PART ONE

PROGRESS

1 The following statement from *Feminist Theory* is as uncontroversial as it is typical of accounts that describe Western feminist theory's development over time:

> There is no disputing that feminist theory, methodology and practice have undergone substantial change since the heady days of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Pressure from within and outside and rapidly changing contexts have resulted in a multiplicity of theoretical and practical approaches to the issue of how to challenge and change the gendered nature of everyday life. (*Feminist Theory* 2003)[1]

It is self-evident—"there is no disputing"—that the last four decades of feminist theorizing, together with the uneven but tangible emergence of academic feminism, have resulted in an increased range of theoretical frameworks to draw on, as well as an increased number of feminist texts published. It is not only the proliferation of approaches and methods that we can be certain about, but, as the extract below makes

clear, the displacement of one set of approaches by others, the move from natural, essential truths to the uncertain pleasures and dangers of post-structuralist approaches:

> As we all know, the study of gender and sexualities in the humanities and social sciences of the past 15 years has been characterized by the prominence of post-structuralist analytical approaches that challenge the biology-based naturalness of genders and sexualities, and emphasize, in different ways, the socio-cultural and discursive construction of sexual categories and identities. (*Nora* 2005)

Further, not only do "we all know" that this trajectory accurately describes what has happened in the study of gender and sexualities, but we can also all agree that such theoretical transformations are in line with, in fact propel, transformations in the object of study—gender and sexuality—itself:

> Without question, certain historical developments, technologies and theoretical insights have forced gender's slide from sexed bodies. Ranging from queer fantasy and transsexual surgeries to critiques of essentialism, these developments make it seem that there is little which is true, fixable or stable about gender meanings. (*Feminist Theory* 2003)

Where we used to accept natural, biological givens, perhaps because things were simpler back then, we now need and have theoretical insights and practices that are more appropriate to the complex world we currently inhabit, one our theoretical insights have played their part in creating. As I hope is clear from the extracts I have introduced thus far, such assertions about the transformations understood to typify both theory and the world it engages (or produces) leave no room for doubt; indeed the more assertive the statement—"without question"—the more singular the story about the recent past of Western feminist theory appears to be.

But what if we do not "all know" the same things about what has happened in Western feminist theory's recent past; what if we were to understand the "we" of the address as inaugurated by rather than inaugurating this repeated certainty? What if we start to dispute that which there "is no disputing" and begin to query its relentless rhetoric? What if we approach the question of Western feminist theory's recent past with greater hesitancy and ask both what is missed in the certainty of such progress narratives and what some of the effects of the same certainty might be? What does such incontrovertibility tell us about the present and those "heady days" long past, beyond what we are already expected to know?

How might the development of a sceptical relationship to what Megan Jones characterizes as "the conceptual truth-claims of feminist thought" (1998: 118) provide insights into what these descriptions do and how they do it? As indicated in my introduction, I want to start the analysis of Western feminist storytelling here with a dual approach: on the one hand, holding in mind that such narrative insistence can never be entirely accurate, is always at least contested; and on the other, asking after the work that this narrative momentum effects, what it inculcates, particularly in its authoritatively descriptive guise. In this approach, I have been particularly influenced by Robyn Wiegman's careful readings of the multiplicities that make up U.S. academic feminism's institutional history, and her insistence that singular feminist narratives about that history actively work to depoliticize the field (1999a; 2002; 2004).[2]

In this chapter I extend my line of inquiry by mapping, sceptically, Western feminist progress narratives, with particular attention to how the meaning and momentum of this aspect of Western feminist storytelling is textually secured and mobilized. This first chapter will provide the building blocks of my subsequent analysis of loss and return narratives, which use similar markers to complicate the story, and reinflect these to different ends. Let me provide a range of initial examples from some of the journals I have analysed to get the discussion underway:

> Over the past decade, general theorists within feminism have developed increasingly sophisticated responses to questions about how best to theorize power and subjectivity. . . . (*Signs* 2000)

> The development of Women's Studies occurs through crucial shifts in the theoretical paradigms of feminism and the political preoccupations of the women's movement. These shifts have both deconstructed the founding premises of feminist theory and generated a greater depth to feminist thinking and research. (*Feminist Review* 1999)

> During the 1970s we could argue straightforwardly that women were marginalized and subordinate—that women lived and suffered under patriarchy. This claim now requires some urgent refiguring in order to move towards a more nuanced understanding of how and why marginalization and subordination continue and how they were changed. (*Feminist Review* 2000)

> The breadth of feminist issues is now much broader than ever before and intersects with a number of theories about gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, class,

corporeality and popular culture, to name just some areas of current complex feminist discussion. (*Feminist Theory* 2002)

First, the question of universal female subordination is set in focus, then the second phase, when eyes are opened for "the differences of the difference," and a third deconstructivist phase where multiple genders, floating gender boundaries and the body become the key issues of interest. (*Nora* 2001)

Identity politics has overcome the homogenizing tendencies of second-wave feminism by acknowledging the differences among women and, most significantly, attacking the hierarchy concealed in the category "woman". (*Feminist Theory* 2000)

The most interesting and far reaching of the rethinking of theoretical frameworks and of feminism itself would be the rewriting of the mind-body split and the rethinking of the sex/gender distinction. These poststructuralist feminist arguments had radical consequences for the understanding of the gendered nature of knowledges, and even more significant consequences for the ways in which identities came to be understood as multiple, unstable positions which could therefore be negotiated and possibly changed. (*Australian Feminist Studies* 2000)

I have included the above examples all together to give a sense of this narrative of progress told across journal sites on either side of the millennium as one that is general and repeated. It is, I expect, a story familiar to many readers, and one that we are likely to reproduce ourselves in teaching or writing contexts. It is a story I was told as a student in the mid-1990s, and one I find myself telling students now, whatever my intentions. In one way or another, through curriculum design, through what is included in an "advanced" or "introductory" academic feminist class, or through the narratives we produce in lectures or in our readings and corrections of student work, we reproduce this understanding of Western feminist theory as having progressed, and in a particular manner. We have moved from a time when we knew no better, a time when we thought "woman" could be the subject and object of liberation, to a more knowing time in which we attend to the complexity of local and transnational formations of gender and its intersections with other vectors of power. Further, in the extracts above, this is a familiar account of the institutionalization of feminist knowledge and thus describes the development of "Women's Studies" (from the second extract) as well as feminist theory

more generally. Indeed, in both progress and loss narratives, academic feminism is often understood as an agent, one that has acted upon and transformed Western feminist theory and practice.

