

What is feminism, anyway?

Understanding contemporary feminist thought

Chris Beasley

ALLEN & UNWIN



Editing of this title has been assisted by the South Australian Government through Arts SA.

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First published in 1999 by
Allen & Unwin

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National Library of Australia

Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Beasley, Chris.

What is feminism, anyway?: understanding contemporary
feminist thought.

Bibliography:

Includes index.

ISBN 1 86448 4373.

1. Feminism. 2. Feminist theory. I. Title.

305.4201

Set in 11.5/12 pt Lapidary by DOCUPRO, Sydney
Printed and bound by South Wind Production Ltd, Singapore

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my good friend Christine Putland, who suggested the overall form of this volume and offered several valuable suggestions; to Peter Hall, for extraordinary generosity and patience in difficult times, not to mention a number of design contributions; and to our daughter, Perry Grace, for her utter disinterest in my completion of anything unrelated to her small, lively self.

Contents

Introduction	ix
Part I Departing from traditional fare	1
1 Feminism's critique of traditional social and political thought	3
2 Feminism's difference from traditional social and political thought	11
Part II Active ingredients	23
3 Debates 'within' feminism about feminism	25
4 Overviews of feminist thought	36
Part III What's on the menu?	49
5 Starters on the feminist menu: liberal, radical and Marxist/socialist feminisms	51
6 'Other' possibilities: feminism and the influence of psychoanalysis	65
7 More on the menu: postmodernist/poststructuralist influences	81
8 Reassessments and potentialities: feminists concerned with race/ethnicity	101
Conclusion	117
Notes	119
Other overviews of feminist thought	151
Bibliography	152
Index	167

Introduction

Feminism is a troublesome term. It may conjure up images of lively discussions, gesticulating hands and perhaps the occasional thumping of fists on tables; certainly, hot milk and bedsocks do not spring to mind. And yet, while the term appears to encourage a great many people to express opinions, it is by no means clear what is being talked about.

Such lack of clarity is not a straightforward result of either limited knowledge or prejudiced misrepresentation. Feminism is one of those terms that inconveniently defy simple explanation. Moreover, feminism's complexity and diversity provide obstacles to those wishing to gain a satisfactory grasp of its meanings. This interesting and powerful combination initially suggested to me the need for a short, comprehensive and intellectually rigorous book, a book which could deal with the question of what characterises contemporary Western feminism. I chose the somewhat impatient query, 'What is feminism anyway?', as the appropriate title for this book in order to signal my growing perception that although the term 'feminism' is commonly used it is, at the same time, both confusing and difficult.¹

This book is intended to be used as a helpful, condensed but thorough reference by those of you who are new to the field as well as those who are already well informed. It offers both analysis and a survey—an accessible, short-cut through the swathe of writing dealing with feminism. After reading the book you should be able to launch into a discussion on the subject of feminism with some degree of confidence.

THE PROBLEM

Feminism is becoming an increasingly accepted part of ordinary social and political discourse, even if it is not viewed in the same light by everyone. However, feminism now, as in the past, entails a variety of widely differing approaches. And yet, in spite of this diversity, feminism is often represented in everyday discussions, as well as in lecture rooms, as a single entity and somehow concerned with 'equality'. This limited portrayal is rarely challenged, partly because many forms of current feminist analysis require considerable previous knowledge and are sometimes only available in forms of academic language so difficult that they make Einstein's theory of relativity look like a piece of cake. Contemporary feminist thought has sometimes, in this context, been accused of retreating from broadly understandable language into an incomprehensible jargon typically associated with 'ivory tower' academics.²

Whether this accusation is fair or not, the problem remains that despite a growing awareness of and potential audience for feminist ideas, feminist thought is little understood—even among academics. I have been lecturing in the field of feminist thought for well over a decade and have recently been struck by the ever increasing number of students and staff from other courses and disciplines asking me for assistance. It is both a pleasing and dispiriting development. On the one hand, academic teachers wish to include some reference to feminist approaches in their subjects and, relatedly, students are now often required or wish to write on topics involving women, 'gender' issues, bodies, sexuality, et cetera. On the other hand, teachers within universities and in other settings find that it is no simple matter to gather together the resources necessary for even the most basic inclusion of contemporary feminist frameworks in their subjects. And students ask for assistance because, while there may be some discussion of feminism in the courses they undertake, the material provided typically either assumes feminism is equivalent to (North American) liberal feminism or hints gloomily at the hardships involved in coming to grips with contemporary feminist thought without much further clarification. The problems associated with gain-

ing some understanding of the term 'feminism' are usually even greater for those outside educational institutions. In this context, teachers, students and other interested individuals obviously require some reasonably quick, painless and relatively straightforward guide through the complexity of the field.

A close look at the range of materials commonly employed by teachers attending to feminism goes some way to explaining why it is actually quite difficult to gain a satisfactory grasp of the field. Although feminist thought has been considered by many authors, existing writers rarely attend to the issue of what it is they are discussing. The meaning of the term 'feminism' is almost invariably assumed and/or evaded. Furthermore, most texts dealing with contemporary Western feminism tend to deal only with some aspects of feminism—such as focusing on more established ('modernist') approaches, or only summarising various 'types' of thought named feminist (which does not explain why they are so named). The result is that those who hope to become better informed about feminism have little choice but to struggle through several texts and try to develop some perspective of their own.

While I do not for one moment suggest that wide reading or the process of attempting to figure out the characteristics of a field of knowledge are undesirable, there is no doubt that most of us face restrictions on the time and energy necessary to devote to these forms of intellectual preparation. Moreover, I see no reason why finding out about feminist thought has to be such a chore. On these grounds there seemed to me a definite place for a book which provides a reasonably accessible analytical guide in one site. This book is not supposed to replace wider reading but it is intended to make that reading more efficient and less agonising.

The book clarifies the question of what contemporary Western feminism involves and thus offers a 'definition' of the term. The notion of 'defining' feminism is controversial.³ In addition to the problems associated with a complex, shifting and sometimes inaccessible field, defining feminism also involves considering whether it is in any sense distinguishable from 'other' forms of thought. As will be noted shortly, the issue of feminism's 'borders' is a matter of debate. Finally,

feminists themselves often indicate considerable reluctance to engage in the task of definition. In the main, feminists are inclined—frequently deliberately—not to define what they mean by feminism, sensing dangers such as internal policing of both the field and of feminists by those who might like to determine what is to be included (or not), as well as the potential danger of constricting the unstable vitality of its meanings.

Although the problems associated with defining feminism are inclined to make one pause, I believe that discussion about the meanings of the term is not to be dismissed because it is an arduous undertaking. It can also be argued that refusing to engage in definition does not mean that the question of definition is avoided, rather it leaves implicit definitions in place. These problems in my view indicate that greater attention needs to be paid to *how* the task of definition might be approached. Nevertheless, any brief, neat account of feminism is likely to be disputed. The 'definition' provided in the book is inevitably rather more of an exposition or 'map'. In common with Braidotti,⁴ I consider that feminism's manifold qualities suggest a cautious, open-ended and wide-ranging approach to exploring its characteristics rather than an attempt to find some concise central core. Shortly I will explain how I understand the task of 'defining' in more depth but, for the moment, what is relevant here is that such a map or guide is inevitably far more fluid and extensive than any fixed definition that you might find in a dictionary or encyclopedia.⁵

Unlike dictionary definitions, this 'mapping' methodology encourages tendencies to write at great length and in painstaking detail. I was determined to resist such tendencies. I wanted to write more of a pocket-book analytical guide rather than a full-blown overview text in order to assist those who require a quickly absorbed but comprehensive reference, and for this to be of use to a wide variety of readers.

My reason for writing such a book is that an answer to the question of what makes a particular group of writers feminist theorists—rather than some other sort—is not as obvious as you might imagine. Although I think there is reason to be wary of strict definition in the traditional dictionary sense, feminism

is not a term that is entirely up for grabs. As Rothfield notes, feminism is scarcely a static label, but '[t]his is not to suggest that feminism has no boundaries'.⁶ The use of words or labels (no matter how broadly and conditionally understood) does involve the inclusion of something(s) and the exclusion of others, even if the boundaries change over time and are permeable or fluid rather than concrete. Hence, it becomes important for those who wish to understand a term to explore *how* the term may be 'defined'. Because a term like feminism means something(s) and not others at any given moment in time, in a cultural climate where the term is in common usage, the problem of defining or characterising feminism takes on a measure of urgency.

As I have already suggested, there are a number of problems associated with the task of discerning the characteristics of feminism one of which is its variable usage. According to Offen, the term 'feminism' barely existed before the twentieth century. Originating in France, it only began to be employed in the 1890s.⁷ In other words, it is a relatively 'new' term within the long history of Western social and political theory and in this sense suggests a new framework or new frameworks. Moreover, its meaning has varied over time and its present multiple meanings are rather different from those in use in the 1890s.⁸ Delmar suggests in this context that there is no set 'ideal' or vision in feminism. She also distinguishes between the practical politics of the women's movement and a history of ideas.⁹ Delmar considers that feminism may exist only in the form of an intellectual tendency with or without the benefit of a social movement. However, many feminist writers do not accept a conception of feminism as simply a set of ideas existing in the absence of a movement. In other words, there are both broad and narrow definitions of feminism which affect how you see feminist thought and what it might be said to offer.

Delmar notes that in contrast to this lack of uniformity in response to the question of 'what is feminism?', there has often been a considerable degree of consistency in the images said to represent feminism and feminists.¹⁰ When you consider that images may refer to styles of dress, haircuts, ways of behaving, attitudes and so on, you can probably conjure up a number of

graphic pictures yourself. It is interesting that these easily evoked images are more often associated with pejorative views of feminism. However, the images also suggest an impulse to tie feminism down to something and to ignore considerable differences over the characteristics of feminism.

APPROACH AND ORGANISATION

Perhaps one way of dealing with the difficult task of establishing 'what is feminism?' is simply to avoid trying to arrive at a clear-cut definition, to cast off a notion of burrowing ever-inwards towards a definitive core. After all, there is no reason why characterising or defining a term is necessarily to be equated with discovering its supposed eternal essence. Instead, given the purpose of this book and its focus on feminist theory, definition becomes a more modest task, 'a clarifying device'.¹¹ Accordingly, I have adopted a method which involves looking at the task of 'definition' from various perspectives and am more concerned to provide the sense of a field alive with possibilities than with locating a tidy answer.

In Part I (chapters 1 and 2) I look at the relationship between Western feminist thought and 'traditional' Western social and political thought. This section, entitled 'Departing from traditional fare', provides the first taste of how feminism may be regarded as diverging from the 'diet' of mainstream thinking. In other words, I start the process of 'defining' feminism from considering that which various feminists describe as providing a point of 'departure'. Feminists indicate what they mean by the term as they point out what distinguishes it from 'other' (non-feminist) bodies of thought. However, it must be noted at this juncture that aspects of those bodies of thought supposedly 'outside' feminism are nonetheless incorporated into feminism.¹² This raises certain issues. If even some feminists include 'within' feminism aspects of that which they have demarcated as non-feminist, how then is feminism in any sense distinguishable from these other forms of thought?

It appears that feminism has boundaries (feminism does

involve some distinguishable meanings) but, at the same time, the interchanges between feminist thought and 'other' forms of thinking which feminists criticise indicate that there is unlikely to be a strict, clear-cut dividing line between them. Perhaps the image of the Berlin Wall is helpful in illustrating this seeming inconsistency. The Wall no longer provides a physical barrier—it is continuously breached—and yet this does not mean that East and West Germany are indistinguishable. Similarly, feminism has boundaries which may be permeable, but this scarcely implies that feminism is no different from any other form of thinking. Rather, the issue becomes not simply where feminism's boundaries might be, but how they might be understood. As a result, clarifying boundaries (how feminism departs from 'other' bodies of thought) and their potential permeability (the ambiguities of that departure), are both part of the first steps in 'defining' feminism.

Part II, 'Active ingredients', allows the reader to digest feminism's volatile dimensions, to absorb the character of its 'cuisine'. Thus, by contrast with the first section, part II begins to depict the parameters of feminism from a standpoint designated by feminists as 'within' feminism. This leads, in chapters 3 and 4, to overviews of the field. (The discussion outlined here is subject to the same concerns regarding boundaries as those noted earlier.) Finally, chapters 5 to 8 offer brief descriptions of most of the generally agreed 'dishes' available on the menu of Western feminism, providing an opportunity to partake of its several varieties.

The intention of the book's organisation is first to outline how feminism is distinguished from 'other' forms of thought—that is, the implications of negative demarcation (Part I)—and, second, to delineate the field in a number of ways, that is, marking out both the dimensions and content of a positive terrain (Parts II and III). This yields a workable, if rather pragmatic, analytical guide to the problem of 'defining' feminism. A pragmatic guide allows for diversity and change as well as indicating potential difficulties attached to overly rigid or clear-cut definitions which attempt to lay down the law regarding what is and what is not 'feminist' thought.

Because the task of 'definition' is pursued pragmatically, the assertion of my own views is restricted to the proposal about *how* to characterise feminism and I have tried to avoid being prescriptive when surveying the content of that field. Throughout the book I intentionally do not engage with the different strands of feminism or with different writers in the sense of offering evaluative comments, in order to leave the field as open-ended as possible. The aim of this less judgmental style is both to forgo the suggestion that I can discern the real, best or essential feminism and to allow you, the reader, to consider this for yourself. However, my concern to avoid an overly prescriptive tone also reflects a point of view in relation to the various 'types' of feminism. While I am presently preoccupied with three of these (those described later as psychoanalytic, postmodern/poststructuralist and those attending to race/ethnicity), I am able to see uses for all the types of feminism in certain contexts and hence do not regard myself as entirely committed to any one of them.

