statements, not phony heterosexual replicas' (Nestle 1987: 100). Her view of sexual role-play in the 1950s is of showy resistance, the denial of invisibility, and her work, like that of queer theorist Judith Butler, honours the performativity involved in playing with gender.

Vestiges of the idea of a 'lesbian continuum' remain in the work of radical and cultural feminists, and in the politics of total separatism; yet many a younger lesbian/straight woman becoming accustomed to the colourful if commodified representations of 'queer' sex, finds the idea of sexual radicalism, the 'queer' way, more attractive.

See also: *heterosexism, queer theory, separatism*

FURTHER READING

The Radicalesbians' manifesto is available in Koedt et al. (1973) or reprinted in Nicholson (1997) and, along with other essays in the Koedt collection, helps explain how lesbians perceived themselves in the movement, even as they were popularly perceived as taking over. This lays the ground for Rich (1986), whereas both Jeffreys (1994) and Nestle (1987) offer totally different visions of a lesbian politics beyond the lesbian continuum. Butler (1990) or Fuss (1991) provide the queer inflection on lesbian politics.

masculinity/ masculinities

Masculinity is the set of social practices and cultural representations associated with being a man. The plural 'masculinities' is also used in recognition that ways of being a man and cultural representations of/about men vary, both historically and culturally, between societies and between different groupings of men within any one society.

The feminist critique of masculinity as that against which women are defined as 'the Other' has a long history, but writing on masculinities grew enormously from the 1980s onwards. In the words of one contributor, 'it seems as if every man and his dog is writing a book on masculinities' (MacInnes 1998: 1). In the literature on masculinities, evaluations of masculinity and explanations of the links between masculinity/ masculinities and those people defined as 'men' vary according to theoretical perspective. For example, in accounts drawing on the natural sciences, masculinity/masculinities are the result of physiological factors, such as hormones or chromosomes. Goldberg (1979), for example, identifies the 'neuro-endocrine system' (the interaction of the nervous system with the hormone system) as the biological basis of masculinity/masculinities. Such essentialism is also characteristic of populist 'celebratory' writing about masculinity, in which men are urged to reinvigorate their 'natural' masculinity. Robert Bly (1991), for example, sees masculinity as being damaged by the conditions of modern society, and prescribes a remedy in the form of men-only retreats and bonding rituals. In contrast, from the more critical, academic perspective of the social sciences, masculinities are understood as a form of power relation, both among men themselves and between men and women. In place of essentialism, masculinities are argued to arise from the social contexts in which men live, for example, from their positions in the various institutions and organisations of their society and/or in the context of the socially available discourses about gender.

Connell (1995; 2000) has developed a social scientific analysis of masculinities as part of his broader, relational theory of gender. For Connell, gender is the end-product of ongoing interpretations of and definitions placed upon the reproductive and sexual capacities of the human body. Masculinities (and femininities) can be understood, therefore, as the effects of these interpretations and definitions: on bodies, on personalities and on a society's culture and institutions. In Connell's account, masculinities occupy a higher ranking than femininity in the 'gender hierarchy' characteristic of modern Western societies. At the top of the gender hierarchy is 'hegemonic masculinity', the culturally dominant ideal of masculinity centred around authority, physical toughness and strength, heterosexuality and paid work. This is an ideal of masculinity that few actual men live up to, but from which most gain advantage and so Connell calls the next level 'complicit masculinity'. Below this in the hierarchy are 'subordinated

masculinities', the most important of which is homosexual masculinity. More generally, this form of masculinity includes a range of masculine behaviour which does not fully match up to the macho ideals of hegemonic masculinity. At the bottom of the gender hierarchy are femininities. (Although these may take a variety of forms, for example emphasised or compliant femininity and 'resistant' femininity, femininity is always subordinated to masculinity.) In Connell's analysis, the social changes of the twentieth century (in the industrialised West) have undermined the gender hierarchy, and the position of hegemonic masculinity within it. In this context, masculinity politics have developed: 'those mobilizations and struggles where the meaning of masculine gender is at issue, and with it, men's position in gender relations' (1995: 205). Connell goes on to identify the main forms taken by masculinity politics in Western industrialised societies, including masculinity therapy, such as called for by Bly (1991), gay liberation, and 'exit politics', in which heterosexual men actively oppose hegemonic masculinity.

The theorising of multiple masculinities by writers like Connell (1990) has led others to raise questions about the meaning of masculinity as a concept. MacInnes (1998) for example, points to the vague, confused and contradictory definitions of the concept present within much of the masculinities literature. If masculinities are so varied and fluid, then what is it that makes them recognisibly masculine? MacInnes suggests that, in fact, many writers on masculinities 'smuggle in' to their otherwise social constructionist accounts an assumption that it is only biological men who possess masculinity. MacInnes himself argues that masculinity does not exist as the property, character trait or aspect of individuals but should instead be understood as an ideology about what men should be like, and this is developed by men and women in order to make sense of their lives (1998: 2). Indeed, discursive approaches to masculinities, influenced by postmodernist/post-structuralist perspectives, have become increasingly prominent within gender studies. One example is the work of Speer (2001) which shows how, in talking about sport and leisure, young men draw on a range of particular cultural models of masculinities and in the process give shifting, gendered, accounts of themselves.

In his more recent work, Connell (2000) emphasises that masculinities are not simply equivalent to biological men. In other words, 'masculine' bodies, behaviour or attitudes can be the social practices of people who are otherwise defined as 'women'. For Connell, then, masculinities is a concept that 'names patterns of gender practice, not just groups of people' (2000: 17). Elsewhere, he insists that masculinities cannot be understood only as discourses, since 'gender relations are also constituted in, and shape, non-discursive practices such as labour, violence, sexuality, childcare and so on' (2001: 7).

See also: *body, gender, gender order, men's movements/men's studies*

FURTHER READING

Edley and Wetherall (1995) provide overviews of the various theories of masculinities, and identify key questions to assess the adequacy of each. Whitehead's (2002) *Men and Masculinities* is one of the more recent contributions to the topic. A special issue of *Feminism and Psychology* (volume 11, no. 1) is devoted to research on discursive constructions of masculinities and includes an introduction, overview and critique by Connell.

men's movements/ men's studies

Men's movements emerged at the time of the Women's Liberation Movement, and the groupings gathered together under this umbrella title were as heterogeneous as early radical feminist groups. In a sense they all seemed to be a reaction to feminism, but that could be either a positive or a negative one. Men's consciousness raising (CR) groups, emerging during the early 1970s, generally had a benign relationship with feminism and women in general. There was an acknowledgement that all men had at least the potential to be the oppressor and had greater opportunities for power, and therefore it was important that men got together in their own separatist groups to discuss the effects this knowledge had upon them as individuals. Just as women in CR learnt a great deal about the processes of their own socialisation, so men came to understand the ways in which they were educated to be 'men' and what that meant.

