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SIGNIFYING RACE AND GENDER: DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN FEMINIST
THEORY AND POLITICS

by

ROSE M. HARRIS

A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Graduate Program in Political Science

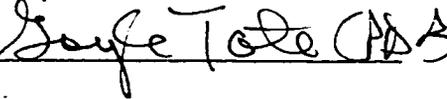
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Signifying Race and Gender: Discursive Strategies in Feminist Theory and Politics

by ROSE M. HARRIS

Dissertation Director:

Linda Zerilli

This dissertation examines the various ways in which race and gender are both configured within and produced by feminist theory and politics. The overall project is divided into two parts. Part I, "Theoretical Intimations," calls for a re-examination of "how we think about" race and gender in feminist theory. In contrast to existing literature on race in feminist theory, I do not posit that race or the Black women have been excluded, ignored, or misrepresented in feminist theory, but that the category race, and the symbol "Black Woman", is figured as that which cannot be represented or captured within the discursive domain of feminism. I argue that the best way to understand the role and function in feminist theory is to adopt a poststructuralist view of language. To this extent, I identify and outline five discursive strategies employed in feminist discourse that effect the erasure of race, even as race is made visible. These strategies are: (1) Exclusion and Denial; (2) Analogy and Comparison; (3) Adjectival Modification; (4) (In)Visible Objectification; and (5) Accusatory Defensiveness. These five strategies suggest that gender difference necessitates and depends upon the suppression of racial difference. Part II, "Empirical Examples," uses the nomination of Lani Guinier, as a point of departure, to explore the metaphorical function of race in feminist discourse through, what I have termed, the "Black Woman (as) Symbol(ic)." In addition, I analyze the theoretical works of

Monique Wittig and recent responses to racial critiques of feminist theory, to illustrate how the category race is reduced to biological and physical characteristics that signify blackness. This section also pinpoints the use of these strategies in various feminist texts, and demonstrate how stories of gender depend the category race for its stability. In the final analysis, this study reformulates the relationship between race and gender by eschewing the notion that they are separate and distinct categories.

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As is always the case with an undertaking of this magnitude, no one person succeeds without the help and support of many peers, colleagues, mentors, family members, and friends.

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While attending Howard University, I had the pleasure of meeting and working with Karin Stanford and Daryl Harris. Their enthusiasm for the scholar-activist career was both inspirational and encouraging.

My stay at the University of Iowa, although brief, was facilitated by encouragement from Sally Kenney, who also provided me with opportunities to present my research; some of which forms the basis of this project. A very heartfelt thanks to the informal Women of Color Reading Group, co-formed by

Jennifer Evans, Jackie McMichaels, and myself. Our weekly meetings were indeed a "life-saver."

My transfer to Rutgers University was based upon Susan Carroll's stringent recruiting efforts, her genuine interest in my work and, of course, the Women in Politics program within the Political Science Department. To that end, I want to thank her for her "behind the scenes" efforts in raising important issues about diversity within the discipline and the department.

A special thanks to my committee members, which included Sue Carroll, as well as Cindy Daniels, Gayle Tate, and my director, Linda Zerilli. I am grateful to each of them, especially Gayle and Linda, for the many hours they spent listening to, what must have seen to them, the mundane life of a graduate student.

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I owe a great debt to my family and friends. I want to especially thank my mother, Lessie B. Hardman Harris, for her support and for instilling in me that I can accomplish any task set before me. I am also grateful for her generosity in allowing me to convert her den into an office while writing this dissertation. To my siblings, Glen D. Harris, Pauline Harris White, Artis T. Harris, Jr., and my brother-in-law, Will White, Jr., I owe a gracious and humble "thank you" for supporting and otherwise, simply "putting-up" with me during my many years of schooling.

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of the LORD with you...fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you" (KJV). In the final analysis, the Lord Jesus Christ was, and still is, with me.

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PART I: THEORETICAL INTIMATIONS

**CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION:
DISTORTED IMAGES: FROM (MIS)REPRESENTATION TO
SIGNIFICATION**

"[C]ultural images of African American women, while generalized to African American women in America, failed to represent accurately the myriad differences in African American women throughout the United States."

—K. Sue Jewell

"Practices that exclude women of color and working-class women from the mainstream of women's studies have important consequences for feminist theory. Ultimately they prevent a full understanding of gender and society. The failure to explore fully the interplay of race, class, and gender...has rendered feminist theory incomplete and incorrect."

—Maxine Baca Zinn, et. al.

I. Research Problem: Race, Gender, and Representation

Feminist theory and politics has been thoroughly criticized for failing to include issues of race and the experiences of African American women and "other women of color."¹ Similarly, in Political Science, especially within the

¹I place quotations around the phrase "women of color" to indicate my reservations in using it as a descriptor for Black women. My objection to the phrase "women of color" are numerous. Generally speaking, the limitations of the phrase "women of color" positions non-white women as the "other" within feminism, and assumes that white women are non-raced. To this extent, "whiteness" serves as the standard and remains an uninterrogated racial category. In addition, the phrase lumps all non-white, and even international or "Third World" women, into one single category which obscures racial, ethnic, and national differences. In terms of feminist thought in the United States, the popularity and invocation of the phrase "women of color" is, in my observation, one method used to avoid the deep racial divide between whites and Blacks. For a discussion on how feminist practices obliterate racial and ethnic differences

subfields of Women and Politics and Black Politics, there is a glaring absence of scholarship on or about Black women and their relationship to the body politic. Critics explain the absence of race and Black women from these disciplines as the product of individual racism; the author's unwillingness to take race and racism seriously; the pervasive assumption that the category "Woman" includes all women; the belief that sexism is more pervasive than or originated before racism; the presumption that race is not a feminist issue and thus the politics of eradicating racism is to be found in "some other movement"; and the notion that Black women have not fully developed a "feminist consciousness" and as such, are only half-heartedly committed to feminist politics.² Moreover, to the extent that African American women have been included in these discourses, it has been on the basis of racist stereotypes. The "Black Woman," critics argue, has been distorted, misrepresented and inaccurately portrayed through stereotypical images like Mammy, Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, Jezebel, and Welfare Queen.³

among women who are non-white, see Lynet Uttal, "Inclusion Without Influence: The Continuing Tokenism of Women of Color," in Gloria Anzaldúa, ed., Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), 42-45.

²For examples of these kinds of critiques see bell hooks, Ain't I A Woman, (Boston: South End Press, 1981), and Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, (Boston: South End Press, 1984); and Gloria I. Joseph and Jill Lewis, Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives, (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

³See for example, Donald Bogel, Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films, (New Expanded Edition, New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1992); "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," in Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); K. Sue Jewell, From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy, (New York: Routledge, 1993); Diane Roberts, The Myth of Aunt Jemima: Representations of Race and Region, (New York: Routledge, 1994); Patricia A. Turner, Ceramic Uncles &

Intimating the depiction of Black women in other cultural and social spaces, feminist discourse and politics, cast the Black Woman as the perennial outsider who disrupts the "progress" and efficacy of the movements with her constant indictments and questionable claims to be "uniquely" and "triplely oppressed." Figured as the "white-woman castigating," and the ever-present critic, Black women have become, many argue associated with a plethora of negative and distorted images.

According to this line of reasoning, the inability to separate the negative stereotypical images of Black womanhood from "real" or actual Black women prevents feminists from fully recognizing Black women's position in society "as women." Moreover, equating "real" Black women with negative stereotypes occludes one's view of Black women as long-time and committed contributors to the women's movement and other forms of political activism. This familiar typology explains the Black Woman's exclusion from feminist theory in terms of its adherence to faulty, mythical, distorted, and/or inadequate images. The argument is usually framed in such a way as to suggest that any theoretical framework that represents Black women in terms of negative stereotypes not only helps to perpetuate those stereotypes, but becomes an active agent in facilitating them. As such, theories that emerge from these frameworks cannot be inclusive of Black women because they are based upon false, negative or inaccurate images. False imagery, in the words of K. Sue Jewell, lack "empirical correspondence" and are not able to "represent accurately" African American women. To the extent that such theories are unable to achieve "empirical correspondence," they are unable to include Black women within their

Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and their Influence on Culture, (New York: Anchor Books, 1994).

framework. Therefore, the inclusion of the Black Woman as subject, can only occur when Black women are adequately and accurately portrayed.

This dissertation considers anew the issue of race and gender in feminist theory. Departing from traditional arguments about the nature and function of race in feminism, I challenge the idea that race has been "excluded," or ignored. In contrast, I argue that race *has* figured prominently in feminist thinking and theorizing. Not only has race, which is often and erroneously reduced to biological attributes or to the figure of the Black woman, assumed a significant and crucial position in theories that seek to explain sexual difference, but race as blackness is necessary to the coherency of the story⁴ that feminism tells. Race has become (is) a foundation, if not the foundation, on which feminism grounds its story of sexual difference.

My objective in proposing that race figures prominently in feminist thinking and scholarship is not to simply reverse absence to presence; to "find" race where it is not. Rather, my approach to this question is informed by a view of language that emphasizes its productive nature. In other words, language here is not conceived of as a transparent medium through which to capture and convey linguistically that which is "real". Rather, language is seen as producing and constructing concepts, categories, and their meanings, even as it pretends, to simply re-present the "real." Therefore, to "read race" so to speak, in its absence, is to acknowledge that "race" can be constructed *in absentia*, i.e., without explicitly referring to the "word" or sign itself. This view allows one to see absence, not simply as an oversight on behalf of the author, but as both an effect

⁴For an explanation of the concept of "feminist stories," see "Feminisms: Stories of Gender," in Jane Flax, Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in Contemporary West, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 135-183.

and function of the particular discourse in which race operates.⁵ To the extent that discourses, like feminist theory, can produce race through absence, most notably by constructing a racial category which is assumed to be unraced, or unmarked, it can also be noted that that the same discourse may rely upon and deploy what Toni Morrison calls, "racially informed and determined chains."⁶ Because "race" is conceptualized as something that belongs only to "Blacks",⁷ "language...can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority,

⁵I explore absence as a function of race in greater detail on pages 51-73 in my description of the Exclusion and Denial Discursive Strategy.

⁶Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), x.

⁷Here I am referring to the legal and social application of the "one-drop rule" to "Blacks." Because this rule extends only to "Blacks," they are the only group perceived "be" a race without ethnic variation, despite the fact that African Americans do not perceive themselves in this manner. In the case of African Americans (and only in the case of African Americans), race and ethnicity is conflated so that "African American" an ethnic category, is read simply as "Black race." In denying this "artificial separation of race from culture," Paul Robeson, Jr. argues that

"[African Americans] are at one and the same time *both* Black *and* African American. Like European-Americans, Latin-Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, [African Americans] are both racial and ethnic. [African Americans] use the term Black to emphasize the common, racial aspect of our culture, while African-American refers to the diverse, ethnic aspect. (Paul Robeson, Jr., *Speaks to America*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993, p. 6).

While Robeson's uncritical acceptance of race as being rooted in biology is not unproblematic, he aptly illustrates the popular notion that "race" is tantamount to "Black." See also, F. James Davis, Who is Black? One Nation's Definition, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); and Mary C. Waters, Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America, (1995).

cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering.'⁸ Thus, the ways in which race is configured and the manner in which it is invoked and deployed, are practices that are in need of analysis. Although I discuss this in greater detail below, what I am suggesting is that racial "absence" can be read as one specific kind of configuration within feminist texts. In other words, not only is race constructed *in absentia* , but it is constructed as an absence in which its function is to appear invisible.

This project also takes to task the notion that Black women have been misrepresented, distorted, and inaccurately portrayed in feminist theory. The suggestion that Black women have not been distorted or misrepresented should not be taken to indicate the opposite—that the appearance of race and the Black female in the writings of feminists has indeed been accurate. Despite the continued debate over the misrepresentation of the Black woman, I maintain that the question at hand is not one of accurate portrayal or proper representation. In fact, the question is not about representation at all. Rather than viewing race as "natural" and "biological", as a state of being that is best reflected in the embodiment of "Black bodies" thereby allowing those bodies to be correctly or incorrectly re-presented, I argue that the category of race and the figure of the Black Woman need to be read as signs, not as referents; as signifiers not as signifieds. The representation-referential model sees race and the figure of the Black Woman as existing prior to and independent of feminist discourse. Feminist theory, so to speak, merely incorporates what is already in existence. By contrast, treating race and the Black Woman as a signifiers underscores language as the generator of meaning, and not merely as the medium through which a pre-existent meaning is communicated.

⁸Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark, op. cit., x.

This study is designed to show that there is a need to rethink the representation-referential model as it relates to race in feminist theory. The objective is to illustrate the ways in which "race" is produced by and constituted within feminist theory *as* that which is outside of sexual difference theory and the category gender.

But why is it necessary to reconsider the representation-referential approach to reading race in feminist theory? What kinds of problems does one encounter within the representation-referent framework? What does it mean to read race and gender as signs, as signifiers? What theoretical possibilities are gained when moving from (mis)representation to signification?

Arguments that posit absence and/or misrepresentation as an explanation for the "exclusion" of "women of color" are directly related to the ongoing debate over whether or not race has actually become an integral part of feminist thinking and theorizing. bell hooks, for example, argues that "[al]though black women/ women of color have challenged the feminist movement to acknowledge the political significance of racial hierarchy, to this day most white women resolutely refuse to change their thinking about the direction and agendas for feminist politics."⁹ Similarly, Higginbotham claims that when race (in particular) is acknowledged, it is "hardly more than lip service,"¹⁰ because the categories Woman and gender continue to be invoked and deployed as if it has no relation to race. These types of responses implicitly conceptualize "race" as an "entity" or "thing" in reality that, once uncovered and adequately grasped, will "change

⁹"Feminism in Black and White," in Marita Golden and Susan Richards Shreve, eds., Skin Deep: Black Women and White Women Write About Race, (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 1995), 268.

¹⁰Elizabeth Higginbotham. "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," Signs 17 (Winter 1992): 251-274.

[one's] thinking about the direction and agendas for feminist politics." This is not to deny the disruptive power of a racialized understanding of gender narratives, but at the same time, such views cannot articulate *how* and *why* the attention given to race in feminist theory is, as Higginbotham puts it, "hardly more than lip service." Simply "noting", "acknowledging," or "recognizing" race as an important category that feminists *ought* to analyze, precludes the possibility that "acknowledgement," in and of itself, can function as a normative constraint in which race simply becomes (an)other category among similit categories of difference. It is as if "th[e] very noting [of certain absences]...permits [one] to ignore or render neutral [the] elision of the internal differentiation of th[o]se categories."¹¹ In other words, "acknowledgement" serves to legitimate race as a marginal category in the very process of naming and locating it at the margins of feminist discourse. "Acknowledgement," while explicitly noting the absence of race, implicitly shores up the boundaries demarcating sexual difference from racial difference and (re)assigns the category race to a marginal position within feminist discourse. As such, one need only to "acknowledge," i.e., list race along with other "variables", to claim (1) an understanding of how race both disrupts and constitutes discourse; and (2) how race is an effect of feminist discourse.

I am presumptuous, of course, in assuming that "acknowledgers" do in fact seek to understand race in these two ways. Nonetheless, the fact that race is not conceptualized in this manner is precisely the point. Criticizing race in feminist theory in terms of absence or misrepresentation forecloses the possibility of feminism's ability to produce the effect that it names. A representation-

¹¹Jane Flax, "Minerva's Owl: Fragments of a Thinking Life," in Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Philosophy, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 6.

referential model cannot, for example, explain the production, use, and function of an allegedly distorted image; it can only claim that such an image is inaccurate and then counter such an image with a more "accurate," "truer" image.