This description of the book's organisation also reveals two coexistent elements: first, various ways of understanding the term, feminism, are indicated and some schematic considerations and parameters are arrived at which amount to a proposal regarding a 'definition' or map of the field; second, in the process an overview of the content of the field is also provided. In other words, the book contains both **argument** and **survey**.

There are two further points to make in terms of the presentation and structure of the book. Initially, readers will discover that the characterisation of feminism and feminist thought begins in a quite accessible fashion but in general becomes progressively more demanding. This is because, as the 'types' of feminist thinking are described, the material to be covered becomes for the most part less widely understood. Some descriptions refer to exacting bodies of thought outlined in very condensed form.

In addition, there are certain self-imposed limits on the task of characterising feminism undertaken in this book. Such limits include a focus on Western feminisms, and a focus on theory. With regard to the initial caveat, this book specifically provides a guide to Western feminisms as I do not believe that

it would be a simple task to provide a short but comprehensive account of both the diverse field of Western feminist thought and the enormous complexity of 'Third World' feminist thinking. I wish to focus on the former with some reference to possible points of interconnection.

In relation to the second self-imposed limit, the book examines the meanings attached to the term, feminism, from the point of view of a focus on feminist theory and thought and feminist theorists—that is, it deals in ideas, assumptions and frameworks. Some writers adopt the view that feminism should not be conceived in terms of ideas alone, since it also refers to political struggles. Others suggest feminism could be described even more broadly. Braidotti, for instance, talks of 'the means chosen by certain women to situate themselves in reality so as to redesign their "feminine" condition'.¹³ While I have considerable sympathy for this expanded scope, this book was written to provide a relatively short analytical guide which concentrates on systemic, publicly asserted feminist ideas—rather than on the historical development of feminist political movements, practical struggles, feminist sub-fields or modes of inquiry such as economics or cultural studies, or individual women's negotiation of the 'feminine'. Given my earlier mention of the issue of broad or narrow definitions, it is important to note that I have undertaken an account of feminism and feminist thought which is expediently but necessarily restricted. In any case, I suspect that the apparently limited focus on ideas will give you, the reader, plenty to go on with.

**Part I Departing
from traditional fare**

1

Feminism's critique of traditional social and political thought

Feminist thinkers regard feminism as somehow different from the mainstream—as innovative, inventive and rebellious. In particular, they see their work as attending to the significance of sexual perspectives in modes of thought and offering a challenge to masculine bias. From the point of view of feminist writers, 'traditional' or 'mainstream' Western thought (which includes a wide variety of thinkers from Plato and Hobbes to Sartre and Habermas)¹ is better described as 'malestream' thinking and thus its authority needs to be questioned.² What does feminism's perceived departure from and defiant stance in relation to traditional thought amount to? I will attempt in this chapter to outline some broad parameters concerning what constitutes feminism by indicating how feminists of various sorts criticise mainstream viewpoints and hence in the process distinguish specifically feminist approaches.

FEMINISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF MISOGYNY

In the first instance it is evident that feminist theories and commentaries upon traditional thought have developed in parallel with mainstream social and political thought. They have in fact developed at something of a remove from mainstream thought. One way of exemplifying this remove is to look at the nature of the content of academic journals, the life-blood of publicly available academic intellectual debate. Current journals which discuss social

and political thought tend to discuss a canon of major male theorists and are usually dominated by male writers, with few references to women theorists, feminist analysis or to women's position in social and political life. By contrast, journals which might be called feminist are dominated by women writers who regularly discuss classical and contemporary male theorists' views.³ The flow of ideas in academic journals is definitely one way. It exemplifies what is, for the most part, a one-sided interaction between feminist and mainstream theory and theorists. Yet, ironically, feminist writers are the ones who are typically perceived as interested in an overly specialised field without 'broader' applications and marked by sexual separatism.⁴

Mainstream social and political theory today is characteristically generated at a distance from feminist thought. However, feminists have argued that this is simply a part of three on-going processes: excluding, marginalising and trivialising women and their accounts of social and political life. (Trivialising occurs when women's experiences are reinterpreted in terms of those associated with men,⁵ when feminist writers are said not to talk about the 'big' issues, or when feminist writers are shown 'respect' in a patronising way)

What clearly links 'feminist' as against other theoretical frameworks, it would seem, is a particular view of traditional social and political thought. That view involves a critique. It is a critique of misogyny, the assumption of male superiority and centrality. As Thelle says, '[i]t is common knowledge among feminists that social and political theory was, and for the most part still is, written by men, for men and about men'.⁶

FEMINIST RESPONSES TO MISOGYNY

Though feminist accounts offer a critique of mainstream thought, there have been several different feminist responses to the perceived inadequacy of that thought. I will briefly outline a number of important responses. The first response involves a view that women and women theorists have been omitted from Western social and political theory and that therefore the task of feminist thinkers is to put them back in

(while leaving most of traditional thought relatively intact). This might be described as the 'inclusion/addition' approach, otherwise known as 'add Mary Wollstonecraft and stir'.⁷ The emphasis here is on pragmatic concerns related to reforming Western thought taking into account what is politically possible.

The second view declares that, as Clark and Lange put it, 'traditional political theory is utterly bankrupt in the light of present [feminist] perspectives'.⁸ This is the 'critique, reject and start again' or the 'go back to the drawing board' approach. Such an approach expresses doubts about the success of any agenda to 'fix' traditional thought since that thought is conceived as built upon assumptions regarding sexual hierarchy.

Finally, there is the view that it would be impossible to develop a theoretical framework completely uncontaminated by past perspectives or by the history of male domination.⁹ Such a perspective argues that we cannot escape our social and intellectual context and, ironically, that traditional thought might be seen as a means to elaborate feminist theory itself, since the more we understand the sexual politics of our cultural and intellectual heritage the better able we are to comment on and transform it. Feminist thought is here regarded as revealing the partial and sexualised character of existing theoretical knowledges. This is the 'deconstruct and transform' approach. If traditional thought is seen as a woollen sweater, the above viewpoint might be described in the following terms: 'don't throw away the wool, but rather unravel and restitch the jumper, perhaps several times'.

CHALLENGING WOMEN'S SUBORDINATE STATUS AS SECOND-RATE OR NOT-MAN

I have said that there is considerable agreement among feminists that traditional social and political thought is inadequate, even though they differ over what to do about this inadequacy. Accordingly we may be closer to characterising feminism now because some general agreement in perspective if not in strategy can be detected. Moreover, there is general agreement over *what* is inadequate about traditional social and political theory. In other words

there is also agreement about flaws in the content of traditional thought. The South African feminist Bernadette Mosala perhaps sums up the basis of the consensus about that content when she says of mainstream thought, 'When men are oppressed, it's tragedy. When women are oppressed, it's tradition'.¹⁰

Feminist writers regularly point out that mainstream social and political thought has commonly accepted and confirmed women's subordinate position in social and political life, either explicitly or implicitly.¹¹ Feminists argue that mainstream theory largely takes for granted women's subordination and assumes that this is not a centrally significant topic of political thinking. Whether or not the various forms of mainstream thought express a progressive concern with emancipation, equality and rights, they all tend to accept that women's position is to be taken as given, at most viewing it as of relatively marginal interest. According to Porter, there appear to have been two major ways in which women's accepted subordinate status has been explicitly presented in mainstream thought.¹²

The first view involves an account of women as **partial helpmates**. Here women are defined in terms of men's needs regarding pleasure, provision of services, children and so on. Such a perspective is particularly evident in Judaeo-Christian theology¹³ and Greek philosophy, both of which remain fundamentally important in present-day Western political concepts as well as in the general cultural heritage of the West. One example of this account of women may be found in the work of Aristotle. He argued that while the 'rational soul' is 'not present at all in a slave, in a female it is inoperative, [and] in a child undeveloped'.¹⁴ Aristotle linked 'rationality' to ethical virtues (moral qualities) and self-control. Women, in his view, are therefore in need of care and control and are morally unstable. Another example may be found in the work of St Augustine. St Augustine asserted that only man is in the image of God. Women were partial beings for St Augustine because he linked God's image with a particular view of reason.¹⁵ Women's lesser spiritual and social status is a consequence of their link to sensuality and nature, while men are committed to reason and authority. Once again women can only be cast as assistants, given their intrinsic failings and limitations. This

notion of women as partial beings, and as *for* men, constituted women as second-rate, as flawed or blemished men. Such a view is still evident in much of Western thought today.

Secondly, feminists found in mainstream thought a conception of women as **different but complementary**.¹⁶ Supposedly in this account both sexes are valued. However, in practice women are described not just as different but as men's opposite. Women, in other words, are defined not so much as *for* men but as *in relation* to men. Man is the norm and woman is defined negatively in relation to that norm. Man becomes the standard model and woman the creature with extra and/or missing bits. (The alternate view, in which women are seen as the starting point, is expunged—even though this perspective is just as possible.) The notion of man as the norm is certainly a view alive and well today. For example, a person who cannot become pregnant (a man) is the standard worker of industrial law in Western countries. Women—people who may become pregnant—are not the general reference point but rather represent a particular group with special (and problematic) requirements. Simone de Beauvoir summed up the hierarchical relationship between men and women assumed in the concept of 'different but complementary' in these terms: 'He is the subject, he is the Absolute—she is the *Other*' [emphasis added].¹⁷ Woman is not so much second-rate man in this context as that which is 'not man'.

Woman becomes a kind of rag-bag of repressed elements that cannot be allowed within the masculine. Hence, women come to represent physical reproduction and the nurturing of dependent children within industrial law, even though men in the workforce have children too. Once again in the 'different but complementary' approach men are linked to rationality, to civilisation, to the 'big picture' beyond specialised small-scale concerns, and to what is particularly human (rather than merely animal). By contrast women are associated with the non-rational or irrational, with the supposedly narrow concerns of kin, and with biology and nature. Any notion of overlap between or uncertainties in the meaning of terms like 'rational' and 'emotional' is precluded or discouraged. An example of this kind of approach in traditional thought occurs in the work

of Rousseau, who opposed those who saw women as flawed men. By contrast, Rousseau saw the sexes as different kinds of beings. He considered that women should be educated to please and complement men.¹⁸ Women's difference, appropriately directed, was to be viewed as for men's benefit.

Both versions of women within traditional social and political thought do not allow women much capacity or room for analytical ('rational') thinking. Women are defined as precluded from theorising. What they 'think' is either not on the agenda at all or is seen as being of little significance. Women are not the subjects of social or political thought, nor are they seen as being capable of engaging with it or contributing to it. If you have ever wondered why many women are inclined to think abstract intellectual theorising has not much to do with them, it may be because in a very real sense it has not.¹⁹

In this setting the book you are now reading itself involves a kind of subversion of or challenge to mainstream social and political thought. Women are at the centre of the theories discussed here and are also construed as theorists. Women are both the subject and the agents (active practitioners) of theory. This is in keeping with the characteristics of the field which this book investigates, for what unites feminist commentaries on mainstream modes of thought is a critique of the mainstream focus upon men as the centre of the analysis and the related invisibility and marginality of women. Feminist commentators offer a critique of the focus on men insofar as that focus is not recognised. Feminists note that, within Western thought, to speak of men is taken as speaking universally.

FEMINIST CRITICISM OF CLAIMS TO UNIVERSALITY

Feminists consider that a major problem within mainstream Western social and political thought lies in its inclination to universalise experiences associated with men, that is, to represent men's experiences as describing that which is common to all human beings. How is this sleight-of-hand undertaken? Initially contemporary feminist writers often note a charac-

FEMINISM'S CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

teristic formulation within mainstream theory in which concepts are organised into dualisms (oppositional pairs). Each dualism also contains a hierarchy. Rather than a coupling with equal weight given to both sides, one side of each opposition is represented more positively (as better, more significant) than the other. In other words, traditionally Western thinking is arranged in advance by a series of lop-sided conceptual pairs. Such pairs are so much an accepted principle in our (Western) way of understanding the world that they tend to be instantly recognisable, as is evident in the list below.

However, the reliance of mainstream thought upon paired associations which repetitively represent a hierarchical order is also linked by feminists to an inequitable sexual order. Hence, the characteristic tendency of traditional social and political theory to take men as the central subject of the analysis and extrapolate from their experiences is related to a pre-given conceptual ordering within Western thought. Western thought is organised around pairs of unequally valued associations that mirror over and over again the 'violent hierarchy'²⁰ of the dualism, man/woman. These pairs of associations are suffused with sexual hierarchy even when apparently at a distance from a concern with sex. Thus certain concepts are aligned with the masculine and placed in opposition to others. The latter are constituted as subordinate to the first order of concepts and are connected with femininity. This may be seen more clearly if we look at some oppositional associations characteristic of Western thinking.²¹

man/woman	freedom/bondage
subject/object	active/passive
culture, society/nature	public/private
human/animal	general, universal/particular
reason/emotion	politics, law, morality/personal,
logic/intuition	familial, biological
selfhood, being/otherness,	presence/absence
non-being	light/dark
independence/dependence	good/evil
autonomy/interconnection,	Adam/Eve
nurture	

On this basis feminists consider that sexual difference actually shapes the intellectual geography of our social and political life. It shapes what we can think and how we can think it. Moreover, by this means, feminists argue, mainstream political thought offers a conceptual schema in which viewpoints associated with men are taken as the view, the standard or rational/sensible/proper, universally applicable view.