In the USA and the UK there were a scattering of Men's Liberation Groups or smaller CR groups. Some felt that gender oppresses all

(the) Other

As used by the French writer Simone de Beauvoir, the concept of 'the Other' describes women's status in patriarchal, androcentric cultures. While men are 'the One' (in other words, beings in and of themselves), women are 'the Other', beings defined only in relation to men. A woman, de Beauvoir wrote, is 'defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other' (1997 [1953]: 16).

De Beauvoir's ideas on women as the Other were set out in *The Second Sex* (first published in English in 1953). Drawing on the philosophical arguments of Hegel and Sartre, de Beauvoir saw that relationships between individuals were marked by a fundamental contradiction. Each individual self seeks to act freely and autonomously, but simultaneously requires interaction with others in order to define that self. In de Beauvoir's words, 'the subject can be posed only in being opposed' (1997: 16). Generally, individuals are forced to recognise the reciprocity of Otherness. Through our encounters with other individuals, it becomes evident that, just as we see them as 'the Other', we ourselves are seen by them as 'the Other'. However, in the case of women and men, this reciprocity of Otherness is not recognised. Instead, 'one of the contrasting terms [men] is set up as the sole essential, denying any relativity in regard to its correlate and defining the latter [women] as pure otherness' (1997: 17–18). De Beauvoir offers a range of reasons for women's status as the Other, including the role played by women's reproductive capacities in limiting their autonomy in the eyes of men. An important aspect of her argument, though, lies in identifying women's complicity in their subordination. Men, in defining themselves as 'the One', position women as 'the Other'. Women do not regain the status of being 'the One', according to de Beauvoir, because they largely accept this state of affairs. 'Thus, woman may fail to claim the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other' (1997: 21). Therefore, it is suggested that women identify with the patriarchal, androcentric image of themselves (particularly as reproductive and sexual beings) and so regard themselves as the Other. They have 'chosen' to remain 'beings in themselves' rather than become 'beings for themselves' (Okely 1986: 59), because this status offers them benefits, including the evasion of full, adult moral responsibility and autonomy (Evans 1985: 61).

The Second Sex, widely recognised as a landmark text in the development of critiques of women's status, is also regarded as flawed in its argument and use of evidence (see Evans 1985). Nevertheless, de Beauvoir's development within *The Second Sex* of the concept of the Other has been lauded as a 'strikingly original theory of female subjectivity under patriarchy' (Moi 1994: 164; see also Evans 1985). Its influence is evident in a number of areas of gender studies. Paechter's (1998) analysis of the subordinate status of girls in the education system is one example. For Paechter, the positioning of girls and women in education is 'an exemplar' of the ways in which femininity has been constructed as Other throughout Western society. Paechter draws together a range of research evidence to show that boys/men have been regarded as the normal Subject of education, while girls/women have been positioned as the Other. For example, the history of the development of education in Britain shows that, until the middle decades of the twentieth century, the education of girls was seen as of secondary importance to that of boys. Moreover, educational provision for girls developed in specific ways, in that they were educated for domesticity (as future wives and mothers) and so were excluded from other forms of ('higher') knowledge routinely experienced by boys. In more recent years, although girls have been granted equal access to the formal curriculum, the problem of their 'underperformance' in science subjects has been located in girls themselves, rather than in the androcentric construction of scientific knowledge and pedagogy. In addition to showing how the education curriculum positions girls as Other, Paechter's analysis points to the role played by masculine behaviour and attitudes in school settings. Boys dominate in classroom talk, and in school space, whether in the classroom or in the playground. An important aspect of this, argues Paechter, is the way adolescent girls are subject to a 'disciplinary gaze'. The sexuality of girls is surveyed and consequently controlled by the attitude, language and behaviour of boys (and, often, male teachers) whose authority derives from the masculine-dominated rules of heterosexual culture. Paechter concludes that the Othering of girls within the education system is of particular importance, because it sets girls up for a lifetime of subordination, whereby femininity is that against which masculinity defines itself and asserts its superiority (1998: 115).

A rather different use of the Other can be found in the work of some postmodern or post-structualist feminist writers. In the work of Cixous,

Irigaray and Kristeva, for example, the concept of women as the Other has been developed through engaging with the ideas of Lacan and Derrida. According to Tong (1998), Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva each follow de Beauvoir in focusing on women's Otherness but interpret this condition fundamentally differently. 'Woman is still the Other, but rather than interpreting this condition as something to be transcended, postmodern feminists proclaim its advantages' (Tong 1998: 195). In this understanding of Otherness, it is something of an advantaged, privileged viewpoint, enabling a critique of the dominant patriarchal culture through the celebration of feminine cultures, bodies and sexuality.

The critical evaluation of the concept of the Other centres around the issue of 'difference'. Commentators on *The Second Sex* point to its tendency toward universalism, in that de Beauvoir conveys the view that the Other is the experience of all women, at all times (Okely 1986). Contemporary perspectives, influenced by multicultural and postmodern feminism, emphasise the heterogeneity of women's experiences. For example, in analysing the experiences of African-American women, Hill Collins (1990) identifies the important role of 'controlling images' through which they are stereotyped, as 'Mammy', 'matriarch', 'welfare recipient' or 'hot mamma'. Hill Collins therefore points to the particular form of the Other experienced by African-American women. Similarly, Anthias and Yuval-Davies (1992) are critical of the tendency to position 'women' as Other in a dichotomous relationship to 'men'. They argue for a deconstruction of such binary categories, to encourage the analysis of diversity and commonality in a range of historically specific ethnic and class contexts. From the perspective of postmodernist and post-structuralist feminist analyses, the use of dichotomous distinctions (between 'the One' and 'the Other' or between 'Subject' and 'Object') uncritically reproduces the binarism in Western philosophical thought, a tendency so deeply implicated in the valuing of masculinity over femininity. Feminist writers such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva aim to avoid both patriarchal conceptualisations and universalistic explanatory theories, instead emphasising difference, plurality and diversity. In her work, Paechter recognises the inadequacies of universalism and the way the concept of 'the Other' both encourages dualistic thinking and underemphasises difference. There are, Paechter acknowledges, innumerable Others arising from a range of sets of power relations between groups. Nevertheless, she argues, it is women who have most consistently and most particularly been positioned as Other and it is feminist writings that have been important in developing the analysis of Otherness. Paechter suggests that the importance of the concept of the Other ultimately lies in the way it draws attention to the particular forms of masculinity forceful in creating other masculinities as subordinate, as well as femininities (1998: 115).