In what follows, I explore the problems associated with viewing race within the representation-referential framework. Although there are several feminist works that read gender and the category "Woman" as signs or as discursive enactments of performativity,¹² the category race is rarely conceptualized in this manner. Instead, race is inscribed as a natural, irreducible, and essential difference. It is the one biological "fact"¹³ whose evidence is visible and indisputable. However, in my analysis, race seems to ground and legitimate the category gender and theories of sexual difference. Not only does it anchor and lend support to such theories, but as part of the authorizing ground, race is necessary because it makes possible a coherent story about "women as a group." In those instances where race is viewed as a "social construct," social constructivism takes on a reductive and determinant quality that places it within the representation-referential model.¹⁴ In arguing for the need to move from

¹²See for example Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex," (New York: Routledge, 1993); Alice A. Jardine, Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?": Feminism and the Category "Women" in History, (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis, 1988).

¹³See Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," in Black Skin, White Masks, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967).

¹⁴Several feminists argue that race is "not biological," but a "social construct" and claims to make use of it in their work as a socially constructed category. The popular claim that race is "socially constructed" has, ironically, produced a sub-discourse on race in which it nevertheless remains uninterrogated as the effect of social, legal, and discursive norms. See for example, "'Race' Under Erasure? Poststructuralist Afro-American Literary Theory," in Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 73-96; and Vron Ware's conception of race in

(mis)representation to a framework that makes possible the production of meaning, I outline the theoretical precepts that frame this dissertation. Borrowing heavily from Derrida, Foucault, and feminist appropriations of post-structuralist concepts, I articulate the advantages of embracing a non-representational, discursive approach to reading race in feminist discourse.

II. Theoretical Framework

The Limitations of Misrepresentation

The theoretical framework for this project emerges out of the limitations with the general approach to understanding race and the figure of the Black Woman in feminist theory. Notwithstanding the various theoretical models developed by Black feminists to describe the interaction between race, class and gender (See Chapter 2), up to this point, issues of race have been guided by and developed within a representation-referential model. As stated above, the two most prevalent arguments are: (1) that the issues of race and the specific concerns of Black women have been completely ignored or excluded from mainstream contemporary feminism, thereby making race and Black women absent figures within the discourse; and (2) when race and Black women are "included", they are misunderstood, distorted, or misrepresented in ways that do not correspond to the reality of racial oppression and Black womanhood. Thus, the omission of race and "women of color" become, as the second epigraph that opens this chapter illustrates, a "failure" on the part of the author/ movement, which in turn "prevents a full understanding of gender..." and "render[s] feminist theory

incomplete and incorrect."¹⁵ This position assumes that "there is some form of innocent knowledge to be had."¹⁶ Innocent knowledge, as defined by Flax, is the notion that one can "discover...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."¹⁷ The criticism that white feminists have "failed to include race," operates within this Enlightenment notion of innocent knowledge or truth. "Truth" is a universal principle that is applicable to everyone at all times. If "truth" or knowledge, in this case, feminist theories that articulate and explain gender relations, is seen as partial or exclusionary, it is not really truth. Thus, within this scheme, white feminist theory is perceived as being contaminated with self-interest and racial bias. bell hooks typifies this belief in claiming that "white women who dominate feminist discourse...rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group. Nor are they aware to the extent to which their perspectives reflect race and class biases..."¹⁸ Inundated with biases, feminist theory then becomes inadequate, and inaccurate because it does not and cannot apply to all women. To correct these biases, one need only to "include" all of the social factors that already exist in

Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History, (London: Verso Books, 1992).

¹⁵Maxine Baca Zinn, et. al., "The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies," in Gloria Anzaldúa, ed., Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras : Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color, op. cit., pp.-29-41.

¹⁶Jane Flax, "The End of Innocence," in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., Feminists Theorize the Political, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 447.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 3.

society—race, class, gender, etc. Feminist theory would then generate "better" knowledge about gender relations because it would be grounded in and informed by a truth that speaks to all women. Lacking any biases, and accounting for all women, feminist theory would become complete, accurate, and comprehensive.

This line of reasoning follows very closely feminist critiques of male generated knowledge. By the same token, it has also duplicated the problems of assuming access to a reality, that although specific to women, is nonetheless located and grounded in an "objective" and "innocent" epistemology. In pointing out ways in which male dominance has equated reason, rationality, and objectivity with the male form, feminists have assumed "that the success of the feminist projects of creating effective analyses of gender and of ending gender-based domination depends on our ability to make truth claims about the 'objective' status of our knowledge and our rights."¹⁹ In other words, being both a part and a critique of the Enlightenment narrative, feminists have unwittingly reproduced the ideas and the problems of a true-er, more accurate and better knowledge. This occurs most notably in those instances where feminists attempt to outline a particular feminist way of knowing that is grounded in "women's reality."

As stated previously, some feminists have pointed out the problems of constructing an epistemology grounded in an "experience" that ultimately reveals the "truth" about gender relations. However, the problems associated with this kind of reasoning is less recognized in those instances where questions about race and the position of Black women in feminist discourse become the focal point.

¹⁹Jane Flax, "The End of Innocence," *op. cit.*, p. 456-57.

By treating race as a biological embodiment, best exemplified by those who wear its mark, race becomes a thing whose absence is ameliorated simply by writing the word R-A-C-E or B-L-A-C-K in the text. This explains the typical response that race is absent on not seeing these signifiers in a feminist text. When these signs are absent, race or racialized meanings are said to be absent. As a result, the "presence" of race or Black women is often read in terms of images. Images of Black women or issues that are primarily racial are scrutinized for their accuracy; for how well they correspond to reality.

This is a fundamental assumption of the representation-referential model, namely that there is a distinction and a correspondence between "words" and "thing" or between the "image" provided through language (or any other medium, like film) and the "object" itself. This means that the word "apple", for example, merely stands in for the "real" apple. In this model, one comes to know an object through its presence in language, or more accurately, through its representation, wherein representation is understood as "a substitute, proxy, deputy, or stand-in."²⁰ Objects which are re-presented in language are assumed to be self-identical, i.e., they are assumed to pre-exist their naming in language. Under this model, language is a transparent medium. It plays no constitutive or productive role in that which it names. Its only role is to symbolize in words (signs), that which already exists in reality. Because "[l]anguage [is] construed as representation, [it] becomes a place of irreducible difference, defined in terms of identity and presence of the things it signifies."²¹ It is therefore not surprising that Black feminists and other critics focus on the "presence" or "absence" of the sign

²⁰Samuel Weber, *Return to Freud*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 24.

²¹Ibid.

R-A-C-E, or the ways in which African Americans have been re-presented in feminist theory. What race race signifies in this vast theoretical terrain, we are told, is a myriad of familiar stereotypes, negative images, distorted realities, and gross misrepresentations.

An example can be found in Angela Davis's discussion and use of the myth of the Black rapist. Davis argues that the image of the Black man as hypersexual and overly desirous of white women is a political invention used to thwart the social, political and economic progress of African Americans. The image of the Black man as excessively and uncontrollably sexual, not only marks Black men as natural sexual predators, but it also labels the Black woman as sexually immoral and promiscuous. The notion that Black women are "chronically promiscuous" is the "inseparable companion" of the Black man as rapist image. "For once the notion is accepted that Black men harbor irresistible and animal-like sexual urges, the entire race is invested with bestiality."²² In other words, if the Black man's sexuality is excessive, instinctual and uncontrollable, then one should assume that these innate sexual desires are nurtured and fed by equally insatiable women within the African American community. Both images, Davis explains, justifies a kind of racism that allows and legitimates fraudulent rape charges against Black men (particularly when the alleged victim is white), and dismisses *tout court* rape claims made by Black women. Davis underscores the historical and theoretical connections between the racist manipulation of the rape charge and the lack of legitimacy accorded to the rape claims of Black women. She speculates that Black women's less than enthusiastic support of the anti-rape movement, "...may be due, in part, to that movement's indifferent posture toward the frame-up rape charge as an

²²Angela Davis, "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist," in Women, Race, and Class, (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 182.

incitement to racist aggression" as well as to the fact that "few feminist theorists seriously analyze the special circumstances surrounding the Black woman as rape victim."²³

As such, Davis reserves the severest criticism for those feminists who, in their scholarly work, "portray Black women as promiscuous and immoral," and "...argue that men of color are especially prone to commit sexual violence against women."²⁴ She takes to task feminist works on rape that perpetuate negative and racist stereotypes of Black men and women. In discussing Susan Brownmiller's Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape, Jean MacKellar's Rape: The Bait and the Trap, Diana Russell's Politics of Rape, and Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution, Davis concludes that each of these feminists, despite their illuminating analyses on rape and the treatment of women, has "capitulate[d] to racism," by relying on and using racist stereotypes and images. Davis admonishes Brownmiller's discussion of "ghetto inhabitants" as "those who form the subculture of violence" and challenges her reading of Emmett Till "as a guilty sexist—almost as guilty as his white racist murderers."²⁵ Russell, MacKellar and Firestone, Davis contends, are "so completely mesmerized by racist propoganda," that their analyses can be nothing less than "intentional provocations."²⁶ All reinforce the erroneous notion that the

²³Ibid., 173.

²⁴Ibid., 176, 177-78.

²⁵Ibid., 179. Emmett Till was a fourteen year old Black youth who was lynched and murdered for whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. For a full discussion of this incident, see Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement for the 1950's through the 1980's, (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 1-15.

²⁶Ibid., 179.

"typical rapist is a man of color", and all play an instrumental role in misrepresenting the facts about who actually commit rapes in the United States. Moreover, Davis argues, by relying on the Black rapist/ whore stereotype, these feminists inaccurately depict the African American community as bound by instinctual, animalistic sexual appetites—a condition that whites (especially white women) are justified in fearing, or, as poignantly stated by Diana Russell, "...it is...realistic for white women to be less trusting of black men."²⁷

Because Davis focuses on images, on *what* race signifies, instead of *how* race signifies, her analysis is inevitably tied to the representation-referential model. Feminists, Davis asserts, like society in general, have insisted upon using images of Black women and men that misrepresent and distort their "real" nature. To be fair, at moments, Davis's text does speak to the way in which the "myth of the Black rapist" is an artifice, "a political invention," whose signification has political and social consequences. Emphasizing the artificiality or constructedness of images is not enough since all images, in a sense are "constructions." Davis's focus on the "distortion" or "inaccuracy" of such images precludes a reading of those images as being produced by and within the texts she cites. Insisting on the "inaccuracy" of stereotypical images implicitly assumes unmediated access to a "true" or "real" image of Black men and women. The concept "Black Woman" and its corresponding meaning(s) are assumed to exist prior to its invocation in the text. Thus, feminist theorists are seen as simply using existing images that are produced and given meaning, not within feminist theory, but elsewhere. Within this conceptual scheme, the corrective would be to locate the "real" image of Black women and men and then properly re-present it within the text.

²⁷Quoted in *ibid.*, 180.

Focusing on the what of signification, not only assumes the accuracy or truth of an image, but invariably attaches a negative or positive value to such images. Positive images are often read as "true", "real", or more accurate because they are assumed to counter "non-true", "inaccurate" or negative images. There are several problems associated with the positive/negative binary that is often attached to images of Black women and race in feminist theory.

First, the positive/negative image binary limits the construction and presentation of positive images of Blacks to the opposite of negative imagery. Because of the widespread and popular belief that African Americans are morally inferior, intellectually inept, and sexually perverse, the goal of many feminist and cultural critics becomes one of refuting these assumptions by simply reversing "negative" images to positive ones. African American's inability to "represent themselves to themselves and others as complex human beings, and thereby to contest the bombardment of negative, degrading stereotypes put forward by white supremacist ideologies," resulted in a "...fight for representation and recognition [which] highlighted moral judgments regarding Black 'positive' images over and against White supremacists stereotypes."²⁸ Positive images are constructed in opposition to racist stereotypes and as such take on the "opposite" characteristics of the negative image. Thus, the "lazy, unproductive Negro" becomes "a hardworking, industrious citizen." As Wallace points out, "[n]ot only does reversal, or the notion that blacks are more likeable, more compassionate, smarter, or even 'superior,' not substantially alter racist preconceptions, it ties Afro-American cultural production to racist ideology in a way that makes the

²⁸Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in Russell Ferguson, et. al., eds., Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 27.

failure to alter it inevitable."²⁹ In other words, posing questions about the image of Blacks in terms of positive versus negative does not alter the racist perception that people of African descent are inferior because Black inferiority becomes the point of departure. Constructing "positive" images based upon and in opposition to negative images reinforces the notion of Black inferiority because the goal is to prove that Blacks are not inferior. This conceptual move privileges "...a White norm so that Black [scholars'] efforts [to construct positive images] remain inscribed within the very logic that dehumanizes them."³⁰

Second, since the objective is to undermine the racist notion that Blacks are inferior, the construction of a "positive image" often elides cultural difference in such a way that "positive images" become, through their overdetermined characteristics, "negative images." Images are considered "positive" when they possess characteristics of the dominant culture. "Positive images" are deemed positive precisely because they reflect and represent White ideals about everything from speech patterns to the kind of food that is consumed.³¹ As a result, "positive images" of Blacks, with their White cultural attributes, are criticized for their inability to capture accurately "real" Black people. Because these "positive (White) images" fail to articulate the cultural and social differences between Blacks and Whites, "positive" images become both inaccurate and "negative." The "inaccuracy" of positive images stems from the fact that its image is so White as not to be representative of Blackness at all. They

²⁹Michele Wallace, "Negative/ Positive Images," in Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory, (New York: Verso Books, 1990), 1.

³⁰Cornel West, *op. cit.*, 28.

³¹Ann DuCille makes this point in her recent essay on the OJ Simpson trial. See "The Blacker the Juice: O.J. Simpson and the Squeeze Play of Race," in Skin Trade (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 136-169.

fail, in other words, to reflect that which is "truly" Black; they fail to capture and articulate a different identity. When "[B]lacks are shown as characters who possess 'positive' attributes of white culture," then we are faced with the absence of "...any concrete or complex textualization of cultural difference."³² In addition to the obliteration of cultural difference, "positive (White) images" of Blacks are transformed into negative images because they make evident the problematic assumption that Blacks are indeed inferior and that the only appropriate cure is assimilation. If "positive images" are constructed to contest "negative," degrading images, but can become "inaccurate" and "negative" through a process of racial and cultural obliteration, how then are we to distinguish between what is "negative" and what is "positive?" At what point precisely does a "positive" image become "negative"? What set of criteria do we use to make this determination, and who gets to judge which set of criteria is appropriate? If both the negative image and its responsive counter-part—the positive image—can be criticized for its failure to accurately re-present "Blackness", then our logic has come full circle; for we return to the initial problem of mis-representation.

The obliteration of the particularity and specificity of Black cultural difference is the product of an effort "to show that Black people really [are] like [or better than] White people."³³ This propensity to create a sameness or likeness between Blacks and the dominant culture, through a blurring or reversal of imagery, also tends to obscure significant differences among Blacks. Issues of gender, age, region, and class are effectively obscured in any notion of a "positive image of Blacks." The homogenization process is not necessarily problematic simply because it produces a "monolithic," or "essentialist" concept. Rather, the

³²Michele Wallace, *op. cit.*, 2.

³³Cornel West, *op. cit.*, 27.

problem exists in the fact that this impulse toward likeness takes place within a framework in which the terms of the debate are already set. The absence of cultural (or even racial) differentiation, as a critique against the "positive/ negative" framework, makes little sense unless one recognizes that a "monolithic Blackness" is both presumed and inevitable. Why? Primarily because its corollary, the category "White" is assumed to be the superior, yet neutral, standard against which "negative" images are dismantled. Any construction of a "positive" image of race uses an unarticulated, and equally monolithic (and mythic), prototype of "Whiteness." Therefore, it is inevitable that an undifferentiated Black identity will emerge from the process of countering "negative" images with "positive" ones.