The dualistic nature of Western social and political thought means that categories like 'work', 'the public sphere', 'citizen', 'politics', et cetera, become imbued with meanings dependent upon sexual difference and sexual hierarchy. The notion of a link between men, public life and universal ethics (beyond one's own 'particular' interests), and hence greater access to Truth or morality, enables the specific vantage point of men to be seen as the broader picture. Women are then construed as being small-minded, as 'merely' private beings. By a wonderful sleight-of-hand women become magically invisible within traditional social and political theory. It is a sleight-of-hand in two senses. First, women seem to disappear as they are marginalised within the conceptual framework of Western thought. Second, what remains within Western thought is men focusing on themselves. In this latter sense mainstream theory may be seen as a form of masculine self-absorption: the sleight-of-hand amounts to another variety of 'hand-job'.

2

Feminism's difference from traditional social and political thought

HOW DIFFERENT IS FEMINISM?

Feminists have not had much difficulty consistently asserting the problematic nature of traditional theory's views of women as either second-rate men or as 'the Other' (not-men). There has not been much dispute among feminists concerning the sexual sub-text of categories like 'the public' or 'the political', nor regarding the problems associated with masculine self-absorption evident in the central focus on 'malestream' thought. Nevertheless, the critique of mainstream Western thought is diverse insofar as feminists are inclined to differ, for example, over the degree to which feminism is seen as departing from that thought.

Some feminist commentators argue that the apparent exclusion or marginality of women in traditional theory is simply yet another instance of injustice which just happens to concern women.¹ Feminist social and political thought, according to this point of view, is merely a proposal to include women and the relation of the sexes within existing theory. There is nothing special about feminism *per se*. Relations between men and women can be analysed using the same concepts that have been broadly developed in mainstream thought for analysing groups of superiors and inferiors.² Feminism is here seen as unremarkable, as part of existing theories concerned with freedom from oppression and *not different in kind* from traditional social and political thought. Feminism's 'disagreement'

with the mainstream in this account is more of a complaint about some absences within a mutually acceptable field of endeavour.

By comparison, other feminist writers such as Carole Pateman insist that though women and sexual difference are not acknowledged in social and political theory, they are actually critical to its foundations. In Pateman's view women's marginalised position within social and political thought does not just involve an issue of content, or of omission. Indeed Pateman argues that women's subordination is crucial to the very constitution of the terms of reference, the categories and concepts, and the methods of traditional theory.³ In this context she considers 'political thought' to be fundamentally constructed out of women's exclusion from the concept—that is, political thought itself is a kind of 'boys' club', run according to game rules assuming a male membership and concerned with activities valued and undertaken by men. This approach asserts that women pose a special problem for traditional theory, since traditional thought is founded on frameworks *dependent* on women's subjugation: for example, commonly accepted frameworks within political theory such as 'the public/private distinction' are built upon notions of a separate, more restricted sphere associated with women. In this viewpoint feminism is seen as differing from traditional thought, as necessarily subversive of the content, assumptions and methods of existing bodies of theory. Relatedly, feminism is considered to be *distinct* from mainstream social and political thought in that feminism recognises women's marginalisation and seeks to overcome it.

However, the question of feminism's difference from traditional thought is not simply an issue about the *degree* of difference. It also raises the problem of how that difference may be understood, or rather how we might interpret feminism's **borders**. Feminists who argue that feminism is not unlike existing bodies of thought appear inclined to perceive interconnections between the two, while those who assert that feminism is positively different might seem more likely to propose clear-cut borders. In practice, although the latter grouping of feminists regard feminism as a challenge to main-

stream thinking, they do not necessarily all draw a sharp line between them. Feminism can apparently be envisaged as highly innovative, non-conformist and subversive, and yet simultaneously as integrally intertwined with that which it critiques. In this perspective feminism may be judged distinct but its difference does not necessarily imply isolation from or expunging of 'other' (non-feminist) elements. Accordingly, feminists adopting such a viewpoint may consider feminism as different, even very different from mainstream thinking, but will not perceive that difference—the borders between feminist and 'other' forms of thought—in terms of an impenetrable wall separating irreconcilable antagonists.

As noted in the Introduction, some feminists have drawn attention to the ways in which aspects of those bodies of thought supposedly 'outside' feminism are employed within feminism. For example, feminist thinkers frequently draw directly upon texts imbued with masculine bias in developing their frameworks. Additionally, the project of departing from mainstream (masculinist) thought suggests a necessary familiarity with and active usage of that knowledge.⁴ On this basis, like a new cuisine, feminism can be viewed as drawing upon older traditions, even using some or most of the same ingredients, and yet offering a definite recognisable shift that is more than a mere reaction to established custom.

In sum, feminists interpret the boundaries between mainstream social and political thought and feminism in two major ways: as a matter concerning the extent of feminism's departure from traditional fare and/or as a question regarding the nature of that departure and hence the form of the boundaries. In the first instance, feminists differ markedly over the degree of departure they envisage, some considering feminism as located upon a continuum shared with traditional thought, while still others perceive a distinguishable difference between them. Second, there is a range of opinion among those who are inclined to the latter view. Some perceive feminism's borders as providing a relatively clear point of separation or moment of revolt, but others interpret these borders as shifting and permeable. In this last account, there is a determination that the notion of borders should not restrict feminism's potential

range and directions. However far the departure from the mainstream might lead, it is argued that feminism cannot and ought not be prevented from making 'tactical' use of any mode of thinking, including modes which clearly depend upon masculine bias.⁵

The only 'border', exclusion or limit on feminism's eclectic choices in this approach appears to arise in relation to the meaning of 'tactical' use. Feminism's borders may be permeable in such an approach but, even when these borders certainly do not exclude the mainstream, the term feminism remains associated with a critique of mainstream presuppositions regarding the centrality of *Man* and the related invisibility/marginality of women. Hence, 'tactical' use of the mainstream involves a rejection of its entirety, the totality of its value framework, at the same time as undertaking ongoing engagement with and strategic borrowings from it. In other words, it would seem that feminism is regarded by feminists as at least somewhat different with regard to its content, and by most feminists as also different in kind, from traditional thought. The basis for distinguishing its difference in kind—however this is interpreted—appears to revolve around a refusal of the masculine bias of traditional thinking.

WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT FEMINISM?: VIEWPOINTS ON 'SEXUAL DIFFERENCE'

There are obviously a wide variety of feminist views regarding the relationship between feminism and traditional social and political thought. They range from a perspective which considers feminism and mainstream theory to be compatible and quite similar, to an approach which sees feminism as breaking down the very categories that are used in traditional theory. But if, as the latter view suggests, feminism is in some way distinct, what is distinct about it? Feminism certainly does appear, as I have just outlined above, to challenge conceptions of women and sexual difference in traditional thought. However, the critique offered by feminism—that is, the viewpoint that there is something inadequate and unjust about traditional

theory—is more straightforwardly encapsulated than what feminism offers as the alternative. What feminism actually offers, beyond its initial criticism of existing thought, is very diverse. And so the question remains, 'what is feminism?' How can it be defined from 'the inside' as it were (even if feminism is not always regarded as clearly separable from 'other' modes of thought)?

If we now look briefly at what is understood as constituting feminism—at the alternative it offers compared with viewpoints available within traditional theory—rather than simply looking at the issue of demarcation or feminism's 'boundaries', we might be able to characterise feminism in some general ways. What is the effect of feminism's critique of mainstream thought upon feminism? What does feminism offer that distinguishes it (from traditional theory, for example)? Examining feminism from 'the inside' will not at this point involve an attempt to define feminism by looking at specific feminisms. (The content of the term, feminism, will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.) For the moment I simply intend to note some possible broad features that might figure in clarifying what feminism is. In order to do this I suggest looking briefly at the issue of **sexual difference**. Sexual difference is inevitably of some importance in feminism given feminists' inclination to consider the subject of 'women'—a grouping identified by sex differentiation—yet this issue is approached in at least five main ways.⁶

(a) Some feminists employ a notion of **sameness**. They assume that men and women are much the same and hence are engaged in reworking mainstream theory's conception of woman as defective or second-rate man. These feminists offer an approach in which women are admitted to 'humanity' as described by traditional thought and female oppression is characterised as the restriction of women's human potential. This is a proposal of assimilation. Women are seen as capable of doing what men do, as capable of being 'men' and are expected to enter the world of men. Such an approach has sometimes been described as egalitarian or humanist? feminism and is commonly associated with the public face of North American

(liberal) feminism.⁸ A concern with the notion of sameness is also often linked with liberal feminism generally and with Marxist/socialist feminisms.

(b) Other feminists adhere to the notion of women as distinct, different from men, or at least conceive their agenda in relation to women's cultural constitution as different. This perspective involves reworking the conception of the sexes as 'different but complementary'. Such an approach works with the framework of difference but challenges the assumed hierarchy underlying this account of the sexes found in traditional Western social and political thought. By contrast with views found in traditional thought, where women's difference from men is taken as indicative of inferiority, sexual difference is celebrated by these feminists. Such an approach has been called gynocentric feminism.⁹ Their agenda may include a concern with separatism, a deliberate choice by women to remain separate from men in some way. The celebration of difference is often associated with (Western) European or 'continental' feminism, though such a position is disputed by many feminists who argue that this typically presents a simplistic divide between French and English speaking feminists and ignores those writers whose work may fit somewhere in between.¹⁰ Attention to the notion of women's difference is also connected most commonly, and less controversially, with radical, psychoanalytic, and 'French' ('écriture feminine' school) feminisms.

(c) An increasing number of disparate feminist writers in the 1990s express concerns regarding any straightforward either/or choice between the 'sameness' and 'difference' viewpoints outlined above, preferring to reject this schema of oppositional alternatives. They eschew the sameness/difference dichotomy by shifting the focus of their analysis to the question of the organisation and effects of power. While such writers in some senses give more ground to a perspective recognising women's (socially and culturally constituted) 'difference', they are less inclined than the previous grouping to celebrate the strategic or other possibilities of femininity.¹¹ Rather they downplay the significance of the issue of the similarity or difference between men and women in favour of considering potential strategies which resist or destabilise

sexual hierarchy. The accounts of women offered within traditional social and political thought are conceived as providing analytical material to be examined in the process of deciphering power. These writers range from Catharine MacKinnon's emphasis on women's subordination as the consequence of social power, to Joan Scott's interest in moving beyond assumptions concerning fixed sexual categories and her support for 'an equality that rests upon differences' [emphasis added].¹² Nevertheless, the inclination to eschew the sameness/difference opposition is more likely to be associated with postmodern/poststructuralist feminist work than any other 'type' of feminist thought.

(d) A number of feminist writers make use of a framework of alliance or coalition. Men and women are not so much the same in kind (in an ontological sense) as potential political allies and hence can be partners in allied (much the same) struggles. The issue of sexual difference—whether women are like men or not—is viewed through the lens of political struggle. Political struggle and alliance, in relation to sexual or other forms of power, is what produces arenas of similarity and/or connection. On this basis it can be seen as embarking on a reinterpretation of mainstream theory's concern to depict women as flawed men and/or of that theory's account of women as different and inferior. However, this perspective, like the one outlined above, pays limited attention to social and cultural or other comparisons between the supposed characteristics of the sexes. Feminist writers employing such a perspective may possibly perceive women as similar to or different from men but, whatever their views, such writers signal considerable uncertainties about any position which identifies all women as a group. The question of sexual difference is therefore not regarded as a crucial one *in itself*, rather, sexual difference becomes one position, among many, for an emphasis upon potential alliances which challenge forms of power. This approach is usually associated with feminists concerned with race/ethnicity¹³ but also with some socialist and poststructuralist/postmodernist feminisms. The first two groups are more inclined than the latter to see women as much like men (as potential 'partners in struggle') and to construe

specific political alliances between them as more than a temporary, shifting phenomenon.

(e) Finally, certain feminists consider women to be morally superior to men, to be *better* than men. This approach involves an inversion, rather than reworking, of the mainstream conception of the sexes as different but complementary. In this case the hierarchical relationship between the sexes assumed to be associated with sexual difference in mainstream theory is turned upside down. The notion of women as better people is often (though not always) connected to a perception of women as *innately*, intrinsically pre-eminent. Women's inherent advantage may be viewed as being derived from their special moral-ethical make-up, the specific qualities of their bodies and/or the particularity of their shared experience. Such an approach is particularly associated with radical feminism and is likely to be influenced by the North American 1960s/70s antecedents of this form of Western feminism.

CONSIDERING WOMEN AS THE SUBJECT OF THE ANALYSIS

The variety within feminism simply in relation to the issue of sexual difference indicates that a range of alternatives to traditional social and political thought may be offered by feminist theory. Moreover, this variety implies a number of very different contents for feminism, as well as an array of different sorts of political strategies associated with feminism. Once again what is specific to feminism is somewhat unclear. Can feminism be distinguished as anything more than a mere list of frameworks called feminisms, which are so described only because they are critical of conceptions of women and sexual difference in traditional Western thought? Can feminism only be defined negatively and as a mere menu of complaints concerning injustice towards women? Even from the brief illustration of responses to sexual difference, it would appear that some further clarification might be possible. What does seem to be a feature of all these existing feminisms is the *consideration of women as the subject*: women are at the centre of the

analysis. This is not to suggest that feminism is necessarily identified exclusively with women,¹⁴ but, as Delmar notes, the *concept of 'womanhood' is placed centre stage*,¹⁵ even when this concept refers to multiple differences, is distanced from any singular content and/or is distanced from any set content such that it is destabilised.

