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ABSTRACT

This thesis confronts a fundamental dilemma at the centre of the feminist engagement with power: how to unmask and challenge domination without denying the capacity of oppressed subjects. It demonstrates how second-wave feminist approaches to power, whether domination or empowerment focused, were constrained by gender difference. Both viewed domination as being exercised exclusively by men; consequently, domination was given a moral value as ‘evil’ because it was primarily understood as an external, dangerous and even monstrous force that women were subject to but not participants in. As a result, women’s complicity in domination went unacknowledged; at the same time, the potential for agency was limited to benign forms of empowerment cleansed of dominative power.

Feminist criticism of this polemical opposition to domination has been widespread, but the focus of this thesis is on critiques made in the late 20th century, in particular by Wendy Brown, which aligned with Friedrich Nietzsche’s theory of slave morality and the will-to-power evident in ressentiment. For Brown, ressentiment underpins feminist approaches to power but also fundamentally limits them: revaluing powerlessness as moral virtue in order to mount a critique of domination reflects a fear of power and a reluctance to exert it. This thesis builds on Brown’s account, further demonstrating how ressentiment informed and weakened feminist accounts of power within and beyond the second-wave. However, it rejects Brown’s contention that feminists must adopt a postmodern-inspired dismissal of identity that entails substituting ‘moral’ claims against domination with contested ‘political’ debate, in order to overcome ressentiment. It is argued that far from alleviating ressentiment, postmodern imperatives provide fertile ground for it to flourish. Moreover, feminism should not have to jettison all normative dimensions from its engagement with power.

By creatively re-working and synthesizing the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, this thesis proposes an alternative basis for a feminist moral opposition to domination. Nietzsche’s distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ in the master and slave moralities is enlisted to better define the normative dimensions of Foucault’s work, challenging the widely-held view that his approach to power is morally neutral. It is argued that Foucault follows Nietzsche to debunk the evil nature of domination, but departs from him by remaining committed through all stages of his work to unmasking and challenging domination and its bad effects. Foucault’s greater compassion for the slave means that he does not celebrate the will-to-power beneath all types of power, instead differentiating between them and seeking to limit the most dominative forms that restrict the relative powers of all subjects. The original contribution this thesis makes to the feminist engagement with power is to re-conceptualise Foucault’s opposition to domination as the basis for an alternative moral position; one that extends beyond either a masterly or slavish approach. When domination is explicitly opposed as morally ‘bad’ but not ‘evil’, and the complicit and accountable feminist subject is embraced as ‘good’, it is possible for feminist theorists to identify and challenge the negative forms of power over as domination and account for the oppression of women, without sacrificing the idea of a female subject with the power to act individually and with others.
 DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Kylie Heneker
6 September 2017
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INTRODUCTION

Power is a central concept in political theory, but it is not readily or effectively captured as a concept in its own right. It is often considered to be an “essentially contested” term that is both complex and ambiguous; seemingly simple yet tending to “dissolve entirely” when put under theoretical scrutiny.\(^1\) While many theorists begin with the somewhat neutral premise that power is an ability or capacity, the guiding interest of political theory and the social sciences in how humans interact means that power must be understood in the context of relationships.\(^2\) Power as simple capacity becomes subsumed beneath a broader focus on how power is wielded within a polis or any social context. It becomes most important for theorists to understand how power is exercised, by individuals, groups and governments, in order to achieve certain goals. Then, how the objectives of some individuals and groups are met and others are not, requires theorists to grapple with not only fundamental questions about the nature of power, but also its many operational characteristics: is power intentional, direct, prohibitive, or accidental, indirect, productive?\(^3\)

The demand on the concept of power to explain multiple divergent effects may be what led Terence Ball to claim a quarter of a century ago that social science has “so far failed to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of power”.\(^4\) While this criticism arguably still stands, and the variance in political agenda and focus remains, there is general acknowledgement that there are two broad sides to theoretical debates on power within Western political thought.\(^5\) First is the notion that power is exercised to win out over other actors; it is “the capacity to realise one’s will at the expense of the will of others”.\(^6\) The existence of power is determined by the decisions that are made in a political system, the decisions that are prevented and the latent conflict that exists within the province of dominative power.\(^7\) Second, and in contrast, is the more consensual understanding of power as being exercised in a legitimate fashion to achieve communal goals.\(^8\) For the theorist

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\(^3\) Dyrberg, *Circular Structure*, p. 1.


\(^7\) Steven Lukes’ conception of the three faces of power, with the third being his own, in S. Lukes (ed.), *Power*, Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1986 and Lukes *Power: A Radical View*.

\(^8\) Hindess, *Discourses of Power*, pp. 2-22.
of governance, for example, how to harness power in contractual terms is important, hence power is evidenced in securing the compliance of its subjects through consent in order to meet objectives. The unruly nature of power is mitigated through the consent of the people, which is formalised into a form of authority that empowers governments or leaders with a right to act.\textsuperscript{9}

William Connolly suggests that the different questions asked by these two groups of theorists leads their respective conceptions away from coalescence; in fact, “it may be that neither of these two sides in such debates makes full contact with the other”.\textsuperscript{10} Instead, these two different approaches to power become distilled into either a negative conception of power as exercised over other subjects or groups, or a more positive notion of power as the capacity to achieve individual or communal goals. This tendency toward polarisation between the negative and positive moments in the study of power is important to the argument of this thesis, which focuses on how this schism is replicated within feminist accounts.

In earlier work, I have outlined how feminist theorists have defined power predominantly as either domination or empowerment.\textsuperscript{11} These approaches are considered in the first two chapters of this thesis, the first being the view that power exists as a dominative force where male power over women is the focus, while the second seeks to establish women as empowered agents, with the key interest being women’s power to act despite oppression.\textsuperscript{12} While these two conceptions of power exist as contemporaries within various strains of second-wave feminist thought, theories of domination and empowerment have rarely been reconciled in any considered manner by theorists.\textsuperscript{13} The specific focus of this thesis is on the development of feminist conceptions of power from the 1970s through to the height of postmodern intersections in the late 1990s and into the early 21st Century. Yet the foundational issues identified during this time period have defined


\textsuperscript{13} Nonetheless, there has been substantial critique of each conception within feminist thought. Some of these critiques are mentioned below. Two notable theorists who identified the polarisation in feminist approaches to power are J. Cocks, The Oppositional Imagination: Feminism, Critique and Political Theory, London and New York, Routledge, 1989 and J.B. Eishtain whose work is cited below. An additional article is ‘The Power and Powerlessness of Women’, in her book Power Trips and Other Journeys: Essays in Feminism as Civic Discourse, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, pp. 134-192.
feminist approaches to power and reflect concerns that remain relevant to various strands of contemporary feminism in relation to how power is conceived, utilised and contended.

The work of Amy Allen is considered in this early discussion because she has also directly tackled the tendency for feminist theorists to emphasise either domination or empowerment as two mutually exclusive, and opposed, ideal-typical conceptions of power.14 I share with Allen a desire to ensure that feminist accounts of power include power that is held over others and other forms of power that enable resistance and empowerment with others.15 As Allen notes, all of these expressions of power need to be captured in order to fulfill feminism's analytical purpose.16 However, while I also seek to broaden the feminist understanding of power beyond two separate and opposed concepts, the target of my critique differs. While Allen is focused on better integration between feminist empowerment theories and feminist accounts of domination, I am more concerned with how dominative power remains a spectre looming over both theories of domination and the more positive visions of empowerment devised by feminist theorists. This thesis contends that the critical task of opposing domination, as an externalised and negative male force, has overshadowed and curtailed the equally important task of describing women's empowerment, resistance and capacity to act.

Again, this greater emphasis on power as domination in feminist accounts mirrors a tendency in broader political thought. As Barry Hindess argues, while two main conceptions of power dominate Western political theory, it is those based on collaboration and consent that have been sidelined by the centrality given to power as an instrument of domination.17 However, while Hindess is concerned with reinstating the importance of more consensual expressions of ‘legitimate’ power, the key issue for this thesis is how a subordinated subject can be accorded some agency, or power to act, when the negative side of power as domination is given primacy. The need to adequately account for power as a capacity that is available to all subjects as individuals and as part of communities, despite domination, is my chief focus.

It is argued in this thesis that a key inhibitor for feminism in developing a more nuanced conception of power that recognises this capacity has been the inability for theorists to detach analysis of power and domination from gender difference. What remains consistent between the two

14 Allen, Rethinking Power, p. 21.
15 Allen, Rethinking Power, pp. 31-36.
16 Allen, Rethinking Power, p. 37.
conceptions of power canvassed in the first two chapters of this thesis is the discernment that domination remains largely within the province of men to the exclusion of women. The myriad faces of power become condensed by a gender analysis that deems some forms of power to be acceptable and others not by virtue of a male/female dichotomy. As a result, dominative power is primarily understood as an external force that women are subject to, rather than particulators in. It is beyond the control of women and becomes a dangerous, monstrous form of power that is condemned. Although this approach to power has been criticised by feminist academics, popular authors and political theorists more generally at various points in the history of contemporary feminist thought, I argue that it continues to monopolise feminist analysis well beyond the second-wave.\textsuperscript{18}

To assist in making this argument, this thesis draws upon Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) concept of 	extit{ressentiment} and the role that it plays in the formation of identity. 	extit{Ressentiment} is a psychological state of deep animosity and grievance towards the powerful experienced by individuals who do not have access to power. This resentment paralyses those who harbour it from progressing beyond the pain inflicted by the more powerful, instead consuming and immobilising the powerless and leaving them unable to combat effectively the dominance of the powerful. The resurgence of scholarship on Nietzsche in recent years suggests that his searing psychological insights into identity formation and reflections on the origins of morality still have bearing on the way in which power is conceived and how subordinated individuals seek to challenge domination in contemporary politics.\textsuperscript{19} While this thesis reflects upon some of the broader secondary work on Nietzsche, it is specifically concerned with how his concept of 	extit{ressentiment} figures in contemporary feminist analyses of power. Nietzsche’s 	extit{Genealogy of Morals} (1887), 	extit{Beyond Good and Evil} (1886) and 	extit{The Will-to-power} (1901) are the main texts from his oeuvre that are drawn upon.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} A much earlier iteration of this argument, including the connection between feminism and Nietzschean 	extit{ressentiment} and the usefulness of Foucault’s approach in the feminist engagement with power can be found in K. Heneker, ‘Feminist Negotiations of Power: Moral Imperatives and Nostalgic Commitments’, 	extit{Conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association}, Sydney, University of Sydney, 1999, pp.289-299.


Within Nietzsche’s schema, the master and the slave are contrasted by their approach to power and the way in which they construct an identity and determine moral value. The master’s morality arises from self-affirmation, with his powerful nature and capacity to dominate others embraced as morally ‘good’. From this premise, the master then judges anything that questions or undermines this power as ‘bad’. In contrast, the morality devised by the slave condemns all qualities and characteristics of the powerful master as ‘evil’, with the slave’s value as a ‘good’ subject then reactively becoming a distorted representation of powerlessness. While both moralities have a conception of what is morally ‘good’ they could not be more different; the master’s is a reflection of himself, while the slave’s is based on an inverted reflection of the master. It is because the master’s self-direction, strength and dominance is deemed ‘evil’ by the slaves first that subsequently, and in direct opposition, their inherent lack of power becomes heralded as morally superior and hence, ‘good’. Herein lies the hidden will-to-power of ressentiment: an inversion of value that places the slave, who is uncontaminated by power, in righteous condemnation of the master.

Of particular importance for understanding feminist approaches to domination and empowerment is Nietzsche’s insights into how ressentiment drives the slave’s inverted moral assessment of the world: as every characteristic of the powerful subject is condemned, power itself comes to represent all that is ‘evil’ and reprehensible. This designation ‘evil’, a highly charged term, is used throughout this thesis in accordance with the way that Nietzsche uses it to describe the slave’s condemnation of the powerful. Importantly, to enable this valuation of domination as ‘evil’ to be made, it is essential that domination is perceived as an external capacity and characteristic of the masters alone; a harmful, monstrous form of power not available to the powerless, who are its inert targets. It is this designation of ‘evil’ that is generative of ressentiment and that encourages the oppositional inversion of identity in the slave. While the master’s conception of what is ‘bad’ still has a negative value, and is conceived in opposition to the ‘good’, strong and powerful master, it is not condemned or invested with the capacity to shape or determine the master’s identity. The use of this term ‘bad’ is similarly employed in this thesis in the way that Nietzsche explains it in reference to the master’s discernment of negative moral value, though it is reconceptualised and given further dimension and depth in later chapters (the ‘scare’ quotes around these terms ‘evil’ and ‘bad’ are omitted hereafter, unless I am specifically highlighting the distinction between the two).

While it may initially appear to be a strange alliance between the work of Nietzsche and feminist theory, there is a conceptual parity between *ressentiment*, as an ethos governed by distrust of the ‘masters’ and the values they represent, and the feminist opposition to dominative power, which is often argued in polemical terms. The assessment of the slave that domination is evil is shown to align with the feminist accounts of power considered in this thesis. Like Nietzsche’s slave, feminist theorists of domination begin their analyses by identifying the evil enemy. The identity of women is secondary: because men are powerful, women must be devoid of power. Feminist empowerment theorists then evoke the creative moment of *ressentiment*: the benign, self-sacrificing power aligned with women is revalued as more virtuous than male forms of power as domination. Fundamental to the moral determination that domination is evil in these feminist accounts, then, is the disavowal of any involvement of women in power over others, which is challenged within the new approach offered in this thesis.

Several feminist theorists have argued that feminism is mired in *ressentiment* and share a desire to detach feminist theories of power from its reactive moral foundations. Following Nietzsche’s critique, these theorists contend that by representing weakness or powerlessness as “justice, wisdom, superiority”, feminists are embracing a “fundamentally reactive” moral position that veils a contempt for power. As Nietzsche emphasises, *ressentiment* constitutes an “imaginary revenge” for subjects who lack the capacity to enact change through “the true reaction, that of deeds”; it is the only recourse for the slave who cannot combat domination with strength like the master. As such, *ressentiment* is a limited form of resistance. Moreover, the slave morality comes to rely upon evocations of the “hostile external world” in order to launch a challenge against dominative power; the conditions and harmful effects of oppression provide the substance for its moral force. While *ressentiment* is not without power, its method of resistance is dependent upon the ongoing perpetuation of the evils of domination.

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24 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 36.
Wendy Brown puts forward possibly the most influential of these feminist critiques and it is her account of *ressentiment* that is drawn upon in this thesis. Brown’s critical engagement with feminist theories of power centres on the normative grounding underpinning the moral opposition to domination, which she claims reflects a fear of power and inverse attachment to political positions that are innocent of power. In particular, she is critical of how modernist feminisms claim to offer a perspective on the world and resulting claims to knowledge that are “clean of power”. Brown’s approach is utilised in this thesis to give a further explanation of how *ressentiment* has become entrenched in feminist accounts. However, the solutions she offers to overcome this dilemma are challenged. In particular, Brown’s claim that in order to create a feminist politics *sans ressentiment*, feminist theories of power should challenge domination in masterly fashion – “with strength … *rather than* through moral reproach” – is rejected. Instead, I argue that any attempts to excise *ressentiment* from feminist approaches to power must depart from Brown by refusing to leave feminism without a normative basis for its opposition to domonative forms of power. The contribution that this thesis makes to theories about the feminist engagement with power is to reassert the need for a moral framework, but at the same time insist that such a framework does not align inadvertently with either the slave or the master morality.

In the first three chapters of this thesis, then, Nietzsche’s explanation of *ressentiment* and its role in the formation of identity is useful both as a descriptive and diagnostic tool. The remaining two chapters still draw upon Nietzsche’s master and slave moralities, and the distinction he makes between the two, but in order to find some resolution to the dilemma of *ressentiment* that he outlines. By recognising that the master and slave moralities are not entirely antithetical, it is possible to chart an alternative moral course through the imperatives that drive feminist conceptions of power and identity. Arriving at an understanding that captures women’s complex relationship to domination, empowerment and resistance requires challenging the polarisation between Nietzsche’s moralities, as well as the fixed duality evident in feminist accounts of domination that see identities as either powerful or powerless. It is important that a feminist conception of power is flexible enough to enable feminist approaches to unmask domonative power and issue moral challenges against its most oppressive forms, but without consigning women to powerlessness or forms of ‘female’ power that don’t acknowledge complicity in domination.

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27 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures,’ p. 35.


The work of Michel Foucault, as a theorist who provides a means to undermine the treatment of domination and empowerment, or power over and power to, as two antithetical forms of power, is essential in this task. Foucault's understanding of power as both a dominative force with various negative effects, and a positive, generative and relational concept, makes significant inroads into undermining traditional and gendered antinomies in the study of power. By continuing the same methodology of tracing the positive and negative expressions of power as seen in Foucault's thought, a clearer insight is gained for feminist theories into both the intransigence of the power dualism and how Foucault may provide a means to navigate it. Although Foucault diverges from Nietzsche in important ways, there are obvious parallels between the work of the two theorists with Foucault's analysis of power echoing and developing aspects of a Nietzschean approach. Three points of correlation are pertinent for this thesis and the reconceived feminist approach to power that is offered.

First, both theorists refuse to condemn any form of power as evil or reprehensible because domination and broader power relations are inevitable, ongoing and can be productive as well as restrictive. For Nietzsche, the will-to-power is a basic drive that is common to all human beings; it underpins and finds expression in all phenomena and is a symptom of health and vitality. Similarly, in various phases of Foucault's work, power is presented as not only negative but also positive, generative and productive, and intrinsically entwined with freedom and the creation of subjectivity and knowledges.

Second, and relatedly, both view the identities of subjects as being conceived and formed within a context of power relations. Nietzsche's understanding of how the slave and master develop divergent moralities and how his sovereign individual evolves through the dominance of morality and the effects of ressentiment, influences Foucault's insistence that there is no subject that exists prior to power. Just as Nietzsche's sovereign individual is created through a process of submitting to customs, Foucault argues that processes of discipline and governmentality determine the shape of subjects' identities. Both also praise the creation of new forms of subjectivity and the need for subjects to demonstrate that they can exert power over themselves.30 The subject who lies at the heart of both theorists' accounts is formed through domination and is also able to exert power,
which offers a means for feminism to balance critical detailing of oppression with a recognition of the subject’s capacity.

Third, due to the previous two points, both theorists are often viewed as envisaging power beyond the spectrum of moral considerations or dictums. Foucault notes that “Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, a philosopher who managed to think of power without having to confine himself within a political theory to do so”[^31]. Foucault has similarly been acknowledged as a theorist who, following Nietzsche, reflected on power in terms “beyond good and evil”[^32]. Foucault’s account thus provides a means for feminist theories of power to undermine the foundational normative premises of ressentiment. When power and domination imbue all relations between subjects, and even contribute to the very formation of subjectivities, the attribution of responsibility to external enemies becomes impossible and there is no position that is ‘outside’ of power for the slave to embrace or defend.

The benefits of a Foucauldian framework that explicitly accounts for the participation of all subjects in power relations, including but not limited to resistance, has been well documented by feminist theorists[^33]. However, the usefulness of Foucault’s approach for feminism is seen to be limited by what is deemed to be the resulting absence of a normative framework[^34]. By challenging the evil nature of dominative power, Foucault is seen to undercut the possibility for any moral opposition to domination. Importantly, for feminist approaches to power, this thesis challenges such a reading of Foucault and suggests that feminism can utilise his understanding of power relations without relinquishing the necessary moral imperative to unmask and critique domination. The distinction between the terms ‘evil’ and ‘bad’, that Nietzsche explains differentiates the master and slave moralities, is revisited here to provide a lens through which feminism can make better use of Foucault’s analysis of power, in particular his opposition to domination. While this position is indebted to Nietzsche’s distinction between his two moralities, it is contended that the potential in

Foucault’s analysis is that he also provides the basis for an alternative normative position that extends beyond either a masterly or slavish approach to domination.

**Why Feminist Power? Why Victimhood?**

Despite the focus in this thesis on the work of Wendy Brown and the specific alignment made by feminists in the 1990s between feminist approaches to power and *resentment*, it is important to recognise that the basis of this critique is not entirely new to feminism. In fact, these critiques reflect several prior debates within the feminist canon that have resurfaced over time in varying guises both in academe and the popular arena. For example, in the early 1980s Jean Bethke Elshtain criticised feminist notions of power that characterised domination as exclusively male and reactively viewed women as victims who do not participate in power relations. In 1984, bell hooks [sic] challenged feminists to re-examine an understanding of power that produced and utilised an identity of powerlessness. Using the powerful rhetoric for which she has become known, hooks asserted that while “sexist ideology” posited women as victims by virtue of their femaleness, feminism had not managed to undermine this inherent connection. She claimed:

> Sexist ideology teaches women that to be female is to be a victim. Rather than repudiate this equation (which mystifies female experience – in their daily lives most women are not continually passive, helpless, or powerless “victims”), woman’s liberationists embraced it, making shared victimization the basis for women’s bonding.

In 1987, Lynne Segal further questioned the feminist practice of utilising traditional gender roles as the basis for conceptions of female empowerment. For example, women’s roles as mothers and carers were seen to have developed qualities of compassion and concern for others that lead women to practice forms of empowerment devoid of the need to hold power over others. For Segal, valorising feminine attributes or qualities without challenging the assignment and development of these qualities through oppression was a sign that feminism was “falling back on the traditional consolations of the powerless”.

The argument that feminism was failing to provide an account of women’s agency also found resonance in the popular domain of the mid 1990s particularly in North America and, to a lesser extent, Australia. A spate of texts testifying to the weakening of feminism in political and social

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arenas targeted feminist conceptions of power as the defining problem.\textsuperscript{38} Always eager to report the potential for internal criticism amongst feminists, both the American and Australian media gave extensive coverage to several texts, including Naomi Wolf’s \textit{Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century} (1993) and Katie Roiphe’s \textit{The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism} (1993). Opposition to ‘victim feminism’ became a rallying catch-cry of a younger generation with feminists aligning either as ‘insider critics,’ or as defenders of the original tenets and commitments of second-wave feminism. Wolf claimed, for example, that women had a straightforward choice between continuing to wed feminist theory to “victimhood” as the theory of oppression and powerlessness or to embrace “power” feminism as the theory of “abundance” based on the idea of “more for women.”\textsuperscript{39} Women can choose to be victims like Nietzsche’s slave, who keeps the wounds of injustice fresh through remembering and reliving the hurts inflicted by an enemy, or powerful like the masterful noble in “whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mould, to recuperate and to forget”.\textsuperscript{40} As Wolf presents this decision to feminists, “[w]hich feminism should we choose today? I submit that we choose the one that works ... power feminism moves mountains with astonishing ease, even as victim feminism spins its wheels over the same manicured ground”.\textsuperscript{41} Unfortunately, the historical interrogation of power by feminist theorists that pre-empted these popular debates by more than a decade was rarely acknowledged in public discussion or popular text.

By their very nature, the texts of Wolf and Roiphe approach the problem of ‘victim feminism’ in polemical and exaggerated terms.\textsuperscript{42} For this reason, it became easy for their critiques to become aligned with more conservative forces, in particular those that sought to challenge what was perceived as a rise in ‘political correctness’ in the mid 1990s.\textsuperscript{43} This strange alignment between

\begin{itemize}
  \item Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, p. 39.
  \item Wolf, \textit{Fire With Fire}, p. 187.
  \item Chris Atmore notes that Wolf is probably the least conservative of the popular feminist commentators on victimism in ‘Victims, Backlash, and Radical Feminist Theory (or The Morning after They Stole Feminism’s Fire)’, in S. Lamb (ed.), \textit{New Versions of Victims: Feminists Struggle with the Concept}, New York, New York University Press, 1999, p. 186. Wolf does go some way toward the more nuanced position that there is a difference between describing oppression and building an identity based on oppression. See Wolf, \textit{Fire With Fire}, p. 154.
\end{itemize}
populist feminism and conservative victim-blaming discourse that ensued has also been replicated in current public discourse. The recent ascent (and descent) of two female political leaders in Australia and America has again brought to the fore a dominant tendency in public debate to claim that any reference by women to the challenges of sexism or the impact of gender on women’s leadership necessarily reflects victimism. Both Julia Gillard and Hillary Clinton, for example, have been accused by conservative commentators of “playing the victim card” if they speak of their gender or highlight entrenched sexism. Although argued in more populist terms, these theorists raised issues that paralleled academic debates, often reproducing similar polarised divisions. Alison Convery argues that within academia the feminist engagement with the question of victimhood, notably in the work of Wendy Brown, ignited a derogation of victimhood that led to general distrust amongst feminists of the very notion of “being a victim”. As Convery warns, though, by dismantling victimhood as a critical means of explicating domination, feminism risks losing a vital framework through which oppression is understood and can be challenged.

Nonetheless, the current nature of populist feminism can be seen to have moved away from the language of patriarchy, toward the more benign approach that mirrors Wolf’s “power feminism” of the late 1990s, which suggests that this historical rejection of female victimhood within feminist theory may have had an ongoing impact. Jessa Crispin’s recent text *Why I am Not a Feminist* (2017) suggests that contemporary forms of feminism have become diluted, with the radical challenges issued by second-wave feminists against entrenched systems of patriarchal dominance watered down into individualist claims to freedom and populist celebrations of “self-empowerment”. Against this discourse of individual independence, Crispin claims that contemporary feminism urgently requires a renewed focus on systemic oppression that recognises the continuity of patriarchal domination. Second-wave feminist accounts of domination, particularly the shared opposition to dominative forms of power, may not have entirely exceeded their use-by date in the feminist engagement with power.


It is the key contention of this thesis that feminist theories of power and domination must be able to explain structural disadvantage based on gender difference and that this analysis necessarily entails a normative critique: a moral basis for supporting the judgement that dominative power over others is harmful and should be challenged. However, it is also central to my argument that feminist accounts of power must shift beyond collapsing multiple forms of power into domination as an oppressive force that is viewed as an evil construct. It is this moral stance that evokes victimhood because all forms of power held over others are externalised from women as a political category and as individual subjects. Further interrogation of the ways in which powerlessness as identity has developed within feminism is necessary to challenge this position and find new ways for feminist theories to continue unmasking oppression and resisting domination.

**Two Sides to Feminist Power – The Challenge of Ressentiment**

The first two chapters of this thesis trace how dominative power developed within second-wave feminism as the primary form of power. Both chapters detail what some of the effects of this value-driven view of dominative power have been, with particular attention given to the resulting conception of Woman as a powerless subject with certain epistemological claims against power.

Chapter One, *Power as Domination*, considers the work of several key feminist theorists of the second-wave whose chief focus is on documenting the severity of male domination and women’s oppression. The work of Nancy Hartsock as a feminist theorist who refashioned the socialist critique of power to furnish the feminist case against gendered domination as a primary form of oppression is considered first. Her explicit link between this critique of domination and feminist epistemic claims is also of central importance to this chapter and the rest of the thesis. As radical feminists, Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin more explicitly spearheaded the second-wave feminist use of victimhood as a critical tool. The descriptive task of defining oppression and detailing its myriad forms colours how these theorists understand and explain power relations. The realms of pornography and heterosexuality provide fruitful examples of dominative male power to substantiate the claims of these theorists that this form of power is representative of all relationships between men and women. Carol Pateman’s explication of the institution of marriage

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is then considered as one of the clearest demonstrations in second-wave feminist thought of the ways in which power becomes streamlined into the structurally reinforced domination of one gender over another in liberal systems.

Despite their polemical force, however, I argue that the critical power of these feminist accounts of domination are achieved at the expense of a female subject whose capacities for empowerment and resistance are significantly diminished. The first premise of Nietzsche’s slave morality, involving the determination of the slave’s enemy as evil, helps to explain how the normative dimensions of the feminist opposition to domi native power develops in these accounts and *ressentiment* becomes the chief form of resistance.

While domi native power is a concept widely deployed throughout Western political thought, with many examples of its explication available, the work of Steven Lukes is singled out in this chapter as he not only draws upon the conception of power over but, like these feminist theorists, argues for its primacy. Lukes shares with feminist domination theorists a view of power as conflict-based and necessarily dyadic; the existence of a subordinate who is robbed of agency is central to his account. Further, his ‘radical view’ of power is driven by the desire to locate where power is exercised and by whom in order to determine who is responsible. It is this implicit connection between power and responsibility that also drives the feminist desire to unmask domi native power and imbues this form of power with a negative value. Yet, through comparison with Lukes, the additional normative dimensions of a feminist condemnation of domination become clearer.

Chapter Two, *Power as Empowerment*, then canvasses key examples of feminist accounts of power as empowerment within second-wave feminism and examines how an explicit gender analysis extended traditional and feminist debates on power. In taking up power to as a distinctly feminist type of power, feminist theories began to redress the imbalance evident in traditional political and sociological theory on forms of power over others and thereby reinvigorate an understanding of power as communal empowerment. Before feminist empowerment theorists emerged, however, political theorists such as Hanna Pitkin, Dorothy Emmett and Hannah Arendt, gave emphasis to power as a dispositional property or potentiality, reviving a broader, less pejorative conception lacking in a unilateral understanding of power as domination. The concept of power is expanded to become both the power to act despite domination and the existence of

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oppressive structures, and as a communal force that can be used with others to generate empowerment within the subject or among a community. In her influential text *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (1983), Nancy Hartsock contended that this alternative insight into the nature of power reflected a uniquely female approach. Hartsock's argument reflected the convictions of other feminist theorists, like Janet Baker Miller, Sarah Ruddick, Carol Gilligan and Virginia Held, who also argued that women's experiences of oppression and domination meant that they understood relationships and practiced power differently from men. These theorists reject the qualities and characteristics seen to be associated with men and dominoative power over others to instead embrace a form of female power that involves supporting the aims of others. These feminist accounts of empowerment posed a significant challenge to traditionally conceived feminine qualities by revaluing what had previously been seen as qualities that existed outside the ambit of power.

Nonetheless, this chapter shows how in overlaying the notion of power to with gender division, dominoative power still provides the conceptual framework for how a female subject is conceived and more positive forms of power as empowerment are understood. It is demonstrated how the creative moment in Nietzsche's slave morality is invoked, as all of the qualities that issue from powerlessness are re-visioned as virtuous, superior strengths only in reactive contrast to male dominoative power. The feminist revaluation of female strengths as the basis for empowerment are 'good' because they oppose all that the male enemy is and does. Despite the benign nature of female power that is described by feminist empowerment theorists, Nietzsche’s explanation of *ressentiment* helps to explain how these theorists still invest in a will-to-power over others; they seek to become victorious over men by overthrowing and replacing male domination with female forms of power.

‘Overcoming’ *Ressentiment* – Severing Morality from Feminist Politics

Chapter Three, *Postfoundational Ressentiment*, turns its focus to critiques of feminist theory by black women and other marginalised feminists and the later impact of postmodernism on feminist conceptions of power. Although originating much earlier in Western political thought, the insights

49 Deutchman, 'Politics of Empowerment', p. 5.
50 The later challenge issued by postmodernism in academe reinforced earlier feminist criticism that empowerment relied upon claims to essential female natures or specifically gendered qualities. See for example, T. Brennan, ‘Essence Against Identity’, *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 27, nos. 1 and 2, 1996, p. 94.
of postmodernism became important to feminist theorising and served as the basis for an interrogation of a feminist commitment to power as a dyadic, one-way relation between men and women. A key feminist premise challenged by postmodern thinkers was the use of a unified category of women, which was argued to have obscured differences between women and silenced those whose experience of power extended beyond the influence of gender. Postmodern contributions to feminist theorising mirrored the criticisms of feminists who had been marginalised by the representative attempts of second-wave feminist theory to speak about ‘women as such’ and a unified experience of oppression. Both intersections into feminist theory made it explicit that women experience oppression differently depending on their race, ethnicity, class and sexuality.

It is interesting to note that victimhood as a contested identity and concept emerged within feminist theory first in the 1980s and again in the mid 1990s, when these two series of ‘insider’ critiques were at the centre of feminist debate in academe. On the surface, the reasons for this seem clear: both critiques revealed the use of gender, as a single-axis explanatory concept, to be insufficient and the alignment of domination with men only to be spurious. Importantly, the anger expressed by black feminists at being silenced by white, middle-class feminists and the later postmodern insistence on multiple differences both led to a critical examination of claims to feminist identities defined by oppression. While this thesis focuses on these two critiques from the 1980s and then the late twentieth century, the relevance of these challenges remains for contemporary feminism.

The current renewed focus on intersectional feminism and ongoing questioning and challenging of ‘white feminism’ indicates the potency of these critiques and how they continue to impact the way that feminists speak about and engage with power differences amongst women, but also how difficult they are to resolve.

Chapter Three carefully examines the ways in which feminist theorists reacted to the challenges issued by marginalised women and postmodern theory and traces the impact of these critiques

51 While there is disagreement about a precise definition of when the third-wave of feminism began, it is often defined by its focus on the various differences and intersections between women that began with the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism in the 1990s, which is the key focus of this chapter. The impact of these debates is far reaching and still impacts current feminist thought. See “Definition of Third-Wave Feminism”, genderlitutopiadystopia.wikia.com (accessed 24 March 2017).

on the feminist understanding of dominative power. Wendy Brown’s analysis is central to this chapter, as she claims that the dominant response of feminists to postmodern challenges was to retreat into a form of “reactive foundationalism”. According to Brown, feminists reacted with fear at the potential loss of a unified category of women, and were reluctant to relinquish the rhetorical force of victimhood because these commitments had allowed feminists the moral grounding required to speak out against domination. A particular target for Brown’s critique is Nancy Hartsock’s ‘standpoint feminism’, which exemplifies what Brown terms an “epistemological spirit and political structure” that is commensurate with the framework of ressentiment. She is critical of how approaches like the feminist standpoint claim to offer a perspective on the world and resulting claims to knowledge that are “clean of power”. Hartsock’s feminist standpoint epistemology sought to extend a Marxian analysis by detailing the unique view that women have on power relations by virtue of their perspective as oppressed subjects. For Hartsock, oppressed knowledges are based on a fundamentally different experience of power than men and, as such, can provide “a truer or more adequate account of reality”. As Brown identifies, the feminist claim to greater truth relies upon its origins in a Nietzschean style powerlessness, for critical force.

According to Brown, this commitment to an epistemology of powerlessness meant that feminist theorists like Hartsock were unable to embrace the dissipation of identity politics and “wariness about truth” that are defining conditions of a postmodern politics. Instead, for Brown, feminist reactions against postmodern intersections, with ‘standpoint feminism’ being a prime example, provide evidence that feminism fears losing its “well of truth” that resides in powerlessness, and suffers from “a lack of confidence” in the ability to “prosper in such a [postmodern] domain” without this foundation. Therefore, Brown’s diagnosis of ressentiment in feminist accounts of power is aimed squarely at modernist feminism, with post-foundational approaches to knowledge viewed as potentially curative. According to Brown, if feminists can embrace postmodern political engagement and combat domination with strength, feminism will be able to unshackle identity from the moral trappings of ressentiment. Like Nietzsche’s aesthetic priest, who encourages the slaves to direct the blame targeted at the external masters back at themselves, Brown also

54 Brown, States of Injury, p. 77-78.
55 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 231, 152, 151.
57 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 76.
58 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 75.
appeals to feminists to take responsibility for their powerlessness. Yet this chapter argues that in targeting feminist fear and lack of confidence as the driving force behind a feminist refusal to accept the ‘priestly’ guidance of postmodernism, Brown overlooks the role of Nietzsche’s ‘bad conscience’. While there are cases where feminists have shown reluctance to embrace the uncertainty of postmodern politics and its dissipation of power, a significant trend toward the adoption of postmodern imperatives can also be demonstrated. I argue that these, at times, dogmatic adoptions of postmodern dictums reflect guilt and shame; when ressentiment could no longer be sustained as a critique of an external enemy, white feminists adopted the blame previously attributed to the master as participants in domination. The ‘bad conscience’ is readily accepted by white feminists because the belief that domination is evil has already been internalised. I contend that it is this ‘bad conscience’, rather than fear or reluctance to accept responsibility as Brown asserts, that sabotages the opportunity for genuine recognition of women’s complicity in power.

Moreover, by locating the source of ressentiment in modernist foundations, what Brown views as theoretical reactions to postmodernism may more accurately be seen as endemic to postmodernism itself. In particular, the postmodern commitment to situated knowledge, insistence on the multiple and incommensurable nature of social identities, and concurrent rejection of representational politics are shown to provide fertile ground for ressentiment to flourish. I argue that these postmodern dictums attempt to escape from the evil effects of dominative power by mediating direct conflict between marginalised subjects and ensuring that “bad instincts” like envy, anger and resentment are prevented expression amongst feminist theorists. As conflict and domination are avoided or manufactured out of political engagement, open dialogue between subjects is prevented and each subject’s experience becomes incomprehensible to others. As a result, an unbridgeable distance is created between identities, converting that which is different into unknowable ‘Others’, which rekindles the conditions required for the oppositional identity formation characteristic of the slave morality and that is generative of ressentiment. This chapter concludes that Brown’s promise to feminists that postmodernism will create an environment in which political contest and open debate will replace the moral attachments of modernist identity, is not realised.

Rebecca Stringer makes this argument, which is considered further in the chapter. See Knowing Victims: Feminism, Agency and Victim Politics in Neoliberal Times, London and New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 113.
An Alternative Moral Approach – Domination is Bad Not Evil

In the wake of postmodern challenges to identity politics, there has been a growing acknowledgement within feminism that these debates in the late twentieth century created a false opposition between identity and politics. Several theorists have argued that the task before feminist theory remains finding a means to oppose dominative power but also negotiate between the various experiences of women in a manner that does not retreat entirely from identity. The conduct of social and political engagement without appealing to some form of identity seems unlikely if not impossible. Moreover, claims to an identity can be important strategically when there are goals identified that may benefit the needs of several or many people, whether they share belonging or membership to a particular group, or a temporary alliance.

The more specific question for Chapters Four and Five of this thesis, then, is not whether feminism can adopt ‘postidentity’ locations in order to “develop a politics sans ressentiment” as Brown desires. Instead, the critical question is how feminism can continue to unmask dominative power and issue moral challenges against its negative effects without evoking identities associated with ressentiment. Forming an identity in a manner that evokes ressentiment involves an oppositional reference to others whose qualities, experiences and identification with particular social or cultural groupings serve as the basis for revaluing one’s own identity as superior. Ressentiment is premised on the discernment that those who are different should be feared and condemned because they are ‘not us’. However, when identities are recognised as both subject to domination and complicit in forms of power over others, the moral value attributed to powerlessness is tempered. As Laurie Balfour contends, the feminist emphasis on detailing a history of suffering need not “entail an unhealthy investment in that suffering or a stance of moral superiority”. As she points out, this history is not only one “of injury but also, crucially, a history of survival and achievement against long odds”.

Of chief importance, Brown’s contention that feminists must choose political engagement over normative challenges to domination is emphatically rejected. By aligning ‘politics’ with postmodernism and moral determinations with modernist feminism, Brown creates a chasm...
between these two branches of thought and posits a false choice to feminists. Severing politics from morality by forfeiting any normative opposition to domination may remedy elements of *ressentiment*, but it also underestimates both the appeal and efficacy of moral claims and how ethical considerations continue to define postmodern imperatives. Moreover, challenging domination by unmasking the effects of oppression is vital to the critical import of feminist politics. Rather than abdicate this commitment, it is important to re-formulate how power as domination is conceived, and different identities viewed and constructed, in order to move feminist accounts of power beyond the oppositional basis of the slave morality that allows *ressentiment* to continue flourishing in the feminist engagement with dominative power.

The work of Michel Foucault is drawn upon extensively in Chapters Four and Five, with the aim of finding a means for feminism to answer this critical challenge and retain the commitment to an ethical politics. Chapter Four, *Domination is Bad Not Evil*, specifically examines Foucault’s argument that power is not evil. While Foucault’s analysis of power relations has been widely employed by feminist theorists, he has also been criticised for being deterministic in his description of domination on the one hand and, on the other, for failing to account adequately for domintative power relations. The polarisation between feminist criticisms of Foucault’s work indicates how his work is driven by the attempt to unmask the negative effects of domination but also capture the subject’s agency, and the difficulty in successfully mediating the tensions evident in holding a dual position. Importantly, Foucault’s approach to power is held to be impossible or contradictory by many theorists as the traditional antinomies between power/freedom, agency/structure and power/truth are all undermined in his work. However, it is argued that it is Foucault’s unique approach to power relations and domination that can enable feminists to mediate the tension between opposing domination and creating more affirming notions of identity that reflect women as empowered moral subjects.

Moreover, Chapter Four challenges the view that Foucault’s account of power is normatively neutral and seeks to identify and find a means to better characterise what other theorists have acknowledged as the politically engaged compassion that drives Foucault’s work. For some of his feminist critics, Foucault’s insistence that power is not evil represents an attempt to escape the normative commitments that are required in a radical opposition to domination and that provide a rationale for resistance. However, others argue his work slips in and out of the moral terrain.66 By

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66 The engagement between Habermas and Foucault remains the clearest articulation of the argument that Foucault lacks a normative framework in his analysis of power. See in particular The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans.
enlisting Nietzsche’s distinction between the moral values of ‘bad’ and ‘evil’, which differentiates the slave and master moralities, and creatively applying it to Foucault’s perspective on domination, the basis for a clearer normative framework is identified and further developed.

It is argued in this chapter that Foucault’s account provides the grounding for a moral position that domination is morally bad. Although Foucault is more commonly recognised for conveying how power operates as a positive force to create subjects and imbue them with capacity, he is still guided throughout his *oeuvre* by the need to unmask and challenge domination. Foucault follows Nietzsche to debunk a slavish understanding of power as evil, which opens up the possibility for more empowering ways of understanding identity formation and the subordinate’s agency. However, while Nietzsche expresses little compassion for the slave, emphasising only how the subordinate’s instinct for freedom is self-effacing and limited by resentment, Foucault’s analysis is driven by a concern for the subordinate and an enduring drive to combat and resist the negative effects of domination. Domination is inevitable and ongoing and yet it is not celebrated or supported by Foucault as are other forms of the will-to-power. Instead, Foucault believes that domination is the extreme form of several different modalities of power; all of which he explicitly differentiates. Importantly, while Foucault encourages a proliferation of power relations and notes the positive impacts of power in the form of governmentality, he also seeks to minimise and limit domative power. The automatic attribution of responsibility, with its underpinning belief in the unhindered freedom of the master, is rejected by Foucault, but he still recognises the need for accountability to be taken for domination and its bad effects on others.

Fortifying this normative approach for feminist purposes, then, requires explicit delineation of how Foucault’s account follows but also diverges from Nietzsche and the master morality. I argue that a normative position that domination is morally bad does not follow the master morality or Nietzsche in celebrating the strength and dominance of the powerful, though it recognises that domination is not evil and cannot be eradicated. Instead, because the slave’s predicament is of central concern to Foucault, it is his commitment that gives substance to an alternative moral position. While the moral determination of bad belongs to the master, it is applied to domination within Foucault’s account with the needs and experiences of the slave in mind. I argue that

Foucault’s account offers the possibility of a moral position against domination that is situated beyond the extremes of a master or slave morality.

Importantly for the feminist engagement with power, when domination is a morally bad but not evil form of power the antagonism and stark opposition that characterises the identity formation generated by ressentiment is shown to be alleviated. Rather than being seen as evil enemies who are defined by everything that we are not, as evident in the development of the slave’s morality, other subjects can be seen to be intrinsically related to our own identities: the bad qualities of one’s opponents are not only the basis for differentiation but also for comparison and shared values. The key to this changed view of the enemy is a recognition that all subjects participate in the operation of power, in however minimal a fashion, even those dominative forms of power that may have bad effects.

Chapter Five, Beyond a Master or Slave Morality, then considers Foucault’s concept of resistance that arises from a fundamental agonism between power and freedom. Of importance to feminist approaches to power, this chapter considers whether Foucault provides a means to engage in resistance to domination that can extend beyond the use of identity that is constrained by gender difference, as was evident in Chapter Two, but that recognises feminism cannot entirely absolve claims to identity, as was recommended by Wendy Brown in Chapter Three. It is argued that Foucault’s understanding of the polyvalency of discourses, though posing some risk of reconfirming oppressive depictions of women, enables the ongoing use of identity claims in temporary and strategic ways.

This chapter then draws out the key elements of the Nietzschean distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ to determine whether it can provide a means to develop further Foucault’s conception of resistance so that it can be of greater use for feminist politics. Key to the feminist approach to domination and resistance against it is the capacity to retain the moral opposition to domination as a bad form of power. It is argued that Foucault’s approach to resistance is underpinned by a normative dimension by virtue of an underlying commitment to uncovering and discovering new ways of resisting dominative power for the subordinate. While Foucault refuses to couch resistance within a normative framework that seeks to overthrow or replace domination and repression, he does create space within his account for subjects to make their own moral determinations. Foucault’s subject is endowed with the capacity to act within and resist dominative power structures and so he also affords the subject control in the determination of moral value. It
is argued that his notion of critique as a practice of continual questioning that seeks to undermine traditional oppositions, can be seen to align with the interpretative methodology of Nietzsche’s master who also makes judgements only within the context of practice. While this is not a pre-determined moral position, it does recognise the need for moral discernment between effective and ineffective resistance and even actions that are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (or more or less acceptable than others).

Nonetheless, I argue that, while Foucault departs from Nietzsche by retaining a moral opposition to domination as bad (as shown in Chapter Four), his dedication to a transvaluative model of normativity in his approach to resistance in this chapter is heavily indebted to Nietzsche and aligns more with the master morality. Foucault presents a mode of engagement in resistance that may not be robust enough for feminist purposes because it is not tempered by recognition of the needs of the slave for engagement in power with others. The shared opposition to dominative practices that is made possible with a moral determination of domination as bad needs to be more explicit in Foucault’s account of resistance. This chapter contends that feminist approaches to resistance may be better served by developing further the position that Foucault establishes in his critique of dominative power and yet does not take to its conclusion in his account of resistance: a refusal to settle into either a masterly or slavish approach. The origin of this position lies in Foucault’s understanding of the subject, reconfirmed in his later work on the care of the self, which more clearly outlines how subjects are complicit in power and accountable to others. In order to give substance to Foucault’s stated commitment to minimising domination as a bad form of power, the alignment of this subject with the feminist subject and Nietzsche’s sovereign individual, needs to be fortified as the origin of value in a feminist appropriation of Foucauldian resistance.

The key critical task of this thesis, then, is to theoretically strengthen the feminist engagement with power to ensure it can unmask the negative forms of power over as domination and account for the oppression of women but without sacrificing a female subject with the power to act individually and with others. In order to achieve this aim, this thesis is underpinned by a conviction that while feminism must abandon its familiar moral opposition to domination as evil, it should not sacrifice normative critique of dominative power. The contribution that this thesis makes is to delineate the key requirements for an alternative normative basis for the feminist engagement with power, domination and resistance; one that harnesses the insights of Foucault and Nietzsche and syntheses the master and slave moralities to better reflect a feminist subject who is neither master nor slave.
CHAPTER ONE – POWER AS DOMINATION

Power primarily understood as domination has resonance for a broad range of feminist theorists issuing from different traditions within second-wave feminism. While not always overtly theorised, an understanding of dominative power underpins a gender analysis of various social realms, ranging from the liberal feminist critique of the gender neutrality of state enforced power, through to socialist feminist accounts of the unequal distribution of economic resources on the basis of gender. Gendered domination serves as a useful analytical tool to reveal the inherent power relations imbedded in the use of biological difference and the conceptualisation of socialised gender roles, and to provide a common platform for women as a united and oppressed group. While feminist theorists differ on whether gender is the means by which power is allocated or if it is dominative power itself that dictates how gender is defined, a point of commonality across feminist theories is the conviction that gender and power that is exercised over women are mutually reinforcing. All forms of feminism, regardless of tradition, require some means to unmask and critically challenge how power is exercised unjustly and, in particular, as a domineering force.

This chapter contends that a lack of trust in power and a conviction that it is a corruptive force defines feminist accounts of dominative power, influencing how power is conceived and the tone with which it is dealt. Explicating power as domination and all its varied effects is the central focus for Nancy Hartsock, Catherine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin and Carole Pateman, whose arguments are considered in this chapter. In these feminist accounts, power has the same characteristics and effects as identified by traditional theorists like Steven Lukes and Max Weber: it is strictly exercised over others, it is based on conflict and requires a subordinate for definitional meaning. Power over is strictly dyadic and domineering. Yet, for the feminist theorists considered in this chapter, this form of power is also condemned as a uniquely male form of power exerted over women: it is described as an external, threatening and even monstrous construct. The key theoretical commitments that underpin this concept of domineering power are shown to align with Nietzsche’s description of the slave morality and the condemnation of domination as evil. It is

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1 Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’. Allen argues that feminist theory offers two main ideal-type approaches to power: power as domination and power as empowerment, which do “not necessarily map onto the usually accepted divisions within feminist theory between, for example, radical feminists, relational feminists, socialist feminists and so on”, p. 21.
argued that while feminist conceptions of domination adopt the same characteristics of dominative power evident in traditional accounts, a gendered analysis of power pushes feminist conceptions into more extreme moral terrain that further entrenches the powerlessness of women as subordinated subjects. As fear and distrust of the powerful “aspect of the victorious” imparts an evil quality to the concept of dominative power, the primary form of resistance available to women is a Nietzschean-styled ressentiment.4

The Origins of Domination in Quantitative Power

The concept of power as a quantitative capacity, which a social actor may or may not possess, has been a dominant theme within Western political thought.5 According to William Connolly, it “provides the starting point from which contemporary social scientists typically analyse power relationships”.6 Theorists often begin with the notion that power is a force or energy that enables an individual to act in a social field in order to achieve certain goals. Yet, in order to quantify who possesses power and to what degree, relationships between subjects become paramount. Power as a quantitative capacity “may be put to work for a variety of purposes”; however, in the context of people rather than things this conception quickly devolves into a dyadic relationship which “implies that the wishes of those with more power will normally prevail over the wishes of those with less”.7 In order to achieve outcomes, it may be necessary to triumph over another subject and so, power as a quantitative capacity becomes entwined with a notion of power over.

Steven Lukes has been influential in advancing the connection between a quantitative conception of power and the view that power is essentially conflict-based and so exercised over other subjects.8 According to Lukes, the “basic common core to, or primitive notion lying behind, all talk of power is the notion that A in some way affects B”.9 This idea of power as creating ‘affects’ may seem neutral at first glance, with alignment to a broader notion of power as a dispositional capacity or ability. However, for Lukes, in order to be regarded as “significant” enough to demonstrate that

4 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 122.
5 Hindess, Discourses of Power, p. 1. Hindess argues that power as “a simple quantitative phenomenon” is one of only two main concepts of power that have “dominated Western political thought in the modern period” with the other being the concept of power as a “right to act” as espoused most prominently by John Locke.
7 Hindess, Discourses of Power, p. 2.
8 Lukes, Power: A Radical View. This edition captures Lukes’ better known perspective on power that influenced the theorists of the 1970s and 1980s that are considered in this chapter. Lukes dramatically revised what he included in his conception of power in the later text published in 2005, and this is noted where relevant, but his central focus on power as dominative remains.
a subject has exercised power, A must affect B in a “manner contrary to B’s interests”. This common core to power assumes that power is both contrary, involving potential conflict, and is necessarily exercised over or against the interests of another subject. As Lukes makes clear, what is of most interest in the exercise of power relations is “the (attempted or successful) securing of people’s compliance by overcoming or averting their opposition”. 

The theorists of power that Lukes canvasses are similarly driven by the desire to locate, measure and predict the extent of power that is exercised over other subjects in order to achieve outcomes. The classical pluralist position put forward by Robert Dahl situates an analysis of power within a conflict-based context where many diverse interest groups in society are seen to compete over limited power resources or to achieve influence over the outcomes of decision-making. What Lukes characterises as the first face of power, or the one-dimensional view, is measured by assessing which interest groups are best, or most frequently, served by the state as the “honest broker”. In short, the interest group that is successful in achieving its desired goals, as a result of public decision-making processes, has power. According to Bachrach and Baratz, though, who are leading critics of this position, power is also exercised over other subjects when certain issues that may directly concern them are not even considered by policy makers or the public because they are prevented from entering the political domain. Therefore, for these critics of classical pluralism, the measurement of power must also include this second dimension of decisions that are not made or that have been denied entry into the political process. Power can foster the illusion of “real” democratic participation, serving to reinforce dominant social or political values and those who already have power over others in a political system.

This process of locating and quantifying power, as a resource that is allocated to some groups in greater quantities than others, has been influential for second-wave feminist conceptions of power, particularly those within a liberal feminist framework. Like pluralists, liberal feminists do not necessarily view power as a negative force but instead contend that it is the way in which power is unequally distributed that is problematic. While for classical pluralists every citizen is assumed to

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10 Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, p. 27.
14 Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, p. 11
be a potential contributor to a political system and hence, can participate in debate and battle for power, liberal feminists mirror the critique of theorists like Bachrach and Baratz whose analysis also considers the interests of those who may have limited access to involvement in public discourse or who may be excluded entirely.\footnote{Lukes (ed.), \textit{Power}, p. 24.} Liberal feminists thus recognise exclusions from power based on gender and seek to redistribute access through appeals to the state which, while not gender neutral, is still the means through which change can be sought.

However, Lukes is critical of the individualism that governs the two faces of power he critiques, as he sees both as failing to recognise social alignments or collective structures, which operate to support and underpin individual action.\footnote{Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 22.} Similarly, feminist critiques of the liberal view of power contend that the structural elements of dominoative power are not adequately accounted for in a model that views power as something that is possessed as a quantifiable entity that is seen to be held by a few over the many.\footnote{Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 22.} An analysis of gendered domination instead reveals the more generalised forms of power that are structurally reinforced and that, unlike other forms of distributed power, operate through entrenched belief systems and the systematic oppression by a majority group in society.