Given that the project to construct "positive" images of Blacks is inevitably tied to racist assumptions about African peoples, and because this framework tends to obliterate differences in the name of imitation and assimilation, the notion of a "positive image" cannot account for the ways in which Blacks, throughout the Diaspora, have extracted, appropriated and reinterpreted those characteristics that identify white images of Blacks as racist. Like the erasure of culture differences, this third problem threatens to collapse the dividing line between positive and negative for at least two reasons.

One, as stated previously, "positive images" can transform themselves into "negative" images because the starting point assumes both the superiority and neutrality of the dominant culture. The characteristics of the dominant culture become that which makes positive images "positive. The implication, of course is that non-dominant culture characteristics are inherently problematic and are in need of correction. The result is a rejection of "positive images" as negative. Second, the positive/ negative binary posits a conception of the "positive" and the "negative" that are absolute, separate and in opposition to each other. This

dualism fails in that it is unable to account for those "racist" images that have been borrowed or appropriated from the dominant discourse and used for means altogether different from their intended purposes. In other words, the positive versus negative image paradigm cannot provide the theoretical tools to explain the ways in which racist images (i.e., negative images) have been usurped and turned on their head in a manner that both critiques the dominant culture and serves as a basis for African American cultural discourse. For example, the racist/negative image of African American women as unauthorized heads-of-households, who are by nature "bossy," is appropriated and reinterpreted as a sign of survival, independence, and strength. Within African American discourse, which can be considered "an important variation on post-colonial discourse,"³⁴ female-headed households are not necessarily read as signs of moral degeneracy and breeding grounds for juvenile delinquency. Rather, their roles as "heads of households" are reconstructed to signify strength and endurance in the face of the effects of racism. Once despised, the characteristics of female-headed households become laudable attributes that have enabled the survival of the Black family as an autonomous unit.³⁵ This renders questionable the notion that negative images are always and everywhere "negative." By the same token, the reinterpretation and resignification of "negative" images demonstrates that a pure, untainted, positive image is inconceivable. Given that

³⁴Michele Wallace, op. cit., 2. On post-colonality and minority discourse see, Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd, eds., The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics, (New York: Routledge, 1988).

³⁵For example, this is the thesis in the works of Andrew Billingsley, Black Families In White America, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968); Robert B. Hill The Strength of Black Families, (New York: Emerson Hall Publishers, Inc., 1972); and Carol Stack, All our Kin.

"so-called 'negative images' will probably be necessary to any kind of reformulation or restructuring of prevailing conceptions of 'race' and 'ethnicity',"³⁶ one can no longer assume that the distinction between positive and negative is absolute and self-identical. The mark of the negative image is not only an inherent and constitutive part of a "positive image," but it is the basis for the critical (re)signification of African American culture and discourse.³⁷ The capacity to turn a racist/negative image against itself, to reconstruct its meaning and re-deploy it as part of a critical discourse against a dominant ideology, is incomprehensible within the negative/positive framework.

A final problem with the negative/positive framework is that it assumes the availability of and an access to an already, pre-existent, and "accurate" image. This pre-existent image need only to be uncovered and imported, exactly as one "finds" it, into a text or discourse. The failure to present the "real" image in a text as it exists in "reality" constitutes a mis-representation and a gross distortion. Lola Young, in discussing the representation of Black women in film, explains the problem in this way:

[t]he position which considers Black women to be 'misrepresented' in mainstream cinema is problematic because such a stance implies that the answer to the constant parade of negative stereotypical images of Black women is to produce a 'truthful' or realistic representation of Black women. In demanding an end to 'negative' images of Black women, the notion of a 'Real Black Woman' is invoked. The implication here is that...we may claim unmediated access to an essential Black female subject: of course, that woman exists in the realms of mythology only.³⁸

³⁶Michele Wallace, *op. cit.*, 4.

³⁷Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: The Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

³⁸"The Rough Side of the Mountain: Black Woman and Representation in Film," in Delia Jarrett-Macauley, ed., *Reconstructing Womanhood*.

The implication that an "accurate" or "real" image exists in reality, ties the negative/ positive framework to a theory of language in which words are merely symbolic representations of a corresponding object in "reality." An image is positive or negative, accurate or distorted, based upon how closely it resembles or matches the assumed referent that lies behind it. However, this formula only works if language is viewed as a transparent medium through which re-presentation occurs. Once language is dislodged from this framework, in which the signifier (word) and the signified (meaning) have a permanent one-to-one correlation, then the shortcomings of focusing on what is signified, as opposed to how a signifier operates, is apparent.

The representational-referential model of language, when used to explain "race" in feminist theory focuses on the "truth" of an image or on the presence of the signifier "race" itself, because it assumes that a stable relationship exists between the signifier and the signified. The coupling of the signifier and the signified is presumed to produce a unified whole and preserve a particular and permanent identity or meaning. Thus, the word or concept (i.e., signifier) "Black woman" for example, is believed to automatically yield a specific meaning (i.e., signified) of "Black woman" that corresponds to the hidden referent—the "real" Black Woman. What is denied is the possibility that meaning is not fixed, and that there is "no guarantee of [the sign's] truth or reality by virtue of the [presumed] referent that lies behind the represented."³⁹ Under the representation-referential model, one is unable to discern how the meaning of race or the Black woman comes into existence, so to speak. We know that "meanings" exist, but

Reconstructing Feminism: Writings on Black Women, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 178.

³⁹Elizabeth Cowie, "Representations," in Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie, eds., The Woman Question, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 113.

not how they are constructed or how they operate. We know that certain kinds of "images" offer a critique of the theoretical assumptions and normative practices in feminist theorizing, but not the level or depth of the critique. Focusing on the meaning of images, and labelling them "negative" or "positive" may provide a limited and myopic view of a particular interpretation of an image at one historical moment, but it cannot explain, analyze, or even refute the construction of that image. A specific theoretical dismantling of the very construction of an image cannot take place, because the "real" meaning of an image is assumed to exist prior to its re-presentation in language. Thus, the "meaning" of images ("what they say") cannot be challenged; they can only be condemned for their lack of accuracy.

However, if we view language as a system that constructs or produces meaning through the very *process* of representation, rather than as a transparent medium through which "real" objects are simply translated, then the notion of distorted images or of gross misrepresentations becomes less tenable. Since the use of language produces meaning, then the focus must shift from what is signified to *how* a concept is signified. As a result, "images" are examined, not for accurate portrayal, but for the nature of how their meaning is constituted, the meaning and function of their particular construction(s), and the role they play in both the text and the discourse from which they emerge. Moreover, "images" are read as signs, as signifiers whose meaning is not already known before its invocation and circulation in a text. Viewed in this manner, "[r]epresentation is not a system of signs referring to reality...[in which] there [is] recourse to an original essence against which the achievement of shortcomings of

images produced....can be measured,"⁴⁰ but a system in which "meaning arises in the very construction of representation."⁴¹

This issue of representation and language, as it relates to the category "woman", has been raised within the works of several contemporary feminist thinkers. The works of Judith Butler, Joan Scott, Denise Riley, Monique Wittig, Linda Zerilli, Mary Poovey, and Jane Flax, in varying degrees, eschew the notion of a pre-existent meaning of woman before its articulation in language and discourse.⁴² In these works, the stability of the category "woman" is problematized by focusing on the ways in which "woman" is constituted in and by discourse. The focus on the productive nature of meaning is precisely the kind of theoretical move that is needed when examining "race" as a category in feminist theory. Moreover, in extending and inverting the logic of the circulation of signifiers as productive of meaning, I contend that meaning is also produced through the absence of signifiers, in as much as the absence or "void" becomes in itself a sign. This is not to suggest that "absence" is self-referential, or that the identification of a "void" implies that it is something to be filled. To the extent that meaning is produced through absences, gaps, and voids, it is equally true that any reading of an absence, *as an absence*, is a productive moment as well. Absent signifiers, like the often cited absence of "race" or "Black women" in

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble and Bodies that Matter*, op. cit.; Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments*, op. cit.; Mary Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," *Feminist Studies* 14 (Spring 1988): 51-65; Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?" op. cit.; Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in Gender and the Politics of History, (New York: 1988); Monique Wittig, The Straight Mind and Other Essays, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Linda M.G. Zerilli, Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

feminist texts, are subject to readings, critiques, and analyses that are themselves determinants of the meaning of "absence."

In addition to a particular view on language, adherence to the representational-referential model carries with it certain other assumptions relevant to race, gender, and feminist theory that makes the move toward signification both necessary and appropriate. There are at least four problematic assumptions about race in relation to gender in feminist thinking that are tied directly to the referential model of representation. These assumptions are listed and explained below.

Related Assumptions of the Representation-Referential Model

(1) Assumption One: Race is Separate

Race, as a category of analysis, is considered to be separate and distinct from gender having its own history, formation, constitution and application. Although completely separate, according to this assumptive principle, the internal composition of race and gender is assumed to be symmetrical because both are based on hierarchal concepts incorporating difference, superiority, and domination. Because of their inherent symmetry, race and gender are presumed to operate in parallel ways, and can therefore be effectively compared and analogized. However, neither category fundamentally affects the constitution or the content of the other.

(2) Assumption Two: Race is Secondary to Gender

Not only is race considered to be a separate and distinct category, it is also considered to be secondary to or less important than gender. Patriarchy and

sexual difference is theorized as the most fundamental, most pervasive, and longest enduring form of domination. Differentiation and domination based on race is theorized as a latent function of capitalism or sexism. Even those feminists who employ Lacanian based theories to explore the construction of "gendered" subjectivities privilege gender in explaining the constitution of subjectivity. Although "subjectivities" are fragmented, split or incomplete, race affects the subjects only "after" it is formed. Anna Jonasdottir's comments are indicative of the secondary role race place in theorizing sexual difference and gender. In agreement with the analysis of Ann Ferguson, she states:

Ann Ferguson seems to be right when she writes that no one has presented an analysis that makes clear how *race* fits in as a basic social division between people rather than as an effect of capitalism and/or patriarchy.' Still, in 1994, I am not aware of any such analysis.⁴³

(3) Assumption Three: Race is the Equivalent of "Black"

The concept "race" is reduced to the biological, meaning that the focus of any discussion on race in feminist theory tends to concentrate on biological and physiological racial "markers"—skin color, hair texture, or those who embody these features. These physical markers of race, although not always visible, refer to its reality in "nature." Even when race is claimed to be conceptualized as a "social construct," a reductive move insures that race is confined to and defined as some putative aspect of 'Blackness'. Moreover, race is conceptualized as a biological characteristic or an attribute that only Blacks or "non-whites" possess.

⁴³Quoted in Why Women Are Oppressed, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 39.

In as much as race is defined as the equivalent of "Black", issues of "whiteness" or of ethnicity are configured as invisible, irrelevant, and unproblematic categories.

(4) Assumption Four: Race is a Pre-Determined Category

This assumption is closely related to the notion that race is the equivalent of "Black". Feminist analysis assumes "race" as an unproblematic category that pre-exists its invocation in feminist texts. Race is assumed to be a pre-determined category whose content is already always defined in and by nature. Thus, feminist theory need only to extract and import what is already in existence. The goal is to "add" race to a discursive domain that claims a separation from it. In importing race, the ultimate object is not only to "include" that which was not previously there, but to accurately re-present it.

(5) Assumption Five: Only Feminist Theory Has Access to Gender Relations

Feminist theorizing constructs itself as the only discourse that has access to and can define, explain, and analyze gender relations. As Flax argues,

[a] fundamental goal of feminist theory is (and ought to be) to analyze gender relations: how gender relations are constituted and experiences and how we think or equally important, do not think about them. The study of gender relation includes...[a study of] the situation of women and the analysis of male domination.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," in Micheline R. Malson, et. al., eds., Feminist Theory in Practice and Process, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 56.

Feminism takes as its object of study "Woman," and sees itself as producing research that is not "...only about but for women."⁴⁵ Given this, the "truth" of which feminism speaks is based upon the experiences of "real" women. "Women as a group" is assumed to pre-exist the scholarship that is produced in its name.

(6) Assumption Six: Feminist Theorizing is Inherently "Anti-racist"

The emergence of the First and Second Wave of Feminism from two race-based movements—the Abolitionist Movement and the Civil Rights Movement—underscores the notion that feminism is most open to exploring other forms of domination. Feminist analogies to "slavery" and to the condition of the "nigger" implies that feminist thinking inherently understands race and racism. In most feminist accounts of the history of the women's movement, the "founding mothers" were spurred in to action because of their empathy for the slaves on the one hand, and disenfranchised Blacks on the other. Catherine Stimpson lends legitimacy to this assumption by stating:

Women's protest has followed black protest...Antislavery movements preceded the first coherent woman's rights movement, black male suffrage, woman's suffrage, the civil rights movement, the new feminism. For the most part, white women have organized, not after working *with* blacks, but after working on *behalf* of them. Feminism has received much of its impetus from the translation of lofty, middle-class altruism into the more realistic, emotionally rugged salvation of the self. [original emphasis].⁴⁶

⁴⁵Marylin J. Boxer, "For and About Women: The Theory and Practice of Women's Studies in the United States," 7 *Signs* (Spring 1982), 662.

⁴⁶Catherine Stimpson, "'Thy Neighbor's Wife, Thy Neighbor's Servants': Women's Liberation and Black Civil Rights." In Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran, eds., Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971), 624.

Adrienne Rich, like Stimpson, constructs a history that is inherently "anti-racist." It is important for white feminists to remember," she writes:

that despite lack of constitutional citizenship, educational deprivation, economic bondage to men, laws and customs forbidding women to speak in public or to disobey fathers, husbands, and brothers, our white forefathers have...repeatedly been 'disloyal to civilization,' and have smelled death in the word 'segregation,' often defying patriarchy for the first time, not on their own behalf but for the sake of black men, women and children. We have a **strong anti-racist female tradition**, despite all the efforts of the white patriarchy to polarize its creature-objects...[emphasis added]⁴⁷

⁴⁷"Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia," in On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 284-85. This feminist historiographical account of the women's movement has been critiqued by many Black feminists and Black women historians. See for example, bell hooks, "Racism and Feminism: The Issue of Accountability," in Ain't I a Woman, (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 119-158.

hooks counters the assumption that feminism is inherently anti-racist by arguing that "[e]very women's movement in America from its earliest origin to the present day has been built on a racist foundation" (p. 124). In hooks's view,

Historiographers and especially recent feminist writing have created a version of American history in which white women's rights advocates are presented as champions of oppressed black people. This fierce romanticism has informed most studies of the abolitionist movement. In contemporary times there is a general tendency to equate abolitionism with a repudiation of racism. In actuality, most white abolitionists, male and female, though vehement in their anti-slavery protest, were totally opposed to granting social equality to black people....It is a commonly accepted belief that white female reformist empathy with the oppressed black slave, coupled with her recognition that she was powerless to end slavery, led to the development of a feminist consciousness and feminist revolt. Contemporary historiographers and in particular white female scholars accept the theory that the white women's rights feelings of solidarity with black slaves were an indication that they were anti-racist and were supportive of social equality of blacks...There is little historical evidence to document Rich's

Moreover, the establishment and institutionalization of the feminist movement into the academy as Women's Studies was justified with analogies to Black Studies.⁴⁸ Consequently, feminist theory, in all its various forms, is assumed to be, if not a natural ally to the issue of race, then a neutral discursive ground on which to think through issues of race, class and gender and their relationship.

These assumptions, along with the belief that language is a transparent medium through which "real" objects are simply re-presented, underscore the need to move from thinking of race in feminist theory as a myriad of mis-represented images. The mis-representation view and its related assumptions encourages one to look for the "presence" of race by identifying a racial sign; it insists upon the project of "inserting" race into theories that claim access to "gender relations" unaffected and "undetermined by "race relations"; it calls for a modifying of the category "Woman" in which a series of adjectives presumably corrects its exclusionary and stable theoretical structure; and it conceptualizes race as something only applicable to "women of color."