See also: *androcentrism, double standard, post-structuralism*

FURTHER READING

De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is critically evaluated in Fallaize (1998, ed.), a reader that draws together some classic commentaries on de Beauvoir and her work. For an analysis of the way modern Western art has regarded women as 'the Other', see Pollock (1988). Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) is a classic text identifying the positioning of women as Other in psychological theories of moral development.

patriarchy

Literally, patriarchy means rule by the male head of a social unit (a family or tribe, for example). The patriarch, typically a societal elder, has legitimate power over others in the social unit, including other (especially, younger) men, all women and children. However, since the early twentieth century, feminist writers have used the concept to refer to the social system of masculine domination over women. Patriarchy has been a fundamentally important concept in gender studies, leading to the development of a number of theories that aim to identify the bases of women's subordination to men.

Three of the most important theories in which patriarchy is a central concept are those commonly labelled as 'radical feminist', 'Marxist feminist' and 'dual systems theory'. In 'radical feminist' analyses, patriarchy is regarded as the primary and fundamental social division in society. In some radical feminist analyses, the institution of the family is identified as a key means through which men's domination is achieved (Millet 1977). In other radical feminist accounts of patriarchy, the control men have over women's bodies is regarded as important. For Firestone (1971), inequalities between women and men are biologically based, with the different reproductive capacities of women and men being especially important. In other radical feminist analyses, it is masculine control over

There have been wider criticisms of post-colonial theory, for instance 'that the institutional location of post-colonial theory in the Western academy necessarily and automatically precludes it from being able to perform radical liberatory kinds of cultural analysis' (Moore-Gilbert 1997: 3). It is argued that post-colonial writers and thinkers from other cultures are 'exported', theorised and made palatable for the cultural elite and then sent back to these cultures in a more 'Westernised' form. Audre Lorde seems to make a similar point when she argues that the 'centre' thrives on getting the 'other' to explain its 'otherness' in just one more cycle of domination: '[w]henever the need for some pretence of communication arises, those who profit from our oppression call upon us to share our knowledge with them. In other words, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes . . . The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions' (Lorde in Crowley and Himmelweit 1992: 47).

Further criticisms of post-colonial theory are similar to those directed at post-structuralism or postmodernism – that it has too oblique a reference to politics to be a radicalising perspective. This is as much to do with broader debates about the applicability of high theory to political analysis and any defence depends on one's belief or otherwise in a post-Foucauldian analysis of power and the construction of the subject through discourse. For others, 'the increasingly unfocused use of the term "post-colonial" over the last ten years to describe an astonishing variety of cultural, economic and political practices has meant that there is a danger of its losing its effective meaning altogether' (Ashcroft et al.1995: 2).

Theorists interested in the phenomenon of globalisation might argue that the term 'post-colonial' fails to account for the shaping of the identities and lives of men and women in contemporary society, where the effects of economic globalisation have intensified poverty and deprivation for some groups while empowering others. Gender remains an important category in the analysis of global power, and from an international relations perspective it has been argued that 'the failure to resolve global dilemmas of poverty, pollution, nuclear proliferation and so on, is in part, a result of the neglect of women's contributions to political-economic development and the lack of support of these contributions by international aid agencies and governments' (True in Burchill et al. 2001: 240). In this view, women are the greater casualties of global economic structures because the ways in which globalisation operates at an economic level affect the domestic sphere (family subsistence, male migration, etc.), even though the domestic remains unaccounted for in global economics.

See also: *postmodernism, post-structuralism*

FURTHER READING

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's anthology, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995) is probably a good place to get a solid grounding in the range of post-colonial theoretical writings. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Worlds* (1988) help explain the emergence of post-colonial theory as distinct from post-structuralism. McClintock (1995) is another key text which looks at race, gender and sexuality. For those wanting to look further into issues raised by the final paragraph, Halliday (1994) is a good place to begin.

post-feminism

It must first be stated that there is no agreement about how post-feminism can be defined and consequently definitions essentially contradict each other in what they say about the term. At its most straightforward, the prefix 'post' in this context appears to mean 'going beyond' or 'superseding': it could therefore be seen as a confident announcement that feminism has achieved its key aims and that there is full equality for all women and a blurring of the boundaries between traditional ascriptions of gender. Given that a brief scrutiny of our current social formation does not support this view, we might, however, imagine that a post-feminist position is one formulated due to dissatisfaction with existing feminist politics and is to be located in an entirely new area or set of propositions altogether. Part of this dissatisfaction might be an awareness that even in its heyday, second wave feminism did not achieve its aim of speaking to the majority of women.

Either of these definitions seems possible and the notion of superseding or going beyond has been widely utilised in popular culture, and to some extent in academic discourse. Given that 'feminism' remains within the term post-feminism, albeit problematised by the prefix of 'post', this illustrates that 'feminism is portrayed as a territory over which various women have to fight to gain their ground; it has become so unwieldy as a term that it threatens to implode under the weight of its own contradictions' (Whelehan 2000: 78). The 'post' is not

the end of feminism: actually feminism is constantly to be picked over only to be rapidly set aside again or dismissed as old hat. For Myra Macdonald, 'post-feminism takes the sting out of feminism' (1995: 100); it removes the politics and claims the territory of self-empowerment.

There are some more complex and challenging definitions of the term and according to writers such as Sopia Phoca who co-produced an introductory guide to it, 'post-feminism is considered as a different manifestation of feminism – not as being anti-feminist' (quoted in Ashby 1999: 34) and as being associated with the development of post-Lacanian psychoanalysis, French feminism and post-structuralist theory, suggesting perhaps a permanent fracturation between second wave-style personal politics and 'high' theory. Ann Brooks (1997), however, would argue that it is not a question of depoliticising feminism, but of marking a conceptual shift between the 'old' and the 'new' – from a model based on equality, to debates around the revivified and theorised concept of difference. For Brooks the term 'post-feminism' 'is now understood as a useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundational movements including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism' (Brooks 1997: 1).