The process of locating women as the subject rests upon a critique of conventional notions of male superiority and centrality, but the repositioning of women and the critical context for that repositioning both generate analytical possibilities. This new content, focus and orientation within feminist thought (new in terms of mainstream Western thought) is accompanied by an expanded definition of what may be described as 'politics' or 'social' life, an expanded definition of what is to be examined. For example, the domestic, the private realm, bodies, sexuality, emotionality, and children are brought into the analysis, in a move that is appropriately summarised by the slogan, 'the personal's political'.

The limits of social and political thought are shifted and hence new arenas for study come into play. In the process 'Man', the subject of traditional thought, is also inevitably reassessed. Accordingly, the term feminism may be seen as including certain positive and indeed creative characteristics, as well as negative parameters, in its definition.

Despite the significance of this reconsideration of women as the subject of theoretical analysis, of the question of 'womanhood', there is surprisingly little consensus within feminism about what womanhood is or might be. Delmar notes in this context that feminists have never agreed about the concept of womanhood. Indeed some contemporary feminists (such as those concerned with issues of race/ethnicity and/or influenced by poststructuralism/postmodernism) are inclined to reject any singular account of the concept because it does not note differences between women or are suspicious of any such concept.¹⁶ However, the seeming instability of the concept may not undermine its critical status for feminists and may signal a fruitful indeterminacy characteristic of feminism.¹⁷ So what then is feminism and what does it presently offer?

CRITIQUE OF SEXUAL HIERARCHY, CONSIDERATION OF WOMEN AS THE SUBJECT, PLUS DIVERSITY

Delmar asserts that the early women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s largely lacked a developed theoretical approach. Hence the movement could assert without much detailed analysis a notion of unity among women and regard 'feminism' as a framework which reflected that unity. She argues that as feminist thought developed it displayed a concern with building on this notion of unity and attempted to find causes or even a single cause of women's oppression. The intention was to find an explanation for women's oppression which would express women's commonality and thus bind all women together politically. If all women were oppressed by the same thing(s), then feminist theory would be the means to demonstrate the notion of a unified womanhood and the requirement for a common political agenda. Ironically, as feminist thought became ever more elaborate the tensions created by this monolithic approach became evident and feminism's supposedly unified front broke openly into disputes.¹⁸

Whether or not Delmar's point of view is accepted, feminism is now increasingly marked by very diverse accounts outlining different conditions and contexts for particular women in recognition of **differences between women**. Additionally, the search for a unifying cause or causes of women's subordination has become less fashionable. While feminist thought may be broadly defined by its critique of traditional social and political theory and its related consideration of women as the subject of theoretical analysis, 'womanhood' is by no means inevitably viewed as a unified subject. This plurality may itself be just a fashion in feminist thought (though I somehow doubt that differences between women can now be ignored), but the current stress on diversity does complicate answering the question, 'what is feminism?'

Is diversity itself a distinguishing feature of feminism? Perhaps feminist thought may be 'defined' only in some minimalist sense by its critique of sexual hierarchy—of male dominance—and its related engagement with the question of

'womanhood' (however that question is conceived). But, is this a sufficiently detailed or an adequate description of the range of feminisms which exist? More importantly, whether or not diversity is an inevitable element in the feminist 'package', the question remains, 'is that variety without limit?'. The issue of 'boundaries' mentioned at the beginning of the chapter recurs. It is possible that the difficulties which arise in this search for something distinctive, something definable, about feminism—and relatedly for some limits/boundaries—may reveal that the search itself is no longer important or meaningful. Does the process of characterising feminism necessarily assume or demand a unity that feminism has never had and does not need?¹⁹ On the other hand, if feminism's distinctive characteristics are so unimportant or insubstantial—its diversity so limitless or ineffable—perhaps the label itself should be abandoned? Yet such a manoeuvre might return us to the discredited clutches of traditional thought.

These issues are by no means easily resolved. Nonetheless, the term, feminism, does appear to offer more than a merely negative or reactive criticism of mainstream thinking. Indeed, feminism would be a peculiarly empty terminology, a critical stance without a critique, if it were so limitless that it could not be somewhat more specifically characterised. In this context, I suggest that the precarious project of delineating feminism's characteristics cannot be entirely evaded. As Thompson notes, '[r]efusing to engage in definition does not mean that definition is thereby avoided altogether'. Reluctance to clarify explicitly the meaning(s) of feminism—no matter how theoretically principled—has the effect of leaving in place implicit knowledges²⁰ which in my view tend to be largely available to 'those in the know'. Implicit knowledges are inclined to preserve the authority of an already informed elite and make the complexity of feminist thought inaccessible to the broader community. Hence, while the task of defining feminism is a controversial and difficult one, plagued by many problems, it is also both unavoidable and risky to attempt avoidance by omission.²¹ And in any case perhaps we should not be too precious about the dangers of pinning feminism down. The assumption that clarifying the meanings of feminism

inevitably requires a prescriptive search for unity, for a definitive, unshakable core, rather prejudices the task of 'definition'.

As I noted in the Introduction, there is no reason why characterising or defining a term must be equated with a quest for a central unity, a fixed central sameness. When definition is conceived more modestly as being limited to clarification of existing parameters which are unlikely to mesh into some neat overall whole, the issue of what might distinguish feminism becomes less final and more open. Given that we are able to talk about feminism and feminist thought (thinkers) at all, it would seem we are referring to and implicitly 'defining' something(s). This implies that feminism's diversity is not limitless, but not that these distinguishing elements are necessarily permanently or intrinsically fixed or subject to invariable interpretation. Certainly those who feel they do not understand the term and wish to learn more about it are likely to be excluded from debates about the meaning of feminism if there is *no* attempt to clarify how it might be presently characterised. But this concern to clarify does not need to invoke a narrow conception of 'definition' which reduces the meanings attached to feminism by only recognising what is supposedly always the same within feminist writings. Some further analysis of the problems that arise when considering what feminism's distinctive characteristics might be is appropriate at this juncture.

Part II Active ingredients

3

Debates 'within' feminism about feminism

Having discussed the question, 'what is feminism and feminist theory?', largely from the perspective of a comparison with 'other' bodies of thought—that is, from the 'outside' looking in or from the negative viewpoint of feminism's boundaries—this chapter will attempt some further clarification by giving greater attention to feminism's 'internal' characteristics. Feminists, as noted earlier, do not always consider feminism to be clearly separable from 'other' modes of thought, but limiting analysis of the term solely to how it might be compared with and demarcated from 'other' modes does seem to imply that feminism is inevitably just reactive and lacks 'autonomous' creativity. On this ground, it is useful to signal feminism's dimensions as a *positive* terrain. As the two previous chapters have suggested, there is no simple way of presenting what feminism *is*. I have already given some broad indications of these dimensions, but more detail is likely to be helpful. In Part II the focus on 'internal' debates in feminism will be followed by a listing of elements and broad 'overviews' of the field. (The debates are intended to raise points of dispute concerning feminism's dimensions, while the listing and overviews attempt to summarise discussion of these dimensions.) Finally, an account of the diversity of feminism's content is provided in Part III. The aim of these different strategies in the two Parts is to offer several tastes of the ingredients in this volatile cocktail.

FEMINISM BY THE BOOK: DICTIONARY AND OTHER CONCISE DEFINITIONS

Clarifying the meaning of feminism is often undertaken by referring readers to a number of concise definitions, some dictionary-based. These can be handy because they are short, to the point and easily quotable. Hence they have the great advantage that if someone quizzes you about the nature of feminism, you can appear confidently knowledgeable instead of shuffling your feet and mumbling incoherently. Nevertheless, brief statements of definition do tend to reduce the subtle complexity of a messy field of knowledge to neat slogans. Precisely because these statements are clear-cut and concise they are of limited value if you want to grasp the character of the term, feminism, more fully and appreciate its heterogeneous forms. It is actually difficult to do justice to feminism when speaking with unequivocal brevity. (I suggest pointing out this paragraph to anyone who thinks you are intellectually precious when you become flustered in response to unsympathetic demands for a plain and pithy definition.)

Statements of definition are worthy of attention however because, apart from providing a ready reply to any enquiries, they refer to some kind of specific content. This indicates that feminism is not generally seen as merely critical of other bodies of thought, or as a mere mode or arena of inquiry. Indeed, more particularly, 'textbook' definitions all imply that feminist thought cannot simply be distinguished by its questioning focus on the concept of womanhood. Feminist theory, at least according to such definitions, has a **normative** quality—that is, it is concerned with what ought not and what ought to exist in social and political life. Feminism appears to offer ethical/moral 'norms' in terms of a critical stance regarding the position of women and envisioning a more desirable state of affairs. It does not have a neutral attitude towards its focus on womanhood. Though feminist thought is often, especially more recently, acknowledged to contain many tendencies or factions, textbook definitions usually evidence a belief that feminism does consist of some (possibly abiding) *values*. The following definitions make this plain.

[T]here are many individual definitions of feminism, and its fundamental meaning is in dispute. Dictionaries usually define it as the advocacy of women's rights based on a belief in the equality of the sexes, and in its broadest use the word refers to everyone who is aware of and seeking to end women's subordination in any way and for any reason . . . Feminism originates in the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women. (*Encyclopedia of Feminism*, 1987²)

[Feminism] is a doctrine suggesting that women are systematically disadvantaged in modern society and advocating equal opportunities for men and women. (*The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, second edition, 1988³)

There is no political doctrine of feminism *per se*, and the various groups and currents of thought among feminists are often in bitter disagreement. Basically the movement seeks equal political and social rights for women as compared with men. The main common theoretical assumption which is shared by all branches of the movement is that there has been an historical tradition of male exploitation of women. (*The Penguin Dictionary of Politics*, second edition, 1993⁴)

[F]or any viewpoint to count as feminist it must believe that women have been oppressed and unjustly treated and that something needs to be done about this. But it does not follow from this that any consensus is available as to the precise forms this oppression or injustice takes, or as to how they should be remedied. (J. Grimshaw, *Feminist Philosophers*, 1986⁵)

I adopt a general definition of feminism as a perspective that seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex. (E. Porter, *Women and Moral Identity*, 1991⁶)

It is certainly possible to construct a base-line definition of feminism . . . Many would agree that at the very least a feminist is someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would

require a radical change . . . in the social, economic and political order. (R. Delmar, 'What is Feminism?')

Dictionary and other concise definitions of feminism clearly presume that all the varieties of feminist thought are perceived to have some common ground—that is, women have had and continue to have a **rough deal** because of their sex. Such an approach strongly implies that feminist thought has some orientation towards group concerns, rather than simply those of individuals. At the very least a 'reluctant **collectivism**'⁸ is suggested. However, little more is usually said about this apparently shared content within feminism. Feminists obviously do not concur on why 'the deal' for women was and is rough, whether different women might receive different 'deals' or about what might be done to alter their situation. Concise definitions generally suggest that feminism comprises a constant and common **framework**, a kind of **empty shell** into which may be poured any number of different concerns, details and explanations.

FEMINISM ON UNCERTAIN GROUND?: THE ISSUE OF CHANGING CONTENT

Nevertheless, even this minimalist account of a shared content within feminism has been strongly disputed. Though textbook definitions tend to ignore it, there is some disagreement among feminists as to whether feminism has *any* abiding, unchanging features or values.⁹ It is possible to conceive of feminism as simply a critical strategy/stance which is concerned with particular contexts and is short-term in orientation, rather than as the fully-fledged general world-view or doctrine described by dictionaries. In the former version feminism is less a broad (empty shell) framework describing a rough deal(s) for women and more a **question concerning women and power when investigating specific contexts**. Such an account tends towards a provisional content for feminism and depicts feminist thought as a **form of critical endeavour** (at least in the realm of sexual politics and possibly in relation to intersections

between diverse forms of power) rather than a particular framework. Certainly feminism is not viewed as offering a specific social analysis or collection of ideas. In this case only a very nominal normative element is conceded, that is, the critical stance undertaken implies an imperative towards change.

Uncertainties concerning an abiding, even if very broad, common ground for feminism appear to be more often expressed in contemporary feminist writings than in the past. Some recent feminist commentaries suggest, in contrast to most current dictionary and other concise definitions of feminism, that because modern Western twentieth century feminism has changed over time it is no simple matter to find a common set of ideas or thread in feminist thought. These uncertainties *sometimes* reflect an associated view that there is a marked divide between the content of feminist thought in the 1960s and 70s and that in the 1980s and 90s.¹⁰ Indeed the notion of an unproblematic, shared content for feminism—a notion largely taken for granted in dictionaries—for a number of contemporary feminist writers is itself rather more a feature of earlier 1960s/70s feminist thought than central to feminism *per se*.