Lukes’ engagement with the two faces of power put forward by pluralists and their critics further advances the feminist case for the gendered nature of power because he also emphasises the more insidious ways in which power operates beneath the surface of observable and easily identifiable interests.\footnote{Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 22.} An approach to power that seeks only to locate intentional actions, identifiable consequences and traceable outcomes serves to hide the more “subtle and oppressive ways” that some subjects can limit others.\footnote{Connolly, \textit{Terms of Political Discourse}, p. 106.} Lukes contends that people may not always act in their “best interests” because they may not be aware of their interests or know how to go about fulfilling them. A person’s interests may also contradict current beliefs, needs or wants.\footnote{Lukes (ed.), \textit{Power}, p. 6. This reveals Lukes’ Marxist roots as his notion of latent conflict extends the Marxist argument regarding false consciousness.} While Lukes believes that a subject can exercise direct power over another by “getting him to do what he does not want to do”, he also reveals the more subtle power over others that relies upon “influencing, shaping or determining” wants.\footnote{Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 23.} Lukes’ additional third face of power can prevent individuals from
not only expressing but even being aware of their wants or grievances.\textsuperscript{26} His account of power can thus explain how oppressive relations like gendered domination can elicit the participation of subjects in their own subordination; it is a more subtle and coercive form of power over others.\textsuperscript{27}

Despite Lukes’ critique of the pluralist tendency toward stringent behaviouralism and the tracing of power through observable conflict, he does not explicitly undermine the centrality of conflict \textit{per se} to an understanding of power. Instead, his ‘third face’ of power relies upon a notion of latent conflict, which still requires an inherent contradiction between the ‘real’ interests of the subordinate and those of the powerful, even if it isn’t directly highlighted or confronted.\textsuperscript{28} It is clear in Luke’s schema that conflict, in its latent form, must be simmering under the surface in order for power to be operating: there always remains an “implicit reference to potential conflict”.\textsuperscript{29} While Lukes seeks to differentiate his account from pluralists and their critics, he reinforces the central premise that one subject’s interests must be denied or overruled for power to have been exercised. The conflict, latent or otherwise, is the catalyst for this loss. As Lukes acknowledges, the three dimensions of power are really just “alternative interpretations and applications of one and the same underlying concept of power”.\textsuperscript{30} As a result, the concept of quantitative power ultimately suggests that there will be those who employ power and those who are subject to it: power must be a dyadic and unequal relation.\textsuperscript{31}

Finally, Lukes’ account of dominative power is motivated by a more explicitly political aim than pluralists, in that he wants to attribute responsibility to those who exercise power over others.\textsuperscript{32} In this, the more radical elements of his approach to power are highlighted and his connection with feminist theories confirmed. The desire to ensure the accountability of the powerful entails an implicit critique, in that it formalises the view that there is a negative side to the exercise of power over. The attribution of responsibility for one subject exercising power over another is not a “neutral” determination, but one that is accusatory; to be held responsible suggests that an injustice has occurred and there is a need to justify or explain one’s actions. As William Connolly points out, this inherent link between responsibility and power “shows power to be a concept bounded by normative considerations”.\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{26} Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 25.
\bibitem{27} Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 22.
\bibitem{28} Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 24-25.
\bibitem{30} Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 27.
\bibitem{31} Hindess, \textit{Discourses of Power}, p. 2.
\bibitem{33} Connolly, \textit{Terms of Political Discourse}, p. 97.
\end{thebibliography}
Lukes’ commitment to finding those individuals or groups responsible for exercising power over others works in conjunction with his desire to uncover the more covert, subtle forms of power that lie beneath clearly observable conflicts of interest. Pluralists rely upon the powerful actor demonstrating clear intentions against the express conflict of others, with observable benefits accruing or consequences evident before power can be located. This leads to a narrowing of the scope of power to its most obvious abuses, such that locating its subtle forms, and attributing responsibility for them, becomes unlikely.\(^{34}\) Thus, it is claimed that the pluralist view can be seen as aligning more with the “powerful or elite in society” who may seek to “veil their exercise of power”\(^{35}\). In contrast, Lukes claims that responsibility can be attributed to an actor for a far broader range of actions and even inaction. If a dominant actor could act differently, but chooses not to, then this constitutes an exercise of power for Lukes that should attract a determination that the actor is responsible.\(^{36}\) For Lukes this even includes those instances where a subject is unaware of the consequences of her/his actions but could have reasonably ascertained them.\(^{37}\) This expansive arena of responsibility therefore reflects Lukes’ more radical engagement with power as a dominative force and alignment with those over whom power is exerted.

While for Lukes the dominant actor is not directly named, his account is politically charged by the assertion that “the point … of locating power is to fix responsibility for consequences held to flow from the action, or inaction, of certain specifiable agents”.\(^{38}\) For Lukes, these agents are in positions with the capacity to make broad changes to social conditions that may be for the betterment of many people and yet choose not to do so.\(^{39}\) Lukes’ specifiable agents are thus clearly those who already possess extensive power or authority, as the majority of individuals are not likely to have the means to initiate broad changes to society in general. A subordinated subject, unaware of her/his real interests and hence confined to acceptance of the power held over them, could not possibly be held responsible for inaction or actions taken according to this criterion: responsibility is clearly only within the province of the powerful.

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\(^{34}\) Connolly, Terms of Political Discourse, p. 107.
\(^{35}\) Connolly, Terms of Political Discourse, pp. 98-107.
\(^{36}\) Lukes, Power: A Radical View, p. 55.
\(^{37}\) Lukes, Power: A Radical View, p. 56.
\(^{38}\) Lukes, Power: A Radical View, p. 56 (my italics).
\(^{39}\) Lukes, Power: A Radical View, p.56.
The Necessity for a Subordinate

Both Lukes’ account and the pluralist approach to power highlight effectively how conflict can make the exercise of power visible and can spur on competition among people or groups for limited resources. Conflict can also be an important component in the feeling that power is being exerted: it corresponds with an instinct that power is at play in social situations when something is at stake. Yet conflict does not necessarily have to operate within a paradigm of superordinate/subordinate wherein one person must necessarily dominate or win out over another. It is when the notion of antagonistic conflict is coupled with a conception of power as a zero-sum dynamic that the strict division between superordinate/subordinate is evoked. The assumption underpinning the use of conflict within pluralist accounts is that power is a quantifiable entity; that “the outcomes of conflict are invariably determined by the ‘quantities’ of power available to the contending parties”. In any given political interaction, then, the likelihood of a subject being successful or not depends upon existing access to the instruments of power: the exercise of power becomes a fixed relation. Fundamental to the existence of power is a central antagonism between subjects that means the operation of power necessarily results in winners and losers.

Max Weber’s account of power has been influential to Lukes’ schema as well as pluralist theorists who see power that is exercised over others as the primary form of power. For Weber, domination is one of the driving forces behind social action and one of its most important elements. Starting from the same premise that power is evident in the extent to which objectives are achieved or ends are met by an individual or group, Weber relies upon a conception of individual will. Like Lukes, it is the will of the dominant actor that is of primary interest, in particular when this will is realised against the attempted resistance of others. Power is only evident when actor A achieves her/his desired ends by directing or controlling the agency of actor B. According to Weber, the will of the dominant actor is often manifested as a command that requires the obedience of the less powerful subject. As he succinctly states, “those who hold power do so at the expense of others”.

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40 Hindess, *Discourses of Power*, p. 15.
42 Lukes (ed.), *Power*, p. 2.
43 Lukes (ed.), *Power*, p. 2.
46 Harambolos et al., *Sociology*, p. 102.
Like Weber’s, Lukes’ insistence on conflict prevents his account from recognising any potential for alignment of interests between subjects – for power to be held with others and for power over to be anything but domactive. Even in Lukes’ later formulations, in which he gives greater emphasis to power as a potential capacity, he still presents capacity as being derivative of those forms of power over that extinguish capacity. In contrast, Dorothy Emmett argues that all forms of “original activity” can be seen to involve instances of power over others but without domination. Writers, artists and orators can be seen as powerful as they can command the attention of an audience, change attitudes and alter actions. Yet while artwork or literature may powerfully affect people, there is always an element of voluntarism, and individual interpretation, involved. A person may comply with the suggestions of another subject, may view her/him as an authority or even emulate her/his qualities, style or manner even without any prompting or suggestion. Some relations of power can be more reciprocal and involve an element of autonomy on behalf of each subject, even though one person may have power over another.

However, according to Lukes, when a person uses persuasion, inducement, or encouragement to influence another – presumably toward an outcome the influencing party desires – because there is no overt conflict of interests, no power is evident. If an individual or group chooses to follow an argument or strategy outlined by a leader and work willingly toward a goal they perceive to be in their interests, this too is not a phenomenon that can be explained as an exercise of power within Lukes’ schema. For Lukes, it is not power if “B autonomously accepts A’s reasons, so that one is inclined to say that it is not A but A’s reasons, or B’s acceptance of them, that is responsible for B’s change of course”. When B autonomously accepts A’s reasoning, changes her mind or merely recognises the argument as superior, or in her real interests, then there is an element of choice involved on the part of B. As a result, Lukes contends that “consensual authority, with no

47 S. Lukes, Power: A Radical View, 2nd edn, London, Macmillan Press, 2005, p. 69 for reference regarding power as a capacity. The concepts of power to and power with that are excluded by Lukes and feminist domination theorists in this chapter are considered in the following chapter.
50 In Lukes’ Power: A Radical View, 1974 publication, he would most certainly consider these forms of power to be influence, not power over or any other form of power. Quantitative power as a capacity to act is also precluded from his conception. However, in his 2005 iteration of the same text, these very forms of power over and capacity notions are included in what is a complete change of Lukes’ position. This is discussed further in consideration of power to in the following chapter.
51 Lukes, Power: A Radical View, p. 32.
52 Weber’s understanding of charismatic authority would capture this concept of a leader who is powerful by persuading followers through personality. The concept of leadership is generally more germane to theorists of consensual forms of power. See Lukes, ‘Power and Authority’, p. 650.
53 Lukes, Power: A Radical View, p. 33.
conflict of interests, is not, therefore, a form of power". The subordinate’s capacity to make a choice or exercise autonomy in this situation extinguishes the presence of a power relation.

Lukes also dismisses the more consensual forms of power that do not see power as a limited or finite quantity that must be battled over, solidifying his concept of power as conflict-based and necessarily asymmetrical. As Hindess contends, Lukes fails to recognise how power understood as a government or leader’s “right to act” has been a useful tool to coordinate the sometimes competing, even conflicting, interests of individuals. Lukes’ concern with unmasking the more insidious forms of power ensures a general cynicism toward the notion of consent that underpins power as a ‘right’ to act and more communal conceptions that view power as being held in conjunction with other subjects. Given his emphasis on the more manipulative and coercive nature of power, Lukes deems it impossible to observe whether the consensus achieved within a group or political community is genuine or based upon coercion. This also leads him to reject the claims of theorists like Talcott Parsons that power is a “generalised facility or resource in the society” that can be harnessed in order to achieve agreed social goals that all parties involved can benefit from. For Lukes, this focus on how power is harnessed as a communal force means that power held over others is excluded from consideration.

These examples of persuasive argument, influence and authority highlight in Lukes’ account the relationship between power and freedom. Lukes’ conception of power relies not only on an understanding of power as being exerted over others but also on it as “overcoming or averting their opposition” in a manner that is “contrary to” their interests. Fundamental to the existence of power is a central antagonism between subjects that means the operation of power necessarily results in winners and losers. Peter Morriss argues that in such an understanding of power, Person B becomes the “object of A’s power”, in that it is through B that A achieves his goals. Further, because B must be significantly affected by A – that is, deterred from action or directed toward an action

54 Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, p. 32.
55 While Lukes acknowledges that for B to recognise and identify these real interests, B must have “relative autonomy”, he stipulates that this would occur independently of A’s power, perhaps through democratic participation. How the subordinate would achieve such autonomy is not developed, as argued later in this chapter: *Power: A Radical View*, p. 33.
56 Hindess, *Discourses of Power*, p. 10. Hindess also argues that John Locke’s vision of this political community could be enhanced by Lukes’ notion of interests as being adapted and shaped through power.
59 Parsons, *Structure and Process*, p. 31. Lukes includes phenomena of coercion, exploitation and manipulation in what is removed by these theorists from ‘the theoretical landscape’, p. 33.
60 Lukes (ed.), *Power*, p. 16.
that is determined by A – this secondary subject B can easily become the “objective” of A’s power.\textsuperscript{62} As a result, the subordinate’s involvement in the relation of power becomes merely a reference point for what has been lost or overcome; this defeat is the chief marker of the more powerful agent’s success.

### Dominative Power in Feminist Accounts

Feminist accounts of power in the second-wave of feminist thought aligned with several of these key premises outlined in the work of Lukes and the pluralists. In order to critique and condemn the unequal nature of power relations and to identify the oppression of women in patriarchal societies, many feminists adopted the Weberian focus on domination as the primary expression of power. The insistence on conflict as the central function of power and the necessary ‘overcoming’ of the subordinate’s will, were also common features shared by feminist theorists. One notable example is Nancy Hartsock, who in *Money Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (1983) outlines a detailed exposition on the nature of power that engages directly with theorists of quantitative power and those who take a more communal approach such as Talcott Parsons.\textsuperscript{63} While critical of both sides of the traditional power divide captured by these theorists, Hartsock’s chief focus is on power over as domination and how it is constructed and maintained along gender lines.\textsuperscript{64}

According to Jana Sawicki, several feminists in the second-wave assumed this notion of power as domination rather than directly theorising the concept of power “in itself”.\textsuperscript{65} Hartsock explains that feminism in the 1970s was focused on documenting women’s experiences of oppression but also on ensuring that feminist political practice avoided any form of organisation or action that enabled the exercise of power over others. As she points out, implicit in this approach is “a tacit acceptance of the view that the exercise of power is the exercise of domination”.\textsuperscript{66} While Hartsock seeks to create a more complete understanding of power relations and focus specifically on how it is defined, her attention is given to structurally reinforced “relations of domination”.\textsuperscript{67} She also

\textsuperscript{62} Morriss, *Power: A Philosophical Analysis*, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{63} Hartsock, *Money, Sex, Power*, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{65} Hartsock also puts forward an alternate view of power that she argues comes from women’s experiences, which is considered in the next chapter. See *Money, Sex and Power*, Chapter 9, on the female theorists she believes offer a distinctly female version of power. Importantly for her analysis, though, domination is the primary form of power used by men and “carries a masculine gender”: pp. 11-12, 151.
provides a leading example of how dominative power becomes seen as a predominantly ‘male’ form of power within second-wave feminism.

Hartsock’s chief argument is that theories of power are shaped by the position of the theorist in relations of power: epistemology is intrinsically connected to experiences of either having power or being subject to it.68 She begins her Marxian analysis by critically assessing what she terms “exchange” theories of power. For Hartsock, exchange models of power produce an epistemology that favours the view of the capitalist or those with dominative power, which can only provide an insight into how power operates from the top down. From this perspective, power relations are understood only in a “partial and pernicious” way that serves to obscure the more damaging effects of power that are experienced by those who are subject to it.69 As a result, these conceptions of power based upon the notion of exchange make dominative power relations appear equal.70

According to Hartsock, pluralists view dominative power as an inevitable part of social relations rather than a force that should be engaged with critically.71 She views pluralists as being bound to a model of power based on the market model of free and equal exchange between subjects, wherein all subjects will participate in the battle over control of resources and policy issues. The outcomes of these contests inevitably lead to winners and losers, but the perpetuation of this unequal dynamic is not of interest to pluralists. Hartsock more favourably notes how the views of Bachrach and Baratz give more substance and theorisation of the dominative aspects of power, in detailing how broad-reaching bias can be mobilised to ensure the ongoing dominance of those in power.72 Yet, while she notes that their approach acknowledges that there is more at play in power relations than a free-play of un-coerced exchange, as in the market model of pluralists, she argues that they too remain individualistic by focussing on intentional action that is divorced from restrictive social arrangements.73 As a result, Hartsock aligns her feminist account with Lukes, whom she sees as offering a more structurally based understanding of power as being intrinsically linked to communities with differing interests and differentiated access to resources and the means of power.74

68 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 7-10.
69 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 131.
70 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 19-54.
71 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 92.
72 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 80.
73 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 85-86.
74 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 91.
The more radical location of Hartsock and Lukes in the Marxist tradition aids the alignment here, in particular the commitment to unmasking dominative forms of power that are more coercive and better hidden. Both theorists agree that the pluralists and their critics all adopt an uncritical acceptance of power that masks its true, more insidious and intractable nature. Like Lukes, socialist and radical feminist theorists of the second-wave begin a feminist analysis of power from the shared conviction that entrenched structures of inequality within society serve to reproduce and reinforce forms of power that are exercised over others, hence requiring more explicit challenge than arguments for greater access to power as a resource.

Nonetheless, Hartsock claims that Lukes is still trapped by the conceptual baggage of the theorists he critiques, in particular the belief in a free-willed agent who can assert autonomy in the face of coercion and manipulation.\textsuperscript{75} She argues that Lukes reinscribes the commitment of pluralists to individualism and intentional action by assuming the subordinate can make choices between real and imposed interests.\textsuperscript{76} In Lukes' account, any resistance to the operation of power on behalf of the subordinated subject would require that the fundamental, yet latent, conflict between real and imposed interests is revealed. According to Lukes, the identification of real interests is "up to" the subordinate "exercising choice under conditions of relative autonomy and, in particular, independently" of the dominant subject.\textsuperscript{77}

While this may appear to go against the abject powerlessness of the subordinate, which I have identified as a limiting factor in Lukes' account, it actually serves to reconfirm the incapacity of the less powerful subject. Luke's notion of the 'relative autonomy' of the subordinate exists within conditions in which power acts to constrain the field of possibility for subjects by determining their very wants, desires and interests. Given subordinated individuals may not even be aware of their real interests, as Lukes claims, the likelihood of them being able to express these interests and pursue redress is minimal.\textsuperscript{78} In a paradoxical fashion, in order to participate in the power relation even in a minimal fashion, the subject who is divorced from her/his real interests must display a level of autonomous thought and engagement that Lukes makes clear is necessarily extinguished through the very function of his 'third face' of power. This need for autonomy and its impossibility leaves the powerless more entrenched in dominative power.

\textsuperscript{75} Hartsock, \textit{Money, Sex and Power}, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{76} Hartsock, \textit{Money, Sex and Power}, pp. 88-91.
\textsuperscript{77} Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{78} Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 25.
This is problematic for feminist accounts of power because, by reconfirming the powerlessness of the subordinate, the ongoing unequal dominance of one subject by another is perpetual. Points of conflict, if they actually arise and are voiced, do not resemble resistant action that could result in change but rather act as confirmation that the power of the dominant actor will win out. This concept of dominitative power that relies on conflict but assumes the subordinate will be overcome, without the tools to perceive real interests, is too narrow for the feminist purpose of challenging domination and finding the means to empower action against it.

However, while Hartsock recognises this limitation, also claiming that Lukes leaves the subordinate “unsupported”, it is not the potential powerlessness of the subordinate that she finds most problematic, as I argue. Instead, Hartsock claims that Lukes’ critique of domination does not go far enough in describing the limitations and constraints imposed on the subordinate.79 Hartsock is concerned that Lukes does not adequately account for how individual forms of domination are reinforced by majority groups who enshrine certain controlling behaviours in systematic ways to enforce the oppression of women.80 She concludes that while Lukes is critical of dominitative power, he can only offer limited assistance to a feminist engagement with power, which must instead turn “suspicions into a well-grounded analysis and critique of domination”.81

In order to forge such a critique, Hartsock argues that feminists need to provide an alternative to the surface epistemology that confines Parsons, the pluralists, their critics and ultimately Lukes.82 Issuing from Marxian foundations, Hartsock argues that adopting the position of the proletariat provides for a more critical view on dominitative power from the position of production. For the proletariat, the location on the underside of dominitative power provides an insight into market epistemologies that reveal them to be “ideological”, as “exchange” is given priority over “use”.83 The proletarian vision can provide an epistemology that reveals both the surface structure (where individual, intentional acts of power take place) and base conditions of production (where the true nature of dominitative structures operate).84 Hence, Hartsock argues that it provides a dual perspective that effectively occupies both sides of the agency/structure divide and produces a more

79 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 91, p. 11.
80 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 89.
81 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 88-89, 92.
82 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 11.
84 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 116.
complete view of power relations than the narrow view issuing from the position of those with power.\textsuperscript{85}

From this starting point, Hartsock then moves to incorporate a “feminist standpoint” that goes even further than the epistemic privilege of the proletariat to expose the reality of power relations beneath production, which she characterises as the “epistemological level of reproduction”.\textsuperscript{86} This perspective from women’s lived experience as mothers and providers working under conditions of a sexual division in labour can assist in constructing an “account of women’s oppression from the ground up”.\textsuperscript{87} Through the lens of gender, as the epistemology of reproduction is aligned with women’s experiences of being subject to domination, the surface epistemology that is equated with exchange and individualistic acts of power must belong to men. As Hartsock explicitly states, the ‘feminist standpoint’ reveals the surface epistemology to be “not only of a capitalist vantage point but also a masculinist one”.\textsuperscript{88} Gender is part of the systemic bolstering of domination that is enshrined in capitalism and impacts on how power is viewed by men who have access to it. It is a key part of Hartsock’s approach, then, that a ‘feminist standpoint’ allows for a more critical view of power and domination than that offered by men, who hold power over others.

Beyond this, though, Hartsock encourages a theoretical slippage from the claim that power is experienced and understood differently by men to a contention that power is inherently masculinist in nature; that it “carries a masculine gender”.\textsuperscript{89} She insists that while a female perspective on power enables a critical opposition to domination, and the possibility of exercising power without domination, male approaches are limited by their embeddedness in power and alignment with domination.\textsuperscript{90} She thus formalises the oppositional position of women and men as existing on either side of traditional debates on the nature of power: the antinomies evident amongst traditional theorists are overlaid and reinforced by gender division. The conceptual leap from men being the predominant practitioners of domination to dominative power being intrinsically male or masculine entails a theoretical conflation that is contestable. Yet, this approach strengthened the critical condemnation of domination, as Hartsock intended with her further radicalisation of Lukes’ position, and became the prism through which later conceptions of power were developed within second-wave feminism.

\textsuperscript{85} Hartsock, \textit{Money, Sex and Power}, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{86} Hartsock, \textit{Money, Sex and Power}, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{87} Hartsock, \textit{Money, Sex and Power}, pp. 231, 152, 151.
\textsuperscript{88} Hartsock, \textit{Money, Sex and Power}, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{89} Hartsock, \textit{Money, Sex and Power}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{90} Hartsock, \textit{Money, Sex and Power}, p. 12.
Male Power as Domination

The alignment of domination with ‘male’ power has been highly influential for second-wave feminism, reinforced by the focus given to intimate relations between men and women as the basis for broader critiques on the nature of power. Feminist theorists of the second-wave, such as Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone and Dorothy Dinnerstein, for example, directed theoretical attention to the social construction and operation of heterosexuality, prostitution and sexual relations more broadly, providing critical insight into the negativity of definition by sex or gender and the reinforcement of male domination. The additional arenas of marriage and pornography are considered in more detail in this chapter. According to Hartsock, these intimate sexual relations between men and women are an important indicator of how power operates within the rest of society and in the formation of communities. To the extent that sexual relations between men and women are structured by domination and submission, other social relations will follow and the “community as a whole will be structured by domination”. Importantly, though, as gender is the primary driver in how power is structured, the nature of this domination is presented as immutable: men are the dominators, leaving women as the subjects who can respond to power with futile forms of resistance or as Weber suggests, with obedience.

In her well-known critique of liberal impartiality, *The Sexual Contract* (1988), Carole Pateman gives further credence to this premise of female obedience and how it is enshrined through the contract of marriage between men and women. Pateman argues that marriage is a tool by which male power over women becomes legalised in liberal legislative structures and then in society more broadly. The formalisation of patriarchal right becomes the right to sexual access, which ensures women’s subjection in the private sphere. According to Pateman, the sexual contract is built upon women’s subjugation, which is necessary to men’s freedom in the public domain. It is the “patriarchal right” of men embedded in this sexual contract, the “taken-for-granted, natural
subjection of women to men”, which is then confirmed through the modern marriage contract.

The domination of women is seen to precede the marriage contract, which serves to confirm or maintain domination rather than install it. According to Pateman, the marriage contract is the “ceremonial confirmation of ... patriarchal subjection of wife to husband”.

This pre-existence of power as domination means that the notion of a woman’s consent to the marriage contract is made problematic by Pateman. As the contractual description of a wife means that she is the property of her husband, she does not qualify as an individual in the liberal sense of the word. Hence, a woman has no choice or agency in the decision to marry. As Pateman claims, “the presuppositions of the status of ‘wife’ mean that it is not possible for a woman simultaneously to become a wife and to give consent”. Pateman’s challenge to the notion of consent here is reminiscent of Steven Lukes’ “third dimension of power”, with the perceived desires of the woman being depicted as unaligned with her ‘real’ interests as she accepts what is presented as an unequal and undesirable situation. The capacity of women to identify the disjuncture between their interests as presented by patriarchal society and their ‘real’ interests to more autonomous relationships is similarly limited by Pateman. In fact, unlike Lukes, who attempts albeit unsuccessfully to account for some limited autonomy for less powerful subjects, Pateman argues that because the roles of wife and husband are determined solely by the “natural criterion of sex”, the status of men is perpetual and cannot be challenged. The woman is denied agency in her ‘choice’ of marriage and through her confinement to an innately powerless role.

In the task of describing women’s oppression, Pateman’s desire to explicate the severity of women’s subjection within liberal contracts causes her to present patriarchy as beyond possible intervention. As dominative power is seen to infuse the most symbolic and intimate of relationships between men and women, patriarchy becomes an “eternal and unchanging actor ... that acts but cannot be acted upon”. This leads Pateman often to judge and define the contract of marriage by its worst cases. As Susan Moller Okin argues, Pateman tends to “fuse” past and present so that her statements describing modern marriage do not always reflect current practices. In this, Pateman’s analysis goes beyond being a project of documenting women’s experiences of

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oppression to further reducing women’s agency in order to forge a more critical engagement with domineering power.

In fact, the only space created for women to act as subjects or agents in the face of this male domination, is through her choice of which man will dominate her. As Pateman states, a wife is “dependent on the benevolence of her husband and can only endeavour to obtain a ‘good master’”. The paradigm of master/subject as a description of sexual politics is a useful theoretical tool to highlight how institutions accepted as legitimate can be based upon a hidden abrogation of the rights or freedoms of women. However, just as a slave is defined by her/his servitude, by equating marriage to slavery, the only recourse left to women to combat this role is to refuse marriage and, by extension, heterosexual relationships. Within Pateman’s schema, there is no possibility for women to have autonomy or pleasure in intimate relations with men if their ‘real’ interests are to be supported: as one feminist critic argues, this “inevitably reduces heterosexuality to an exercise in male power and female victimisation (and in terms of the sexual contract) to rape”. Devoid of power within heterosexual relationships, women cannot challenge or undermine marriage and nor can feminist theorists challenge the construct of marriage from within. Instead, Pateman attributes to men, and the patriarchal foundations for the marriage contract, the power to commit radical harm: intimate heterosexual relations are rape.

I argue then that Pateman’s use of dominative power as a construct goes well beyond being a critical analysis or description of gender oppression to being a fundamental and pervasive element in all relations between men and women. This then leads into a condemnation of dominative power that sees it become not only the primary expression of power, but representative of all other forms of power too. While a gender analysis fortifies this exclusion of other forms of power, this tendency is also evident in Lukes’ understanding of quantitative power that builds on a Weberian approach. When the possibility for one person to have power over another without a conflict of interests and coercive action is eradicated, all forms of power exerted over other subjects become domineering in nature. The potential for power to be shared between subjects, for action undertaken by a powerful subject to be accepted and supported by another subject, and the chance for the subordinate to participate with some autonomy in the relation of power, are all precluded. An asymmetrical,

conflict-based and dyadic conception of power, resulting in winners and losers, overshadows a more nuanced conception of power.

**The Object of Power: Woman as Powerless Subject**

It is argued, then, that Pateman’s approach to power aligns with Hartsock in taking the dyadic basis of dominative power a step further than Lukes, with power externalised as belonging solely to one specific community or group: men. As argued, this shift from dominative power being seen as exercised by men, to being considered as inherently male in nature, is bolstered by the focus on personal, intimate and individual experiences of male power. This is also clearly apparent within feminist debates on pornography in the second-wave, which were led by two prominent and influential theorists, Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. Differing from the feminist accounts considered thus far, where gender and domination are mutually reinforcing, MacKinnon and Dworkin argue that gender differences are important but only in that they serve to neutralise and obscure the domination of men. As MacKinnon claims, because “difference is the velvet glove on the iron fist of domination”, there are negative effects for women when their differences from men are celebrated and when they are denigrated: “difference means dominance”.105

To take the “dominance approach”, as MacKinnon terms it, involves a “shift in perspective” away from feminist conceptions that see gender difference as a tool to both describe and a mechanism to possibly overcome oppression.106 For MacKinnon, since dominance is primary, any possible changes in gendered roles will not alter the fundamentally dyadic relationship between men and women, nor the inevitable function of power: “that men have power and women do not”.107 For these feminist theorists who identify as taking a ‘dominance approach’, the tendency toward renouncing all relations with men as inherently infused with power, domination and potential violence, is at its strongest amongst feminist theorists of the second-wave.

MacKinnon and Dworkin’s approach to power that sees male domination as pre-existing gender differences and permeating all forms of social interaction is clearly apparent in their treatment of pornography. In 1983, these theorists drafted an anti-pornography ordinance that sought civil redress for abuses that, it was argued, pornography caused in the form of harm to women, both in

105 MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, pp. 8, 39.
106 Feminist empowerment theorists who call upon gender differences as the basis for female forms of power and liberation are considered in the following chapter.
the making of pornography and as a result of its consumption. As a result of this ordinance, pornography is defined as the “graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and words”. For both theorists, pornography performs a functional role of representing women’s subordination by men in sexualised form in a manner that serves to exploit and endorse women’s subordination. The ground-breaking contribution of these theorists was to move debates about pornography beyond conservative preoccupation with sexual explicitness to a feminist interpretation that is it is a sexualised representation of how women are oppressed by men in a way that permeates society more broadly.

For MacKinnon and Dworkin, pornography inflicts harm on women in two key ways. First, it harms women by sexualising subordination in representative form: the pornographic material itself oppresses women. For Dworkin, pornography mirrors reality and reflects the lived experiences of women in their relationships with men. The ways in which women’s bodies are dominated by men in pornography is possible only because it is exactly how women are valued by men and society more generally. Yet Dworkin takes this even further to claim that, because “woman as whore exists within the objective and real system of male sexual domination”, male domination of the women’s bodies is not merely a representation but also reflects “the basic material reality of women’s lives”. The powerlessness of women is reinforced here, then, through a theoretical alignment between depictions of pornography as representation and pornography as reality. As West points out, the Mackinnon-Dworkin definition of pornography is a constitutive claim that “pornography is, in and of itself, the subordination of women.” Pornography is not only a reflection of women’s subordination that further entrenches harm, but is also in itself constitutive of harm.

Second, it is a catalyst for further harm: male domination and violence in many spheres of public life is bolstered and reinforced through consumption of pornographic material that use women’s bodies as objects for male pleasure. For Dworkin, this includes the role of pornography as a cause

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110. West, ‘Pornography and Censorship’.
111. Dworkin, Pornography, pp. 200-3.
of violent sexual crime.\footnote{Dworkin, Pornograph, p.151.} In making this argument, Dworkin seeks to emphasise the intrinsic connection between male sexuality and violence through graphic imagery that equates guns, knives, bombs and fists with the “more significant”, because hidden, “symbol of terror”: the penis.\footnote{Dworkin, Pornograph, p. 15.} She asserts that male domination fuses violence, sex, and death into an understanding of power that she terms the “male erotic trinity”.\footnote{Dworkin, Pornograph, p. 30.} Because pornography is “inextricably tied to victimising, hurting and exploiting” women it reveals, as fact, that the “perpetual sexual motion of the male” is to rape.\footnote{Dworkin, Pornograph, pp. 69, 151.}

The possibility for relationships of equality between men and women is impossible as dominance is omnipresent and, as with the account of marriage presented by Pateman, any notion of women’s consent is eradicated. According to Dworkin, it is irrelevant how heterosexual relationships are perceived in society or whether they are seen in terms of romance or seduction; there is the same underpinning dichotomy between the roles that men play and those women are forced to assume. It is common practice that heterosexual relationships involve a “hunt”, which Dworkin says always involves by its very nature “targeting, tracking down, pursuing, the chase, the overpowering of, the immobilising of, even the wounding of [women]”.\footnote{Dworkin, Pornograph, p. 27.} The dyadic understanding of power that informs her analysis thus extends beyond pornography to encompass all relations between women and men.

Similarly, for MacKinnon, pornography is not only a symptom of the dominance of women in society more broadly, but is a primary cause of the subordination of women by men. Pornography is emblematic of women’s oppression in representative form but it also has very real effects on other aspects of women’s lives. She states that “men treat women as who they see women as being. Pornography constructs who that is”.\footnote{MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, p. 172.} Hence, although pornography is based on ideas it is also an action.\footnote{MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, p. 188.} This leads her to claim that “women hurt through pornography, or even all women, who live knowing what will, sooner or later, happen to them”.\footnote{MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, p. 223.} According to Ann Brooks, the assumption that there is a direct cause and effect link between pornography as representation and
male violence inevitably leads to women being presented as passive receptors or powerless victims of men’s sexuality, with resistance deemed impossible.122

In the schema offered by Dworkin and MacKinnon, wherein “we are the women in pornography”, there is little option for women but to be subjected to male domination and the options for female roles that are presented within pornography as they define it. Women can embrace an identity “as whore or disavow desire”.123 In the theorists’ own words, “there is no way out”, as male domination exists “independent of our will” and “no matter what we do we can’t get out of it”.124 While Dworkin speaks of ‘male nihilism’, she does not produce any options for women that extend beyond nihilism. In fact, feminists have an obligation to accept the analysis provided by these theorists, as any counter-assertions of women’s potential agency within pornography as it is defined by these theorists serve only to perpetuate the male myth established in these texts.125

Thus, the critical task of outlining the extent of dominative male power as it is captured in pornography, invariably creates a subjectivity of Woman that is derivative. Woman as subject is a secondary creation, an incidental subject or object whose agency and victimhood are in reality as they appear in pornographic material. Both authors detail how the contrasting ideologies of woman as victim and woman as harlot are used interchangeably within pornography to justify male sexual power and control.126 Woman as victim or powerful sexual agent are both “imposed conditions”, designed to divert responsibility for sexual power and conquest from the male. As Mackinnon states, “this is the fate of the metaphysical victim: to be seen as responsible for the violence used against her”.127 This insight into how the identities of women are constructed through pornography without regard for their genuine agency is a powerful argument that serves to unmask the ideology of male force that relies upon the (dis)illusion of female compliance or invitation.

However, MacKinnon and Dworkin’s assertion that women being “blamed” or held responsible by men for their role in pornography only holds credence “in the utterly irrational belief system” of men, suggests that women cannot consent to or claim any responsibility for participation in pornography that sexualises women’s subordination: they are as powerless in reality as they are in pornographic depiction. To claim that some women may actually enjoy pornography as it is defined by Dworkin

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123 Dworkin, Pornography, p. 207.
124 Dworkin, Pornography, p. 223; MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, p. 57.
125 Dworkin, Pornography, p. 224.
127 MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, p. 148.
and MacKinnon is simply a matter of “false consciousness”. A view of power reminiscent of Lukes' third face of power, which operates by keeping subjects divorced from their real interests, is central to this argument. It is an essential component of dominative male power that women’s wants and desires are influenced, shaped and determined by men. The natural extension of this form of power, then, is to create an omnipresent sense of control that makes it impossible for women’s real interests ever to align with the male interpretation of their interests. The potential for radical change to the asymmetrical positioning of subjects on either side of the power dyad is severely restricted, if not prevented entirely, by this view of dominative power. Even if pornography as Dworkin and MacKinnon define it was eradicated or prohibited, the view of women it reflects would continue. As the complicity of the subordinate is denied and all responsibility relinquished to the dominant party, the subordinate’s will and potential for self-determination is forgone. Wendy Brown explains that by fixing the “identities of the injured and injuring as social positions … codifies as well the meanings of their actions against all possibilities of indeterminacy, ambiguity, and struggle for resignification or repositioning”. As MacKinnon insists: “men have power and women do not”.

**Dominative Power is Evil**

The emphasis given to domination in these second-wave feminist accounts arises from several theoretical commitments that can be seen to align with Nietzsche’s explanation of how a slave morality develops and gives rise to ressentiment as the only possible will-to-power of the slave. According to Nietzsche, in “order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world – its action is fundamentally reactive”. Describing and condemning patriarchy is the key structural element that governs the project of each of the feminist theorists considered. Dominative male power is conceived as pervasive: it is a construct that infuses all relations between men and women. Pateman’s account of marriage, for example, conjures a vision of domination that is reinforced through patriarchal social structures and enshrined in legal definitions of subjectivity that are presented as timeless and immutable: it is premised on antagonism and is necessarily hostile.

For MacKinnon and Dworkin, the extent and nature of male dominative power is reinforced in order

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129 W. Brown, States of Injury, p. 27. As Judith Shklar contends, without any possibility for change to the power dyadic, subordinates become symbolic and even less than human. See Ordinary Vices, Cambridge, Belknap Press, 1984, pp. 18-19.
130 MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, p. 51.
131 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 37.
to gain critical purchase, to “describe” and “condemn” the current allocation of power as determined along gender lines.\textsuperscript{132}

Like these feminist theorists, the powerless subjects of Nietzsche’s genealogy also describe and provide testimony against the injury caused by the dominative actions of the powerful master. They begin by saying “No to what is ‘outside,’ what is ‘different,’ what is ‘not itself’”, and this process of differentiation is tinged with fear, rancour and anger directed at the powerful and all they represent.\textsuperscript{133} The rancorous gaze of the slave is fixed on the evil stature of the powerful, represented by his dominative acts that characterise the hostile external world. This is where \textit{ressentiment} starts and what it is driven by: a “need to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself”.\textsuperscript{134} MacKinnon and Dworkin, in particular, draw upon graphic imagery to provide evidence of the pain and injury caused by the violent actions of men. As MacKinnon asserts, “If it does not track bloody footprints across your desk, it is probably not about women”.\textsuperscript{135}

Importantly, the logic of Nietzschean \textit{ressentiment} dictates that all of the master’s qualities are evil because they are outside of the slave’s field of action, rather than being bad, inevitable, elements of all subjectivities that both master and slave participate in. It is this distinction that evokes the particular aggrieved moral stance that invites \textit{ressentiment}.\textsuperscript{136} Each of the feminist accounts of power considered posit domination both as a form of power exercised by men over women and also as a force that is masculine or male in its very nature: dominative power is an intrinsic characteristic of the master. For Hartsock, dominative power is exercised by men and reflects a masculinist understanding of power; for MacKinnon and Dworkin, domination reflects the inherently violent nature of men, while for Pateman this asymmetrical relation of male domination is formalised and made permanent through legal structures. For all of these theorists, women are subject to and excluded from participation in dominative power: the oppressed female subject is, by virtue of her opposition to the male, powerless. As Dworkin emphasises, the very subjectivity of a powerful subject is by its nature exclusive of women: “men have this self and ... women must, by definition, lack it”.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{133} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{134} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, pp. 36-37.
\textsuperscript{135} MacKinnon, \textit{Feminism Unmodified}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{136} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, p. 176.
Denouncing the powerful subject’s virtues as evil is an all-encompassing task that becomes the creative deed of the slave in Nietzsche’s schema as it does for these feminist theorists. Only by opposing all that is powerful in the master morality, and naming it evil, can the slave occupy the realm of virtue that is defined by all that the master is not. Powerlessness becomes the new ‘good’ in the slave morality with those on the under-side of dominative power proclaiming sole ownership of their lack of power as reclaimed virtue. As Nancy Hartsock makes clear, the experience of oppression affords the ability to view how dominative power operates with more clarity, critical acuity and greater perspective; the oppressed are able to reveal its true horror. A subordinate subject who is defined by powerlessness is also at the heart of the accounts of domination put forward by Pateman, MacKinnon and Dworkin, and her lack of power becomes necessary to fuel the critique of domination. Without any claim to the “excess of power” or the “strong full, nature” that characterises Nietzsche’s master, women in these accounts can be seen to align with a slavish mode of engagement wherein the actions of the enemy cannot be confronted on direct terms but nor can they be ignored. Instead, the actions of the male master are harboured, reinforced and must never be forgotten. As Pateman reminds us, in order to understand the systematic male oppression that underpins the marriage contract we must “keep the contract between master and servant or master and slave firmly in mind”.

The blunt assessment of the fundamentally asymmetrical relation of power evident in these feminist accounts issues from the same simple Weberian view that “those who hold power do so at the expense of others”. Like other zero-sum conceptions of power, the possibilities for change in position are fundamentally limited and the potential for subjects to experience both power and powerlessness is completely eradicated. Yet there are key differences in how pluralists like Robert Dahl and his critics Bachrach and Baratz, Weber and even Lukes conceive of dominative power that distinguish their account from the feminist understanding of domination that has been presented here. These points of divergence illustrate how the feminist accounts are in closer alignment with a Nietzschean-styled ressentiment.

While Weber and the pluralists remain firmly committed to an understanding of power as intrinsically dyadic, they do not accord an overt negative value to dominative power. Their key concern is the clearly observable battles between subjects who, though not necessarily equal, are

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140 Harambolos et al., Sociology, p. 102.
engaged through a conflict of interests in the operation of power. It will be recalled that for pluralists, it is the interests of “all citizens who are assumed to be within the political system” that is relevant.141 Thus the inevitable conflict within society is underpinned by an assumed level of autonomy that means power is within the grasp of all subjects: it is not an evil quality associated with one group to the exclusion of another. In fact, according to Hartsock, pluralists align with the epistemology of those with power who view domination as “inevitable but unimportant”.142 For pluralists, while power may have some negative effects in that it results in one party losing or their interests being sidelined, power and conflict are an intrinsic part of life.143 Even Bachrach and Baratz, who are more inclined to recognise how power operates to serve an elite group in society, contend that this form of domination is “neither foreordained nor omnipresent”.144 As such, it is possible to clearly detect what is at the heart of Hartsock’s perspective: these theorists do not have an adequately critical conception of dommissive power because it is not deemed to be an evil force that can cause considerable harm.145

According to Hartsock, Weber and the pluralists give clear theoretical priority to the will-to-power or intentional actions of the powerful. While the outcome of the power relation necessarily results in a winner and loser, there is no theoretical identification with subordinates through an attribution of responsibility that seeks redress on their behalf or evidences sympathy at their loss. Pluralists focus on the loser in a tussle over power only to ascertain where, and how effectively, the powerful have succeeded in overcoming their desires. In this sense, Weber and the pluralists approach power according to Nietzsche’s master morality that “develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself” and conceives of power and goodness from within. An opponent is similarly sought “only to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly” and the enemy, in this case the loser in the conflict, is only a secondary concern to the powerful action of the master.146

In contrast, Lukes indicates a level of distrust in dommissive power and its more coercive forms that could be seen to lay the oppositional groundwork needed for ressentiment. He exposes how dommissive power works to manipulate subjects and prevent them from engaging freely in the pluralist world of competing interests. His more radical project reveals how these conflictual interactions between subjects are actually deeply and structurally unequal. Moreover, Lukes

142 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 92.
143 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 37.
144 Bachrach and Baratz, Power and Poverty, pp. 43-44, Cited in Lukes, Power: A Radical View, p. 21.
146 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, pp. 39-40.
makes it transparent that he views social interaction as being predominantly conflict-based and dominative, to the exclusion of other, more positive and benign, forms of power that may involve subjects working collaboratively or communally. Lukes’ treatment of influence and persuasion reinforces how the very definition of power relies upon the extinguishment of the subordinate’s autonomy, ensuring that any form of power over is collapsed into domination.\textsuperscript{147} He overlooks forms of power over that may be beneficial or empowering to another subject, like the power that a parent may exercise over a child to ensure her/his safety and foster her/his development, or the power an artist or performer has over an audience. Hence, Lukes’ account of power externalises all power over from the active participation of the subordinate, instead making it the weapon solely of the powerful. In this sense, Lukes’ account necessarily produces a powerless subordinate similar to that which is reactively produced in the accounts of the feminist theorists considered.

In addition, Lukes wants to attribute responsibility to the powerful for a broad array of actions and even potential acts that were not prevented which may restrict the autonomy of others. It will be recalled that for Lukes, responsibility should be attributed to an actor for an exercise of power whenever it is deemed that it is in her/his “power to act differently.”\textsuperscript{148} This includes both actions and inactions and includes those instances where a subject is unaware of the consequences of her/his actions but could have reasonably ascertained them.\textsuperscript{149} Importantly for the conjuring of ressentiment, someone must be to blame for the suffering caused by dominative power. Nietzsche bemoans how “popular morality” has invented the notion of this “subject” who “causes effects” rather than it being acknowledged that it is in the very nature of the powerful to be strong, a part of their innate drive or will-to-power. This invention of the subject assumes that the strong man can choose to be strong or otherwise. For Nietzsche, though, there is “no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything”.\textsuperscript{150} For Nietzsche, the man of ressentiment is particularly attached to the notion of a freely-choosing autonomous master and exploits it for his own ends, as it means that responsibility can be attributed to acts of power over others: “they gain the right to make the bird of prey accountable for being a bird of prey”.\textsuperscript{151} As Nietzsche points out, then, a separation of doer and deed is essential for the flourishing of ressentiment as it allows for an accusatory attribution of responsibility.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{147} Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{149} Lukes, \textit{Power: A Radical View}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{150} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{151} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{152} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, p. 45.
Lukes’ attempt to make those who dominate responsible conforms to a similar belief in the agency or free will of the dominator: in Nietzschean language, the view that there is a locatable ‘doer’ behind the ‘deed’. Lukes overlays his account of structural power with a belief in the agency of the powerful actor, which hinges on the unfettered freedom of the dominator or master to act. As Robert Dahl explains, this notion of responsibility assumes an individual be held accountable “only if he caused these consequences but was himself free not to have caused them”, a paradoxical situation that “implies that in some circumstances an individual’s actions are simultaneously a cause and yet themselves uncaused”. Lukes’ desire to attribute responsibility prevents an acknowledgement of how the more insidious ‘third face’ of power can also act upon powerful, dominant subjects to frustrate their free will and agency. Thus it re-invokes the dichotomy between agency and structure, where some subjects are free to act unfettered while others are confined to structural determination or as being the inert receivers of dominative power over. This reflects the accounts of feminist domination theorists who similarly subscribe to the same agency conception of power that Lukes relies on: the free will of the powerful male agent or master who “enjoys the privilege of unhindered activity.”

In many respects, then, Lukes’ account aligns with the feminist approach to dominoative power. He demonstrates a distrust of dominoative power and a desire to unmask how it operates to oppress the subordinate, and he wants to locate the powerful agents responsible for action that limits and oppresses others. Yet Lukes’ account deviates in several key ways from the feminist approach to domination considered. First, while feminist domination theorists and Lukes both condemn the actions of the dominators, the feminist accounts are driven by a more overt moral position. Gender division aids the oppositional stature of ressentiment, in creating an inherent division between master and slave or man and woman that is conducive to the creation of identity. It also provides a face to the master of Nietzsche’s genealogy. As Nietzsche makes explicit, the main difference between a masterly and slavish mode of valuation is the priority attributed to an enemy in the formation of self-identity. In stark contrast to the master, the “evil enemy” is the origin of the slave’s identity and moral evaluations just as it is for the feminist accounts of dominoative power.

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155 As Georg Simmel argues, ‘All leaders are also led; in innumerable cases, the master is the slave of his slaves’. See ‘Domination and Freedom’ in Lukes (ed.), *Power*, pp. 205, 207.
The intention behind the feminist accounts considered is to describe and condemn dominative power and those specific individuals who exercise it. The ‘doer’ behind the ‘deed’ shifts from being patriarchy, or a particular class or grouping in Lukes’ account, to being a specific ‘doer’: individual man. As Nietzsche argues, in the moral schema that governs ressentiment, “one should ask, rather, precisely who is ‘evil’.” Thus the attribution of responsibility is based on personal suffering and a targeted reproach, as Nietzsche makes clear in the lament of the slaves, “I suffer: someone must be to blame for it.” In contrast, Lukes’ account lacks the personal tone and individual targeting of the feminist theorists as his Marxists roots are not openly acknowledged and the ‘specified agents’ are suggested, not actually specified. In this sense, Lukes’ broad attribution of responsibility seems to work in contradiction to his conception of the ‘third face’ of power that operates in more covert and insidious ways and which may lead to outcomes that are more difficult to directly attribute to particular individuals or groups.

Second, while Lukes’s account of dominative power includes phenomena like coercion, exploitation and manipulation, he does not consider acts of violence to be part of the taxonomy of domination. This fearful and dangerous extreme of dominative action is omitted from his schematic map that delineates what constitutes an act of power. According to Nancy Hartsock, power theorists who classify certain “repugnant” acts, like coercion or violence, as beyond power, allow them to be left outside of theoretical consideration and hence, beyond critique. In contrast, the feminist accounts of power presented here absorb all of these dominative acts, which remove any autonomy on the part of the subordinate, into the definition of power, bringing what is viewed as ‘repugnant’, including violence, into the heart of power relations: what was seen as evil becomes synonymous with power. The use of the term evil in Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals has a very specific nature. As Frithjof Bergmann explains, the word evil “evokes a drama of fear and rage and perhaps horror. It does not just indicate the absence of the good, but has a distinct, dangerous, and vile quality of its own.”

159 Joan Cocks makes this argument in The Oppositional Imagination. Both Susan Brownmiller (Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1975) and Susan Griffin (Rape: The Power of Consciousness, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1979) are additional examples of theorists who claim that the individual actions of men lead to the universal oppression of women.

160 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 45.

161 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, pp. 127-128.

162 Hindess, Discourses of Power, p. 8.

163 Lukes, Power: A Radical View, p. 32.

164 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 74. When levelled at Parsons, Hartsock is critical of this move but when attributed to Arendt, Hartsock views it as part of an approach to power defined by her positioning as a woman theorist and is more favourable. See Chapter 9, ‘An Alternative Tradition: Women on Power’, pp. 210-230.

According to MacKinnon, for example, male power involves physical strength, the capacity to terrorise and induce fear, the power of naming and the control of “perception itself”. There is no distinction made between power, authority, force and violence, because for MacKinnon, all forms of power held over others become synonymous. Dworkin similarly argues that “men are biologically aggressive, inherently combative, eternally antagonistic, genetically cruel, irredeemably hostile and warring”; in short, they are “rapists, batterers, plunderers, killers”. Like Nietzsche’s slaves who transform the master into a “real caricature and monster”, these feminist accounts depict the male and his exclusive access to domination as evil. The critique of dominative power thus extends beyond the radical account proffered by Lukes.

Finally, while the very function of power relies on the extinguishment of the subordinate’s capacity for action, the relative autonomy of the subordinate remains a value for Lukes that he is unwilling to abandon completely. Lukes is confronted with the dilemma of the subordinate’s powerlessness that is part of his theory of power when he must try to demonstrate how real interests will be determined. Lukes insists that this identification of what are the real interests of the subordinate are up to the less powerful subject. As Hartsock emphasises, Lukes needs the subordinate to have some autonomy in order to make sense of his notion of real versus objective interests that underpins the ‘third face’ of power. Even though he fails to fully explain or develop this notion of autonomy, and I have argued leaves the subordinate confined within the dominative ‘third face’ of power, its reintroduction conflicts with his previous stance on the eradication of autonomy as a function of power.

For ressentiment to flourish, it is necessary that the values of the masters – in this case their capacity for autonomous action and power over others – are opposed and deemed evil. An important component of this evil determination, and one that is central to the definition of evil used

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166 Dworkin, Pornography, pp. 14-23.
168 Dworkin, Pornography, pp. 16, 48.
170 What is not fully resolved regarding autonomy in Lukes’ 1974 edition of Power: A Radical View becomes an entirely explicit commitment in his 2005 revision of the same title. While Lukes’ focus on power as dominative continues, with more explicit language directly referencing it as such, he changes his view to encompass the ways that subordinates can participate in this form of power (see, in particular, pp. 83-84). He also changes his view to claim that power does not have to be a negative, zero-sum conception that always impacts on the interests of others. Perhaps most surprising given his critique of Parsons, he shifts his perspective on power to, now claiming power is also a “potentiality”. Even what Lukes classified as persuasion or influence could be included as power within his revised text, as power over is not restricted to being only dominative.
171 Lukes, Power: A Radical View, p. 37.
172 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 89.
throughout this thesis, is that these qualities are not seen as being available to the subordinate or slave. This fundamental opposition that underpins the creation of identity is fueled by gender division in the feminist accounts of power. As MacKinnon bluntly determines, the concept of female power is a “contradiction in terms, socially speaking ‘female power’ is a misnomer”. In contrast, while Lukes maintains his opposition to dominative power, he equivocates when it comes to the subordinate’s involvement in power and the capacity for autonomous action. He is reluctant to uphold the powerlessness of the subordinate as testimony to the injury done by the dominator. It thus follows that he does not fully engage ressentiment or evoke the slave morality, which leads to an inversion of values that infuses powerlessness with critical power. In Hartsock’s ‘standpoint feminism’, for example, because domination is an external and evil male construct, a feminist view on knowledge can be deemed to be truthful specifically because it is “clean of power” and its distorting effects. For theorists of the feminist standpoint, power is “a mote in the eye of the perceiver” that serves to distort what is the true nature of power relations, with the assumption being that “power is most acutely seen and most perceptively understood by those who lack it”. As Wendy Brown affirms, the feminist claim to such moral truth relies upon its origins in a Nietzschean-style powerlessness, for its critical force. Thus, according to Hartsock, while Lukes unmasks dominative power, he does not fully adopt the epistemology of the subordinate and so can not turn “our suspicions” into a thorough and total critique of domination as that envisaged by these feminist theorists.

The Will-to-power of Ressentiment

Despite the bleak picture painted by these feminist theorists of women’s powerlessness in the face of domination, a will-to-power is nonetheless evident in these accounts. As Nietzsche makes clear, although ressentiment issues from a place of powerlessness, it is still an expression of the “will-to-power of the weakest”. In fact, Nietzsche maintains that ressentiment actually positions the weak as posing the greatest threat to the position of the strong through a discrediting of power and inversion of the values of the noble and the master morality. While feminist domination theorists do not invert the values of the master in a creative sense, they invert the view of the master that being powerful and dominative reflects true strength and should be embraced and promoted. By

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172 MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified, p. 53.
173 Brown, States of Injury, p. 77-78.
175 Brown, States of Injury, p. 76.
176 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 123.
177 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 124.
focusing all of their critical attention on discrediting this power and determining that it is in fact evil, feminist domination theorists implicitly assume a value to powerlessness: the extent of the damage done to women becomes the basis for critical efficacy. According to Nietzsche, because the weak are “denied the true reaction, that of deeds”, they can only resist the powerful through the imaginary revenge of *ressentiment*. Lacking the power to enact revenge through action, the only recourse for the slave is to undermine the noble’s natural inclination to self-affirmation by denouncing the substance of his identity. The slave uses the experience of powerlessness, fueled by fear and the disguised enmity that it causes, as a barb to provoke doubt and guilt in the powerful noble.

The “venomous eye of *ressentiment*” put into service by these feminist theorists of domination locates “the evil enemy” as the target of all opposition and hatred, successfully casting a pall over power as an expression of male domination. Feminist domination theorists thus use their radical description of the evils of dominative power as a weapon against the dominators. Power is described by the use of a “tough, hard language riddled with fierce evocations of ... exploitation, manipulation and violence”. The domain of language serves as the critical space within which rhetoric, radicalism, reality and representation are blurred to ensure that the harms of male domination are captured and emphasised. The pre-existing nature of domination as an inherently male force, fused as it is with masculinity, means that no attention is given by these theorists to the socially constructed nature of masculinity. The fact that men are also subject to construction as subjects both through external systemic practices and socially reinforced cultural norms is not considered.

Other feminist domination theorists attempt a similar theoretical “mirroring of the subject of critique” by using brutal descriptions of women’s universal objectification. Susan Brownmiller’s most frequently quoted statement that rape is “nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” is one such example. Other examples include Mary Daly’s claim that male domination “is the root of rapism, racism, gynocide, genocide and ultimately biocide”, and that the history of women’s lives is a “history of holocausts

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179 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 36.
180 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 75, 123.
184 Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 15.
...[of] the multitudes of women sacrificed as burnt offerings". While these descriptions accurately represent the devastating reality of some women’s lives, particularly in countries experiencing perpetual war and terror on a daily basis, these statements gain critical power by erasing distinctions and differentiation between women’s experiences.