These assumptions limit our understanding of the role feminist theory plays in producing race as a category as it invokes and deploys it. Most

assertion that white women as a collective group or white women's rights activists are a part of an anti-racist tradition (p. 124-125).

See also Angela Davis, Women, Race and Class, (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1983); Eleanor Smith, "Historical Relationships Between Black and White Women," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed. Black Women in American History: From Colonial Times Through the Nineteenth Century, (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990), Volume 10, 581-589; Rosalyn Terborg Penn, "Discrimination Against the Afro-American Woman in the Women's Movement, 1830-1920," in Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg Penn, eds., The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images, 17-27.

⁴⁸Boxer, *ibid.*

importantly, this set of assumptions, and the accompanying representational-referential model, cannot account for the recent attention feminism has given to questions of "difference" on the one hand, and the increasingly marginal, even invisible position that race occupies on the other. There has been an explosion of texts on or by Black women, and an increase in the number of scholars who "take up the Black woman" as their object of inquiry. This most recent intellectual interest in "the Black Woman" is so sudden, so intense, and seems to attract so many well-known feminist and literary scholars that DuCille names this preoccupation with Black women the "Occult of True Black Womanhood."⁴⁹ Furthermore, issues of difference and diversity are now accompanied by a (verbal) recognition of the inter-relationship between race, class, and gender. Given these intellectual transformations and developments within feminist thinking, the idea that "...American feminism [is] primarily a narrative about the heroic deeds of white women,"⁵⁰ in which "...much [of] feminist scholarship [is] written as if Black women d[o] not exist..."⁵¹ seems to have lost its power of critique. In fact, the claim that feminist theory continues to theorize from a "white, middle-class, female" perspective appears to be little more than rhetoric from a by-gone era. Yet the popular claim that feminist theory is racially exclusive and insensitive to the specific experiences of "women of color,"

⁴⁹Ann duCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies," *Signs* 19 (Spring 1994): 591-627.

⁵⁰Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought, (New York: The New Press, 1995), xiii.

⁵¹Adrienne Rich, "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia," in On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 281. Rich rightly attributes her understanding of this issue to Barbara Smith and other Black feminists who pointed out the shortcomings of early feminist scholarship.

continues to constitute much of the criticism lodged against it. Despite the attention feminist thinking gives to difference, alterity and de-essentializing the category "Woman", race it is argued, still escapes theoretical discussion.

What accounts for the continued assertion that feminism is exclusionary of race and racial issues? Is "exclusion" the most productive way to think about race and its relationship to feminist thinking? How has race been mobilized? How has it been deployed and what is the significance of its use(s) in feminist theory?

Feminist Theory as Discourse and a System Signification

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand how race has been figured and deployed in feminist theory by viewing it through a framework that allows for the productive nature of language. Generally speaking, I maintain that any analysis of race in feminist thinking must avoid the tendency to view race in terms of whether or not the word "race" or "Black women" appear in the text. Similarly, the "presence" of either cannot be evaluated in terms of accuracy and inaccuracy or positiveness and negativeness. Neither can "race" be viewed as a category that has been excluded from feminist thinking; for this would imply that one can simply insert of "include" race into the existing theoretical constructs. In addition, to merely cite exclusion as both the cause and the problem, does not provide the theoretical tools to examine how exclusion occurs, or the role that exclusion plays in stabilizing basic feminist concepts.

In this dissertation, reread race as a category that is produced and defined as it is invoked and articulated in feminist texts. Its invocation may be explicit where the signifier itself is prominent, or its invocation maybe implicit, where race functions and is constituted in metaphorical, or metonymic terms. That race can be produced and used in metaphorical or metonymic terms suggests that it

can no longer be viewed as a thing that exists outside of feminist discourse; as that which simply needs to be "inserted." Rather it suggests that race is always already a part of feminist discourse. However, it is important to recognize that race is not simply a "part" of feminist thinking, in the sense that "part" is conceptualized as a separate component that can be inserted and removed at will, but that race is a *constitutive part* of feminist thinking. In other words, race is not only produced by and through the ways in which it is deployed, but it in turns plays a productive role in constructing, legitimating and stabilizing feminist theory as the discourse which speaks of and forms its object—Woman.

If race is always already a constitutive part of feminist thinking, then it is never outside of its theoretical domain; never "excluded" from it. At the same time, "race" and what it comes to signify, can never precede or pre-exist the signifying system that gives it meaning and understanding. This recognition does not, however, prevent feminist theory from "speaking of," if you will, and defining race as that which exists outside its purview.

To accept these propositions means that one must view feminist theory as a discourse. By discourse, I do not mean "communication of thought by speech" as in conversation, dialogue, or talk.⁵² In this project, I will be using the term discourse as it is developed in the work of Michele Foucault and appropriated by feminists like Joan Scott and Terese deLauretis.

In rejecting traditional units of analyses—text, oeuvre, genre—Foucault defines discourse as "large groups of statements" in which their unity, coherence, and logical correlation are based upon and governed by internal rules and

⁵²See Jennifer Coates, Women Talk: Conversation Between Women Friends. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

structures.⁵³ A discourse consists of a specific structure of statements, beliefs, and even practices, which constitutes itself as a relatively autonomous realm of "truth." In a sense, a "discourse...[can be] seen as something like [a] frame; and what [it] enclose[s] [is a 'large group of] statements."⁵⁴ A discourse is a discursive formation in that it is a "rule-governed language terrain."⁵⁵ Foucault defines a discursive formation in this manner:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion; whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positionings and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation.⁵⁶

Hence, Foucault is not interested in the specific statements or beliefs themselves, or whether or not such statements are indeed "true." Instead, he is "interested in the conditions which make it possible for the structure [of statements, beliefs, and practices] to arise."⁵⁷ He is interested in the "unity of discourse"; in the conditions that create or construct unity and permit discourses to exist as a discourse. In other words, Foucault focuses on the rules of formation, the "conditions of existence...[as well as the conditions of] coexistence,

⁵³Michel Foucault, The Archeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language, Translated from the French by A.M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 37.

⁵⁴Ibid., 110.

⁵⁵Jeremy Hawthorn, A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory, Second Edition, (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 49.

⁵⁶Michel Foucault, Archeology of Knowledge, op. cit., 38.

⁵⁷Manfred Frank, "On Foucault's Concept of Discourse," in Timothy J. Armstrong, ed. Michele Foucault Philosopher, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 107.

maintenance, modification, and disappearance in a given discursive division."⁵⁸ The key in identifying rules of formation, or the conditions of existence is to ask: what rules permit certain statements to be made and not others; what rules order the statements that are made; and what rules permit one to identify some statements as "true" and others as "false"?⁵⁹ The discursive rules and practices within a discursive domain, govern the way in which the object of the discourse is "...talked about, when, where, [how], and by whom."⁶⁰ Any historical and specific set of discursive rules, practices, or conventions make possible the existence of a discursive formation, or a discourse by functioning as boundaries which simultaneously permit and prohibit what is spoken of within a discourse.

An important aspect of the concept discourse is the notion that it produces or constitutes its objects. In the words of Foucault, "[i]t would be quite wrong to see discourse as a place where previously established objects are laid one after another like words on a page."⁶¹ Similarly, in analyzing how discourses are formed, "[i]t would [also] be inadequate to say that one was dealing...with the consequences of discovery..."⁶² A discourse does not contain concepts, ideas, beliefs, and practices that were created elsewhere and then placed within its domain only to be discovered at some future time. The conditions that are

⁵⁸Michel Foucault, Archeology of Knowledge, op. cit., . 38.

⁵⁹Mark Philp, "Foucault" in Quentin Skinner, ed., The Return of Grand Theory, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶⁰Jeremy Hawthorn, A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory, op. cit., 49.

⁶¹Michel Foucault, Archeology of Knowledge, op. cit., 43.

⁶²Ibid.

necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse are also necessary "if one is to 'say anything' about" that object.⁶³

Which means that one cannot speak of anything at anytime. [Without the conditions or rules that bring an object of discourse into existence,] it is not easy to say something new; it is not enough for us to open our eyes, to pay attention, or to be aware, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground....[T]he object does not await in limbo in the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive condition of a complex group of relations"[emphasis added].⁶⁴

Thus, discursive formations are not differentiated by their object, instead they refer to a common object by "produc[ing] the object of which they speak."⁶⁵ A discourse is not characterized by a privileged object or concept that is assumed to refer to its "real" counterpart outside of its domain. Instead, a discourse is characterized by the way in which it forms the very object of which it claims to have access. The object or subject of any discourse can never precede its invocation and articulation in the text. Discourses constitute and define their objects, subjects, and concepts through the very process of speaking of them. In short, a discourse is a discursive formation that is defined and governed by rules that bring it into existence and maintain its claim(s) to a particular kind of knowledge. A discourse is constituted by all that it says in its "large groups of statements," which names, defines, describes, and explains its object. In

⁶³Ibid., 44.

⁶⁴Ibid., 44-45.

⁶⁵Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Second Edition, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 61.

expanding this notion, I argue that a discourse is as much constituted by what it says in its "large group of statements", as by what it does not say or fails to say. This includes those statements that choose say that "nothing will be said" of a particular concept or issue. I recognize the dismissive act of saying "I will not speak of this particular subject, although it is important...." as a part of the productive process that delineates and gives meaning to the object of which the discourse speaks.

In Foucauldian analysis, "[t]he conditions necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse...are many and imposing."⁶⁶ According to Foucault, discourses are established through primary, secondary, and discursive relations. Primary relations are those relations "...established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, systems of norms, [and] modes of characterization."⁶⁷ Primary relations are external and exist "independently of all discourse or all object of discourse."⁶⁸ Secondary relations are those "relations that are formulated in the discourse itself."⁶⁹ They are internal to the discourse and function to connect concepts or words with one another or establish deductive or rhetorical structure between propositions or sentences.⁷⁰ Discursive relations are neither external nor internal to discourse.

They are in a sense, at the limit of discourse: they offer it objects of which it can speak, or rather (for this image of offering presupposes

⁶⁶Michel Foucault, Archeology of Knowledge, op. cit., 44.

⁶⁷Ibid., 45.

⁶⁸Ibid., 45

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., 46.

that objects are formed independently of discourse), they determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them, name them, analyse them, classify them, explain them, etc. [emphasis added].⁷¹

Following Foucault's insights, I argue that feminist thinking and theorizing must first be understood as a discourse characterized by a set of rules governing the contents of its domain. "But the rules of a discourse are not rules which individuals consciously follow; a discourse is not a method or a canon of inquiry. Rather these rules provide the necessary preconditions for the formation of statements" and therefore operate 'behind the backs' of the speakers of a discourse.⁷² If discursive relations are, as Foucault argues, "at the limit of discourse," then the importance of such relations lies in their double ability to enable or allow certain statements to be made on a specific topic, and to simultaneously constrict, limit, or constrain what is said.

Just as discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write or conduct oneself, so also by definition, it 'rules out,' limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it.⁷³

An examination of these boundary-marking, border-setting relations allows us to look at the ways in which a discourse is constructed through permissive and restrictive discursive moments. By focusing on the rules and practices that produce and regulate the "truth" of a discourse, one is able to see

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Mark Philp, "Foucault," op. cit., 69.

⁷³Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in Stuart Hall, ed., Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 44.

discourse not simply as "a large group of statements" about a particular object, but as "large group of statements" that brings into existence and defines its object through the very process of "speaking" of it. By focusing on the rules of formation, on the conditions that make possible and bring into existence a discursive field of knowledge, one is able to identify and analyze discursive norms, practices and regulatory schemes and their function in a particular discourse. Conceived of in this manner, the task in analyzing language in its role as representation "...is to dispense with 'things.' To 'depresentify' them....To substitute for the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior [or external] to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse."⁷⁴ The goal would be to define the object of discourse "...without reference to the *ground*, the *foundation of things*, but by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical [theoretical, and discursive] appearance."⁷⁵

The significance of the Foucauldian concept of discourse then is that it helps one to conceive of language as a system of construction; as a signifying practice that both produces meaning and is a product of its own activities and formulations. As such, discourse cannot be viewed as a purely linguistic concept that is concerned only with the language or words used by the discourse. The discursive relations that form the boundaries of a discourse and enable it to speak of its object "characterize not the language (lange) used by the discourse, not the circumstances in which it is deployed, but discourse itself as a practice."⁷⁶ Thus, the concept discourse is about language *and* practice. It is about the

⁷⁴Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, op. cit., 47.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 48.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 46.

production of knowledge and meaning through linguistic practices. Discourses define and produce knowledge by giving meaning to its object of analysis. To view discourse in this manner, means that we can no longer treat

discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is the *more* that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech.

If discourse is a practice, then the language it employs is not simply a transparent medium through which the "real" of reality is simply conveyed or represented. Unlike the traditional or referential approach to language, which assumes a pre-existent object with a self-identical meaning, the concept of discourse emphasizes language as signification, i.e., as the process of producing and articulating meaning. Thus, the significance in moving from the referential approach to an approach that emphasizes the productive nature of language, lies in the theoretical ability to explain how meaning is constituted and how such meaning might be signified through various configurations. If race, for example, is assumed to be the equivalent of "a Black person", whose "blackness" is given in and by nature, then its "presence" in feminist thinking will be judged by whether or not the word "race" appears in feminist texts. If the meaning of race, especially as it relates to gender, is considered to be pre-determined, then feminist theory will not see itself as producing particular meanings of race. In addition, feminist theory will be unable to see the ways in which the category race helps to make possible the object of feminist discourse---Woman. Viewing feminist theory as a discourse will help to avoid the pitfalls associated with notions of accurate or positive representations of race or Black women in feminist thinking.

Joan Scott and Teresa deLauretis have both outlined the importance of viewing feminist theory as forming its own unique discursive domain. Specifically, Scott argues that poststructuralist concepts like discourse, difference, and deconstruction, are "useful for feminists" because they provide "a new way of analyzing constructions of meaning and relationships of power that [call] unitary, universal categories into question..."⁷⁷ To analyze such constructions, Scott maintains that language must be seen as "a meaning-constituting system," which is differentiated from a discourse, which is defined as "a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs."⁷⁸ In applying these particular post-structuralist concepts, de Lauretis defines "[t]he notion of a feminist discourse, [as] a configuration of rhetorical and interpretive strategies, a horizon of possible meanings that may be agreed upon as constituting and defining feminism at a given historical juncture."⁷⁹ While de Lauretis admits that there is "no boundary [that] separates or insulates feminism from other social practices or makes it impervious to the institutions of civil society,"⁸⁰ she does argue that

[t]here are, however, discursive boundaries: not only specific terms, concepts, and rhetorical strategies that distinguish feminist writing and speech from the others, but also certain shared assumptions, interpretive paths, inferences drawn from events and behaviors, and unstated premises—unstated because they no longer need to be stated, having become, one might say, 'part of the

⁷⁷Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," in Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, eds., *Conflicts in Feminism*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 134 & 135.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁹Teresa de Lauretis, "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, (1986), .

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

discourse.' These discursive boundaries....[are not] simply constraints but also configurations, [that] delineate a set of possible meanings..."[emphasis added]⁸¹

Once feminist theory is conceptualized as a discourse, the questions that emerge as they relate to race are: are there any "shared assumptions," "interpretive paths" and "unstated premises," that produce and construct the category race in feminist discourse? How has feminist theorizing conceptualized race, and what kind of knowledge has feminism produced about "racial" matters? How, and in what configurations, has the category race been deployed in feminist thinking? What is its role(s) and function(s) in general and in specific feminist texts?