According to this perspective the elements that in concise definitions are usually distinguished as being basic to all feminism are seen as exactly those belonging to an older and therefore specific variety of feminism. For example, feminism is presented in the definitions given earlier not simply as a general framework which assumes that there is 'something wrong with society's treatment of women' (the 'rough deal' scenario), but additionally as a framework containing two common ideas: first, macrosystemic ill-treatment (terms employed include 'subordination', 'oppression' or 'exploitation') suggesting sustained devastating use of power over women and their subsequent victimisation; second, a conception of a desirable alternative involving 'equality', 'equal opportunities', 'equal rights'. Certain contemporary feminist writers have argued that these two ideas, **oppression** and **equality** (in relation to men), are not so much intrinsic to feminism's content as characteristic of Western feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. They assert that beliefs which constitute

all women as *victims of oppression* and which propose that women should be *equal to men* (much the same as men) are no longer taken as given by the feminists of the 1980s and 1990s. On this basis many, perhaps most, dictionary and other abbreviated statements concerning the content of feminism could be regarded as dated and as making the error of equating earlier versions of feminist thought with all of feminism.

FEMINISM AS A DISTINCT SOCIAL ANALYSIS/POLITICAL STANCE: REVOLUTIONARY OR ECUMENICAL?

Definitions of feminism that can be found in dictionaries tend to depict a reasonably limited content shared by feminists. Many contemporary feminist writings show marked equivocation regarding this notion of a shared content. Nevertheless, there have always been any number of feminists who have been rather more definite about connecting elements within feminism. While in the contemporary context attention to the diversity of women and their situations has led to doubts about describing feminism as some general perspective capable of being applied to all, at the same time considerable concern has arisen that this focus on diversity might involve abdicating from a recognisable political position. Does an emphasis on the variety of possible positions within feminism mean that feminism is weakened and diluted politically? Does a fragmented feminism lose its 'bite'? In this setting writers like Bordo have exhorted feminists not to forget a collective generalised agenda, a shared meaning for feminism: 'too relentless a focus on historical heterogeneity . . . can obscure the trans-historical hierarchical patterns of white, male privilege that have informed the creation of the Western intellectual tradition'.¹¹ On the other hand, the depiction of feminism as a general doctrine that can speak for all women has become associated with ignoring crucial differences between them—such as cultural differences linked to race/ethnicity—and hence any straightforward notion of a shared set of ideas and values is now contentious.

Clearly ignoring differences is now viewed as a great mistake by contemporary feminists but, as Bordo's comment indicates, this view sometimes sits side by side with an equally strong belief that it is a mistake to understate or refuse any concept of a common content for feminism. In this context Grant goes so far as to dispute the amount of attention given to divisions within feminism, arguing that this has led to a common misrepresentation of feminism as 'multicentred and undefinable'. Indeed, according to Grant, feminism has an underlying foundation, a foundation developed by 'early radical feminists . . . as the Women's Liberation Movement was breaking away from the largely Marxist Left'.¹²

bell hooks, though a writer who deals very specifically with questions of difference, is also most definite about what she sees as the dangers of an overly vague, wishy-washy or simply understated account of feminism's content. She objects to broad inclusive definitions of feminism which give little indication of any particular set of ideas. Indeed, hooks argues that an 'anything goes' approach makes the term feminism practically meaningless. On this basis she rejects the view that 'any woman who wants social equality with men *regardless of her political perspective* . . . can label herself feminist' [emphasis added].¹³ hooks, unlike Grant, is not so much preoccupied with pinning feminism down to a particular set of core concepts as she is concerned to exclude what she deems inappropriate to the term. hooks is choosy about what may be called 'feminist' and her answer to the question, 'what is feminism?', involves an identifiable political commitment.

I think we have to fight the idea that somehow we have to refashion feminism so that it appears not to be revolutionary—so that it appears not to be about struggle . . . I say the minute you begin to oppose patriarchy, you're progressive. If our real agenda is altering patriarchy and sexist oppression, we are talking about a left, revolutionary movement.¹⁴ [emphasis added]

In this way hooks sets herself at odds with more broadly-based accounts of feminism in dictionaries and other concise definitions, as well as with those contemporary writers who express uncertainties concerning a shared content for feminism no

matter how broadly defined. Moreover, she offers an alternative perspective to those feminists who support linking feminism to a broadly shared content intending that feminism have **broad, even mass, appeal** (such as Naomi Wolf¹⁵), or those that at the very least refuse to deny the label 'feminist' to approaches with which they disagree politically (for instance, the **anti-sectarian** sentiments of Alison Jaggar¹⁶). Finally, hooks' viewpoint concerning the particular political and theoretical character of feminism may be distinguished from those approaches which assume a distinction between feminist politics and theory, thereby allowing for a range of political positions under feminism's broad umbrella. Davies, for example, argues that feminism involves a **common broad-based political agenda in contrast to its diverse theoretical beliefs**.¹⁷ For hooks, the political agenda may be shared but there are manifest limits on the extent of political and theoretical diversity that may be termed feminist.

hooks is a clear proponent of the view that feminism is a distinct political stance. Nonetheless, it must be recognised that feminists who value mass appeal, as well as those who merely reject hooks' concern to exclude non-revolutionary political perspectives, may also offer avowed conceptions of feminism as a committed and definitive political stance. Such examples show that, for some feminists, feminism may well represent a specific form of political thinking but it is a more ecumenical politics than hooks would accept. In this context, it is evident that discussions about the nature of feminism are likely to run up against the question of whether its content is intrinsically radical and in the vanguard of social and political thinking, or potentially populist. Furthermore, the problem of the identity of feminism's politics tends almost invariably to raise a related point concerning the identity of feminism's 'membership'.

SPEAKING OF FEMINISM: MALE FEMINISTS?

There is and has always been much dispute in modern Western feminist thinking about whether feminism is revolutionary in its orientation, and hence likely to be at some distance from

popular opinion. Are feminists bound to be radicals? remains an ongoing point of debate in considerations of where or how to draw a distinction between what is and what is not feminism.¹⁸ Intimately connected with this issue is what can and cannot be said and *by whom*. Oddly enough there seems less and less dispute about the latter problem. It would seem that more recently feminism has been defined not simply as a particular framework, set of ideas or social analysis or form of critical questioning around a focus on women and power, but also as representing a **specific body of experience**. This body of experience is taken to refer to the impact of *being female, having a female body* in Western society. Feminism is not typically perceived to be an unattached disembodied critical approach, range of ideas or politics, it would seem; rather feminism is almost invariably (a) female (discourse). Despite the fact that feminists are increasingly inclined to view womanhood, female identity and female experience as diverse and unstable, notions of an embodied identity and experience are now more than ever placed as necessary to feminism's content, in the sense of defining who is a feminist. Currently a critical aspect of feminism's content appears to be that it is 'spoken' by women. (This is evident even in the work of contemporary feminists who raise uncertainties about the notion of any ready-made shared content for feminism.¹⁹) While mainstream social and political theory is commonly viewed from within feminism as being male, feminist theory looks more womanish by the minute. As Delmar notes,

In 1866, J.S. Mill could be welcomed as an adequate representative of women's aspirations by the first women's suffrage societies. As recently as 1972 Simone de Beauvoir could refer to feminists as 'those women or even men who fight to change the position of women, in liaison with and yet outside the class struggle, without totally subordinating that change to a change in society'. Now, in the mid-eighties, it is practically impossible to speak of 'male feminism'. Feminism is increasingly understood by feminists as a way of thinking created by, for, and on behalf of women, as 'gender-specific'. Women are its subjects, its

enunciators, the creators of its theory, of its practice and of its language.²⁰ [emphasis added]

In the wake of ever-growing doubts about what, if anything, the category of 'woman' refers to, it is unclear whether this 'intensification of emphasis on women'²¹ is possible to sustain. That emphasis renders the question, 'what is feminism?', increasingly dependent on the issue of 'what is woman?', on the conception of a supposedly specific female identity or body of experience distinct from that available to men. Is feminism, despite its diversity, increasingly identified by the concept, woman, such that it is an **embodied theory** and not just a floating framework or set of ideas available to all? But if the category 'woman' is by no means straightforward, how can a clear dividing line be drawn between the sexes? Are men positioned 'outside' of the identity and experience associated with women, which means they *cannot* partake of that which constitutes feminism and hence cannot describe themselves as feminists? Delmar's historical notes on changing views among feminists suggest that although the answer seems generally in the affirmative at this time, it may not remain so.

Additionally, despite the apparent accord on the issue of men's relation to feminism, there are some important dissenting views. Certain feminists concerned with race and/or ethnicity and conceptions of difference, for example, assert that men 'must be part of the feminist movement' or refer to 'male feminists'.²² In this setting, bell hooks is sharply critical of broad-based accounts of feminism's political orientation but on the other hand includes 'everybody' in feminism's content and membership. This inclusivity is specifically linked to engaging with 'black men in the struggle for their lives' and to challenging crude conceptions of feminism as 'anti-male, anti-family'.²³

Men may well be included once again under the banner of feminism as feminist theory develops over time (rather than being regarded more in the role of potential barrackers). However, without some recognition of women's social and political positioning as distinct from that of men—that is, some employment of a notion of women as a distinguishable group—it is hard to imagine any meaning for feminism as a theory/politics

of change. From this point of view it seems difficult to erase a sexual dividing line of some sort—which brings us back to the possible benefits of a sexually exclusive focus and membership for feminism. While a feminism which examines sexual difference (as well as other differences) but also includes both sexes in its membership is undoubtedly imaginable (as is evident above), the stronger the emphasis on the significance and meaning of a feminine identity and bodily experience in feminist writings the more likely feminism is to be located as a women's movement, as speaking with a woman's voice.

Overviews of feminist thought

A SCHEMATIC LISTING OF ELEMENTS

Having outlined some of the debates within contemporary Western feminism concerning its 'internal' characteristics, it seems that the number of relatively uncontroversial elements we might identify as distinguishing the 'diet' of feminist thought is rather small and that even these are neither fixed nor likely to involve only one interpretation. I have suggested that the field of feminism attends to or includes: (1) a critique of misogyny/sexual hierarchy; (2) a focus on consideration of women as the subject of the analysis, which may include references to differences between them and even question the status of the grouping itself; (3) an expanded account of and altered orientation to what may be discussed within analysis of social and political life—compared with traditional thought; (4) diverse perspectives, manifestly represented by certain forms of debate,¹ some of which are described in chapter 3; (5) some recourse to a normative imperative at least in relation to challenging sexual hierarchy (and frequently other intersecting social hierarchies), which may be implicit but more often is clearly evident²; (6) some, at least minimal, element of collectivism; (7) an inclination to view feminism as particularly relevant to or resonant with women, though men may also be seen as benefiting from and (by some) as party to its concerns.

However, such an account of the 'cuisine' does not quite seem to summon up my sense of the ever-growing, volatile

fluidity I associate with the term, feminism. This plentiful exuberance, so distant from the apparently abstemious frugality of a mere listing of ingredients/dimensions, is not easily susceptible to any form of description. And, more problematically, employment of this listing as a clarifying device to explain the complexity of feminism might suggest an overstated commonality among feminists as well as an overly neat set of 'core' elements for feminism. Many feminists are suspicious when accounts of feminism seem not merely to describe but to prescribe what can be included (and hence what cannot be included) within it. They sense dangers like internal policing of the field and its advocates, as well as the potential to confine the unstable vitality of its meanings. I should make it clear at this point that although a schematic listing of ingredients does contain certain problems, such as the potentiality for prescription in advance, these ingredients are stirred and shaken by various 'cooks'. The 'cuisine' of feminism generates a liberal, indeed intoxicating brew of interpretations.

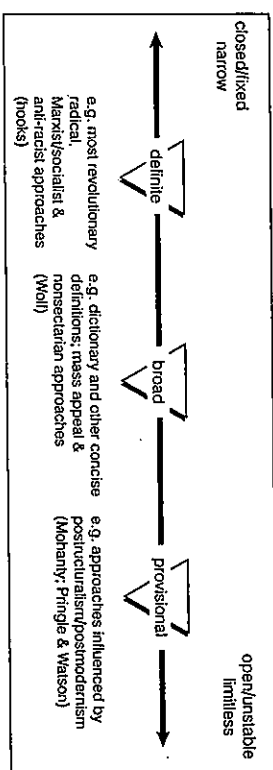
The parameters outlined above are clearly only relevant to existing feminist work. Their variable interpretation and interaction with one another tends to resist any reduction of feminism to a singular central meaning. Nevertheless, perhaps another approach to the problem is in order. On this basis I will attempt to draw together some of the issues raised in the discussion of 'debates' (chapter 3) and present them visually (Figure 4.1). The initial map can then be employed in conjunction with a more complex visual account of the various feminisms/feminist groupings (Figure 4.2). Together these two rather different pictures are intended to provide a broad *overview* of perspectives on feminism. Such overviews offer another outlook on the question, 'what is feminism?', and can therefore be considered alongside the schematic listing of elements described above. What I am attempting to stress here is that analysis of feminist thought does not simply involve dealing with a plurality of 'types' of feminism—a diverse content³—but additionally requires consideration of a plurality of standpoints on how to undertake the analysis—that is, consideration of a range of methodological alternatives.