The real power behind *ressentiment*, and the inversion of values it evokes, is that it aims to poison the consciences of the fortunate and make them “ashamed of their good fortune”. In Nietzsche’s schema, it is clear that as the originator of this ‘bad conscience’, the creature of *ressentiment* has potential power and is likely to become victorious. As he emphatically states, “it is not the strongest but the weakest who spell disaster for the strong”. How effective these feminist accounts of male domination can be in evoking guilt or the sting of conscience in the perpetrators of dominative power is difficult to ascertain. It is clear, though, that the feminist opposition to dominative forms of power that relied upon the moral outrage underpinning *ressentiment* has served other important purposes for feminism in the second-wave.

With its origins as a political movement founded in practice, during the late 1970s and into the 1980s, feminist theory really began to develop exponentially as an academic discipline. Some of the approaches within second-wave feminism that have been canvassed sought to uncover hidden yet accepted gender bias and to confront the entrenched tradition of male dominance in academic thought, as well as reveal oppression within women’s everyday experiences. In order to break into this domain, feminism may have required the moral outrage that underpins *ressentiment* in order to be heard. Moreover, attributing responsibility for dominative power is a strategic move countering the tendency for women to be blamed, and to blame themselves, for being participators in their own oppression. While the radicalism that defines how domination is theorised in these accounts may now seem extreme, some of these key statements remain as potent today as in the second-wave. Nietzsche’s insight that *ressentiment* is “man’s greatest danger”, certainly suggests that the approach of the slave may have potential political efficacy that helps to explain how the oppositional positioning of *ressentiment* has been used as a tool or strategy in these feminist accounts.

188 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 75.
190 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 122. Rebecca Stringer argues that by following Nietzsche’s account of *ressentiment* as a process of psychological development, it is possible to see that *ressentiment* is not entirely negative and she warns against the possibility of completely jettisoning *ressentiment* from feminism. See “A Nietzschean Breed”, pp. 247-273.
In addition, Hartsock's assertion of a feminist standpoint, based upon women's experiences of oppression, has allowed for a more critical perspective on power relations that was not previously visible in theoretical analysis. As Connolly argues, "close attention to those on the receiving side of such relationships suggests a different paradigm of power". Linking the experiences women have of oppression and domination to a unique epistemological position was an explicit and deliberate attempt to infuse women's individual accounts with a power sourced from a common and united feminist critique. Prior to this, as Hartsock points out, dominative power was viewed with distrust, and because it was distanced from the practice of feminism as well as from women themselves, it was also left unexplored and unchallenged.

Moreover, there is polemical value in feminist accounts of domination as evil that can lie beneath the surface of the self-effacing resentment that underpins the slave morality: that is, when the evil nature of dominative power is used as a call to arms for radical theorists. The effectiveness of the radical speech used by domination theorists, like MacKinnon, can be detected in the reactions of those who otherwise criticise the victimism inherent in her work. For example, popular writer Katie Roiphe claims that in MacKinnon's lectures, "the audience is intimidated, enraptured, captivated, motionless. Even the sceptics like me are silent and listening" and further, that MacKinnon's "radical fighting words, travel high and far: people listen, people are convinced". This critique of dominative power may lack subtlety and inspire a sense of fear about the omnipresence of male power, but its impassioned radicalism may also elicit outrage at the injustice underpinning gender oppression. As Segal claims, MacKinnon's account has "mobilised anger against the abusive, dismissive and oppressive behaviour of many men towards women". There is power in exposing the 'evils' of domination because it has the potential to unite women against male power.

Nonetheless, in examining the potential of ressentiment as its own will-to-power, there is an important distinction that needs to be made between documenting women's powerlessness and establishing a shared normative opposition to domination, and recreating a paradigm from which escape or resistance for women seems impossible. Feminist accounts of power require an acknowledgment that oppressive practices exert power over women and their material conditions, thoughts and actions. Unmasking individual instances and established practices where dominative

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191 Connolly, Terms of Political Discourse, p. 107.
192 Roiphe, The Morning After, pp. 149-152.
193 Segal, Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism, p. 17.
power operates along gender lines can also assist in removing the veil that keeps Lukes’ ‘third face’ of power hidden and action prevented. A critical inventory of gender oppression and powerlessness has allowed feminists to develop a sense of unity in shared oppression; it has provided a moral foundation for critical analysis; and it has served, along with other oppositional stances, to voice the vulnerability of oppressed subjects. Finally, the very practice of documenting women’s experiences of oppression and victimisation is part of a process of revision and critique that de-naturalises victimhood. These tasks are central to the critical purpose of feminist theory and need not entail the constant tracking of women’s “bloody footprints” or continual remembering of past injustices for political effectiveness.

While MacKinnon and Dworkin’s replication of the masculine voice of domination aims to highlight the evils of dominative power and to controvert its messages, it can also serve to reinforce domination. When domination is conceived as an evil force, the unmasking of oppression goes beyond documentation to become the chief action of feminist theorists. This action as an isolated strategy is a fragile form of resistance rather than a vision for agency, empowerment or change. Like ressentiment, it substitutes action with theoretical re-interpretation of dominative power. This process of interpreting suffering through a critical gaze is an attempt to control or manage the pain of injury by capturing its worst effects but it becomes the central purpose and only outlet for exercising power. However, as its source of power is through meaning, not deeds, it does not extend beyond that which is described. With regard to the feminist project of documenting oppression, Judith Roof similarly argues that: “[U]ncovering the truth of history and reinscribing it as action tends paradoxically to contain the change such truth might catalyse. Knowledge by itself is not enough to change the story. In fact, knowledge becomes the story’s satisfaction”.

The fundamental limitation of ressentiment, as Nietzsche points out, is that it “requires a hostile external world in order to exist”: the slave is indebted to the conditions that made its identity, and its critique, possible. For these feminist dominative theorists, “the evils of patriarchy buttress this feminism’s moral identity and serve as a necessary resource for its ‘survival’”. Therefore, the

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194 Brown, States of Injury, p. 67; Elshtain Public Man, Private Woman, p. 142.
195 Despite being a prominent critic of domination theorists, Naomi Wolf still acknowledges that there is a difference between detailing oppression and forming an identity around oppression. See Wolf, Fire with Fire, pp. 153-154.
198 J. Roof, ‘How to Satisfy a Woman “Every Time”’, in Feminism Beside Itself, p. 59.
199 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, pp. 36-37.
likelihood of *ressentiment* producing the possibility of transformative action for feminist politics beyond these conditions of oppression is limited.\(^\text{201}\) As an expression of a will-to-power that ultimately despises strength, *ressentiment* is reactive and resentful because it is driven by the "need to direct one’s view outward", rather than an examination of what is morally good in the female or feminist subject. Feminist theorists who have applied Nietzsche’s understanding of identity formation to feminist politics and theory thus share the belief and desire that feminism can go beyond a politics that relies solely upon the reactive and effacing force of *ressentiment*.\(^\text{202}\) While it is important that feminist political theories can continue to unmask dominitive power in all its forms, there are limitations to an approach that invests all theoretical energy into condemnation of domination as an external male force. Moreover, a feminist account of women’s oppression must insist that vulnerability is not "rationalised out of existence" but cannot risk valorising powerlessness so that the only basis for identity or the only form of resistance is through the "triumph of the weak as weak".\(^\text{203}\)

**Conclusion**

It has been argued that for Steven Lukes and the theorists of power over that he canvasses, a quantitative view of power as a scarce resource that is the focus of conflict between subjects ultimately leads to an asymmetrical conception of power that is fixed and dyadic. This notion of power requires the subordinate subject to resist, but her opposition must be overcome in order for power to have been exercised. The same understanding of power has translated to feminist conceptions in the second-wave, underpinning liberal feminist accounts of the unequal distribution of power and informing socialist and radical feminist opposition to gendered domination. It has been argued that because power over as domination is the chief focus of these theorists, a subject’s power to act and capacity to change power relations has been nullified. Moreover, as multiple forms of power over become coalesced into domination, more varied forms of power over others, like influence, leadership and authority, are excluded from the theoretical terrain.

In the accounts of power put forward by feminist domination theorists, the need to describe oppressive practices has been overridden by radical condemnation of these practices. Male power and dominance is condemned as an evil force because it is pervasively evident in all relations


between all men and women, and also because it is seen to belong only to men. While men act in a totally unhindered fashion, demonstrating all the free will of agency conceptions of power, women have little, if any, influence or impact on the outside forces of power that dominate them and they have no complicity in dominative power.\footnote{The third chapter of this thesis focuses on women’s complicity in power over other women and the effects that critiques based on race, class, ethnicity and sexuality have had on this view of dominative power. As Amy Allen notes, while domination theorists do acknowledge that these differences may affect the form of domination men wield over women, they still refer to a category of women as dominated by men \textit{per se}: ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 29.} This shift from a critical unmasking of domination to a rancorous condemnation of dominative power has led to an overemphasis on the powerlessness of women as subjects.

The polemical power issuing from this opposition to domination has been shown to reflect a slavish approach aligned with \textit{ressentiment}, a position that is not without critical strength but that does limit significantly the possibilities for feminist resistance. The greater the emphasis on the evil nature of dominative power, the further feminist domination theorists descend into a valorisation of victimhood. The female subject is a secondary creation, an afterthought that follows from the determination of that which is evil: dominative male power. The victim of male domination is necessary for the accounts of feminist domination theorists, but only in the way that conflict is for pluralists: as a means to locate and highlight instances of power. The only virtue of the female subject of oppression is her very exclusion from power: because she is devoid of power, she can speak out \textit{against} power. Powerlessness thus becomes the basis for a "politicised identity" that is embraced rather than overcome.\footnote{Brown, \textit{States of Injury}, pp. 70-74.} The following chapter considers how power has been conceived by key feminist theorists in the second-wave who were concerned with redressing this imbalance and focused on capturing the opportunities for empowerment that women as subordinate subjects have in spite of dominative power. The important contribution of these theorists to the feminist engagement with power is an understanding of power \textit{to} as a capacity that is available to all subjects and that can be held in conjunction with others. Yet it is argued that the oppositional formation of identity that is evident in the slave morality still dictates the nature and value of this form of female power, which is conceived in juxtaposition to the same conception of domination as an evil, externalised male force. Empowerment theorists remain captured by the will-to-power of \textit{ressentiment} that seeks to become victorious over male power through the dominance of female virtue.
This chapter considers the accounts of feminist theorists of empowerment in the second-wave of feminist theory and their contribution to the feminist understanding of power.\(^1\) The alternative perspective on power and women’s identities that is offered by these theorists is vitally important to the central concern of this thesis with capturing both the oppression and capacity of women. Importantly, by demonstrating that women do exercise power, this alternative strand of feminist theory expands the concept of power beyond being viewed strictly as dominative power over others. Forms of power to and power with others that are subsumed beneath asymmetrical and dyadic notions of power as domination are reconceptualised through the perspective of gender difference. Feminist empowerment theorists argue that within the dyadic and oppositional framework of domineering power that is applied by feminist domination theorists, female power becomes “a contradiction in terms”.\(^2\) Without any recourse in the face of male domination, the possibility of an alternative future or transformative vision beyond domination is also impossible. In order to redress these limitations, an alternative feminist approach to power evolved that focused instead on the ways in which women utilise power differently from men to empower themselves and others in the face of domination.

The concepts of power to and power with are considered first in this chapter with a focus on how they have been defined outside of feminist theory, then modified and developed by second-wave feminism to encompass a notion of female empowerment. For feminists categorised as empowerment theorists, the alternative approach that women take toward power relations, seen to resemble forms of power to and with others, are heralded as more advanced than, or even superior to, male forms of power. The best-known exponents of this approach are Nancy Hartsock and Janet Baker Miller. Feminists categorised under the rubric of ‘difference’ feminism also advanced a unique form of female power by locating it in revalued feminine characteristics.\(^3\) Qualities considered uniquely feminine, like pacifism, nurturance, self-awareness and connectedness with others, are accorded a new value and infused with a reconfigured power. The works of Carol Gilligan, Nancy Chodorow and Virginia Held are considered for their contribution to

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\(^1\) This second-wave understanding of empowerment is very different from contemporary notions of feminist empowerment often linked to embracing ‘girl’ power, freedom in self-expression and an almost opposite refusal of gender roles. See E. Cox, “Empowerment” Feminism is Not Working – We Need a Far More Radical Approach to Gender Equality’, The Conversation, 23 March 2017. This more contemporary approach is reflected on later in this chapter.

\(^2\) Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 25.

\(^3\) Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 201-228.
revaluing the different moral voices of women and the relational qualities that women develop through their roles in mothering and nurturing others. In contrast to feminist domination theorists, an empowered female subject is at the centre of this approach to power, which shifts from description of the oppressive nature of dominative power relations to a program for change. Liberation from dominative power becomes possible through an imagined future that is more humane and caring because traditional feminine values have been re-valued as central to humanity.

Feminist empowerment theorists pose a significant challenge to power conceived as domination because conflict between subjects is not essential to power and nor is the overpowering of others’ interests. However, it is argued in this chapter that a concept of dominative power as an inherently male construct still provides the framework for how female power is conceived. Dominative power remains evil in that it is not considered to be a part of women’s identity; instead, Woman is defined in opposition to domination and as the antithesis of all that Man represents. As Nietzsche reminds us, from the conception of “the evil enemy”, which is the “basic concept” in the process of ressentiment, the subjectivity of the oppressed evolves “as an afterthought and pendant” though significantly, also “a ‘good one.’” This reactive inversion of value marks the creative moment of ressentiment. The revenge launched against male dominative power by feminist domination theorists shifts from anger and rancour to something more subtle and creative in the new value system that is developed by feminist empowerment theorists. Appeals to greater humanity and justice, through an alternative ethic of care and female power, are offered as the means to overcome the dominance of male power. Yet this approach is still shown to be underpinned by the will-to-power arising from ressentiment, reflecting a desire on behalf of empowerment theorists to become triumphant through replacement of masterly vice with slavish virtue.

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4 J. Flax, ‘Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory’, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, vol. 12, no. 4, 1987, p. 52. The focus on gender difference as potentially empowering is supported during this period by many other feminists not considered in detail here: Adrienne Rich sought to connect women on a continuum by virtue of their “woman-identified” natures; Mary Daly argued for a celebration of the unique female power evidenced in childbearing, which creates in women a life-loving energy; and ecology-based feminists also emphasised the connection of women to nature, with women encouraged to reclaim the original power of female ‘earth goddesses’ who ruled before patriarchy and hierarchical domination. See A. Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’, Signs, vol. 5, no. 4, 1980; Daly, Gyn/Ecology; A. Collard, Rape of the Wild: Man’s Violence Against Animals and the Earth, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1989. An overview of these theorists is provided by Judith Evans in Feminist Theory Today: An Introduction to Second-Wave Feminism, Sage Publications, London, 1995, p. 83.


6 Allen also argues that empowerment theorists balanced out the one-sidedness of domination theorists but that they did not adequately detail domination. Our arguments diverge on this point, which is addressed later in this chapter. See Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’.

7 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 39.

8 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, pp. 36-37.
Conceptions of Power To and Power With

The previous chapter demonstrated that an over-emphasis on power exercised over others hides how power exists as a capacity in all subjects, especially those on the receiving end of dominitive power. In her reflections on power and the ancient polis, Hannah Arendt makes the point that preoccupation amongst political theorists with the question of “Who rules Whom?” reflects a false conviction that power relations that are dominitive are of greatest political interest and importance.\(^9\) According to Arendt, “[o]nly after one eliminates this disastrous reduction of public affairs to the business of dominion will the original data concerning human affairs appear or rather reappear in their authentic diversity”.\(^10\)

By shifting analysis from the exercise of power, and its achievement against the opposition of others, several theorists have argued that power is more accurately seen as a capacity or ability that is available to all subjects.\(^11\) According to Hanna Pitkin and Dorothy Emmett, for example, power need not be evident in a relational sense and nor does it need to be exercised in order to be detected or classified as power.\(^12\) Pitkin suggests that theorists should instead begin to understand power by looking at how the word is used in language. She states that “[e]tymologically, it is related to the French pouvoir, to be able, from the Latin potere, to be able. That suggests, in turn, that power is a something – anything – which makes or renders somebody able to do, capable of doing something”.\(^13\) This concept of power as capacity or ability is reflected in the locution ‘power to’, which recognises that often power is evident simply in the knowledge that a person can act or has the power to act.\(^14\) Power is not necessarily dependent on action; it does not have to be realised but is seen as a dispositional property.\(^15\)

Nonetheless, a conception of power understood as potential capacity or the potential power to act does not preclude understanding how it can operate in action. In fact, a conception of power to opens up the potential for power to be shared or employed in conjunction with others.\(^16\) As Pitkin

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10 Arendt, ‘Reflections on Violence’.
12 Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, p. 276.
13 Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, p. 276.
14 Connolly, Terms of Political Discourse, p. 87.
suggests, one “may have power to do or accomplish something all by himself, and that power is not relational at all; it may involve other people if what he has power to do is a social or political action”. Power to can extend toward a form of power with others based on the capacity of a group of individuals who are united in a common action or goal. In this understanding of power with, the act of coming together is an extension of the individual’s own capacity.

Hannah Arendt aligns with these theorists in her contention that power can be detected without need for action or achievement of a goal. She states that, “[p]ower springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that may follow”. As this statement makes clear, though, power as capacity extends beyond the individual to being inherently communal in nature; the very existence of a community is evidence of power. As Arendt’s well-known statement confirms, power is the “human ability not just to act but to act in concert”. For Arendt, the existence of power over is also reliant upon the capacity of others. While the individual head of state may be said to have power, this power exists only by virtue of the many who have entrusted the leader to lead in accordance with their interests: s/he is “in power” only because s/he is “empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name”. Arendt’s approach to power is a dramatic departure from the dyadic view held by Weber, Lukes and the feminist domination theorists considered in the previous chapter, then, because the source of power is found in moments of alignment between subjects rather than the points of conflict, antagonism and opposition.

The challenge that is issued by these theorists to conceptions of power over as dominative, then, is twofold. First, it is asserted that power can be a dispositional capacity without needing to be exercised; it is a capacity available to all subjects. Second, this form of power to can be fundamentally relational without being exerted over other subjects; it can be communal in nature rather than only the province of an individual, autonomous actor. These two key characteristics of power to and power with are important to the alternative conception of feminist empowerment that evolves during feminism’s second-wave. In fact, for feminist theorists who focus explicitly on theorising power, there is an intuitive and direct alignment with the ways in which women approach and use power. A gendered analysis of power is central to this interpretation.

17 Pitkin, Wittgenstein and Justice, p. 277.
19 Arendt, ‘Communicative Power’, p. 64.
20 Arendt, ‘Communicative Power’, p. 64.
Female Power as Empowerment

Nancy Hartsock and Jean Baker Miller are two key feminist theorists who argue that women view and conceptualise power differently from men both in theoretical terms and in the ways that women use power. It will be recalled from the previous chapter that for Hartsock women’s understanding of power relations differ from men’s because they have divergent experiences of domination. Women’s lived experience working under conditions of an unequal sexual division in labour informs women’s unique perspective. For Hartsock, it is vitally important that this experience issues from the underside of dominative structures because it is this location that allows feminist theorists to critique power by accounting for all of the effects of oppression. Importantly for this chapter, while Hartsock’s target remains dominative power, she also argues that the alternative and gendered perspective women have on power can provide a conception that goes beyond power over others.

Hartsock claims that the women theorists she identifies are all connected by the same desire to emphasise how power is an ability or capacity that affords the subject a sense of competence and capability. Hartsock highlights the work of Dorothy Emmett, Mary Parker Follett, Hanna Pitkin and Hannah Arendt, with the addition of Berenice Carroll, also noting how these theorists share a desire to identify forms of power that do not involve power over others and to free this form of power from association with domination. Berenice Carroll’s account of power is singled-out as a “feminist theory of power” by Hartsock because she builds a case specifically for women’s alternative powers that allow for a sense of competence in the face of dominative power. Arendt is also noted for opening up the potential for power to foster positive relationships between people and for different forms of community to arise.

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22 Hartsock, Money, Sex, Power, p. 151.
23 Hartsock, Money, Sex, Power, pp. 231, 152, 151.
24 Hartsock, Money, Sex, Power, p. 12.
25 Hartsock, Money, Sex, Power, p. 222.
27 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, citing B. Carroll, Peace Research: The Cult of Power’, Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol. 4, 1972, pp. 614-15. Carroll suggests several variants on how power can be understood, including "disintegrative power, expressive power, collective power" as well as "innovative power, norm-creating power". This last form is reflected on further in relation to feminist empowerment accounts that can be seen to align with resentment (see Carroll, p. 614, cited in Hartsock, Money, Sex, Power, p. 225).
28 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 223. Hartsock also cites Arendt’s separation of power and violence as a favourable part of her specifically “female” take on power, which underscores how female forms of power are more benign. However, when Hartsock considers Talcott Parsons’s exclusion of violence from power she claims it is part of a strategy to remove “repugnant” extremes from the realm of power, and hence responsibility. When male domination is the key focus for Hartsock, she argues for the inclusion of violence as an extreme form of domination (as was apparent in the accounts of feminist domination theorists in the previous chapter). Arendt makes this distinction in On Violence, London, The Penguin Press, 1969, pp. 43, 50-51.
Significantly, Hartsock claims that each of these theorists gives precedence to capacity over domination because they are women. The focus on power as a capacity is for Hartsock a particularly female way of viewing power that differs entirely from male versions. According to Hartsoch, female power is focussed on empowerment that can be shared, captured by the locution power to or with, while male power is concerned with power over as domination or conquest. While Hartsock acknowledges that her several examples of female theorists provide only “suggestive evidence” for her argument, she claims that she was “unable to discover any woman writing about power who did not stress those aspects of power related to energy, capacity and potential.”

There are several glaring omissions in Hartsock’s account, not least of which is the inclusion of the feminist theorists considered in the previous chapter, whose emphasis is almost exclusively on all-encompassing male domination and female powerlessness. The potential for women’s capacity, or power to, in the face of domination is precluded by theorists such as Pateman, MacKinnon and Dworkin; as MacKinnon explicitly states, “what it means to be a woman is to be powerless, and what it means to be a man is to be powerful”. Moreover, Hartsock is selective in the male theorists she considers, overlooking several notable contributors to debates on power during the 1970s and 80s who focussed on power as a capacity and emphasised how the subordinate can retain agency within dominative power relations. These omissions highlight Hartsock’s determination to align women with a particular conception of power that is different from, and in opposition to, male conceptions of dominative power. Underpinning her distinction between the opposing forms of power is a trenchant adherence to gender difference as fundamental to how knowledge is approached, how subjects behave and how power is viewed and utilised. In fact, paradoxically, it is the lack of a specifically gendered analysis of power and “its importance in structuring social relations” that Hartsock notes is missing in the otherwise aligned conceptions of power she finds

29 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 225.
in her selected women theorists. In other words, apart from Carroll, these female theorists do not foreground their gender or operationalise their approach to power in gendered or feminist terms.

Jean Baker Miller, who is contemporaneous with Hartsock, does provide such an explicit gendered analysis as her vision of power to and power with arises specifically out of women’s experiences of oppression. For Miller, women’s capacity for empowerment can be realised through the achievement of outcomes but is also acknowledged as having a wide range of potentiality residing within an individual. Power is identified as any capacity that can make a change, whether that be in the broader realms of economic or political transformation, in relationships with others or even the potential for an individual to change her/his thoughts or emotions. Of key importance to Miller’s analysis of power is the assertion that women’s empowerment is not separate from women’s oppression; rather, it emanates from the psychological strengths developed under conditions of domination.

Like Hartsock, Miller believes that given women’s experience as subordinated subjects, they will approach power differently than men, with perhaps a more critical but also more creative approach. She claims that in the context of oppressive situations, women have become practiced in a form of empowerment that “fosters the growth of others”. Through the predominantly female-defined roles of mothering and care of others, women have honed the skills needed to instil in others the power to act and fulfil objectives. In this sense, her conception of power extends beyond being focussed only on the individual to being inherently relational in nature. As Miller asserts, women are “most comfortable in a world in which we feel we are not limiting, but are enhancing the power of other people while simultaneously increasing our own power”. Yet according to Miller, this understanding of the possible effects and benefits of power have not been recognised or valued, largely because women’s experiences have been excluded from theoretical accounts of power. Miller therefore seeks the inclusion of a female version of power to balance one-sided accounts of dominative power so that the full capacity of human potential can be realised, valued and incorporated into “action in the conduct of all human affairs.”

35 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 225.
Empowering Women Through Difference

Another strain of feminist theory, categorised under the rubric of ‘difference’ feminism, elaborates upon this female approach to power but extends it further to encompass a broader range of impacts arising from differences between men and women. Theorists such as Carol Gilligan, Nancy Chodorow, Virginia Held and Sarah Ruddick embrace the differences between men and women that have evolved and been reinforced through gendered roles as the basis for a new approach to women’s empowerment that also envisions new ways of conceiving justice and subjectivity. They argue that women’s differences provide for an alternative understanding of the subject that is built on connection and relationships rather than separateness and autonomy. For these theorists, it is the unjust allocation of value to male characteristics over female characteristics that is problematic rather than the existence of differences between the genders.43 Importantly, by revaluing traditionally conceived feminine qualities and connectedness, these theorists insist that the empowerment of women and the betterment of society more generally can be achieved by adopting ‘female’ approaches toward enhancing the power of all subjects, including those most disempowered or excluded.

The source of this power lies in women’s difference from men. Women’s experiences in traditional caring and supportive roles means that certain qualities, like the capacity for connection, empathy, and inter-dependence, are more developed in women and so offer a potential strength not available to men. Similar to the argument made by Hartsock, these theorists contend that women’s experiences as mothers and carers for family and friends afford an alternative vision of the world and a different way of approaching both personal relationships and political engagement. At the heart of this difference is the divergent psychological development of men and women that creates entirely different subjectivities and modes of engagement. Carol Gilligan’s research, for example, shows that when presented with various moral propositions, women are more likely to consider relationships and the effects of moral decisions on others, rather than individualistic and separative conceptions of justice.44 Her results also indicate that women prioritise moral considerations based on empathy and the common good rather than what is ‘right’ in a legal or procedural sense.

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43 Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 23.
Gilligan’s conception of women having this “different voice” that gives primacy to connection and association, provides the basis for what she terms an “ethic of care”.45

According to Gilligan, by listening to the different voices of women, the liberal “conception of a separate self” that is based upon notions of independence and autonomy becomes problematic because it not only disregards the voice of connection, but also takes as foundational an approach to political life that is incomplete and distorted.46 For Gilligan, “hearing the difference between a patriarchal voice and a relational voice means hearing separations which have sounded natural or beneficial as disconnections which are psychologically and politically harmful”.47 Gilligan thus asserts that women and men cannot afford to know as individual entities apart from relationships; the ethic of care is absolutely fundamental to how human beings think and should live.48

Like Miller’s female form of power to, the origins of women’s different voices and their propensity for more collaborative forms of engagement and power are seen to arise from the social roles that women have performed historically. For Virginia Held, whose work builds on Gilligan’s, the distinctive qualities of care and connection evident in women’s different moral voices are specifically connected to women’s roles as mothers and nurturers.49 Both Held and Gilligan seek to understand the basis for women’s inclination toward caring in the qualities exhibited in mothering and to locate the reasons why mothering is primarily the occupation of women. In this endeavour, both theorists draw upon the analyses of Nancy Chodorow, who claims that woman’s role as nurturer is reproduced inter-generationally not simply by virtue of biological and functional qualities or economic divisions, but through the complex developmental psychology of female children.50 The psychological theory of object-relations enables an explanation for female nurturance and empathy, hence supporting the revaluing of qualities that are distinctly ‘female’ by virtue of social conditioning.51

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46 C. Gilligan, ‘Hearing the Difference’, pp. 120-122.
On the basis of this analysis, Held embraces the mother-daughter bond as the ideal model for a
self that is conceived in relation to others, what Held terms the “relational self”, and which underpins
her contribution to the “ethic of care”. For Held, the “maturity (of the self) is seen in terms of
competence in creating and sustaining relations of empathy and mutual inter-subjectivity”. While
contractual conceptions of justice proffer a disconnected autonomy as the pinnacle of human
aspiration, the ethic of care is based on a more developed interdependent self that can better
support a morally-driven social framework. Thus, with the mother-child relationship at its core, it
is argued that this connected model of a subject is superior, because it is more evolved than the
individualist and autonomous liberal subject; as such, it has revolutionary potential as a moral force
or ethical approach.

This relational self as the basis for engagement with others influences how these theorists view
relations of power. Held’s account reflects a preference for forms of power that are utilised with
others rather than over other subjects because the interests of individuals are seen to be
compatible and even aligned with those of others. For Held, this approach toward power and
empowerment is also inherently gendered. As Held emphasises, while male forms of power aim to
“cause others to submit to one’s will” and seek “hierarchical control”, the capacity for giving birth to
life and nurturing young gives rise to a vision of maternal empowerment that is “more humanly
promising”. Her female empowerment is devoid of the intrinsic conflict that lies at the heart of the
accounts of feminist dominative theorists and instead, like Miller, seeks to further promote the aims
of others.

Another theorist who contributes to this development of female power is Sara Ruddick, who
similarly advocates that “maternal thinking” should form the basis for a feminist approach toward
politics and power. Ruddick argues that the role of women as the primary carers of children
equisps them with advanced skills in nurturing others by affording protection, supporting growth,
encouraging social acceptability, which involves a form of moral training. This maternal thinking
honors women’s skills in developing the growth of others, which leads Ruddick to claim that

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56 Held cited in Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 27.
59 Ruddick, Maternal Thinking, p. 17.
maternal thinking necessarily fosters a commitment to protect and treasure all human beings.⁶⁰ In explicitly linking motherhood with more peaceful approaches to broader political engagement, Ruddick presents a benign notion of the power that is involved in the practice of mothering. While she does acknowledge that mothers are not “intrinsically peaceful”, she claims that maternal practice is a “natural resource” for peace politics.⁶¹ This is confirmed when Ruddick acknowledges that the involvement of women in dominative power and violence is as observers rather than participants. She claims that women have “serviced and blessed the violent” and yet this involvement has occurred “while denying the character of the violence that they serve”.⁶² Ruddick reinstates women’s distance from domination in order to preserve the benign and peace-loving nature of women’s power, allowing her to make the slightly tempered claim that “through maternal efforts to be peaceful rather than achieved peacefulness”, women can find the resources for “creating a less violent world”.⁶³

For feminist empowerment theorists, gender difference thus provides the basis for challenging existing models of subjectivity that are based on male autonomy and agency, and for offering an alternative notion of female power that may have the potential to liberate women from dominative power relations. As a result of the emphasis on gender difference, though, theorists like Gilligan, Held and Ruddick have been criticised widely for assuming a universalism to women’s experiences. Several feminists have argued that appeals to women’s “different” voices and “maternal” thinking as the basis for a politics of peace amounts to an underpinning belief in the innateness as well as universalism of these qualities shared by women.⁶⁴ According to this critique, these accounts are proposing that conventional feminine characteristics are “indispensable and necessary attributes ... as opposed to those which (women) may have or not”.⁶⁵ Thus, feminist critics have argued that ‘difference feminists’ focussed on empowerment commit to a belief in an essentialist nature of Woman.⁶⁶

Yet while the empowerment theorists considered here call upon or connect their analyses to the biological sex of men and women, hence claiming an origin for female and male characteristics,
they do not necessarily see these qualities as innate. Chodorow, Held and Gilligan are specifically detailing women’s strengths that issue from social conditioning or convention. In this sense, they are involved in a project of re-visioning a different future for women as subjects, rather than a straightforward description of Woman. The project of empowerment evident in the accounts of these theorists goes beyond being a critique of dominative power or even a description of how power operates. It is a project of reconstructing women’s experiences focussed on the future and a possible change in power relations that builds upon, rather than disrupts, gendered differences. Nonetheless, like feminist domination theorists, the understanding of female empowerment relies upon an erasure of differences between women’s experiences.

Two Sides to Feminist Power

Within feminism of the second-wave, domination and empowerment theorists can be seen to fall into a polarised opposition that paralells traditional political thought; with domination or power over and more consensual notions of power to and power with existing on opposing sides of discussion on the nature of power. This has lead to similar criticisms of these feminist accounts that each depicts power with a “one-sided emphasis”. As Amy Allen argues, while domination theorists “tend to neglect the forms of power that women do have”, empowerment theorists by contrast “tend to neglect the ways that men dominate women”. Several theorists from within second-wave feminism also claim that empowerment theorists overlooked or under-theorised dominative power. The focus on gendered differences is seen to be prioritised over the inequalities that underpin these differences, which explains why it is often argued against difference feminists that domination is left out of their accounts of women’s empowerment. Despite her own emphasis on female empowerment, Nancy Hartsock makes a similar point that the focus of feminist empowerment theorists on female forms of power to and with others may serve to detract from the primary feminist task of confronting and challenging domination.

This tendency to emphasise domination or empowerment as polar opposites is reinforced by the dual imperative that governs feminist theory and politics: the need to critique and transform

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70 Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 22.
71 Oakley, ‘A Brief History of Gender’, p. 30.
72 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 225.
structures of power. It is often asserted that feminism must “describe” and “condemn” dominative power relations but that it also has a need to balance this emphasis on “critique” and “description” with a focus on “construction” and “change”. In line with Allen’s critique of the polarity in feminist conceptions of power, it has been tempting for feminists to separate these theoretical tasks accordingly. The need to understand women’s oppression is assigned to the descriptive imperative, which is evident in the version of dominative power that was the focus of feminist domination theorists in the previous chapter; critique and condemnation is paramount and guides how power becomes viewed exclusively as a negative, oppressive male form of domination. It was argued in that chapter that domination theorists do not attempt to construct an alternative subjectivity for women or outline a means for women to attain greater autonomy or empowerment. In contrast, feminists focussed on empowering women in the context of gender-based oppression seek transformation of power relations by creating feminist notions of power from women’s experiences and unique attributes. This vision is future-focussed and seeks to replace dominative power relations with an alternative that is deemed better for all.

These two distinctive tasks governing feminist theory have meant that the resulting conceptions of power as domination or empowerment that arise do not inform each other. Power over as domination and power to achieve goals are separate modalities of power that are concerned with different elements of a feminist political strategy. Allen argues that this underpinning polarisation is inadequate to feminist politics because in isolation neither can capture the complexities of women’s relationship to power and they remain “partially blind to the significance of the other”. Allen thus proposes that feminism needs to “integrate” domination and empowerment conceptions, to conceive of an approach that is complex enough to deal with “the multifarious relations of power that feminists seek to both critique and to transform”.

It is certainly evident that neither domination or empowerment theorists capture adequately the complexity of women’s relationship to power and both are polarised in the attributes of power that they focus on. I share the conviction of Allen that it is the key challenge for feminist approaches to power to be able to effectively unmask and critique dominative power over women, but without sacrificing the task of locating and developing the ways that women do have power, including

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75 Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 31.
76 Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p.31.
participation in power over others.  However, Allen’s proposal to integrate these conceptions overlooks how they are already intrinsically related and entwined by virtue of one key theoretical commitment that ultimately limits both accounts. In contrast to Allen, I argue that empowerment theorists do not neglect domination. In fact, they employ a conception of domination that completely defines their account of female power. Both feminist domination theorists and empowerment theorists uphold the same belief that domination exists as a male construct that is conceived as external to women as a group. They also share an identical disavowal of women’s participation in dominative power over others and tend to interpret power over as being necessarily dominative. Empowerment theorists start from the same premise as domination theorists through identification first of what is evil – male dominative power – before then determining the basis for what constitutes ‘good’ forms of female power. This position is not lacking critical engagement, as Allen claims, but instead relies upon the same moral condemnation of domination that drives the accounts of feminist domination theorists and underpins the oppositional formation of identity characteristic of ressentiment. The role of gender difference is of pivotal importance in this understanding of domination and in the creation of identities for women.

The Role of Gendered Domination

In the accounts of Hartsock and Miller, because the more genial and cooperative types of power to and power with are aligned with women, power over as domination and conquest is still a feature of their accounts and is presented as an exclusively male power. In Hartsock’s schema, because women’s experiences of being subject to domination are aligned with an epistemology from the underside of power, the surface epistemology that is equated with individualistic, intentional acts of power must belong to men. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the feminist standpoint reveals that the surface epistemology, which views power from the top down, is not only “a capitalist vantage point but also a masculinist one”. From this, the subsequent move to viewing power, especially dominative power, as a uniquely male expression is a natural development.

Miller also juxtaposes male and female power when she states that, “women have been most comfortable using our powers if we believe we are using them in the service of others”, yet this is

79 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 152.
80 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 11.
difficult to comprehend “for it is not how the ‘real world’ has defined power”.\(^{81}\) For Miller, the “real world” sees power predominantly as self-serving, exercised against the wishes of others if necessary, and, as such, women are “right to fear the use of power as it has generally been conceptualised and used”.\(^{82}\) Miller describes how, for many women, the exercise of power is seen to reflect a “destructive” impulse because “women have lived as subordinates and, as subordinates, have been led by the culture to believe their own, self-determined action is wrong and evil”.\(^{83}\) However, rather than challenge this belief, Miller claims that the female rejection of this ‘real world’ power should be supported as women prefer to be powerful in ways that enhance, rather than diminish, the empowerment of others.\(^{84}\) The form of power that is opposed to women’s relational, benign and supportive practices, and that Miller believes to be rightfully rejected by women, is undeniably power as it is used by the dominators: power held over others. Thus, there is a concept of domination in the accounts of these theorists that aligns with the account provided by feminist domination theorists.

Moreover, the notion of an autonomous agent who is masterful and free-willed, which is so central to the conception of power over considered in the previous chapter, also remains pivotal for feminist empowerment theorists. The conceptualisation of women’s subjectivities that arises from the accounts of empowerment put forward by Gilligan, Held and Ruddick are prefaced with an opposition to and rejection of all qualities and characteristics considered masculine.\(^{85}\) In Gilligan’s account, men are seen to be ruled by reason to the detriment of emotion because it is through patriarchy that boys learn to “aspire to self-sufficiency and power over others”.\(^{86}\) For Held, men are independent at the cost of connectedness with others, preferring hierarchical control of others to mutual aims, and for Ruddick, men are competitive and dominating, as opposed to cooperative and peace-loving.\(^{87}\) The self-determining and dominating master is exactly as he appeared in the accounts of domination theorists: he is the figure against which female subjectivity is juxtaposed. Each of these characteristics aligns with the approach to power detailed by Hartsock and Miller, with women adopting more benign, gentle and communal approaches to counter-balance the negative, aggressive and self-serving model of male power.

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\(^{83}\) Miller, ‘Women and Power’, p. 245.
\(^{84}\) Miller, ‘Women and Power’, p. 247.
\(^{85}\) Alcoff, ‘Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism’, p. 497.
This theoretical opposition between male and female power serves to create a dichotomy between the practices of power within the community of women and power as domination that exists outside and beyond this community. While feminists participate in power to and with, power as domination is only exerted from outside: it is externalised from women as group and woman as subject. Hartsock confirms this false opposition when she claims that at some stage the necessity will arise for feminists to confront "society ... on its own terms – that is, in terms of power as control". This polarisation leads to the assumption that forms of power based on energy, creation and action are unique to women, and more problematically, that they are devoid of any negative impacts on other subjects. Nira Yuval-Davis notes that the assumption that feminist conceptions of female power as more benign falsely assumes that it is “always possible for some people to take more control over their lives without it sometimes having negative consequences on the lives of other powerless peoples”.

The challenges issued by women marginalised by the notion of a ‘feminist community’ and unified conceptions of gender difference, used as the source of shared experiences in relation to power, are considered further in the following chapter. As Allen rightly asserts, feminist approaches to power need to account for the intersections of racism and class oppression within this community, attention which brings into sharper focus that “women’s use of power is not necessarily benevolent”. A dyadic conception of power bolstered by gender difference obscures power imbalances between women and the potential position of some women as oppressors of other women. Variations in power relations between and across the categories man/woman are renounced, creating a theoretical situation wherein men and women cannot simultaneously oppress and be subject to oppression, not only by other subjects of the same gender, but in relations between genders. As Elshtain says, “[we] are instead ‘this’ or ‘that’: victims or victors, oppressed or oppressor, exploited or exploiter”.

Empowerment theorists also follow feminist domination theorists in collapsing all forms of power over into domination, and treating them both as negative and worthy of condemnation. Although coming from the opposite side of the power divide from theorists focussed on domination, empowerment theorists uphold the centrality of conflict to definitions of power over, assuming that

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90 Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 31. These intersections of power are considered in the following chapter.
91 E. Jeffreys, ‘What is ‘Difference’ in Feminist Theory and Practice?’, p. 6; Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 32.
92 Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman, p. 212.
domination is the exclusive expression of power exercised over others. The prism of gender difference enables this conflation and ensures the continuance of a polarised conception of power. As discussed earlier, Ruddick seeks to preserve the benign nature of women’s power within motherhood even to the extent that she denies women any responsibility for participation in violence or domination by virtue of their inherent moral opposition to it. She further negates the involvement of women in any form of power over her children when she claims that in the face of constant demands on her time and despite “resentments at her social powerlessness”, woman as mother exhibits an almost saintly “restraint” toward her children.93 This claim does not bear out in statistics on the abuse of children, where the myth of ‘stranger danger’ is debunked by evidence that it is most often family members who harm children.94 US Department of Health and Human Services figures indicate that 40.5% of child maltreatment cases reported in 2001 were perpetrated by mothers and 19.3% by the mother and father together.95 Nonetheless, other feminists have argued that mothers only exercise power over children if they are “carrying out the orders of men”.96 Or a similar argument is that it is only “in a context where male power already exists that the relation between mother and child can be characterised as one in which the mother is seen as powerful”.97 In short, any power that the mother may have over her child exists within a context of hierarchical dominance that is not of her making. On this account, all power over is dominative and domination is a male form of power that is external to women as a category and the subjectivity of Woman.

Moreover, by assimilating domination and power over, and then aligning both with male forms of power, feminists focussed on empowerment also avoid exploring the ways in which power over can be positive, beneficial and at times necessary to the successful organisation of communities. Power over does not have to mean controlling the action of others but can instead involve mounting a persuasive argument that will influence, lead or inspire others to adopt a specific strategy or work toward a particular outcome. The power of authority that is derived from expertise is also a valuable form of power over others that can be beneficial for evidence-based development of the goals and strategy of a particular community. Even in the practice of mothering, the power of women over

93 Ruddick, Maternal Thinking, p. 166.
96 hooks, Feminist Theory, p. 86.
97 Mackinnon, Feminism Unmodified, pp. 52-53.
their children could usefully be explored as an alternative conceptual basis for understanding how power over can work in conjunction with relational forms of power to and with.\textsuperscript{98}

However, in feminist discussions of motherhood and leadership during the second-wave, there is a tendency to deny that either role involves power over another person, or people, even when such power may be positive or beneficial. Instead, ‘female’ forms of power are intentionally divorced from leadership practices within feminist organisations and entrenched in theoretical conceptions. According to Nancy Hartsock, second-wave feminist organisations assumed that all forms of management would involve domination of others as they equated leadership with “loudmouthed, pushy, ego-centred men”.\textsuperscript{99} As Hartsock asserts, leadership and power were identified as “oppressive male characteristics”\textsuperscript{.100} If a woman did seek a leadership position, Hartsock claims that she was often labelled a “thrill-seeking opportunist, a ruthless mercenary”.\textsuperscript{101} Hartsock attempts to challenge this assumption and argue for the importance of leadership for women, but in doing so she still refuses to acknowledge the importance of power over to such roles. Reconfirming the gendered dichotomy, she asserts that “female” leadership focuses on power as “strength, vigour, energy and ability”. As such, women’s “leadership qualities” should not be “confused with the desire to be a leader”.\textsuperscript{102} By implication, desiring to be a leader is still considered to be negative, as it is stigmatised by its reliance on power over others, which is immediately associated with domination of the needs and aspirations of others. Having power over others in the form of effective influence, persuasive direction and mobilisation of other non-dominative forms of power that underpin strong and collaborative leadership are thus excluded from women’s empowerment.

\textbf{The Slave Revolt in Morality}

While feminist empowerment theorists differ from domination theorists in their treatment of gender difference and its interplay with domination, the concept of gendered domination wholly defines women’s relationship to power in both accounts: their powerlessness or empowerment. The effects of this shared positioning in relation to dominative power are brought into clearer focus through the prism of Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of \textit{ressentiment}. The psychological processes of the slave

\textsuperscript{98} T.E. Wartenberg \textit{The Forms of Power: from Domination to Transformation}, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990, p. 187, cited in Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 27; this form of power over children, for example, would be what Wartenberg considers to be “transformative” power.
\textsuperscript{100} Hartsock, ‘Political Change’, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{101} Hartsock, ‘Political Change’, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{102} Hartsock, ‘Political Change’, p. 9.
morality highlight the mutual indebtedness of both groups of theorists to an oppositional framing of identity that promotes *ressentiment*. Importantly, the slave morality considers the master’s powerful nature and associated qualities to be evil because they are outside of the slave’s field of action and experience. Dominative power itself is evil, rather than a bad, inevitable, element of social interaction that all subjects are involved in. It is this distinction that evokes the particular aggrieved moral stance that invites *ressentiment*.\(^{103}\) While domination theorists consider domination to be a force that is masculine or male in its very nature, empowerment theorists seek to explain how dominative power becomes a prized value and practice of the male subject through learned or socialised practices. Nonetheless, for both groups of theorists, domination is conceived as a male quality and disposition that operates externally to women as a group and that individual women do not participate in. For empowerment theorists, female forms of power and subjectivity are subsequently defined in juxtaposition to male domination; female power encompasses everything that male power is not.

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated how the sole focus of feminist domination theorists was on condemnation of domination and all the values of the master. Domination was conceived as an evil force that was external to women. In these accounts, the only virtue of the female subject of oppression is her very exclusion from power; her powerlessness becomes the basis for a “politicised identity” that speaks out against power and thus is embraced rather than overcome.\(^ {104}\) The example of Hartsock’s ‘standpoint feminism’ illustrated how when domination is an external and evil male construct, a feminist view on knowledge can be deemed to be truthful specifically because it is “clean of power” and its distorting effects.\(^ {105}\) Importantly for this chapter, Hartsock’s feminist standpoint not only provides a means for better understanding power through the perspective of oppression but also the possibility of liberation from domination.\(^ {106}\) She seeks to revision a female understanding and approach to power, based on connection and relationships with others, as an eventual means for women to attain potential empowerment.\(^ {107}\) Hartsock’s account of female power thus goes beyond the heralding of women’s powerlessness as conceived by thinkers in Chapter One to a formalisation of the creative moment of *ressentiment* that inverts the values of the master morality. The female subject is not entirely devoid of power because it is

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103 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 176.
105 Brown, *States of Injury*, pp. 77-78.
107 Hartsock, *Money, Sex and Power*, p. 232. In this sense, Hartsock’s two accounts of power inhabit both elements of a feminist political strategy, providing a critique of domination and a proposal for women’s empowerment. The potential of this is considered in later chapters.
recognised that women participate in forms of power to and with others. Yet the characterisation of female power as benign, beneficial and communal in nature retains the opposition to male domination, as women are still ‘clean’ of masculine forms of power over others.

As Nietzsche makes clear, the master morality celebrates demonstrations of power over others; strength and self-determination are valued as ‘good’ qualities that arise from the master’s own self-assured sense of his own identity. In contrast, the slave morality has as its “distinctive deed” the characterisation of the master as evil, and then from this “basic concept” the slave evolves “as an afterthought and pendant, a ‘good one’.”

Importantly, it is the contrast with the master that is pivotal to the slave morality, which Nietzsche explains best with the analogy of the bird of prey and the lamb. He describes the slave’s thought process as follows: “these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb – would he not be good?” The logic of ressentiment dictates that the powerless can only secure the position of ‘goodness’ through a reversal or inversion of the morality of those with domimative power; the master’s.

Like Hartsock, Miller’s female mode of being and the alternative moral framework she constructs is conceived in complete opposition to the way the world currently operates in accordance with male principles. Just as the slave morality distances itself from the autonomous power of the master, Miller accepts the culturally reinforced belief that women’s involvement as subordinates in “self-determined action is wrong and evil”. This view has “enormous validity” for Miller who claims that women are “right to fear the use of power as it has generally been conceptualised and used”: power over reflects a “destructive” impulse, and the male drive toward success and independence are “spurious goals”. Moreover, she claims that it is no accident that the very qualities “most highly developed in women and perhaps most essential to human beings” are the “very characteristics that are specifically dysfunctional for success in the world as it is”. Rather than competing in this world on male terms by engaging in battles of strength against strength, then, women should seek to reverse the male tendency to devalue emotionality by embracing and cultivating the disparaged power of vulnerability. Miller acknowledges that connectedness, vulnerability, feelings of “weakness” and emotionality are not only undervalued in society but also

109 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 45.
110 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, pp. 33-34.
111 Miller, ‘Women and Power’, p. 245.
113 Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, p. 129.
"punished" and it is due to this rejection of such values, particularly by men, that human experience has become distorted.\textsuperscript{114}

From this starting point, Miller then determines that women should instead preference the forms of power that aim to serve others, which arise from women’s experiences of vulnerability. In contrast to male forms of power, the pursuit of "womanly strengths" exhibits a “greater recognition of the essential cooperative nature of human existence".\textsuperscript{115} The “female” power issuing from the re-evaluation of “feminine” qualities is valued because, in contrast to the power and danger that exist in masculine forms of power, it is “harmless” and therefore “good".\textsuperscript{116} It is then heralded as a superior form of power specifically because it is more benign than the masculine view it opposes.\textsuperscript{117} Miller thus explicitly engages in a process of envisaging a new female morality, which is based on women’s vantage point as subordinates and gained through their experiences of powerlessness. Vulnerability and weakness arise as by-products of what is conceived first to encompass evil — masculine power — to become installed at the pinnacle of the new value system created by Miller.\textsuperscript{118}

In line with Nietzsche’s understanding of ressentiment and the slave morality, this interpretation of vulnerability or “weakness as freedom and … thus as a merit” is only possible from within the confines of oppression or powerlessness.\textsuperscript{119}

For Hartsock and Miller, the experiences that are gleaned through oppression are what afford women a unique and privileged perspective on power and relationships. Women’s strengths are also inseparable from dominative power relations and women’s position on the receiving end of this power imbalance. Gilligan, Held and Ruddick are not as explicit in linking the qualities developed in mothering, caring and the psychological development of girls to social conditions in which women are dominated. In her more recent work, Held has argued that an important part of an alternative ethic of care is the focus on “the moral significance of the unchosen relations between persons of very unequal power in which we find ourselves".\textsuperscript{120} She does not, however, explicitly connect her new value system of care to powerlessness or vulnerability.

\textsuperscript{114} Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{115} Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, pp. 123-124; Miller, ‘Women and Power’, p. 245.
\textsuperscript{116} Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p.46.
\textsuperscript{117} Deutchman, ‘Feminist Theory and the Politics of Empowerment’, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{118} Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{119} Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 46.
Nonetheless, the empowerment accounts of Gilligan, Held and Ruddick do not challenge the original assignment of gender-based characteristics, which lends itself to the oppositional framing of the slave morality. Each of these theorists assumes that the designation of characteristics as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ is valid and hence leaves the dichotomy intact. Joan Cocks succinctly articulates this notion, claiming that such conceptions

Investigate material punishments, functions, limitations and allowances that are levelled as injuries and benefits on biological creatures designated as having one sex/gender or the other. Indeed, they are leverable as injuries and benefits of a system of power only because that designation has already been made.\footnote{Cocks, \textit{The Oppositional Imagination}, p. 12.}

Even though Gilligan is reluctant to assert that connection is part of women’s nature, or necessarily specific to women, she accepts and utilises differences between male and female gendered roles as the basis for her revaluing of women’s different voices. To work from outside the paradigm of difference would disable her claims, as the inclusion of women is premised upon, and justified by, their divergence from men. As she states, “if women’s voices are no different from men’s, then leaving women out is no problem. If women’s voices are different from men’s, the listening to women will change the voice we hear as human”.\footnote{Cocks, \textit{The Oppositional Imagination}, p. 15.} Gilligan thus relies upon the notion of difference to argue for the inclusion of qualities embodied by women into the public realm. For Held and Ruddick, the revolutionary potential women possess also lies in their differences from men, which have been learnt and transmitted through the role of mothering. In this commitment to advancing a program of liberation through difference, these empowerment theorists are in complete alignment with the arguments of Miller and Hartsock.

It will be recalled from the previous chapter that feminist domination theorists like Catherine MacKinnon diverge from empowerment theorists in viewing domination as prior to the social allocation of differences based on gender. MacKinnon can therefore claim that to affirm the practices of motherhood, caring or nurturing is to reaffirm powerlessness.\footnote{MacKinnon, \textit{Feminism Unmodified}, p. 39, also cited by Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 30.} However, for MacKinnon, as women are already powerless in patriarchal society, the possibility for any role to be affirming is impossible: difference means dominance. While we may not accept MacKinnon’s claim that any revaluing of difference must involve recouping oppression, caution needs to be exercised in making gendered differences the basis for advocating a change in power relations. While Ruddick and Held discuss the learned practice of mothering and in doing so do not make
explicit claims about “women’s nature”, they do still seek to elevate women’s practices of mothering, which is conceived from within a broader societal context of women’s subordination or exclusion from economic power. Thus, feminists need to be concerned about the potential for recuperation of “patriarchal assumptions”: in the best-case scenario, such practices still have “mixed implications”.124

Of interest here is that Amy Allen’s reasoning for integrating empowerment and domination conceptions of power is specifically that neither can “do justice to the complex ways in which women can be both dominated and empowered at the same time and in the context of one and the same practice, institution, or norm”.125 However, it is my contention that because empowerment theorists like Gilligan, Held and Ruddick do precisely this – locate the chief source for women’s empowerment from within the same structures that have also dominated them – they tempt ressentiment and its heralding of powerlessness. Like Hartsock and Miller, what Gilligan, Held and Ruddick do not do is locate women’s agency, or capacity for power to, beyond practices of caring and relationships with others that exist in institutions like mothering, or acknowledge women’s participation in power over others within or outside of these roles. The only way to challenge domination is to overcome it entirely through a transformation of values, rather than attempt to undermine the ways in which dominative power has structured the allocation of gendered roles and their current value.

As domination and empowerment theorists both posit alternative views on the origins of gender difference, either domination or social construction, we cannot really be sure of the relationship of oppression to the practices of care and nurturance: are women caring due to the gendered nature of social roles and expectation or because they are oppressed? In either formulation, though, it is possible that women are in fact better carers because they are oppressed. Miller gives some credence to this possibility when she claims that it is through the experience of vulnerability as oppressed subjects that women learn to be “attuned to the vicissitudes of mood, pleasure, and displeasure of the dominant group” in order to get their own needs met.126 According to Nietzsche’s critique of ressentiment and the slave morality, the values that are “brought into prominence and flooded with light” by those without access to power are valued because they are “virtually the only means of enduring the burden of existence”.127 Valuing women’s caring and supportive natures as

125 Allen, ‘Rethinking Power’, p. 25.
126 Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, p. 41.
127 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 178.
the basis for empowerment can mean glorifying, or at the least reconfirming, women’s oppression. To adopt a view of power founded upon virtues that have been considered feminine partly because they have been distanced from the centres of power can easily lead to an anti-feminist reassertion of oppressive divisions, such as separate spheres, which negatively contain gender identities and the subjectivity of Woman. The subjectivity of Woman produced through these accounts becomes irretrievably housed by the terms and structures of that which oppressed her; the socially constructed nature of the gender dualism. According to Lynne Segal, mobilising this strategy of inversion of value signals that feminist approaches to power were relying upon “the traditional consolations of the powerless”. In keeping with ressentiment, such theoretical moves resemble an instinct for freedom that has “turned back on itself”.