Other critics would argue that the 'post' prefix added to modernism, structuralism or colonialism seems to unproblematically connote the 'going beyond' both spatially and chronologically that has occurred in modern theory; yet Brooks asserts that post-feminism used in this theoretical context signifies feminism's maturity. She reflects that rather than 'post' meaning going beyond or breaking with, in these contexts it means 'a process of ongoing transformation and change' (Brooks 1997: 1). Other kinds of 'rebranding' for feminism of course include the use of 'third wave' feminism where again the prefix is used to imply key shifts in the meaning of 'feminism' itself and in this theoretically-informed definition of post-feminism there might be seen to be common ground between third wave and post-feminism, although third wavers would certainly reject any suggestion that feminism is over. Brooks herself acknowledges the way post-feminism is associated with a negative portrayal of feminism in the mass media – particularly in the way the rhetoric of post-feminism is summoned in the backlash against feminism (see also Faludi 1992).

One of the reasons it is argued that the move to post-feminism is essential is because of the influence of postmodern thinking which refuses the 'grand narrative' of gender difference, so that it becomes increasingly impossible to lay claim to the identity 'woman', because of the impact of 'difference' theories and the contestation of knowledges about how 'woman' is constructed. Brooks's version of post-feminism puts 'woman' under erasure; of course one could argue that this denies any political agency to a feminist who cannot lay claim to that identity, 'modernist' as it is, suggesting as it does a retreat to the self and ultimately the individualist framing of identity so favoured by enlightenment liberalism. The category 'woman', no matter how unsatisfactory as a means to summon up the wealth and diversity of women's experiences and identities, allows at least a space to lay claim to a wealth of shared experiences (gendered pay differentials, the impact of sexual violence, the relationship of nation to gender for instance) which permits a collective oppositional response to injustices against women.

For critics who are still happy to call themselves 'feminist' without any prefixes, such a model of feminism does not readily allow for an acknowledgement of some highly productive shifts in feminism since the 1970s. Feminist politics has not remained static, and many of the central issues, so radical in the 1970s, are now accepted as part of mainstream politics. As Sylvia Walby notes, 'Who would now call someone who believes in equal pay feminist? Yet before 1975 this was not law and was controversial' (1997: 163). Rene Denfeld, in her critique of second wave feminism, *The New Victorians*, bears this out when she points out that while the next generation has problems with the epithet 'feminist', they have no problem supporting the principles of equal pay and educational opportunities (Denfeld 1995: 4). For Denfeld this change from broad support of feminism to scepticism and alienation is a response to a change in the terms of second wave feminism itself: 'It has become bogged down in an extremist moral and spiritual crusade that has little to do with women's lives. It has climbed out on a limb of academic theory that is all but inaccessible to the uninitiated . . . feminism has become as confining as what it pretends to combat' (Denfeld 1995: 5). Denfeld is pointing to widely aired anxieties that feminism has become just one more arcane theory – stemming from what she perceives to be a majority of cultural feminist writers creating and delivering women's studies curricula in American universities, containing an alleged anti-male agenda. It is as if she actually doesn't want to dismiss feminism but rather to take it 'back' from whoever she feels has stolen it. The irony is that 'post-feminism' from both Phoca and Wright's and Brooks's perspective is in many ways just such another 'inaccessible' theory for the uninitiated.

Tania Modleski is more concerned that while 'woman' is being put under erasure in the debates about difference, conceptual shifts such as the 'men in feminism' debate (a debate about whether men should call

themselves feminists or be feminist critics independently of women) might make women disappear from feminism altogether. Talking about one particular anthology of 'male feminist' criticism she observes that '[i]n an unusually strong post-feminist irony, the final essay of this volume which banishes women from its list of contributors is a complaint about the way heterosexual men have become invisible within feminism!' (Modleski, 1991: 12). Modleski's dissection of post-feminism in the critical sphere in many ways anticipates Susan Faludi's arguments in *Backlash* where it is the appropriation of the language of feminism which is seen to be used against itself in popular culture. Modleski's combination of questioning theory and using examples of popular film, television and news, suggests that this appropriation goes much deeper and, she would argue, drives us straight back to male-centred discourse and critical authority.

There is still the accusation that second wave feminism failed to cede the hegemony of white middle-class heterosexual women to other groups of women, and there is clearly some truth in this claim. But nonetheless it is clear that many feminists (particularly at the level of grassroots politics) did acknowledge the common links between different sites of oppression; and the growth in political and critical perspectives by women of colour, working-class women and lesbians suggests that for them the struggle is not over. One can think of key voices in black American feminism, such as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins who emphatically lay claim to 'feminism' as a term which still has political resonance, and this suggests that not all proponents of feminist discourse are ready yet to cede the ground to post-feminism, but would rather address the gaps, in the belief that there might be some consensus about what feminism can do.

See also: *difference, feminisms, postmodernism, third wave feminism*

FURTHER READING

Ann Brooks (1997) gives a fairly comprehensive account of what 'post-feminism' means in a theoretical context; for those still struggling with French feminism, post-structuralism and Lacan. Phoca and Wright (1999) offer a crisp and concise account, liberally using illustrations and graphic narrative. Modleski (1991) and Faludi (1992) offer challenges which provide illuminating comparison.

postmodernism

Postmodernism is a broad set of ideas and arguments relating to advanced industrialised societies of the late twentieth century onwards. It is concerned with the description and analysis of the distinctive features of these societies and with theorising the ramifications of these features for relations between social groupings, for individual selves and identities, and for the status and forms of knowledge, science and culture. Postmodernism as a concept is sometimes used interchangeably with that of post-structuralism. In this volume, however, the two concepts have separate entries in order to clarify the differences between them. We follow the view of writers like Marshall (1994) in regarding post-structuralism as primarily a theory of knowledge and language, and postmodernism as primarily a theory of society, culture and history.