I will return to some of the more intricate themes represented in the above extracts later in the chapter, but for now I want to outline some of the more striking features of a progress narrative. First, it is clearly a positive account, one told with excitement and even relish. It is a narrative of success and accomplishment and positions feminist theory, and its subjects, as attentive and dynamic. Second, it is a narrative with a clear chronology: we are taken from the past—in one extract explicitly the 1970s—via key shifts in politics, theory, and feminism's subject, and towards a complex feminist present. The shifts represented are from singularity of purpose and perspective to understandings that emphasize multiplicity, instability, and difference. The enthusiasm for these shifts is enacted through the use of terms describing current approaches as "interesting," "far reaching," "complex," generative of greater "depth" and nuance, "increasingly sophisticated," and so on. Indeed, the epistemological shifts referred to are consistently rendered as possessing the urgency and eye-opening capacities of a new political moment. Third, these shifts in time and approach are not represented as an inevitable flowering of difference and multiplicity, but are the outcome of that critical energy, directed explicitly at older approaches seen as lacking. In the extracts cited above, "founding premises" are "deconstructed," assumptions about women's subordination require "urgent refiguring," and "homogenizing tendencies" must be "overcome." Feminist theory has moved away from, indeed has directly distanced itself from, earlier preoccupations with "patriarchy," "woman," and "female subordination," focusing instead on intersections of power—"gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, class"—the "gendered nature of knowledges," and the limits of earlier approaches. Thus, a Western feminist progress narrative transforms rather than merely adds to existing approaches, deconstructs and moves beyond as well as forward. The story is one of change brought about through displacement: of feminist objects, epistemologies, and subjects. Integral to the momentum in the above extracts is the enthusiasm about these transformations in both object of inquiry and methodology. Western feminist progress narratives position their subjects as energetic and analytically astute, as generative of and residing in a well-earned state of positive affect.

How do these common glosses work to persuade their reader that the shifts they describe are both accurate and desirable? How do they produce the enthusiasm we are likely to want to share? We can already see that the work is not achieved by direct citation of particular theorists, or by analytic attention to debates over any of these issues. Instead the narrative certainty is textually achieved by techniques of comparisons that propel the momentum described above, that combine time and critique to create the appealing endorsement outlined above. We can see this textual technique already in the above extracts, which describe a trajectory from sameness to difference, singularity to multiplicity, or simplicity to complexity. Further, these relationships are temporally secured, where the former term belongs to the past and the latter term to the present. The shifts are complete; the past is over. Neither is the move from sameness to difference a neutral one occurring gently with the passing of time. Sameness is consigned to the past precisely because of the critical efforts of those who occupy the present position of difference, as indicated above. Thus the characterization of feminist sameness or singularity is as not only over but as necessarily over, dusted as well as done. In this respect, a critical as well as temporal hierarchy is established between textual comparisons between terms. Laying claim to being the subject of this Western feminist progress narrative, laying claim to being on the side of complexity and multiplicity, enthusiasm rather than nostalgia, one thus adopts a shared past, and crucially, one that is displaced through that very enthusiasm in the present. In narrative terms, one is not given the opportunity to choose homogeneity or singularity instead, because we will want to be on the side of sophistication not homogenization, proliferation not unidimensionality, intersectionality not intractability, and thus belief not defeatism. We will want to take up the opportunities these narratives provide to be an optimistic subject of Western feminist theory.

To take up the desired position of subject of this critical displacement, the required shift is not only from one set of objects or concerns to another, but also from one set of perspectives, approaches, or methodologies to another. These reveal and effect the displacement necessary to produce the present narrated in progress narratives. Shifts are not only from sameness to difference, then, but also from the epistemological and ontological assumptions central to their logic. As the above extracts emphasize, instead of an emphasis on and investment in female experience as

the ground of feminist knowledge and action, we must insist on the irreducibility of gendered experiences, and thus on the instability of experience as a term and ground for Western feminist inquiry. And instead of an investment in sex/gender as a critical tool to reveal kinship norms and social structures, we insist on deconstruction as the primary tool for revealing sex/gender's exclusions. In contrast to asserting women's universal subordination and the importance of its transformation into action, we focus on power as diffuse and changing, and the subjects and objects of violence or marginality as not fully known in advance. These shifts do more than describe the terms sameness and difference themselves. They describe shifts in critical investments and methodologies that transform what we mean by the key terms—and related terms such as power, subjectivity, and agency—as well. In effect, in charting moves from sameness to difference, and singularity to multiplicity, Western feminist progress narratives also chart a move from one set of schools of thought—radical or socialist—to another—poststructuralist or postcolonial.[3] As an attempt to represent the complicated relationship between sameness and difference and other related textual pairs, I often denote this as sameness → difference. I do so to highlight the epistemological and temporal direction of the comparison, in which the latter term critically transforms rather than merely comes after the former.

The binary relationships described and instantiated here not only anchor theoretical, political, and temporal shifts, but disciplinary ones too. If we have displaced experience as the ground of feminist knowledge production, we have also displaced empirical observation as a primary feminist method for accessing and transforming the social world. If instead we celebrate the possibilities opened up by a focus on what was excluded in these former accounts, then we come to prioritize textual deconstruction as a method too. How we understand power will thus also determine what we think comprises an effective intervention. This next, rather early, extract is particularly explicit about the methodological underpinnings of the Western feminist progress narrative:

> Empirical studies conducted from a range of theoretical perspectives (radical, socialist and liberal feminist) have all in some way affirmed the existence of women's experience as a source of privileged understandings, if not the basis of an alternative social science. Now, however, the deconstruction of "women" is having profoundly destabilising effects upon feminist theorising and research. . . .

> With the turn to post-modernism many of the certainties of a feminist research practice have been dislodged. This has liberated a plethora of exciting philosophical, political and cultural endeavours that tackle the essentialism around women embedded in both feminist and non-feminist texts. At the same time, however, feminist social analysts find themselves confronting an ironic impasse as what have been seen as the unifying objects of our research dissolve before our eyes. (*Gender, Place and Culture* 1994)

Empiricism, women's experience, and essentialism are fused in this account, such that a change in methodology and an interdisciplinary "postmodern" perspective can be framed as uniquely able to "tackle the essentialism" and the "certainties of a feminist research practice" of the past.[4] In the process the objects of inquiry also alter; a focus on "culture" rather than "social reality" references these overlapping epistemological transitions. As indicated in the final line of the above quotation, uncertainty about this move from the social sciences to the interdisciplinary humanities becomes an important rallying point for Western feminist return narratives that stress the need to recover not only lost objects of feminism that seem to "dissolve before our eyes," but lost disciplinary methodologies as well.