**Female Power Becomes Victorious**

With empathy, care and peace heralded as the basis for an alternative morality, and competence, capacity and the empowerment of others representing the basis for female power, empowerment theorists seem poles apart from the rancour and anger that was evident in the ressentiment of feminist domination theorists. Empowerment theorists also do not seem to evince the subterfuge or mendacity required by ressentiment, as there is a genuine belief in the beneficial nature of female forms of empowerment and engagement with others. However, a key insight of Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality is that the slave’s creative inversion of value still represents a will-to-power that seeks to win out over the masters. Ridley describes the slave’s inversion of the master’s values as the slave attempting to take control of suffering through interpretation of it, “so that interpretation becomes the means of exercising one’s power”. The slave revolt in morality thus seeks a form of power over, though in a subtle or even sublimated guise. The function of ressentiment requires not only vengeance as motivation; in order for the slave morality to be victorious, the slave must also have some level of self-deception about their motivations or a genuine belief in the value of their virtues. For Nietzsche, there is no doubt. While the slaves may claim to be “the just” and

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131 Segal, *Is the Future Female?* p. 3.  
believe in the furtherance of their inverted morality, he thinks they hide behind a false guise: “what they desire they call, not retaliation, but the ‘triumph of justice.’” Thus for Nietzsche, the slave morality seeks to become victorious through its deliberate promulgation of benign, harmless notions of power and morality as the epitome of “justice, wisdom, superiority”.

While empowerment theorists may oppose power over, then, claims to powerlessness, vulnerability and care for others may still entail a will-to-power that involves dominitative power. This is clearly evident in Miller’s account when she suggests that the “womanly strengths” that arise from vulnerability and better connection with emotionality can be used as “weapons” in the “struggle with dominants”. Similarly, Mary Parker Follett explains that even when a person appears to have no power, s/he can exert power over others by giving rather than taking from or dominating others. As she states, “it is sometimes through our weakness that we get control of a situation”. She cites the example of the power of a sick person to command the attention and service of others or the “martyr” who continually “does” for others, hence taking away their control of the situation and securing a debt that puts them under a sense of obligation. This form of power aligns directly with Nietzsche’s description of the slave as having a sickness that can infect those who are well and thriving. Follett later rejects this type of power over that is based on mobilising weakness as an insidious form she calls the “power of the humble”. As Nietzsche makes clear, the slave knows “how to keep silent, how not to forget, how to wait, how to be provisionally self-deprecating and humble”.

This will-to power of reessentiment is most clearly apparent when feminist empowerment theorists seek a complete replacement of masculine approaches with the superior, benign and beneficial forms of female power, subjectivity and moral engagement. Hartsock’s feminist standpoint, for example, initially aims to balance out the one-sided masculine view of power that sees only how it operates from above. She claims that the feminist standpoint enables a re-theorisation of power that is more “complete and thoroughgoing” because it involves consideration of both this surface

135 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 48.
136 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 123.
137 Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, p. 41.
138 Follett, ‘Power’ in Fox and Urwick (eds.), Dynamic Administration, p. 70.
140 Follett confirms in this statement: ‘I am under obligation to you for some favour conferred, I feel an unpleasant sense of your power, and so I return the favour in some way in order to restore the equilibrium between us which has been disturbed’: Follett, ‘Power’, p. 68. Nietzsche also refers to the ‘sick woman’ as being the greatest threat to the morally healthy: ‘no-one can excel her in the wiles to dominate, oppress, and tyrannize’: Genealogy of Morals, p. 123.
142 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 38.
view and the perspective of the subordinate from the underside of power. However, this dual perspective is undermined by Hartsock when she proceeds to argue for the superiority of women’s perspectives, which provide “a particular and privileged vantage point not only on the power relations between women and men but on power relations more generally”. She argues that the tension between the two perspectives on power enables a feminist standpoint to reveal the partiality of the male capitalist perspective and its imposition as the “created truth” for oppressed subjects. From this basis, she asserts that not only can we expect that the male and female perspectives on power will “represent an inversion of the other” but that in systems of domination the perspective of the dominators will be not only partial, but perverse. The logic of a feminist standpoint thus dictates that the female subject, being further embedded into the effects of domination, possesses a more critical and objective, hence superior, perspective on power than the masculine view.

Similarly, in Miller’s account, female behaviour and approaches to power that arise from experiences of oppression set women apart as more advanced in their practices than men. According to Miller, “women have a much greater sense of the emotional components of all human activity”, which is “in part, a result of their training as subordinates”. As the “carriers” of vulnerability, women understand how to provide support to others in a “way that men do not” and hence even those women “who live by all the old stereotypes are in advance of the values of society”. Men do not have access to the same experience or knowledge and yet these insights are deemed central to the whole of humanity and its progression. As Miller claims, because women are more likely to acknowledge their fears or weaknesses, they are more able to identify their needs accurately, which enables psychological progression. As a result, women are “both superficially and deeply … more in touch with basic life experiences – in touch with reality”. Thus the inherent superiority of the female approach to power lies in its claims to a greater humanity and stronger ethical foundation that is not readily accessible to men. While women are not asserted as having power over men in a strict reversal of power as domination, then, they possess a form of power.

143 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 12.
144 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 151-152.
146 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 232.
147 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 231.
148 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 41.
149 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 47, 57.
150 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 33-39.
151 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 34.
issuing from their unique experiences that men cannot access: Woman is powerful in this new inverted moral schema, while Man is excluded from the enjoyment of this deeper and more satisfying form of “genuine” power.

In contrast to Hartsock and Miller, however, Gilligan, Held and Ruddick extend the possibilities for re-visioned values of nurturing and caring to men and in practices of mothering to parenting more generally. Nancy Chodorow, whose work underpins Gilligan’s and Held’s care ethic, asserts that this move is essential.152 Ruddick similarly argues that nurturing others and the values this encourages have been learnt by women and as such can be learnt by men.153 Since her earlier formulations, Held has made it explicit that she envisages the ethic of care as being responsive to both men and women in that it “attends as closely to the points of view of recipients of care as of care providers” and is focused on promoting “caring practices for men as well as for women”.154 Her more recent work also extends the moral basis evident in the ethic of care well beyond the practices of women to encompass matters of international law and the ways in which nation-states engage. As she claims, the “new outlook” of a feminist ethic of care is “capable of providing guidance for the full range of human relations, from our closest relations in contexts of families, friendship, and small groups to our most distant relations in political and even global society”.155

Importantly, then, Held, Gilligan and Ruddick include men in their vision for the future and hence break out of the confines of gender difference as dictating a form of advocacy that promotes women’s empowerment over men’s. By not insisting on the exclusion of men, their accounts appear to align more with a shared vision for empowerment that avoids the will-to-power of ressentiment that is necessarily based on opposition to, and exclusion of, the enemy. Held presents her project as an attempt to seek a redress of the imbalance in emphasis that has historically been given to male notions of justice and morality over women’s relational ethics. As she claims, “[t]he ethics of care is based on an appreciation of the traditionally overlooked and enormous amount of caring labor necessary for human survival and development of the values incorporated into caring practices”.156

153 Ruddick, Maternal Thinking, pp. 40-45.
Nonetheless, these theorists still base the need for transformation on a clear prioritising of female forms of care over male approaches. The source of potential transformation remains in women’s experiences, women’s psychological development and women’s socially reinforced roles of caring for others. From this basis, relational subjectivities and female moral judgement are presented as a better alternative to the rational, independent male model. According to Held, the relational self is a superior notion of being to the autonomous liberal subject as it entails an understanding of our inherent interconnectedness that is “more humanly promising”. For Gilligan, it is clear that women’s differences will expose the limitations of male modes of judgement and moral reasoning that have been “psychologically and politically harmful” and offer a depth and dimension to humanity that is sorely lacking in male approaches. Finally, according to Ruddick, the hope for a future that is more peaceful and humane lies with women as the bearers of maternal thinking, which seeks to replace the dominating and violent approaches historically taken by men. As Iva Deutchman argues in relation to these approaches to subjectivity and empowerment, by “better than … feminist theorists mean more humane, less destructive, more fully human”. Held, Gilligan and Ruddick offer an account of a female model of ethics based on care and peaceful interaction that usefully highlights the skewed focus on liberal conceptions of individualism modelled on male behaviour and standards. Yet these theorists also claim that women’s ethical makeup derived from their experiences of caring for others is superior and hence, female approaches should become the primary or preferred form of engagement with power and morality. As part of this, they envisage the overthrow of male dominative forms of power through a transformation of values that seeks the replacement of male morality and subjectivity. As Held asserts, the ethic of care “calls for the transformation of the most fundamental domination, that of gender, and for an end to domination itself”. In this sense, these theorists also go beyond redressing an imbalance between male and female value systems to seeking the supremacy of one moral system and vision of power over another.

159 Ruddick, Maternal Thinking, pp. 127-139.
Nietzsche’s critique of ressentiment highlights how giving too much emphasis to relational power and seeking the prominence of a female care ethic – advocating for the ‘superiority’ of the slave morality over the master’s – empowerment theorists may underestimate the importance of conventionally “masculine” traits, such as autonomy, independence, and other forms of well-being that these male characteristics can serve, both in understanding power and in the practice of mothering and caring. By emphasising how the potential for individual empowerment also aids the development of others, the need for women to foster individual forms of self-determination can be sacrificed. For example, while Miller begins with a generic conception of power to that is about women enabling individual change in the face of dominative power by “moving one’s own thoughts and emotions”, this quickly becomes channelled into power with that could easily end up being power for others. As she claims, women are most “comfortable” with exerting their capacity for power to when it is “in the service of others”.163

In contrast, as Pitkin made clear, one “may have power to do or accomplish something all by himself, and that power is not relational at all; it may involve other people if what he has power to do is a social or political action, but it need not”. This form of individual capacity is essential within situations of oppression to enable resistance or action that subverts and challenges existing gender roles. Moreover, individual power to is needed to enable the fundamental transformation of gender relations that empowerment theorists ultimately hope for. As Bergmann notes, the morally good qualities that align with the slave morality – “the sweet and saintly and forgiving, the gentle and the mild” – can otherwise become so mild that those who display them “become incapable of exerting force, and end up purifying themselves utterly out of this world”. Nietzsche also indicates that the heralding of harmless and benevolent qualities aligned with lack of power amounts to no more than a resignation that “we weak ones are, after all, weak; it would be good if we did nothing for which we are not strong enough”.166

162 Held is a possible exception here as her more recent work acknowledges the limitations of adopting a care ethic based on the superiority of one range of tendencies over another, and she explicitly critiques Gilligan for doing this. See ‘The Ethics of Care as Normative Guidance’, pp. 107-115. As she states, ‘What needs more clarification, then, is what it means to overthrow the gender hierarchy of traditional ethics’, p. 111.
165 Bergmann, ‘Morality and Moral Psychology’, p. 82.
166 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 46.
Importantly, subordinated subjects have the capacity to perceive with greater clarity the ways in which they are dominated. However, while a woman may become empowered to make distinctions between forms of caring that aid both self and others, and nurturing that involves detrimental self-sacrifice, this knowledge does not necessarily entail an alternative strategy or provide the means to resist oppressive practices. In fact, when empowerment is sourced from women’s current caring roles, emphasising care-as-morality as the superior form of engagement can lead women to take responsibility for others to their own detriment, in relationships of inequality or even violence, and hence may offer only the necessary resources to survive, rather than fight, oppression. Recognition of the capacity and potential of the subordinate is an important contribution, but it is only a starting point. Broad transformative change requires converting thought into deeds in order to extend beyond the “powers of the weak” to enable direct confrontation with, and resistance against, domination.

Yet it is also important to keep in mind that Nietzsche’s critique is informed by his aversion to ressentiment and ultimately, the slave. Nietzsche claims that ressentiment is “man’s greatest danger” because the inversion of values that underpins it has the potential to become successful. Nietzsche expresses regret that the slave’s more subtle and cunning approach could lead to weakness being broadly valued as more virtuous than the master’s simple and direct expressions of power. Despite these fears, and his reluctant acknowledgement that the slave is a more complex being than the master, Nietzsche favourably notes the “strong, full natures” of the masters and noble race as being robust enough to repel any feeling of ressentiment toward an enemy. As he states, ressentiment in the noble man “fails to appear at all on countless occasions on which it inevitably appears in the weak and impotent”, and even if it does it “consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and therefore doesn’t poison”. For Nietzsche, any form of resistance that is not a direct fight of strength against strength is potentially based in ressentiment as it undermines the straightforward, forceful mode of engagement preferred by the master or noble. This signals an inherent limitation of his critique for feminist theories, which require multiple and divergent strategies both for empowering women and for resisting dominative power.

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168 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, pp. 39-40. As the Genealogy of Morals represents the alternative story of the development of Christian values, it would seem that it does become victorious.
Nietzsche’s slave morality and critique of ressentiment can usefully highlight the dangers for feminism in a complete adoption of a slave morality based on benign forms of female power gleaned through oppression. However, simply throwing off the shackles of gender difference in masterly fashion to confront domination is not as simple as Nietzsche or some feminist critics have suggested. Naomi Wolf, for example, claimed in the 1990s that feminists have a straightforward choice between continuing to wed feminist theory to “victimhood” as the theory of oppression based on gender difference or embracing a more powerful, equality-based, feminism based on a theory of “abundance” and the notion of gaining “more for women”. While Wolf accurately identifies the pervasive effect of gender difference on the framing of feminist approaches to power, she proffers an alternative individualised concept of “power feminism” that underestimates the impact of sex and gender on women’s potential for engagement with domintative power structures. As Joan Scott argues, gender is “implicated in the conception and construction of power” in feminist accounts, but also in the systems and structures that have created exclusion and oppression.

Moreover, identifying how ressentiment has impacted feminist accounts of empowerment should not mean that feminists renounce all elements of the accounts put forward by empowerment theorists. The vital contribution made by feminist empowerment theorists to traditional and feminist conceptions of power is to afford those who suffer oppression some capacity for power that is not captured when power is understood only as power over. The various powers available to oppressed subjects to act within the constraints of oppression are underpinned by a recognition that the thoughts, emotions and reactions of the subordinate are relevant to the operation of power. As Monique Deveraux argues, second-wave feminist conceptions of empowerment highlight what still remains absent in many theories on power: the importance not only of external impediments that restrict action but also the internal function and processes of empowerment. In addition, these theorists go beyond the insistence of theorists of domination that power as a capacity must automatically degenerate into power over others when it is considered within the context of a relationship. Importantly, by challenging the autonomous version of a subject, empowerment feminists redress an imbalance in approaches to power that see it only as individual action against the will of other subjects. The capacity of a subject, reflected in the concept of power to, can be

171 Wolf, Fire with Fire, pp. 136-238. A more current version of Wolf’s power feminism may be seen as the ‘self-empowerment’ movement within contemporary feminism. This version of women’s empowerment is coined by Jess Crispin in Why I am Not a Feminist and is focused on personal self-expression and individual advancement or “choice” but articulated as equal participation like that which was proposed by Wolf. See also Eva Cox’s critique of this position, “Empowerment Feminism is Not Working”.
expressed in a manner that doesn’t necessarily contravene the capacity of another subject and may even enhance his/her power to act or realise greater empowerment.

Conclusion

Second-wave feminist attempts to unmask the evils of dominative power and account for the different forms of empowerment available to women have travelled along the fault line of gender division, a divide that been debated throughout the history of modern feminisms. The pervasive and entrenched nature of gender division permeates not only the issues covered in this and the previous chapter – pornography, heterosexual sex, marriage, motherhood – but also most of the additional personal and political areas that have been central to feminist analysis, such as abortion, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, the body, prostitution, sexuality and the family. It is a contention of the first two chapters of this thesis, then, that the feminist understanding of power as either dominative or empowering remains inextricably linked to, or perhaps embroiled with, gender division. As Cocks confirms, for feminism the “relation of gender to power is one of the most problematic aspects of its history”.

I have argued that each version of power considered in the first two chapters of this thesis is limited by an inability to capture the complexity of power relations that both constrain and enable women’s agency. When power over as domination is defined as something that men participate in and women do not, Woman is confined to powerlessness; when the power to act despite structures of dominance is the focus, Woman is empowered but only by a harmless and benign form of female power defined in juxtaposition to male domination. By locating the source of change and liberation from within gendered oppression and women’s re-valued differences from men, empowerment theorists ignore how the “very categories that we use to liberate us may also have their controlling moment”. Gender difference is a vital lens through which feminist theories have sought to understand power relations, yet it can also cloud wider possibilities for how power is experienced beyond, or in spite of, gender categories. By complicating the use of gender and realising the fine and shifting line that exists between description and advocacy in feminist accounts of power, we can see how the use of gender can be both “dangerous and liberating”.

174 Kimball, Feminist Visions, p. 12.
175 Oakley, ‘A Brief History of Gender’, p. 53.
177 Nicholson (ed.), Feminism/Postmodernism, p.16.
The first two chapters of this thesis demonstrate that by remaining entirely captured by gender difference, foundational second-wave feminist approaches to power fostered an oppositional stance that aligned with the slave morality of Nietzsche’s genealogy. Feminist empowerment theorists attempt to replace domination with more benign, harmless forms of ‘good’ power that, when viewed through the gaze of Nietzschean *ressentiment*, is seen to reflect a hidden will-to-power. Even though this form of power is claimed to be more virtuous than dominative forms of power held over others, it still seeks to win out against the characteristics of the dominant male. While *ressentiment* is not entirely devoid of power, then, it is nonetheless a form of power and identity formation that remains indebted to an external enemy and the conditions of oppression from which it arose. Integrating the two polarised conceptions of feminist power, or utilising domination in description and empowerment in proposals for change, ignores the limitations endemic to both conceptions of domination and empowerment. Feminist analyses of power need to document and challenge domination, as well as recognise that women have the power to act and bring about change. The concept of power must also reflect that women exercise power in conjunction with others but they are also participants in power over others in productive as well as dominative ways. To move closer to this more varied understanding of power, it is important that the prima facie commitment to a feminist community, as the means to understand oppression as and as the source for empowerment, is also problematised. The attempts within second-wave feminism to negotiate differences in power and experiences amongst and between women, as well as the engagement between feminism and postmodernism, will be discussed in the following chapter. The impact these two debates from different eras have had on the dyadic and polarised conceptions of power and subjectivity within feminism from the second-wave and into its third wave is considered.
CHAPTER THREE – POSTFOUNDATIONAL RESENTIMENT

It has been demonstrated in the previous chapters how the identity logic of the slave morality that underpins ressentiment has informed feminist accounts of both domination and empowerment. What unites these two ideal-typical feminist approaches to power is the assertion that dominative power is evil because it is pervasive throughout all relations between men and women, is conceived as external to women as a category and excluded from Woman as subject. This chapter considers the critiques of black women in the second-wave and later postmodern challenges to this unified feminist position against dominative power. It is argued that the criticisms of marginalised women and postmodern theory challenged effectively the external nature of feminism’s evil dominator. However, when moral critique of domination was redirected to white feminists as participants in domination, guilt and shame were prominent in feminist responses. The opportunity to recognise women’s complicity in power was sabotaged not only by reactive attachment to ressentiment, but in response to its effects in the form of a Nietzschean ‘bad conscience’. This chapter shows how the perception that dominative power is an evil force that contaminates knowledge claims persists beyond feminism’s second-wave. Within postmodern debates, as every attempt is made to exclude dominative power from feminist engagement with other subjects, particularly those who have experienced oppression, its moral value as evil is reconfirmed. This chapter contends, though, that feminist theorists need not accept that the only way to overcome the moral attachments of the slave morality is to become more masterly by combatting domination with strength, as self-contained and separate individuals. Instead, in order to foster genuine engagement with others that prevents the conversion of different identities into unknowable Others and allows for the sharing power, it is necessary to accept complicity in power, including domination.

The chief point of engagement in this chapter is with the work of Wendy Brown and the solutions that she offers to remedy the prevalence of ressentiment in feminist accounts of power.¹ Brown’s proposal that feminism should embrace postmodern imperatives and sever morality and identity from feminist approaches is the key focus.² While sharing Brown’s desire to challenge an over-reliance on ressentiment in feminist accounts of power and knowledge, this chapter puts forward

¹ Brown, States of Injury is the main text drawn upon as it is the most influential of Brown’s works on ressentiment. Other feminists who have applied Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment to feminist politics and broader neoliberal conditions are Yeatman, ‘Feminism and Power’; Cocks, The Oppositional Imagination; Tapper, ‘Ressentiment and Power’; Probyn, ‘Re: Generation’; and Stringer, Knowing Victims. Stringer provides an excellent summary of each of these theorists and others, detailing their points of intersection and differences.

a more sceptical view of postmodern remedies. Feminist willingness to adopt postmodern challenges is demonstrated to counter-balance Brown’s argument that the predominant feminist reaction to postmodernity has been to retreat into reactive foundationalism and modernist tenets. Brown claims that this retreat confirms ressentiment within the feminist engagement with postmodernism. However, in contrast, I argue that it is the postmodern insistence on refusing representation, and reinforcement of the situated and incommensurable nature of knowledge claims, that provides the fertile theoretical ground for ressentiment to flourish. These postmodern dictums are shown to immobilise debate between different identities, reconfirming the evil nature of dominative power. Moreover, by precluding the possibility of speaking across differences, with the possibility for shared commitment deemed suspect, the oppositional creation of identity evident in the slave morality is encouraged. The creation of distance between different identities enables subjects who are not like us to be treated as evil because they possess characteristics or qualities that are not understood and may be feared and resented.

Brown’s entreaty to feminists to abandon moral opposition to domination in exchange for the political engagement of postmodernity is rejected as the best way for feminism to combat ressentiment in accounts of domination and empowerment. It is argued that the positing of a dichotomous choice to feminists between moral or political engagement as a means to excise ressentiment does not give due weight to the feminist requirement for morally invested opposition to domination that is underpinned by an unmasking of its negative effects. Instead, it is the key contention of this chapter that while feminism can afford to give up its moral opposition to domination as evil, it must not jettison all normative dimensions from its engagement with power.

Challenges to Feminist Power and Epistemic Privilege

The entire foundation of the second-wave feminist understanding of power, as a dominating male force exerted over women, was first challenged in a significant way well before postmodern critiques. In the early 80s, black feminists contended that feminism was reflecting only the experiences and issues central to white women. In obscuring the differences created by race, white feminists had ignored divisions amongst women that “take precedence over the common

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experiences women share”. Debates over the relative importance of race and gender in explaining women’s experiences of oppression, and how to respond to dominative power, divided feminists in similar ways to debates over class differences. The result was both “polarization as well as concerted efforts to overcome it”.

Importantly, the idea that power is an entity contained within some categories and not others, or only possessed by some individuals, was seen to obscure the complex functioning of power between women and within feminism as a political category. Women could no longer be represented as “situated identically in relations to men”. Instead it was recognised that the specific location of different women within racial, class, sexual and ethnic relations determined their access to power and certain structural privileges. Moreover, white women are often actively involved or at least complicit in the oppression of black women.

bell hooks spearheaded this critique of feminist theory in the second-wave, arguing that there are “degrees of suffering” within the community of women, with black women experiencing a total “absence of choices” compared with white women whose potential for choice, while restricted, is still evident. According to hooks, the comparative privilege of white women means that even though they have power exercised over them, they are also participators in domination. As such, she contends that “white women and black men have it both ways”. In contrast, black women have not been “socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor in that we [black women] are allowed no institutional ‘other’ that we can exploit or oppress”. Feminist discourse was thus opened to interrogation for the foundational basis of its claims against dominative power: namely, that domination is an exclusively male construct and women do not have power or only participate in positive, non-dominative forms of power to or with others.

The effectiveness of gender as a single-axis critical framework has since been increasingly undermined by the postmodern challenge to universal categories, which gained ascendancy in

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4 hooks, Feminist Theory, p. 4.
5 Jeffreys, ‘What is “Difference”’, pp. 4-5; de Lauretis, ‘Upping the Anti (sic)’, p. 265.
9 hooks, Feminist Theory, p. 5.
10 hooks, Feminist Theory, p.5.
academia in the late 1990s. Many feminist theorists associated with postmodernism argue that claims to a unified female identity assumes a spurious universality amongst women, one that privileges both a notion of authentic subjectivity and shared experiences as women. They argue that representations of a united feminist position in relation to power risks representations that reflect only women with greater access to social and economic resources. Common to many postmodern thinkers is the claim that categories appealing to unity, such as an identity based upon a political grouping of women, invariably lead to the exclusion and silencing of difference or “otherness”. As the critiques of black women and women of marginal ethnic backgrounds established, when presented as representative the view expressed becomes “privileged, publicized, and accepted as authoritative while others are marginalized”. The postmodern emphasis on partiality and multiplicity therefore reinforces the need for feminism to recognise differences in experiences of oppression amongst women and question the integrity of claims to a unified community among women.

Moreover, the riposte to white feminists that they are not speaking and can not speak on behalf of all women forced a “reassessment of the feminist self” that underpinned epistemological claims based upon experiences of oppression or powerlessness. The postmodern insight that there are only “partial knowledges” constructed from specific and situated locations provides further impetus to this challenge by questioning the possibility for any perspective, feminist or otherwise, to claim epistemic purity or privilege. As Jane Flax affirms, “[p]ostmodernism calls into question the belief (or hope) that there is some form of innocent knowledge to be had … some sort of truth which can tell us how to act in the world in ways that benefit or are for the (at least ultimate) good of all”. Flax claims that many feminists have embraced this fragmentation of feminist narratives and postmodern insights as complementary to feminist political goals. Nonetheless, she argues that

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13 Weedon, Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference, p. 106.
there are many others who have been unable to abandon the idea that feminist knowledge “can only do good, not harm to others”.\textsuperscript{19}

Nancy Hartsock exemplifies this reluctance, noting that it “seems highly suspicious” that postmodern criticism targeted the notion of a subject at the “precise moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves”.\textsuperscript{20} Reasserting the subject Woman is for Hartsock an essential part of feminist strategy and as such a postmodern approach involves risks deemed to be too great for feminism.\textsuperscript{21} However, Hartsock’s claim that this subjectivity is essential for feminism is viewed with cynicism by other feminist theorists who have been marginalised by appeals to unity amongst women. Ien Ang, for example, argues that contemporary white feminism responded to the postmodern fragmentation of the category of women by replacing the “assimilationist” approach of the 1980s with a “multi-cultural” focus.\textsuperscript{22} She claims that this multicultural attempt to acknowledge differences between women is not a great advance on previous approaches because it is motivated by a similar desire to “settle”, “overcome” and “deal with” differences in order to preserve the polemic and political power entailed in a unified category of women. For Ang, the key motivating factor for white feminists is preserving the ability to talk about women as a group that are oppressed by male power, which underpins the previously united feminist opposition to domination.\textsuperscript{23}

Shifting the second-wave feminist approach to power from its unitary focus on an external male enemy as the exclusive perpetrator of domination has been particularly difficult for feminist theorists who had argued that this characterisation is fundamental to the way power operates between men and women. Acknowledging that women are complicit in power over other women also meant that the oppositional basis for women’s identities, fortified through gender division, could no longer be uncritically sustained. According to Glynis Breakwell, “one of the prime tenets of intergroup theory is that people seek to attain psychological distinctiveness; when this cannot be gained by intergroup comparisons it is likely to be sought within the group”.\textsuperscript{24} As a result,

\textsuperscript{19} Flax, ‘The End of Innocence’, p. 447. Flax cites Sandra Harding, Nancy Hartsock and Catherine MacKinnon as theorists who represent ‘this double position of criticism and hope’. See p. 461 n. 3.
\textsuperscript{21} Hartsock, ‘Foucault on Power’, p. 160. As Grunell and Saharso also note, ‘the argument that is often raised against a postmodern notion of identity as a socially constructed identity is that it hampers political organization’. See M. Grunell and S. Saharso, ‘State of the Art: bell hooks and Nira Yuval-Davies on Race, Ethnicity, Class and Gender’, The European Journal of Women’s Studies, vol. 6, no. 2, 1999, p. 208.
fragmentation within the category of women was “virtually inevitable”, with differences in experiences of power seen as potentially threatening for some theorists whose critical purchase issued from a position that was in total opposition to dominative male power. As Breakwell suggests, the reaction of some theorists to this splintering of the feminist community sometimes led to the “many dimensions of differentiation” being “called upon to act as a lever for kudos”.25

For example, in response to postmodern critiques, bell hooks reinstates her argument for the salience of the oppressed conditions of black women in defining the true nature of dominative power. In earlier iterations hooks had argued that because black women lack any structurally reinforced basis to oppress others, they possess a unique vantage point on power afforded by virtue of marginality.26 In the context of the postmodern emphasis on differences, hooks claims that “if we look at the dilemmas of women who are not white, not privileged … these will often shed light on the overall understanding of what is happening generally with women”.27 Thus her later position is modified in reaction to postmodern critiques, but is still underpinned by an assertion that access to knowledge about women should be derived through black women’s experience, as this reflects a more significant oppression that is devoid of the privilege of belonging to a dominant racial group.

Catherine MacKinnon, whose account of dominative male power was considered in Chapter One, responds to postmodern critiques and the challenge issued by black feminists like hooks by reasserting white women as the central foci of knowledge claims. She contends that postmodern critiques undermine the assertion that women as a group are “genuinely” oppressed as the white woman becomes “discounted by white, meaning she would be oppressed but for her privilege”.28 MacKinnon strongly rejects this critique and how she does so is instructive. She claims that “what is done to white women can be done to any woman, and then some. This does not make white women the essence of womanhood. It is a reality to observe that this is what can be done and is done to the most privileged of women”.29 By inverting the emphasis on privilege, MacKinnon

26 hooks, Feminist Theory, p. 5.
27 hooks, cited in Grunell and Saharso, ‘State of the Art’, p. 204.
28 C. MacKinnon, ‘From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?’ in D. Bell and R. Klein, (eds.), Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed, North Melbourne, Spinifex, 1996, p. 51. MacKinnon contends that while ‘woman’ as a category has been questioned and challenged extensively, the same theoretical treatment has not always been extended to the category of race. This same point is made by J. Roof and R. Wiegman, (eds.), Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1995, p. 30; and S. Bordo, Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism’, in Nicholson (ed.), Feminism/Postmodernism, p. 146.
29 MacKinnon, ‘From Practice to Theory’, p. 53.
attempts to shift ‘whiteness’ from being a marker of advantage to being further evidence of the omnipresence of gender-based oppression.

MacKinnon’s response reflects the concern that Ang highlights; without an epistemological structure that gives voice to the knowledges of women as an oppressed social category, feminists will be unable to legitimise the views of more privileged, though still oppressed, women.30 By simply re-stating the relevance of either their privilege or lack thereof, not only are MacKinnon and hooks articulating existing and opposed interests and foreclosing the potential for change, they are refusing to relinquish the basis for their unique contribution: a subjectivity that is defined by lack of power. Carol Gilligan indicates that in response to challenges to the unified category of women, powerlessness was reinforced as powerful currency when she asks, “[i]s this in part the power and the threat of black women – that they challenge this retrograde splitting of race and gender, that they hold both cards?”31 This perception that belonging to both an oppressed race and gender is powerful and threatening only makes sense through the inversion of value that defines the slave morality of Nietzsche’s schema and that is generated by ressentiment. It will be recalled from the previous chapter that the “will-to-power” of the weak lies in powerlessness representing “some form of superiority”.32 When ressentiment gives birth to its inverted value system, it results in the most oppressed, or the “lowest” in Nietzsche’s terms, claiming that “we alone are the good and just”.33

The reactions of hooks and MacKinnon to the dissipating impulse of postmodern thought would therefore reflect what Wendy Brown terms “reactive foundationalism”.34 Importantly, through both the critiques of women marginalised by feminism in the 1980s and the rise in influence of postmodernism in the 1990s and the early 21st century, feminism was being challenged to abdicate both its singular claims to truth based on a unified notion of gender and the attachment to a feminist epistemological position that is better, because distanced from power. According to Brown, though, feminist anxiety about postmodernity finds its origin in these two challenges, which disrupt the

30 Flax, ‘The End of Innocence’, p. 446.
32 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 123.
33 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p.123.
moral grounding of feminism: “our subject that harbors truth and our truth that opposes power”.\footnote{Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 77.} She argues that feminists are reluctant to shift from the predominant understanding of power as domination, with its “easy opposition between rulers and ruled”, toward a broader conception of power as being a more pervasive part of social engagement that can disrupt identities and impact claims to truth.\footnote{Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, pp. 69, 75.} In short, feminists do not want to abdicate the moral foundations that underpin ressentiment.

The chief target of Brown’s critique is ‘standpoint feminism’ as conceived and expressed by Nancy Hartsock, which Brown argues shares an “epistemological spirit and political structure” with ressentiment.\footnote{Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 75.} As outlined in previous chapters, Hartsock’s ‘standpoint feminism’ claims a unique epistemology for women on the basis of their position on the underside of power as subjects who are oppressed by male domination. For Hartsock, as ‘standpoint feminism’ provides an “account of women’s oppression from the ground up” it can provide a clearer and more complete view on how dominative power operates than the view from the perspective of men who are the holders of power.\footnote{Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, pp. 151-152, 231.}

In response to postmodern critiques, Hartsock remains steadfast in her original contention that oppressed knowledges provide “a truer or more adequate account of reality”.\footnote{Hartsock, ‘Postmodernism and Political Change’, p. 51.} The view from the surface perspective of male dominative power, previously aligned with capitalists, pluralists and other male theorists in the original standpoint theory, is shifted by Hartsock to postmodern theorists who become the new “voices of the powerful”.\footnote{Hartsock, The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays, Boulder, Westview Press, 1988, p. 251.} Even though Hartsock expands her notion of the feminist standpoint to encompass multiple standpoints, she is still insistent that each of these marginalised perspectives present “deeper and more complex” insights than those who dominate.\footnote{Hartsock, ‘Postmodernism and Political Change’, p. 48; Hartsock, Feminist Standpoint Revisited, pp. 243, 237.} For Hartsock this is because, despite the fragmentation of power and identity insisted upon in postmodern theory, oppressed knowledges remain “savvy to modes of denial”, repression and forgetting that distort the perspective of those with power.\footnote{Hartsock, ‘Postmodernism and Political Change’, p. 51. Like Nietzsche’s slave, oppressed knowledges have the capacity to remember injustices and intimate details of injury while the master is practiced in the art of forgetting. See Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, second essay, in particular section 3.} Hartsock does not want to abdicate...
the claim that oppressed or marginal identities can provide an “epistemically pure glimpse of the world”.43

Brown accurately identifies, then, that Hartsock is reluctant to give up the critical potency of feminist claims to knowledge that are bolstered by ressentiment. Hartsock’s resistance to the full impact of postmodern imperatives, which is echoed in the responses of MacKinnon and hooks, reflects a steadfast attachment to the belief that dominative power is external to women and potentially contaminating to knowledge.44 By continuing to posit one epistemological position as superior to the other, offering a more complete and better understanding than the “partial and perverse” account that is tainted with power, Hartsock reinforces the connection between powerlessness and critical authority.45 An understanding of power as dyadic and fundamentally asymmetrical is necessary to preserve this “less contaminated” epistemological insight issuing from oppressed subjects. Therefore, despite an acknowledgment in Hartsock’s later work that it is “important to locate white feminist theory in terms of both victimhood and complicity”, this does not impact or redefine fundamentally her account of epistemology.46

Postfoundational Politics: Beyond Morality

Brown’s analysis of the connection between feminist approaches to power that are based on moral reproach and the commitment to an epistemology that is “always on the side of the damned or excluded”, illuminates how ressentiment drives feminist accounts of knowledge; this influence has been pivotal to the arguments put forward in previous chapters of this thesis.47 I also support Brown’s contention that these commitments have been carried into the feminist engagement with postmodern challenges. However, it is at this juncture that I diverge from Brown, specifically in how she characterises the predominant feminist reaction to postmodernism as one of fear and retreat into modernist foundations. This interpretation also defines the solutions offered by Brown to resolving the feminist attachment to ressentiment, which I also contest in this chapter.

For Brown, in order to develop a politics “without ressentiment”, feminists must forfeit theories of knowledge that give primacy to the “world from women’s point of view”, as these exemplify a form


45 Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power, p. 232.


47 Brown, States of Injury, p. 46.
of identity politics that necessarily assumes unity and invites exclusion. Brown claims that what will take feminism beyond ressentiment is instead a willingness to embrace “postidentity political positions and conversations”. What it means to base a postmodern feminist politics around ‘postidentities’, in Brown’s account, is the ability to take a political position in an open, contestable manner that refuses assumptions of an innate subjectivity or pre-empts shared or communal values. As she states, postmodernity presents an opportunity for feminists to “decide ‘what we want (to be)’ rather than derive it from assumptions or arguments about ‘who we are’”. This shift in language is meant to alleviate what Brown views to be the closed or fixed nature of identity that is tempted by unified, modernist identity claims. Of key importance for feminist approaches to power and domination, Brown’s entreaty to feminists to adopt ‘postidentity’ positions must also include relinquishing the feminist reliance on the normative dimensions that underpin identity and that give substance to superior claims to knowledge. According to Brown, modernity has bequeathed to feminists a “preference for deriving norms epistemologically over deciding on them politically”. In contrast, she believes that postmodernity offers an “amoral political habitat” where feminists can instead contest norms and struggle for alternative forms of more open-ended notions of identity.

However, in making the recommendation to feminists that identity and moral claims must be contested and debated, I contend that Brown often goes beyond advocating for debate over norms to a complete excising of moral claims. This is most clear when she asserts that the question now confronting feminists in the face of a postmodern consciousness, is “whether feminist politics can prosper without a moral apparatus, whether feminist theorists and activists will give up substituting Truth and morality for politics”. She insists that feminism not only become involved in “amoral contests”, inviting debate over what constitutes “the just and the good”, but must also rid itself of “specifically moral claims against domination – the avenging of strength through moral critique of it”. Brown’s appeal to feminists thus evokes a Nietzschean solution: feminism must adopt a masterly approach to power that involves combatting domination on direct terms without the

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50 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 78.


reactive fear and moral condemnation characteristic of the slave. As she instructs, feminists must learn to contest domination “with strength … rather than through moral reproach”.

There is no middle ground here for Brown; there is only a stark dichotomy between strength and the type of moral engagement that resembles *ressentiment*. To suggest that direct, fearless confrontation with power is the only possible means to overcome *ressentiment* is to potentially rob feminist approaches of any normative basis to underpin the necessary tasks of uncovering oppression and seeking to challenge its negative effects. Moreover, it assumes that the potential of postmodern engagement is fully realisable. Brown puts great stock in the possibilities that postmodernity can offer feminists to support a mode of engagement with identity that moves beyond the oppositional moral posturing that characterises *ressentiment*. However, by framing her solutions in dichotomous fashion, Brown simplifies the choices available to feminists: either embrace political contest or retreat into regressive forms of normativity.

Brown presents the “political” as open-ended and devoid of foundations, and postmodernism as creating a theoretical arena where ongoing questioning and challenge is encouraged. In Brown’s schema, postmodern politics is the brave new world that represents everything that modernist, anti-postmodernist and “reactive foundationalism” does not. As Brown specifies, those theorists who line-up against postmodernism value “[t]rust … over politics”, “certainty and security … over freedom”, “discoveries … over decisions” and definable identities over political argument. While modernism and anti-postmodernism are “extra-political”, in that they cannot unshackle themselves from their inherently moral commitments, postmodernity is claimed to be aligned with politics because it involves the embracing of uncertainty and contestation. In order to engage with this “vital politics of freedom”, Brown deems that all modernist foundations need to be expunged from feminist theorising.

By juxtaposing postmodern ‘politics’ and modern feminist approaches that preference ‘morality,’ then, Brown forges an unbridgeable distance between modern conceptions of politics and identity on the one hand and postmodern conceptions on the other. While she correctly identifies the tendency for *ressentiment* to issue from a particular moral opposition to domination, she assumes the only way to overcome *ressentiment* is to jettison any claim to morality or identity. The limitations

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57 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 75.
59 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 79.
of this framing of the debate are clearly apparent in Brown’s treatment of Hartsock’s ‘standpoint feminism’.

According to Brown, ‘standpoint feminism’ mobilises all of the foundations of modernist feminism that she believes are preventing feminists from adapting to the new conditions and political realities of postmodernity. This Brown characterises as reflecting an attachment to the “peculiarly modern” triad of the “subject, truth, or normativity” that are also seen as the cohabitating emblems of ressentiment. She argues that ‘standpoint feminism’ attempts to resolve the dissipation of women’s unified claim to identity, caused by the challenges of postfoundational approaches, by reaffirming women’s experiences as the basis for grounding epistemology. Brown contends that the claim that feminism cannot survive without a subject grounded in women’s experiences is spurious: such claims are no more than a “coping strategy for our ‘lost’ condition in postmodernity”.

For Hartsock, though, retaining a commitment to knowledge claims that can reflect how certain realities are experienced is essential for social change. This approach to epistemology based on women’s experiences has provided the basis for feminist engagement and politics and, as the later discussion in this chapter demonstrates, it is not easily abdicated nor entirely avoided within postfoundational approaches. Brown’s focus on ‘standpoint feminism’ as a modernist reaction to postmodern politics means that she fails to acknowledge the points of convergence between these two approaches to knowledge. This has important ramifications for Brown’s argument that postmodern theories will provide the means for feminism to negotiate an alternative, more combative and open basis for epistemology. For example, Brown overlooks how ‘standpoint feminism’ is an approach that preceded the postmodern emphasis on difference through its much earlier insistence on the importance of situating knowledge claims. Her critique of Hartsock’s use of experience also fails to acknowledge that, for Hartsock, this basis for knowledge claims is the “product of systematic theoretical and practical work”, it is contextualised through engagement with multiple women and adapted for feminist politics; which reflects the postmodern emphasis on the achieved and constructed nature of experience.

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62 Brown, States of Injury, p. 35.
65 Hartsock, ‘Postmodernism and Political Change’, p. 48. Stringer makes a similar point, citing various theorists who contend that Brown is ‘strongly didactic and flattens out’ the accounts of modernist feminism, including the use of experience. See Stringer, Knowing Victims, p. 109.
Moreover, Brown overlooks Hartsock’s attempts to respond to postmodern challenges and find a compromise position between a unified epistemology and the diversity of women’s perspectives. Hartsock claims a shared theoretical commitment with many postmodernist theories, favourably noting the poststructuralist affirmation of “incommensurability” of viewpoint and the “need to move to the margin”. Since her original standpoint thesis of the 1980s, Hartsock has also adapted her approach to the feminist standpoint by acknowledging that she “did not give proper attention to differences among women”. In order to respond to her postmodern critics, Hartsock seeks to “pluralize” the ‘standpoint feminist’ approach by recognising how context and particularity of experience can define each woman’s understanding and knowledge, captured in the shift in her phraseology to feminist *standpoints*. Hartsock acknowledges that she needs to “dissolve the false ‘we’” she had assumed and to instead build an account that is still immanent in the experience of those on the margins but reflects this position as being one of “real multiplicity and variety.” This aim of building an account of the world from the varied contributions of marginalised subjects may reflect what Ang once referred to pejoratively as white feminists attempting a form of multiculturalism. However, it does hold potential for moving beyond a false ‘we’, if Hartsock were also to recognise that dominative power is part of the diverse ‘we’ that is the category of women.

By failing to recognise these attempted adaptations in Hartsock’s account, and other key points of alignment between standpoint and postmodern imperatives, Brown removes the possibility of any grey area between the two realms of theory and the potential for retaining some aspects of modernist commitments. The result is that postfoundational approaches are hailed as the only viable means to operate within postmodernity without ressentiment. Brown thus implicitly proffers postmodernism as creating an ideal and neutral realm, what she terms an “amoral political habitat” that encourages debate and disagreement and can expel effectively normative claims to identity.

69 Hartsock, ‘Foucault on Power’, p. 171.
71 Brown does have some reservations about postfoundationalism that she raises in *States of Injury* and which are discussed later in this chapter.
Moreover, it is presented as producing both epistemological and ontological “ruptures” but without any “necessary or inevitable political entailments.”

Brown’s adoption of the mantle of the ‘political’, which she fuses with postfoundationalism, is thus recommended to feminists as being more rigorous, innovative and forward-thinking than the alternative. I argue that this characterisation allows Brown to assume a position of righteousness that discounts any criticism as reactive and somehow lacking; those feminists who argue against some of the premises of postmodernism display a “wariness” which extends to a reluctance to engage openly in politics itself. Brown insists that feminist refusal to relinquish identity and moral claims against power is evidence that feminists aligned against postmodernism are frightened about developing a politics that is “appropriate to” the “characteristic powers of our age”. Another prominent postmodern feminist, Donna Haraway, presents this division between two camps of feminists in more acrimonious, though similar, terms when she claims that white women have been “forced kicking and screaming to notice” the “non-innocence of the category of ‘woman’”. By characterising feminists who challenge elements of postmodernism as entrenched modernists who are reluctant and unwilling to consider the challenges of postmodernism, these theorists polarise debate and encourage an antagonistic climate of accusation and reproach. While anger may underpin these criticisms and help to propel debate about exclusionary practices, accusation and reproach can be counter-productive if it leads to an automatic assumption that any criticism of how exclusion is framed reflects reluctance or a reassertion of dominant paradigms.

This polarisation also misrepresents both the diversity of feminist reactions to postmodernism and some other underpinning motivations that have driven engagement with many of its theoretical tenets. As Jane Flax points out, it is important to acknowledge that postmodern politics is bound to create “profound uneasiness”, especially among “white Western intellectuals, whose consciousness and position are among its primary subjects of critical analysis”. The insecurity that may be aroused by the challenges of postmodernity can be productive if it leads to recognition of bias, ignorance or practices that have silenced some voices. However, a theoretical climate characterised by “constant anxiety of ‘exposure’ and political discreditation” is not conducive to re-

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73 Brown, States of Injury, p. 32.
75 Brown, States of Injury, pp. 33, 37.
76 Brown, States of Injury, p. 33.
77 Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, p. 198.
78 Flax, ‘The End of Innocence’, p. 446.
examination of previously held views. In fact, it can preclude all forms of risk-taking that may advance theoretical and political debate.

It is my contention, then, that the wave of reactive foundationalism that Brown depicts as being the predominant reaction to postmodernism amongst feminists reflects only one part of the story. Many feminists have also adopted postmodern critiques of difference and identity politics willingly in an attempt to acknowledge complicity in domanative power and the silencing of other women. Iris Marion Young, for example, argues that if feminism follows the “logical and metaphysical critique of the unity of community from postmodernist philosophy” the only viable “alternative must be a politics of difference”. Her subsequent project focuses on finding a way forward for feminism to negotiate differences between women, accepting that the program of difference spurred on by postmodern debates is an inevitable part of this process. The role of intersectional differences amongst women remains a central feature of contemporary feminist debate, a conundrum that is still being grappled with seriously and genuinely.

There are also other clear examples within feminism of how the uneasiness felt by many feminists in the face of postmodernism has led to extreme denouncements of feminist unity, retraction from debate and even the refusal to question some of the premises of postmodernism. Susan Bordo, for example, argues that rather than fortifying the foundations of gender analysis, many feminist theorists have accepted that “the only ‘correct' perspective on race, class, and gender is the affirmation of difference”. In the most extreme cases, postmodern discourses have inspired a new dogma, revealed in the complete rejection of any explanation that relies on gender as a category of analysis in case it should be interpreted as “essentialist or totalizing”. This more extreme adoption of postmodern dictums has also been described as a “doxa of difference”, where difference is embraced uncritically and sometimes functions as an “unassailable value in itself”. Avtar Brah, for example, exhibits such a tendency when she insists on the need for a “re-

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81 Young, ‘The Ideal of Community’, p. 300.
82 See for example Carastathis, ‘Concept of Intersectionality’, pp. 304-314.
83 Bordo, ‘Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-scepticism’, p. 139.
84 Bordo, ‘Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-scepticism’, p.139.
85 R. Felski, ‘The Doxa of Difference’, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, vol. 23, no. 1, 1997, p. 1. This focus on difference remains a key focus of contemporary debates about intersectional feminism. One populist article asserts that intersectional feminism is the only alternative to white feminism: recognising multiple oppressions is a ‘painful and messy but necessary process that’s moving feminism on to its next level’. Lee and Dzodan, ‘What “White Feminism” is’. See also Carastathis, ‘Concept of Intersectionality’. 
valorisation of the multi’. This position reflects forms of postmodern politics in which heterogeneity and incommensurability become translated into total valorisation of all differences.

By overlooking these positive responses and more extreme adoptions of postmodern challenges to feminist identity, Brown underestimates other feminist motivations and commitments. Rather than reluctance and a lack of capacity to adapt to criticisms of exclusion, I suggest that the desire on behalf of white feminists not to exhibit qualities that are deemed domimative or that may silence other women, plays an equally important role. The origins of feminism as a movement aiming to alleviate oppression and highlight the experiences of marginalised subjects, predisposes feminist theorists to these concerns. In fact, the postmodern attention to problems of representation has meant that feminists are often afflicted with anxiety about committing theoretical errors through appeals to unity or speaking about women’s oppression that will be interpreted as reflecting “deeply conservative and racist tendencies”. Brown’s view that feminism is resistant to recognising its “fictions of unity” thus underestimates how many feminists are not only critically engaging with the need to adapt conceptions of identity, morality and female experience but in some cases completely discrediting the possibility for any such claims.

In fact, theorists who challenge the assumption of unity amongst feminists make it clear that the target of their criticisms is the consciousness of white feminists. For example, when launching her critique of modernist feminism, Chandra Mohanty argues that there is a need for “greater self-consciousness within feminist politics”. Yet she also tellingly issues a disclaimer that her critique is not an attempt to “lay blame or induce guilt”, signalling that it may also be “consciences” that are aroused. Foucault also gives credence to the interpretation that guilt is prevalent in these debates when he claims that the contemporary theorist is “guilty about pretty well everything: about speaking out and about keeping silent, about doing nothing and about getting involved in

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88 Bordo, ‘Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-scepticism’, p. 141.
89 Bordo, ‘Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-scepticism’, p. 142.
91 Mohanty, ‘Feminist Encounters’, p. 78. As Flax has also noted, in creating ‘guilt and anxieties about racism’ the ‘projects of postmodernism and women of color overlap’. She claims that both of these discourses, and the uncertainty that they have caused, are ‘exactly where responsibility beyond innocence looms as a promise and a frightening necessity’. However, what Flax refers to here as the need for responsibility to be taken reflects accountability for complicity in power, not acceptance of the logic of resentment that dictates complicity is evil. Flax, ‘The End of Innocence’, pp. 459-460.
everything”.93 For Foucault, the guilt of the intellectual is “an effect of a deep-seated anxiety. The feeling of ‘no room,’ ‘him or me,’ ‘it’s my turn now.’ We have to walk in line because of the extreme narrowness of the place where one can listen and make oneself heard”.94 This description of the guilt of the modern intellectual can be detected in the responses of feminists, most specifically white feminists, to postmodern challenges, presenting a very different picture of the postmodern scene than that presented by Brown.

The ‘Bad Conscience’ and the Postfoundational Priest

Brown’s emphasis is on feminists who retreated into foundationalism in response to postmodern challenges because they were motivated by the desire to retain the moral basis that underpinsressentiment. However, she underestimates how ressentiment still impacted those feminist accounts that adopted, rather than rejected, some of the key tenets of postmodernism. I contend that white feminist anxiety and guilt – as opposed to fear and reluctance – were key motivators behind feminist attempts to take on board postmodern theoretical dictums and can be explained in reference to the effects of ressentiment as a moral force that has been turned inward. As the external nature of the male enemy was undermined, white women, as the bearers of relative privilege, assumed their involvement in dominative power made them subject to the same criticisms owed the masters. Dominative power continued to be treated as an evil force, but not only because feminists were fearful and wanted to rekindle the unified identity that opposed male power. Instead, a sense of guilt and a willingness to accept blame ensured that the harms of domination and the desire to ameliorate these effects were of foremost concern. Nietzsche’s explanation of how the ‘bad conscience’ develops and the role of the ascetic priest are both useful in explaining how ressentiment re-occurs and is redirected back into communities comprised of subjects who have all experienced some form of powerlessness, though to differing degrees.

It will be recalled from the first chapter of this thesis that Nietzsche envisaged the slave morality becoming triumphant by instilling a ‘bad conscience’ in those with power and privilege. This ‘bad conscience’ arises as an inevitable development of contact with others, specifically through the relationship between creditor and debtor.95 According to Nietzsche, the “moral conceptual world of ‘guilt’” began in the “sphere of legal obligations”, which is the “oldest and most primitive personal

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95 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 65.
relationship" where “one person first measured himself against another”. Nietzsche contends that from its origins in this system of legal obligation, the notion of debt is transformed into a broader conception that includes all social interaction, which is sanctioned effectively not by fear of punishment but by the development of a consciousness of guilt. The connection with ressentiment is made explicit when Nietzsche claims that, while both master and slave can be subject to the effects of ressentiment in the form of a ‘bad conscience’, it is the “man of ressentiment” who invented it and who utilises it as a primary tool against the dominance of the master.

Feminists are bound similarly by a sense of political and personal obligation associated with the debt owed to all women as part of the feminist movement against women’s oppression. Like Nietzsche’s ‘bad conscience’, the existence of a community and interaction with others precedes the formation of guilt and recourse to moral sanctions. In Nietzsche’s schema, even the masters cannot escape the effects of the ‘bad conscience’ though they are more robust and can fight it off with greater strength than the average person. As Nietzsche explains it, the ‘bad conscience’ is “the serious illness that man was bound to contract ... when he found himself enclosed within the walls of society”. Within the feminist community, which is premised upon an explicit commitment to a politics that takes women beyond individual experiences to a shared commitment to redress inequity, the potential effects of the ‘bad conscience’ are likely to be more severe. It is my contention that white feminists felt an inevitable sense of guilt and ‘bad conscience’ when faced with the realisation that through participation in structural systems of dominance, they had silenced the voices of women facing more significant forms of exclusion and oppression.

While the slave’s resentment in Nietzsche’s account is directed outward to the dominative and autonomous masters who are all-powerful, within the community of women the new target for ressentiment becomes women who are participants in dominative power. The inversion of values that denounces power and installs powerlessness as the pinnacle of virtue constitutes the framework for moral judgement within the community of the oppressed. The slaves, while the promulgators of this new system of value, can also be subject to it. In fact, the guilt and shame that white feminists feel at their “excess” of power is further heightened by their own experiences of

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96 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, pp. 70-71.
98 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 75.
99 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 84.
powerlessness and awareness of the suffering of others. Unlike the masters in Nietzsche’s genealogy, white feminists are familiar with the desire to seek a cause for suffering as a “reactive protective measure”, which, in turn, assists in deadening the pain experienced through oppression. White feminists are more reflective than the traditional masters who are the agents of their own destiny and have no need to seek an external cause for their suffering in the form of a “guilty agent”. Thus, the internalisation required to develop a conscience already exists to a greater degree in the feminist subject whose “instinct for freedom” has been suppressed and who has accepted some of the values of the slave morality. One vitally important value that has been adopted is the belief that domination, as the province of the master, is an evil expression of power that belongs only to those who rule through precluding the agency of other subjects. Accepting that this masterly quality is shared by white women therefore involves a level of shame that far exceeds any felt by the traditional master. The corresponding belief that, in Nietzsche’s terms, “it is disgraceful to be fortunate, there is too much misery!” is thus more readily adopted by white feminist theorists.