FEMINISM AS A CONTINUUM: AN INITIAL MAP

Outlining the characteristics of contemporary Western feminism/feminist thought as a 'positive terrain' appears to be a difficult business, even without including much detailed content. While it is extremely useful to be able to provide a generalised overview of feminism's 'internal' dimensions, this is not a simple narrative task. For this reason it is worth attempting to explore the possibilities of an overview in terms of a continuum. On the other hand, any conception of a continuum representing the dimensions of feminist perspectives is limited by its linear emphasis. This emphasis tends to restrict the overview to an account of various responses to a particular—even if broad—aspect of the field. I have chosen to attend to one of the broadest themes within feminism capable of distinguishing among feminist approaches, enabling both some delineation of the scope of the field and some ability to discriminate within it. The continuum attempts to demonstrate the range of responses within feminism to the *question of the definition of feminism itself*. Positions within feminism stretch from those adopting more explicit and specific political commitments which demand less widely inclusive conceptions of feminism's defining qualities, to those stressing flexibility and diversity related to an emphasis upon historical, local and contextual specificity. Feminist approaches are not, however, to be found along the whole length of the continuum presented in Figure 4.1; they are also not to be found at either extremity. Feminists do not apparently hold views of feminism which perceive it as having utterly fixed dimensions or content nor do they regard it as limitless and without any distinguishing features. Though the continuum in Figure 4.1 does not contain a *summary* of the dimensions or content of feminist thought, it can give an indication of its *reach*.⁴

At the left of the continuum we find notions of feminism as a definite set of ideas or social analysis. In this perspective feminist thought can be defined comparatively narrowly and is conceived as a relatively 'closed' approach requiring a commitment to a revolutionary politics which is explicitly collectivist. In the middle of the continuum are broad definitions of

Figure 4.1 Views of feminism's scope



feminism, including dictionary and other abbreviated accounts, as well as notions of feminism as either an approach with potentially mass appeal or a non-sectarian collection of ideas or forms of analysis. These broader accounts of feminism are somewhat less likely to attend to political commitment than those described as offering a 'definite' view of feminism's content and, when this commitment is a concern, allow for a wider variety of political positions to be included in what counts as feminist. The effect of this ecumenical breadth is to include positions ranging from those which clearly refer to collective or group concerns to those which largely attend to individual attainment and assume a minimalist approach to collectivism.

The most 'open' definitions of feminism's scope are depicted on the right of the continuum. Here, feminist thought is viewed as having highly contextualised and provisional dimensions or content. Rather than a specific set of ideas or forms of analysis, we encounter approaches that tend to depict feminism as a mode of critical inquiry in the arena of sexual politics, especially politics described in theoretical or intellectual terms. Although there may be some antagonism to binding feminism to a particular politics or ethics, the 'provisional' definitions include many writers whose works make it clear that a feminism which is open to a changing content, and hence rejects a singular political viewpoint, is not necessarily politically promiscuous.

Finally, it is important to recognise that although there are approaches to feminism which may be distinguished by their concern with the provisional nature of feminism's dimensions and content, these same approaches may not be so provisional about the membership of feminism. Indeed of all the positions outlined on the continuum only some within the 'definite' and 'broad' groupings are more 'open' about men being regarded as feminists or being somehow included under the banner of feminism.⁵ Characterisations of feminism across the board are more likely to be circumspect about who can speak feminism than about what can be said.

This continuum emphasises the point that when we attempt to define or map feminist theory it is not just a question of merely noting that there are many kinds of feminism. The problem is that there also many differing statements about *which* kinds are to be included and differing explanations regarding *why* these kinds might be included.

FEMINISM AS A PRAGMATIC LIST OF VIEWPOINTS: TODAY'S MENU

The overview continuum demonstrates the lively complexity of the field, the variety of ways in which contemporary Western feminism might be explored. But this initial 'map' provides only a very few signposts and barely hints at the diversity of richly detailed 'landscapes' which await the explorer. Given the difficulty of providing an overall map of feminist thought, I have suggested previously that it may be simpler and more helpful to forgo the desire to see the whole picture. Instead I think there are advantages in laying out several different ways of considering feminism. So far we have examined how feminists demarcate feminism from traditional thought, outlined several broad parameters in that context, depicted some significant debates and provided broad overviews in the form of a listing of elements and a picture of feminism's scope. Another very much more common method for discussing feminism involves a menu of 'types' of feminism. Perhaps it is now possible to define feminism by listing its constituent viewpoints.

Presenting a mere catalogue of the perspectives that have been described as feminist might not seem a very analytically insightful way of characterising feminism and it certainly means that from hereon I adopt without further discussion a most inclusive account. However, if for the purpose of viewing all possible approaches we do not disallow any, definition then becomes a pragmatic exercise, putting to one side agonising about what might be included in the 'best' definition. And so, in order to halt pedantic angst, from here to the end of the book let us be pragmatic. After you have considered all the alternative methods offered in this book for defining or characterising feminism *you* can then decide for yourself which of them singly or in conjunction have been helpful in clarifying the term. Additionally, as you read the accounts of the 'types' of feminism to follow, you may wish to ponder—in the light of the discussion so far—whether or not any of them fit into *your* definition or map of feminism. For now what is important is an awareness of considerable dispute within feminism about the nature of feminist thought.

Feminism or feminist theory defined simply as a pragmatic menu of constituent viewpoints can be viewed as the sum of all the different perspectives described so far, a loose collection with no necessary overarching connection assumed between viewpoints, beyond perhaps broadly interpreted elements listed at the beginning of this chapter. This still leaves much room for debate. Feminist thought is presently in a very fluid state and you, as much as anyone else, can develop an original position or new synthesis of existing approaches. The intention of the remainder of the book is to assist you in clarifying your understanding of, and your own position in relation to, the many different approaches within feminist thought.

THE TERMS OF THE 'PRAGMATIC MENU'—A LIST OF WHAT?

Before a pragmatic list of the varieties of feminism can be presented, there are a few further issues that arise. There is little disagreement among feminists that many kinds of feminist

thought exist but feminists have offered widely different accounts of the ways in which they are divided and whether or not these divisions are important. Feminists disagree therefore on how to label themselves, on how to present the different kinds of feminist thought. For example, Karen **Offen** simply divides (Western) feminism into two: **relational** and **individualist**. In the first instance she describes feminists, including feminists prior to the nineteenth century, who have focused on egalitarianism in heterosexual familial settings. 'Relational' feminists, according to Offen, are concerned with a notion of equality which pays attention to women's sex-specific positioning, that is, women's distinct position as women (largely related to child-bearing and nurturing capacities). 'Individualist' feminism, on the other hand, includes a group of feminists who focus upon a quest for personal individual independence and downplay sex-linked qualities.⁶

Elizabeth **Grosz** provides a rather different analysis of the field. She, in common with Offen, divides feminism into two major strands but refers to **equality** and **difference**. Feminists oriented toward 'equality' are described as asserting that women should be able to do what men do. Grosz also employs the term, 'egalitarian feminists' in relation to this grouping and mentions that, for those familiar with more commonly used labels, equality feminism includes liberal (egalitarian) and socialist feminists. Feminists concerned with 'difference' or 'autonomy', on the other hand, recognise and value difference—there being no expectation that women should do what men do. Such feminists support conceptions of difference without hierarchy, difference without a norm, let alone a male norm.⁷ Radical, postmodernist/poststructuralist and certain psychoanalytic feminists might be included under this umbrella term.

The work of Offen and Grosz alerts us to the number of ways and the different labels which might describe aspects of Western feminism.⁸ In line with earlier comments regarding the advantages of employing a method which is both pragmatic and broadly inclusive, allowing the reader to make decisions regarding definitional niceties, I have chosen a more common and mundane mode of analysis to divide up feminists. Figure

4.2 (see page 48) refers to the various schools or traditions which enables easy comparisons to be made between the descriptions and interpretations contained both in this book and others. In particular this mode of analysis provides some continuity, and hence points of comparison, with a range of previous overview texts such as those by Jean Bethke **Elshtain**, Alison **Jaggar**, Josephine **Donovan** and Rosemarie **Tong**.⁹ These writers employ more extensively dissected accounts of feminism than the comparatively concise two-sided models outlined by Offen and Grosz, describing between four to six major feminist approaches. I refer to seven¹⁰: liberal, radical, Marxist/socialist, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic (the latter including 'French feminists'), postmodern/poststructuralist, and feminists concerned with race and/or ethnicity.

THE SCHOOLS/TRADITIONS MODE OF ANALYSIS: SOME PROBLEMS

While the number of feminisms outlined may seem bewildering, some awareness of the schools or traditions is invariably assumed in feminist theoretical writings. All the same it is a categorising approach which has its share of problems, not least of which is the tendency to understate the extent to which individual writers may not fit neatly under one 'label' and/or may change their views over time. In this sense, this methodology might be said to impose a rather too neat order on the typology of feminism and downplay 'cross-overs' in strands of feminist thinking. Or, alternatively, it could be argued that presenting feminism in the form of a list of schools or traditions encourages an overly fragmented picture of feminist theory which obscures an underlying shared core. These are both important criticisms and ones that deserve at least a cursory response clarifying the reasons for adopting such an approach.

In relation to the first concern, Stacey has asserted that a 'category' oriented analysis of feminism may ignore the difficulty that some viewpoints are not so easily distinguished."

Moreover, it can be argued that labelling may discourage the reader from creatively assembling bits and pieces from any combination of or all feminist viewpoints. While I have some sympathy with Stacey's remarks on the problems of labelling and of neat, apparently fixed 'types' of feminism, in my view these problems are only of significance to those already steeped in the field. For those new to feminist theory, guidelines about general patterns are of considerable help. Once some grasp of these patterns has been obtained it might then be appropriate to consider Stacey's important point about the limits of any form of categorisation.

In my work as a teacher of feminist thought I have certainly found it more useful to stress that one can pick and choose aspects of the various feminist viewpoints than to break up the groupings before these are well understood. In other words, the aim of this book is to emphasise the flexibility of the reader rather than focusing on the fluidity of feminist approaches. In my experience, this is a more accessible starting point. In both Figure 4.2 and the commentary to follow, an account of a number of feminist groupings or schools is outlined. These schools are not clear-cut, not all feminist writers fit neatly into only one category and, most importantly, your own views—like those of many within the field—may cross over the groupings.

With regard to the second concern, Grant has stated that presenting the field of feminism as a list of schools or traditions underplays what is shared within feminism and hence involves a prior judgment about the fragmented nature of the field which is both dangerous and misleading.¹² It is evident from earlier discussions (chapter 3) that no account of feminism can ignore those analyses which espouse the notion of a shared content for feminism but, what is regarded as specific to feminism, the extent to which this specificity is held in common in the same way by different feminist writers, and how it is held in common, are contested. Methodologies employed to delineate feminism are certainly required to indicate the possibilities for a shared content, but they cannot be framed by a view that even considering diversity in feminism produces a dubious or inaccurate picture of the field. Just as the issue of shared content is an aspect of feminism, so too

are the several 'types' of feminism. Furthermore, it is important that the reader be offered some account of the different versions of feminism since without this knowledge many texts and discussions in the field would be incomprehensible. Nonetheless, it should be kept in mind that for certain feminists like Grant, these 'types' give an appearance of fragmentation which tends to cloud or mask an underlying commonality in feminism. After reading this book it may be helpful to reassess—in the light of the different criticisms offered by Stacey and Grant among others—the benefits and limits of characterising feminism in terms of a list of commonly accepted varieties.

COMMENTARY TO FIGURE 4.2

Having decided on how to go about considering the *content* of feminism, it is difficult to outline the many viewpoints that may be included under the term without reducing them to mere slogans and without committing the error of reducing whole traditions or schools to a perspective that may not be held by all theorists in that tradition. Although the various traditions do become more established over time, newer feminist trajectories are often quite messy and are not so straightforwardly summarised. Consequently older traditions or schools in Figure 4.2 are described as 'feminisms' and theoretical approaches involving new elements are described in terms of groups of 'feminists'. This distinction is suggested because the latter do not form particularly coherent collections. Attempts to describe such groups in terms of a distinct perspective (as an 'ism') are likely to falter because the description may well fit only some aspects of the work of the writers included in that collection. This problem is especially evident among the so-called 'French feminists' (the 'écriture féminine' school), postmodern/poststructuralist feminists and feminists attending to race/ethnicity. The tendency of more recent feminist writers in particular not to fit comfortably within collective agendas and to retain comparatively idiosyncratic (individualistic?) viewpoints suggests the need for cautious

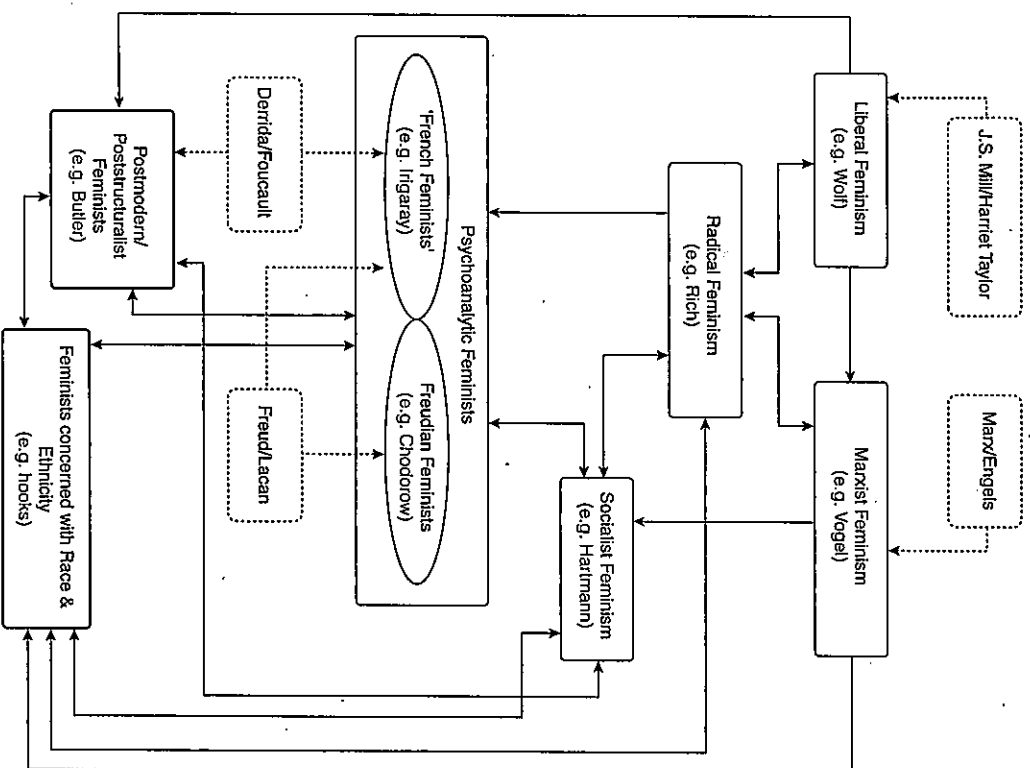
'labelling'. On this basis it seems appropriate to indicate **group linkages**—loosely formed schools of thought—but not to name still emerging approaches as 'feminisms'. While feminist views concerned with race/ethnicity have been around at least as long as any other type of feminism, I have described them as a grouping rather than an 'ism' because their writings are very diverse, only broadly linked, and include some developing trajectories, such as 'postcolonial' frameworks.