WHEN IS THE PAST?

To return to the chronological aspect of this story, temporal transitions are combined with assumptions about the theoretical, epistemological, methodological, or political shifts discussed above to ensure that the latter can be assumed to have happened once and for all. Western feminist progress narratives produce a clear sense of what comes when in feminist theory, what is displaced, what takes place in the present, and what the future holds. What takes place in the past is cast as irredeemably anachronistic, in order that the present can represent the theoretical cutting edge.[5] A key concept for the chronology of Western feminist progress narratives is "essentialism," which is both that which has been transcended and the political and intellectual reason for that transcendence. Essentialism is, as we know, never a good thing; its negative characteristics are so self-evident that uncovering evidence of it in any school of thought or text has the potential to consign it to an intellectual backwater from which it cannot return.[6] In progress narratives, essentialism and anachronism are fre-

quently tied up with each other, mutually constitutive of the need for difference, the very opposite of what constitutes theoretical rigour and accountability in the present.

But to say that essentialism is anachronistic, or that it is over, does not give us a very precise sense of when these essentialist ills are assumed to have taken place, or when they were critiqued and overcome. In the series of extracts I introduced above, only one names a precise decade—the 1970s—as the site of this particular anachronism. The overwhelming majority of progress narrative glosses do not name the 1970s directly; instead changes are more euphemistically temporalized, as is the case in this extract from *Feminist Theory*:

> There are, undoubtedly, some feminist (and other) approaches which take absolutist and essentialist approaches to questions of difference and social location. Yet, one of the heartening developments in feminist theory and practice over the past few years has been the increasing take-up of positions which are concerned to build temporary, strategic alliances across differences. (*Feminist Theory* 2000)

"The past few years" remains obscure, the phrase's function less to explore that past than to reassure its reader that the present is a time of proliferation. So accepted is this view that neither the past nor its transitional phase need citation or discussion: once the business of reiterating the credentials of the present is out of the way, we can move to more controversial considerations. Yet despite this lack of direct decade naming, we do know that it is the 1970s that carries the weight of essentialist anachronism in Western feminist progress narratives. Intertextually and imaginatively, the 1970s is consistently marked as thoroughly unified in its aims, unreflexive in its theorizations, yet bold in its ambitions. By intertextually, I mean that texts outside of the glosses I am analyzing here often do explicitly name the 1970s as "already composed in a fairly fixed way, and this with particular effects" (Bashford 1998: 51). Megan Jones notes that "the feminisms of 1970s Australia are often perceived as a unitary, simplistic and predominantly uncomplicated whole . . . [that] constructs an unsophisticated feminism at its beginnings in the 1970s and progresses to the supposedly sophisticated feminisms of the 1990s—feminisms of plurality, multiplicities of meaning and complex specificities" (1998: 117). By imaginatively, I mean that "the 1970s" as a decade may be referred to through its presumed essentialist dimensions in part because this fits with our broader sense of

what has happened in Western feminist theory and our attachment to not being essentialist any longer. I should note here that I am not contesting the idea that many 1970s texts might be deemed "essentialist" and that essentialism all too frequently has problematic effects; indeed it does. But I am struck nevertheless by the textual containment of essentialism in the 1970s in progress narratives and in ways that this (irredeemable) ill attaches to the 1970s *as a decade*.

More than through intertextual or imaginative modes, however, our knowledge that the 1970s is "the essentialist decade"—whether or not it is named—is secured in Western feminist progress narratives through other, more precise, decade naming. Thus, we often know that the 1990s (or later) is the site of difference and multiplicity, both because this is often the time of writing and because it is directly cited as representing these self-evidently good things. But this naming of the 1990s is patchy too and heavily reliant on the role of the 1980s. In Western feminist progress narratives the 1980s is the most directly named decade, burdened with the responsibility for moving feminist theory from a generalized, generalizing past to a differentiated, differentiating present. The following example from *Women's Studies International Forum* is typical:

> During the 1980s there was another, compelling, reason for questioning the category "women," in that it served to conceal differences among women and to privilege definitions of womanhood framed from White Western viewpoints. Once this ethnocentrism was exposed it became clear that "women" has never been a unitary category (Brah, 1991). (*Women's Studies International Forum* 2001)

The 1980s takes on a kind of explanatory role in progress narratives, temporally anchoring the growing realization of difference, bringing to light the problems of unity, acting as a stepping stone to postmodernism or poststructuralism, however understood. The transformation of feminist theory is serialized, with the 1980s acting as the pivot or transition point for the emergence of a fully realized focus on difference. The direct mention of the 1980s, more consistently than any other decade in progress narratives, ensures that anachronistic essentialism belongs to the 1970s, as suggested, but it also ensures that it too is transcended by what comes afterwards. Thus, we see that contemporary approaches to difference were unquestionably "shaped by a post-1980s pendulum swing within feminist theory and research" (*Feminist Review* 1999) and that,

By the eighties, changes were taking place that laid the groundwork for the third phase of feminist criticism, which I will call the engendering of differences. (*Critical Inquiry* 1998)

These last two quotations make clear that in progress narratives (within and beyond interdisciplinary feminist journals) the 1980s functions as a catalytic decade rather than as a decade of arrival: the changes taking place then pave the way for something else; a pendulum swing finds its level only after several swings back and forth. It is consistently "identity" that is positioned as that which moves Western feminist theorizing away from universal claims about "woman" and sisterhood (see citation from *Feminist Theory* 2000 above), but also as that which itself needs to be moved on from for fragmentation not to result in reification. Identity, as I explore below, is thus rather strangely located as poststructuralist ally, and simultaneously as difference's antonym.