Such questions can only be asked and examined when feminist theory is seen as a discourse containing discursive practices that name and produce its subject—Woman. As previously stated, the idea that the category woman is "historically, discursively constructed...in which female persons can be very differently positioned so that the apparent continuity of subject of women [cannot] to be relied upon,"⁸² is an emerging, if not an already acceptable claim. But what is missed in these analyses of the "discursive constructions" are the ways in which race is constituted and in turn constitutes or forms the very category "woman." In many instances, race (whatever its configuration), is deployed in the service of legitimating "woman" and as such, brings it and the notion of "women as a group" into existence as a unified and coherent concept.

To the extent that feminist theory is a discourse, it must also be recognized as a narrative in that it is both a process and the product of telling a story about

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Denise Riley, "Am I that Name?", op. cit., 1-2.

"women's oppression." Because "expectations about plotting, the central characters, and acceptable morality..." change, it is more appropriate to say that "feminists have constructed new genres [or] stories, [in the plural], about gender from women's point(s) of view."⁸³ That "[f]eminist theorists have constructed a variety of interesting stories about how gender systems are produced, reproduced, and maintained and about how and why these systems become ones of domination," is significant in that such "stories," whether they are confined to certain texts, events, or conceptualized as broad categories of theory, become a site for theoretical examination. However, in analyzing the "stories" about "Woman" and her configuration in various linguistic, theoretical, social or political practices, I am less interested in what these stories say, and more interested in how they say what they say. For example: How does the varying story of "women's oppression" get told? What makes the story possible? What makes it possible to say certain things and not others? How is it possible for feminist discourse to lay claim to its self-defined subject of "gender"? What makes the story of "women's oppression," or the notion of "women as a group" coherent and stable?

According to Flax, "[c]ertain themes, agreements, and disagreements recur throughout these stories."⁸⁴ For example, each story identifies one set of social or cultural practices thought to be crucial to and definitive of gender relations. Some "stories" focus on the sex/gender system, the sexual division of labour, and motherhood as an institution, while others focus on childbearing practices, the

⁸³Jane Flax, "Feminisms: Stories of Gender," in Thinking Fragments, op. cit., 138.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 143.

processes of representation, signification or language.⁸⁵ There are many issues at stake within these stories, including

the meanings and nature of sexuality and its relation to gendered anatomy; the meanings and values of 'difference,' [especially]...**the relative importance and significance of differences among women as well as between women and men;**...the sources of power within societies, including the relative significance of relations of production, the sexual division of labor, childrearing arrangements, kinship and family organizations, the control of sexuality and women's capacity to bear children, and processes of signification and language [emphasis added].⁸⁶

If the meaning, "importance and significance of differences among women" is one of the issues at stake in the various "stories of gender," then feminist discourse not only tells a story about women's oppression, but it also tells a particular story about racial and other "differences" in relation to gender. That feminist theory has something to "say" about racial difference within the context of gender, necessarily means that feminist theory has a certain way of "speaking" about racial difference, and in turn producing racial subjects within feminist discourse. Although "feminist stories of gender" were not constructed to identify, explain, and analyze how racial systems or subjects are produced and maintained, they have nonetheless made use of the category race, and in so doing have produced racialized-gendered subjects and given race a particular kind of meaning in relation to gender.

By looking at feminist theory as a discursive practice that names, produces and constitutes its categories, concepts and ideas through the process of telling a story, or a variety of stories about gender relations, one is able to identify the

⁸⁵[ibid.

⁸⁶[ibid., p. 143.

role(s) race has played in constructing "feminist stories of gender," as well as the specific story (or stories) feminist theory has to tell about race and its racialized subjects. The notion that feminist theory is a discourse that tells a particular story or narrative about gender relations, allows us to think about "the story of race" on two different levels. The first level allows one to view race in terms of its place or position within specific texts and feminist theory in general. At this level, one is not only able to identify when and where "race" becomes an issue in "stories of women's oppression," but also to identify its function(s) in such stories. In its most simplistic form, this first level sets out merely to establish that feminist theory does indeed "speak" about race; that it is a part of the story. It seeks to identify when and where "race" enters into the narrative and to specify what race signifies within such a narrative.

The second conceptual level made possible from reading feminist theory as a discursive practice has more to do with how feminist discourse "speaks" of race than with what it says about race. This distinction is important because it can, for example, account for the gap between a claim that ascribes an importance to race and an analysis that at the same time denies or negates that importance. The focus here is on how race is configured and how its configurations work to make possible both its appearance in the story and the coherence of the story. If the task of the first level is to acknowledge and identify the ways in which "race" is a part of the "stories of gender," then the task of this second level is to identify and tell the story about the "part" that race plays in feminist thinking. In other words, the ultimate goal is to recognize that the process of articulating and defining the category race, as it is invoked in various texts, is in itself a story. The story of how race is produced as a site of signification is a story that is both embedded within and runs parallel to "feminist stories of gender."

These two conceptual levels underscore the notion that feminist discourse tells a story about race and gender, and that in these "stories" are the product of its own written character. To understand feminism in terms of the discursive processes that produce the category race suggests that race and its relationship to gender take on meaning as they are invoked and become objects within discourse. In the case of images of Black women in feminist theory or the definition of the category "race," neither is self-referential; they do not have meaning in and of themselves. Rather, their meaning is the product of how feminist theory chooses to speak about race; how it deploys and puts into service the category race and how it "races" its subject. Whatever meaning feminist theorizing gives to "race," should be thought of, not as images that are distorted or misrepresented, but as signifiers whose meanings and functions are the product of discursive practices and norms. If we move from this assumption, then, following the reasoning of Foucault, we should be able to identify:

1. statements about "race," "Black women", "women of color," racial difference, etc. which give us a certain kind of knowledge about these things within the context of feminist theory;
2. the rules (or discursive strategies) which prescribe and limit what can be "said" about these topics and govern when and how "racial difference" is talked about;
3. 'subjects' who in some way personify the way in which feminism "speaks" of race and its rac-ed subjects---the quintessential and inexplicable racialized "Other" of feminist discourse (e.g., the "True Black Woman,"⁸⁷ Lani Guinier,⁸⁸ the runaway slave,⁸⁹ etc.). The

⁸⁷Ann duCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood," *op. cit.*

⁸⁸See Chapter 4.

⁸⁹See Chapter for an examination of the use of race, through the notion of "runaway slaves," within the work of Monique Wittig.

attribute of these subjects are given in the way knowledge about them is constructed within and by the discourse.

4. how feminism's knowledge about "race," "Black women", "women of color," racial difference, etc., acquires authority, and a sense of embodying the "truth" about the interplay between race, class, and gender ; how feminist discourse constructs itself as a neutral discursive space and therefore as a natural ally to theories designed to bring clarity to the relationship between race and gender.⁹⁰

The point here, as stated previously, is to view feminist theory as a discursive field that creates and set its own boundaries and give meaning to the objects which fall under its purview. However, discourse is not the only relevant post-structuralist concept that will prove to be useful in understanding the signifying process of race and gender in feminist theory. Derrida's concept of difference is useful in understanding the ways in which the category "race" becomes (or remains) hidden and repressed at the expense of privileging "gender." Following Sausure's structuralist linguistics, Derrida's concept of difference "refers to the notion that meaning is made through implicit or explicit contrast, that a positive definition rests on the negation or repression of something represented as antithetical to it."⁹¹ Since, in Derrida's view, there is no one-to-one correlation between a signifier and a signified, all signs are signifiers and must get their meaning through its difference from other signifiers. The absence of a fixed meaning, of an ultimate transcendental signified, suggests that there is no ground or area of certainty that gurantees the meaning of any signifier. In other words, meaning is not immediately present in a sign; it is not self-present or self-constituted. As an alternative to the logocentric view, Derrida

⁹⁰Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," op. cit., 45.

⁹¹Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," op. cit.

posits the notion of differance, which means both to differ (in space) and to defer (to put off in time, to postpone presence).

First, differance refers to the (active and passive) movement that consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving...Second, the movement of differance, as that which produces different things, that which differentiates, is the common root of all oppositional concepts that mark our language, such as, to take only a few examples, sensible/intelligent, intuition/signification, nature/culture, [speech/writing, gender/race], etc....Third, differance is also the production...of these differences...[which] is the condition for any signification and any structure.⁹²

Thus, the Derridean concept of differance sees meaning as permanently deferred, always subject to and produced by its difference from other meanings. The meaning produced through the contrast of a positive and a negative, through its difference from other meanings, is referred to as a binary opposition. In a binary opposition, there is always two terms, and one term is always the positive or privileged term. The positive term is always privileged over the negative or secondary term through a process of exclusion or repression. Thus, within the hierarchy of a binary opposition, the superiority of the privileged term, indeed its very identity and meaning, is made possible through the negation of the repressed term. However, the hierarchy of a binary opposition is constructed in a way that it appears as if the privileged term is self-constituted and self-referential. In addition, the dualism of a binary opposition creates what appears to be two separate, stable and homogenous categories. This homogeneity gives any binary opposition the appearance of unity and stability because the privileged term denies its dependency upon the repressed or excluded term, and even denies the process of repression and exclusion itself. Thus,

⁹²Quoted in Jeremy Hawthorn, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

binary oppositions can never be taken at face value. They must be deconstructed, i.e., shown that the meaning of the terms within the opposition are not simply interdependent, but that each is always already inscribed within the other.

Recently, some feminist theorists have explored the ways in which the category gender rests on the binary opposition of male and female. Woman is, it is argued, the "Other" of man; the second sex. Within the binary opposition of male/female, the first term takes on positive definition by constructing the second term as antithetical to it. Thus, Man is not-Woman. Therefore, there is no generic or non-gendered category like humanity, mankind, or citizen, because Woman is the ground upon which men define themselves as men. While this position, in various forms, runs rampant throughout much of feminist thinking, the same logic has not been extended to the category race.

To the extent that Woman is made possible or defined in contrast to man, the category gender itself, which includes male/man and female/woman, is made possible and defined by and in contrast to the category race. Applying the Derridean notion of differance to the category race, as it relates to gender and the construction of its subject Woman, is significant because it allows us to think about race as always already a part of gender and feminist discourse. Where as feminist theorizing has explored the binary opposition of male/female and man/woman, differance, when applied to the category race within the context of feminist theory, brings to light a gender/race binary. As is true of all oppositions, the term on the right (gender) is seen as the superior or privileged term. Feminist discourse, through its statements and implicit and explicit rules governing its domain, constructs gender as the object of its domain and therefore, as the privileged term of its discourse. Again, like all terms in a binary opposition, the positive definition of the privileged term "rests on the negation or

repression of something represented [and defined] as antithetical to it."⁹³ In feminist discourse, that which is repressed and defined as antithetical to gender is the category race and the notion of a subject constituted by and through racial differentiation. Race is the negated and repressed term while gender is the affirmed, positive, or privileged term. Feminist stories of gender, which contain concepts like "women as a group," "sisterhood," "the bonds of womanhood," "women's work," and "private sphere," to name a few, privilege the category gender to what Hegel calls the sublation of the negated term—in this case the category race. The superiority of the category gender, and the concepts that explain its nature, are made possible and given meaning through the suppression and negation of race. Feminist discourse, of course, denies this process of repression and negation because it looks merely at the fact that it "speaks" of race, "difference" and diversity, and not how it speaks of, and therefore constructs racial difference. One of the consequences of this denial is the appearance of two separate, homogeneous, and unrelated categories. Gender and race appear as separate and unrelated categories primarily because feminist discourse has defined race as existing outside of the boundaries of its domain. Not only is race defined, articulated, and given meaning in feminist discourse, but it is effaced, obfuscated and hidden at the same time. Despite the fact that feminist discursive practices define race as existing outside of its theoretical boundaries, it is never outside of its domain, and therefore cannot be "excluded" from it. Race is, as the repressed and anti-thetical term of the gender/ race binary, the category which gives meaning to, makes possible, and brings into existence, concepts of "women's commonality" embedded within feminist stories of gender. In other words, the meaning of gender and its attendant forms of

⁹³Scott, op. cit., p.

women's common bond, as produced and articulated in feminist discourse, cannot exist without simultaneously defining race as excessive and unrelated to feminist stories of gender. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that race is both necessary to and constitutive of feminist stories of gender. Race is necessary because, as the antithetical, excessive "Other" of gender, it is needed to lend stability and coherence to the category gender, and to justify the claim that feminist discourse speaks to and for women—not on or about race. Race is constitutive of feminist stories of gender because it is always already inscribed within gender, and because it makes possible the notion of women's common bond. Feminist theory produces its own definitions of race by employing it in its discursive domain. More often than not, the category race, or the Black woman, is constructed and defined as that which cannot be accessed. Nonetheless, since race is always already inscribed within gender its meaning can never be understood without tracing the embedded meanings of race. If, as Derrida argues, the meaning of a sign is a matter of what the sign is not, then the meaning of gender is, discursively speaking, not-race. Hence, the "not-race" component of gender is in some sense always both present and absent from the category gender. The meaning of gender, even as it is expressed in feminist stories of gender, is, as the Derridean notion of *differance* suggests, permanently deferred because it is always subject to and produced by the negated difference of its binary opposite—race.

If the idea that gender depends upon and gets its identity from its repressed binary opposite—the category race—is taken seriously, then a deconstructive project designed to dismantle its false unity and autonomy will threaten to collapse the entire system holding the gender/ race opposition in place. If an examination of race in the constitution of feminist stories of gender, threatens to undermine the very foundation upon which feminist discourse is

built, then it is only logical to assume, given the nature of discourses, that it will attempt to shore up its boundaries by reinscribing the primacy of gender.

According to its own self-defined claims, whenever feminist theory speaks of race it is speaking of an object outside of its discursive domain. As a result, gender is re-affirmed as the primary category and the category race is negated and repressed in ways that appear to affirm its position within the discourse. One group of feminists explained this process of re-affirmation by noting that

...inequalities other than sex and gender [like race] are recognized, but they are not explicated. After a perfunctory acknowledgement of differences, those taking this position make no further attempt to incorporate the insights generated by critical scholarship on race and class into a framework that would deal with women generally [emphasis added].⁹⁴

Citing "inequalities other than sex and gender" without explication may serve as an indicator of "a perfunctory acknowledgement," but I am not altogether convinced that the inability give the category race the same kind and level of analysis as gender falls entirely on the backs of "those taking [such a] position" who, after acknowledgement, "make no further attempt to incorporate [racial] insights." Assertions and acknowledgements about the importance and significance of race to feminist thinking are plentiful, but the lack of explication has more to do with the inherent repressive features of the gender/race binary and the nature of discursive systems than with individual scholars who fail to "incorporate" race. This is not to suggest that feminist scholars should not have a "willingness to explore histories, novels, biographies, and other readings that will help us grasp the realities of class, race, and other dimensions of inequality."⁹⁵ It does suggest, however, that "grasping the

⁹⁴Maxine Baca Zinn, et. al., op. cit., 34.

⁹⁵Ibid., 39.

realit[y]" of race first requires understanding how feminist discourse both constructs and relies upon race to insure its legitimacy and coherency. As a discourse, feminist theory may "speak" of race, may assert its significance, and may even attempt to analyze racial difference in relation to gender, but it can do nothing more than postulate the notion of racial heterogeneity and interdependence. As soon as it speaks about race, indeed the more it speaks about race, it homogenizes its particularities linking it back to the discursive system that holds the gender narrative in place. Because of this, feminist theory is unable to apprehend anything in its discursive domain which threatens to undermine the coherency or stability of "feminist stories of gender," precisely because it is this coherency and stability that is at stake. The discursive rules and practices that govern feminist theory will automatically, for lack of a better word, insure its status in telling "stories" about gender—and not-race.