This embeddedness in ressentiment, and increased susceptibility to the ‘bad conscience’, also makes those who have experienced domination vulnerable to the redirection of ressentiment and its central mechanism of blame. As Nietzsche explains, it is an important phase in the development of ressentiment that it becomes redirected inwards to the “sick herd” through the pivotal role of the ascetic priest. For Nietzsche, the ascetic priest is responsible for seizing upon the inverted morality of the slaves and putting it into service for the broader purpose of securing the dominance of Christian values. While this broader value system may not contradict the impulse of ressentiment that inverts powerlessness into virtue, it does provide a means of directing it away from the automatic reflex of blaming those external to it. According to Nietzsche, the priest who is an “artist in guilt feelings” acts to redirect the slave’s assignation of blame from the evil master back to the suffering. The priest tells the slaves that responsibility for suffering belongs only to them: “you alone are to blame for it – you alone are to blame for yourself!” Suffering that was previously seen to have been caused by the master thus becomes reinterpreted as a form of divine or otherworldly punishment. In Nietzsche’s terminology, through the guidance of the priest, the slave who was

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100 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 127.
102 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 87.
once an “invalid has been transformed into ‘the sinner.’” Nietzsche says: “[t]his is brazen and false enough: but one thing at least is achieved by it, the direction of ressentiment is altered”.

While Christian virtues are the framework that Nietzsche is concerned with, the role of the priest provides an interesting allegory in the context of an alternative framework of value such as that promised to feminists by postfoundational politics. Nietzsche’s priest is presented as the “predestined saviour, shepherd, and advocate of the sick herd”. Brown’s postfoundational politics is similarly presented as promising freedom from the negative impulse of ressentiment as it offers a means to unshackle feminism from a “well of truth” that opposes the power of the dominators. Postfoundationalism has been charged with presenting its approach as “more in line with contemporary standards of justice” – as right because more rigorous. Like Nietzsche’s priest, it offers “bearlike seriousness and feigned superiority, [it is] venerable, prudent and cold, as the herald and mouthpiece of more mysterious powers” that can “dominate the suffering at all times”.

Rebecca Stringer more specifically targets Brown when she claims that as a “diagnostician of ressentiment [Brown] assumes the role of Nietzsche’s ascetic priest, [by] encouraging the resentful towards introspective self-blame”. For Stringer, Brown encourages the self-blame of those subject to ressentiment because she places the responsibility for its existence and overcoming in their conduct, rather than in rectifying any external conditions that generate and reinforce both oppression and ressentiment. Just as Nietzsche’s priest tells the slaves to direct blame “sternly back upon themselves”, Stringer contends that Brown appeals to feminists to “assume responsibility for [their] situations” in order to undermine the functioning of ressentiment; the oppressed must “better understand the ways in which the subordinated and excluded are implicated in their own subordination and exclusion”. For Stringer, this is in effect a form of victim-blaming of those who have suffered oppression – holding the oppressed accountable for their powerlessness.

Yet while Nietzsche’s priest encourages all slaves to adopt the blame for their own predicament as suffering beings in a manner akin to Brown, as Stringer argues, my point here differs. White

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113 Stringer, *Knowing Victims*, p. 113.
feminists are blameworthy not only for participating in *ressentiment* by asserting their own claims to powerlessness but also for their role as the more powerful subjects within the category of women. As Nietzsche makes clear, it is part of the priest’s role also to “direct the *ressentiment of the less severely afflicted* sternly back upon themselves”.114 In this case, the ascetic priest in Nietzsche’s formulation acts to insert the values of the inverted slave morality into a Christian paradigm wherein this absorbing of blame and taking of responsibility becomes channeled through displays of patronage to others who are worse off. The less severely affected subjects of *ressentiment* become governed by the Christian entreaty to show “love of thy neighbor” by “doing good, giving, relieving, helping, encouraging, consoling, praising, rewarding” those who are subject to greater suffering.115 This approach to those who are suffering more is reflected in several postmodern dictums, as outlined below, that attempt to ameliorate the impact of dominative power by creating space for marginalised subjects.

In contrast to Brown’s assessment that feminists retreated from postmodern challenges with fear and a lack of confidence, then, it is argued that when “strength and good fortune (‘privilege’ as we say today)” were cast as an “indictment in a culture of suffering”, guilt and shame led white feminists to succumb to the ensuing logic and effects of *ressentiment*.116 What the impact of the ‘bad conscience’ and the example of the priest highlight is the intractable nature of *ressentiment* and how it can continue to operate within and amongst subjects who have suffered as a result of dominative power.117 However, a cautionary message for postfoundational politics from Nietzsche’s example of the priest is that while he attempts to heal the wounds of suffering, he “at the same time infects the wound”.118 While Nietzsche notes with approval how the priest channels the rancour and blame away from the original, all-powerful masters, he concedes that the priest’s reliance on the “exploitation of the sense of guilt” amongst the slaves, ultimately makes “the sick sicker”.119

117 Stringer makes a similar point that critics of *ressentiment* underestimate its ‘autoreferential’ nature and that ‘diagnosing’ *ressentiment* invites the critic’s own *ressentiment*. See *Knowing Victims*, pp. 112-113.
118 Stringer, *Knowing Victims*, p. 117.
Postfoundational ‘Politics’: On Not Speaking for Others

It is contended that these effects of the ‘bad conscience’ and the redirection of ressentiment that is encouraged by Nietzsche’s priest, can be detected in the feminist adoption of three key postmodern tenets, to be considered next. First is the insistence that majority group theorists refrain from claiming to speak for or represent marginalised groups. In order to counteract the silencing of universal claims, and demonstrate respect for previously silenced minorities, theorists are encouraged to carve out a terrain for conversation across difference by limiting the speech of certain privileged subjects. As Sonia Kruks suggests, the goal of “multiple-difference feminism” is to “create spaces of various kinds in which the previously silenced can speak”. In order to create these spaces and buttress them from misrepresentation or claims to false universalism, postmodern approaches underscore the need to avoid representational claims entirely.

Second is the postmodern insistence on the local, specific and situated nature of knowledge claims. I argue that this epistemological approach reinforces the need for subjects to speak for themselves but, in so doing, reconfirms an understanding of experience that is meant to be a prime target of postmodern criticism. In accordance with postmodern attention to the multiplicity of difference, each subject speaks from a partial perspective that reflects only the specific experience of that subject, and which cannot be easily shared or accessed by other subjects. Third, and relatedly, is the postmodern contention that in order to overcome the tendency for priority to be given to any one identity over another in the context of these more fragmented identities, the claims to knowledge of each subject are rendered incommensurable. As a result, identities are separated in postmodern debates by unbridgeable distances, which fosters an oppositional framing of Otherness that aligns with how the slave morality understands identity. Both of these dictums underpin and reinforce the postmodern refusal of representation, which I argue does not alleviate ressentiment but may actually inspire its continuance.

Refusing Representation

Postmodern theorists argue that the practice of speaking on behalf of oppressed groups and individuals has the potential both to silence them and “obscure real material differences”. The intractability of structural privilege is emphasised and in some cases even the possibility of any

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speech on behalf of others, without doing harm, is questioned.\textsuperscript{122} Andrew Lakritz notes that “sympathy or empathy cannot be taken for granted; the mere desire to be on the side of the underprivileged is not enough, never enough”.\textsuperscript{123} Lakritz echoes the arguments of many postcolonial and feminist theorists when he claims that the oppressive nature of the relationship between the powerful and marginalised subjects always lies beneath expressions of empathy.\textsuperscript{124} The potential risk of further subordinating individuals who have suffered oppression by appealing to a representative commonality that may serve to silence or subsume the specificity of experience is deemed too great by many theorists.\textsuperscript{125}

Influential poststructuralist thinkers, such as Foucault and Deleuze, have also asserted the impossibility for positive forms of representation. They claim as absolutely fundamental the “indignity of speaking for others”.\textsuperscript{126} Foucault develops instead an account of what he terms the “specific intellectual”, which emphasises that intellectuals should aim to avoid speaking in universal terms but seek instead to occupy a more narrow, restricted position based on pragmatic intervention.\textsuperscript{127} While he later adapts his position on the role of intellectuals to encompass the importance of theory to transformative action, at this stage of his thought he concurs with Deleuze that “there is no more representation; there’s nothing but action”.\textsuperscript{128} The influence of this approach has been profound, becoming broadly shared amongst theorists such that it became commonplace to assert that it is “no longer acceptable for anyone to represent anyone else”.\textsuperscript{129}

According to poststructuralist theorists, a social position that is supported by structural power is built on the necessary silencing of that which is other or different. As such, certain “privileged locations are discursively dangerous”.\textsuperscript{130} To speak for another subject is to go beyond representing his/her desires, needs or goals: it includes a representation of who s/he is, as interpreted by the speaker. According to this understanding, a speaker would become actively involved in constructing another subject’s position even if they were speaking in the more limited sense about

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{122} Weedon, \textit{Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference}, p. 109. Weedon has Spivak and other postcolonial writers in mind here.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Roof and Wiegman, (eds.), \textit{Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity}, p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Roof and Wiegman, (eds.), \textit{Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity}, p.9.
\item \textsuperscript{125} S. Lovibond, ‘The End of Morality?’ in Lennon and Whitford, (eds.), \textit{Knowing the Difference}, p. 69.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Lovibond, ‘The End of Morality?’, p. 69.
\end{itemize}
another’s experience. Adhering to the logical development of this argument against representation thus significantly reduces many forms of conversation and debate. Most importantly, it can lead not only to the desire to hear from many voices, but also the insistence that it is only possible to achieve an accurate insight into the identity of a person, to capture all the complexities and different affiliations they may have, by hearing directly from them.

Although the intention behind a refusal of representation is to recognise the impact of dominative power relations that have silenced oppressed and excluded voices, it also assumes that representative claims and attempts at speaking beyond a singular self must involve domination. It reduces the varied nature and forms of power to being necessarily power over others by subsuming all possible motivations for representative attempts beneath an intrinsic reflex to silence and, therefore, dominate. An intention to express genuine empathy about the experiences of another marginalised subject, a desire to convey the views of others to a broader audience as part of the duty of the more privileged oppressed to seek redress for the less privileged oppressed, or an attempt to discuss the impact that specific oppressions have had on the quality of our shared society, are all deemed suspect. As Lakritz argues, expressions of empathy or sympathy are “never enough” to erase the differential in power between privileged and oppressed subjects. The postmodern challenge for theorists to recognise complicity in power, particularly in tackling white privilege, should involve a constant and vigilant attention to exclusion and the ways in which privilege insidiously informs speech and action on behalf of others. However, a blanket rejection of representative politics can serve to stifle attempts at understanding, which is needed in order to challenge such privilege.

Moreover, the hope that practices of domination and exclusion can be neutralized through refusal of representation is an “illusory wish”. As Linda Alcoff argues, “there is no neutral place to stand free and clear in which my words do not prescriptively affect or mediate the experience of others”. In fact, an absolute retreat from practices of speaking for others can obscure how the choice not to speak reflects an already privileged position. Alcoff provides the following example:

At a recent symposium at my university, a prestigious theorist was invited to lecture on the political problems of postmodernism. The audience, which includes many white women

and people of oppressed nationalities and races, waits in eager anticipation for his contribution to this important discussion. To the audiences' disappointment, he introduces his lecture by explaining that he cannot cover the assigned topic because as a white male he does not feel that he can speak for the feminist and postcolonial perspectives that have launched the critical interrogation of postmodernism's politics. Instead he lectures on architecture.136

By attempting to mediate any situation where domination may become visible, and therefore open to critique, the more oppressive forms of dominative power may also become further hidden. Even if this theorist is unwilling to risk offence or the misrepresentation of the views of others, he is also refusing to risk critical engagement about the problem of his privileged position. While his retreat is made under the guise of respect for the views of others, it also betrays an unwillingness to confront and challenge his own perspective and embeddedness in power. Instead, his 'bad conscience' confirms the impossibility of comprehending difference and fails to meet the challenge of tackling the subtle effects of white privilege.137

Moreover, the example of Nietzsche's ascetic priest highlights how attempts to relieve the predicament of the more powerless can instead recuperate a hidden, more subversive, buttressing of power and privilege through moral superiority. As the ascetic priest in Nietzsche's formulation inserts the values of the inverted slave morality into a Christian paradigm, this absorbing of blame and taking of responsibility converts into another means of exerting a will-to-power. Nietzsche emphasises that ressentiment, once internalised, can be channelled into displays of patronage to others who are worse off. According to Nietzsche, this new will-to-power, reframed by the priest, reflects “slight superiority” toward those who are subject to greater suffering and actually reflects an attempt to retain some power over the less fortunate subject.138 This also echoes Nietzsche's views on pity, which he claims actually preserves the decline of the subject who is pitied. To pity is to subscribe to a false sense of moral superiority when one is instead “multiplying misery”.139

137 Adale Sholock argues that to combat white privilege, white feminists must confront their ignorance, which can cause doubt and ‘cognitive anxiety’ that is self-defeating. While white feminists may feel this doubt regardless, the shame and guilt caused through falsely occupying 'powerlessness' and commitment to a view that domination is evil can exacerbate it. See Sholock, 'Methodology of the Privileged', pp. 701-714.
**Situated Knowledges: Experience Revisited**

Nonetheless, the attempt to create space for the speech of marginalised subjects through refusal of representation is bolstered further by the postmodern insistence upon the need to situate knowledge claims. This commitment is underpinned by the desire to encourage dialogue amongst individuals that attends to the many divergent experiences of power and structural oppression that lie beneath more generalised claims to group or unified identities. The postmodern challenge to the ‘god’s-eye view’ or objective position emphasises that “where an individual speaks from affects both the meaning and truth of what she says and thus she cannot assume an ability to transcend her location”.

This attention to location means that subject positions become defined by an increasingly complicated layer of differences. As a result, the potential for speaking about others’ perspectives and forming coalitions is often guarded against. By virtue of the complexity of differences and inequalities among subjects, arguments for situated and partial knowledge can mean that broader identity claims are interpreted as always involving an “imposition”, with any discussion of “who women are” necessarily eschewed.

Brown’s argument against Hartsock’s ‘standpoint feminism’, for example, is based on the latter’s continued reliance upon the “coherence of women as a collective subject” in the face of the dissipating impulse of postmodern thought. In contrast, Brown proposes that a “late modern or postmodern consciousness” would refuse to call upon a unified subject as this would invariably invite “exclusions and violations”. Instead, in Brown’s schema, speech is derived from an individual statement of wants that involves the subject reflecting on specific, individual priorities.

In accordance with postmodern dictates, this claim to a position does not evoke an explicit identity as a precondition for speech and nor does it seek to represent the views of others. As Brown states, she wants to replace the language of “who I am” with more specific discourse that begins with, this “is what I want for us”. Any vision of commonality this entails can only ever reflect the views of one person: it is intentionally non-representational.

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141 Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, p. 35.
However, this form of limited self-representation can be seen to rekindle a conception of experience that is otherwise strongly rejected by Brown and other postmodern theorists. Postmodern critiques have challenged the “authority and presence” of experience *per se* and have been critical of knowledge claims that use experience as “an unexamined, catch-all category”.¹⁴⁷ Joan Scott, for example, argues that feminists must recognise that experience cannot serve as “uncontestable evidence” that provides a direct connection to identity but that it should instead be subject to critical interrogation.¹⁴⁸ It will be recalled that Brown similarly rejects ‘standpoint feminism’ for its attempt to deal with the dissipation of postmodern politics by “deriving from within women’s experience the grounding for women’s accounts”.¹⁴⁹

However, the postmodern refusal to represent others means that speech is necessarily reduced to the individual whose experience, while understood as being filtered through his/her location in social structures of power, is not directly accessible to others. As Bickford notes, while anti-foundational theories “reject an ahistorical, absolute foundation for knowledge and, relatedly, for the human self”, they are still grounded by the specific context.¹⁵⁰ This contextual basis for knowledge claims does not privilege broader, global or unified, claims to identity but nor does it preclude the use of experience. Rather, as all of the multiple differences between subjects are emphasised, potential divisions within each subject are brought to the fore, which serves to splinter experiences into a fragmented web of specificity.¹⁵¹ The postmodern insistence upon locating speech in situated perspectives thus still requires an appeal to one’s experience, which, although effective in providing for the inclusion of all views, nonetheless continues to evoke the speaker’s own perspective as a central component of knowledge claims.

Postmodern theorists would argue that this form of experience departs from a modernist approach, because each perspective is recognised as being thoroughly constructed. As Brown claims, when the unified subject is dispensed with by a postmodern proliferation of differences, speaking about one’s own experience becomes conditional as it is “linguistically contained, socially constructed, discursively mediated”.¹⁵² In Brown’s formulation of ‘postidentity’ speech, when a woman speaks

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about what she wants for women more broadly, these individual desires or ‘wants’ do not reflect
upon her subjectivity as a woman.\footnote{Brown, States of Injury, p.40.} Instead, Brown insists that “our words cannot be legitimately
deployed or construed as larger or longer than the moments of the lives they speak from”.\footnote{Brown, Wounded Attachments, p. 221; Brown, States of Injury, p. 40.}

However, as Sonia Kruks explains, knowledge claims that rely on such individualised experience
invariably reflect what she terms an “epistemology of provenance”.\footnote{Kruks, ‘Identity Politics and Dialectical Reason’, p.4.} For Kruks, because the
‘provenance’ of the speaker is paramount, when broader modernist claims to identity are made it
is assumed that those outside the group cannot share knowledge. However, when the ‘provenance’
of a subject’s knowledge is partitioned along lines of class, race, ethnicity and gender, the terms
for understanding knowledge are narrowed further such that “only those who live a particular reality
can know about it; and only they have the right to speak about it”.\footnote{Kruks, ‘Identity Politics and Dialectical Reason’, p.4.} In both approaches, a direct
connection is assumed between certain characteristics of women and the knowledge of women,
which reinforces the notion that there is an immediacy to experience that belies its constructed
carer.\footnote{M. Lazreg, ‘Women’s Experience and Feminist Epistemology: A Critical Neo-Rationalist Approach’, in Lennon and Whitford, (eds.), Knowing the Difference, pp. 54, 52.} In this sense, the retreat from representation may not resolve the appeal, or even the
importance of experience to knowledge, but may actually consolidate it as “transparent and self-
knowing”.\footnote{Alcoff, ‘The Problem of Speaking for Others’, p. 110.} As knowledge claims become confined to reflecting the multiplicity of individual
experience and the incomprehensibility of other knowledges affirmed, it becomes necessary for
subjects to be able to account for their own experiences directly and transparently.\footnote{Lazreg, ‘Women’s Experience and Feminist Epistemology’, p. 53.}

Moreover, despite Brown’s insistence that postmodern or ‘postidentity’ speech avoids the pitfalls
of experience and subjectivity that confine modernist feminists, her description of how this speech
operates belies this conviction. Brown claims that ‘postidentity’ speech that is framed in the “right
political language” is directed away from association with the subject – beyond the self and toward
the world – because it involves a vision towards “diversity and the common”, encapsulated in the
statement that this “is what I want for us”.\footnote{Brown, Wounded Attachments, p. 220; Brown, Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures, p. 81; Brown, States of Injury, p. 51.} However, in describing the conversion of this inward-
looking speech into an external or “public idiom”, Brown tellingly evokes modernist subjectivity in
her claim that one begins from a “situated (subject) position”.\footnote{Brown, Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures, p. 81.} It is clear in this statement that the
“situatedness” of knowledge is not part of a feminist epistemology that Brown wants to “overcome”.\textsuperscript{162} As a result, she is captured by the rules of her own theoretical stance and the impossibility of going beyond the subject when situated experience remains the basis of knowledge claims. Even if this subject represents only the thoroughly constructed and contestable subject of postmodernism, it still remains a feature and necessary anchoring point for speech. It is arguable, then, that there is fear behind Brown’s placement of the subject in brackets. Fear that without a subject, the radical political action that is required by feminist politics in the name of specific subjects, will not be as compelling or may not even be possible.

Yet the key point of divergence between the modernist subject and Brown’s bracketed subject is that the latter is thoroughly dispersed by multiple influences, particularities of experience and potential groups of belonging or affiliation. The unified subject of modernist feminism is substituted with a postmodern version of the subject as diverse: an individual who is internally divided into several different parts that correspond to different aspects of his/her identity.\textsuperscript{163} Rather than obviating identity entirely, there is an appeal to partial, dispersed and situated positions, which come to represent what Jennifer Wicke terms “serial identity politics”.\textsuperscript{164} The unified identity politics criticised by Brown and other postmodernists for its generalisations thus becomes replaced with a form of “individualised identity politics”.\textsuperscript{165}

As a result, the knowledge claims that arise from this postmodern subject are just one perspective amidst a myriad of others and epistemic priority can not be given to any one subject. For example, Donna Haraway, who is described as typifying a postmodern feminist epistemology, emphasises the situated basis for knowledge claims but also insists on their fundamental “partiality”.\textsuperscript{166} She claims that “only partial perspective promises objective vision … feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object”.\textsuperscript{167} Thus Haraway is seen to have abandoned “the quest for an epistemically pure, foundationally innocent standpoint”.\textsuperscript{168} Instead of oppressed knowledges providing better access to an

\textsuperscript{162} Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p.81.
\textsuperscript{163} Mullin, ‘Selves, Diverse and Divided’, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{165} Mohanty, ‘Feminist Encounters’, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{167} Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, pp. 190-193.
\textsuperscript{168} Conway, ‘Das Weib an Sich’, p. 115.
understanding of power and domination, it is partial knowledges that “seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world”.  

**Fragmented and Incommensurable Knowledges**

However, the partiality of knowledge claims means that there is always “the irreducibly particular that cannot, ultimately, be shared”. 169 In fact, for many postmodern theorists, the “local, heterogenous” nature of knowledge claims leads to celebration of the “incommensurable” nature of discourses. 170 Uma Narayan claims, for example, that even “sympathetic individuals who are not members of an oppressed group should keep in mind the possibility of this sort of failure regarding their understanding of issues relating to an oppression that they do not share”. 171 The “rhetorical force” of partial and limited knowledges issuing from experience issues in part from this very inability to verify the knowledges of others, unless they share the same experience. 172

Ien Ang more specifically claims that an emphasis on the incommensurability of knowledges is fundamental to any discussion of difference. Incommensurability produces discomfort, because there is no possibility for differences to be negotiated without difficulty and there is never an endpoint or conclusion to this process. Instead, it is an uncertain, “never-ending, and partial negotiatory process”. 173 Importantly, acknowledging incommensurability means accepting that the “construction of a solid, unified ‘we’” is not necessary but fragile and uncertain. 174 In making this claim, Ang seems to be suggesting a form of incommensurability that may not be total or complete, in that some negotiation of alignment between subjects may still be possible. However, because she then equates commensurability with the assimilation of differences “into the dominant whole”, moments of correspondence are interpreted as necessarily meaning complete understanding of differences between subjects. 175 As moments of commonality or empathy are collapsed by Ang into “totalizing, universalizing, all-assimilating truths”, she must insist upon a “fundamental

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169 Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, p. 191. This contradicts Susan Hekman’s claim that the ‘major distinction between postmodernism and standpoint theory, the claim of privileged knowledge … has been almost entirely abandoned’. See Hekman, ‘Truth and Method’, p. 358.
175 Ang, ‘Comment on Felski’s “The Doxa of Difference”,’ p. 61.
incommensurability” in order to preserve any differential positioning in relation to race. This is evident when Ang insists that the experience of racism is “simply not accessible to white people”, as there is an “irreparable chasm between a white and a black feminist truth. No harmonious compromise or negotiated consensus is possible here”.

Arguments for incommensurability, bolstered by an emphasis on locating the knowledges of diverse subjects and a firm rejection of representation, thus inevitably leads to a demand for subjects to account only for their own perspectives that issue from specific, and highly individual, situations. Feminist politics is left with the kinds of claims that are based on what “I want” as an individual, which Brown authorises as “postidentity” and recommends as being beyond the ressentimental posturing of broader modernist identity claims.

Insistence on this limited form of individual self-representation belies the confrontation and “wars over position” that Brown associates with the ideal realm of postfoundational politics. It will be recalled that Brown claims that postmodernity challenges feminists to embrace public speech that can be “interrogated to the ground by others”. In her presentation of postmodernity as a neutral and open terrain that encourages debate, Brown’s vision has several elements in common with the process of decision-making that is described by pluralists. According to Di Stefano, this alignment is shared by other postmodernists who have “re-appropriated the political vocabulary of ‘pluralism’ to describe its version of theory as a huge ‘conversation’ among a variety of fractured participants”. It will be recalled from Chapter One that for pluralists all public decisions are contestable and conflict is endemic to society: it is an essential and positive element of power relations. Similarly, for Brown, feminists need to “engage in overt struggles for position” and to choose contest over theoretical or derived certainties.

In contrast to Brown’s vision, though, the insistence on individual self-representation can instead be seen as a means to engineer an avoidance of direct expressions of conflict and power over others. Retreating from representation is motivated by a desire to recognise differences and avoid silencing, censoring or misrepresenting other women. Yet this desire is buttressed by

177 Ang, ‘I’m a Feminist but…’, p. 64.
178 Ang, ‘Comment on Felski’s “The Doxa of Difference”’, p. 60; Ang, ‘I’m a Feminist But…’, p. 64.
establishing a “set of neutral rules” that are designed to “guarantee that adherence to them will not result in the distortion or erasure of someone’s ‘truth.’” 183 It is only because power continues to be treated as a threatening, contaminating and negative force that it is deemed necessary to orchestrate the interactions of subjects who have different experiences of power and oppression to ensure domination does not surface. While individual self-representation does not directly occlude the potential for any dissenting view to be expressed, it remains immune from direct critique. Contention, conflict, misrepresentation and anger are being treated as the evil effects of dominative power relations, rather than inevitable or even generative components of communication.

While “not speaking for others” is an attempt to acknowledge and meet the responsibility of privilege and exclusion, then, this dictum eradicates the potential for argument but it also makes the possibility of finding agreement or commonality unlikely. 184 Speaking only for oneself, from one’s own location, means that each speaker is safe from the interrogation and challenge of others. 185 Each unique identity, which is marked by multiple points of difference, becomes closed to critical revision, including those that are bolstered by established privilege. 186 At its most severe, this conversation that is governed by giving credence to difference and the impact of different forms of oppression, can end up relieving more dominant subjects of the responsibility to engage, to listen actively or receptively. 187 As Mohanty makes clear, without any “common terms”, the question of how to “negotiate between my history and yours” is left unanswered. 188 Instead, the insistence on the incommensurability between women from multiple ethnic and cultural origins “posits as inevitable the inaccessibility of such concerns to white women, who are thereby relieved of any need to engage with them”. 189 Attempting to conduct conversations across difference in strict adherence to the postmodern dictum not to speak for others, then, is carried out carefully but at the expense of potential conflict that may lead to greater understanding and possible change.

Brown believes that feminists are “hesitant” to engage in the contestable arena of postmodernity due to a lack of confidence in how to negotiate norms and locate positions in this domain. 190 Yet I argue that the hesitance evidenced through a retreat from representation reflects guilt and shame

186 Strickland, ‘Feminism, Postmodernism and Difference’, p. 271.
190 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 75.
rather than a lack of confidence. Brown underestimates both the intractable nature of reßentiment and how it has already become the prism through which feminists engage with postmodernism. The impact of the ‘bad conscience’ leads to a desire to remedy previous transgressions by nullifying the effects of evil dominative power. Importantly, the value judgement that domination represents an evil and fearsome quality belonging to those who have power does not change through the experience of the ‘bad conscience’ in the privileged oppressed feminist subject. In fact, this subject is far more prepared and willing to accept the belief instigated by reßentiment and promulgated by the ‘bad conscience’ that “it is disgraceful to be fortunate”. Ameliorating privilege becomes the main priority because shame and guilt are the predominant motivators.

Ressentiment Rekindled: The Other Who is Not Me

Importantly, the pluralist ideal borrowed by postmodernists and reflected in the account of Brown also relies on the assumed autonomy of all subjects to participate in the tussle over political decision-making. Like Brown’s description of postmodernity as a “vital politics of freedom”, pluralism deems even those subjects who are on the margins of economic and political power as potential contributors to public debate. Yet in contrast to Brown’s hope that within postmodernity feminists can approach dominative power with strength rather than a moral reproach, marginalised identities are being ‘invited’ to speak by white women rather than being embroiled in an open and contested debate over what the terms of the ‘good’ are for women. Ang makes it clear that for her, as “a woman of Chinese descent”, the conditions for speech outlined by postmodern theory have meant that “white’ feminists invite me to raise my ‘voice,’ qua a non-white woman, and make myself heard”.

Space is created for the speech of the marginalised, the most oppressed, by others with greater power, hence reinforcing the assumption that asserting the right to speak in a contested arena is not within the capacity of the subordinate or the more oppressed subject. The empowerment of women with less power to act requires the reinforcement of other, more powerful women. While this could enable forms of power with others, this potential is precluded by the insistence of theorists like Ang that there is no point of “harmonious compromise” between, on the one hand, women who are complicit in power and, on the other, marginalised women: the dyadic relationship

191 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 124.
192 Brown, States of Injury, p. 79.
193 Ang, ‘I’m a Feminist But…’, p. 57.
is paramount. The manner in which this priority is ‘given’ by those complicit in domination rekindles the familiar, and problematic, conception that participation in dominative power necessarily involves precluding the capacity of another. Against the promised splintering of power that is meant to characterise postmodernity, power instead comes to replicate the Weberian zero-sum understanding upheld by feminist domination theorists: when power is held, it is “at the expense of others”.194

As a result, the potential will-to-power evident in the self-representation of marginalised identities is conceived in contra-distinction to the powerful; in this case, white women. Ang is being asked to speak specifically as a ‘non-white woman’ for whom dominative power is experienced in a way unavailable to white women; underpinning her first-hand account of oppression is the potential to transform difference “into intellectual and political capital”.195 As Marion Maddox notes, there is a moral element inherent in such forms of speech because they are based on the “disclosure of otherness” or experience that is not available or knowable intimately by other subjects.196 More specifically, these forms of self-disclosure are most powerful, and further beyond reproach or criticism, when the speaker is recounting experience of pain and harms inflicted.197 The speech of marginal subjects thus serves as the best testimony against the illegitimacy of domination. It is the power of ressentiment that is being called upon, as it is the exposure of injustice, exclusion and suffering that can most effectively “awaken” consciences.198

The desire for a “lost, pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic self” that is a primary target of postmodern criticism, thus resurfaces when it is assumed that beneath the “violence” that is done through attempts to represent others lies the only authentic perspective on domination. As Minh-ha Trinh explains, this notion of identity “requires the elimination of all that is considered foreign or not true to the self, that is to say, not-I, other”.199 The postmodern commitment to self-representation shores up the boundaries of separate identities, ensuring that “a clear dividing line

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194 Haralambos et al., Sociology, p. 102.
195 Ang, ‘I’m a Feminist But…’, p. 57.
197 Maddox, ‘Baring All’, pp. 95-96. As Maddox also notes, however, ‘this mode of moral discourse illustrates not only the creative possibilities in disclosure-based ethics but also the ways in which familiar, intractable inequalities intrude into even the most careful efforts to communicate difference’, p. 90.
can be made between I and not-I, he and she ... between us here and the them over there”. Recognising particularities in lived experiences is important in overcoming oppressive practices of representation but not to the extent that each subject is seen to live within his/her own unique, discrete and incomparable history. As Yuval-Davies notes, feminists make no advance by replacing unified identity claims with a “kind of identity politics which completely separates social categories”.

In terms of a feminist approach to power that is able to ameliorate reliance on ressentiment, then, I argue that a total separation between identities needs to be avoided. Supporting theoretical imperatives that ensure marginal identities remain beyond representation preserves the gulf between subject positions necessary for the oppositional formation of identity, characteristic of ressentiment. The creation of distance between different identities enables subjects who are not like us to be treated as evil because they possess characteristics or qualities that are not understood and may be feared and resented. Without the possibility of speaking across differences, and finding points of commonality or shared commitment, the oppositional creation of identity evident in the slave morality is encouraged. As the bridge between identities is foreclosed, the moral evaluation of powerlessness as virtue is strengthened. In Nietzsche’s words, “profound suffering ennobles; it separates”, enabling claims to being “at home” in, many distant, terrible worlds of which ‘you know nothing.” Uma Narayan makes this appeal clear when she claims that subjects who do not suffer a particular oppression, should “realize that nothing they may do, from participating in demonstrations to changing their lifestyles, can make them one of the oppressed”.

This continued functioning of ressentiment is inevitable within a schema that perceives different identities as antagonistically opposite, and hence, as enemies in a Nietzschean sense. Rather than possessing like characteristics that may involve complicity in power, it is argued that white feminists have assumed that their own complicity in domination prevents the involvement in power relations of those who have been excluded and marginalised. A total retreat from representation therefore reflects an unproductive ‘bad conscience’ wherein guilt and shame has dominated rather than a

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202 Grunell and Saharso, ‘State of the Art’, pp. 210-211.
203 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 190.
204 Narayan, ‘The Project of Feminist Epistemology’, p. 265. This statement brings to mind Felski’s comment that ‘certain axes of differentiation may be significant without being worthy of preservation. One example might be the “difference” generated by the experience of severe poverty or starvation’. Felski, ‘The Doxa of Difference’, p. 16.
productive recognition of complicity in power and domination. By assuming the role and blame of the masterly enemy, the retreat from representation confirms that power operates as a zero-sum equation and posits those who are silenced by discourses that privilege whiteness as ‘beyond’ power and irrevocably ‘othered’ by their position as oppressed subjects.

As noted in previous chapters, when white feminists participated in this will-to-power that places the highest moral value on greater claims to powerlessness, the evil nature of domination was reinforced and the subordinate’s exclusion from power reconfirmed. As Stuart Hall explains, when he is attributed with “speaking from the other side, from the space of difference” as a black migrant theorist, the powerlessness attached to his identity is reinstated. Hall argues that his identity as a black migrant shouldn’t be defined in contra-distinction to the strength and domimative natures of those with power: it is “not necessarily armour-plated against other identities. It is not tied to fixed, permanent, unalterable oppositions. It is not wholly defined by exclusion”. Hall can thus be interpreted as resisting the oppositional framing of identity that characterises the development of the slave’s identity in Nietzsche’s genealogy; an identity that is defined only by exclusion and in direct opposition to the strength and domimative natures of those with power. As other theorists have also noted, by occupying the site of otherness as a radical deconstructive tool, the ‘Other’ can become romanticised and contained by this identity. Spivak, for example, suggests that understanding the mechanics of othering may offer more insights than “invocations of the authenticity of the Other”.

Rather than challenge this tendency to embrace positions of marginality, though, poststructuralist theories that focus on the deconstruction of ‘otherness’ can counterproductively reinforce it. Within feminist poststructuralist theories, this has taken the form of embracing the ‘feminine’ as a theoretical tool in philosophical attempts to undermine logocentrism. By emphasising that the ‘feminine’ represents a “necessary symbolic absence”, the silencing and suppression of dominant discourses are highlighted. This approach follows Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, both of whom

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205 McRobbie, ‘Feminism, Postmodernism and the Real Me’, p. 133.
208 Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, p. 294.
maintain that the subjectivity of Woman lies in her unanswerability: woman does not exist except as "the Other of a discourse grounded in Her radical exclusion". Kristeva maintains that because woman is irretrievably housed by a position of exclusion in relation to man, she exists beyond recognition and so in retaliation must reject being defined at all.

Several theorists have pointed out that this attempt to embrace the ‘feminine’ as “paradoxically what is not” through asserting total difference can reconfirm original gender divisions and hierarchies, confining Woman to the symbolic position of otherness. Postmodern approaches to difference and poststructuralist accounts that attempt to recuperate the voices of marginal subjects can instead turn otherness “into a generalised philosophical item”. Rosalyn Diprose gives the example of Nietzsche’s use of woman as the “enigmatic”, which she argues serves to recreate the same notions of subjectivity for women that have developed through oppression and risk recuperation of these conditions.

These concerns with the use of woman and the feminine as symbolic of exclusion provide a cautionary example of the risks involved in the postmodern insistence that marginal identities within feminist discourse are similarly “beyond” representation. Similar conditions to those established in the second-wave feminist engagement with domination are evoked. The belief that domimative power is not part of white women’s identities was a function of the framing of identity in complete juxtaposition to an externalised male identity that is powerful. Domination was evil because it was not seen to be part of women’s identities. Attributing the same abject powerlessness to other marginal subjects reproduces the same commitments: domination is evil and different identities are diametrically opposed.

217 Felski, ‘The Doxa of Difference’, p. 17. As Felski also notes, this celebration of alterity ultimately reinforces an ‘otherness that necessarily leaves the realm of the same untouched’, p. 19.
I argue, then, that rather than being an attempt to achieve equality or a fundamental restructuring of the way in which power hierarchies operate, the postmodern insistence on self-speech in order to better understand cultural specificity or differences in experiences of power, can instead reconfirm the marginality of oppressed identities. As first-hand experience of oppression is again confirmed as the necessary basis for critical knowledge and speech, the only authority such knowledges have is the privilege to speak “forever as other, the native informant to all other others”. The ‘privilege’ of experiential authority becomes a ruse that defines positions of identity in terms of powerlessness.

The Postmodern Panacea?

Brown claims that, “In casting postmodernity as a time, circumstance, and configuration rather than an intellectual tendency or political position, I do not mean to underestimate the troubling nature of some of its constituent qualities”. However, in her desire to shed the foundations of modernity that anchor ressentiment, there is significant evidence that undermines Brown’s disclaimer. While Brown certainly perceives both unified and more disparate forms of individualised identity that arise in postmodern debates to be problematic, she firmly places responsibility for the re-emergence of the more unified identity claims at the feet of modernist feminists. According to Brown, theorists who are attached to universal or global accounts defensively adopt the terminology of postmodernism, rather than modify their actual approach. They are “self-consciously perspectival rather than Archimedean, temporally situated rather than floating above history, framed by and within a particular idiom rather than pretending to universal voice”. She thus suggests that these theorists do not quite achieve the potential of postmodernity: if they did genuinely adopt its imperatives, there might not be a re-emergence of identity or the moral opposition to dominative power.

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218 Roof and Wiegman, Who Can Speak?, p. x.
219 Roof and Wiegman, Who Can Speak?, p. 94.
220 Roof and Wiegman, Who Can Speak?, p.94.
221 Brown, States of Injury, p. 33.
222 Roof and Wiegman, Who Can Speak?, p. 35. As Di Stefano points out, for ‘the time being ... postmodernism is as entrenched in the dilemmas of difference as are the modernist and anti-modernist alternatives’. Feminism/Postmodernism, p. 77.
223 Brown, States of Injury, pp. 35-36.
224 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 63. The difficulty in outlining a position without defensiveness or forbidden terminology is not confined to modernist thinkers. Sandra Harding exemplifies this when she states, ‘I argue for the primacy of fragmented identities but only for those healthy ones constructed on a solid and non-defensive core identity, and only within a unified opposition, a solidarity against the culturally dominant forces for unitarianism’. See Di Stefano, ‘Dilemmas of Difference’, p. 77.
When Brown acknowledges that politicised forms of identity can also arise “as both a product of and reaction” to the “increased fragmentation, if not disintegration, of all forms of association”, this is not attributed to postmodern theory or the political realm of postmodernity. Instead, Brown claims that the inability to connect across difference is a condition of “late-modern secular society”. Brown also expresses concern about being left “rudderless in postmodernity”, however, she claims that the separations between identities and movement toward incommensurability that invites relativism, reflects the disciplinary regimes of liberalism more so than a postmodern politics.

To support this claim, Brown uses the example of an ordinance which seeks to protect citizens from discrimination on the basis of “sexual orientation, transexuality, age, height, weight, personal appearance, physical characteristics, race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, sex or gender”. For Brown, this practice of politicising every difference “aims to count every difference as no difference” and serves to normalise in liberal regimes that which could otherwise exist as subversive. However, her concern here with the “juridical equivalence” between claims, or the flattening of identity, which she targets specifically at the late liberal tendency toward legislating against discrimination based on multiple axes of difference, is difficult to reconcile with her commitment to a postmodern dispersal of difference. In fact, the postmodern celebration of differences insists upon the particularities that make up each individual identity, as it is this partiality that is supposed to undermine claims to the privileged insight of one epistemology over another. Craig Owens notes, for example, how the emphasis on specificity of difference inspired by postmodernism “reduces us to being an other among others; it is not a recognition, but a reduction to [sic] difference, to absolute indifference, equivalence, interchangeability”. This reflects exactly the same concern that Brown targets at the disciplinary regimes of liberalism. However, as I have argued, the individualising tendencies of postmodernity are equally reinforced by the theoretical imperatives of postmodernism to eschew representation and embrace situated and multiple perspectives.

The shift in Brown’s target from modernist feminist reactions to postfoundationalism, to problems endemic to neo-liberalism and its alignment with postmodernity, may also reflect the two

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dimensions of her critique of *ressentiment*. As Rebecca Stringer argues, Brown adopts a diagnostic approach to *ressentiment* when she critiques modernist feminist attachment to Woman as a subject who stands in opposition to power. Yet when she puts Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* into service as a sociological concept or process of identity formation, she applies this to neo-liberal societies that enshrine a model of individualism or “discourse of social being” that is both entrenched in *ressentiment* and offered as a form of escape from it.231 As Stringer notes, the latter application of *ressentiment* opens up broader questions about the causes of *ressentiment* and possibilities for lessening its prevalence.232 Importantly, when Brown’s criticism shifts to liberalism she is able to question some of the more troubling elements of what I have identified as belonging to the theoretical impulse of postfoundational politics, particularly its tendency toward fragmented identities and individualism.233

Brown’s critique of liberalism thus begins to reflect back onto some of her earlier pronouncements on the ideal political realm of postmodernity and its potentially curative nature. For example, while Brown claims that the practice of public debate should be enhanced by the epistemological “nakedness” of postmodernity, she acknowledges that the negotiation of differences between multiple and divergent identities must involve the “deliberate development of postmoral and antirelativist political spaces”.234 Brown thus concedes that postmodernity, as an epoch or moment in time, may in fact disperse the opportunity for connection across differences that postmodern feminists must attempt to cultivate.235 She claims that by creating these spaces, postmodern feminists can “potentially replace a politics of difference with a politics of diversity – differences regarded from a perspective larger than one point in an ensemble”.236 This is a significant shift from her argument for the need for self-representation evident in her insistence that a subject’s speech cannot be taken to represent anything beyond the immediacy of her/his life in that moment.237

232 Stringer, *Knowing Victims*, p. 112. Stringer also argues that the sociological approach to *ressentiment* allows for recognition that *ressentiment* cannot simply be extracted from feminist politics and may also be a ‘generative source of ethical insight and a force for social change’. This is considered further in later chapters.
233 Brown’s appeal to modernist feminists to embrace ‘a politics as thoroughly Nietzschean in its wariness of truth as a postmodern politics must be’ thus shifts to caution about the Nietzschean solution to the moral and epistemological ‘nakedness’ of postmodernity, which she claims are ‘excessively individualized’. See Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 78. This is addressed further in Chapter Five.
235 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 79.
236 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p.79.
237 Brown, ‘Wounded Attachments’, p. 221; Brown, *States of Injury*, p. 40. It is interesting to note here despite the substantive critique Brown focuses on modernist feminism, in order to create spaces between women in response to this dilemma, Brown herself returns to modernist thinkers calling for a feminist re-theorisation of democratic political space that issues from the Greek philosophical tradition, is further developed by Hannah Arendt and made more contemporary through the work of Jurgen Habermas. While she seeks to modify these approaches, insisting feminism requires spaces that are “heterogeneous, roving,
However, despite Brown suggesting some ambivalence between a commitment to these two competing priorities of situated, self-representation and the need to combat relativism, it has been contended that she places too much faith in postmodernism as the curative mechanism for ressentiment. Her desire to create spaces that will allow for a ‘larger’ perspective beyond one individual must still adhere to the postmodern insistence on self-representation and what Brown authorises as ‘postidentity’ speech. By giving priority to this form of engagement where each speaker represents only themselves, Brown precludes the kind of change that can be effected collectively.\(^{238}\) I have argued that the postmodern emphasis on situating knowledge, partiality and incommensurability means that the potential for feminists to have power with other subjects – for shared opposition to domination that is built from moments of alignment or affiliation between subjects – is not only guarded against but seen as entirely suspect.

Moreover, the prospect of building connection between feminist subjects is made further unlikely with Brown’s insistence that any such spaces that are intentionally created must be ‘postmoral’ in nature. This reconfirms Brown’s position that feminists must challenge domination with strength and without reliance upon a normative basis for this engagement.\(^{239}\) Yet by framing her solutions again in dichotomous fashion, Brown simplifies the choice available to feminists: either embrace political contest or normativity.\(^{240}\) In her desire to rid feminism of ressentiment, and its reactive moral basis, all other potential forms of normative engagement are precluded. By juxtaposing modernist and postmodernist feminists, identity and ‘postidentity’, morality and politics, Brown rules out the possibility for critically engaged and morally invested conceptions of identity that do not fall into postures of ressentiment. The positing of a dichotomous choice to feminists between morality or politics as a means to excise ressentiment also does not give due weight to the feminist requirement for morally invested opposition to domination that is underpinned by an unmasking of its negative effects. Finding alignment with other oppressed subjects need not be based on a form of moral claim that forecloses difference and externalises domination as evil, but it does rely on a shared view that oppression has negative effects that should be challenged.

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\(^{239}\) Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 77.

\(^{240}\) Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 75.
It is contended, then, that the stubborn return of identity and the intractability of moral claims evident in the feminist engagement with postmodernism may indicate that it is not only difficult but undesirable for feminist theorists to completely excise the appeal to some form of identity and moral connection to others. It is at the practical level of political engagement where theoretical conventions meet the true test and the identity of a subject, even if defined by multiple affiliations and belonging along different axes of power, necessarily forms the basis for individual judgement as well as the collective wherewithal to act and seek change. Yet, in terms of ressentiment, it is “how an identity is experienced and how it defines itself with respect to different identities that is crucial”. I have argued that without the possibility of speaking across differences, and finding points of commonality or shared moral commitment with other feminist subjects, the gulf between subject positions necessary for the oppositional formation of identity, characteristic of ressentiment, will continue to resurface.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how feminist debates on race, ethnicity, class and sexuality, and later postmodern intersections, have challenged the formerly unified category of women as oppressed subjects. The acknowledgment that domination exists within and amongst women, spurred on by the criticisms of excluded or marginalised voices and postmodern insights, has also undermined the external nature of the feminist enemy. However, the concept of an enemy who is designated as evil because invested with dominative power has re-emerged internal to women as a group and political category. It has been argued that white feminists have responded to their complicity in power by adopting the position of the master. Refusing to engage in representational politics to avoid risking participation in any form of power over others confirms the belief that participation in domination is evil, and can be eradicated from feminist engagement with other women. Brown recognises the fear and envy that ressentiment evokes in the reactive foundationalism of some modernist feminisms. However, I have argued that she overlooks the guilt and shame fostered by Nietzsche’s ‘bad conscience’ as an effect of ressentiment and its powerful redirection inward to women as a political group.

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242 W. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 9. Connolly explains that how identity is conceived is crucial to “engagement with the second problem of evil”: “the evil that flows from the attempt to establish security of identity for any individual or group by defining the other that exposes sore spots in one’s identity as evil or irrational”, p. 8.
As a result, Brown's entreaty to feminists to embrace “postidentity political positions” and “postmorality” insufficiently addresses the re-emergence of moral claims in postmodern discourses, the intractability of identity and its thorough dispersal into individualised positions. The postmodern proliferation of differences has fostered a necessary commitment to situated perspectives and recognition of the partiality of knowledge claims, but has also increased the distance between groups and individuals, encouraging a decreased willingness to find points of commonality and alignment with others across difference. By attempting to manufacture an arena for discussion that moderates the worst forms of evil dominative power, postmodern politics also sacrifices argument as a spur to understanding, confirms the powerlessness of marginal subjects and fosters an environment where difference is converted into ‘not-I’. As a result, ressentiment is rekindled.

I have also argued in this chapter that by promoting postmodern approaches to politics that are devoid of moral basis, Brown precludes alternative approaches to identity and normativity that can support feminism’s political task of unmasking domination and opposing the oppression of women. The Nietzschean solution of a masterly approach to engagement with domination based on direct combat and strength, but devoid of any explicit moral judgement that domination has negative effects, is not a satisfactory choice for feminist approaches to power. To undermine the influence of ressentiment, a singular understanding of power as an evil dominative force that is excluded from some identities needs to be directly challenged. Attention also needs to be given to ways in which feminist identities can be conceived without inspiring ressentiment and a normative challenge to domination forged, without imprisoning oppressed subjects in powerlessness. These tasks are addressed in the chapters that follow.
CHAPTER FOUR: DOMINATION IS BAD NOT EVIL

This chapter turns to the work of Michel Foucault specifically because he is attributed with undermining the traditional antinomies in the study of power that have shaped and confined the feminist engagement with power considered in this thesis thus far. Of key importance for feminist approaches to domination and empowerment is that Foucault challenges an understanding of power as being focussed narrowly on a fixed, dyadic relationship between dominator and subordinate. He does this in various ways throughout his corpus, but it is clear that as Foucault’s conception of power as positive and productive develops, so too does the active involvement of all subjects in relations of power.¹ Importantly, there is no position for Foucault that exists ‘outside’ of power and so the concept of an autonomous evil agent who acts unhindered and holds power to the exclusion of other subjects is dismantled. As the subordinate is recognised as an involved and complicit subject in the play of power relations, the nexus between powerlessness and truth that has been so potent for feminist epistemological claims outlined in previous chapters also becomes untenable. By refusing to treat domination as an evil construct, Foucault thus makes impossible a moral position based on ressentiment.

Yet what Foucault contributes to the feminist engagement with power can only be of value if the fundamental question of his normative neutrality is directly confronted.² As the previous chapter highlighted, attempts to sever a feminist approach to power from moral claims against the oppressive nature of dominative power are not only fraught with difficulty but also undesirable for feminism. Without a normative basis to challenge domination, feminist theories cannot adequately combat gender oppression. This chapter traces, throughout the various phases of Foucault’s work, a consistent argument against domination and a developing commitment to subjugated voices and subordinate identities. Foucault is shown to shift between an initial condemnation of domination as evil toward a more measured position that recognises the complicity and involvement of subjects in domination but without denying its bad effects. Nietzsche’s distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ in the master and slave moralities assists in re-conceptualising this implicit opposition toward domination into a definitive normative position. It is argued that domination is morally bad in Foucault’s account in three key ways. First, because the critical task of unmasking domination

² The engagement of Habermas with Foucault is the most well-known critique of his neutrality, but within feminist political theory, Nancy Fraser has been the leading proponent. See Fraser, ‘Foucault on Modern Power’, pp. 17-34.
remains a consistent and constant focus in Foucault's work, with domineering power being defined as the most extreme expression of power amongst a range of different forms, all of which are distinguished by Foucault. Second, while Foucault contends that domination is inevitable, he explicitly seeks to reduce its negative or unacceptable effects and encourage the conduct of power relations with a “minimum of domination.” Third, while Foucault insists that responsibility cannot be directed outward toward an external enemy, he argues that accountability should still be assumed by each subject in her/his involvement in power relations. I conclude that this alternative framework can offer a means for feminist accounts of power and domination to alleviate the tendency toward ressentiment but without sacrificing moral opposition to domination.

**Foucault’s Early Conception of Power**

In the early 1980s, Foucault claimed that the goal of his work thus far had not been to focus on an analysis of power but rather to create a history of the formation of subjectivity. This is certainly true for the analyses provided in *Madness and Civilization* and the archaeological phase of his work, because power is not yet formulated as a “central problem.” This early work focuses specifically on the various modes of “objectification” of the subject through the interplay between discursive processes of classification and the systems of “institutional and social practices”. In particular, the dominant discourses of natural history, biology, psychiatry, medicine, and later criminology are shown to objectify the subject by operating through modes of exclusion and repression. For Foucault, these discourses function as “dividing practices” wherein the subject becomes “divided inside himself or divided from others” into categories such as “the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the ‘good boys.’” The purpose of this exclusion and separation is to ensure the silence of subjects whose existence poses a threat to the dominant “identity logic” underpinning Enlightenment ways of thinking.

In these early texts, Foucault initiates what is to become a persistent theme throughout his corpus; namely, locating and listening to the perspectives of those who have been excluded and
marginalised. Capturing or re-invoking these “subjected” knowledges is an essential strategic move that can reveal how domination and exclusion function, and encourage further questioning of these practices. According to Foucault, to “release” subjugated knowledges is to bring to light the most vital source of resistance to domination: the voices of those Others whose difference has been obscured beneath the identities of dominant subjects. This commitment to creating the space in which to explore difference and the creation of “otherness” also becomes central to his later, more developed view of power and a consistent theme applied to each of his later conceptions of resistance.

However, these earlier works written in the 1960s on the discursive formation of the subject and the exclusionary practices of rationality serve as a contrast point for Foucault’s later analyses of power. Even though Foucault claims that he had not “properly isolated” the problem of power in these works, he acknowledges that in Madness and Civilisation in particular, he “made at least an implicit use of this notion of repression”. He states: “I accepted the traditional conception of power as an essentially judicial mechanism, as that which lays down the law, which prohibits, which refuses, and which has a whole range of negative effects: exclusion, rejection, denial, obstruction, occultation, etc”. By presenting knowledge as a monolithic and repressive structure or order, which is largely impenetrable, Foucault denies the subject any involvement in its formation or in the production of discourses encasing it. As Lois McNay argues, because Foucault’s understanding of the discourse of “dividing practices” is conceived from within a concept of power as exclusively dominative, the involvement of the subjugated in the creation of knowledge – as “marginal but also immanent in the episteme” – goes unrecognised. As a result, Foucault presents subjugated knowledges as the ultimate site of “absolute alterity”: as Others who represent an epistemic break from the dominant order of discursive structures.

Foucault came to acknowledge later that by working within this conception of domination, the potential for resistance was limited. The only reaction available to those subjugated was in the form of what Foucault terms ‘transgression’. Transgressive reactions to systems of order are resistant

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forces, but are limited because they are also necessary to the continuing dominance of that order. The implications for the autonomy or agency of subordinated subjects within this schema are not only bleak but reminiscent of the minimal resistance offered to feminist subjects in previous chapters. As was shown in Chapter Three, poststructuralist feminists similarly present the subject of Woman as a symbolic opportunity to reveal the processes of exclusion in discourse as the radical other to Man; the very silencing of Woman invests her with critical power. The postmodern emphasis on difference and the need to hear directly from those marginalised by dominitative power was also seen to invoke an authenticity to these knowledges; a capacity to offer insights gained through direct experience of oppression that are not available to other subjects. At this stage of his thought, Foucault similarly invests subordinated subjects with critical potential by virtue of their exclusion and marginalisation, claiming that in order to challenge domination, it is imperative to uncover the voices of those who have been most affected by power.