The combination within Western feminist progress narratives of textual pairings and chronological ordering that assumes the essentialist past belongs to and resides in the 1970s, with difference proper taking place in the 1990s and beyond, means that we can tell this story without needing to include all of its component parts. Thus, in very general glosses of Western feminist theory's development, even those that contest some of its presumptions such as the those below, utilize familiar markers:

I reject the argument that there are insuperable chasms between the knowledges of different communities, and am against settling for the defeatism and isolationism of forever partial and situated knowledges. (*Feminist Theory* 2000)

What [remains] . . . unexplored are questions of how to formulate in explicit terms the relation between female subjection and multiply positioned, unstable female subjects, between patriarchal power and the regulation of female self-difference. (*Feminist Studies* 2001)

While both extracts make the case for bridging the gaps between different schools of thought and do not prioritize one framework over another, they do nevertheless reinforce the temporality I am discussing here. In the first quotation, "knowledges of different communities" are counterposed to "partial and situated knowledges"; in the second, "female subjection" is compared to "regulation of female self-difference," mirroring the techniques of singularity → multiplicity, sameness → difference that underpin

the chronology I am interested in unpacking. In fact, these general statements only make sense insofar as we understand them as already tied to a chronology comparing the 1970s with the 1990s. In considering the techniques that make up the political grammar of Western feminist progress narratives, then, I am also struck by the fact that not all parts of the chain of associations that make up the narrative as a whole need to be present in a particular gloss for the others to become resonant. Indeed, this is how the different components signify, as standing in for the narrative overall and as concomitantly reliant on that whole for singular meaning.

DIFFERENCES A DECADE MAKES

If the 1980s is the decade of transition in these narratives, it marks a very particular kind of transition. In Western feminist progress narratives the 1980s is marked as the decade of critique of universal categories and essentialist presumption as we have seen, but it is also marked as the decade of located critique. The 1980s offers an interrogation of 1970s exclusions from particular positions, and with particular, and often multiple, differences in mind. The following two extracts are typical of the ways in which a variety of subjects and critiques come to occupy this overburdened decade:

> Perhaps the most important legacy of 1980s feminism is the crucial concern with difference: differences between women in race, class, sexuality, and nation; and differences within particular women, with gender conceived as one of a number of social categories that are coarticulated in female subjects. (*Feminist Studies* 2001)

> Since the early 1980s, lesbians, feminists of color, postcolonial critics, and queer theorists, as well as postfeminist and antifeminist women, have exposed the ethnocentric conceits and consequences of the foundational categories of Western feminist thought—women, gender and sex. (*Signs* 2000)

In both excerpts the 1980s is marked as the decade where proliferation and interrogation coincide. The "crucial concern with difference" in the first extract emphasizes gender's "coarticulation" with "other" axes of difference, typically "race, class, sexuality, and nation," while the second extract focuses on the subjects articulating these critiques, namely "lesbians, feminists of color, postcolonial critics, and queer theorists." In this respect, the

1980s is represented as the decade in which critical mode and subject of critique coincide. Thus, differences of "race, class, sexuality, and nation" are exposed by subjects whose identities are formed through their marginal locations. In other words, it is "lesbians . . . and queer theorists," and "feminists of color . . . [and] postcolonial critics" who reveal "ethnocentric conceits and consequences" of "women, gender and sex." This is a common pattern across the journals. As part of a Western feminist progress narrative, the 1980s is heralded as the decade of emergent black feminist and lesbian critique in particular, both in terms of what constitutes the appropriate object of analysis and of its speaking or writing subject. Yet as I indicate later, these subjects and objects of inquiry are not positioned entirely equally. Although most work identifying the 1980s as the site of the emergence of complex Western feminist analysis frames this period as one of attention to multiple differences, what is overwhelmingly focused on is the critical assessment of white, Western feminism as endeavoring to represent all women. The extract from *Signs* above is instructive in this respect as it includes a range of subject positions making critiques of "the foundational categories of Western feminist thought," but what is critiqued by all of them is the same problem: ethnocentrism, rather than, say, heterosexism and ethnocentrism.

The 1980s attention to racism and ethnocentrism in prior feminist work constitutes a dominant theme in progress narratives. Progress narratives thus reflect the importance of critiques of white, Western feminism and reiterate the significant damage caused and privileges maintained when feminists assume that white, middle-class women are the *de facto* subjects of feminism. The critique provided, as progress glosses make particularly apparent, precipitates feminist analysis into a more enlightened era of interrogation of Western feminism from within. The two following excerpts give a flavour of how these glosses scan:

> During the 1980s . . . the notion of "woman" that had been the focus of feminist study was recognised as colour, class, and nation specific. The result of this critique was a new or increased emphasis on differences among women. (*Australian Feminist Studies* 2000)

> For example, the writings of black women in the 1970s and 1980s were concerned to get difference debated by white as well as black feminists (Bryan et al., 1985; Mirza, 1997; Sudbury, 1998). (*Feminist Theory* 2000)

As in the prior examples from *Feminist Studies* and *Signs*, a range of differences are brought forward in the 1980s to critique homogeneity, and a range of subjects are implicated as needing to shift their own critical attentions. Yet what interests me about these examples is the temporality that anchors the narrative and contains the critical direction it represents. In the *Feminist Studies* and *Signs* examples, difference is a 1980s "legacy," inaugurated after the 1970s and brought forward into the present of writing. And in the above extracts, too, the 1980s marks a shift away from the problematic previous emphasis on "woman" as the singular object of feminist inquiry. As discussed earlier, this is a common technique of rendering the present more sophisticated and multiple than the past and a way of dismissing the 1970s as anachronistic and essentialist. This is straightforward in the first example. In the second, even though (unusually) black women's writings from the 1970s as well as the 1980s are mentioned, note that the citations included are from the 1980s and 1990s (reprints in anthologies rather than original publication dates are chosen here). The momentum is thus forward rather than backward even where citation practice is more ambivalent.

Such historiographic practices have several effects. First, they mark the 1970s (or before) as the decade that contains the problems highlighted in the 1980s. One effect of this I have already flagged is to code the essentialism of the 1970s not only as a misplaced belief in sisterhood but also as a primarily racially exclusive one. The anxiety of being labeled essentialist or anachronistic within Western feminist theory is thus a more precise anxiety of being understood as racist; this historiographic narrative tactic more than any other ensures a Western feminist disidentification with its imagined past. Second, the temporality of such glosses fixes black feminist critique in the 1980s from the other side too, allowing Western feminist theory to represent itself as *increasingly* attentive to difference—particularly racial difference—as well as coding the past as notably inattentive to the same. In the above extracts it is feminist theory as an enterprise that has shifted as a result of these critiques, resulting in "increased emphasis on differences" in the first and debate about difference across racial locations moving into the 1990s in the second. In the first two examples the 1980s leaves a "legacy" for the present and inaugurates Western feminist theory's increasing sophistication and attention to multiplicity. In this respect, black feminist critique is frequently inscribed in Western feminist progress narratives as *catalyst* to a more general focus on difference.