It is hard to identify a single, concise illustration of postmodernism, partly due to variations in the meaning of the concept according to disciplinary perspective and partly due to the tenets of the concept itself: a key idea of postmodernism is that things are not certain, orderly and fixed, but are instead uncertain, disorderly and fluid. That being said, there is reasonably widespread agreement that the key authors of postmodernism include Lyotard, Baudrillard and Jameson; Foucault is also often labelled as a postmodernist writer. There is reasonably widespread agreement, too, that a shared feature of postmodernist perspectives is the critique of 'modernism' as a set of ideas, arguments and analyses. Briefly, modernist thinking is argued to encapsulate the Enlightenment belief in the practices and values of science as a way of understanding both the natural and the social world. Rational thinking and a belief in progress are seen to have underpinned the development of the key social, economic, political and cultural features of modern societies, from, say, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries up until the mid to late twentieth century. Modernist thinking was reflected in, for example, the organisation of large-scale methods of production, in the development of mass party politics, trades unions, and the welfare state, and in large-scale, universalist social and political theories which explained or otherwise 'justified' modern societies, including Parsons' structural functionalism and Marxist historical materialism. In contrast to modernism, postmodernism encapsulates a turning away from the Enlightenment project, through a rejection of the authority of science and a questioning of the inevitability of, and benefits of, progress. In the

analyses of postmodernist authors like Lash and Urry (1987), Jameson (1991) and Baudrillard (1990), for example, advanced industrialised societies exhibit features such as disorganisation and fragmentation, insecurity, uncertainty and unpredictability (for example, in the rise of 'flexible working', the decline of class-based politics, and through the 'hyperreal'). For authors like Lyotard (1984), there has been a loss of faith in the powers of science and other universalist 'metanarratives' (or large-scale theories) as the route to improve the human condition. Instead, there is increasing plurality in cultural representations and knowledge forms, with greater recognition of the local and the specific and of minority social groupings, differences and diversity.

The impact of postmodernism has been significant across a wide range of academic disciplines. It is a concept which has proved impossible to ignore, although it remains a highly controversial one that has elicited a variety of responses, including within gender studies. For some writers, there is a strong affinity between feminism and postmodernism. Hekman (1990), for example, argues for a 'postmodern approach to feminism', in part based on the similarities between the two. Both feminism and postmodernism critique dominant knowledge forms, especially conceptions of science which privilege rationality, causal explanation and either/or dichotomies. Furthermore, Hekman sees feminism and postmodernism as 'complementary and mutually corrective'. A postmodern position can help resolve some of the key issues debated in feminism (for example, the existence of an essential female nature), while, in turn, feminism can contribute to postmodernism through bringing in gender, a focus which it otherwise often lacks (1990: 3–8). More broadly within gender studies, an important consequence of the postmodernist challenge to the legacy of Enlightenment thinking has been the destabilising of dichotomous gender categories and the increased recognition of differences within those grouped as 'women' and 'men' (age, class, ethnicity, sexuality, dis/ability, etc.). Relatedly, there has been a shift away from large-scale theories which seek to causally explain gender relations in a universalist sense (for example, patriarchy), to approaches which centre on the analysis of language and discourse in the construction of gender (for example, Butler 1990). For Brooks (1997), such intersections of feminism with postmodernism have produced 'post-feminism'. In other words, through an engagement with postmodernism, feminism has matured into 'a confident body of theory and politics, representing pluralism and difference and reflecting on its position in relation to other philosophical and political movements similarly demanding change' (1997: 1).

Responses to the development of 'postmodernist feminism' by some other writers have, however, been less positive. If, as postmodernist arguments propose, 'women' and 'men' are untenable unitary categories, then where does this leave feminism as a political project? Walby argues against postmodernist feminism, insisting that the 'signifiers of "woman" and "man" have sufficient historical and cross-cultural continuity, despite some variations, to warrant using such terms' (1994b: 229). Other critics, Walby included, emphasise the continued importance of empirical investigations into gender relations, and especially of focusing on material aspects, rather than merely examining representations and discourses (for example, Maynard 2001; Jackson 1998). As Oakley contends, 'if we took the admonitions of the postmodernist . . . theorists seriously, we would abandon altogether the interest a practical feminism must have in establishing how peoples' material resources, life chances, and experiences are affected by their gender' (1998: 143). A further set of responses to the influence of postmodernism within gender studies amounts neither to its wholesale acceptance or rejection. In a general sense, most writers within gender studies recognise that postmodernism has quite rightly focused attention on diversity and difference, and that its critiques of 'grand narratives' have at least some value (for example, Maynard 1995; Walby 1994b). Moreover, some contributors to the debate on postmodernism and gender studies have begun to question the very distinctions that have been drawn between the modern and the postmodern. Zalewski (2000) analyses modern and postmodern feminist perspectives on the issue of new reproductive technologies. She argues that, although different, their perspectives on new reproductive technologies are not necessarily contradictory and can even be seen as complementary. Similarly, in Felski's (2000) analysis, modernism and postmodernism are not antithetical concepts, partly because neither are unified, coherent or self-evident entities. Felski's argument is that feminist theory can help deconstruct the distinction drawn between modernism and postmodernism and reveal the 'leaky boundaries' between the two concepts. For Felski, feminism can benefit from an engagement with postmodernism as a concept, but also needs to retain some 'modernist' concerns. In other words, feminism should pay attention 'to diverse and often contradictory strands of cultural expression and affiliation without losing sight of broader determinants of inequality' (Felski 2000: 206). Feminist analyses also need to realise that 'power and inequality do not simply reside in language, even though we can only make sense of them through language' (2000: 206). In outlining these terms of feminism's engagement with postmodernism, Felski is in keeping with the broader reception given to the concept within gender studies.

is a rearticulation of the concept, rather than its complete abandonment. Lister (1997) identifies three main elements to the reconstruction of the public and the private dichotomy, and of the relationship between them. First, it is necessary to deconstruct the gendered qualities and attributes associated with the public and the private, so that the terms no longer operate as euphemisms for masculinity and femininity, and relations of power between them. For example, as Sypnowich (2000: 103) argues, 'the patriarchal concept of the private as a domain of natural authority, immune to political scrutiny, can be given up without abandoning a concept of the private as a sphere of freedom important to all individuals, men and women'. Second, the multiple and complex interpenetrations of the public and the private must be fully acknowledged, along with the role their entangled relationship plays in structuring gender inequalities. Third, recognition must be given to the changing boundaries of the public/private divide and to the fact that the very act of classifying activities as one rather than the other is an exercise of power (Lister 1997: 120–1). In short, as Weintraub observes, the public/private distinction remains 'a powerful instrument of social analysis and moral reflection if approached with due caution and conceptual self-awareness' (cited in D'Entreves and Vogel 2000: 2).