Foucault acknowledges this early position in opposition to dominitative power when he is questioned about the “diffuse naturalism” that plagues his earlier works and which he seeks to undermine throughout the later stages of his thought. Underpinning this earlier approach to power is the theory that beneath domination, with its “acts of violence and its artifice, we should be able to rediscover the things themselves in their primitive vivacity”, which, as Foucault points out, subscribes to a “certain aesthetic and moral choice: power is bad, ugly, poor, sterile, monotonous and dead; and what power is exercised upon is right, good, rich”. Foucault acknowledges that during this phase of his work, power remains captured by the same moral opposition that has been shown to define feminist accounts in previous chapters: power is condemned and those upon whom it is exercised are deemed morally ‘good’ or virtuous. As such, it is interesting to note that Foucault depicts the purpose of revealing subjugated knowledges as operating in a similar way to the function of ressentiment, which aims to arouse the consciences or ‘bad conscience’ of those who wield dominitative power. For example, by “amplifying” the “shrieks and frenzy” of madness, the exclusions and divisions of this “limit” are brought to bear upon Reason, as a judgement and

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17 McNay, Foucault: A Critical Introduction, pp. 43-44. Brent Pickett more favourably contends that Foucault’s emphasis on transgression reflects his desire to attain an ‘agonism in culture’ by establishing a debate between the two polar extremes of reason and unreason. For Picket, this earlier period thus pre-empts Foucault’s later focus on freedom and power as existing in a similar agonistic relationship. See Pickett, ‘Foucault and the Politics of Resistance’, pp. 449-450.


19 M. Foucault, “Power and Sex”, in Politics, Philosophy, Culture, pp. 119-20.
criticism. Foucault claims that it is through the reception of these works of “unreason” that “the world is forced to question itself” and “made aware of its guilt”.

Foucault’s conception of power remains within the paradigm of domination into the early 1970s, and yet he begins to challenge the ‘diffuse naturalism’ of his earlier works through targeting those concepts traditionally valued as morally ‘good’: namely human nature, justice, progress and the concept of liberation. Foucault’s chief focus is on juridical frameworks that understand power in terms of sovereignty, which he sees as having masked the operation of domimative power. These conceptions of power disguise the oppressive characteristics of domination beneath discourses of “right”, which alongside the allied notions of justice and progress, serve to “efface the domination intrinsic to power”. In short, Foucault believes that these discourses do not mitigate against, or limit, the operation of domination but serve to sustain domimative practices. Foucault explains that his aim “was to invert it [the system of right], to give due weight, that is, to the fact of domination, to expose both its latent nature and its brutality.

The radical objective underpinning Foucault’s analysis of domimative power during this stage of his analysis aligns closely with the key imperative of feminist theory: to unmask domination in all its guises and to reveal its effects on subordinated subjects. For Foucault, like feminist theorists, the motivation to reveal domination lies in the belief that when it remains hidden, with the appearance of institutions and discourses as neutral, domination is allowed to flourish. By unmasking domination in all of its modes of operation and by critically detailing its negative effects, “one can fight against them”.

Yet Foucault also begins to challenge several key assumptions that underpin a moral opposition to domimative power as evil and that are closely held by the feminist theorists considered in previous chapters. Like Nietzsche, Foucault’s goal is to reveal the historical contingency of concepts like liberty, justice and the sovereign subject, and to challenge the presumed value of these emblems and their claim to pre-eminence and progressive evolution. Using a genealogical

21 Foucault, Madness and Civilization, p. 231.
22 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 95.
23 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 95.
25 Pickett refers to this stage in Foucault’s work as his ‘revolutionary’ phase. See ‘Foucault and the Politics of Resistance’, p. 351.
approach, he aims to “debunk grand values by pointing to their lowly origins”. The philosophical development of humanism, as a dominant means of interpreting human subjectivity, is Foucault’s main target. For Foucault, humanism not only masks power, it represents “everything in Western civilization that restricts the desire for power” and hence the wherewithal to challenge it or seize control.

In Chapter Two of this thesis, it was noted how feminist empowerment theorists use appeals to greater humanity and justice, through an alternative ethic of care and female power, as the means to overcome the dominance of male power. Feminist empowerment theorists claim that female forms of power will necessarily result in better forms of empowerment devoid of power over others. It was argued that this attempt to replace domination with more benign, harmless forms of ‘good’ power, when viewed through the gaze of Nietzschean ressentiment, reflects a hidden will-to-power. Even though this female power is “cloaked in the ostentatious garb of the virtue” of the weak, it is motivated by the desire for one form of power to win out over another.

According to Foucault, liberation discourses like feminism are as imbued with the desire for power as any fascist or right-wing political program or dominant group in society. Even in this early work, Foucault’s suggestion that power will remain the same regardless of who is in the official ‘driver’s seat’ begins to debunk a belief in the purity of oppressed subjects by challenging the inherent assumption that good motives will necessarily lead to morally acceptable and justified acquisitions of power. Like Nietzsche’s dismantling of the slave morality and its conception of the ‘good’, a concept like justice is for Foucault “chimerical” in that it is used as either an “instrument of power” or “weapon against that power”, serving only to mask the “will-to-power”. Foucault thus continues the Nietzschean project of revealing how the motivating force of a will-to-power underlies all political positions, even those that seek revolutionary change or the betterment of society through appealing to arguments for greater justice. Importantly, by debunking humanism and unmasking its dominative origins Foucault is guided by the desire to release the “subjected will-to-power” of sovereign subjects.

29 Foucault, ‘Revolutionary Action’, p. 221-222.
30 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, p. 46.
32 Foucault, ‘Revolutionary Action’, p. 219. As he says, this relies on the mistaken belief that ‘the masses could dream of a full stomach but never of exercising power’.
35 Foucault, ‘Revolutionary Action’, p. 221.
As part of this unmasking of humanism, Foucault also begins to assert his argument regarding the inevitability of domination, which is a consistent tenet throughout his work on power. In a debate with Noam Chomsky in 1971, Foucault diverges from Chomsky, who contends that power is the necessary but “evil” means to attain “better justice”, to instead argue that while it may be necessary to appeal to notions of just cause, the end will always be the continuation of power relations. According to Foucault, the model of genealogy reveals that history is a passage that is not necessarily a progression toward higher or more progressive values. As he claims: “[h]umanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination”. Foucault thus undermines not only the rationale behind a feminist challenge to domination that seeks to veil its will-to-power beneath claims for better justice or greater humanity, but also questions the very possibility of liberation from domination. While Foucault does not explicitly challenge the notion of domination as evil at this stage of his thought, he does begin to undermine key theoretical commitments that fortify such a moral opposition.

Moreover, despite the continual and inevitable nature of dominative power that Foucault describes at this stage, he still manages to salvage an element of potential agency for those who are repressed by power. While his description of this agency remains elusive due to the density and constancy of domination, it signals his later position that domination is not an evil force. Foucault attributes to subjects a quality he terms “plebs”, which enables resistance or reaction against domination. Foucault contends that the “plebs” is not a “sociological entity” but rather a “quality or aspect” found in “bodies, in souls, in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie”, and as such it is a diverse and irreducible energy. It acts as a “limit” or “counter-stroke” to power that can motivate new networks of power and enables subjects the capacity for disengagement or disavowal.

38 Foucault, ‘Power and Strategies’, p. 137.
It is easy to identify with Foucault’s notion of ‘plebs’ as it captures the instinctive reaction that individuals often have to exercises of control or determination by others. For Foucault, this innate response is also evident in social groupings beyond the individual. As Foucault explains:

There is indeed always *something* in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power, something which is by no means a more or less docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge.41

In this sense, ‘plebs’ can be seen to embody an instinct that resembles the conceptions of power to as dispositional capacity that were considered in Chapter Two. For these theorists, power to does not only exist in actions or in its exercise but like Foucault’s ‘plebs’, is an ever-present potential. Pitkin’s explanation of power to mirrors Foucault’s notion of ‘plebs’ when she states, “power is a something – anything – which makes or renders somebody able to do, capable of doing something”.42 While this concept is not further developed in Foucault’s work at this time, it does signal his commitment in the very early stages of his thought both to unmasking dominative power and recognising the potential for the participation of all subjects. As such, a glimpse into Foucault’s later conceptualisation is afforded: domination has a range of negative effects but it begins to move beyond being an evil force that extinguishes all possibility for interception or resistance.

**Shift in Foucault’s Conception of Power**

From the mid-1970s onward, Foucault’s analysis becomes more explicitly focussed on relationships of power as he came to see his understanding of power as repression and domination as a “wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception ... [but] one which has been curiously widespread”.43 The shift in Foucault’s project from a central focus on the repressive function of power to a consideration of power as more productive reflects his realisation that his former work did not capture all of the effects of power or the explicit involvement of subjects in power relations.44 While Foucault believes juridical or legal conceptions of power mask the function and effects of domination, he also became dissatisfied with the state-centric, economically driven analyses of Marxism.45 For Foucault, power is presented in these accounts as a negative and centralised force and so the specific mechanisms of power – its “techniques and tactics” – remain unexplored and

44 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 92.
unchallenged. In contrast, Foucault is adamant that change in current structures of domination will not occur through opposing the power of the state alone, but needs to be conducted through a study of the “multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power”. While Foucault recognises the limitations of an account of power that focusses exclusively on domination, he maintains his concern with a radical unmasking of the negative forms of domination in this period.

The chief limitation of the feminist conceptions of domination and empowerment that I have identified in previous chapters is that they remain captured by an opposition to domination as an evil form of power. This designation evil has been used throughout this thesis in the sense that Nietzsche used it to describe the slave’s condemnation of the powerful. To enable this valuation of domination as evil to be made, it is essential that domination is perceived as an external capacity and characteristic of the masters alone; a harmful, monstrous form of power not available to the powerless, who are its inert targets. Importantly, during this middle phase of Foucault’s work, he becomes more focused on extending his account beyond theorists, feminists among them, who have “contented themselves with denouncing ... [power] in a polemical and global fashion as it existed among the ‘others’ in the adversary camp”. While he remains committed to revealing the negative effects of domination, he refuses to condemn domi-native and other forms of power as evil.

There are several ways in which Foucault undermines a moral opposition to domination as evil that serve to disable the conditions necessary for re-sentiment to flourish and thereby benefit my reconstructed feminist approach to domination and empowerment. First, because Foucault contends that power operates in more diffuse and fragmented ways even through disciplinary forms of control, it can no longer be isolated in an evil enemy or master. The impulse to blame that underpins re-sentiment and drives the accounts of feminist domination theorists relies on an outward gaze that isolates the capacity for control and dominance in an external enemy who comes to represent all that is morally reprehensible. The possibility of locating an enemy in a formulaic manner is disrupted by the more fragmentary nature of power that Foucault describes and by the involvement of all subjects in their own discipline.

49 Hindess, Discourses of Power, p. 98.
Second, and relatedly, as Foucault dissolves the antinomy between structure and agency by recognizing how all subjects are created by and yet participate in dominitive power, the concept of any subject who exists ‘outside’ of power, as a non-participant even in dominitive forms of power, is undermined. As a result, the belief in a dominator who acts with unrestricted autonomy or sovereignty is challenged, and the conception of a female subject who is ‘clean’ of power cannot be sustained. Both theoretical conditions were seen to be fundamental to the feminist conceptions of domination and empowerment considered in previous chapters. The belief in the unfettered agency of the dominitive male enemy allows feminist domination theorists to fortify the critique of domination with moral approbation, while feminist empowerment theorists gain critical capacity and superior insights into power by virtue of the location of female subjects on the ‘other’ side of dominitive power. Foucault’s challenge to feminist approaches to empowerment and domination affects all of these theoretical commitments that are necessary for ressentiment to thrive.

No External Enemy

In *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality – Volume One*, Foucault’s focus turns to the processes through which the subject is formed, in institutions and through cultural dialogues that are centred on the body. In this work, Foucault begins to examine power “at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations ... that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions”. In *Discipline and Punish*, the function of discipline and organisation in prisons, hospitals, armies and schools allows Foucault to illustrate his thesis that the function of power is intimately connected to the body and materiality, particularly in the ways in which various institutions operate. Foucault focusses his analysis of corporeal power on the mechanisms through which subjects become subjugated and controlled, including both institutional practices and routines that act directly on the body and through the knowledge that develops of the desires and thoughts of those held in institutions.

This study of power accounts for the historical transition from the centrally administered and “top down” power of the sovereign to the more dispersed forms of disciplinary power. According to Foucault, economic changes and growth in the eighteenth century made it necessary to consider the ways in which power circulates through less visible channels to gain “access to individuals

51 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 96.  
themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions”. In prisons, for example, the practice of structuring space to optimise visual access was formalised in the architectural model of the Panopticon famously conceived by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). The success of this system relies upon the prisoner’s belief that constant surveillance is occurring, causing the prisoner to interiorise the ‘gaze’ of the guards and to comply with self-regulation and self-discipline. Eventually, the inmate becomes his own “overseer” and participates in the system that contains him by “exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself”.

Importantly for feminist conceptions of power as domination and empowerment, this shift in Foucault’s focus challenges the notion of an evil enemy who can be isolated as being in sole possession of dominative power. According to Foucault, the power behind the disciplinary control of institutional life and the force of surveillance is not based upon a sovereign or external dominator imposing power directly over subjects. Rather, it is supported by a set of norms that are derived from ‘natural’ rules and formalised through discourses of knowledge that underpins the acceptance of control by subjects. For Foucault, it is “human science which constitutes their domain, and clinical knowledge their jurisprudence”. Foucault argues that the various methods that facilitate and govern the accumulation of knowledge, inevitably create “apparatuses of control” because they evoke the subtle mechanism of normalisation. Psychiatry, in its registration of normal and pathological individuals and policing of this divide through observation, is particularly targeted as a normalising discourse.

In modern society and institutional life, the juridical rule of law that ensures cohesion of the social body coexists with disciplinary power. As Foucault explains: “[w]hen a judgement cannot be framed in terms of good and evil, it is stated in terms of normal and abnormal. And when it is necessary to justify this last distinction, it is done in terms of what is good or bad for the individual”. As “scientific knowledge” is deferred to more frequently and normalising procedures become entwined with legal systems, Foucault argues that globally societies will become centred around the mechanisms of normalisation. Similarly, the techniques of surveillance that drive the process of normalisation

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58 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 102.
within institutions begin to model the function of power more generally, to become “ubiquitous features of all modern societies”.62

In order to capture the increasing intensity of modern deployments of power, Foucault insists that rather than a focus on how an individual seeks to dominate another or how the sovereign rules from above, particular attention must be given to what he describes as the “veritable technological take-off in the productivity of power”.63 In the first volume of The History of Sexuality, for example, Foucault traces the influence of the mechanisms of surveillance through the discourses that surround sexuality. As with Discipline and Punish, the diverse mechanisms of power that exist beneath wider categories of analysis are Foucault’s focus, particularly the micro-levels of power relations that comprise the basis for the sovereign’s power.64

The question that governs feminist accounts of domination and empowerment – “who then has power and what does he have in mind?” – becomes “labyrinthine and unanswerable”.65 According to Foucault, while it is still important to know who is in charge within governments, this information will not reveal the machinations behind policy decisions and the ways in which policies can install new norms of behaviour that may benefit some individuals and harm others.66 Motivations may be, and usually are, more complex than a simple intent or motivating desire to dominate. As Foucault’s studies illustrate, power that is exerted over other subjects may be motivated by an attempt to be more ‘humane’ as with prisons, or originate as an attempt to ‘help’ people through medical assessment. The motivations of psychiatrists, doctors and penal reformers may be better understood as “strategic necessities” which, for Foucault, are “not exactly interests”.67 He argues that theorists of power should not focus on the sole question of why some individuals want to dominate others and what their intentions are, or focus only on the sovereign in “his lofty isolation”, because all of the myriad manifestations of power cannot be understood from such a singular, and externalising, position.68

62 Hindess, Discourses of Power, p. 117.
63 Foucault, ‘Truth and Power’, p. 119. As Jeffrey Minson argues, while the point of punishment by the sovereign was to take something from the prisoner, who had detracted from the sovereign’s power through transgression, the point of disciplinary power is to ‘augment the forces of those subject to its government, in direct proportion to the degree of their political docility’: see Genealogies of Morals, p. 42.
Instead, Foucault wants to challenge the “formula” of responsibility that tends toward automatic attribution of blame to one group for social ills or injustices. The notion of a dominant class is not obviated by Foucault, but should be open to question and challenge rather assumed as a pre-given, generalised reality that is unchanging and without diversity.\(^69\) Moreover, while certain organised actions may be motivated by an objective that is operationalised into a strategy, the invention and imposition of this strategy is often fragmentary and unplanned, with strategies taking on a life of their own.\(^70\) In answer to the question, “who fights whom?” Foucault claims that “we all fight each other. And there is always within each of us something that fights something else”.\(^71\)

Yet it is not simply the difficulty in locating a perpetrator that Foucault is concerned with in challenging the concept of responsibility. It is also the tendency to place the evil enemy as the origin in studies of power and in the determination of moral value. Foucault contends that verdicts of guilt and innocence are too readily pronounced in modern society and especially in the study of power. As he states, with a subtle nod to Nietzsche, “you know very well that the last man, when radiation has finally reduced his last enemy to ashes, will sit down behind some rickety table and begin the trial of the individual responsible”.\(^72\) This disdain for the “judgemental” function of the judicial apparatus is reflected throughout Foucault’s work on power. In his analysis of the discourses of madness and sexuality and in his study of institutions, Foucault makes it clear that the important aspect to be targeted in uncovering the function of power is the classificatory system that “culminates and reveals itself in a simple and basic ideology, in the notions of good and evil”.\(^73\) This moral distinction underpins the impulse to blame that propelled second-wave feminist accounts of dominative power, with assignations of responsibility targeted at the male masters. As Nietzsche emphasises, in the moral schema that governs ressentiment, “one should ask rather precisely who is ‘evil’.”\(^74\) Undermining this distinction thus involves challenging the divide between normal/abnormal, mad/sane and innocent/guilty, all of which are the oppositional conditions that frame identities and that form the basis for ressentiment, because what is different is conceived as entirely ‘Other,’ as Not Me and hence evil.

In making this argument, Foucault follows Nietzsche’s rejection of responsibility that is directed by the slave toward the master. For Nietzsche, the notion of the master being held responsible for...

\(^70\) Foucault, ‘The Confession of the Flesh’, pp. 203-204.
\(^73\) Foucault, ‘Revolutionary Action’, p. 228.
\(^74\) Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 45.
being powerful relies upon a fabricated belief in the master’s free will that is created and promulgated by the slave. According to Nietzsche, the slave morality must maintain the “belief that the strong man is free to be weak and the bird of prey to be a lamb – for thus they gain the right to make the bird of prey accountable for being a bird of prey”.\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, p.45.} What makes the master potentially guilty for his actions is the fact that he may have acted otherwise: it was a decision or choice to dominate.

Foucault continues this project of removing the automatic attribution of responsibility to the powerful master, but he does not absolve the master by virtue of his innate drive to dominate, as does Nietzsche.\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}. As Nietzsche’s famous formulation makes clear, the slave assumes that there is a ‘neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed’, p. 45.} Instead, Foucault also details the conditions under which the master acts by demonstrating how all subjects are created within a context of domination in some way, through self-surveillance and the production of identity through discourses and practices of governmentality. By exposing the conditions under which the master as subject is created, Foucault adds further weight to Nietzsche’s assertion that the doer – a free, autonomous subject – is ‘merely a fiction’. Yet he also challenges the belief in an autonomous agent who is unconstrained by power over them and thus able to exert power freely and with intent over others. The grounding for the impulse to blame the master for domination that lies at the heart of feminist conceptions of dominative power is therefore tempered by a recognition that the master is also subject to power.

\textbf{No ‘Outside’ of Power}

Foucault’s description of disciplinary control and the power that is infused through the production of identities has been criticised both by feminist theorists and other commentators for presenting modern power as an entirely repressive, controlling and inescapable force.\footnote{M. Walzer, ‘The Lonely Politics of Michel Foucault’, in \textit{The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century}, New York, Basic Books, 1988, pp. 191-209; McNay, \textit{Foucault: A Critical Introduction}; Cocks, \textit{The Oppositional Imagination}.} It is claimed that in describing the creation of subjects through dominative forms of disciplinary power, Foucault presents power as omnipresent and inescapable. Utilising the intensified and extreme forms of control in prisons as archetypes for society in general is considered by his critics to be an overstatement that ignores the differences in the relative freedoms of institutionalised and ‘free’ subjects. Lois McNay, for example, argues that Foucault over-estimates the “effectiveness of
disciplinary forms of control”, contradicting his later work on the productive aspects of power and the subject’s involvement in the creation of subjectivity. Moreover, in accounting for the fragmented or capillary-like nature of power, Monique Deveaux cautions that feminists “should not slip into fatalistic views about the omnipresence of power. This means rejecting Foucault’s assertion that absolutely no social or personal relations escape permeation by power”.

However, what these critiques overlook is that while Foucault is focussed on detailing the myriad ways in which power works to dominate, it is clear that this is not a process that extinguishes the involvement of subjects: power is not evil because it is not beyond interception or modification. Foucault points out that the power formations he describes, from disciplinary power to the production of discourses and identities, are “something quite other, or in any case something much more than repression”. Foucault’s central argument during this phase of his work is that the productive possibilities of power extend to the development of knowledge. For Foucault, “what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted” is not the extinguishment of the subject’s capacity through domination but the propensity for power be productive and to involve the subject through discursive formation.

In addition, according to Foucault even corporeal power operates as a dual process in that bodies are not only “subjected” to disciplinary power, but also constituted by that power. In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, he argues that “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive and a subjected body”. The disciplinary measures utilised in prisons serve to create subjects who are “docile bodies”, a phrase which undermines a conception of an “autonomous” pre-given subjectivity because it indicates a subject who is ‘made’ to be accountable and responsible. Such subjects can be directed toward productive and sometimes political purposes.

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79 Deveaux, ‘Feminism and Empowerment’, p. 233.
80 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 92.
83 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 97.
85 Despite the criticisms of this form of subjectification and Foucault’s later emphasis on ‘technologies of the self’, feminists have still utilised this Foucauldian analysis to understand the effects of power on the body, in particular Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky. See I. Diamond and L. Quinby (eds.), *Foucault and Feminism: Reflections on Resistance*, Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1988.
In this, Foucault reflects Nietzsche’s understanding of how the sovereign individual develops through the adoption of societal customs. For Nietzsche, it is with “the aid of the morality of mores and the social straightjacket (that) man was actually made calculable”. The positive spin that Nietzsche puts onto the creation of the sovereign individual through power relations and customs is that, through this process, the individual learns to become reliable and accountable. While Nietzsche rails against the moral confinement of customs, he does note favourably that this process of inculcation develops the capacity in man to “ordain the future in advance” and to “stand security for his own future”, which he cannot do until he has become “calculable, regular, necessary”. In fact, according to Nietzsche, this sovereign subject is the “ripest fruit” that arises from within a system of domination through morality.

For Foucault, following Nietzsche, the domination of the subject through forms of discipline and normalisation enables a form of subjectivity that provides the conditions for the power to act, for self-regulation and for living amongst a community of other subjects. Agency is not salvaged in spite of the subject’s conditioning so much as it becomes possible because the subject’s engagement with structural forces allows for action or agency. Therefore, Foucault rejects “the assumption that domination falsifies the essence of human subjectivity”. While rendering subjects “docile” through surveillance makes them productive or “useful” for the institutional system, the process of “subjectivation” also involves the subject’s agency.

According to Judith Butler, this is the “paradox” of Foucault’s schema as his term “subjectivation ... denotes both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection – one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power”. Although the subject is constituted through power, there is flexibility within this process because the resulting subjectivity reflects the specific choices made by each subject between multiple possible modes of self-definition. As Foucault confirms much later, his aim in this period was to illustrate simultaneously how power operates both as a “system of coercion” that produces disciplined subjects, and “the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion”.

87 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 59.
88 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 58.
89 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 59.
90 Gordon, ‘Afterword’, p. 239.
91 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p. 138. See also Power/Knowledge, p. 239.
94 Bernauer and Rasmussen, The Final Foucault, p. 11.
Foucault also emphasised through his work on governmentality how power can operate to enhance the lives of subjects and to create conditions in which their development is improved even though they may be subject to a form of governance that involves power over. According to Foucault, processes of governmentality join the techniques of discipline and normalisation to displace the “dualisms of state/society, public/private, coercion/consent.” Governmentality aims to reinforce the state through the regulation of conduct or the “imbrication of men and things” which involves the regulation of one’s own conduct and the conduct of others. Foucault traces the origins of this “art of government” through ancient Oriental texts that reflect a connection between the God-like practice of shepherding a flock of disciples and later themes on the role of Kings in governing. The shepherd’s role in these earlier texts was to maintain leadership of the people under his care through intimate knowledge, and specific targeting, of every individual’s needs. The development of these themes within Christian thought were carried through to modern practices of “pastoral technology” in government which similarly aim to manage people through interventions that are individualised and seek to care for and improve the lives of all citizens. While the family had once served as the model for how a state should be run, it now became the central focus in facilitating the art of government. For Foucault, this reflected a fundamental shift in the tools used in governing the population, extending the reach of government and generating new positive strategies and techniques of administration.

Against the model of juridical citizenship, then, which is based on the notion of a rational individual bestowed with rights, Foucault posits a subject created by its engagement with the state and the mechanisms of ‘police’ and ‘pastoral’ power. Although in this work on governmentality Foucault moves beyond discipline as the dominant mechanism of control, he still emphasises the importance of surveillance. While ‘pastoral’ power creates subjects through more positive mechanisms, by assigning identities to citizens based upon their needs and claims on the government, these identities are still imposed on individuals through the power of self-surveillance.

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102 Pastoral power is concerned ‘with the welfare of its subjects’, which involves management of both the ‘material needs’ of the flock and their moral direction: Hindess, *Discourses of Power*, p. 118; Foucault, ‘Governmentality’, p. 100. The role of ‘police’ is seen as ‘mainly a moral one’, focussing on the virtues of the kingdom’s subjects. Foucault, ‘Politics and Reason’, p. 78.
and demands for self-knowledge. To be subject to the techniques of governmentality, then, is to be subjected to a form of control and a relationship of dependence and yet, the subject is involved and invested in the very processes that create identity.

Moreover, in his more recently published lectures, Foucault further details how the practices of government needed to evolve during the eighteenth century to accommodate the economic drivers of the market, with the market becoming the predominant influencing factor in how the power of a government operates. As Patton contends, Foucault recognises that in order to govern properly within the new realities of a market driven political system, “certain kinds of freedom had to be respected”. Foucault’s insights into neoliberal government highlight that the role of government is not only to uphold the freedoms underpinning liberal marketplaces, like the freedom of speech, association, free trade and exchange of goods and property, but to actively engage in the production of these freedoms.

Foucault’s understanding of power and the effects of domination during this period therefore disrupts a unilateral emphasis on domination as a form of power that operates primarily through direct constraint on the freedom of subjects. In particular, he challenges the widespread idea that structural conditions are only constraining, repressive forces that oppose and disable a subordinate subject’s agency. As Pizzorno explains, “the ‘victim’ of power for Foucault is not as he is ‘for Marx as for Weber ... the individual as such who structural power prevents from developing as he could have done in other conditions’. There is no ‘other condition’ or position outside of power wherein the subject can develop in freedom from power relations. As Foucault explains, what troubles him about such analyses is that there is a subject who is pre-determined and fully-constituted before power is then thought to be exerted, externally, onto the subject. By contrast, for Foucault, power is “internal to the subject by virtue of constituting it”. Continuing his challenge to the rational, self-constituting subject of humanism, Foucault insists that there is no subject prior to practices of power, domanative or otherwise.

110 Foucault, ‘Body/Power’, p. 58.
111 Dyrberg, Circular Structure, pp. 96-97.
112 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 98.
While Foucault emphasises the structural elements of power that dominate through an ordering and forming of behaviour, his conception of the subject provides an important means to understand how domination cannot be seen as an evil form of power. Dominative power does not “subdue or crush” individuals, who are not simply, or only, its “inert or consenting targets”, but rather the subject is “one of its prime effects”. According to this understanding, power operates in a double movement by constituting the discourses that then provide the conditions for the subject. For Foucault, to conceive of a subject outside of power is thus an impossibility, as it is through the very function of power that “certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals”. If dominative power provides the very conditions for the creation of the subject, it cannot be overthrown and nor can it be understood as a capacity that is exercised by one subject to the exclusion of another.

The guiding concern of this thesis with ensuring that domination in all its guises is not hidden, but also that the potential agency of subordinates is recognised, thus remain as constant motivations in Foucault's work in what I have identified as his early and middle phases. By maintaining his commitment to these two related, though often opposed, theoretical motivations Foucault provides an insight for feminist accounts of power that have been unable to capture both the domination and empowerment of women effectively. It will be recalled that within these feminist accounts, power over as domination and power to achieve goals are conceived as separate modalities of power, with each reflecting different elements of a feminist political strategy. As a result, as Amy Allen also contends, each conception “is incapable of fully illuminating women’s complex experience with power”. For Foucault, attempting to overcome this polarity involves moving beyond the fundamental opposition that underpins a dyadic conception of power. Unlike the feminist accounts of empowerment and domination, he refuses to treat power over and power to as distinct forms of power. For feminist accounts, Foucault's understanding of the dual potential of power disrupts the automatic creation of identities for women that are determined through opposition to power by virtue of gender difference, and makes difficult a moral opposition to domination that results in ressentiment. It is not possible to condemn dominative power as evil when it is recognised as a necessary force in the creation of all identities.

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113 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p.98.
114 Foucault argues in his later work that the subject is constituted not only through the process of subjection, but also ‘in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty, as in Antiquity, on the basis, of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment’. See ‘An Aesthetics of Existence’, in Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p. 51.
115 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 98.
The Challenge to a Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

As a result of Foucault’s approach to domination and the formation of the subject, then, the feminist subject who is created by feminist domination theorists as well as empowerment theorists cannot claim to exist ‘outside’ of power. This has important ramifications for a conception of female power, seen by second-wave feminist empowerment theorists considered in Chapter Two to be more advanced because untainted by dominative power. Feminist epistemological claims that are based on the unique and superior insights and knowledge of the oppressed are also problematised.

Foucault’s work in The History of Sexuality explicitly challenges the notion that any knowledge or claim to truth is beyond the scope, and reach, of power. For Foucault, challenging the assumption of a polarity between power and truth is part of his broader critique of humanism and its commitment to the notion of an autonomous subject. He contends that because knowledge and power are fundamentally entwined, “there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power”.¹¹７ Instead, power imbues claims to knowledge such that each invoke the other: power is intimately connected with claims to knowledge and there is no situation where knowledge will not engender power.¹¹８

For Foucault, sexuality is an ideal area to study this more productive function of power because it has been so highly regulated in Western societies. The “same modalities” used in the study of madness can be applied because sex has similarly been created as the “reality behind rational consciousness”.¹¹⁹ Yet according to Foucault, while the treatment of madness in the nineteenth century elicited the “negative operations” of power in the form of exclusion and segregation, sexuality became a “fabricated” domain inducing pleasure and desire, forming knowledge and producing discourse.¹²⁰ Through various institutional mechanisms and discursive formations, sex became a vehicle through which power could be organised and administered. Within Western societies, the discourse around sexuality “was organised in a particular way, in terms of a number of codes”, all of which centred on the “strong incitement to speak of sexuality”.¹²¹

¹²¹ Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, p. 112.
While the History of Sexuality texts still reveal the dominance of systematising forms of thought, they also document the struggle of more local and fragmentary knowledges: what Foucault terms “popular knowledges”.¹²² Like “subjugated knowledge”, the knowledge of the “psychiatric inmate or the parricide” is marginalised and discounted by the dominant discourses governing institutional life and, when revealed, can similarly reveal how the dominant systems of thought operate.¹²³ Importantly, though, through his genealogies of prisons and study of the discourses of sexuality, Foucault reformulates his own earlier treatment of ‘subjugated’ or ‘subjected’ knowledges. While the “episteme” in Foucault’s earlier works is presented as a specifically “discursive apparatus” that structures behaviour, it develops into the more complex apparatus of knowledge in these later texts, which is a far more heterogeneous framework than the episteme and includes non-discursive elements.¹²⁴ This adaptation means that the marginalised, subjugated and silenced are included by Foucault as part of the regimes of power, both inside and out of the formation of discourse.¹²⁵ This shift can be seen to reflect an acknowledgement by Foucault that the ‘Other’, previously treated as a break from the episteme and invested with radical potential by virtue of marginality and exclusion, is instead complicit in power relations.¹²⁶

As Foucault makes clear, truth is not the result of liberation from, or epistemological positioning outside of, power.¹²⁷ Power is evident in every claim to truth, even if the basis of that truth issues from an oppressed subject. As a consequence, even “subjected knowledges” can operate within the “regime” of truth which is accepted in our society, and as such actively contribute to the production of “true discourses”: an inherently powerful act.¹²⁶ Foucault thus moves ‘subjugated’ knowledges away from dependence upon the location of ‘Otherness’, ‘difference’ or powerlessness evident in his earlier work to a broader capacity for disruption of dominant discourses. A further articulation of the subordinated subject’s capacity and potential resistance becomes possible. As Foucault claims: “those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them ... introducing themselves into this complex mechanism, they will make it function in such a way that the dominators find themselves dominated by their own rules”.¹²⁹

¹²² Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, pp. 82-83.
¹²⁶ McNay, Foucault: A Critical Introduction, pp. 87, 80-82.
¹²⁹ Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, p. 378.
Foucault’s analysis of the apparatus of power/knowledge is useful for feminist approach to power and epistemological claims, therefore, in that it provides a mechanism to analyse who has been silenced, who is included in discourses and how all subjects are formed and constructed through the role that they play. Yet, while it is the very difference of subjugated knowledges that enables resistance and “makes them worth listening to”, complicity in the function of power prevents the attribution of authenticity and the assumption that those who have been suppressed will reveal a greater truth.130 As Foucault makes clear in a much later article:

A delinquent puts his life into the balance against absurd punishments; a madman can no longer accept confinement and the forfeiture of his rights; a people refuses the regime which oppresses it … One does not have to maintain that these confused voices sound better than the others and express the ultimate truth. For there to be a sense in listening to them and in searching for what they want to say, it is sufficient that they exist and that they have against them so much which is set up to silence them.131

Accepting that subordinated views and knowledge of domination are valid and necessary, but not better or innately truthful, provides a means for feminist epistemological positions to move beyond basing critical acuity on the capacity to gain distance from or ‘see through’ the discourses of the dominant. Yet, the value of these voices and their unique contribution can still be recognised.

Genuine Participation of the Subordinate

In various later articles and interviews published after this middle phase, Foucault clarified his conception of power in accordance with his understanding of governmentality, making even more explicit how the participation of all subjects is central to the function of modern liberal government and the conduct of power relations.132 In the late 70s and early 80s Foucault shifted from his study of institutions to an analysis “from the standpoint of power relations”.133 Rather than speak of power per se in this period, Foucault uses the phrase “relationships of power”, which indicates that power both exists in action, and is generative and complex.134 Like the forms of power to considered in Chapter Two, power is not something that is either possessed or submitted to. It is also relational, and so cannot be isolated in the actions of one individual but rather must be analysed as operating in a series of actions and reactions between subjects.135 While power can be exerted over another,
Foucault also asserts that relationships of power “can modify themselves” on the basis of a variety of elements and as such “they are not given once and for all”. 136

Unlike the conceptions of power over as domination considered in Chapter One, Foucault questions the principle of contradiction as necessarily the best means to explain how power functions and the form that struggles against power take. 137 While conflict is essential to the function of power for Weber, Lukes and feminist domination theorists, Foucault’s understanding of power as multiple and dispersed attempts to disrupt the binary structure that causes power to be housed in an either/or dichotomy. Differences between experiences of power and oppression are stressed as a means to overcome a dyadic understanding of a subject’s position as either oppressor or oppressed. 138 Moreover, other forms of power can be recognised including those that may be seen as dominative by feminist theorists but may more accurately reflect a productive or positive form of power over. This possibility is evident in Foucault’s treatment of communication as a relationship of power. 139 In the case of argument, domination is only evident for Foucault when either party is subject to an “arbitrary and useless authority” and hence has no freedom to make choices. Otherwise, Foucault argues that as “power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free”, there is no “evil” in the “practice of someone who, in a given game of truth, knowing more than another, tells him what he must do, teaches him, transmits knowledge to him, communicates skills to him”. 140 Unlike feminist domination theorists, then, Foucault does not see power as needing to be enacted directly upon another agent, rather as a force that “acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or future”. 141 For Foucault, the term conduct is the best means to explain how power relations operate, as it does not insist that a subject must be determined by another. Instead, the conduct of power may also be a means of leading others, which can involve having power over them through influence, yet this invites a range of open possibilities for how other subjects may react and conduct themselves. 142

While ressentiment is the only form of resistance for the subordinate in the accounts of feminist domination theorists, agency and freedom are pre-requisites for Foucault’s understanding of power

136 Foucault, The Final Foucault, p. 12.
137 Foucault, ‘Power and Strategies’, p. 143.
139 Foucault, The Final Foucault, p. 18.
140 Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 221; Foucault, The Final Foucault, p. 18.
relations. Foucault argues that power is not “in itself ... a renunciation of freedom”. Instead, for power to function the ‘Other’ over whom power is exercised must be “thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts”.¹⁴³ The ‘subordinate’ is far more than a tool to locate power or a symbol of powerlessness in Foucault’s account, then, and conflict is not conceived as external to the relation of power or as something that must be overcome in order for power to have been exerted. Rather, the relationship between power and freedom is understood as working in tandem and in a reciprocal fashion.¹⁴⁴ Foucault thus emphasises that all subjects exhibit a will that cannot be immediately extinguished in the conduct of power relations because there is a stubborn “recalcitrance” on behalf of freedom.¹⁴⁵

**Moral Engagement with Domination: Searching for Evil**

By suspending the normative judgments that facilitate a condemnation of domination as evil, then, Foucault is able to make a new departure in the study of power. As Colin Gordon argues, Foucault reflects on power from “outside the fields of force of two antithetical conceptions of power whose conjunction and disjunction determine the ground rules of most modern political thought.”¹⁴⁶ Most importantly, the foundational elements that underpin the feminist opposition to domination as evil and are generative of *ressentiment* are undermined. Foucault’s understanding of the myriad ways in which power operates, both creating and enabling the capacity of subjects, means that domineering power cannot be seen as external to any identity; there is no evil enemy and no position ‘outside’ of power. However, Foucault’s excision of this familiar moral juxtaposition as the foundation for his understanding of power has been rejected by several feminists. Foucault’s argument that power relations are perpetual, even those of a domineering nature, is seen to be incompatible with feminism because there is no possibility for achieving a future beyond power.¹⁴⁷ Relatedly, the impetus behind the feminist critique of domination is seen to be disabled: there is no place “exterior to power” that feminists can speak out against power.¹⁴⁸

This is of particular concern for Nancy Hartsock. In the previous chapter, it was noted that Hartsock made modifications to her ‘standpoint feminist’ account by acknowledging the important divergences between women in experiences of power and hence knowledge claims. However, she

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¹⁴³ Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 220.
¹⁴⁴ Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 222.
¹⁴⁵ Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 222.
remained reluctant to allow for this recognition to impact the basis for her feminist standpoint, which is that it offers a perspective on power that is better because less contaminated by power. Embracing Foucault’s understanding of power relations would require an acceptance that all subjects are participants in power and are shaped by power, even subordinates. However, this recognition of the genuine complicity of women in power relations would undermine Hartsock’s conviction that speaking against the negative effects power is more potent when it comes from subjects who have no access to power and whose knowledge is enhanced by their experiences and insights into oppression. As a result, Hartsock’s acknowledgement of women’s complicity in power is only a partial recognition: she states that feminists “are not pure victims but instead are forced to be complicit in the projects of dominant groups”. What Hartsock really wants to retain in the feminist opposition to domination, then, is what is explicitly denounced in Foucault’s approach: the critical space of powerlessness that is afforded when domination is conceived as evil. In Hartsock’s terminology, this “status of liminality gives us [feminists] a cognitive edge”.

On the other hand, feminist critics also claim that Foucault does not give adequate emphasis to the impact and oppressive nature of dominative power. It is asserted that in granting a level of involvement to the oppressed as part of the function of power relations, Foucault occludes the actual functioning of power inequalities. The predominant concern behind this feminist rejection of Foucault’s account is that it is feared a focus on the fragmented and capillary-like nature of power will undermine analyses of how power is organised to oppress specific groups of subjects. If power is so highly dispersed, it becomes difficult to locate structures of domination. As a result, it is claimed that the feminist capacity to theorise and critique unequal gender relations is hampered.

However, Foucault’s emphasis on reversible relations of power in his later work is an attempt to expand upon a singular focus on domination, as the more commonly recognised and theorised form of power, rather than deny its existence. He makes several statements that support this

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149 N. Hartsock, ‘The Feminist Standpoint Revisited’, in Hartsock, The Feminist Standpoint and Other Essays, p. 232. Denise Morgan’s words also reflect such a denial. While she accepts women’s participation in domination ‘across class, race and national boundaries’, it is only to the extent that women are ‘caught up in political webs not of our making which we are powerless to unravel’, cited in Mohanty, ‘Feminist Encounters’, p. 81.
150 Hartsock, ‘Postmodernism and Political Change’, p. 49.
153 Bordo, ‘“Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender Scepticism”, p. 152; Walby, ‘Post-Post-Modernism?’, p. 35.
154 Foucault, The Final Foucault, p. 19.
assertion and also highlight his recognition of both the individual effects of domination and how it
can become fused into fixed and hierarchical social structures that are bolstered by domination.
Foucault notes that “states of domination do indeed exist. In a great many cases, power relations
are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited
margin of freedom”. Moreover, he insists that the domination “of a group, a caste, or a class”
remains a “central phenomenon in the history of societies” because it represents the manifestation
of all forms of power “in a massive and universalising form, at the level of the whole social body”.156
In an interview late in his career, Foucault further contends that “domination is in fact a general
structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found descending to
the most recalcitrant fibres of society”.157 In contrast to these feminist critiques, then, I argue that
the whole corpus of Foucault’s thought is focussed not only on how power works from the “top
down”, but also with examining the effects of dominative forms of power from the “bottom up”.158
In fact, it will be recalled that several feminists have been critical of Foucault for overemphasising
the prevalence and constancy of dominative forms of power in his detailing of disciplinary power.159

What Foucault does undermine, though, is the conditions that uphold moral approbation of
domination as evil. He challenges the assignation of responsibility to individuals for the exercise of
power; he reveals that all subject positions are imbued in the will-to-power, and; he refuses to treat
the two conceptions of power that underpin feminist approaches to domination or empowerment
as antithetical. In Foucault’s account, power over does not extinguish power to but depends upon
it. Foucault’s account of power reflects an understanding that dominative power can lead to
oppressive states that are unequal and fixed into states of asymmetry, and yet he refuses to
conceive of domination as extinguishing all possibility for modification or change. Rather than
failing to account for domination, then, Foucault fails to provide a basis for the familiar moral
challenge to dominative forms of power that underpins feminist critique of gendered domination.160

As Weedon contends, it is Foucault’s “neutrality” toward dominative power that is of most concern
for feminist theorists.161 Certainly, as the previous chapter highlighted, what feminism needs is a
basis for a critical approach to domination and some element of moral impetus behind its political
aims.

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159 As discussed earlier, several theorists argue along with Lois McNay that Foucault presents the ‘subject as totally determined’. See also M. McLaren, ‘Foucault and the Subject of Feminism’, Social Theory and Practice, vol. 23, no. 1, 1997, pp. 109-129.
In contrast to the concerns of these theorists, however, I argue that while Foucault forfeits the slavish approach to power that dictates it is evil, he does not adopt a straightforward masterly approach of neutrality toward domination. This contention is given support by the assertions of several theorists who have noted that while Foucault debunks the overt moral framework that dictates power is evil, he fails to suspend entirely the normative commitments in his work.162 Monique Deveaux, for example, claims that it does not “seem fair to impute to Foucault, as both Fraser and Hartsock do, a normatively neutral world view, because his work consistently reflects what are manifestly – if not always polemical – political concerns”.163 Even Jürgen Habermas, as Foucault’s most ardent critic with regard to his normative neutrality, recognises that Foucault’s approach is marked by “engagement” and that a “critical tenor dominates the theory no less than the self-definition of the entire work”.164

For Nancy Fraser, though, the rationalisation that Foucault can overcome his normative neutrality with the politically engaged tenor evident in his approach, is insufficient.165 Relieving Foucault’s analysis of his confused normative position must involve discovering “what alternative normative framework he is presupposing”. She asks:

Could the language of domination, subjugation, struggle, and resistance be interpreted as the skeleton of some alternative framework? Although this is certainly a theoretical possibility, I am unable to develop it concretely. I find no clues in Foucault’s writings as to what his alternative norms might be.166

Yet, because Fraser seeks a framework that accords with the dictates of the “modern Western normative tradition”, which posits evil as the extreme point of moral condemnation, she subjects his account to criteria that it inevitably lacks.167 Like Wendy Brown, whose approach was canvassed in the previous chapter, it is assumed that the only possible normative framework must

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164 Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, p. 282.

165 Fraser, ‘Foucault on Modern Power’, p. 28.

166 Fraser, ‘Foucault on Modern Power’, p. 29.

167 Fraser, ‘Foucault on Modern Power’, p. 30. Olsen claims that “Fraser and Habermas up the normative ante on Foucault, claiming that he needs a carefully articulated basis for criticism, then criticise him for failing to meet that standard”: ‘Genealogy, Cryptonormativity, Interpretation’, p. 254.
be one that accords with a polarity between dominative power as the evil extreme of power relations and the abolition of domination as the good.\textsuperscript{168}

I contend that by searching for evil in Foucault’s account, Fraser overlooks several clues in Foucault’s approach to domination that suggest an alternative normative position, namely: that domination is bad, but not evil. Foucault’s consistent opposition to domination and his complementary championing of the subjugated subject support this interpretation. A moral position that domination is bad does not align with a Nietzschean stance against morality that Wendy Brown adopts in the previous chapter and nor does it reflect the feminist desire, evident in domination and empowerment accounts, to retain a moral opposition to domination as the evil extreme of power relations. Instead, the assertion that domination is bad offers a normative contrast to underpin a critique of dominative power that also supports the recognition that all subjects are involved in power in some way.

Through his description of the logic of \textit{ressentiment}, Nietzsche explains how the slave morality conceives of the master’s qualities as evil because they are outside the slave’s field of action. For the powerless slave, the strength and dominative power of the master has an evil quality specifically because it represents all that the slave does not have and cannot do. An important component of this evil determination, then, is that these qualities are not seen as being available to the subordinate or slave. When domination is \textit{evil}, rather than a \textit{bad}, inevitable component of all subjectivities, the particular aggrieved moral stance that invites \textit{ressentiment} is evoked.\textsuperscript{169} In contrast, for the master, expressions of strength and dominance are innate and because they represent all that is good, what is bad is then conceived as a “subsequently-invented pale, contrasting image in relation to its positive basic concept”.\textsuperscript{170} While a determination of bad for the master may be pale in comparison to the slave’s conception of evil, it is still a contrasting moral designation. As Nietzsche asserts, “assuming it has long since been abundantly clear what my aim is, what the aim of that dangerous slogan that is inscribed at the head of my last book \textit{Beyond Good and Evil} – At least this does not mean ‘beyond Good and Bad’”.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{168} Olsen also contends that Foucault escapes many of the problems of the more “muscular, demanding, and non-contextual forms of normativity that Habermas and even Fraser seem to want” because it is “subtle, implied, and often concealed”, ‘Genealogy, Cryptonormativity, Interpretation’, p. 255. The ramifications of drawing out Foucault’s normativity are considered further in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{169} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, p. 176.

\textsuperscript{170} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{171} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, p. 55. For Nietzsche, while this can be read as a cryptic attempt to reinforce his support for the master morality over the slave morality, particularly as he rails against the morality governed by \textit{ressentiment} and appears to favour the more naked will-to-power of the master. However, it is apparent that he is equivocal on whether he seeks a return to the noble or master’s mode of being, as he recognises that \textit{ressentiment} will eventually be successful and favourably notes the
However, to reconceptualise domination as a morally bad form of power within Foucault’s account for feminist purposes can not entail a straightforward adoption of the master’s morality in its entirety. The moral value of bad as defined by the master does not adequately capture the critical challenge required by feminist theories to unmask domination and recognise the negative effects of oppression, and nor does it reflect accurately Foucault’s opposition to domination. What is important for Foucault’s account of power in the master’s conception of bad is that it is underpinned by the belief that domination and power relations are an intrinsic, necessary part of life. It is also important that in order to make the distinction with evil that it is recognised that both master and slave are participants in power. The master’s moral framework provides for a moral contrast but does not invest all power in an external enemy or revalue powerlessness as virtue. However, Foucault’s divergence from Nietzsche and the master is also vital to enable a moral position to be reconceived from Foucault’s work that is suitable for feminist accounts of power. Of key importance is that the master’s instinctive will to dominate others is not championed in Foucault’s account, and nor is it expected of the oppressed to meet dominative actions with a ‘single shrug’ as do the masters. Instead, Foucault’s opposition to domination as bad evinces a different value judgement than the master because it is made with priority given to the experiences and needs of the slave. In striking this balance, it is suggested that Foucault provides a basis for a reconceptualised moral position that is neither masterly or slavish but instead, synthesizes aspects of both approaches.

Throughout Foucault’s work on power, from his critique of humanism through to his understanding of the construction of the subject within the context of domination, there is an indebtedness to Nietzsche, even if it is not always directly acknowledged. However, Foucault cannot manage the lack of interest in the oppressed that characterises the master’s approach and directs Nietzsche’s often scathing disregard for suffering and the experiences of the slave. It has been demonstrated in this chapter that Foucault’s focus on revealing where domination is at its worst has a specific purpose. Through each of the three phases of his thought that I have outlined, Foucault is committed to unearthing hidden voices and subjugated knowledges that are subsumed beneath dominant discourses and recognising the capacity of all subjects to intercede in power relations; theoretical tasks that align his project with the predicament of subordinated subjects. While Foucault disassembles the basis for ressentiment when he challenges its underpinning moral

cleverness and cunning of the slave. Aaron Ridley, for example, argues that in his desire for a mode of valuation that ‘affirms life’ Nietzsche is not, as is often assumed, advocating a return to the original, instinct-driven noble. See Nietzsche’s Conscience, pp. 129-133.
framework, then, he departs from Nietzsche in retaining a critical stance with regard to domination and a greater compassion for the oppressed. As a result, I believe that he also leaves open the possibility and provides significant ‘clues’ for this alternative moral challenge to domination.

**Domination is Morally Bad**

Foucault’s explication of the bad nature of dominative power is reflected in the radical objective underpinning his analysis throughout all phases of his work, which aligns closely with the key imperative of feminist theory: to unmask domination in all its guises and to reveal its effects on subordinated subjects. While Foucault modifies his position in relation to domination over time, I have argued in this chapter that his commitment to unmasking domination does not cease during any of the phases in his analysis. In fact, Foucault describes his own project as being committed to giving “due weight ... to the fact of domination, to expos[ing] both its latent nature and its brutality”.172 Similarly, other commentators have noted that Foucault’s analysis of power is conducted as an “unmasking” or “laying bare” of the structures of power that have previously remained as “hidden mechanisms of domination and discipline”.173 Foucault’s motivation to reveal forms of dominance that lie beneath the neutral appearance of institutions and discourses is that when hidden, they are allowed to flourish. In his focus on power as struggle and warfare, Foucault argues that when the myriad forms of domination are “unmasked”, it becomes possible to “fight against them”.174 His desire to expose and challenge dominative forms of power confirms that he believes them to have negative effects that should be curtailed and fought against.

For Charles Taylor, Foucault moves from “conceptual” normative analysis to a “substantive” moral critique when he undertakes this “unmasking” of dominative power. According to Taylor, however, this substantive critique represents a commitment to bringing “evils to light”.175 When Foucault’s work on power is considered in its entirety, particularly as he moves beyond the archaeological phase of his work, I have argued that his unmasking of dominative power moves away from a focus on bringing evils to light. Instead, Foucault strikes a balance between highlighting and opposing the bad effects of domination and emphasising the multiple ways in which subjects are part of its operation. Even in his earliest work, the concept of the ‘plebs’ provides a glimpse into Foucault’s later insistence that while domination is continual and has a range of negative effects, it doesn’t

175 Taylor, ‘Foucault on Freedom and Truth’, p. 69 (author’s italics).
extinguish all possibility for adaptation or interception. ‘Plebs’, like resistance, always contains a process of “disengagement” or disavowal from what may otherwise be the evil effects of domination and repression. When domination is described as warlike and based on constant and continual struggle, this does not constitute a “fatality” but a “permanent political task” to understand how it works and who it affects negatively. Foucault makes clear that a society without dominative power relations, whereby “individuals try to conduct [or] to determine, the behaviour of others” is merely an abstraction. Challenging domination will not necessarily result in greater freedom, better justice or more humanity. Nonetheless, it is important to expose and undermine how it operates.

Importantly, in Foucault’s account, domination is not an external, evil force that precludes any reaction or action in response, but is a form of power that may have bad or unacceptable effects that can be changed. As he makes clear, while domination is inevitable and “we cannot jump outside of the situation”, his analysis is driven by the belief that “we are not trapped” by dominative power as “we can always change it”. In a later series of interviews, Foucault claims that the “ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger”. In this interview, Foucault makes a distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘dangerous’, claiming that his work attempts to show not how everything is bad but how everything is dangerous. This distinction has been cited by several theorists to underscore an absence of any normativity in Foucault’s work, as domination is interpreted as being presented as not even bad. Yet I would argue that Foucault is understanding ‘bad’ in this reference as something that we cannot do anything about (which would be more aligned with a conception of evil). For Foucault, when “everything is dangerous” we can act, which corresponds with a moral determination that it is bad but can be challenged, while what is evil is determined from the outset, and is monstrous and unchanging. Amy Allen also challenges the interpretation of this distinction as a-normative when she contends that it is “conceptually confused to say that we can identify something as dangerous without implicitly...

177 Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 223.
181 Barry Hindess, for example, makes the assertion that Foucault attempts to argue in his later interviews and essays that domination is not ‘bad’. Discourses of Power, p. 155. Amy Allen also highlights how Colin Koopman does the same in Genealogy as Critique: see her review of his work, ‘The Normative and the Transcendental: Comments on Koopman’s Genealogy as Critique’, Foucault Studies, no. 18, 2014, pp. 238-244.
making a normative judgement about it”. She asks: “What else does dangerous mean if not ‘likely to lead to something bad or harmful’?”