This forward momentum from exclusion to inclusion is achieved by a variety of techniques of comparison and citation that situate black feminist critiques as essential to the transformation of Western feminist theory, but ultimately as transcended. The following extract provides the typical chronology:

> Initiated by feminists of color who called attention to their exclusion and/or misrepresentation by mainstream feminist accounts of "women", the focus on women's differences was underwritten as well by poststructuralist feminism. Both critiques have produced the most recent object of feminist theoretical inquiry: the female subject who inhabits diverse cultural locations and for whom gender is dynamically engaged with numerous other social categories and discourses. (*Feminist Studies* 2001)

In this example the "focus on women's differences" is once again framed as a legacy, one that enables a fuller consideration of a different kind of object, one who is not in fact named, but is "a subject who inhabits diverse cultural locations." In this quotation the shift in emphasis is "initiated by feminists of color" and "underwritten . . . by poststructuralist feminism"; it is a combined move that leads to the present subjective mobility of our research focus. Note too that, by the end of the extract, "exclusion and/or misrepresentation" have been replaced by a "dynamically engaged" female subject. The transitions Western feminist theory has made have also transformed the object of inquiry into an agent rather than a victim of power. This shift is essential in order that the present be a space of positive affect, of celebration at the accomplishments of Western feminist theory, rather than a space of conflict or irresolution.[7]

The next excerpt makes this framing of racial critique as a developmental stage clearer still:

> Two related intellectual debates provided the impetus for critical reflection on "the subject" of feminist thinking. First, women of color and Third World women feminists critiqued "the subject" implicit within most feminist thought at the time, a subject that normalized the experience of white, middle-class, first-world women (hooks, 1984; Trinh, 1989). This critique stimulated greater interest in the multiplicity of oppression and fractured the notion of "woman" and her experience(s). Second, a growing interest in post-structural psychoanalytical perspectives (e.g. those of Lacan and Derrida), as well as Foucault's notion of power/discourse, also profoundly affected feminist theory. Feminists appreciated post-

structural attempts to deploy an anti-essentialist world-view, reject totalizing 'grand' theory, and embrace multiplicity, difference and the "decentred" subject (Sarup, 1988). (*Gender, Place and Culture* 1999)

While black feminism and "post-structural psychoanalytic" accounts are on one level represented here as of the same era (all citations are from the 1980s) and as having related concerns, the temporality I am tracing is reinforced through the ordering of critiques: "poststructuralism" comes "second." Further, the "first" set of critiques is described as stimulating "greater interest in multiplicity," rather than evidencing that interest *tout court*. This ordering of theoretical engagement is reinforced by the use of the past tense in describing the critiques of women of color and Third World feminists, while the "growing interest" in poststructuralism is linguistically active, allowing its proponents to continue to "deploy," "reject" and "embrace." Thus, poststructuralism imaginatively spills over into the next decade, while the critiques of women of color and Third World women are temporally fixed by their frames of citation, becoming tropes in the service of a teleology they are no longer the subjects of. In the extract from *Signs* cited earlier (on page 42), the ordering of critics is similarly instructive, though perhaps less immediately evident. Here, critical exploration of "foundational categories" has been occurring "since the early 1980s" from "lesbians, feminists of color, postcolonial critics, and queer theorists, as well as postfeminist and antifeminist women." My analysis in this section has suggested that this ordering is pivotal rather than accidental, leading from identity politics to epistemological and ontological challenges to authenticity and further to the rejection of feminism altogether.

It is not entirely accurate to suggest that these shifts to difference are always represented as occurring first in the 1980s, however, while this is certainly a common trend. Alongside narratives that directly highlight the transitional role of that decade in the achievement of a contemporary era of flexibility and difference in both feminist object and subject, there are others that locate this focus more firmly in the 1990s. Thus, to extend a quotation I included a fragment of earlier in this chapter:

Over the past decade, general theorists within feminism have developed increasingly sophisticated responses to questions about how best to theorize power and subjectivity. . . .

To this end, theorists such as Joan Scott (1988), Elizabeth Spelman (1990), Iris Young (1990), Chantal Mouffe (1992), Anne McClintock (1995), Leonore

Davidoff (1995), Nira Yuval Davis (1997), and Ruth Lister (1998) have begun to formulate various ways of addressing the multiplicity of subject positions that women, as bearers of classed, racialized, national, ethnic, sexual, and aged as well as gendered identities, occupy in relation both to men and to each other. (*Signs* 2000)

Here all citations of theorists attending to the "multiplicity of subject positions" are from the 1990s except Joan Scott, who is thus marked as rather precocious (as Haraway or Spivak often are in other contexts). A further example from the same journal suggests similarly that:

"Radical" feminists usually do acknowledge racism and economic marginalization as factors that render some women especially vulnerable to sexual and other forms of exploitation. However, they do not even begin to engage with the insights of 1990s post- or neo-colonial feminist theory, which teaches that "race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they simply be yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather they come into existence in and through relation to each other—if in contradictory and conflictual ways" (McClintock 1995, 5). (*Signs* 2000)

There are several features of interest to me in this passage. The first is the routine association of "radical" feminism with a focus on women's oppression and marginalization, which here can address racism and classism, but only as what makes women vulnerable to "sexual . . . exploitation" (rather than as agents). The extract then jumps straight to the failure of such an approach to reach the giddy heights of 1990s sophistication in theorizing intersections within and across differences. Again it is McClintock from the 1990s who is cited. But what has happened to the 1980s in this formulation? Why is the 1990s credited with these insights when the dominant narration of change in Western feminist theory locates the beginning of these same insights in the previous decade?[8]

My reading of this apparent contradiction has to do with two issues mentioned earlier. The first is that in its role as the decade of theoretical and political catalyst, the 1980s is also historicized as concerned with identity rather than "difference proper." Thus its absence in such glosses serves as further evidence that these early attempts have been surpassed. The second is that, in line with the narrative techniques linking sameness → difference and singularity → multiplicity with empiricism → decon-

struction, the 1990s has to be understood to address these issues of difference in a fuller, more sophisticated manner, in order that the narrative remain one of progress rather than stasis. Reading across all the examples given in this section, the 1990s thus stands for an epistemological and methodological plurality begun but not achieved in the 1980s, whether or not the latter decade is explicitly mentioned. This temporality is reinforced in the following fragment:

> Recent decades have seen the academic feminist discussion on decentring and pluralizing the (white, western, heterosexual, middle-class) categories of gender and woman by examining how other intersecting categories such as race, ethnicity, nation, class, generation, sexuality and disability shape or constitute gender and women (see, for example Anthias and Davies 1992; Collins 1998; Crenshaw 1994; Lorde 1980; Oyewumi 2002; Young 1997). (*Nora* 2003)

Once again, the 1990s and onwards are cited as the intersectional decade(s), moving us well beyond the "white, western, heterosexual, middle-class" past. The citation of Audre Lorde as a very early exception (it is so frequently Lorde) serves two functions here. It marks a threshold point that reinforces our knowledge that this exclusionary past comes before 1980 and positions her as notable exception, separated from her closest citational ally by over a decade. For me, it is particularly in these excerpts that pass over the 1980s that one of the most problematic effects of "decade-fixing" of black feminist theory can be most fully appreciated: that it allows for its subsequent textual and historical erasure or tokenization.

SEXUAL SUBVERSIONS

In Western feminist progress narratives, the 1980s is not only represented as providing necessary critiques of white, Western feminism. This decade also frequently carries responsibility for inaugurating the critique of feminism's heteronormativity. Where this is the case, the terms of the comparison mirror those already discussed above, with the 1980s signalling a progressive move away from sexual as well as racial myopia. To return to two extracts cited earlier, we are reminded that the 1980s represents a transfer of attention in both object and subject of feminism:

> Perhaps the most important legacy of 1980s feminism is the crucial concern with difference: differences between women in race, class, sexuality, and nation; and

differences within particular women, with gender conceived as one of a number of social categories that are coarticulated in female subjects. (*Feminist Studies* 2001)

Since the early 1980s, lesbians, feminists of color, postcolonial critics, and queer theorists, as well as postfeminist and antifeminist women, have exposed the ethnocentric conceits and consequences of the foundational categories of Western feminist thought—women, gender and sex. (*Signs* 2000)

The 1980s thus opens feminism up to a range of newly appropriate objects and draws previously marginalized subjects, including sexual subjects, towards its centre.[9] As I discuss in more detail below, however, racial critique will always be prioritized in contexts where more than one form of critique is introduced or understood as competing, as the second extract above implies.

As with representations of black feminist critiques, the inclusion of sexuality in Western feminist progress narratives similarly pivots around the 1980s and contrasts the singularity of the past with an increased openness in the present. Thus, and typically:

From the feminist "sex wars" of the 1980s to the queer theory and politics of the 1990s, debates about the politics of sexuality have been at the forefront of contemporary theoretical, social, and political demands. In feminism's sex wars of the 1980s, pro-sex feminists argued, persuasively I think, that radical feminism's representation of women as disempowered actors fails to see women as sexual subjects in their own right. . . .

While radical feminists see "female sexuality" as repressed by "the patriarchy," the pro-sexuality movement sees repression as produced by heterosexism and "sex-negativity"—cultural operations often seen as institutionalized in feminism itself. (*Feminist Review* 2000)

In by now familiar ways, here radical feminism implicitly occupies the demonized 1970s and is imagined primarily in negative terms. While radical feminists "fail" to recognize sexual subjectivity, reducing "female sexuality" to repression, the pro-sex feminists of the 1980s are expansive, indeed are "at the forefront" of an impressive range of demands. Importantly, pro-sex feminists see women as "sexual subjects in their own right" rather than a patriarchal dupes. This emphasis on agency as marking temporal transition in progress narratives is most marked around sexual

subjectivity, in fact. It indicates a shift from a concern with oppression and violence (and the concomitant need for liberation) and towards a focus on agency and pleasure (and thus new modes of political engagement). If the placing of pro-sexuality concerns in the 1980s (and later) were not enough to remind the reader of the inadequacies of what has been left behind, we might notice that the radical feminist claims in this passage are all in scare quotes, while the pro-sex positions remain unqualified (with the exception of the "sex wars" that brings together both perspectives in antagonistic relationship), a technique that underlines the extract's forward momentum. Again, however, as with the containment of black feminism, those pro-sex feminist positions themselves give way to the "queer theory and politics of the 1990s," the "wars" of the 1980s having been resolved in the latter's favour. Indeed, perhaps the scare quotes around the "sex wars" in the extract also signal precisely this inevitability: they are not really "wars," because they can only be resolved in one direction in Western feminist progress narratives.

This chronology of Western feminist sexual politics allows the specific steps that underwrite it to be easily passed over in much the same way as we saw in relation to black feminism. Thus:

> Whereas the earlier generation of feminist scholars challenged patriarchal ideologies that reduced women's prime contribution to society to their "biological capacity" for nurturing and reproducing, the new gender theorists are fundamentally concerned with the historical subjectivity of sexed individuals and the embodiment of sexual identity, seen as indeterminate, ambiguous, multiple (Morris, 1995). For Judith Butler (1990, 1993), who argues that sexual identity is lived as a highly regulated performance, one is not female; one can only "do" female. (*Theory, Culture and Society* 1998)

The excerpt represents the familiar opposition between the challenges to "patriarchal ideologies" of "the earlier generation" and the "indeterminate, ambiguous, multiple" focus of the 1990s. The "earlier generation" needs no direct reference in the above quotation, its response to those "patriarchal ideologies" locating it firmly in the 1970s as we have seen. The narrative skips over what we can only presume happens in the 1980s, with the "new gender theorists" and their focus on indeterminacy and multiplicity remaining the only ones cited and temporally located in a direct way. Indeed, not only are Morris and Butler brought into the text, but Butler's

texts are also lent precision by their differentiation from one another. As with black feminist containment in the 1980s, here "the sex wars" and sexual identity have been displaced by a move into difference proper, difference without fixed sexual object or subject.