Figure 4.2 offers an overview of the 'pragmatic menu' of contemporary Western feminists/isms and, together with the expanded commentary provided in chapters 5 to 8, it will give an impression of the major schools or kinds of feminism. For those readers with more background in feminist thought, the combination of visual map and commentary will hopefully provide a concise picture of established as well as more heterogeneous, recent, approaches. To assist in 'tasting' the current dishes on the feminist menu, the commentary presented in the following chapters briefly outlines an account of each feminist school and how it is connected to others: a somewhat compressed discussion of the first three feminisms (liberal, radical, Marxist/socialist) and fuller descriptions of the next four (Freudian, Lacanian, postmodern/poststructuralist, race/ethnicity) are given. The disparity in the length of the summaries is because the latter four viewpoints are less widely known. Within this group of four the length of summaries also varies because of differences in their accessibility and the range of knowledges assumed in them. Some are relatively less established in the English speaking world and often draw upon a number of difficult theoretical knowledges. Hence it is difficult to find them summarised in a brief accessible form elsewhere. The outline of postmodern/poststructuralist feminist work is particularly lengthy on this account because of its increasing impact in other feminist approaches.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, this particular presentation (an overview of the content of feminism in terms of seven feminist viewpoints described as traditions or schools) is not the only or inevitable way of characterising this material. It has been a matter of judgment and pragmatic choice, framed by my own teaching. I regard other aspects of Figure 4.2 as more

controversial. I refer here to the illustration of 'flows of influence' between various viewpoints. Sometimes a flow of influence is presented as relatively unimportant or non-existent (represented by no connecting arrow), sometimes as largely one-way (\rightarrow), and sometimes as involving a degree of mutual interaction (\leftrightarrow). My assessment of the existence and extent of links between viewpoints is not crucial to new readers but will probably be of interest to specialists or those wishing to undertake more extensive study in this field.

Figure 4.2 Overview of feminism's content—current feminist viewpoints



Part III What's on
the menu?

5

Starters on the feminist menu: liberal, radical and Marxist/socialist feminisms

A crucial beginning for the different orientations of the several feminisms lies in differences between three major traditions. These traditions, like the ones that have come after them, are not discrete, and many feminists use a little from some or all of them. They are liberal feminism, radical feminism and Marxist/socialist feminism.

LIBERAL FEMINISM

Liberal feminism is the most widely known form of feminist thought and it is often seen as synonymous with feminism *per se*—that is, responses to the question ‘what is feminism?’ or ‘are you a feminist?’ commonly draw upon liberal versions of feminist thought. It is certainly the ‘moderate’ or ‘mainstream’ face of feminism. In this approach the explanation for women’s position in society is seen in terms of **unequal rights** or ‘artificial’ barriers to women’s participation in the public world, beyond the family and household. Thus in liberal feminist thought there is a focus on the **public sphere**, on legal, political and institutional struggles for the rights of individuals to compete in the public marketplace. In liberal feminism there is also a critical concern with the value of individual ‘autonomy’ and ‘freedom’ from supposedly unwarranted restrictions by others. Though sometimes this freedom from social restraint is understood in terms of freedom from ‘interference’ by the

state or government, more often it is seen as freedom from the bonds of custom or prejudice. Public citizenship and the attainment of **equality with men** in the public arena is central to liberal feminism.

There is a presumption of **sameness** between men and women in liberal feminist thought. Liberal feminist political strategies reflect a conception of a **fundamentally sexually undifferentiated human nature**—that is, since women are much the same as men, women should be able to do what men do.¹ Given an assumed commonality between the sexes and the focus on access to what men have in society, liberal feminists do not perceive the sexes to be 'at war' or dismiss that which has been associated with men. Not surprisingly, liberal feminism involves an emphasis upon **reform** of society rather than revolutionary change. A well-known example of this kind of approach may be found in the more recent work of Naomi Wolf.² Wolf promulgates what she calls 'power feminism', a feminism based on a sense of entitlement and which embraces monetary and other forms of 'success' in existing society. She explicitly rejects strategies which might be less palatable to 'mainstream' women (and men), effectively dismissing more critical or revolutionary agendas (and is seen by some as offering an increasingly conservative version of liberal feminism). In crude terms, liberal feminists such as Wolf want access to opportunities associated with men. They want what men have got, rather than questioning its value in any thorough sense. This has led to accusations from both other feminists and anti-feminists that liberal feminism suffers from a kind of 'penis envy'. Whether or not this is true it has produced practical benefits for women.

Liberal feminism draws on (but also modifies) **welfare liberalism**³—a form of liberal political thought influenced by writers such as J.S. Mill⁴—insofar as this feminist tradition does not challenge the organisation of modern Western societies but rather suggests some **redistribution** of benefits and opportunities. Liberal feminists also take from welfare liberalism a limited acknowledgment of social or collective responsibility, that is, they accept a need for some (possibly government) intervention in the competition between individuals for social

opportunities and reject so-called *laissez-faire* liberalism⁵ which argues that freedom and justice are best served by nominal government and that a just and natural inequality will emerge if individuals are left to their own devices.

Welfare liberals support certain restricted forms of state intervention on the assumption that, since unregulated inequality may lead to overly harsh social outcomes for some, a society in which inequality is tempered with benevolence towards those who are disadvantaged or less fortunate better advances the welfare of all. Welfare liberals also consider that certain unwarranted barriers hinder the emergence of an authentic merit-based (just and natural) hierarchy. Liberal feminism follows this line of thinking in specifically asserting that women are not fundamentally different to men and yet are denied opportunities on the basis of their sex. Sex therefore constitutes an unwarranted disadvantage, a barrier to competition and the recognition of merit. Hence women's position in society may be the legitimate subject of government intervention.

In this setting liberal feminism provides a framework for the development of 'moderate' feminist policies and practices which can be employed, for example, by government agencies. However, the extent of liberal feminist interest in links with government is very context specific, ranging from the comparatively greater emphasis on individual rights and freedoms—as against connections with the state—in North American liberal feminism to the myriad of interactions between feminists and government to be found in Australia.⁶ But, whatever the context, given liberal feminism's concern with working for attainable social change within the existing confines of modern Western societies, it is not surprising that most feminists have perforce made use of this framework.⁷ Indeed liberal feminism is the most commonly borrowed—even if only temporarily—approach in the feminist pantheon.

RADICAL FEMINISM

Radical feminism, unlike liberal and Marxist/socialist feminisms, is not drawn directly from previous bodies of

'malestream' thought. It offers a real challenge to and rejection of the liberal orientation towards the public world of men. Indeed it gives a positive value to womanhood rather than supporting a notion of assimilating women into arenas of activity associated with men. Radical feminism pays attention to **women's oppression as women** in a social order dominated by men. According to this approach, the distinguishing character of women's oppression is their oppression as women, not as members of other groups such as their social class. Hence, the explanation for women's oppression is seen as lying in **sexual oppression**. Women are oppressed because of their sex.⁸

That notion of shared oppression is intimately connected with a strong emphasis on the **sisterhood** of women. While differences between women are sometimes—particularly in more recent writings—acknowledged, there is a strategic focus on women's similarities and the pleasures of forming political and other bonds between women in a world where such bonds are marginalised or dismissed. In this context, **Johnson** comments: '[o]ne of the basic tenets of Radical Feminism is that any woman . . . has more in common with any other woman—regardless of class, race, age, ethnic group, nationality—than any woman has with any man'.⁹

Such an agenda encourages some degree of 'separatism' from men, which may range from simply supporting other women to living as far as possible in the exclusive company of women. Furthermore, this identification with women and rejection of male dominance involves both a critique of the existing organisation of heterosexuality as prioritising men and a recognition of lesbianism as a challenge to that priority.¹⁰ Radical feminism stresses that in a social order dominated by men the process of changing sexual oppression must, as a political necessity, involve a focus on women. And because radical feminism recommends putting women first, making them the primary concern, this approach is inclined to accord lesbianism 'an honoured place' as a form of 'mutual recognition between women'.¹¹

Sexual oppression is seen as the oldest and even the most profound form of inequality.¹² Radical feminists often view

other forms of power—for example, unequal power relations within capitalism—as derived from **patriarchy** (social systems of male domination, the rule of men).¹³ Given the significance of patriarchy to radical feminism, it is appropriate to provide a brief account of the term. Although the subject of considerable debate, this term remains widely used and refers to the systemic and/or systematic 'organisation of male supremacy and female subordination'. **Stacey** summarises three major instances of its usage: historical, 'materialist' and psychological. She notes that some feminists employ patriarchy to trace the historical emergence and development of systems of male domination. Others use the term to explore the sexual division of labour (that is, to explore the 'material'—or concrete structural, bodily, physical—aspects of social organisation which divide up and differentially value tasks and activities on the basis of sex). And, finally, certain feminists perceive the term as enabling a recognition of the deep-rooted nature of male dominance in the very formation and organisation of our selves (the psychological or unconscious internalising of social patterns of sexual hierarchy).¹⁴ Radical feminists draw upon all three of these usages of patriarchy as well as others and are among the most committed to its continued employment because of its centrality to their analysis.

Radical feminists adopted an approach in which the recognition of sexual oppression (patriarchy) is crucial, in part at least, as a counter to the politics of the radical left in the 1960s and 1970s which either ignored sexual inequality or deemed it of secondary importance.¹⁵ Radical feminism describes sexual oppression as *the* or at the very least *a fundamental form of oppression* (usually the former) and the **primary oppression for women**.¹⁶ Men as a group are considered to be the beneficiaries of this systematic and systemic form of power. Radical feminists state the most strongly of all feminist traditions that **men as a group are the 'main enemy'**.¹⁷ In radical feminism all men are unambiguously viewed as having power over at least some women. Indeed this approach commonly suggests that any man is in a position of power relative to all women, and possibly some men.¹⁸ Perhaps the most useful way of summarising this point, to allow for some potential

differences within radical feminism, is to state that radical feminists perceive all men without exception as sharing in the benefits of a social system of male supremacy (patriarchy). This 'does not mean that all men are invariably oppressive to all women all the time',¹⁹ nor does this approach deny that some men at least may struggle to overcome this system of domination.

Radical feminism's strong interest in recovering or discovering positive elements in femininity (asserting in essence that it is good to be a woman and to form bonds with other women), in combination with its location of men as the beneficiaries of sexual power relations, results in a relatively sharp division drawn between men and women. In Elizabeth Grosz's terms this is a **feminism of difference**. Radical feminists usually present an historically continuous, clear-cut difference between men and women. Sometimes this is argued to be the result of an ontological (essential, intrinsic, innate) difference.²⁰ However, other radical feminist writers note that 'male domination is a social structure' and not the consequence of some in-built male propensity, even if motivations towards mastery are 'typically male'.²¹ In other words, feminists in this tradition see a difference between men and women as inevitable (given by nature) or at least as so established historically that it is very deeply embedded.

Since radical feminist thinkers consider sexual oppression to be profoundly entrenched, frequently depicting it as the *original* form of coercive power,²² they also present the social and political changes required to overthrow the system of male domination as far-reaching. As you would expect given the name, radical feminism generally advocates a **revolutionary** model of social change. However, the proposed revolutionary change in the organisation of power relations between the sexes is not described in terms of a single cataclysmic moment, but rather as the consequence of the cumulative effect of many small-scale actions. Moreover, revolutionary practice—conceived as *the* basis of radical feminist theory—is undertaken with an emphasis on small group organisation rather than formalised centrally administered structures.²³

Radical feminists may pursue a revolutionary agenda but, like liberal feminists, they stress practical political strategies. Nevertheless, in contrast to liberal feminist frameworks, radical feminism is inclined to be suspicious of government intervention, perceiving the state itself as being intrinsically patriarchal, and also tends to focus on the **politics of the 'private' sphere**, in particular sexuality, motherhood and bodies. Given the central importance granted the category of sex in this revolutionary politics it is not surprisingly to find a particular concern with **control over women's bodies**. One example of such an emphasis may be found in the work of Robyn Rowland and her stringent critique of new reproductive technologies like IVF (*in vitro* fertilisation).²⁴ Radical feminism usually deals with ideas, attitudes or psychological patterns and cultural values rather than with the economics of male domination,²⁵ and the (sexed) body is often the only concretely 'material' element in the analysis.