This position is further supported in Foucault’s later work, where he emphasises the need for subjects to take responsibility for the power they exercise over others. For some commentators, by rejecting the automatic attribution of responsibility for dommative actions, Foucault forfeits any human culpability for the exercise of power and hence, denies the need for moral judgement of domination. However, I have argued that Foucault’s rejection of responsibility again reflects his refusal to accept the normative framework of good and evil, with its underpinning belief in the unhindered freedom of the sovereign individual. Yet this does not mean that he fails to recognise the need for accountability to be taken for domination or its bad effects. In fact, Foucault follows Nietzsche’s explanation of the development of the sovereign individual who has been subject to domination and the effects of ressentiment and has become accountable. For Nietzsche, his sovereign subject exhibits a “proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of responsibility, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate”. Similarly for Foucault, responsibility for dommative power shifts from being automatically attributed to an external perpetrator, to being focussed on individual accountability. Foucault signals this in his later work on the care of the self where he identifies such care as a positive ethical practice that can serve to minimise the exercise of power over others. As Foucault explains it, if one becomes “a slave to one’s desires” there is no tempering or limiting of power over others; instead a “good ruler is precisely one who exercises his power as it ought to be exercised, that is, simultaneously exercising his power over himself. And it is the power over oneself that thus regulates one’s power over others”. To become accountable and to act in an ethical manner means, then, that proper care and management of the self is a way of “limiting and controlling power”.

This then raises the question of what Foucault’s moral aim is in uncovering the bad and harmful effects of domination – why does he want subjects to fight against the impositions and limitations imposed by dommative forms of power and seek to limit them? Barry Hindess claims that the “sweeping condemnation of domination in the name of liberty that Foucault proposes in several of his later interviews and short essays serves to promote yet another version of the utopian critique

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184 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 60.
of power that Foucault’s own work has done so much to undermine”. However, this criticism of Foucault’s later more explicit normative stance overlooks what Hindess also goes to great lengths to demonstrate: that for Foucault, “domination is an indispensable condition of liberty”. Foucault’s clearest confirmation of his normative opposition toward domination is evident in his statement that relations of power need to be “played with a minimum of domination”. In issuing what comes close to a moral directive here, though, Foucault is not calling for domination to be replaced with a utopian situation where there are only benign power relations. Liberty is not a pure ‘good’ that is being rescued as the opposing value to domination as the evil. Instead, while Foucault does not seek to abolish domination in favour of liberty, he does seek to limit domination with the more moderate aim of enabling and fostering the greater involvement of subjects in power relations.

The constant purpose for Foucault in undermining the harmful and bad effects of dominative power is to revive the voices and capacities of subjugated and marginalised identities. In this, he demonstrates his compassion for subordinated subjects that provides the depth to a moral position in relation to domination. Yet, while Foucault wants to ensure that the hidden function of domination is exposed and the voices of those silenced are heard, as his thought progresses he no longer seeks to capture these perspectives as resembling all that is “good, right, rich”. The key indication that Foucault views domination as bad, but not evil, is his continual insistence on hearing from those who have been oppressed by dominant discourses because they have so much set up against them to silence them, and not because they offer a view that is better because outside of power.

Importantly, Foucault’s conception of freedom is not absolute and as a result, this also informs how he conceives of subjects as being both confined and enabled through dominative power. Foucault’s gradual recognition of the subject’s involvement in power and domination takes his subject from a position of abject submission to one that is both the result of dominative power and as a fundamental contributor to the play of power relations. As Foucault makes clear, “in order for there to be a movement from above to below there has to be a capillarity from below to above at the

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187 Hindess, *Discourses of Power*, p. 156. There are some examples in Foucault’s work when he does make broader claims, yet these are the exception. See for example, ‘Politics and Reason’, pp. 84-85, and ‘Revolutionary Action’, p. 233. Foucault’s position, though, that freedom is not independent from power and domination remains constant throughout his work.

188 Hindess, *Discourses of Power*, p. 155.


190 Foucault, *The Final Foucault*, pp. 18-19.

same time". Dominative power does not extinguish the involvement of subjects and nor does it belong to one subject to the exclusion of another; it is not evil. Even in his analysis of disciplinary power, Foucault remains committed to reflecting the different modalities of domination and empowerment or capacity. While he gives emphasis to the negative forms of dominative power that form into “systems of coercion”, with very limited freedoms available to subjects, he nonetheless highlights the ways in which each subject can intercede in power by participating in the creation of subjectivity.

In terms of a moral position, then, Foucault begins a necessary process for feminist accounts of power of moving beyond the dichotomy of a masterly or a slavish approach to power, freedom and the subject. The subject for Foucault is not the autonomous and dominant master and nor is it the inverted ‘good’ subject of the slave morality whose powerlessness is defined in opposition to the master. Instead, Foucault’s conception of the subject is an individual who develops through power and is shaped by domination but is also a complicit and involved participant. The basis for making a moral determination that issues from this subject cannot be evil, as this form of moral reproach is not sustainable when the subject is a participant in power too and cannot only direct responsibility immediately outward to an enemy. Yet a subject who is both subject to power and a participant in power can recognise that some subjects fare worse than others in power relations and thus make the determination that it is bad to dominate and confine others such that their capacity to engage in power relations is thoroughly limited.

While Hindess identifies a moral stance in Foucault’s later work, then, he obscures the alternative interpretation endorsed in this thesis that Foucault more consistently presents domination throughout all phases of his account as bad but not evil. Hindess’ subsequent qualification of his argument regarding the normative element in Foucault’s later interviews very nearly makes this point. He acknowledges that “Foucault regards domination as, at best, a necessary evil, and one that is to be avoided as far as possible”. However, if domination is necessary, it cannot be evil: something to be expunged, removed or overcome. Instead, this view of domination accords far more with my contention that Foucault’s account better aligns with a moral approach that domination is normatively bad – a form of power that is tolerated but avoided as “far as possible”.

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193 Foucault, The Final Foucault, p. 11.
194 Hindess, Discourses of Power, p. 154.
Good and Bad Forms of Power

In order to give further weight to this normative position that domination is bad, it is imperative that there is some basis to enable feminist theorists to make distinctions between domination and other forms of power. Several feminists claim, however, that Foucault treats all forms of power as synonymous. According to Chris Weedon, for example, “Foucault offers no basis for criteria by which to distinguish between good and bad forms of power”.195 This failure in Foucault’s approach means that for Amy Allen, Foucault “ends up painting power as the night in which all cows are black”.196 Nancy Fraser is more explicit when she contends that “what Foucault needs, and needs desperately, are normative criteria for distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable forms of power”.197 While Foucault does not outline explicit normative criteria for making this determination, as Fraser and Allen assert, he does provide the necessary basis to distinguish between unacceptable forms of power and those that are more acceptable. If the moral stance against domination as a bad form of power is adopted as a reconceptualised moral position from Foucault’s account, the differentiation Foucault makes between domination and other modalities of power gains a normative dimension.

In fact, this moral view of domination as a bad but not evil form of power actually fosters a more differentiated understanding of power and related manifestations of power. As Hannah Arendt asserts, distinctions between power, strength, force, authority and violence are often assimilated in political thought and even more tellingly, “treated as synonyms when the key concern is who rules whom”.198 It will be recalled that feminist domination theorists in Chapter One actively coalesce violence, force and dominance into the conceptual territory of power, thus representing all as evil manifestations of the master’s power. In Chapter Two, the chief distinction made by empowerment theorists is in accordance with the slavish approach to domination; hence, dominative male power is ‘evil’ and female power is ‘good’. Yet beneath this juxtaposition is a coalescing of all forms of power over, even leadership, into domination. Necessary distinctions between forms of empowerment that may be beneficial to individual women as well as others and those that may further entrench oppression are also not explicitly made.

197 Fraser, ‘Foucault on Modern Power’, p. 33.
198 Arendt, ‘Communicative Power’, p. 64.
In contrast, Foucault’s account rails against an understanding of power that focusses on the singular question of who rules whom and works against the coalescing of all forms of power, even power over others, into domination. As Foucault argues, by reducing power exclusively to “the figure of the master there is linked another reduction”, that of all forms of power to domination. Coalescing different expressions of power under the umbrella of domination “enables power never to be thought of other than in negative terms ... Power is what says no”. As Foucault points out, it is this more fundamental opposition to domination that inevitably leads to a “schema of power which is homogenous for every level and domain”. An understanding of domination that instead seeks to challenge its dyadic and oppositional nature and functioning, as does Foucault’s, is less likely to assume an equivalence between forms of power.

Tellingly, when Foucault is asked in an interview late in his career (1982) whether domination is the extreme evil, as Jean-Paul Sartre presented it, he insists these terms need better defining. As he says, “[i]n my analysis of power, there are three levels: the strategic relationships, the techniques of government, and the levels of domination”. While the more negative aspects of power, “the interdiction, the refusal, the prohibition”, are accounted for when Foucault details domination as a form of disciplinary power, these are not the primary or essential forms of power. The power that produces knowledge and creates identities through discourses of sexuality are “above all, productive”. Like the care of subjects that is carried out through practices of governmentality, these productive forms of power are “something quite other, or in any case something much more than repression”. Foucault is clear that his focus on these more productive forms of power is designed to remedy a singular focus on domination. As Margaret McLaren argues, it is important to “take seriously his distinction between power and domination” during this period of his thought because it reveals a clear alignment with feminist critiques of oppression. The multiple ways in which power functions enables domination to be more complex than simply dyadic or oppressive and yet, it can still be seen as operating as the more extreme and negative form of power. In short, it is not evil but it is still a bad form of power.

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199 Foucault, ‘Power and Strategies’, p. 139.
201 Foucault, ‘Power and Strategies’, p. 139.
202 Foucault, The Final Foucault, p. 19. When asked whether philosophy has a duty to warn of the dangers of power, Foucault contends that it is an important role for philosophy to challenge all forms and expressions of domination; “political, economic, sexual, institutional, and so on”, p. 20.
203 Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, p. 118.
204 Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, p.118.
205 Foucault, ‘Two Lectures’, p. 92.
206 Foucault, The Final Foucault, p. 19.
In addition to this explicit distinction between domination, governmentality, and strategic relations of power that Foucault makes in this late interview, his argument that domination is more hierarchical than governmentality or the free relations of power between subjects is also consistent throughout his work. For Foucault “strategic relations, techniques of government, and states of domination” are different types of power with varying effects and severity in their impact on subjects. Strategic relations necessarily involve a greater level of engagement by subjects; they are “relationships of power” that are based around subjects attempting to influence each other’s action or conduct. The techniques of government may form into “regulated and concerted systems” and are not as open to individuals interceding, like in institutional settings and through more coordinated practices of governmentality. Nonetheless, both of these forms of power are for Foucault potentially “mobile, reversible, and unstable”.210

In contrast, domination can act as a ‘block’ in the other two forms of power.211 Foucault explains that “[w]hen an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilising them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political, or military means, one is faced with what may be called a state of domination”.212 A state of domination is an unequal and possibly stable form of power that involves an “above and a below, a difference of potentials”.213 While relationships of power are essentially “reversible”, states of domination are more fixed and can even be permanently asymmetrical with the possibility of resistance still evident, though limited.214 Within Foucault’s schema, then, the differences between the three forms of power provide a gradation of power that ranges from the freer flow of power relations to domination as the most restrictive form of power.

Moreover, Foucault determines that when domination is ordered in such a way that it precludes entirely the involvement of subjects, it is no longer classified as power or even domination: it is violence. The only situation in which Foucault believes that power operates without the possibility for movement, divergent outcomes and the reaction of subjects is when “man is in chains”, or

213 Foucault, The Confession of the Flesh, pp. 200-201.
physically determined.\textsuperscript{215} He claims that violence is the “last resource” of power and also its “permanent secret”.\textsuperscript{216} With these statements, it would make sense to assume that Foucault views violence as the evil extreme of dominative power. If this were the case, though, Foucault would be committing what Hannah Arendt argues is an erroneous assumption made by political theorists from the Left and the Right, namely: “that violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power”.\textsuperscript{217} However, Foucault clarifies this position when he contends that violence is actually outside consideration as a form of power; if one person were “completely at the disposition of the other, an object on which he can exercise an unlimited violence, there would be no relations of power”.\textsuperscript{218} In this, Foucault reflects the position put forward by Arendt that power and violence are fundamentally different, as violence demands “unquestioning obedience”.\textsuperscript{219} For Foucault, though, while violence is presented as beyond power, it still represents the most extreme form of control over another subject. According to Foucault, “violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities”.\textsuperscript{220} Unlike relations of power, techniques of government and even hierarchical structures of dominance, the “opposite pole” of violence ‘can only be passivity’.\textsuperscript{221} As such, because violence robs the subject of any capacity, it is a monstrous force more aligned with the moral designation evil; which again, for Foucault, is differentiated from domination.\textsuperscript{222}

Within this framework, then, Foucault’s normative neutrality toward power, which is of particular concern for feminist theorists, can be seen to be applicable to strategic power relations or relationships of power generally, while a normative opposition toward domination as a bad form of power is consistently maintained. This goes some way toward alleviating what Nancy Fraser has termed Foucault’s “normative confusion”. For Foucault, a proliferation of domination would be unacceptable, a position he makes clear in his entreaty that power relations should be played with “a minimum of domination”.\textsuperscript{223} In contrast, because “relations of power are not something bad in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{215} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 221.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 220. At times Foucault uses ‘force’ interchangeably with ‘violence’ to explain this extreme form of control that exceeds power: ‘Politics and Reason’, pp. 83-84. Some feminists have found this separation of power and violence problematic, particularly in understanding violent sexual assault or domestic violence. For Deveaux, Foucault’s separation means disregarding the ways in which this power is frequently transformed into violence: see ‘Feminism and Empowerment’, p. 235. Yet her reference to transformation here seems to indicate that there is a difference in the exercise and effects of each action, and a transition from one to the other. A combination of domination and violence also is not precluded by Foucault.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Arendt, ‘Communicative Power’, p. 59.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Foucault, The Final Foucault p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Arendt, ‘Communicative Power’, p. 62.
\item \textsuperscript{220} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 220.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’.
\item \textsuperscript{222} Nietzsche also views force as a lower ranked form of the will-to-power: see Beyond Good and Evil, p. 211.
\item \textsuperscript{223} Foucault, The Final Foucault, pp. 18-19.
\end{itemize}
themselves, from which one must free one’s self, encouraging engagement in relationships of strategic power would be acceptable. Therefore, the feminist requirement for distinctions between “social practices which are ‘good’ (less coercive) and ‘bad’ (very coercive)” is exactly what Foucault’s distinction between power relations and domination enables. By reconceptualising Foucault’s opposition to domination as a normative position that domination is morally bad, this distinction is fortified and allows for a feminist valuation of different modalities of power.

Foucault thus makes explicit distinctions between forms of power so that they are not all equivalent. Nor does he assume, as his position on violence makes clear, that all “social practices are as good as any other”. Importantly, a moral position that sees domination as bad, but not the evil extreme of control over other subjects, provides an alternative to the slavish tendency toward making all forms of power normatively synonymous with domination. It also provides an alternative to the Nietzschean masterly approach of championing all forms of power, including domination. In fact, a skeleton normative framework can be aligned to the different forms of power in Foucault’s account: while domination is the night in Foucault’s account, not all forms of power are black.

Conclusion

The dual imperative that underlies feminist assessments of power relations – the need to ‘unmask’ domination, on the one hand, and to account for the agency of the subordinate, on the other – is shown to be a determining consideration throughout Foucault’s work. The tension between these two objectives also explains the developments in Foucault’s view of power. His earlier work reconfirms the limitations of an account that views dominative power as a largely repressive and negative force understood within the normative framework of evil/good, while his later work brings into greater clarity the benefits of challenging directly traditional antinomies that have confined the capacity and participation of subordinated subjects. This chapter has highlighted how Foucault’s work is driven by the attempt to incorporate both power over and power to and, of course, the difficulty in successfully mediating the tensions evident in holding a dual position. This is particularly difficult because such a position is held to be impossible or contradictory by many critics, according to the traditional antinomies between power/freedom, agency/structure and power/truth, and the widely-held conviction that it is necessary to work towards a more liberated society beyond

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224 Foucault, The Final Foucault, p. 18.
226 Fraser, ‘Foucault on Modern Power’, p. 32.
domination and repression. It has been argued that what underlies these criticisms, therefore, is partly a reluctance to accept the central, radical theme that runs through Foucault’s work on power: that domination is not an evil substance and that power relations more generally are not bad in themselves.

By applying the Nietzschean distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ to Foucault’s account of dominitative power, it has been argued in this chapter that it is possible to identify the basis for an alternative moral position in Foucault’s account that is particularly useful for the feminist engagement with power, namely: that domination is morally bad. While Foucault does not explicitly align himself with such a normative position, I have argued that he makes several theoretical overtures that support this interpretation. First, is the commitment that Foucault maintains throughout his work on power to unmasking domination and exposing its negative impact on subordinated subjects. For Foucault, domination consistently remains the most restrictive and extreme form of power and in his later work is explicitly differentiated from other forms of power. Second, in his debunking of the automatic attribution of responsibility to guilty agents, Foucault shows that his view of domination is not value-free by insisting that there still needs to be accountability taken for dominative exertion of power over others. Third, Foucault emphasises the need to minimise and limit the negative, bad effects of dominative power and combat all of the dangers that arise when subjects are prevented from realising their capacity.

Identifying and fortifying this normative approach for feminist purposes requires explicit delineation of how Foucault’s account follows, but also diverges from, Nietzsche and the master morality. I have argued that a normative position that domination is morally bad does not follow the master morality or Nietzsche in celebrating the strength and dominance of the powerful, though it recognises that domination is not evil and cannot be eradicated. It also does not adopt the slavish opposition to domination that gives over all power and control to the master, then condemns it because it represents all that the slave is not. Instead, the slave’s predicament is of central concern to Foucault and it is this that gives substance to the alternative moral position. While the moral distinction of bad belongs to the master, it is applied to domination by Foucault with the needs and experiences of the slave in mind. As a result, a moral designation that domination is bad extends beyond both the master and slave moralities. Within this framework, then, feminists can draw upon Foucault’s broader provision for the subordinate’s potential agency and acknowledge complicity in domative power, without relinquishing the focus on opposing the negative effects of domination and seeking to minimise its impact and prevalence. The following chapter explores how Foucault’s
account can offer feminists various means for opposing and resisting domination beyond the limited resistance of *ressentiment* evident in the approaches of feminist domination and empowerment theorists. It also considers whether the normative distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ can be applied to Foucault’s provision for resistance, and the moral opposition to domination as morally bad maintained, in order to allow for an adequate framework for feminist political practice.
This chapter examines how Foucault’s understanding of the interplay between power and freedom provides feminism with multiple forms of resistance that are precluded when domination is conceived as an evil form of power. Importantly, Foucault’s conception of resistance ensures that power is not embedded into dominators and oppressors in a fixed manner through social categories like gender and all subjects are recognised as having the capacity to act. Foucault opens up various potential techniques and strategies for feminism to challenge an imposed, fixed concept of gender difference as the basis for political identities and the feminist engagement with power.

The key task of this chapter is to trace the normative dimensions inherent in Foucault’s approach toward resistance and determine whether these can provide an adequate basis for a feminist program of resistance to domination. Several theorists have contended that without normative claims to truth, justice or freedom – those virtues which have always existed on the other side of power as evil – Foucault cannot explain the purposes and reasons for resistance. Nietzsche’s distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ that helped to explicate a moral position in Foucault’s account of domination in the previous chapter is again useful in this chapter to highlight the normative dimensions in Foucauldian resistance. While Foucault does not seek to overthrow evil domination as the pre-determined goal of resistance, it is argued that his approach allows for judgements to be made about good or bad forms of resistance within the context of these practices. This position is reflected in Foucault’s genealogical approach and underscores his commitment to a form of critique that arises from the subject who is created through action and the play of power relations.

However, it is argued that while feminist theorists can challenge negative or retrogressive forms of resistance that may bolster domination within this schema, Foucault gives priority to a Nietzscbean mode of engagement in resistance that more closely aligns with the master of Nietzsche’s genealogy. This chapter suggests that the desire to minimise domination that is evident in Foucault’s moral opposition to domination, and is also replicated in his later vision for the conduct of the subject in relation to others, must be made explicit in his account of resistance in order to

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foster a more robust normative framework suitable for feminist purposes. It is concluded that this normative framework needs to better reflect Foucault’s subject and the feminist subject, both of which are more akin to the sovereign individual of Nietzsche’s genealogy, to enable a feminist approach to resistance that extends beyond either a masterly or slavish mode of engagement.

Resistance as a Form of Engagement

An important aspect of Foucault’s account of power for feminist approaches to domination and empowerment is his emphasis on the reversibility of relations of power and the possibility for challenges to be issued from within dominative power structures. Importantly, unlike the feminist conceptions of domination in Chapter One and the vision for female empowerment in Chapter Two, Foucault makes possible the involvement of all subjects in power relations and domination. He formalises this position with his account of resistance, by asserting that there is always, within the flow of strategic power relations, the “possibility of resistance – of violent ruse, of escape, of strategies that reverse the situation”\(^2\) Even within dominative power structures, Foucault believes that freedom and power are agonistic and that subjects must retain the capacity to act in order for power to be operating.

It was argued in the previous chapter that this relationship between freedom and power affords subordinated subjects a genuine capacity for engagement in power. Resistance, like Foucault’s very early conception of ‘plebs’, captures the ever-present potential of each subject to alter and change how power operates. For Amy Allen, Foucault’s account provides feminists with an understanding of domination and empowerment as “complexly intertwined”, which she argues “offers an insight that is lacking in many feminist discussions of power”.\(^3\) However, rather than a lack of integration between the two accounts of power, I emphasised in Chapter Two how it is the common view of domination as evil that limits the feminist empowerment account rather than a lack of integration. The central weakness identified in the accounts of feminist empowerment theorists was that, because power to was articulated from within the confines of domination as an evil construct, it was contained by an oppositional framing of identity that was determined by gender difference. The power to act attributed to women was defined as a gendered version of female empowerment that didn’t provide a means to directly engage, resist or subvert domination. In contrast, the capacity that Foucault attributes to all subjects is not defined by this relationship of

domination as dictated by gender difference. Domination is not afforded status as the starting premise, as it is in the feminist accounts considered; for Foucault, the influence of social categories like gender is part of the matrix through which power operates, but it does not determine that power will always operate in a dyadic fashion according to determined or static divisions. As a result, Foucault’s concept of power to can be seen to more closely align with the dispositional notion that is put forward by theorists like Hanna Pitkin: it is a capacity or potential available to all subjects.

Theorists who attempt to develop a complex understanding of the multiple subject positions that influence one’s power or ability to resist, often attribute this capacity to subjects only by virtue of their entrenched social power. It is the clash between experiences of social power and inequality that is seen to enable a critical perspective, while having some access to the resources of social power provides the capability to resist. Davina Cooper contends that in such accounts, when a subject is dominated, “resistance emerges from a contradictory positioning as both powerful and powerless, for instance, as a middle-class woman. Not only does such a condensed location provide the wherewithal to resist, it also generates the motivation”. Similarly, Thomas Wartenberg stresses the importance of social alignments, both in supporting the function of a power relationship by reinforcing the agency of a dominant actor and in potentially disrupting this dyad. For Wartenberg, the dyadic relation of power between two individuals cannot be understood in isolation but is more accurately seen as influenced by a complex web or “structure of peripheral social agents that controls and distributes certain items in society”. It is not just the intentional actions of one actor that determines a relationship to be a power-based one or not but the whole of the “social field” and its reactions and interactions with each subject.

Foucault similarly emphasises the impact of a vast field of social forces on the nature of the power relation and recognises that individuals can occupy multiple positions in relation to power at the same time. As such, he provides the possibility for undermining gendered dichotomies that contain or house power. Yet he also diverges from Wartenberg and Cooper on the import given to social position through his later emphasis on the relationship between power and freedom. The means that the subordinate agent’s capacity to act, to challenge or subvert domination, does not hinge on

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5 Cooper, ‘Productive and Relational Power’ p. 11.
9 Cocks, The Oppositional Imagination, p. 6.
a breakdown or misalignment of social practices as it does for these other theorists.\textsuperscript{11} Instead, power is more pervasive in that it shifts through social categories in unpredictable ways that may also allow for resistance without the necessary social alignments supporting the dominance of one actor. Social factors or markers that shore up an agent’s power are recognised, but seen as necessarily temporary. Categories that define subjects as ‘having power’ and the ability for agency are not necessarily the defining means for tracking or tracing practices of power; what may induce intimidation, such as someone’s age, race or gender, may also be a later cause for another subject to feel empowered or effect resistant action.\textsuperscript{12} As Foucault states, “between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle there is a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal”.\textsuperscript{13}

For some theorists, though, Foucault’s conceptualisation of resistance as being in a constant interplay with power is interpreted as affording subordinates only limited capacity to react to, rather than engage in, power.\textsuperscript{14} Underlying this criticism is the assumption that resistance is already and only the province of the subordinate because an antagonistic attribution of power to one group over another is presupposed. Cooper asserts, for example, that resistance is conceptualised as “the means by which subjugated forces act, counterposed to power within an apparently secure dialectic”.\textsuperscript{15} This criticism assumes that the same principles underpinning a dyadic understanding of power apply to Foucault’s account of resistance, specifically the notion that the only recourse for subordinated subjects is an exertion of capacity that is doomed to failure. Cooper thus claims that resistance is conceived of negatively by Foucault such that those who are oppressed are prevented from “deploying” power.\textsuperscript{16}

However, it is key to Foucault’s provision for resistance that while resistant actions are formed “right at the point where relations of power are exercised”, resistance does not operate in the same way as conflict does in Steven Lukes’ schema or the accounts of feminist domination theorists; as an entirely futile exercise.\textsuperscript{17} In Chapter One, it was demonstrated how conflict is essential to locate where power is operating because it signalled the eventual overcoming of the subordinate. In contrast, for Foucault, resistance is the “key word” in the study of power because it “remains

\textsuperscript{11} Wartenberg (ed.), \textit{Rethinking Power}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{12} Foucault, \textit{The Final Foucault}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{13} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 226.
\textsuperscript{15} Cooper, ‘Beyond Resistance’, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{16} Cooper, ‘Beyond Resistance’, pp. 126, 128.
\textsuperscript{17} Foucault, ‘Power and Strategies’, p. 142.
superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with resistance”.18 As a result, resistance is able to alter and even transform power relations, rather than serving as a tool merely to locate power or determine that it is in operation. For Foucault, resistance is an essential and intrinsic element of the relation of power.19 As Foucault asserts, resistance “does not predate the power which it opposes. It is coextensive with it and absolutely its contemporary”.20 Moreover, it is not through the principle of contradiction or dialectics that we fight power or locate its mechanisms, as Foucault questions any all-encompassing binary opposition beneath the function of power relations.21 Instead, resistance provides a mechanism to examine power relations that involve people in a “strategic situation toward one another” wherein each person can “influence the behaviour or nonbehaviour of the other”.22

Every action or resistant attempt is for Foucault part of the field of power relations and is unique in its approach and what it seeks to achieve. Of key importance is that these different resistances are not simply reactive. Foucault is careful to point out that while varied forms of resistance seek to challenge domination, they do not only negate what is being asserted through power. As he states, “this does not not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat.23 While Foucault’s formulation recognises that at times it is important to “say no as a decisive form of resistance”, then, he also explicitly states that to “say no is the minimum form of resistance”.24 As power interacts with relations of strategy to form the field of power relations, resistance is accorded a comparable capacity to power.25 Resistance is not, therefore, an objective in itself but a necessary element for power to operate at all.

Refusing the Imposition of Identity

Foucault’s understanding of resistance also challenges the notion of an autonomous subject whose agency exists outside existing power relations. Resistance issues from within the very structures of power that both constrain and constitute the actions of subjects. This position aligns closely with feminist theories, which have long contended that women as gendered subjects are created

19 B. Smart, Michel Foucault, Chichester, Ellis Horwood, 1985, p. 133.
20 Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, p. 122.
23 Foucault, History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p. 96 (my italics).
through social convention and yet, they can undertake an “immanent resistance” against socially determined practices.\textsuperscript{26} According to Foucault, there is at the heart of power relations what he calls an “obstinacy” that ensures there is always the possibility to challenge and change the power dynamic.\textsuperscript{27} For Foucault, it is not possible to situate ourselves as subjects outside of domination or power relations, but because there is always the possibility of change, “we are not trapped”.\textsuperscript{28}

A primary site for resistance is the constitution of subjectivity and the creation of identities. It was made clear in the previous chapter that Foucault refuses the concept of a social realm abstracted from power relations, “where the individual is entirely free to define him or herself”.\textsuperscript{29} Foucault argues that the social identity of subjects – what makes them individual – is created through engagement with the apparatus and discourses of the state. As the subject is not assumed to exist prior to power relations, these processes of engagement and the various dominant discourses that are evoked to describe the subject, need to be investigated. While Foucault does not believe in the possibility of total emancipation, he nonetheless claims that subjects can intercept the very processes that shape and form them.\textsuperscript{30} Resistance lies in the potential to alter and modify particular normalising practices.

According to Foucault, modern forms of resistance and various recent struggles against power have been targeted at those relations of dominance that ‘subject’ individuals and form them in limiting ways. Those struggles that challenge the power of “men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live” possess the common aim to “question the status of the individual”.\textsuperscript{31} By refusing the identities assigned to them, those involved in these struggles are resisting what Foucault terms the “government of individualisation”.\textsuperscript{32}

In his influential study of governmentality, which forms the background to these practices of resistance, Foucault argues that government has altered dramatically from a focus on the deployment of “legitimate” state power to a broader involvement in the “non-legitimate” areas of

\textsuperscript{27} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{28} Foucault, ‘Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity’, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{30} Sawicki, ‘Feminism, Foucault and “Subjects” of Power and Freedom’, p.165.
\textsuperscript{31} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 211.
\textsuperscript{32} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 212.
state control – in the regulation and discipline of citizens’ lives.33 While struggles against domination and forms of exploitation are still evident, current forms of resistance need to target the particular rationality that underpins state power, rather than focus on specific institutions or social groupings.34 It will be recalled form the previous chapter that the focus on a sovereign power or external dominator shifts to the more subtle “forms of subjectivity and submission”.35 Driven by the question, “Who are we?” current forms of resistance refuse abstraction of identity and reject the “scientific and administrative inquisition which determines who one is”.36 According to Foucault, the capacity of governmentality for “individualising and totalising” control means that the main “target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are”.37

This inability to conceive of the truth of who we are at any given time means that identity is not fixed or closed, but in constant progress or flux. Resistance can then emerge from a refusal to believe in locating essential identities or the practice of liberating ourselves through disclosure of truths about our subjectivity. For example, in terms of sexuality, Foucault argues that “one should aim instead at a de-sexualisation, at a general economy of pleasure not based on sexual norms”.38 A celebration of pleasure, as divorced from one’s sexuality or sex, thus aims to subvert a narrow focus on ‘who’ one is by encouraging an emphasis on inducing pleasure in diverse forms. This form of resistance recognises the central irony of a process of “self-discovery”, namely that by encouraging subjects to search for their authentic selves, discourses on sexuality obfuscate the very constructed and hence malleable nature of our sexual identities.

Foucault challenges, therefore, the emphasis that many second-wave feminists gave to the distinction between sex and gender.39 This division between sex, “which was taken to be universal and biological”, and gender, “which was understood as culturally variable”, allowed feminists to claim a fundamental basis for differences between the sexes while also recognising the constructed and potentially alterable status of gender.40 Foucault asks, can “sex – which seems to be an instance having its own laws and constraints, on the basis of which the masculine and feminine sexes are defined – be something which on the contrary is produced by the apparatus of

40 Brooks, Postfeminisms, p. 190.
sexuality?" If sex is produced rather than given, gender cannot be seen as the social inscription that is drawn onto one’s pre-existing sex but is involved in generating the very terms of how sex is defined and regulated. Both categories are defined by social forces, cultural inscriptions and the practices of governmentality, and hence neither can simply represent an essential identity.

Thus, Foucault is cautious about the creation of a culture specific to a particular aspect of one’s identity, or a form of subjectivity that allows for categorisation. He doubts the identity politics involved in basing one’s subjectivity on sexuality. Instead of developing a culture specific to homosexuality, for example, by basing identity on "our own culture", Foucault asserts the need to be “free of identity” through a process of “dissipation”. Similarly, Foucault claims that “the creative and interesting element in the women’s movements” has been the ability to utilise and yet move beyond sex as the basis for identity: the very refusal of “imposed” identity that acts as a resistant force against the practices of governmentality. Yet it is important to note that it is the rigid “assignation and pinning-down” to sex as the basis for identity that Foucault is targeting here and not the strategic deployment of sex, which may still form part of resistant action.

What Foucault interprets here as the successful refusal of identity sits alongside his assertion that challenging the kind of individuality created by practices of government can involve the promotion of new subjectivities. For Foucault, refusing the “kind of individuality that has been imposed on us” is not an isolated strategy but should also involve a complementary attempt to “imagine and build up what we could be”. As Nietzsche similarly claimed, “we want to become what we are, human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves”. Following Nietzsche, Foucault envisages the creation of subjectivity as a form of art that can contribute to a new cultural life. Seeking to devise new ways of being, carving out possible alternative identities and focusing on development of the self, which also informs our

45 Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 216. As Rosi Braidotti notes, this parallels feminist concerns ‘that feminist theory is not only a movement of critical opposition of the false universality of the subject, it is also the positive affirmation of women’s desire to affirm and enact different forms of subjectivity’. See her Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory, Columbia, Columbia UP, 1994, p. 4.
46 Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 216.
conduct with others, can all provide the source for undermining those forms of subjection which tie “the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way”.49

This form of resistance against the creation of imposed identities has influenced the argument put forward by Wendy Brown that was considered in Chapter Three. It will be recalled that Brown argues feminists should move beyond identity claims to instead base political engagement around “postidentities”. For Brown, who follows a Foucauldian line of argument, refusing the imposition of identities means challenging unified claims based on belonging to certain social groups that reflect innate characteristics. In addition, Brown aligns with Foucault to claim that postmodernity “poses the opportunity” for feminists to “decide ‘what we want (to be)’ rather than derive it from normative arguments about ‘who we are.’”50 However, it was identified in Chapter Three that Brown’s opposition to identity, like her challenge to normative positions, is total: feminists need to reject all identity claims because they will necessarily invite closure on diversity and remove the possibility for debate and adaptiveness. As a result, Brown encourages adoption of the postmodern imperative to embrace difference and adopt forms of self-representation and speech that eschew identity. However, it was argued that this resulted in an individualised form of politics and identity, which is at the centre of what Foucault also wants to challenge.

It was argued in Chapter Three that when Brown applies her critique of ressentiment to liberal and neoliberal governance structures, she is better able to detect the problematic tendency for identity claims to become entrenched forms of individualisation, like that outlined by Foucault. Yet her insistence on the need for “postidentities” and “amoral” debate reinforced this predicament. In contrast, Foucault contends that the very processes that regulate the individual can also serve as the “basis from which resistance to government can be articulated”.51 Those discourses that subjugate individuals serve as the material for the creation of alternate subjectivities. Importantly, Foucault sees the creation of these new subjectivities as an inherently ethical process: finding new ways to express subjectivity is the key “political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days”.52 As a result, Brown can be seen to depart from Foucault’s account, which instead contends that identity can still be utilised strategically as a form of resistance and that this resistance is in itself part of political and ethical action. Moreover, Foucault makes it clear that in order to resist the individualisation that is enforced through practices of governmentality, it is also necessary to

50 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 78.
52 Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 216.
challenge the ways in which modern power structures “separate the individual” from “links with others” and a sense of community.\textsuperscript{53} He thus suggests that forms of resistance to the power of government may involve making connections with other subjects in order to refuse the separation that underpins individualisation.

Moreover, due to the polyvalent nature of discourse, Foucault asserts that challenges to identity politics may begin, and occasionally return, to the use of the “same vocabulary” and the “same categories” to speak about those aspects of identity considered to be “deviant” or “other” to the dominant norm.\textsuperscript{54} Foucault argues that by reversing discourses strategically in this way, the very terms for exclusion and disqualification can be brought into question. The example he provides again is the struggle for recognition of homosexuality, which originated in a “demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturality’ be acknowledged”, rather than a straightforward refusal of the ways in which the debate had been framed.\textsuperscript{55} This parallels various tactics used by feminist theory that has revealed the fraudulence of categories such as “human nature” by employing these very categories.\textsuperscript{56} It is only by harnessing these terms and inserting women into them that their exclusionary nature is exposed, for example the initial challenges made by first-wave feminism to the notion of equality, which although presented as a universal concept was revealed to reflect the male standard as the benchmark.

As Foucault argues, claims to truth are the basis of discourses and so counter-truths can be asserted without going outside this schema of truth. It is possible to escape mechanisms of domination that reinforce oppressive truths about an identity but “not by playing a game that was a complete stranger to the game of truth, but in playing it otherwise”.\textsuperscript{57} What this can mean for feminism, then, is that gender difference can be used as a tool in resisting the ways in which women’s oppression has been reconfmed but without necessarily abdicating gendered identities or the usefulness of the category for analysis of power relations and social critique. Resistance within discourse utilises identity as the “starting point” and makes it “function to the limit” but only with the view to “colonizing”, “disengaging” and “cross[ing] beyond it toward other affirmations”.\textsuperscript{58} Foucault’s emphasis on the temporary nature of resistant strategies is vitally important, though, because it recognises how the social construct of gender can contain and restrict the potential for

\textsuperscript{53} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, pp. 211-212.
\textsuperscript{54} Foucault, History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{55} Foucault, History of Sexuality: An Introduction, p.101.
\textsuperscript{56} Diamond and Quinby (eds.), Feminism and Foucault, p. xi.
\textsuperscript{57} Foucault, The Final Foucault, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{58} Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, p. 114-116
new, creative subjectivities for women due to dominant discourses that devalue what is feminine. Nonetheless, gender still has a place within Foucauldian-based strategy and resistance in contributing to what may be alternative affirmations of identity beyond current arrangements of power.

The potential for gender to be used in this way is captured in Judith Butler’s appropriation of Foucault’s work. In Butler’s schema, the female subject is also the product of discursive formations, an agent with the ability to resist imposed identities from within language. Like Foucault, Butler proposes that feminists can seek to subvert identity through what she terms “practices of repetitive signifying”. Butler emphasises that gender often involves an element of performance and hence it is malleable with multiple possibilities for its representation. Such performances do not reflect an authentic gendered self but instead are “fantasised ideals, hence masquerades, never copies of originals or of simple biological foundations”. On this basis, she argues along with Foucault that feminist resistance involves countering the “government’s rigid deployment” of these categories through putting them into strategic operation.

Butler’s performative model of gender disrupts the straightforward attribution of various actions, behaviours, expressions and desires to one sex or another, as based on a core gender division. Butler argues that the alignment between gender and culture, and sex and nature, belies the impact and influence of discursive forces that shape sex as “prior to culture”. In short, sex is engendered by discourse and social practices to the same extent as femininity and masculinity. For Butler, an understanding of “an abiding substance or gendered self” that grounds the unity of sex, gender and desire is implicated in the “normalisation and control” of subjects. On this basis she defends the need for a deconstruction of identity in order to challenge this unity and deems this action to be at the heart of political engagement. This logic of identity formation, and the immanent challenge to its confining nature within the matrix of gender, evokes Foucault’s understanding of subjectivity as a process of subjectivation. For Butler, the source of the subject’s agency is the

60 Butler, Gender Trouble, p. 145.
63 Butler, Gender Trouble, p. 7.
64 As Martin suggests, ‘Butler challenges feminists to cease reproducing the assumption of just two neatly divided genders, but goes further to challenge the foundationalist assumption that two discrete (biological) sexes underlie the social construction of gender. In one of her best-known formulations, Butler argues that “sex will be shown to have been gender all along”; see Martin, ‘Sexual Practice’, p. 101.
66 Butler, Gender Trouble, p. 148.
very norms through which the subject has come to understand him/herself. By viewing the subject as “an effect”, Butler claims that gender can be destabilised and “new, unforeseen possibilities for agency” evoked. The form of this agency is a “reiterative and rearticulatory practice” that corresponds with a Foucauldian understanding of resistance as immanent to power. The potential for resistance, then, lies in undermining any claim to dominance based upon belonging to a gendered identity by utilising normative structures, and repeating norms in “inappropriate contexts” to disturb and subvert their coherence.

**Limitations of Resistance to Identity**

Both Foucault’s and Butler’s tactics of resistance centred on identity and discourse pose some problems for feminist theory. The first difficulty involves Butler’s understanding of discourse. Ann Ferguson, for example, claims that Butler presents discourse as a coherent and self-regulating system that entirely determines the subject and her resistant actions. But while Butler’s conception of discourse initially placed the material body as a mere tool of discursive performance, her later work attempts to combine bodily performances and thinking processes to show how there can be intentional, and critical, use of the body. While Butler reveals how each gendered identity is merely a reproduction or copy of what is broadly understood to be appropriate for a particular gender, she still recognises how gender is also embodied and lived in a very real way by subjects. All subjects must identify to some extent with the code of gender as doing so brings the rewards of social and cultural legitimacy. Furthermore, Butler is indebted to a Foucauldian understanding of discourse, which goes beyond language to encompass those mechanisms that “take a material form in both social and cultural institutions”. In particular, Foucault’s study of punishment and medical practices indicates the physical and practical ramifications of discourses both on subject’s bodies and routines in institutions.

The second problem with Butler’s Foucauldian approach reflects the inherent limitations of a form of resistance that utilises dominant discourses as the basis from which tactics of subversion are

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68 Deveaux, ‘Feminism and Empowerment’, p. 238.
69 Butler, Bodies that Matter, p. 15.
72 This shift is between Gender Trouble and Bodies that Matter and is also noted by Ann Ferguson in ‘Moral Responsibility and Social Change’, p.124.
73 Weedon, Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference, p. 102.
74 Weedon, Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference, p. 125.
75 Weedon, Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference, p. 126.
then launched. This difficulty is reminiscent of the poststructuralist feminist strategy of occupying the space of the feminine as “other” in order to highlight the exclusions of masculine discourse. According to Elaine Jeffreys, “feminists parodying femininity” can similarly tempt a reinforcement of “traditional feminine stereotypes”. As Foucault also made clear in his earlier critique of humanism, which was discussed in the previous chapter, borrowing from the current terms of society to overcome its limitations can rarely be liberating. In Chapter Three, the practice of occupying sites of ‘Otherness’, ‘alterity,’ or marginality were also shown to offer radical potential as the basis for a resistant strategy, but also reconfirm the powerlessness of silenced identities. Poststructuralist feminist accounts, which use the liminal status of the Other too optimistically, reconfirm the importance of a critical voice that does not romanticise or assume immanent resistance for the marginal subject.

Both Foucault and Butler give some credence to this potential problem. While insisting that “resistance always relies upon the situation against which it struggles”, Foucault suggests that, at times, these strategies need to be changed. He even cites the very example of feminists utilising “lack of power” or “oppression” as the basis for resistant identities and counter-strategies, which he sees as having been useful for a time but that “these tools, these weapons” may have now become “obsolete”. Judith Butler also expresses some doubt regarding the effect of parodying gender identity through intentional performances of difference when she states that these practices “can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmic, and mimetic – a failed copy as it were”. In emphasising this distinction, it is possible that the exclusion of marginal genders could be affirmed.

Butler’s answer to this dilemma is to proliferate gender performances, particularly in those contexts where they will be immediately recognised as contradicting assignments of natural gender or sexual divisions of personal attributes. While embracing female forms of power is a strategic move, for example, it is underpinned by a desire to occupy what is distinctive to women based on their experiences of oppression. In contrast, Butler insists that what could be perceived as a failure to “become ‘real’ and embody ‘the natural’” is instead proof of the fact that all “gender enactments”

76 Cooper, Power in Struggle: Feminism, Sexuality and the State, p. 134.
78 Foucault, ‘Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity’, p. 168.
80 Butler, Gender Trouble, p. 146.
81 Butler, Gender Trouble, p.146.
fail “for the very reason that these ontological locales are fundamentally uninhabitable”. While Butler’s approach of mimicry may have the effect of recuperating oppressive notions of gender or sexual difference, it is also possible that it can assist in the critical project of denaturalising femininity.

For Foucault, the main cases in which discursive resistance risks reconfirming the silencing of exclusionary discourses is when it merely sets out to reverse the original arrangement of the dominant discourse. Somewhat confusingly, given his naming of such resistant movements as “reverse discourses”, Foucault insists that recuperation “results from the mere negation of a dominant claim”. The effect of this type of reversal can be to inadvertently reinforce the dominance of the term that is being challenged. An example that illustrates this point is feminist attempts to provide for female agency and empowerment in pornography by recreating the pornographic gaze from the perspective of women. For example, Sara Diamond suggests that feminists could challenge the sexualisation of women’s subordination in pornography by producing female-oriented pornography. She describes some of the tactics that could be employed, such as placing men in vulnerable or exposed positions in place of women and depicting women seeking violent revenge on men, or instead more closely reflecting a ‘feminine’ version of sex and desire by presenting men as sensitive and caring. However, the potential empowerment of women that is supposed to be gained hinges on a simple reversal of roles and positions of power, serving only to reinforce traditional gendered stereotypes. Foucault emphasises that the important element of the polyvalency of discourses and the repressive hypothesis is that the principle of contradiction, or mere reversal of discourses, is not a tool that is immediately resistant. As Sawicki confirms, “reversing power positions without altering relations of power is rarely liberating”.

Foucault’s response to the limitation of this form of resistance is based on a continual modification of resistant approaches. He claims that if at “times such simplifications are necessary” to move debate from “pro” to “contra” this should only be a temporary and provisional gesture. As he explains, “[t]his reversal of values and truths … has been important to the extent that it does not

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82 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.146.
85 Alcoff and Gray, ‘Survivor Discourse’, p.269.
88 Sawicki, ‘Feminism, Foucault and “Subjects”’, p. 171.
stop with simple cheers (long live insanity, delinquency, sex) but allows for new strategies.\textsuperscript{89} Difference, including those differences based on gender, are important sources for resistance in both Butler’s and Foucault’s accounts. Yet in neither account can the use of gender division be a permanent basis for strategy that seeks to undermine dominative forms of power. Rather, “difference is a resource that helps us multiply sources of resistance”.\textsuperscript{90}

**Resistance in the Absence of Good and Evil**

Foucault’s focus on multiple points of resistance responds to the fragmented networks of power that he describes, which operate through discipline, surveillance, governmentality and the production of discourses. However, by shifting away from forms of centralised resistance against a sovereign power or an externalised dominator, Foucault has been charged with proffering a form of resistance that loses its radical impetus. According to Michael Walzer, for example, “by denying the existence of a directing centre” Foucault’s conception of resistance seeks to “rob radical politics of its object” and replace it with a diluted reformism. He claims that the loss of a unified and locatable enemy results in a conceptual schema that is so dispersed that it will inevitably lead to nihilism.\textsuperscript{91}

According to Foucault, underlying this criticism of reformism is a “profoundly inadequate logic” based on an understanding of all struggles as hinging on, and able to be explained by, the function of a dialectic.\textsuperscript{92} When the “logic of contradiction” serves as the “principle of intelligibility and rule of action in political struggle”, local struggles can only be viewed as ineffectual.\textsuperscript{93} When confronting the “massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with ‘dominators’ on one side and ‘dominated’ on the other”, local struggles are seen as easily “reabsorbed” by broader forces unless they target the “weakest link” which will enable the disruption of wider power structures.\textsuperscript{94} For Foucault, this misreads the function of power and the usefulness of local resistances. He believes that the role of theory is to focus on the specific details and mechanisms of power in order to determine what strategies may be appropriate and to build a “strategic knowledge”, rather than broadly and ineffectively challenge global or universal forms of power.\textsuperscript{95} This doesn’t preclude

\textsuperscript{89} Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{90} Diamond and Quinby (eds.), Feminism and Foucault, p. xix.
\textsuperscript{91} Walzer, ‘The Lonely Politics of Michel Foucault’, p. 195.
\textsuperscript{92} Foucault, ‘Power and Strategies’, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{93} Foucault, ‘Power and Strategies’, pp. 143-144.
\textsuperscript{94} Foucault, ‘Power and Strategies’, pp.143-144.
\textsuperscript{95} Foucault, ‘Power and Strategies’, p. 145.
broader changes to entrenched systems of thought or established norms. As Grosz points out, a focus on “marginalised, localised” struggles, while ruling out the possibility of “the Revolution’ smashing patriarchy in one fell swoop”, still acknowledges that “patriarchal relations can be transformed”.96

This focus on the multiple and varying forms of resistance also aligns with the approaches of third-wave feminists who seek to complement an earlier feminist focus on “structural changes”.97 As Fixmer and Wood explain, more recent forms of feminism adopt a Foucauldian approach to resistance to “emphasize the importance – indeed, the necessity – of resistance in everyday life, of fighting back at localized sites where injustices occur”.98 Importantly, what underpins this approach is the conviction that it is often on the level of everyday practices and behaviours that power is felt and needs to be challenged because these are the more persistent forms of dominance that can continue despite changes occurring in broader structures.99 It is important that this attention to local resistance does not mean a lack of attention to maintaining the gains achieved by feminists in challenging systemic oppression and the need for further efforts in this regard, but it is a necessary complementary strategy. This is supported by Foucault when he states that “nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not also changed”.100

Moreover, while Foucault questions the dominant means of understanding and challenging structures of power, he recognises the existence of global formations and the need to resist them through collective effort. Resistance must be as effective, mobile and productive as power is, which means that it can also be “organized and stabilized, it has to come from below and be strategically shared”.101 As the “compatriot of power”, resistance is similarly “multiple and can be integrated in global strategies”.102 Foucault’s wariness about totalising theories thus leads him to avoid proposing resistance as a grand and unified strategy, yet without denying the usefulness of

96 Grosz, ‘Contemporary Theories of Power and Subjectivity’, p. 92.
98 Fixmer and Wood, ‘The Personal is Still Political’, p. 244.
100 Foucault, ‘Body/Power’, p. 60.
coalition or integration of local resistances. For Foucault, not having a predefined “program can be very useful and very original and creative, if it does not mean without proper reflection about what is going on, or without very careful attention to what’s possible”.

For several theorists, however, not having a defined program that is governed by pre-determined normative criteria means that Foucault cannot provide a satisfactory explanation for why people would, or should, resist. It is claimed that no reason can be provided for Foucauldian resistance because even if a particular resistant effort is successful, it will only be replaced with further power relations. As Nikolinakos contends, Foucault’s schema is insufficient because “it is not clear why anyone should be committed to such politics if there is no escape from the grip of power”. At the heart of these criticisms is Foucault’s refusal to commit to a program that aims for liberation or the complete overthrow of dominative power relations. It is a specific form of moral commitment, a teleological one that has a conception of a dominative power as needing to be eradicated in order for resistance to have any purpose. Walzer reflects this need for an ultimate aim for resistance when he asks of Foucault, “resistance in the name of what? for the sake of whom? to what end?”. Without a clearly defined answer, it is claimed that Foucault’s commitment to resistant action is “pure affirmation”.

In contrast to the expectations of these theorists, Foucault’s understanding of the political task of philosophers and of criticism more generally is based instead on continual questioning of what a desirable outcome of resistant action could be. This approach to resistance as an “endless inquiry” does not work from “timeless lessons” learnt from history; it does not “play on timely sympathies” or “settle things once and for all”. Rather, for Foucault engaging in politics means trying to “know with the greatest possible honesty whether the revolution is desirable. It is in exploring this terrible mole-hill that politics runs the danger of caving in”.

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103 Diamond and Quinby (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault*, p. xiii.
104 Foucault, ‘Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity’, p. 172.
105 As highlighted in the previous chapter, Fraser and Habermas are key proponents of this perspective on Foucault’s normative foundations, which apply equally to Foucault’s position on resistance. See: Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, in particular Chapter 10; Fraser, ‘Foucault on Modern Power’, pp. 17-34. See also: McCarthy, ‘The Critique of Impure Reason’, pp. 121-148; McLaren, ‘Foucault and the Subject of Feminism’, pp. 109-129; Walzer, ‘The Lonely Politics of Michel Foucault’.
110 Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, p. 122.
Therefore, the predominant response to these critiques from commentators is that Foucault’s interest in the study of resistance is to attempt to understand how it functions and the specific points at which it can alter and modify the operation of power. For Foucault, because both power and resistance are inescapable, neither require a normative justification of the kind that will allow for foundational claims to validity and an assessment of whether or not subjects resist “with reason”. There is “little point” in subjecting Foucault’s understanding of resistance to the criteria of \textit{a priori} moral commitments, as it will necessarily fail. As Paul Patton observes, within Foucault’s schema, those subject to relations of domination will inevitably be led to oppose them. It is not a question of advocating such resistance, of praising autonomy or blaming domination as respective exemplars of a good or evil for all, but simply of understanding why such resistance does occur.

Foucault’s indebtedness to Nietzsche persists with his study of resistance, as the motivation to resist power is a reflection of the ongoing and inevitable will-to-power that all subjects share, which includes the “will to resist constraints imposed by other powers” as an inevitable “condition of all living things”. For Foucault, Nietzsche’s attempt to study the psychology of power and subject formation without the traditional trappings of theoretical or moral presupposition allows for an understanding that may challenge our assumptions and so the very function of power. In the previous chapter, this alignment with Nietzsche enables Foucault to alleviate the specific moral opposition to domination as evil that defines feminist approaches to power and generates an understanding of identity that fosters \textit{ressentiment}.

In his approach to resistance, Foucault also follows Nietzsche by emphasising the impossibility for normative conditions to issue only from within an opposition to power as evil, because there is no stance of complete powerlessness to embrace or defend. Habermas contends that this is key to Foucault’s inability to provide normative foundations for his critique of dominative power and the conduct of resistance. He claims that Foucault has no moral grounding because he rejects, albeit with “with good reason”, the conferring “upon the other of reason the status that he has denied it”, namely as the other of power that occupies the “unspoken” purity or “primordial vitality” of powerlessness. For Habermas, by refusing to “take the side” against power, relinquished after

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111 Hindess, \textit{Discourses of Power}, p. 150.
112 Hindess, \textit{Discourses of Power}, p. 150.
115 Habermas, \textit{The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity}, p. 286. Habermas is citing Foucault from ‘Power and Sex’, p. 158.
Madness and Civilisation, Foucault precludes the possibility for any normative engagement with domination as the basis for critique.

Foucault's Ethical Critique

However, I contend that in his understanding of resistance, Foucault does not simply relinquish any claim to a “right side” as Habermas alleges.116 Instead, he suggests a process of undoing the mechanisms that lead to such designations. Theorists of power can still ‘take sides’ but temporarily and only through a process of constant questioning. For Foucault, “one must pass to the other side – but by trying to turn off these mechanisms which cause the appearance of two separate sides, by dissolving the false unity, the illusory ‘nature’ of this other side with which we have taken sides. This is where the real work begins”.117 In Nietzschean terms, a morality that cannot acknowledge its own complicity in power is bound to be regressive in that it defines itself only in opposition to power. According to Aladjern, it is this very reluctance to stage an opposition to power as a principled position that gives Foucault’s account its unique critical potential.118

Unlike Habermas, Foucault argues that to engage in the process of critique is not to know from the outset that certain practices or conduct are problematic.119 Instead, his basis for critique derives from questioning the very oppositional foundations upon which moral judgements have been made. As he states, “It is a matter of pointing out on what kind of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest”.120 This mode of critique aligns well with a feminist approach that similarly interrogates the assumptions that underpin gendered roles and subsequent allocations of social and economic power that have been accepted historically. This kind of critique is essential for radical transformation because, for Foucault, change can only become possible by altering established ways of thinking and challenging the grounds upon which assumptions are based.121

In this task, Foucault borrows from an aspect of Kantian philosophy. For Foucault, Immanuel Kant’s essay ‘What is Enlightenment’ attempted to capture the important question of what defines our experiences and ways of knowing in the current moment: what Foucault characterises as an

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116 Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, p. 282.
117 Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, pp. 120-121.
120 Foucault, ‘Practicing Criticism’, p. 154.
121 Foucault, ‘Practicing Criticism’, p. 155.
“ontology of the present”. According to Foucault’s reading, Kant’s attempt differed from the Cartesian search for the trans-historical subject ‘I’ in that his project was determined by an interest in what constitutes the subject “in a very precise moment of history”. It is an “analysis of both us and our present”. As Moya Lloyd suggests, Foucault’s use of Kant is a means for him to further embellish his critical approach and not, as is assumed by other theorists, as an adoption of the broader overarching principles and concepts of Kantian thought such as “progress, autonomy, emancipation, rationality”.