With all that, I should rush to reiterate that feminist discourse does tell a story about race and racial difference. It is a story about repression; a story in which the category race is negated in order to affirm gender. It is a story in which race lends legitimacy and stability to the larger narrative in which it is embedded. The story about race tells us that this category gives meaning to and makes possible coherent definitions of women's commonality. At the same time however, it is a story about the production of race; about race as a site of signification. As such, it is not simply (or only) about how race is "used," as if one merely picks it up and places it within the discursive boundaries of feminist theory. Rather, this part of the story is about how feminist theory participates in giving meaning to race even as race gives meaning and stability to the category gender. This is not to suggest that feminist discourse creates or invents race, or that its meanings is unrelated to other social and discursive practices. It does however, imply that feminist theorizing codes the category race in its own

unique ways, and that these coded meanings are indispensable from the narrative which gives it meaning. In other words, race is figured in ways that are not only important, but necessary to "feminist stories of gender." For example, within feminist discourse, race signifies that which is excessive, strange or mysterious. It is the category which cannot be explained, even as it is invoked to explain or lend legitimacy to gender. At the same time, race is also a signifier of absence; a site of silence. In signifying silence, race functions either as the missing, non-existent category, usually represented in the form of the non-raced (white) subject, or as the important-but-unrelated-category in a larger story that does not, presumably, involve the petty difference of race. Either way, in whatever ways race is coded and whenever it is spoken of, it seems inevitable that the end result is a (re)privileging of the category gender. This process of affirmation and negation, of (re)privileging gender, even when (or especially when) race is invoked, is made clear by examining five discursive strategies that emerge from and are deployed in feminist discourse. While I define and explain in great detail my use of discursive strategies in the following chapter, suffice it to say here that discursive strategies have a regulatory function. Discursive strategies set the boundaries around a discourse thereby effectively regulating what a discourse can and cannot say within its confines. As it relates to race, the discursive strategies in feminist theory function to insure that stories of gender remain primarily about gender, even as it relies upon race to tell its story.

III. Approach and Method

The method for this dissertation is directly tied to the theoretical framework outlined above, and as such, it is primarily a theoretical project. In a very real sense, this dissertation is about method; about how we should think

about and approach race in feminist theorizing. It argues, at its most basic level, for a theoretical framework that would allow one to think about: (1) the production of "race" and racialized subjects; (2) the role or function of "race" in stories of gender relations; (3) the constitutive aspects of race to gender; (4) how to read the role and function of race in feminist discourse as a story about race; and (5) how feminist discourse produces its own discursive strategies to insure the coherency and stability of its narrative.

The relationship between the theoretical framework above and the method described and used in this dissertation is significant. By pointing out the limitations of viewing language as a transparent medium through which "real objects" are re-presented, I argued that it is necessary to view feminist theorizing, in all its varieties, as a discourse that names, produces, and constitutes its object—Woman—through creating a narrative or story about that object. I also noted that to the extent that feminist discourse tells a story about Woman, or gender, it also tells a story about race. Herein lies the significance, of a discursive approach to the production of feminist knowledge. A discursive approach—one that emphasizes signification not representation; one that acknowledges that inherent linguistic and discursive process of affirmation and negation—enables one to examine the ways in which race is discursively defined and maintained, as well as ignored, minimized, or played up. To argue for the significance of viewing race as a product of discursive practices is not to suggest that race does not have, in the words of the critics, "material consequences rooted in reality." Rather, the discursive framework contends that the reality of race is in large part constituted by language and the symbolic meanings we attach to it through discursive, as well as, social and cultural practices.

If, as I have argued, feminist discourse contains within it its own self-defined set of concepts, themes, assumptions, and terms, then one should be able

to identify not simply the concepts, themes, assumptions, and terms that make up feminist discourse, but also the strategies that make the practice of that discourse possible. Working from this theoretical principle, the goal, of course, is to identify the strategies, relative to race, that make stories of gender possible.

My interest in identifying and demonstrating how these strategies work within feminist discourse, as they relate to race, can best be accomplished through the Derrida's "method" of deconstruction. I place "method" in quotation marks because Derrida does not view deconstruction as a method, a critique or even a particular kind of critique. In fact, "to reduce deconstruction to a concept definable in terms of method or technique"⁹⁶ is to work against the very notion of deconstruction and Derrida's critique of Western philosophy. That is, to assume "that meaning can always be grasped in the form of some proper self-identical concept," is precisely the assumption Derrida seeks to deconstruct.⁹⁷ Because, deconstruction cannot be reduced to a concept or method which is then "applied" to various research programs, it is best understood as "a process, an activity of reading."⁹⁸ To deconstruct a discourse, which includes discursive as well as cultural and social practices, is show how meaning is produced and made to operate. For Derrida, meaning is never self-present, which means that there is no signified which is not in itself a signifier. The meaning of a sign is always already a matter of what that sign is not so that its meaning can never be completely grasped or made present. As a result, the activity of closely reading a text, or more broadly a discourse, is not a hermeneutical or exegetical exercise.

⁹⁶Christopher Norris, *Derrida*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 19.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 20.

The goal is not to identify the "true interpretation," or to explain the "author's real intention." Rather, deconstruction is a way of "tracing" the operation of meaning through the constant flickering of signifieds which become signifiers which then become signifieds, and which ultimately become signifiers...and so on. Thus, the term "deconstruction," as Barbara Johnson points out, "is not synonymous with destruction," but is closely related to "analysis" which means "to undo."⁹⁹ "The deconstruction of a text," she writes, is "the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself."¹⁰⁰ This careful "teasing out of warring forces" often shows that a text, or in this case, a discourse, is inscribed with, indeed made possible by a set of binary oppositions. The hierarchical logic of a binary opposition positions or privileges one term over another, in which the privileged terms derives its meaning from the repressed term, while simultaneously denying this process of affirmation and repression.

Feminist theorists have, of course, shown how Western philosophy and theory has cast Woman as the "Other," as the antithesis of Man. Western philosophy operates, in other words upon a male/ female binary opposition. One author sums it up this way:

Woman is the opposite, the 'other' of man: she is non-man, defective man, assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the male first principle. But equally man is what he is only by virtue of ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposite, defining himself in antithesis to it, and his whole identity is therefore caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which he seeks to assert his unique, autonomous existence. Woman is not just an other in the sense of something beyond his ken, but an other intimately related to him as the image of what he is not, and therefore as an essential reminder of what he is. Man therefore needs this other even as he spurns it...Not only is his own being parasitically dependent upon

⁹⁹Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference*. (), p. 5.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

the woman, and upon the act of excluding and subordinating her, but one reason why such exclusion is necessary is because she may not be quite so other after all.¹⁰¹

I quote this author's description at length because it cogently presents how the male/female, Man/Woman binary operates in Derridean terms. It is also instructive because the "Woman-as-the-Other of Man" is at least one of the stated beliefs, or as de Lauretis puts it, "shared assumptions" that characterizes feminist discourse. Even still, the length of this quote serves yet a third purpose: to reiterate my claim that race operates in feminist discourse (as the "Other" of gender) in the same way that Woman operates in Western philosophy (as the "Other" of man). Feminist scholars are likely to agree upon the above description of Woman's theoretical position in relation to Man, but are less likely to agree upon the proposition that *within* feminist discourse race, in all its configurations, is the "Other" of gender. If I were to rewrite the above description to describe the position of race in feminist theorizing, it might read as follows:

[Race] is the opposite, the 'other' of [gender]: [race] is defined as not-gender, a secondary, tertiary, arbitrary, or subsumed category that is assigned a chiefly negative value in relation to the gender first principle, which is that women, as a group, are oppressed *as women*. But equally gender and the "common oppression of women" is what it is only by virtue of ceaselessly shutting out this other or opposite, [and by] defining itself in antithesis to its Other. ...[As such] [gender's] whole identity [and meaning] is therefore caught up and put at risk in the very gesture by which it seeks to assert its unique, autonomous existence, [by speaking for all women as women]. Race is not just an other in the sense of something beyond gender's ken, but an other intimately related to it as the image of what gender is not, and therefore as an essential reminder of what gender is. Gender, as a category, therefore needs this other even as it spurns it, denies or excludes it...Not only is

¹⁰¹Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 132-133.

gender's own being or meaning parasitically dependent upon the category race, and upon the act of excluding and subordinating it, but one reason why such exclusion is necessary is because race may not be quite so other after all.

Because feminism speaks so much about race, it might respond by flatly denying that its discourse is inscribed with the gender/race binary. And that is precisely the point. Feminist discourse denies this process of erasure and repression of race, even as it relies upon and is constituted through its deployment. "Race" is constructed as existing independently of feminist discourse, but it turns out that it is essential to the articulation of it as a signifying system. This is the importance of deconstruction as critical "method." One can only identify the production and operation of binary oppositions through the active reading of a deconstructionist lens because "to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations [or discursive strategies] that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise."¹⁰² As an active practice of reading, "deconstruction is," to reiterate Christopher Norris's definition, "the vigilant seeking-out of those 'aporias,' 'blindspots or moments of self-contradiction where a text involuntarily betrays the tension between rhetoric and logic, between what it manifestly *means to say* and what it is nonetheless *constrained to say* [original emphasis]."¹⁰³ Thus, the goal of deconstruction is to seize upon "a set of paradoxical themes at odds with their manifest argument."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 86.

¹⁰³Christopher Norris, Derrida, *op. cit.*, 19.

¹⁰⁴Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 57.

In reference to this project, the objective is to point out discursive strategies that work against the very idea of showing the interconnections between gender and race. Hence, I will "seek-out...blindspots or moments of self-contradiction" by "seizing on precisely those unregarded details (casual metaphors, footnotes, incidental turns of argument, [seemingly benign comparisons], [instances of denial], [mispellings], or [moments of ambiguity])"¹⁰⁵ that reveal the gender/race binary and threatens to collapse the hierarchy of privilege and repression.

Besides identifying binary oppositions and their function, deconstruction also involves reversing and displacing such oppositions. The process of reversal shows "that the privileged term [gender] depends for its identity on its exclusion and repression of the secondary term [race]."¹⁰⁶ It does so by inverting the binary opposition; by showing that the "inferior" term is in fact "superior." Reversal alone would simply invert an opposition leaving its dichotomous structure intact. The displacement of a binary opposition puts the "superior" or privileged term "under erasure," by demonstrating that its meaning is not self-identical, or natural. Displacement dismantles the positive and privileged signification of the "superior" term by showing that the "inferior" term is always already inscribed within it. Johnson describes the significance of reversing and displacing a binary opposition in this way:

The starting point is often a binary difference that is subsequently shown to be an illusion created by the working of differences much harder to pin down. The differences between entities...are shown to be based on a repression of differences within entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself....The 'deconstruction' of a binary

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid. 56.

opposition is thus not an annihilation of values or differences; it is an attempt to follow the subtle, powerful effects of differences already at work within the illusion of binary opposition."¹⁰⁷

Deconstruction then, does not work from the outside in. It is not the imposition of a certain external, omnipotent theoretical force that dismantles, criticizes, and breaks down an otherwise logical and coherent concept. Rather, deconstruction works from the inside out. The text, narrative, or discourse always provides the means of its own deconstruction. As this dissertation illustrates, feminist theory has provided the means for its own deconstruction in the various texts and narratives that constitute its discursive field. In reference to race, feminist theory "means to say," indeed does in fact say, one thing, but is "nonetheless constrained to say" another. For example, it may mean to say, it may in fact say, that race is important and necessary to understanding gender relations, but may nonetheless relegate the category race to a position outside an analysis of gender relations. How is feminist discourse able to "say" (or "mean to say") one thing about race, yet end up doing another? One answer is this: by producing and employing discursive strategies that insure the primacy of gender and the narrative constructed in its name.

Only a deconstructionist method—a "careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself"¹⁰⁸—can enable one to see the production and deployment of discursive strategies in feminist discourse as they relate to race. A deconstructionist method makes it possible to refuse to view race as something that exists outside of and external to feminist discourse. Rather it enables one to view race as a product of feminist discourse. In turn, feminist

¹⁰⁷Quoted in Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," op. cit., 137-138.

¹⁰⁸Barbara Johnson, The Critical Difference, op. cit., p. 5.

discourse is conceptualized as a boundary-making and boundary-marking field that relies upon race to make and mark its boundaries.

Furthermore, a deconstructive approach, which conceptualizes language as signification, exposes the limitations of thinking about race in feminist theory solely in terms of representation—of presence and absence. It also problematizes more recent attempts to "historicize" the category woman, without including in that historiography the "metalanguage of race."¹⁰⁹ In addition, this approach can also help to expose the flaws of the commonly-held notion that to state or demonstrate how "different women experience sexism differently" is to use race as a category of analysis. These arguments, and others, are undergirded by assumptions about race that keeps the privileged position of gender intact. Only a theoretical approach which provides an understanding of the discursive techniques that give meaning to race while rendering race invisible can assist us in understanding why feminism continues to be plagued by critiques of racial parochialism

In this dissertation, I argue for the "method" of a close deconstructive reading while simultaneously employing it. In demonstrating feminist theory's intolerance of race even as it relies upon it, I focus on those "ambiguous moments," those seemingly benign theoretical gestures generally regarded as unproblematic, that betray this operation. I have, of course defined "feminist theory" broadly which is consistent with my understanding of it as a discourse. Thus, the different "frameworks" or theoretical approaches within feminist theory does not undermine my very broad use of the term. Because I am interested in feminist theory as a discourse, and how race is configured within its discursive boundaries, I consult and analyze many different kinds of sources.

¹⁰⁹Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," 17 *Signs* (Winter 1992): 251-274.

Feminist books, journals, articles, and pamphlets comprises much of the sources used for this dissertation. Most chapters will rely heavily upon these secondary sources while at least one, Chapter 4, will draw extensively upon primary sources, namely newspaper articles.

IV. Chapter Outlines

This dissertation is divided into two major parts. Part I: Theoretical Intimations, in which this chapter is included, lays bare the theoretical foundation for this project. In this introductory chapter, I have outlined the limitations associated with the idea of (mis)representating race in feminist theory. I have explained and called for a theoretical approach and method that will expose how race is produced by and within the discursive boundaries of feminist theory.

Chapter Two, "Discursive Strategies in Feminist Theory," identifies and explains five discursive strategies: Exclusion and Denial, Analogy and Comparison, Adjectival Modification, Invisible Objectification, and Accusatory Defensiveness. By analyzing a broad range of feminist texts, and highlighting key feminist concepts, I demonstrate how feminist theory has relied upon the category race to construct a narrative about "women." I also demonstrate how feminist theory denies its reliance upon the category of race by constructing race, and racialized subjects, as objects outside the domain of its discursive boundaries. I point out that constructing race and racialized subjects as existing outside the domains of feminist discourse is in fact a construction *within* the boundaries of feminist theory. Put slightly different, I argue that the moment feminist theory speaks of race, race becomes a part of the discourse. Moving from this observation, I not only identify the ways in which race functions in feminist discourse, but I demonstrate that feminism discourse is as much a story

about race as it is about gender. While this chapter is not to be a comprehensive discussion of the strategies I have identified and outlined, or of other strategies that may be identified in further analyses, it does lay bare the theoretical concepts and ideas for future analyses. By the same token, the five strategies I identify in this chapter are not mutually exclusive, and therefore, I do not devote a single chapter to each strategy. Rather, the deployment of one or more strategies is implicit within each of the chapters in Part II.