See also: *dichotomy, domestic division of labour, sexual contract*

FURTHER READING

A collection of readings edited by Landes (1998) draws together feminist work on the public and the private from a number of disciplines, and includes contributions by Seyla Benhabib, Carol Pateman, Anne Phillips and Iris Marion Young. A volume edited by D'Entreves and Vogel (2000) assesses the changing nature of the public/private divide, from the perspectives of law, politics and philosophy.

queer theory

Queer theory developed in the humanities in the mid-1980s and grew in the wake of growing theoretical interests in sexuality, particularly through the work of Michel Foucault. This was coterminous with the adoption of the term 'queer' by gay and lesbian activist groups such as Queer Nation, ACTUP and OutRage in the USA and Europe. It was a deliberate appropriation of a term always used pejoratively and homophobically in the past in order to facilitate more radical declarations of gay and lesbian visibility. This strategy of visibility and rebellious assertion of 'deviance' was to characterise much of the political work conducted in the wake of the AIDS epidemic. Once cast as offensive, the term 'queer' is now used against the knowledge of its past meanings to 'offend' the general public and to anticipate their normal lexicon of abuse. To put it in Judith Butler's more complex terms, 'the subject who is "queered" into public discourse through homophobic interpellation of various kinds *takes up* or *cites* that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition' (in Phelan 1997: 18). 'Queer' has come to be associated with a new militancy in gay and lesbian politics – a determined push for visibility and a celebration of the transgressive.

In principle this is a stance that denies and interrogates the privileges of heterosexuality and tries to openly question dominant ideas of normalcy and appropriate behaviour. The adoption of the term 'queer' suggests a blurring of boundaries between straight and gay sex and validates those who would in the past have been considered sexual 'outlaws'. It is a deliberately provocative political and theoretical stance in that it foregrounds sexual identity, pleasure, and desire, and their part in the construction of our knowledge of self. Queer theory has been embraced by some as a means out of the gay/straight split (given that post-structuralist thought has encouraged the dismantling of such binaries) and a move beyond the politics of identity, in that 'queer' plays around with identity and refuses to be fixed or categorised.

Foucault's writings on sexuality and his notion that the body is immersed in discourse and given meaning by it have made a huge contribution to the development of queer theory. Adopting a 'queer' position amounts to a celebration of one's 'outlaw' status as well as actively denying the meanings attached to sexual identity: this is not a plea for the assimilation of 'gay' culture into 'straight', but rather a celebration of continuing marginality which then holds the 'centre' (heterosexuality) up for scrutiny. For some gays and lesbians the blurring of sexual identities ignores the fact that being known to be gay can have real material consequences on people's lives. In some senses an outlaw identity is already thrust upon gays and lesbians by a straight mainstream which will discriminate on the basis of these assumptions. In the UK, for example, Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 prevented the 'promotion of homosexuality' in schools, effectively a gag to teachers who

wanted to discuss homosexuality, which had a profound effect on the way children could learn about sexuality. At the time of writing, although it had been repealed in Scotland in 2000, England has yet been unable to push its repeal of Section 28 through the House of Lords. Cynics might therefore argue that 'queer' is a useful banner for those straight white middle-class individuals who felt themselves disenfranchised by identity politics, and who therefore wanted to display their radical credentials in an environment where identity was under erasure.

Queer theory in academia helped to bring together aspects of lesbian and gay studies with other postmodern theoretical writing; but even in this environment some are sceptical about the motives for wanting to take the label queer – as Caroline Gonda says, 'anyone who feels at odds with social or sexual convention can claim the label "queer", including, presumably, heterosexual men' (Gonda in Jackson and Jones, 1998: 124). Queer theory questions the usefulness of gendered binary distinctions and re-examines their role in the centralisation of heterosexuality. It has links with theories of embodiment and performativity in gender and draws much of its impetus from developments in post-structuralist and psychoanalytical theory, particularly as a means of asserting the breakdown of dualist structures of meaning and the application of homosexual and bi-sexual identifications. Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) clearly made a profound contribution to the field, most notably with her idea that gender is masquerade – not that these are roles one can adopt or not at will, but that they are the result of social scripts we actively conform to or reject (always with the possible costs of public censure or worse). She clarifies what is meant by gender performativity by saying that it 'is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted; it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self' (Butler in Phelan 1997: 17). At heart queer theorists, in common with queer political radicals, are out to undermine the naturalness of gender in order to decentre heterosexuality as a privileged identity.

For some the word is still closely linked to the establishment of a personal identity, even as it deflects singular identity: 'I use the word queer to mean more than lesbian. Since I first used it in 1980 I have always meant it to imply that I am not only a lesbian but a transgressive lesbian – femme, masochistic, as sexually aggressive as the women I seek out, and as pornographic in my imagination and sexual activities as the heterosexual hegemony has ever believed' (Allison 1995: 23). Queer theory increasingly becomes associated with theories of individual sexual identity and has been especially popular in film theory and analysis of popular culture. It has introduced terms such as 'genderfuck' which dramatise this sense of the liberatory potential of playing with gender categories through pastiche and exaggeration – and as best embodied by performers such as Madonna in the realms of popular culture. The mass media has also proved itself adept at producing a 'queer' spectacle for a large liberal audience, as the 2002 BBC adaptation of Sarah Waters' novel about lesbian life in 1880s' London, *Tipping the Velvet* (1999) demonstrates. It serves as a reminder that the 'transgressive' can all too readily be appropriated for mainly heterosexual spectacle.

Radical feminists are among those most sceptical of queer theory and for Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger, 'radical feminist analyses are ignored or marginalised at best, subverted or derided at worst. . . . queer politics is often expressed in terms explicitly oppositional to feminism – especially radical feminism' (Wilkinson and Kitzinger in Bell and Klein 1996: 379). They see it as overly fascinated with SM and sexual violence and valorising gay male culture at the expense of lesbian culture and the feminist critique of heterosexuality as a main site of women's oppression. Sheila Jeffreys is another outspoken critic of queer theory, partly because she feels that queer effaces lesbian identity under a male homosexual norm and partly because of 'the unwillingness of postmodernist theory to wish to talk about vulgar things like oppression' (Jeffreys 1994: 176).

Whether there is any truth in assertions that queer *theory* is irredeemably apolitical, it is clear that organisations such as ACTUP and Queer Nation have been instrumental in a new force in gay and lesbian politics which is witty, ironic and resolutely challenging to a social order which was, for example, slow to rise to the problems of AIDS in the 1980s. It might, however, be reasonable to recognise that some aspects of queer theory work well as a positive assertion of an endlessly multiple and transgressive self against a culture of heterosexism, but not as a means to alleviate the pain and injustice of being punished or abused for one's perceived sexual identity. Lynne Segal quotes American critic Suzanna Walter who remarks, 'wearing a dildo will not stop me from being raped as a woman or being harassed as a lesbian' (Walter quoted by Segal 1999: 68).