'Material', as noted earlier in this section, is a terminology that refers to concrete structural, including economic and technological, and bodily or physical aspects of social organisation. Radical feminism's relative disinterest in 'material' social issues such as waged work was, and is, often the subject of rebuke by liberal and Marxist/socialist feminists. However, radical feminists in many ways pioneered a stress on the significance of the politics of bodily materiality within feminist thought which is now well accepted within most feminist approaches. Their focus on the body as a critical site of oppression for women but also as representing women's difference and therefore to be celebrated, stands in sharp contrast to liberal feminism's general aim of reducing or preferably eradicating attention to bodies and bodily difference as politically retrograde.²⁶

Radical and Marxist/socialist feminists have more in common here in the sense of acknowledging that social life is embodied but, as will shortly become evident, the inclination of the latter feminist approach is frequently to limit interest in embodiment to the labouring body of the paid (or less often, the unpaid) worker and more specifically to investigation of the sexually differentiated activities and jobs undertaken by women

waged workers. Radical feminists tend to leave workforce activities to one side but are far less unidimensional regarding the body, ranging over sexuality, sexual violence, the (maternal) reproductive body, the feminine body as a source for creativity and spirituality and the meaning of an embodied self (feminine subjectivity and identity). Indeed, unlike Marxist/socialist feminism, radical feminism conceives the body—and, in particular, the sexually specific body—as critical to social analysis. Sexual difference (evident in, for example, women's capacity to give birth) is not socially insignificant nor something that will become irrelevant once old-fashioned prejudices restricting women's opportunities are abandoned.

Rather than perceiving the (sexed) body as mere, inanimate 'meat' separate from social practices, power relations or social change, this form of feminism stresses the interconnection between bodies and society. The agenda of radical feminist writings is to counter women's supposedly natural, biological, inferiority and subordination within patriarchal society by asserting their at least equal (or superior) status in relation to men: a crucial aspect of that agenda is for women to **gain control over their own bodies/biology** and relatedly to **value and celebrate women's bodies**.²⁷ Many aspects of radical feminism's emphasis on body politics have been taken up with enthusiasm by emerging groupings of feminists, such as psychoanalytic and postmodern/poststructuralist feminists. In focusing on the issue of 'control' over bodies, radical feminism is inclined to distinguish the self (who might take control) from the body (the object of that control) in certain respects.²⁸ By comparison, the latter groupings tend to give more attention to the ways in which the self and body are indistinguishably bound up.

MARXIST/SOCIALIST FEMINISM

The third major feminist tradition is Marxist/socialist feminism. Marxist feminism was an influential school of Western feminist thought in the 1960s and 1970s. While the impact of Marxism on feminist theory remains evident in a number of

contemporary approaches (such as psychoanalytic and postmodern/poststructuralist feminisms, as well as those concerned with race/ethnicity), the Marxist feminist tradition is waning. Its place in advocating the significance of Marxism/socialism and class analysis for feminism has now largely been overtaken by a range of socialist feminisms.

Indeed Curthoys asserts that *both* the Marxist and socialist feminist traditions 'more or less died at the end of the 1980s, when socialism itself collapsed throughout Eastern Europe'.²⁹ Curthoys is by no means alone in her concern that the meaningful use of terms like Marxist or socialist may have fallen out of favour within feminism³⁰ and that feminism may have abandoned the issues most associated with this grouping such as economics, class, historical analysis and interventions in social policy development.³¹ Cockburn, for example, declares that 'in some countries of Europe one finds few women today who will describe themselves as socialist feminists, or even Marxist feminists'.³² Nevertheless, the pronouncement of socialist feminism's eclipse seems a little premature. While few feminist theoreticians in the 1990s continue to describe themselves as Marxist feminists,³³ some groups of Marxist feminists continue to be politically active and are usually found within broadly based Marxist organisations or parties, rather than in specifically feminist associations.³⁴ Additionally, there are any number of activists and writers firmly within the socialist feminist tradition, as well as many contemporary theorists who may be regarded as being influenced by and engaged in reworking the boundaries of that tradition.

In this context, Curthoys' pessimism may be tempered by caution. She is herself an example of the ongoing existence of socialist feminist thought. Curthoys has produced a considerable body of analysis on theories concerning women and work and, in discussion with Rosemary Pringle, has articulated a classic form of the debate between socialist and postmodern feminist approaches.³⁵ Other writers³⁶ within the tradition include many (if not most) feminist writers producing work on social and public policy—particularly policy linked to the welfare state; a fair proportion of writers who produce feminist texts with a social sciences (sociology, history, law, politics)

orientation or which discuss 'family' and 'work'; most of the writers in the field of feminist studies of technology, labour and economics, and much of the work in the field of feminist analyses of masculinities. The variety of writers who are influenced by but concerned with reformulating and transforming the socialist feminist agenda ranges from feminists dealing with racism to those who are more or less interested in intersections with postmodernism.³⁷ Nevertheless, it should be noted that socialist thought has historically been more influential in Europe, Britain and countries like Australia than in North America, and for this reason it continues to have a differential significance in different cultures within Western feminism.³⁸

In order to understand the impact of socialism in feminist thought it is necessary to consider first the approach taken in Marxist feminism, since it was this form (rather than pre-Marxian 'Utopian' socialism) which became the subject of revived feminist interest in the twentieth century.³⁹ In *Marxist feminism*, following the work of Karl Marx,⁴⁰ hierarchical class relations (built on unequally distributed or owned sources of wealth, including monetary and other resources) are seen as the source of coercive power and oppression, of all inequalities ultimately. *Sexual oppression is seen as a dimension of class power*. In this model the earliest forms of class division historically gave rise to male dominance; class oppression predates sex oppression. The emerging organisation of the first forms of private wealth, and therefore of class hierarchy, led to the treatment of women as property. In other words Marxist feminism offers a version of history and society which is in some ways the opposite of that proposed by radical feminism. (In radical feminism the earliest forms of male domination over women produce a framework of hierarchical social relations in which class divisions arise; sexual oppression predates class power.) Clearly what is at stake in this difference of views is the question of which is the primary oppression for women, and hence which should be given the highest priority in feminist political struggle.⁴¹

By comparison with radical feminism there is typically less concern within Marxist feminism with ideas and attitudes and more of a focus on labour and economics when exploring

women's positioning. Since *labour* is viewed as fundamental to all economic activity (historically specific) analysis of the organisation of labour is crucial to Marxist feminist approaches. Indeed, the *organisation of labour* and the *tools/technologies* associated with labour are perceived in concert as constituting the underlying economic structure or system of society. This economic structure conditions the form of all other social relations in that society and in this sense is the *basis of society*.⁴² Hence Marxist feminists, in common with other Marxists, generally accept some version of what is called the *base-superstructure* model of society that is, social relations—including those related to sexual inequality—are conceived as crucially shaped by the *economic base* of society, rather than by ideas and attitudes.

The Marxist feminist approach tends, like liberal feminism, to be oriented towards the public sphere and, given its concern with the organisation of labour, generally pays particular attention to women's position in relation to *waged labour*. The significance of unpaid labour undertaken in the private realm, which is very much associated with women, is controversial in Marxist feminism because Marxism largely equates 'the economy' with the capitalist market-place.⁴³ However, unlike liberal feminists, Marxist feminist thinkers are deeply antagonistic to the capitalist economy and advocate a *revolutionary* approach in which the *overthrow of capitalism* is viewed as the necessary precondition to dismantling male privilege.⁴⁴

Relatedly, there is less emphasis in this model than in radical feminism upon men's involvement in power or the benefits for men of unequal power relations. Power is not primarily associated with sex but with the imperatives of class, private wealth, property and profit. One example of this inclination to describe women's subordination within the terms of a Marxist account of the requirements of class society may be found in the work of Lise Vogel.⁴⁵

The 'main enemy' in this form of analysis is the class system (capitalism, in modern societies) which creates divisions between men and women. Marxist feminism shares with liberal feminism (both are what Grosz has described as 'equality' or 'egalitarian' feminisms), an assumption that there is an under-

lying *sameness* between men and women.⁴⁶ While women seem to be oppressed by the men around them, they—like men—are ultimately oppressed by capitalism, and hence the 'interests' of men and women are not crucially different.⁴⁷

SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Debates between radical feminists and Marxist feminists in the 1960s and 1970s concerning the fundamental cause of social inequality were important in the formation of new groupings of socialist feminism.⁴⁸ Socialist feminists attempt to maintain some elements of Marxism regarding the significance of class distinctions and labour while incorporating the radical feminist view that sexual oppression is not historically a consequence of class division. In other words all socialist feminists assert, along with radical feminists, that women's subordination predated the development of class-based societies and hence that women's oppression could not be *caused* by class division. There are several versions of socialist feminism which involve **different combinations of radical and Marxist feminism**, and which sometimes incorporate the influence of psychoanalytic feminisms.⁴⁹

In brief, three major socialist feminist traditions may be described as deriving from debates between radical and Marxist feminists. The first strand involves a concern with the social construction of sex (gender) which was largely seen in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis. This approach tends not to perceive sexual oppression through the lens of women's unequal socio-economic position—in Marxist terms the so-called 'material' organisation of social life—but rather conceives that oppression as the effect of psychological functions. At the same time the approach continues to make use of a Marxian understanding of class relations. Hence this first strand of socialist feminism offers what has been termed a **dual systems model** of social analysis, investigating sex and class power according to different procedures and identifying two 'systems' of social organisation corresponding to these forms of power, that is, **patriarchy and capitalism**. In broad terms a psychological

model of sexual power is presented alongside an (historically specific) economically based account of class power. Moreover, the former is moulded or historically contextualised by the organising force of the latter. Because the overall model makes use of Marxist 'materialism' (that is, a methodology which sees economics as the fundamental motor of social relations—shaping the form of society), it tends to adopt a version of the Marxist base-superstructure model in which class is still ultimately fundamental (base) since sex is (merely) psychological (superstructure). Hence, in some ways this is more a **two-tier**, rather than a mutual or dual, theory of social relations. The two-tier approach is epitomised by the early work of Juliet Mitchell.⁵⁰

The second major strand of socialist feminism attempts to draw the work of radical and Marxist feminists into one theory of power and describes a **unified system** sometimes referred to as **capitalist patriarchy** (although this term is also used by other feminists, including other socialist feminists). Examples of this approach include work by Alison Jaggar and Iris Young.⁵¹ By contrast, the third strand—like the first—describes a 'dual system' model of social organisation. However, in this case both sex and class power have a **material aspect**, that is, they both are conceived as having an economic form. In other words, **patriarchy is not seen as simply psychological**, as is the case in the first variant associated with Juliet Mitchell. The third form of socialist feminism offers a more full-blown account of both systems in which sexual and class oppression interact but are not cast as dependent forms. Neither is viewed as more fundamental than the other in the overall shaping of social relations. The work of Heidi Hartmann provides the classic example of this 'dynamic duo' approach.⁵²

These versions of socialist feminism are identified by their views of the relationship between class and sex (sometimes referred to as the category, gender)—that is, the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. Other categories of power such as race tended to be marginalised in initial accounts of debates among socialist feminists. Indeed the issue of race and/or ethnicity, for example, increasingly became a point of contention within socialist feminism given its concern with

forms of power that cut across both class division and sexual difference.⁵³ Recently, such debates have contributed to the development of certain 'postcolonial' feminist perspectives, indicating ongoing interactions between socialist feminist themes and feminist concerns regarding race/ethnicity. I will return to this point in chapter 8.

6

'Other' possibilities: feminism and the influence of psychoanalysis

By the 1980s Western feminism could no longer be simply divided up into the three general categories of liberal, radical and Marxist/socialist traditions. Many other approaches, drawing upon an increasingly eclectic and sometimes rather inaccessible range of social and political theories, became a feature of academic feminism at least. Psychoanalysis was one of the more influential streams of thought to be re-evaluated by feminists in both English speaking and non-English speaking Western countries. While in the 1970s liberal and radical feminists rejected psychoanalysis, it began to be reconsidered as an element within the work of some Marxist/socialist feminists. However, my focus in this chapter is upon those feminist viewpoints which *organise their theorising* around some form of psychoanalytic theory. Such viewpoints are diverse, and include writers such as Juliet Mitchell whose earlier work was more clearly within the Marxist/socialist feminist tradition. Despite such diversity, **psychoanalytic feminists** share—in common with radical feminism—an interest in the issue of **difference** in relation to the sexes; a concern with the notion of women as **other** than men.

In broad terms the influence of psychoanalysis has produced two major variants. The first of these is Freudian feminism which has attended to the significance of psychology and the formation of sexually specific personalities (subjectivities) in the framing of male dominance by analysing the impact of women's responsibility for mothering. Freudian feminism is