Chapter Three, "Theorizing 'Difference' in Feminist Thinking: Explanatory Models for Understanding Race, Class, and Gender," explores the various ways in which these three categories have been conceptualized. By drawing mostly upon the works of African American feminist thinkers since 1970, I trace the evolution of the "triple oppression" thesis and how it has come to be an integral part of feminist discourse. I distinguish between Frances Beale's early model of "double jeopardy" and later "addition models" (race + class + gender = Black woman's experience) and Deborah King's "multiplicative model" (race x class x gender = Black woman's experience). I note the advantages and shortcomings of each and then explore other contemporary versions of the "triple oppression" thesis. I conclude by noting that the best way understand the connection between race, class and gender is to view them, not as separate categories that momentarily intersect, but as mutually productive and constitutive categories.

In keeping with this notion, I apply the theoretical intimations of Part I to specific, empirical examples in Part II. Each chapter in Part II reads critically some cultural, social, political phenomenon or feminist theoretical text with the objective of illustrating how feminist discourse constructs race and how race in turn, operates within that discourse.

Chapter Four, "The Socio-Symbolic Significance of Lani Guinier: The African American Woman as the 'Unknown Other'," uses the empirical example

of the Lani Guinier's nomination, in contrast to the nomination of Zoe Baird, to explore the ways in which race, functions to "ground" racial difference as that which is beyond the reach of feminist discourse. As an example of the (In)Visible Objectification Discursive Strategy, this chapter argues that Lani Guinier's nomination and subsequent withdrawal, is theoretically instructive because it presents the "African American Woman" as always already outside of and excessive to feminist interpretations. Using newspaper articles from the New York Times and The Washington Post, as well as articles from numerous new magazines, I analyze not only the ways in which Baird and Guinier were constructed in the media, but also how (and if) a gendered or feminist analysis was offered to explain their position in the realm of politics. In this chapter, I show that a gendered analysis, and to some extent a feminist analysis, was more forthcoming in the case of Zoe Baird, than in the case of Lani Guinier because, as a Black Woman, Lani Guinier fell outside the subject-position Woman. To underscore the relationship between these two public nominations and the responses they prompted to feminist theorizing, I suggest that the particular configuration of Lani Guinier during her nomination process, and the absence of a specific gendered analysis of that process, bespeaks of a larger problem in feminist theory. I argue that the Lani Guinier nomination, compared to that of Zoe Baird is instructive because it suggests that feminist theory reads the Black Woman as incomprehensible. By using the popular feminist concepts of the public versus the private sphere and rape, I briefly examine how feminist articulations of "women's condition" are based upon the incomprehensibility of the Black female body.

Chapter Five implicitly addresses the popular misconception that "post-structural" or "postmodern" feminist critiques of the category Woman as ahistorical, universal, and natural are also necessarily critiques against the

trivialization of race in feminist analysis. It is assumed that anyone who adopts a poststructuralist stance in their work by questioning the universality of the category Woman, or by questioning the representation model of language, are also seen as being sensitive to, and perhaps even contributing to, the project of dismantling the racial hegemony embedded within the category Woman. Hence, the focus of Chapter Five, entitled "'Like Runaway Slaves': Language Games in the Works of Monique Wittig," will examine the ways in which gender is re-privileged in those texts that are generally considered "poststructuralist" or "postmodern" in content and hence sensitive to issues of racial difference. "[If], as bell hooks has noted, "[p]ostmodernist discourses are often exclusionary even as they call attention to, [and] appropriate the experience of 'difference' and 'Otherness,'"¹¹⁰ then it is crucial that we explore both how such appropriations take place and the implications of these kinds appropriations. By reading closely the theoretical works of French feminist Monique Wittig, I will explore the ways in which "race" is effectively erased in the text itself, even as it is used (or perhaps because it is used) to dismantle biological or natural assumptions that undergird the category "Woman." Using Wittgenstein's notion of "language games," I argue that while the contemporary feminist focus on language as productive is used to deconstruct the Man/Woman binary, it simultaneously constructs a gender/race binary. My invocation of Wittgenstein's concept of language games in this chapter is, I believe, neither contradictory nor inexplicable. While I am aware of the theoretical tensions that may exist between Foucault, Derrida, and Wittgenstein, my use of each of these theorists is for one objective: to illustrate the production and function of race in feminist thinking. In addition, feminists have discussed the merits and demerits of the

¹¹⁰bell hooks, *Yearning*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p.

theories these men purport, and have, in many instances appropriated their ideas and concepts into feminist analyses. As such, I see my limited use of these varied, yet related concepts, as building on feminist work already completed.¹¹¹ In terms of discursive strategies, this chapter contains an illustration of the Analogy and Comparison Strategy and, to some extent, the (In)Visible Objectification Strategy.

Chapter Six, entitled, "What is a White Woman Anyway?": Responding to Race in the 1990's," is taken from the title of an article written by Catherine MacKinnon in 1993.¹¹² In this chapter I argue that feminists, white feminists to be more precise, have begun to respond to critiques like: "feminism is a white woman's project," or "feminism is centered around or based upon the experience white women," with anger and defensiveness. In contrast to the "guilt, shame, and silence" which characterized white women's response to race in the 1970's and 1980's, these new responses to Black women's claims of racial privileging are being met with not only hostility, but also accusations. The accusations usually take the form of admonishing "women of color" for not being "totally inclusive"

¹¹¹This is particularly the case with Derrida and Foucault. See for example, Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., Feminist Theorize the Political, (New York: Routledge, 1992); Diane Elam, Feminism and Deconstruction, (New York: Routledge, 1994); Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin, eds., Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wicke, eds., Feminism and Postmodernism, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Jane Flax, Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West, op. cit.; Lois McNay, Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender, and the Self, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992); Linda J. Nicholson, ed., Feminism/Postmodernism, (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc. 1990); Jana Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body, (New York: Routledge, 1991); Joan Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," op. cit.

¹¹²See "From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?," 4 Yale Journal of Law and Feminism (Fall 1991): 13-22.

of all races and ethnicities, or for "overlooking class" in their analyses. Moreover, Black feminists are figured as threatening, divisive, self-segregating and excessively different. I read these responses as a particular kind of discursive strategy—Accusatory Defensiveness—that is deployed to deflect attention away from a discussion on race. At the same time, I read such responses as a discussion on race.

Through a close deconstructive reading of Alison Jaggar's and Paula Rothenberg's influential edited volume, Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men, I examine how white feminists view the work of Black feminist theorists. Often painted as simple polemics, Black feminist scholarship is viewed as an accumulation of years of Black women's critiques, not as a cohesive and systematic theory. The story that feminist discourse tells about race in general, and Black feminist theory in particular, is that it is a "diversionary 'special interest'" issue.¹¹³ To the extent that Black feminist theory is granted the title of theory, it is figured as a special kind of theory, existing outside the domains of "real" or "legitimate" feminist scholarship." As this last chapter illustrates, the ability to engage in this kind of intellectual gatekeeping—i.e., deciding what feminist theory *is* and who can produce its *kind of theorizing*—is another example of how the discourse regulates its domain. Because discursive strategies are "regulated ways of practicing the possibilities of discourse," Accusatory Defensiveness, like other discursive strategies, serves a regulatory function by undermining the threatening implications of a racialized critique. In this case, Accusatory Defensiveness operates through counter accusations of "exclusion," by casting

¹¹³Phyllis Marynick Palmer, "White Women/ Black Women: The Dualism of Female Identity and Experience in the United States," Feminist Studies 9 (Spring 1983): 151-170.

racialized critiques as divisive, disruptive and hence invalid, and by locating Black feminist scholarship outside feminist discourse.

CHAPTER TWO DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN FEMINIST THEORY

In the previous chapter, I argued for the necessity of viewing feminist theory as a discursive practice which tells a story, or stories, about gender. I also noted that to the extent that feminist theory, as a discourse, tells a story about gender, it also tells a story about race. Part of what makes the story of gender coherent and stable is the process of affirmation and negation that takes place relative to gender and race respectively. That is, the stability of any gender narrative depends upon the repression of race; of relegating race to a secondary position. At the same time, however, this "secondary position" is both a product of and necessary to stories of gender relations. Hence, this necessary and constitutive nature of race to feminist discourse underscores the notion that race is indispensable from gender narratives even in its repressed and negated state. The constitutive role of race is denied in feminist theory precisely because it is figured as external to gender *within* the discourse. As a result, feminist theory, as a discourse, (re)privileges the category gender, even as it depends upon the category race. Feminist theory must also, ironically, (re)privilege the category race *precisely* because it speaks of race. When feminist theory speaks of race, it names it and brings it into existence within the discourse. However, this naming must be accompanied by a denial of the category race, which in turn (re)privileges the category gender.

I believe that feminist discourse provides a vivid dramatization of this process of (re)privileging at the level of its own articulation, particularly when it attempts to take as its object of analysis race or Black women—categories which it defines as always already existing outside of its boundaries. When feminist theory attempts to "explain" or analyze racial difference, even among women,

new and more sophisticated ways of linking itself back to gender as the primary and superior category of analysis is inevitable. The result is the (re)production of the gender/ race binary and the continued negation of "race." This process of affirmation and negation, of production and articulation, takes place through a series of discursive strategies. Below, I define the concept "discursive strategies" and my use of it in this project. I then identify, define, and explain five such strategies in feminist theory, and indicate the ways in which these strategies insure the primacy of gender within feminist discourse.

I. On Discursive Strategies

In Foucault's work on discourses, there is an acknowledgement that discursive formations "...give rise to certain organization of concepts, certain regroupings of objects, certain types of enunciation, which form, according to their degree of coherence, rigour, and stability, themes or theories..."¹ Foucault calls these themes and theories "strategies," because they "open a field of possible options [that] enables various mutually exclusive architectures [i.e., a series or structure of statements] to appear side by side or in turn."² The unity of a discourse is best conceptualized as strategies because the teleological notion of development that undergirds the concepts of themes or theories is problematic. Whereas the "thematic" approach to unity and disunity is explained by the development of progressively better solutions to the same problem, the notion of discursive strategies sees unity and disunity as the product of the ways in which changes "are integrated into discursive practice without the general form of its

¹Michel Foucault, Archeology of Knowledge, op. cit., 64.

²Ibid., 66.

regularity being altered."³ So that claims about the significance of race to "women's experience," for instance, may expose the workings and importance of racism in the academy, politics, the labor force, social programs, police protection, and family organization, to name a few, yet the *discursive practice* of feminist theorizing continues to establish the same kind of relationship between race and gender in an effort to preserve the commonality and coherence in "feminist stories of gender." Certainly, as Foucault has pointed out within the context of the discourse of psychiatry,

new objects appear (new types of individuals, new classes of behavior are characterized as pathological), **new modalities of enunciation are put into operation** (quantitative notations and statistical calculations), **new concepts are outlined** (such as those of degeneracy, perversion, neurosis), and of course **new theoretical structures [are] built [emphasis added]**.⁴

However, the appearance of "new objects," "new enunciative models," new concepts," and "new theoretical structures" in feminist discourse, are not an indication that feminist theory has expanded to include a new object of analysis within its domain. Instead, the way in which these new elements are co-opted into a discourse illustrates the self-containing and self-maintaining function of discursive practices. The appearance of new objects, models, concepts, and theories as they relate to race in feminist theory, do not destabilize and render untenable the boundaries of feminist discourse because they appear "through the same laws and rules of formation"⁵ that govern the discourse as a whole.

³Ibid., 74-75.

⁴Ibid., 75.

⁵Ibid.

According to Foucault, any discursive formation "can define the system of formation of the different strategies that are deployed in it."⁶ However, unlike Foucault, I am more interested in the discursive strategies themselves than in the rules of formation that make such strategies possible. I am interested, in other words, in identifying the different strategies that are deployed in feminist discourse as it relates to the category race and the notion of racial difference. Although the term "strategy" connotes a willfulness on behalf of an outside "doer," it should be emphasized that discursive strategies reside within discourse itself. Not only do discursive strategies reside within discourse, but they are the product of the discourse's objective to constitute itself as the authority over a specific subject matter. As such, discursive strategies are not static forms that are externally produced and imposed. They are not "tactics" originating in the minds of and implemented by certain theorists who wish to constrain the confines of the discourse. By the same token, "it should be noted that...strategies are not rooted anterior to discourse, in the silent depths of choice that is [considered] both preliminary and fundamental... They are not determined in advance and pre-figured in a quasi-microscopic form."⁷ Rather, discursive strategies are "the points of choice a discursive formation makes available, 'the different possibilities that it opens of reanimating [i.e., of prompting or putting back into motion] already existing themes...of making it possible, with a particular set of concepts, to play different games.'"⁸ Discursive strategies indicate the finitude of a discursive field. Strategies are put into play when the discourse cannot authoritatively speak of an object; when it tries, in other words, to speak of an

⁶Ibid., 68.

⁷Michel Foucault, Archeology of Knowledge, op. cit., 69, 70.

⁸Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, op. cit., 71-72.

object in which it has not given itself authority. As a result, discursive strategies or

options [within a discourse] must be described as systematically different ways of treating objects of discourse (of delimiting them, regrouping or separating the, linking them together and making them derive from one another), or arranging forms of enunciation...and of manipulating concepts. [Discursive strategies, then,] are regulated ways...of practicing the possibilities of discourse"[emphasis added].⁹

As Dreyfus and Rabinow point out, those who are enmeshed within a discourse, whose work help to constitute its boundaries and set up its rules of regulation, cannot see the boundary-making and setting aspect of their theorizing, not to mention the process of deploying a set of discursive strategies. They

do not see themselves as restricted to a limited range of strategies. Only from the outside can these strategies be seen as governed by principles of rarity constraining the space of options open to exploration. Only the archeologist,[as Foucault argues], can see that these options [or strategies] are regulated ways of practicing the possibilities of discourse."¹⁰

Because discursive strategies are "regulated ways of practicing the possibilities of discourse" they are also regulatory in function, meaning that they are important in maintaining the stability of the discourse's boundaries.

Using the definition above, I argue that feminist discourse "give rise to certain organization of concepts, certain regroupings of objects, certain types of enunciation, which form" a set of discursive strategies relevant to the category race and the notion of racial difference. The use of these strategies "opens a field of possible options" and produces, in the words of Foucault, the appearance of

⁹Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, op. cit., 69-70.

¹⁰Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, op. cit., 72.

new objects, puts new modalities of enunciation into operation, outlines new concepts, and offers ways of building new theoretical structures." The appearance of new objects in feminist discourse then, includes "new types of individuals" or subjects like, 'women of color,' 'Other women,' and 'The Black Woman.' New ways of enunciation are put into operation in the form analytical models like additive, multiplicative, and intersection models. The emergence of new concepts appears under such names as 'triple oppression,' 'white solipsism,' and 'womanism'; all of which give rise to new theoretical structures like Multicultural Feminism, Black Feminist Thought, and Chicana Feminism. Like all discourses, feminist discourse respond to its newly self-constructed objects, by linking these objects back to the narrative in which it is embedded. That is, feminist theory shores up its boundaries by co-opting or integrating potentially subversive and destabilizing elements.

The "new objects," "new enunciative models," "new concepts," and "new theoretical structures" described above are co-opted through the deployment of five major discursive strategies in feminist theory. In essence, these discursive strategies effect the erasure of race by (re)producing the gender/ race binary. The five discursive strategies outlined below identify and explain the role and function of race in producing and privileging the category gender. In addition, these strategies illustrate the ways in which race participates in the production of a stable and coherent narrative on gender relations. More importantly, these strategies are themselves signs, signifying the ways in which race is coded or given meaning within feminist discourse. Finally, these five strategies illustrate how feminist theory represents itself on race.

The five strategies produced and deployed by feminist discourse are: (1) Exclusion and Denial, (2) Analogy and Comparison, (3) Adjectival Modification, (4) (In)Visible Objectification and (5) Accusatory Defensiveness.

These five strategies are not mutually exclusive. They are interdependent and their use and meaning often overlap. The development of these strategies within the literature is not necessarily chronological, although the first two strategies are more prevalent in the First Wave feminist thinking and the early feminist writings of the Second Wave.