In his later work, Foucault substitutes Kant’s focus on universal morality with an understanding of the “Enlightenment as an attitude: a mode of asking questions about the constitution of the historical present”. Foucault’s rejection of the concept of human nature also remains consistent in this move, as the self-formation of the subject is still embedded in the surrounding social context and created from existing discursive conditions. As Lois McNay argues, Foucault continues to view the subject as the result of “historical and practical” conditions, rather than the Kantian determination of the subject as “ontological in a transcendental sense”. What is important in Foucault’s utilisation of Kant’s approach is his recognition that there is a necessary relationship between critique, the formation of the subject and the possibility for resistance. The critical stance of the subject “has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time an historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them”.

Foucault thus views his notion of critique as the basis for seeing “politics as an ethics”, whereby ethical considerations are governed by the constitution of subjectivity and how the subject resists against subjectivation. Understanding the function of power and the desirability of different forms of resistance must always remain an “experimental work”, guided by the “conditions of possibility

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123 Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, p. 216.


126 McNay, Foucault and Feminism, p. 144.


necessary for subjects to change their identities”.

The possibility for change and development of this subject is central to Foucault’s account of resistance as he wants to retain both the capacity for ongoing, critical engagement as fundamental to the practice of resistance, but without confining the subject to any predetermined standard or fixed approach.

According to Charles Taylor, Foucault’s questioning approach to resistance within the context of practice is inadequate because it cannot determine progression towards more freedom or greater truth. For Taylor, making decisions on what is effective through practice is ineffectual if there is a denial of the need for progression, or an overt means to gauge “more” progressive “truths”. While Habermas rejects what he terms Foucault’s “arbitrary partisanship” on the grounds that there are no fixed moral criteria by which to judge the value of actions, Taylor questions the corresponding absence of a central principle like “truth or the good in which to situate moral claims”.

The main divergence between the expectations of Taylor and Habermas, and the methodology of Foucault, lies in the interpretive procedure of making moral judgements within the context of action. Yet the principle of subjects cultivating their own judgements is actually a shared philosophical position. In fact, Taylor shares a similar “conception of ethical discourse” with Foucault and Nietzsche, while disagreeing with the interpretive framework it is housed in. The Nietzschean view of the person as a “valuating animal” corresponds with Taylor’s belief that the capacity of a subject to undertake moral evaluations is what defines the self as human. Moreover, Taylor’s subject participates in making evaluations that change over the course of time and he describes this process in similar ways; Nietzsche’s “transvaluation of values” is utilised by Taylor to explain his own concept of “reasoning in transitions”. However, “while Taylor treats Nietzsche as one who is engaged in an ethical enterprise, he consistently denies that standing to Foucault”.

It is argued, then, that this dismissal of Foucault’s project fails to recognise how Foucault’s subject is the centre of his ‘ethical enterprise’, as the governing agent of moral judgement and the chief mechanism for the valuing of different actions. The very contradictions within a social subject

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132 Connolly, Identity/Difference, p. 223. As Connolly also argues in defence of Foucault, “it makes as much preliminary sense to treat ‘life’ and ‘difference’ as fugitive ethical sources to be cultivated in relation to the prevailing terms of cultural organization as it does to treat ‘God’ or the ‘embodied self’”, p. 223.
134 Taylor, Sources of the Self, p. 72.
135 Connolly, Identity/Difference, p. 224.
provide the capacity for resistance because in deciphering which modes of being are acceptable, the subject makes moral decisions on the basis of previous valuations and their relative success or failure. For Foucault, criticism of resistant actions, while not carried out on pre-determined grounds, is not arbitrary. As Foucault insists with his discussion of identity, subjects realise what were previously thought to be ‘truths’ about themselves only by virtue of hindsight – that is, as they enter into other discourses that may articulate an element of their subjectivity previously ignored or misrepresented. These ‘new truths’ cannot be seen to be more truthful, however, as they too will be superseded or altered through the creation of still newer discourses or ‘truths.’

Of key importance is that Foucault’s subject is not “the same kind” of subject in all relationships because as the “games of truth” alter so does the form in which the subject represents itself.\textsuperscript{136} Using Nietzsche’s phrasing, Foucault argues that the subject is not “primarily or always identical to itself”, which means that “the only Being vouchsafed for us is changing ... it is involved in relationships”\textsuperscript{137} Many of Foucault’s resistant strategies are, therefore, based on challenging the process of subjectivation, which must necessarily mean refusing to “base one’s subjectivity, that multidimensional relationship (to others, to things, and to ourselves) on any science, nor on any previously established doctrine”\textsuperscript{138}

**An Interpretive Model of Normativity**

For Foucault, then, attention to differences must take priority over a unified moral goal in analysis of power relations because these conditions maintain and encourage the survival of the reflexive subject. As values are viewed as “internal to types of individual and social being, not independent of them”, they are widely divergent and hence, normative grounding or universal “criteria of evaluation” cannot be imposed from without\textsuperscript{139} As Paul Patton argues, Foucault’s subject is created through power relations and endowed with power as capacity:

> This power is only realised in and through the diversity of human bodily capacities and forms of subjectivity. Because it is a ‘subject’ which is only present in various different forms, or alternatively because the powers of human beings can be exercised in infinite different ways, this subject will not provide a foundation for normative judgement of the kind that would satisfy Fraser or Habermas: it will not provide any basis for a single universal answer to the question, ‘Why ought domination to be resisted?’\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{136} Foucault, *The Final Foucault*, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{139} Patton, ‘Foucault’s Subject of Power’, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{140} Patton, ‘Foucault’s Subject of Power’, p. 61.
Foucault thus follows Nietzsche’s lead to insist that the interpretative practice of making moral determinations is what constitutes the very field of morality. As Nietzsche states, “there are no moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of phenomena”.\(^{141}\) This transvalutative quality of moral decisions – how they alter over time and through each individual’s interpretation – is of central importance to Foucault’s resistance. According to Nietzsche, such an approach to epistemology encourages the thinker to “look now out of this window, now out of that”, which guards against “settling down” into a philosophical position that forms the lens through which all action is interpreted.\(^{142}\) This doesn't prevent critical engagement or judgement being made, however, on what may be acceptable or unacceptable forms of resistance to domination. Comparison with past actions can allow for a critical assessment of resistance, but this critique will always remain “immanent to the regime of discourse/power whose claims it seeks to adjudicate”.\(^{143}\) Subjects can and will say “yes” or “no” to those “claims made upon them by others” by virtue of criteria that are internal to the specifics and complexities of their situation.\(^{144}\)

Of key importance for feminist use of Foucault’s approach to resistance is that Foucault insists on the need for continual critique of dominant structures and actions against them.\(^{145}\) As he asserts, the “ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger”.\(^{146}\) It is an approach to domination and resistance against it that “leads not to apathy but to a hyper and pessimistic activism” governed by a belief that because everything is potentially dangerous, “we always have something to do”.\(^{147}\) It was argued in the previous chapter that while Foucault forfeits a commitment to an emancipatory ideal and an explicit normative framework that opposes domination as evil, he maintains an opposition to domination that can be interpreted as a normative position that it is morally bad.\(^ {148}\) By dismantling the opposition between ‘evil’ domination and ‘good’ liberation, it was argued that Foucault’s schema still enables feminists to unmask and challenge domination as a bad form of power with negative effects. Foucault’s continual unmasking of

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\(^{141}\) Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 78.  
\(^{142}\) Nietzsche, *The Will-to-power*, p. 221.  
\(^{145}\) Michael Kelly argues that the main element of disagreement between Habermas and Foucault is not simply that one offers critique and the other fails to but that while Habermas insists on the need to ‘separate critique and power’ as critique must ‘hold power in abeyance’, Foucault seeks to show how critique is ‘just one of many discursive practices tied to power’. See M. Kelly, *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault and Habermas Debate*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1994, pp. 2-3.  
\(^{147}\) Foucault, ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics’, p.256.  
dominative power and his dedication to revealing the negative effects of oppressive discourses on subjugated knowledges reflects this consistent position that domination is bad.

I argue that within Foucault’s approach to resistance, then, moral distinctions between good and bad, borrowed from the master morality, can continue to be made without the determination of power as “evil, ugly, sterile, and dead”. Foucault refuses to conceive of resistant struggles as ‘counter-hegemonic’, or necessarily against a unified or common enemy which is pre-defined as evil, as this approach will quash the diversity of resistant actions under broad-sweeping norms of ideal engagement. Yet his account is not without ethical grounding, rather questions about whether strategies are positive or negative, good or bad, are seen as “practical not theoretical issues” that can be answered and “justified in the context of practice”. It is possible within this framework for subjects to make their own normative determinations of what actions are bad, or unacceptable, and what may be good, or acceptable, in the context of resistance. The practice and conduct of resistance is not carried out as an ‘amoral’ exercise, but relies upon the judgements of each subject: to guide his/her own ethical engagement with domination and resistance against it.

This approach to making normative judgements regarding resistance reflects Nietzsche’s refusal to determine a moral code that can be applied universally. According to Nietzsche, “differing moralities” influence the course of our actions. Resistance, like any form of action, is “many-coloured” and never “unequivocal” but rather will “shine alternately in different colours”. For Nietzsche, “only if mankind possessed a universally recognised goal would it be possible to propose ‘thus and thus is the right course of action.’ As no such general goal can be identified, or any one goal that could be ascertained would be variously and contradictorily defined, it is “irrational and trivial” to impose such a demand on theory. In following this Nietzschean approach, the chief criticism of Foucault’s account of resistance from feminist theorists, in particular, is that he is unable to specify “what sort of change is desirable” and

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149 Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, p. 282.
151 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 128-129.
152 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 128-129.
154 Welch supports this position when she argues that ‘Universal denunciations of systems of oppression are a dangerous evasion of the relationship of power/knowledge, of the fragility of discourse ... It is oppressive to “free” people if their own history and culture do not serve as the primary sources of the definition of their freedom’. See ‘The Truth of Liberation Theology’, p. 217.
so has no goal to aim for nor benchmark against which resistance can be measured.\textsuperscript{155} However, even Nietzsche makes a concession toward the possibility of setting a goal to guide moral decision-making, that provides some support to Foucault's moral opposition to domination as bad. Nietzsche claims that “to recommend a goal to mankind is something quite different: the goal is then thought of as something which \textit{lies in our discretion}”.\textsuperscript{156} Foucault gives his clearest indication of a recommendation or goal that could guide resistant action in his statement that relations of power need to be “played with a minimum of domination”.\textsuperscript{157} It was argued in the previous chapter that Foucault's desire to limit domination is not an attempt to rescue freedom as a ‘good’ because, according to Foucault's schema, power will always exist where there is freedom: their complementary relation precludes the reign of one over another.\textsuperscript{158} A recommendation to minimise domination suggests, though, that resistance should aim to put limits on domination in those cases where it restricts both the capacity for resistant action, the free-play of power relations and the active creation of new identities.

Nonetheless, within Foucault’s schema of resistance, Foucault gives greater emphasis to Nietzsche’s condition that any such goal for resistance or recommendation must lie “in our discretion” than he does to his own broader commitment to minimising domination.\textsuperscript{159} Both Foucault, and Judith Butler following him, believe that establishing normative conditions prior to engagement in resistance contravenes the way in which norms are created through action and interaction between subjects.\textsuperscript{160} Importantly, Foucault’s reflexive subject provides the impetus for the higher priority he gives to the subject’s own determinations of morality over his normative recommendation to minimise dominative power. His clear priority is to ensure that resistances can be adaptive, mobile and unconstrained by supporting the potential for change in his subject. Foucault thus makes suggestions for the conduct of resistance that reinforce his opposition to domination as a bad but not evil form of power, but he falls short of making this the basis for an explicit goal of resistance.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{155} Fraser, ‘Foucault: A Young Conservative?’, p. 43; Fraser, ‘Foucault on Modern Power’, p. 29.
\item\textsuperscript{156} Nietzsche, \textit{Daybreak}, p. 108.
\item\textsuperscript{157} Foucault, \textit{The Final Foucault}, pp. 18-19.
\item\textsuperscript{158} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, pp. 220-222.
\item\textsuperscript{159} Nietzsche, \textit{Daybreak}, p. 108.
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A Masterly Approach to Resistance

The key question for feminist theorists, then, is whether Foucault’s approach to resistance provides an adequate foundation for critical moral challenges against domination. While moral determinations regarding domination and resistance against it are not precluded, it is only through struggle and within practice that the usefulness and value of resistant action can be determined, and not before. This perspective has some validity in terms of feminist approaches to political strategy. As Bickford contends, “[a]ccusations about what is dangerous and what is appropriate for feminists to engage in can serve to stifle the vitality and risk-taking that a critical political and intellectual movement needs to flourish”.\(^\text{161}\) Strategies may become “outdated or even destructive” and so the focus of change and the action chosen will alter according to the specific historical conditions: what is understood as a good or successful strategy may become outdated, ineffective or even dangerous.\(^\text{162}\) Importantly for feminist approaches to domination and empowerment, Foucault’s approach does not foreclose multiple interpretations of what might be good or bad forms of resistance to domative power.

The benefits of Foucault’s methodology of critique and his interpretative model of normativity is that it affords the feminist subject expansive control and involvement in the determination of morality. His approach to resistance and the methodology of critique that underpins it relies upon his notion of a subject who is constantly changing and is complicit in power as well as subject to it. Foucault refuses to assert a normative framework that might constrain the choices of this subject. In this he relies upon “the participant-observer’s expert knowledge of the points of leverage that lie within our contemporary culture”.\(^\text{163}\) The voices of subjects who have direct experience of oppression and the negative effects of domination are needed in Foucault’s account to inform judgements of what may be acceptable or unacceptable forms of resistance. Importantly, for Foucault, this means that we must insist on hearing from those who have been subjugated by dominant discourses because they have so much set up against them to silence them, not because they offer a view that is better because outside of power.\(^\text{164}\) This is an empowering position for the feminist subject as it recognises the relevance of the experience of power from above and below, as well as the productive conflict that emerges from more complex positioning in relation to power.

\(^\text{161}\) Bickford, ‘Why We Listen to Lunatics’, p. 17.
\(^\text{162}\) Oliver, ‘Fractual Politics’, p. 187.
\(^\text{163}\) Olsen, ‘Genealogy, Cryptonormativity, Interpretation’, p. 256.
\(^\text{164}\) Foucault, ‘Is it Useless to Revolt?’, p. 8.
It is also possible to see how Foucault’s account of resistance avoids the pitfalls of positing a choice to feminists between political engagement devoid of any normativity and the reactive moral judgement of *ressentiment* that arises from a pre-determination of what is evil. Foucault’s understanding of the interpretive process of determining moral decisions and his notion of critique both reinforce the conviction that normativity is integral to the formation of the subject and to political engagement through resistance. By avoiding the principle oppositions of a pre-defined morality with evil conceived from the outset, Foucault’s account enables a more subtle and flexible process of ethical engagement. Just like his unmasking of dominative power, Foucault’s account of resistance does not insist on the severing of morality from politics but rather presents resistant action as an ethical practice: the political is not, as shown in Chapter Three, a domain that must involve “amoral” contests as Wendy Brown insists.

However, in his insistence that moral determinations can only be made within the context of practice and through the application of resistant actions, Foucault’s position aligns with the account of Brown by leaning more heavily on Nietzsche’s methodology than he does when defining his opposition to domination. It was argued in Chapter Four that Foucault explicitly deviates from Nietzsche and the master morality by refusing a position of neutrality towards domination because he retains a commitment to unmasking dominative power and its bad effects. It was contended that this alternative moral position also involves a rejection of a masterly approach because it acknowledges the harm caused by domination. While Foucault follows Nietzsche’s master in debunking the moral dichotomy between good and evil in his analysis of power and domination, he seeks to minimise bad dominative practices. In this, he exhibits a greater compassion for the slave than is apparent in either Nietzsche’s account or in the behaviour of his master. The master’s distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ is drawn upon, however, what is deemed to be bad by Foucault is conceived in recognition of the negative effects that domination has on the slave and hence, Foucault gives greater credence than Nietzsche to the predicament of the slave.

It is argued, however, that this careful balance between the master’s discrediting of domination as evil and the slave’s conviction that it nonetheless has negative effects, is not upheld by Foucault in his understanding of how moral value is determined through the practice of resistance. Within his account of resistance, Foucault adopts an approach to ethical judgement that aligns with the

165 As Olsen says, Foucault’s account is ‘normative in a rich and fertile sense’. See ‘Genealogy, Cryptonormativity, Interpretation’, p. 255.
master’s mode of engagement: moral designations that certain behaviours are bad can be issued by subjects only in the context of practice and not beforehand. As Nietzsche’s explication of the master morality makes clear, the master considers what is bad through action and engagement with others: it is a judgement that is immanent in power. It is not the starting point of the master morality like evil is in the slave morality, and as a result it is not a presupposed frame or prism through which actions are then judged. While it is possible for Foucault’s reflexive subject to make a determination that a particular form of resistance is bad while resistant action is being carried out, there is no generalised agreement that it will be measured against Foucault’s recommendation that it must aim to minimise dominative power. I have argued that Foucault provides the potential for this to occur in line with his opposition to domination as morally bad, but that this commitment bends to the conditions of a Nietzschean recommendation; individual discretion and choice must be prioritised over the setting of an explicit or shared goal.

Moreover, in giving the greatest priority to his subject, as the centre and purpose of resistance, Foucault can be seen to accord with the other key feature of a masterly approach to normativity; the subject is the origin of moral judgement. It will be recalled that in the master morality, all moral value derives from the ‘good’ masterly or noble subject, who is the origin for any subsequent moral determination about other identities or actions. Unlike the slave, who starts with a condemnation of the master as evil, the master is self-assured and does not need any support to challenge domination with strength. Instead, all that is associated with the master is deemed to be good: the masterly subject determines what is bad only subsequently and then combats it directly. Foucault’s approach is one of ethical engagement and ongoing critique of domination, both of which contribute a moral dimension to his focus on resistance, but his highest priority is given to protection of the possibilities for his subject as the vehicle for resistant action. His insistence on preserving his subject’s capacity for the power to resist and adapt its challenges to domination reveals where Foucault places moral value: his subject is the source of moral judgement as it is in the master morality. Implicitly, then, in Foucault’s favouring of an interpretative approach to resistance, he replicates the master’s mode of moral judgement.

This prioritising of the subject as the origin in moral assessment is not necessarily problematic for feminist accounts of power and subsequent approaches to resistance. In fact, as I argue in the following section, basing determinations of what is valued as ‘good’ on the feminist subject as the premise for engagement, particularly when that subject is recognised as both created by and complicit in power, has great potential for feminist politics. In addition, deciding on what are good
or bad forms of resistance through practice, and not before, also means that multiple interpretations and diverse approaches to resistance can be fostered.

However, because Foucault’s subject is never the same kind of subject in any situation or power relation, there is the very real possibility that his approach to resistance risks returning feminist engagement to a form of fractured individualism. Foucault’s mode of engagement with resistance limits normative judgements to statements that issue from the location of one individual – like Wendy Brown’s formulation of feminist claims based on ‘what I want for us’ considered in Chapter Three – without any clear grounds for a shared commitment. As Foucault makes clear, his priority is that resistance can be adaptive and so he “would rather open up spaces in which people can make their own decisions, form their own movements, and reach their own objectives”.  

判gements on what forms of resistance are good or bad must be left to each subject.  

For feminist accounts of power, the forming of coalitions and the need to find some “commonality within the context of difference” is an essential component of effective strategy and engagement with domination.  

Amy Allen claims, for example, that Foucault’s approach to resistance is inadequate for the feminist project because it demonstrates a “blindness to relations of solidarity”.  

Tellingly, even though Brown encourages feminists to embrace “a politics as thoroughly Nietzschean in its wariness of truth as a postmodern politics must be”, she also expresses concern that a Nietzschean solution to the moral and epistemological “nakedness” of postmodernity may be “excessively individualised”.  

The unbridgeable chasms between subjects encouraged by postmodern imperatives that require each subject to represent themselves and their own unique moral position, was shown in Chapter Three to foster unbridgeable distance between subjects. With entirely discrete stories, each person’s unique location can never be experienced first-hand and so can never really be understood by others. It was argued that this insistence can serve to promote a form of ignorance of other subjects as Not Me that is a vital ingredient allowing ressentiment to flourish.

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167 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 417, n. 20, n. 21, citing Foucault, ‘Non au sexe roi’.  
168 Anzaldúa, cited in Fixmer and Wood, ‘The Personal is Still Political’, p. 239.  
171 Brown, ‘Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures’, p. 78: she claims that “Postidentity public positioning requires an outlook that discerns structures of dominance within diffused and disorientating orders of power, thereby stretching toward a more politically potent analysis than that which our individuated and fragmented existences can generate”, p. 80. I have suggested that this positioning is possible in Foucault’s approach to domination but not made explicit in his account of resistance.
Moreover, despite her concerns about the risks of Nietzsche’s individualised approach, Brown also advocates that feminists must engage with power in more masterly than slavish fashion by learning “to contest domination with strength”. As I have argued, Brown’s approach involves operating in the postmodern realm of political engagement without any normative basis for opposing domination or forms of resistant action that seek to perpetuate it. Instead, as Rebecca Stringer contends, Brown insists it is feminists who must act with more agency – who must, in effect, become more masterly. Like Foucault, she assumes that the feminist subject can engage in resistance against dominative power like the master; unburdened by oppressive constraints. Both expect masterly behaviour from the subject; a capacity to engage without a moral framework to guide action and buffer, or support, the subject.

On the other hand, theorists like Nancy Fraser and Martha Nussbaum argue that feminist approaches to power and resistance require a pre-determined moral grounding that more closely resembles the slave morality because it seeks to condemn domination from the outset; its process of engagement is “rooted in a claim to validity”. For Fraser, Foucault’s schema supports resistance against domination but this is insufficient if it cannot also provide an agreed moral foundation from the outset. Similarly Nussbaum claims that the very fact that a reader may find Foucault or Judith Butler’s writings liberating or encouraging or that they may supplement them “implicitly with a normative theory of human equality or dignity”, is problematic. She argues that a requirement of theory is that it should be able to provide for the normative basis to say that “you cannot simply resist as you please, for there are norms of fairness, decency, and dignity that entail this is bad behaviour” and more pointedly; “we have to articulate these norms”. For Nussbaum, then, a shared and pre-determined normative framework that first determines what is morally reprehensible needs to be applied to Foucault and Butler’s approach in order to make them appropriate for feminist purposes.
Beyond a Master and Slave Morality

A feminist appropriation of Foucauldian resistance thus seems to require a choice to be made between accepting the transvaluative approach to normativity, which supports the changing and diverse nature of the subject, or reasserting a pre-determined moral framework, which assumes a shared understanding of what action should be morally condemned at the outset. The first approach requires feminists give up a shared moral opposition to domination, while the second risks undermining the ethical basis for Foucault’s approach that supports the potential capacity of the subject to determine and challenge norms through practice.179 There are clear limitations to both theoretical options for the feminist engagement with resistance and, in addition, neither approach in isolation can fully capture what is required in a feminist understanding of power. Preserving the subject’s capacity for power to, as Foucault attempts to do, is important to redress the absence of this form of power in the accounts of feminist domination theorists and also enhance how it is understood in the accounts of feminist empowerment theorists. Foucault’s conception of power to reinforces the dispositional nature of this capacity and provides an alternative means for feminists to challenge the processes of subjectivation that have been imposed through dominant and gendered discourses as part of an understanding of empowerment. Of equal importance, though, is the need to account for power with other subjects, which was disassembled in postmodern approaches to the subject and precluded in the masterly approach to engagement in resistance.

It is suggested, then, that feminist approaches to resistance may be better served by developing further the position that Foucault starts in his critique of dominative power and yet does not take to its logical conclusion in his account of resistance: namely, a refusal to settle into either a masterly or slavish approach. What is identified as providing the basis to move beyond the mode of engagement of either the master or slave is a strengthening of two key elements of Foucault’s account. First, it is suggested that the shifting and changing nature of Foucault’s subject, which provides for the capacity to resist, is only one aspect of Foucault’s subject that should be given prominence in a feminist appropriation of his account of resistance. It is important that Foucault’s subject is also explicitly recognised as being a subject who takes accountability for complicity in power; is committed to ethical conduct in relation to others; is capable of forms of power to that enhance the power of others; and is a subject created by power but also subject to the bad, limiting

179 Fiona Webster makes a similar point about the division between the work of Seyla Benhabibi and Judith Butler: see Webster, ‘The Politics of Sex and Gender’, p. 9.
effects of dominative power. It is contended that it is these characteristics that bring Foucault’s subject into closer alignment with the feminist subject and can bolster his normative engagement with resistance. I argue that this subject, which reflects both the feminist subject and Nietzsche’s sovereign individual, should be the point of origin of a more explicit conception of the ‘good’ subject that can guide feminist moral engagement with resistance. Second, I contend that Foucault’s recommendation that domination be minimised is entirely compatible with this more developed conception of the subject and needs to be fortified through this subject as an explicit moral stance. Doing so enables Foucault’s opposition to domination as a morally bad form of power with negative effects to be reconfirmed but, without undermining the potential for modification and change of resistant action through practice.

As Rebecca Stringer and other theorists have pointed out, it is important to Nietzsche’s genealogy, and I have argued to Foucault’s concept of power and domination, that the master and slave are viewed as ideal-types that “designate neither pure nor immutable states”. As Nietzsche also emphasises in Beyond Good and Evil, both the master and slave moralities can coexist, though in “harsh juxtaposition – even within the same man, within one soul”. Of key importance to forging a normative position between the two opposed moralities is that Foucault’s subject is not the autonomous and dominant master who seeks only to enhance his own power, and nor is it the inverted good and powerless subject of the slave morality who is defined in opposition to the master. Instead, Foucault’s subject develops through power, is shaped by domination but is also a complicit and involved participant: it is an achieved subject formed through power who is more closely aligned with Nietzsche’s sovereign individual than either the master or slave.

By considering ressentiment as a process of identity and moral development, rather than a diagnosis of an “eradicable ‘state’”, Stringer argues that it is possible to see how ressentiment can be a creative process that ends with a more evolved and balanced subject that combines elements of both the master and the slave. Nietzsche’s slave is a more complex being than the noble: the slave must create an identity, where the noble’s is self-apparent and unquestioned. While the noble has brute strength and a capacity for self-determination, the slave must resort to subtler, derived, 

181 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 176.
forms of identity and power. While Nietzsche praises the master’s capacity to repel ressentiment, he also expresses a reluctant acknowledgement of the intellect or cleverness that lies behind the slave’s moral inversion.\textsuperscript{183} According to Stringer, ressentiment may have enabled feminism to develop “the reflexive desire for strength over weakness, the ability to posit goals and assume politicised agency, the ability to assume responsibility for power, the ability to generate ethics”.\textsuperscript{184} All of these qualities are more likely to develop in the subject who has been complicit in ressentiment but also exposed to the effects of ressentiment through the ‘bad conscience’.

It is contended that all of the qualities that Stringer suggests may be evident in a feminist subject who has experienced ressentiment, and which evolve in the sovereign individual of Nietzsche’s schema, are also essential to Foucault’s subject. Unlike both the master and the slave, the subject who has experienced ressentiment and suffered the effects of the ‘bad conscience’, is able to recognise complicity in power, accept accountability and develop the capacity for ethical engagement with others. The positive possibilities that the ‘bad conscience’ provides for the master is through the psychological processes of the ‘bad conscience’, whereby the internalisation of guilt allows the master to develop a conscience that was “originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes” into a fully developed sense of accountability with “depth, breadth and height”.\textsuperscript{185} Nietzsche makes it clear that the ‘bad conscience’ is “an illness ... but an illness as pregnancy is an illness.”\textsuperscript{186} As the master becomes “calculable” through the “morality of mores and the social straightjacket”, Nietzsche explains that then he is able to “stand security for his own future, which is what one who promises does!”\textsuperscript{187} The autonomous, self-interested master who thrives on holding power over others thus becomes the more measured sovereign individual with the capacity to make commitments to other subjects. As Nietzsche says of the sovereign man, who can make promises to others, there is a “proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of responsibility, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate, [which] has in his case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct”.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{183} Nietzsche states that the man of ressentiment is likely to become ‘cleverer’ than the noble, in part because the slave honours cleverness to a greater degree as it is a faculty relied upon in the absence of strength. See Genealogy of Morals, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{184} Stringer, “A Nietzschean Breed”, p. 269.
\textsuperscript{185} Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, pp. 84-85.
\textsuperscript{186} Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{187} Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, pp. 58-59.
\textsuperscript{188} Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, p. 60.
Nietzsche’s sovereign individual signals what is to become essential to Foucault’s subject and aligns with feminist visions of subjectivity: an ability to connect with other subjects and to take accountability through exercising power over oneself. Foucault makes it clear that in order to resist the individualisation that is enforced through practices of governmentality, it is also necessary to challenge the ways in which modern power structures “separate the individual” from “links with others” and a sense of community.\textsuperscript{189} He suggests that forms of resistance to the power of government may involve making connections with other subjects in order to refuse the separation that underpins individualisation. Importantly, when Foucault notes the diversity of his subject, which is in constant flux, he attributes this to interactions between subjects. As he says, “the only Being vouchsafed for us is changing … it is involved in relationships”.\textsuperscript{190}

Foucault’s conception of power as action upon the action of others is important here to demonstrate how his subject exercises capacity in a manner that can work in conjunction with others. As Paul Patton points out, “communication, reciprocity and mutual recognition all count as power in Foucault’s sense of the word”.\textsuperscript{191} In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated how Foucault challenges the dyadic conception of power upheld by feminist domination theorists as he insists that interaction between subjects that involve influence or persuasion should still be seen as forms of power even though these do not involve the overcoming of another subject’s resistance or power to act. Instead, Foucault makes it clear that one subject’s power to achieve a goal or undertake an action does not necessarily limit or adversely affect another. This points to the possibility for overcoming the separation of individualised identities as one subject exerting power to can also “enhance the capacity of others.”\textsuperscript{192} As Patton argues, there is “nothing in Foucault’s concept of power as action on the action of others that rules out or fails to appreciate the role of communicative and reciprocal relations based on mutual recognition in the constitution of the political autonomy of citizens”.\textsuperscript{193}

This understanding of power to is also fundamental to the conceptions of female power and the empowered feminist subject that were considered in Chapter Two. Feminist empowerment theorists demonstrate how power to, as a dispositional capacity, is far more than an individual property that exists in isolation from social relations. These theorists challenge the assumption of

\textsuperscript{189} Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, pp. 211-212.
\textsuperscript{191} Patton, ‘Foucault and the Strategic Model of Power’, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{192} Patton, ‘Foucault and the Strategic Model of Power’, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{193} Patton, ‘Foucault and the Strategic Model of Power’, p. 18.
feminist domination theorists, which was carried through to postmodern intersections, that all forms of power must automatically degenerate into power over others when considered within the context of relationships or broader political spheres. What feminist empowerment theorists offer is an understanding that power with others is a vital component of feminist political strategy and resistance. While the basis for claims to a community may be more diverse than was presented in second-wave feminist accounts, forfeiting the possibility for communal forms of power does not serve a feminist approach to power and domination either. In addition, while empowerment theorists were seen to emphasise connection with others over the individual capacity of female subjects (and the potential benefits of ‘male’ defined forms of power) they did redress the imbalance of overly individualised notions of subjectivity. The relational self, based around an ethic of care for others, ensures that empathy is prioritised as fundamental when we interact with known subjects and those whom we engage with in political and normative negotiations.

The relational feminist subject is compatible, and further supported, with Foucault’s insistence on the need for subjects to take greater accountability for their conduct with other subjects. It will be recalled from the previous chapter that, while Foucault rejects an automatic attribution of responsibility for dominitative forms of power as demanded by the slave, he has an explicit commitment to taking responsibility for minimising domination. This differentiates his account of domination and his moral position from Nietzsche’s master. As Foucault explains, if one becomes “a slave to one’s desires” there is no tempering or limiting of power over others; instead a “good ruler is precisely one who exercises his power as it ought to be exercised, that is, simultaneously exercising his power over himself. And it is the power over oneself that thus regulates one’s power over others”. Moreover, Foucault insists that in order to become accountable to others and to act in an ethical manner, the subject must engage in proper management of the self as a way of “limiting and controlling power” and ultimately better caring for others. In his later work, Foucault’s description of this care of the self is inherently relational in a way that reflects the care of others that is central to the practice of empowerment and female subjectivity championed by feminist theorists. In fact, when asked in a late interview whether his version of the care of the self is such that “in thinking of itself, one thinks of others?”, Foucault replies, “Yes, absolutely.”

\[196\] Foucault, ‘The Ethics of the Concern for the Self’, p. 288. Ladelle McWorter also argues that Foucault’s practices of freedom provide fertile ground for feminist engagement with power that points to a different strategy beyond claims based on group oppression. See McWorter, ‘Post-liberation Feminism and Practices of Freedom’, pp. 54-73.
To realise the possibilities of Foucault’s ethical subject or the relational subject of empowerment theorists, though, the feminist subject must follow Foucault’s subject and Nietzsche’s sovereign individual to recognise complicity in power. It is important for feminist approaches to power and domination that white feminists in particular recognise participation in power over other women and marginalised subjects. In Chapter Three, an important difference between the priest’s intention to induce self-blame in the powerless slave and the impact of postmodern dictates is that while the priest tells all slaves they are responsible for their own suffering, marginalised women demanded that white feminists specifically acknowledge their accountability for involvement in power and hence, take some responsibility for the suffering of others. This taking of responsibility can be productive if it involves active and conscious attempts at understanding and empathy rather than retreating from debate or conflict due to guilt and shame. As Flax has noted, the uncertainty caused by these challenges is “exactly where responsibility beyond innocence looms as a promise and a frightening necessity”. Recognising complicity in dominative power means being accountable for dominative actions and for minimising the impact of power over others. In this sense, there is another possibility for the ‘bad conscience’ that aligns more with the possibilities of the sovereign individual: the challenge of converting a ‘bad conscience’ into a more productive subjectivity that is not slavish or masterly but both complicit in and subject to domination.

I argue, then, that what the feminist subject, Foucault’s subject and the sovereign individual all have in common is the potential capacity for bridging differences between subjects. Hannah Arendt emphasises how it is the capacity of responsible subjects to make promises to one another that is essential both to enable representative forms of political engagement and to foster opportunities to act with others. For Arendt, the force that underpins power with others, what keeps them together, “is the force of mutual promise or contract”. An important component of feminist empowerment that should not be jettisoned from an understanding of the feminist subject is the commitment to others that arises from gendered analysis. As Allison Weir contends, “attachment to gender identity is not just attachment to subjugation, but … can also be attachment to sources of empowerment: to particular communities and relationships, and particular others”.

For a feminist approach to resistance, sustaining an understanding of oppression and recognition of the constraints on subjects, means not forfeiting a shared commitment to unmasking dominative

198 Habermas, ‘Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power’, in Lukes (ed.), Power, p. 244.
power, opposing and seeking to minimise its bad effects through all resistant efforts. While feminism can risk giving up the slavish approach to domination as evil, it cannot afford to lose the moral and critical impetus behind an explicit and shared moral commitment to minimising domination as a bad form of power. Therefore, it is important for feminist approaches to domination and resistance that Foucault’s Nietzschean recommendation – that resistance be undertaken with a “minimum of domination” – is part of a feminist appropriation of Foucault and fortified as an alternative normative basis for challenging domination as morally bad. It is contended that this Nietzschean-styled recommendation can be strengthened as a moral value and goal through Foucault’s subject.

By reasserting the multi-dimensional nature of Foucault’s subject as the origin for moral judgement, it is possible to navigate a way for feminism to retain normative engagement with resistance without having to determine from the outset that domination is evil. Instead, the same mechanism for moral judgment used by the master is called upon: the moral ‘good’ issues from the subject and yet this subject, unlike the master, is complicit, accountable and able to engage ethically with others. It is from this subject as the origin of value that feminism can set a goal for resistance: a clear determination that any practice or action that allows domination to flourish is morally bad and any action that minimises its effects is morally good. Foucault makes this possibility clear when he explains that engagement in power relations means that subjects need to “acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games with as little domination as possible”.200 His subject thus underpins and reinforces what I have argued is his clear moral opposition to domination as a bad form of power.201 To fortify this moral position is not to apply a yardstick that comes from outside of power as does the designation evil. It is a moral position that is immanent in power as it does not presume a teleological goal that domination can be overthrown or a realm of subjectivity that exists beyond power. While the conception of what is bad – domination – still has a negative value, it is also part of the feminist subject and so can not be condemned such that is becomes invested with the capacity to shape or determine the subject’s identity. Instead, moral judgements are guided by the belief that resistant actions should seek to minimise dominative forms of power, which is an ongoing process open to change, the possibility for modification and the creation of new identities.

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201 Foucault, The Final Foucault, pp. 18-19.
In answer to the question of why subjects resist, the answer then becomes to ensure that participation in power relations and the capacity of all subjects is encouraged as far as possible. This aligns not only with Foucault’s desire to minimise domination, but with his stated commitment to forms of engagement with others and practices of the self that are based on as “little domination as possible”. Resistance is governed by the principle that power relations and domination will continue but subjects will intercede where possible to limit the impact of domination. The important point is that while complicity is not forfeited by labelling dominative actions bad, feminist challenges to domination still retain the moral capacity to condemn as unacceptable resistant actions that perpetuate domination.

Conclusion

As Chapter Four demonstrated, while Foucault disassembles the basis for ressentiment when he challenges its underpinning normative framework, his account offers the possibility of a moral position that is situated beyond the extremes of a master and slave morality. This chapter has argued that the same balance in positioning is also required if Foucault’s schema of resistance is to be of greater use for feminist purposes. Key to the feminist approach to domination and resistance against it is the capacity to retain the moral opposition to domination as a bad form of power. This position recognises both the subject’s complicity in power and how the subject can be limited through states of domination. Moreover, it acknowledges that feminist approaches to resistance require a methodology that retains some shared moral perspective to underpin power with others. To strike this balance, it has been argued that resistant actions need to be measured against the commitment to minimise domination that arises from the complex subject at the heart of Foucault’s schema.

If a feminist approach to resistance begins with the feminist subject as a reflection of both the sovereign individual and Foucault’s multi-dimensional subject, it is possible to seek to minimise dominative power relations as a goal for resistance. Moral value arises from the subject, who is complicit, accountable and engaged in ethical conduct with others that involves fulfilling her/his individual capacity and the power to act while also potentially enhancing the capacity of other subjects. From this position, it is possible for feminists to determined that some types of resistance are unacceptable if they exploit dominative power or exacerbate its bad effects. Importantly, this fortification of Foucault’s approach to resistance does not undermine his key objective, which is to support the subject at the centre of his analysis of power in diversifying and challenging the ways
in which it is both created and confined by dominative power. In fact, it has been argued that this synthesizing of the master and the slave approaches to morality not only provides a more robust basis for a feminist engagement with power and domination but also better reflects the masterly and slavish qualities of both the feminist subject and Foucault’s subject of power.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In coming to terms with how power has been conceived within feminism, this thesis has necessarily turned on several different theoretical axes. Like all of the big themes and conundrums of political theory, power is a fundamental lens through which we understand the world and our part in it as individual and communal beings. Power does not exist in a vacuum. For feminist theories, in particular, power is intimately connected to conceptions of freedom, responsibility and morality, and has implications for an understanding of identity, community and epistemology. Each of these theoretical terrains is worthy of a thesis and while they cannot be done justice when the key focus is on power, they cannot be ignored either.

The feminist task of ‘unmasking’ domination has been shown to be an essentially oppositional project that carries with it normative claims and theoretical justifications. I have argued that underpinning foundationalist second-wave feminist approaches to power is a normative position that domination is an evil force. While this challenge to domination as evil has severely limited the feminist engagement with power, it has, at the same time, enabled some radical possibilities for feminist politics. Unmasking the evils of domination allows for the injury and pain of oppressive forms of power to be acknowledged and to accurately direct where blame and responsibility should be assigned. It has provided moral impetus to feminist arguments against gendered domination, allowing feminism to gain critical traction and, at times, evoke outrage and a desire for dramatic change.

However, this particular moral stance against domative power also entails several theoretical sacrifices. First, a position that opposes domination as morally evil can occlude recognition of both the subordinate’s agency and the participation of women in power over others. Second, it was argued that the framework of evil domination defines the very terms for a conception of female empowerment and thereby serves to contain and stifle a potentially transformative vision of female power to. Third, it was highlighted that when women’s participation in domination is viewed as evil, this conviction can lead to reactive guilt and shame at the complicity of women in power, rather than a recognition that allows for more complex and nuanced conceptions of women’s agency, which includes power over others but also with others.
This thesis has thus contended that despite the critical efficacy that results from opposition to domination as an evil form of power, the sacrifices of this moral position are too great for feminist theory. Instead, feminism requires a conception of power that can unmask the negative forms of power over as domination and account for the oppression of women, but without sacrificing a female subject with the power to act individually and with others. In order to achieve this aim, it has been the key contention of this thesis that while feminism must abandon its familiar moral opposition to domination as evil, it should not have to sacrifice normative engagement or critique of dominitative forms of power.

The first two chapters of this thesis demonstrated how feminist conceptions of power as domination and empowerment have been framed by an understanding of domination as an external and evil male construct. In Chapter One, it was shown that feminist domination theorists see power in unilateral terms as a force that is always and only exerted over others to dominate and oppress. These feminist theories of domination continued the Weberian emphasis of Steven Lukes and pluralist theorists of conflict and power over, supplementing it with a critique of the omnipresence of domination through the patriarchal control of men. For Lukes, the subordinate’s forfeiture of autonomy confirms that power over is operating, while for the feminist theorists considered, focusing on the powerlessness of the female subject is the primary critical task. Scant attention is paid to the strengths of women or the possibility of empowerment. Women’s subordination is complete and can only serve as testimony against the evil nature of male dominitative power. In both accounts of power over, the subordinated subjects of dominitative power become no more than objects of power. If domination is an evil force, it is the sole province of an enemy, rather than being a bad but inevitable component of all subjectivities. While it can be argued that feminist domination theorists have utilised the position of women as victims of dominitative power as a tool or strategy to challenge male oppression and evoke anger, it has been argued that this places serious constraints on the potential for resistance. For the feminist domination theorists considered, all forms of power are collapsed into power over as domination and women as subjects are excluded as participants or agents.

In Chapter Two, it was argued that feminist empowerment theorists recognised that a feminist understanding of power needed to account for the capacity of the feminist subject and all subjects who face the oppressive nature of dominitative power and structurally reinforced systems of domination. This chapter considered the argument of Amy Allen that feminist conceptions of domination and empowerment do not inform each other: power over as domination and power to
achieve goals are different modalities of power reflecting two divergent elements of feminist political strategy. Yet while I agreed with Allen that these two forms of power remain polarised in feminist thought, I disagreed that empowerment theorists do not have a critical concept of dominative power. Instead, the designation of dominative power as evil that is made by domination theorists is not denied by empowerment theorists. The initial determination that domination is evil is upheld by these theorists and is allowed to define what is deemed to be ‘good’ forms of female power. The oppositional stance gleaned from gender difference underpins an understanding of what attributes belong to which identity and how they are then accorded value. Dominative power is still attributed to men to the exclusion of women and it remains as the leading concept from which follows an understanding of women’s powers to achieve goals or find empowerment more broadly.

While there is great merit in re-valuing qualities that are perceived as feminine and have been disparaged or undervalued, there are dangers in continuing to align them with women as the main source of potential empowerment. By attempting to extirpate any involvement in the power exerted by the male masters, the ‘good’ forms of power can be presented as benign and even beneficial; but they are also derived from or secondary to the primary assertion of value that is attributed to dominative male power. It was argued that the power afforded this moral position can only be temporary as it is contained by the very conditions of the subordinate’s oppression. As a result, while these feminist theorists have provided valuable insights into the effects of oppression and the ways in which women can be empowered in spite of domination, and within its confines, they have emphasised power to as a relational concept to the detriment of individual capacity and self-direction. Moreover, like domination theorists, these accounts of empowerment also fail to account for the ways in which women can exercise power over to lead, direct and influence but also dominate others.

In Chapter Three, the focus then shifted to consideration of the critiques of black women and postmodern intersections into feminist theory, which were shown to shatter this one-dimensional characterisation of the feminist enemy. It became vital to the sustained development of feminism as an inclusive oppositional politics and theory to acknowledge that appeals to a unified category of women had served to silence the voices of marginalised women. By opposing domination as an external male form of power, white feminism, in particular, had ignored differences among women in relation to power and failed to account for the participation of some women in domination. In this chapter, the work of Wendy Brown highlighted how this dispersal of power struck at the heart of modernist feminism by severing the connection between claims to knowledge and a moral position
that had based its critical efficacy on being outside of power and so clean of its distorting effects. Importantly, as Brown articulates, a feminist politics of *ressentiment* relies upon this condition for its existence and its critique of power.

Yet I have argued that the motivating force of *ressentiment* was not only challenged but incited by these theoretical and personal intersections. Feminist theorists accepted that the evil dominator could not be sustained as an external male figure as a result of the critiques of marginalised women and the challenges of postmodernism. Many acknowledged their participation in domintive power. However, rather than this altering how power was conceived – domination cannot be monstrous and evil if it is also part of our own identities – many feminists reacted to complicity in domination with guilt, shame and reactive retreat. It was demonstrated that this reaction could be attributed to the continued prevalence of the belief that domintive power is not only negative but evil. While some feminists retreated into the familiar modernist opposition to power, as Wendy Brown contends, many others adopted postmodern imperatives uncritically, driven by guilt and shame at their participation in domintive power over other women. By adopting the postmodern imperative to refuse to represent others and therefore not speak for other subjects, and insisting on the incommensurability of knowledges, greater separation between identities was encouraged and a theoretical terrain where debate and conflict could lead to greater empathy and understanding, nullified. Rather than being a productive recognition of women’s participation in power over other women, then, postmodern politics provided fertile ground for *ressentiment* to continue flourishing.

Therefore, Chapter Three rejected Brown’s contention that in order to overcome *ressentiment* feminists must adopt a postmodern-inspired dissipation of identity and engage in ‘political’ forms of engagement, rather than rely on the ‘moral’ determinations of modernist feminism. It was argued that this polarisation between two divergent approaches to power and identity offers a false choice to feminists between a masterly approach toward domination based on strength or a slavish retreat into normative foundations. While Brown seeks to jettison *ressentiment* from feminist accounts of power by escaping moral claims entirely, I have contended that feminism is better served by an alternative normative approach that can support continued moral opposition to domination and recognition of the capacity and complicity of the feminist subject.

Negotiating such an alternative position with regard to power and domination in this thesis has required an acknowledgement both of the political efficacy and the intractability of *ressentiment* within feminist accounts. There is something intuitively correct about Nietzsche’s explanation of
the psychological processes of ressentiment, perhaps because we are all subject to resentments, fear and envy at times and also share as social subjects the capacity to be wounded and suffer injustices. This is an all-too-human condition. The strength required to determine our own identity without recourse to a negative and oppositional reference to others is also a challenge that is universally experienced, if in divergent ways, to different degrees and with varying impediments.

In a schematic sense, Nietzsche’s explanation of the process of ressentiment featured throughout each of the first three chapters of this thesis. In Chapter One, feminist domination theorists undertake the first step in the development of the slave morality, which is to determine who is the evil enemy. All energy, anger and rancour is directed outward toward male dominative power with the identity of women being an afterthought. In Chapter Two, feminist empowerment theorists take the next step in the process of ressentiment, which is the creation of the concept of the ‘good’. Female subjectivity and empowerment is conceived in juxtaposition to all the qualities of the evil master. It was argued that what unites these two feminist approaches to power is the assertion that dominative power is evil because it is pervasive throughout all relations between men and women, and because it is conceived as external to women as a category and exhumed from Woman as subject.

Then, in Chapter Three, it is the effects of ressentiment in the form of the ‘bad conscience’ that is evident in feminist responses to the critiques of marginalised women and postmodern imperatives. As the evil dominator could no longer be sustained as an external enemy, the power of ressentiment as a critique of domination was redirected and the guilt and shame of white feminists became paramount. Nietzsche’s understanding of the ‘bad conscience’ as the primary effect of ressentiment helped to explain that this reaction arose in large part from guilt. Further, the role of the aesthetic priest, who redirects ressentiment back to the slave, highlighted the analogous role of postmodernism in shifting responsibility firmly back to white women as subjects who are oppressed by dominative power but also participants in exerting power over others.

In the first three chapters of this thesis, then, the engagement with Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment and explanation of how the two divergent moralities of the master and slave develop, usefully highlighted some of the limitations of feminist approaches to domination and empowerment. Yet in the final two chapters, this framework also provided a means to navigate a new direction forward. As Chapter Four attests, it is because Foucault’s debunking of dominative power as evil aligns with Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals and critique of ressentiment that he is
able to assist feminism with resolving the limitations of this kind a moral approach. Foucault’s adoption of Nietzsche’s understanding of power as an inevitable and necessary part of life and his refusal to determine that power and domination are evil in nature, are key points of alignment between the two theorists. Importantly, in Chapter Four, these two central and radical themes that run through Foucault’s work on power offered a means for feminism to relieve the tendency toward ressentiment.

By recognising that all subjects are involved in power relations, including domination, in however minimal a way, the external nature of the feminist enemy becomes impossible as there is no position outside of power to embrace or defend. As a result, an automatic attribution of responsibility is replaced by a willingness to accept accountability as all subjects are recognised as both enabled and constrained by domination. Foucault’s unique insight into the constitution of the subject in relation to discourses or “games of truth” also serves to underpin the notion of power as invested in the creation of knowledges, which posed a direct challenge to a feminist epistemology based on ressentiment. Finally, the notion of power as agonistic or in perpetual contestation with freedom constitutes a complete rejection of the notion of a subordinate as an innately powerless object who must be limited for power to be in operation.

Yet while these points of convergence with Nietzsche’s approach to power strengthen Foucault’s account, it was argued that it is in his departures from Nietzsche that Foucault’s account can be creatively re-worked to better support a normative position that is of more use to the feminist critique. The chief contention of Chapter Four was that Foucault’s approach to power and domination is far from normatively neutral. It has been argued that Foucault shows greater compassion for the slave, as evidenced by his consistent commitment to unmasking dominative power throughout his account. As part of this unmasking, the hidden voices of the subjugated and the relative powers of all subjects became vital to an account of how power operates. While Foucault adopts Nietzsche’s perspective that dominative power is inevitable, then, it is far from being a form of power that he celebrates or wants to encourage.

In this chapter, Nietzsche’s distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ provided a means to conceptualise Foucault’s normative commitments and to provide feminism with a framework through which to utilise his other important insights into power. Domination is the extreme form of power relations

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1 Foucault, The Final Foucault, pp. 9-10.
within Foucault’s schema, as he distinguishes dominative power from productive forms of power like governmentality and the more fluid relationships of power between subjects. Moreover, relations of power involve all subjects and should be encouraged as a form of power that is inseparable from all social interactions. Importantly, while liberation from power relations and even domination is not possible, Foucault allows for a potential moral opposition to dominative power as bad when he seeks to limit its unacceptable effects and encourage the conduct of power relations with a “minimum of domination”. Foucault’s subject, who is created through domination, but can still exercise power, also provides the basis for Foucault’s shift from challenging the attribution of responsibility for evil to an external enemy, to a position that encourages accountability to oneself and others. It was thus concluded that this alternative framework allows feminist accounts of power to adopt Foucault’s challenge to many of the established polarities that define the study of power and have restricted feminist approaches, but without sacrificing moral engagement.

In Chapter Five, this distinction between ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ also highlighted how Foucault’s schema enables moral distinctions to be made from within the context of practice and the conduct of resistant action. His understanding of critique as a practice of constant engagement with dominative structures allowed for ongoing questioning of resistant actions and reflected Foucault’s desire to ensure the proliferation and diversity of resistance. Foucault empowers the subject as a valuating being with the capacity to make moral determinations according to the specifics of each challenge and each subject’s unique experience of domination. However, it was argued that, while feminist approaches to domination and resistance gain flexibility and recognition of the capacity of the subject through this approach, a firm basis for shared opposition to domination is precluded. Foucault’s approach to resistance thus tilted the scales in favour of an individualistic and masterly mode of engagement rather than a careful balancing of approach that acknowledges the benefits of the master’s self-affirmation but also the strengths and limitations of the slave.

It was contended that when Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals is viewed as a progressive story of the development of identity and morality, it can assist with understanding how powerful and powerless identities are inextricably entwined. In Chapter Four the development of the sovereign individual, who is the end result of Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals, was detected in Foucault’s subject of power. In this subject, the results of the dominance of the moral code is evident and the subject is neither masterly nor slavish, powerful or powerless, but endowed with capacity even though formed through domination. However, in Chapter Five, the expectations that Foucault has of this subject to engage in normative decisions without recourse to a moral framework or shared
objective resembles a masterly mode of engagement. He fails to emphasise the critical and moral possibilities that arise from his ethical subject that, like Nietzsche’s sovereign individual and the feminist subject, has elements and qualities of both the master and the slave. Importantly, the capacity of this subject to engage in resistance in an accountable and ethical manner, with explicit consideration given to other subjects, means that the conduct of power and resistance is undertaken with the express aim of trying to limit dominative power. By elevating the potential of this ethical subject through closer alignment with the relational subject of feminist approaches, Foucault’s Nietzschean recommendation that domination should be minimised in the conduct of power relations is fortified. The determination of moral value can then begin with this subject, and subsequent judgements made about bad forms of resistance that may not support the capacities of this subject. As a result, the moral position that domination is a bad but not evil form of power is reconfirmed.

Overall, it has been argued that a moral position that can go beyond a masterly and a slavish approach to power requires that feminism pursue a more productive ‘bad conscience’ than that which is reactive to ressentiment: one that must develop from recognition of complicity in power over and a concomitant refusal to externalise domination from feminist identities. It also requires that feminists foster a conception of power that enables individual self-determination and the capacity to engage in power with strength in a manner that can support the capacity of other subjects. Yet this position does not have to mean that feminism must forfeit its critical capacity to challenge domination with other subjects, to uncover its bad effects and expose multiple forms of oppression that limit involvement in power relations. While feminists can risk giving up the slavish approach to domination as evil, they cannot afford to lose the moral and critical impetus behind an explicit normative designation of domination as bad.
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