While the role of sexual critique in Western feminist progress narratives mirrors that of racial critique in many ways, its taken-for-granted subjects are rather more ambivalently positioned. Thus in the extracts from *Feminist Review* and *Theory, Culture and Society* discussed above, we might also want to call attention to the fact that lesbian feminism and lesbian feminists are nowhere directly mentioned. They are not named in relation to a "pro-sex" feminist turn in the 1980s, despite the centrality of debates about lesbian sexual practices to those "sex wars," for example, in contrast to black feminists who are assumed to carry racial critique in the same era. And they are clearly not part of the 1990s, with its focus on indeterminacy and performance, rather than named identity. Perhaps we might find a lesbian resting somewhat uncomfortably under the term "female sexuality" instead? Or perhaps one can hear echoes of lesbian identity through its implicit challenge in the statement "one is not female; one can only 'do' female"? If this is the case, lesbian subjects may be more associated with the 1970s than their superficial inclusion in the "turn to difference" of the 1980s might lead one to believe. Certainly this dynamic is true of the following example, in which the 1980s is imagined as both the time of lesbian critique and the time of its undoing:

> In 1980, Monique Wittig challenged lesbians and gay men to deny the divisive power of heterosexuality by refusing to think of themselves as women and men. More recently, postmodernists and queer theorists have questioned the twofold divisions of gender, sexuality and even sex, undermining the solidity of a world built on men/women, heterosexuals/homosexuals and male/female (Butler, 1990; Garber, 1992, 1995; Sedgwick, 1990). (*Feminist Theory* 2000)

Again, the extract produces a familiar chronology in which the 1990s figures as the bold inheritor of previous perspectives. But here Monique Wittig's role is ambiguous. As a lesbian theorist her citation marks the 1980s as a time of lesbian critique, yet her challenge is to "lesbians and gay men" to move beyond dualism. Both her injunction and the deconstructive call of the 1990s take sexual identity as their target, as that which must be surpassed, even while providing it with a history that crosses over

several decades. More candid critiques of the accuracy of this picture of "redemptive inviolate lesbian feminism" as "something invented *about* the 1970s during the major sex wars of the 1980s" (*Feminist Review* 1999) nevertheless retain dominant assumptions about where the 1990s has taken us that retrospectively code previous decades as stages in the development of a taken-for-granted multiplicity and fluidity. This point echoes the one I make in the introduction that reformist histories do not necessarily attend to the problematic politics of the present, and thus offer revisionist rather than radical challenges to accounts of the feminist past.

Any ambivalence about the temporal, epistemological or political location of lesbian feminism is resolved when brought directly into comparative tension with black or postcolonial feminism, however. While both sexual and racial critique give way to "difference proper" in the 1990s and beyond, and while both lesbian and black feminist subjects give way to radical postmodern or poststructuralist indeterminacy, so too is their own encounter temporally and hierarchically ordered. When brought together, black feminists or ethnocentrism/racism as subject and object of critique take priority over lesbian feminists or heteronormativity/homophobia. We saw this in the example from *Signs* cited earlier, in which all manner of subjects expose ethnocentrism, rather than a range of exclusions produced by "the foundational categories of Western feminist thought." Here is the passage again as a reminder:

> Since the early 1980s, lesbians, feminists of color, postcolonial critics, and queer theorists, as well as postfeminist and antifeminist women, have exposed the ethnocentric conceits and consequences of the foundational categories of Western feminist thought—women, gender and sex. (*Signs* 2000)

Further, when a direct critical relation is expressed chronologically, it is lesbian identity or politics/theory that is surpassed by black feminists or critical race feminism. This example from *Signs* demonstrates that relationship quite clearly, I think:

> Beginning in the 1980s, the scholarship of feminists of color in the United States challenged lesbian studies as monolithic . . . (Moraga 1985; Lorde 1984; Anzaldúa 1987). (*Signs* 2003)

In the above excerpt, "feminists of color" are familiarly positioned in the 1980s (more explicitly than usual, indeed), as underlined by the chosen

citations. But here this scholarship is pitted against lesbian studies rather than radical feminism more generally, a move that reinforces the ways in which "radical feminism" and "lesbian feminism" often come to stand in for one another in Western feminist progress narratives. Thus although in some versions of the progress narrative, feminist essentialism of the 1970s is rendered as *both* racist and heteronormative, in others lesbian essentialism is critiqued for its own racially marked exclusions. At no point did I come across a progress narrative gloss in which lesbian critique in the 1980s is represented as challenging prior black feminist exclusion; where the two are framed in sequence rather than coextensive, black feminism is always the one challenging exclusion and holding the temporal as well as moral high ground.[10] The above excerpt is interesting for another reason, too. The challenge to lesbian studies that takes place in this gloss is inaugurated by "feminists of color," but importantly the authors cited are all well-known *lesbians of color*. On the one hand, that would indicate a more complex relation and temporality than I have suggested here, one internal to rather than displacing of lesbian studies. But on the other, I am struck by the fact that their scholarship is textually represented as that of "feminists of color" and precisely not "lesbians of color," again prioritizing a singular, racialized, aspect of critical identity. In the process, these authors are utilized to effect their own erasure from their participation in feminism in the 1970s ("beginning in the 1980s" the text insists), in order that "lesbian studies as monolithic" signals a racial exclusion subsequently corrected.

A Western feminist progress narrative that moves from lesbian feminism to black feminism and on to postmodernism or poststructuralism chimes unnervingly with some of the broader cultural representations of lesbians, and of second wave feminism as anachronistically lesbian, that I outlined in my introduction. We are familiar with the stereotype of a 1970s feminist as an unfashionable, angry, man-hating lesbian. From tracing the relationship between black and lesbian feminists and feminism in Western feminist progress narratives, we can also see how this stereotype finds intertextual, intercultural validation in representations of that figure as white and/or racist as well. In the progress narratives I have been tracing here, in other words, the character of the lesbian feminist is not only anachronistic, but the very essentialism that she represents is also coded in racial terms. As Victoria Hesford notes in her astute essay on "feminism

and its ghosts," "as the 'flannel shirt androgyne, close minded, antisex puritan humourless moralist racist and classist ignoramus essentialist utopian' [Zimmerman 1997: 163], [the lesbian feminist] often stands as a symbol for the limits of cross-class and cross-race alliances in second wave feminism" (2005: 228). I want to argue that this linear account of feminist development also provides the perfect alibi for implicit or explicit homophobia in both feminist and postfeminist accounts, marking lesbian feminist politics as particularly inattentive to racial exclusion historically, and therefore as ignorable on those grounds. This is one of the ways in which Western feminist progress narratives uncomfortably reinforce postfeminist accounts of "an earlier generation" as inattentive to the complexities of contemporary social, political, and interpersonal life, as dated, as nothing to do with the present. It is this kind of amenability—of one form of feminism narrative with another—that makes the political grammar of Western feminist stories significant both within and outside feminist theory.