See also: *heterosexism, lesbian continuum, sexuality*

FURTHER READING

Phelan (1997) is a useful and wide-ranging collection, whereas Burston and Richardson (1995) is a good collection for looking at the way 'queer' has translated into popular culture. Jeffreys (1994) is one of the more

(relative to women) employment contract within the capitalist system presupposes women's incorporation into the private sphere via the marriage contract. According to Johnson, Pateman therefore provides a gender-reductionist explanation of capitalism, depicting capitalism as but a form of patriarchy (although, see Pateman's (1996) reply). Pateman's treatment of race and ethnicity can also be criticised in that she pays insufficient attention to the ways in which the sexual contract interacts with what Mills (1997) calls 'the racial contract'. Other writers have criticised Pateman's work on the sexual contract for the way it depicts power relations between women and men. For Fraser (1997), Pateman portrays dominance and subordination as dyadic, with women as the subjects of individual masters (men). The need for a more nuanced, relational view of gendered power relations is emphasised by O'Connell Davidson (1998) in her study of prostitution. Prostitute use is shown to be more than a simple matter of patriarchal domination, when account is taken of the context of agreements reached between a prostitute and a client. Other criticisms of the sexual contract arise from its continued applicability, in the light of significant changes in gender relations during the late twentieth century. Changes in women's legal standing, including the recognition in Britain in 1991 of rape within marriage, and their increased participation in paid work and formal politics, are developments which can be argued to reflect the dismantling of the sexual contract in contemporary Western society. Pateman (1997), however, strongly refutes the claim that the sexual contract has been effectively dismantled and points to women's continuing subordination across the societies of the world. Brown (1995, cited in Squires 1999) suggests that, while it may be difficult to identify the legacy of the sexual contract in specific examples of contemporary contractual relations (like the marriage contract), it remains important to recognise that the sexual contract continues to operate at the level of discourse.

See also: *citizenship, public/private*

FURTHER READING

For a summary of debates generated by the concept of the sexual contract, see Squires (1999). A range of views on the 'rewriting' of the sexual contract can be found in Dench (1997), including those of Pateman herself. More recently, in an interview with Puwar (2002), Pateman recounts the origins of her work on the sexual contract, and reviews and refutes some of the criticisms it has attracted.

sexuality

Sexuality is a difficult term to define since, as will be shown, it does not simply relate to 'sex'. Michel Foucault's groundbreaking *The History of Sexuality* has revolutionised the way contemporary theorists perceive sexuality; it was he who suggested that 'homosexuality' as an 'identity' that could be applied to an individual was a fairly recent invention, with the terms homosexuality and heterosexuality only appearing in 1869. Foucault shows that sexual perversions before the latter part of the nineteenth century were dealt with as acts that anyone could perform and be punished for, but a marked shift was effected when the 'homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality' (Foucault 1979: 43). Foucault is suggesting that sexual practices come to define and delimit a person – a reversal of ancient legal definitions of, for example, sodomy.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the burgeoning interest in sexology (the scientific study of sexual practices, primarily interested in 'deviance') and psychoanalysis meant that what was known about individuals' sexual appetites and predilections multiplied and was used to police sexuality as well as predict the personality types associated with each act. Gradually as more people were encouraged to consider their anxieties and neuroses and speak their desires, it became more common for people to see sexual desire as saying something profound about their deepest selves – as if their 'sexuality' lay at the heart of the mystery of human life.

Foucault's examination explains this increasing association of sexuality with the real self as an effect of the multiplying discourses of sex, which allow scientists frenetically to gather more and more information about increasingly arcane fetishes and desires. Foucault and other theorists show how normative sexuality, in response to the identification of deviance, becomes bound to reproductive imperatives, the idea that 'sexual difference is essential to sexual desire' (Jackson in Jackson and Jones 1998: 139). These kinds of links self-evidently make all kinds of appeals to nature and have shaped what is considered normal – so that heterosexual penetrative intercourse is regarded as *the* determinant of heterosexual sex because it facilitates procreation, seen as governing 'normal' sexual

response (regardless of what sexual practices heterosexuals individually favour). This focus on the natural is part of the 'endeavour to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction: to say no to unproductive activities, to banish casual pleasures, to reduce or exclude practices whose object was not procreation' (Foucault 1979: 36). This attempt to create irreducible meanings from sexual response is in Foucault's view further evidence that these meanings are actually socially constructed.

John Gagnon and William Simon, in common with Michel Foucault, emphasise the ways the meanings of sexuality are socially created – particularly the way that the body is imbued with all kinds of essential meanings: 'we have allowed the organs, the orifices, and the gender of the actors to personify or embody or exhaust nearly all of the meanings that exist in the sexual situation. Rarely do we turn from a consideration of the organs themselves to the sources of the meanings that are attached to them, the ways in which the physical activities of sex are learned, and the ways in which these activities are integrated into larger social scripts and social arrangements where meanings and sexual behaviour come together to create sexual conduct' (Gagnon and Simon 1974: 5). They believe that Freud and Freudian psychoanalysis over-emphasised the association of the body with the natural – the idea that anatomy is destiny – regardless of the meanings that we attribute to the body and the different taboos on exposure or touch which shift across time and cultures. Similarly they assert that sexologists focus too much on sexual acts with little concern for their shifting social significance, arguing with Foucault that the act is meaningless without the social/cultural setting that makes it illicit or licit, homo or heterosexual.

One of the tensions for modern feminism was that it tried to analyse the way heterosexual sex is informed by patriarchal relations of power at the same time as wanting to focus on sex as a positive life-force for women. These ambitions have to be set in the context of post-1960s' women. These ambitions have to be set in the context of post-1960s' libertarian thinking and the emergence of the so-called 'sexual revolution', where discussions about heterosexuality, homosexuality and desire were becoming more open, and where sexual health and the banishing of sexual ignorance became real aims. Within this framework, early second wave feminists were beginning to demand the right to be sexually active without censure and to find ways to portray women as desiring *subjects* rather than as *objects* of desire. Regrettably, the will to find new ways for women to express desire freed from the language of patriarchy became buried in a gradual reticence about feeling able to talk about heterosexuality at all.

Heterosexuality for women is always going to be linked to fear of conception and how one deals with the possible consequences, and perhaps too often feminist debate focused on contraception and abortion at the expense of imagining a sexual future for women where they had their own language of desire. For all the discussions about sexuality and the important documents that emerged from the early Women's Liberation Movement, such matters were left unresolved. Anne Koedt's momentous 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' (1968), a pamphlet that was reproduced in thousands and circulated from the USA to Europe and beyond, debunked the precedence of penetrative sex in order to declare once and for all the centrality of the clitoris to female sexual excitement. Contemporary commentators have since claimed that Koedt went too far and was inaccurate in her claim that the vagina had virtually no sensation at all. These critiques are valid, but should not detract from her intention to unseat the centrality of Freudian notions of female sexual response, geared as it was to the notion of the passive receiving woman and the active predatory man.