CITATION TRACES

Representations of Judith Butler's work are key to securing the Western feminist progress narrative I have been mapping in this chapter. As is no doubt clear from many of the extracts above, Butler is frequently credited with being *the first* to move feminism on from the political and intellectual traps of both an exclusive prioritization of "woman" as the ground of theory and activism (through her critique of the sex/gender distinction, in particular) and the related problems of identity politics, however multiplied. While not taking issue with Butler's importance for feminist theory, in conducting the research for this book I could not help but be struck by the repetition of Butler as responsible (occasionally alongside others, often on her own) for the most extraordinary range of transformations in and of feminist theory. Importantly, for this point in the analysis, it is Butler who is consistently understood to move Western feminism beyond both essentialism and identity reductionism in ways that often precipitate her to a location outside feminism itself.[11] The following examples are typical of the position Butler's work occupies in the glosses I am interested in here:

It is difficult to overestimate the extent to which Butler's compelling reformulation of these theoretical impasses [between theorisation of the psyche and the

social] has succeeded in pushing feminist thought on gender identity on to new conceptual terrain. (*Theory, Culture and Society* 1999)

For such feminists as Judith Butler, Joan Scott, and Denise Riley, it is the refusal of *women* as a foundational referent that gives to feminism the internal critique necessary to rethink its own historical emergence. Such rethinking functions to revise accepted notions of power, politics, and subjective agency, thereby challenging the foundational assumptions of certain activist agendas common to feminism's earlier practices. (*Differences* 1999/2000)

Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) deconstruction of the strategic division of gender from sex rejecting the notion of prediscursive materiality . . . (*European Journal of Women's Studies* 2004)

At least since Judith Butler's seminal book *Gender Trouble*, published in 1990, feminist and gender studies have been concerned with how new conceptions of the body affect and reform disciplinary questions in the humanities, as well as to some extent in the natural and social sciences. (*Nora* 2002)

Butler "pushes" feminist thought forward, "refuses" to get caught in the traps of a focus on "women" that mark earlier periods of feminist theorizing and politics, rejects an essentialist view of the body or the social as outside discourse, and carries academic feminism into a new era. Because of Butler, feminist theory now has the epistemological and methodological tools to deconstruct or "revise" previous understandings of "power, politics, and subjective agency" and to take its own history as object of inquiry. In such accounts, Butler is positioned as critiquing both the "foundational assumptions" of earlier activism (1970s) and identity claims (1980s) in order to take feminism into a broader realm of relevance too (1990s and on). In this respect, citation of Butler, accompanied by a striking lack of engagement with anything she writes, performs Western feminist theory's move fully into deconstructive approaches to the subject and the social world, and away from assumptions about feminist sameness and the reification of difference. More specifically, citation of Butler marks essentialism and identity as in the past, and the subjects of a feminist theoretical present as different from and opposed to these earlier approaches. In the process, iterations of her *threshold* role in a Western feminist progress narrative erase any previous challenges to "womanhood" as an unqualified ground of feminist knowledge.

Looking more closely at how Butler signifies as this threshold figure in Western feminist progress narratives highlights many of the central problems I have already indicated attend Western feminist progress narratives. In discussing how black and lesbian feminisms and feminists are positioned in these narratives, I identified two main modes through which identity politics (associated with the 1980s) are represented as an important stage in Western feminism's development. The first mode cites these interventions as important, but ultimately and necessarily as surpassed; the second skips straight to the 1990s or later without direct citation of what has been transcended. In the former, identity politics is separated out from 1970s feminism; in the latter the previous two decades are folded into one another, and the past is more euphemistically referred to. Both modes allow postmodernism, poststructuralism, or deconstruction to variously emerge as more concerned with difference than what has come before and thus as heroic in the celebratory tone of these narratives. Citation of Butler, as indicated in the above extracts, tends to reinforce the second mode, moving us beyond generally "accepted notions of power, politics, and subjective agency" through a critique of "certain activist agendas" that remain unspecified. In the process, the specific contributions of black and lesbian feminists are not simply transcended, but entirely erased, as Butler's critiques appear to emerge out of the blue. Such citation of Butler allows poststructuralism to emerge as both *more* concerned with gender, sexuality, race, and class and as *less* dependent on feminist theory in general to explore power relations, since feminism can be represented as the worst of the essentialist offenders left behind.

Western feminist progress narratives are not neutral about the transformations Butler inaugurates. Progress narratives inflect their achievements positively, of course, expressing these shifts enthusiastically and as something we should all celebrate. This positive affect is achieved through the emphasis on newness, transformation, and proliferation; the present is an exciting time of possibility, and we are invited to explore this "new conceptual terrain" with appropriate attitude. Such positive affect is also achieved through the combination of narrative tactics I have been exploring throughout this chapter. Any potential discomfort at the generational logic that homogenizes the past in order to discard it is allayed by the particular framing of what we are being encouraged to leave behind. We are being enjoined to leave behind homogeneity and essentialism, which

we now know are racist and homophobic as well as anachronistic. To be ethical subjects of feminism, we *must* leave the past behind, then. All that is narratively required is to bracket out specific reference to what has otherwise been assigned to the 1980s, namely the black and lesbian feminist epistemologies and ontologies whose absent critiques haunt the theoretical present. Feeling good about where we are can also attach to Butler in other more precise ways, because citation of her obliquely references the rejection of lesbian identity in favour of strategic mobilization of sexual alterity: a queerness that has no a priori subject. In this respect, I do not think it is too much of an over-reading to suggest that citation of Butler brings both the general temporality of progress narratives into textual play, as well as a temporality that will abandon lesbian feminism more easily than black feminism.[12] I hope I have been able to illustrate that these problematic figurations of race and sexuality are key rather than tangential to how feminist progress narratives operate and that erasure of a complex past is a necessary condition of their positivity. Our celebrations have historiographic and political consequences that are not always immediately visible, then, ones that fold us into narrative logics that figure race and sexuality in particularly problematic ways. These historiographic representations imagine an anachronistic feminism in singular terms that resonate with postfeminist or antifeminist accounts, and provide "difference alibis" we should be exceptionally wary of.