What emerged as the two key feminist debates on sexuality were pornography and political lesbianism. The 1982 Conference, 'The Scholar and the Feminist: Toward a Politics of Sexuality' held at Barnard College, New York is reported as disintegrating into open conflict around the issue of pornography. This conference was set up in the context of what one of its organisers, Carole Vance, saw as an increasing backlash in the 1980s against abortion reforms (especially in the USA) and excessive 'permissiveness'; with the emergence of the powerful New Right, feminism and radical thinking from the 1960s were seen as directly responsible for moral degeneration. This meant that any 'outlaw' expressions of sexuality – gay and lesbian or active heterosexual female, or adolescent – were treated with renewed censure, and AIDS was tastelessly seen as moral retribution on gays (the group most intensely affected by the virus at first in the USA and Europe). For many feminists the huge feminist anti-pornography movement ironically gave fuel to the backlash so that 'pornography, according to its critics, was now the central engine of women's oppression, the major socialiser of men, and the chief agent of violence against women' (Vance 1992: xix); this could only further problematise the exploration of female sexuality.

Feminists such as Ti-Grace Atkinson had implied that all feminists were lesbians in the political sense, and the notion of 'political lesbianism' developed from this connection, initially intended as a political statement, but later becoming more closely attached to sexual practice. For the Leeds Revolutionary Feminists of 1979, 'Our definition of a political lesbian is a women-identified woman who does not fuck men. It does not mean

compulsory sexual activity with women' (quoted by Gonda in Jackson and Jones 1998:117). While this is an emphatic denial that political lesbianism has anything to do with sex, it also dictates to women what is and is not acceptable even if the principle was to unseat the hegemony of heterosexuality. Women who were heterosexual and feminist were being implicitly forbidden to engage in sexual contact by some political lesbian groups, thus condemning all heterosexual practices as intrinsically oppressive without any possibility of change. Lesbians were seemingly expected to accept that their sexual choices were to be freely utilised for 'political' purposes regardless of their own desires, so the new dawn of female desire seems to have disappeared under the weight of some fairly thorny feminist political contradictions. Lynne Segal observes this shift within some quarters of the women's movement as from radicalism to 'bleak sexual conservatism' (Segal 1994: xii) and heterosexual feminists dealt with this by barely talking of sex at all.

What also emerged in the controversy around porn at the Barnard Conference was also a rejection of this desexualised image of the lesbian as the political conscience of feminism, and the emergence of pro-sex or anti-censorship lesbians claiming a full sexual identity in all its varieties. The tensions were clear: where lesbian feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys were clinging to a certain model of lesbian sexuality (often termed 'vanilla' lesbianism by pro-sex lesbians), others were questioning the validity of claims of authentic lesbian sex, especially if the social constructionist view of sexuality were to be endorsed. For Jeffreys this is nothing but a 'heresy', as the title of her 1994 publication *The Lesbian Heresy* suggests, and discussing what she sees as the increasing predominance of SM and penetrative sexual practices among lesbians, she says that 'a new generation of lesbians are cheerfully adopting the values and practices of gay male culture to the extent, as some of them are prepared to admit, of wishing that they were gay men' (Jeffreys 1994: 143).

Carole Vance asked whether the feminist concept of 'the personal is political' meant 'that sexual life was singularly and entirely political? If so, it was perhaps logical to expect that feminists who shared the same politics should have identical or highly similar sexual lives, and that there should be a close conformity between political goals and personal behaviour' (Vance 1992: 21). She is trying to foreground the perils of equating the construction of sexuality so closely with patriarchal interests and oppression; it needlessly removes pleasure from the equation and contributes to the caricature of the radical feminist as puritanical and anti-pleasure (which came to inform the popular view of all feminists by the 1990s).

The problem in the past with analysing heterosexuality is, as Jo Van Every asserts, that '[t]here is relatively little discussion of the fact that heterosexual relationships encompass much more than sex' (Van Every in Richardson 1996: 40). Carol Smart takes the example of sex education which highlights the dangers rather than actually educating children about sexual pleasure: 'It is hard to imagine sex educators today daring to speak openly of pleasure and joy, or of discussing the benefits of young women learning to masturbate, so that they know their own bodies before they experiment with another person' (Smart in Richardson 1996: 175). The definitions of heterosex as yet remain too crude, too focused on its 'institutional' embodiment, and fail to take into account how individual women negotiate, resist and challenge the institutional discourses of heterosex while still being defined by them. Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson attempted to address some of these questions in their collection about heterosexuality (1993); as lesbian feminists they shifted the margin/centre roles usually assigned to homo/heterosexuality and wrote to heterosexual women asking what their sexuality meant to them. What it underscored is that heterosexuality is not a political identity for women the way lesbianism can be: '[b]ecause "lesbian" is an intrinsically politicised identity, and heterosexuality is not, the two terms are not commensurate, do not belong in the same conceptual space' (Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1993: 8). Their intention, therefore, was to encourage a politicisation of the category heterosexual. One contributor sums up this feeling of role reversal: 'to be invited to write *in the name of heterosexuality* by another is to experience the force of being positioned as Other' (Young in Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1993: 37). This kind of exercise might help feminists emerge from the impasse around how to redefine heterosexuality and, as Segal argues, if we 'really cannot offer a response to much of women's sexual experience, other than to condemn it as part of a repressive social order, we can only dishearten rather than inspire the majority of women' (1994: xii). If one embraces the view that sexuality is socially constructed, then one way beyond the heterosexual impasse is to explode the hetero/homo binary and embrace the playful resistances of queer theory. After all, queer theory shows that 'heterosexuality is "unstable", dependent on ongoing, continuous and repeated performances by individuals "doing heterosexuality", which produce the illusion of stability' (Richardson 2000: 40). What might be emphasised here, as in the rhetoric of earlier feminism, is the radical possibilities of self-determinism – 'when we reclaim our sexuality we will have reclaimed our belief in ourselves as women. When this intense and powerful part of our nature is no longer suppressed we will refuse to do meekly as we are told.

Queer Theory

An Introduction

Annamarie Jagose

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
Washington Square, New York