II. Discursive Strategies in Feminist Theory

Exclusion and Denial

That feminist thinking excludes the experiences of African American women and "other women of color" is perhaps the most widespread and prominent critique lodged against feminist discourse. Zinn and others exemplify this kind of critique when they state: "women of color have been virtually hidden in feminist scholarship [and] made invisible by the erroneous notion of universal womanhood."¹¹ As a result, the [k]nowledge [produced by feminist scholarship was] assumed to be 'universal' [but] was actually based...on the experiences of women who were white and primarily middle class."¹²

Generally speaking, the critique that race is excluded from feminist discourse hinges on a definition of exclusion that means "a part from and external to" that which is defined as the major subject of the discursive field—gender. In this sense, "to exclude" means "to shut out...to give no place to [by] prevent[ing] the existence, occurrence or use of...to reject from consideration or notice."¹³ Exclusion then, is by definition, "the act or process of excluding."¹⁴

¹¹Gloria Anzuldua, ed., Making Face/Soul, op. cit., 33.

¹²*ibid.*

¹³From "exclude" as defined in The World Book Dictionary, (Chicago: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 740.

¹⁴*ibid.*

Given this common and generally accepted definition, most analyses on the exclusion of race from feminist scholarship take one of two forms: (1) exclusion is explained in terms of willful or unconscious acts stemming from racist behavior; or (2) the absence of race is seen as an oversight that can be easily corrected by inserting it, as a variable, into existing frameworks.

When the exclusion of race is analyzed in terms of willful or unconscious acts of exclusion, such acts constitute nothing less than "racism" and are prime illustrations of "racist behavior" and thinking in feminist theorizing. In analyzing the issue of racism in the early and contemporary feminist movements, hooks represents this view when she states that white feminists "had been socialized to accept and perpetuate racist ideology" and that their racism was revealed in their "dialogues and writings" about "the American woman's experience."¹⁵ "In most cases," according to hooks, "this racism was an unconscious, unacknowledged aspect of their thought."¹⁶ She explains it in this way:

[white feminists] attitudes toward black women were both racist and sexist. [But] [t]heir racism did not assume the form of overt expressions of hatred; it was far more subtle. It took the form of simply ignoring the existence of black women or writing about them using common sexist and racist stereotypes.¹⁷

Thus, "to deny the existence of black women [was] to exclude them from the women's movement."¹⁸ As hooks points out, "exclude" in this context does not mean that Black women were "overtly discriminated against...on the basis of

¹⁵"Racism and Feminism: The Issue of Accountability," in *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, op. cit., passim, 136-137.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 142.

race"¹⁹ in that they were actually barred from participation. Rather, exclude is defined as a form of alienation; a way of constructing concepts, ideas and analyses, that were inapplicable to Black women.

In addition to exhibiting "racism," under the willful-or-unconscious acts view, an author's explicit exclusion of race also indicates that he or she moves from the unexamined assumption that race is irrelevant in and to the "story of gender." To treat "race and class as secondary features in social organization" and "to make gender relations primary is to assume that they create a set of universal experiences more important than those of other inequalities."²⁰ Because authors refuse to see the complex relationship that exists between race and gender, the argument goes, the quality of the finished product is at best questionable.

For other critics, the act or process of excluding race from feminist theorizing has less to do with an author's intent, and more to do with the lack of information on issues of race in feminist theory. As Zinn and others explain, "race and class inequalities [are] set aside on the grounds that, while they are important, we, [feminists], lack information that would allow us to incorporate them in analysis."²¹ In addition, the exclusion of race may be viewed as a benign oversight rather than an intentional and "racist" decision deliberately made by the author. Feminist theorists "overlook" race primarily because it is treated as a "secondary feature...in female subordination,"²² and because Black women have

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Maxine Baca Zinn, et. al., op. cit., 34.

²¹Ibid., 34.

²²Ibid.

been denied the kind of privilege white women have in publishing works about themselves. As a result, exclusion is seen as the inevitable consequence of a narrowly defined discursive field which is borne out of the lack of Black female academics and the paucity of available resources on Black women and race.

There are, of course, problems with explaining exclusion in these two ways. The first reading of the exclusion of race in feminist thinking locates the problem with the author. Exclusion is the result of a "racist" mindset, or of the author's inability to think critically about his or her assumptions. The difficulty in assessing whether or not an author "intended" to be racist presents itself as a major task, including defining precisely what constitutes racism. By what means would one measure "intentions"? What would the criteria be for judging what is and is not racist? Who would get to determine the criteria and on what basis would such criteria be established? Would the absence of "intention" necessarily rule out the possibility of "racist or racial thinking"?

In addition to the problem of identifying precisely what constitutes "racism", the "intentional" explanation for race-exclusion places the burden of proof on women of color. Defining exclusion in this way, shifts the problem of explaining the absence of race from those who produce the scholarship to those who are "excluded" from it. As such, African American women would be charged with the task of providing "evidence" or "proof" that the author "intended" to exclude race.

Reading the exclusion of race in feminist theory in terms of oversight is also problematic because it assumes that the appropriate solution is simply to include race, i.e., to "add" race where it had previously been left out. "Including" or "adding" race is usually articulated in terms of specification, in which the word "woman" is preceded by an adjective (or a list of adjectives) designating

racial or class difference.²³ Because this kind of specification or modification is viewed as a solution to exclusion, and not as an act of exclusion, it is never questioned. Moreover, the addition-solution to race oversight also assumes that adding or inserting the "modified" and "specified" Woman would not change or completely reconfigure the framework to which it is added.

The oversight explanation poses another problem: it locates the exclusion of race in the lack of Black female academics and resources and not in the conceptual paradigms that frame feminist scholarship. In so doing, the oversight explanation functions as a form of the victim-blaming rationale by implicitly asserting the circular and tautological argument: Black women are absent from feminist scholarship because they are absent from feminist scholarship.

In addition to the problems outlined above, neither of the two approaches to reading race speaks to the theoretical structure and practice of feminist theory. Both approaches define the "presence" or "inclusion" of race in terms of whether or not some "representable" form of it is visible in the text, including the "presence" of a racial signifier. The assumption that the absence of a racial signifier constitutes the exclusion of race from a discourse presumes that "absence" itself cannot be a part of feminist theoretical practice. The intentional-racist and oversight approaches preclude us from asking: What theoretical practices makes exclusion both necessary and possible? How does feminist theory participate in producing the exclusion of race as well as constructing it as a "problem" (to be solved)? What role does exclusion play in feminist theory, i.e., what does the "exclusion" of race allow feminist theory to do? Do the roles that race-exclusion play alert us to a different reading of exclusion that is not based on the visibility of a racial signifier?

²³I say more about this in my discussion of the third discursive strategy, Adjectival Modification.

I offer these critical comments on the nature of exclusion not by way of an apologia, but as starting point for re-thinking how race and (its) "exclusion" is conceptualized in feminist theory. In examining the nature of race-exclusion in feminist theory, I am unconvinced that one should expend energy to determine whether or not such acts are indeed racist, and I question the notion that the "intention" of the author should in fact be our focus.²⁴ Again, this is not to suggest that specific feminist texts, and feminist discourse in general, do not convey racist ideas. Not only does feminist discourse and the canonical texts that comprise it convey racist ideas, but it creates, constructs, appropriates and perpetuates problematic racialized ways of thinking, regardless of whether it "intends" to or not. Focusing on the intention of the author or the alleged lack of scholarly resources, however, cannot be the basis for explaining the exclusion of race because intention and lack cannot account for the ways in which feminist thinking, nevertheless, *betrays* its own racist ideas and assumptions. I emphasize the word "betray" to underscore those moments in which feminist theorizing accidentally or unconsciously exposes its own markings of racial myopia. The concept of betrayal is also important because it questions the assumption that feminist theory is a natural ally to issues of race and racism, and that feminist discourse is a neutral discursive ground on which to think through the complexity of race, class, and gender.²⁵ Feminist theory's inability to speak for "women," especially for African American women and "other women of color," implies a kind of unfaithfulness to accomplish what the discourse claims it has

²⁴Similar issues are raised in Roland Barthes, "The Death of an Author," in Image, Music, Text, (New York: Hill and Wang,) and Michele Foucault, "What is an Author?" in Language, Counter Memory, Practice, (Cornell University Press, 1977).

²⁵Assumptions are listed on pages 23-25.

the ability to do—speak for "women." Focusing on the intention of the author or the alleged lack of resources on race locks one into an approach that seeks to define what exclusion is as oppose to how it operates. Not only does reading exclusion as an act of an individual's will, or as the inevitable outcome of a lack of relevant scholarly resources tie us to the referent-representation model, it denies the operation of exclusion as a specific discursive strategy deployed to insure the coherency of "women as a group."

Thus, exclusion cannot be reduced to conventional arguments. Debating over an author's intentions, or about whether exclusion constitutes racism, or even about whether or not certain fundamental feminist concepts,²⁶ despite their "exclusion" of race, are nevertheless applicable to women as a group, keeps us locked into a representation-referential framework. Because of this, it is necessary to re-read "exclusion" and to dislodge it from its representation-referential frame. When a racial signifier, or a specifically racialized subject, is visibly absent from a feminist text, it is assumed that race is excluded—i.e., shut out—from the text. It is assumed that race has no role or "place" in the story of gender.

In keeping with the general definition of exclusion: "a part from and external to; to shut out...to give no place to [by] prevent[ing] the existence, occurrence or use of...to reject from consideration or notice,"²⁷ I contend that the exclusion of race must be read, not as that "thing" which is "missing" from feminist stories of gender, but as that category which is discursively constructed, within the stories themselves, as existing outside of and apart from those stories.

²⁶Judith Grant, Fundamental Feminism: Contesting the Core Concepts of Feminist Theory, (New York: Routledge, 1993).

²⁷The World Book Dictionary, op. cit., 740.

If race is discursively constructed by and within feminist stories of gender, then it must also have a particular discursive function. For the most part, the category race and especially Black women, function within feminist discourse as that which is outside of the discourse. Putting aside the specific function of race for the moment, the point that I want to emphasize here is that in order to function within a discourse, to be defined by a discourse, race can never be "shut out from that discourse and giv[en] no place...by preventing [its] existence, occurrence or use of" because it is always already a part of that discourse. Race, however it is defined and whatever its functions may be, helps to construct feminist discourse as a discourse, and as such is a constitutive and productive part of it. Therefore, it cannot never be "excluded" from it.

What I am suggesting, is that the exclusion and denial of both the category race and Black women as subjects, must be read as a discursive strategy--i.e., as a regulatory way of practicing the discourse. Re-reading instances of exclusion and denial as the deployment of a discursive strategy, rather than an act of racism, allows one to think about the function and position of race in feminist discourse. When read as a discursive strategy, exclusion and denial is no longer defined as the "absence of a visible racial signifier," but as a specific theoretical or discursive move that solidifies the boundaries of feminist discourse and insures the prominence and stability of the category gender. The Exclusion and Denial strategy, like all discursive strategies, limits what can and cannot be said within a discourse because its function is by nature constrictive and regulatory. These discursive strategies assume a regulatory and preservative responsibility by ensuring that gender remains the privileged category and by maintaining a coherent and non-disruptive narrative about patriarchy and the oppression of "women as group." Exclusion and Denial, like the Analogy and Comparison, Adjectival Modification, (In)Visible Objectification, and Accusatory

Defensiveness Strategies, create the conceptual view that race is separate from gender and therefore inappropriate as an object of analysis in feminist discourse.

The exclusion and denial of race in feminist discourse occurs in two forms: it is either explicitly stated or implicitly inferred. When explicitly stated, feminist thinkers clearly and categorically assert the irrelevancy and insignificance of race to the condition of "women as an oppressed group." In these instances, race is declared as immaterial, extraneous, and unimportant and this then, serves as the basis for "excluding" race from the analysis. The result is an analysis of "women's oppression" in which race has been written and spoken out of existence.

According to the traditional argument, to speak or write race out of existence, is to "exclude" it from feminist thinking. The irony of course, is that once race is spoken of, once it is announced as irrelevant and immaterial, it becomes a part of feminist discourse, as well as a product of feminist discursive practices.²⁸

Explicit claims against the relevancy and significance of race are, at the very least, empirical examples of the occurrence of the signifier "race" in feminist discourse. That is, such claims are, at the most basic level, indications that the word "race" does indeed appear within feminist thinking and theoretical texts. However, to simply note the appearance of the signifier race does not account for the nature of its appearance, or how race operates when it does appear. The fact that race is spoken of, even if only in terms of its irrelevancy, must be explained, and analyzed. To put it more precisely, an examination of how race is constituted and how it operates in feminist discourse is necessary especially because it is explicitly designated as insignificant to the story of women's oppression.

²⁸By this I mean that feminist theory produces specific constructions of race that are both necessary to, as well as a product of, its narrative structure.

The second manner in which race is excluded and denied in feminist discourse is through implicit inference. Unlike clear and explicit statements on the irrelevance of race to gender, this form of exclusion either fails to mention race at all, or constructs it in metaphoric or metonymic terms. Feminist analyses that "fail to mention race" do not contain within them visible racial signifiers, nor does race, as a category, figure into or shape the argument or analysis. In contrast to explicitly stated exclusion, in this version, race is not explicitly spoken or written of (even in terms of its irrelevancy) because the presumption is: to talk about the condition of women is to not talk about race. Feminist theorizing that takes as its point of departure a common oppression rooted in "the bonds of womanhood" is indirectly suggesting that gender relations are uninformed by race relations. For this reason, the implicit exclusion and denial of race is marked by silence, i.e., the absence of racial signifiers and the lack of statements naming its irrelevance.

Implicit exclusion of race may also occur when race is invoked in metaphorical or metonymic terms. In each case, the consolidation of a feminist concept or term is made possible through metaphors and metonyms that evoke racial "blackness." That is, feminist discourse often makes use of what Toni Morrison calls, "symbolic figurations of blackness,"²⁹ that stand in for race, as a way of signifying race, without explicitly acknowledging (or realizing) that this process of signification is at work.

The Exclusion and Denial strategy, in both its explicit and implicit forms, suggests that the "exclusion" of race in feminist discourse is an inverted form of inclusion. By this I mean that, race is turned inward on itself; it is "included" and put into service only to perform its own erasure. Race is included, i.e., spoken of

²⁹Playing in the Dark, op. cit., p. ix.

and written of, only to the extent that it then must be "excluded"; it is invoked only to be revoked. As soon as race is "spoken of" and brought into existence, it must then be extracted from the equation and released from the burden and obligation of having to signify racial difference. This strategy actively includes or speaks of race while simultaneously constructing its exclusion.

This kind of exclusion does not, on its face, "shut [race] out" of feminist discourse [by] prevent[ing its] occurrence or use." On the contrary, feminist discourse does "use" race by deploying it in its narrative on gender. Similarly, this type of exclusion is not an exclusion in which race is "given no place." Feminist discourse does give place to race by claiming and asserting that it has no place. Feminist discourse, in other words, produces and constitutes race as a sign of absence. The production of race as a sign of absence suggests that the role and function of race is to exist in a state of non-existence; to exist as that which is excluded. In other words, when constructed *in absentia*, the role of race is "to be absent"; to function in silence "as silence." An important distinction to remember is that the Exclusion and Denial strategy does not explain the position or role of race in feminist discourse, it *is* the position and role of race in feminist discourse.

Viewing exclusion and denial as a discursive strategy, as a theoretical move practiced in feminist discourse, illustrates the importance of race in and to feminist theorizing. It illustrates that race is a *necessary prelude* to constructing and consolidating a coherent notion of a common bond based on gender relations that is unaffected by race relations.

The Exclusion and Denial strategy is aptly illustrated in the works of many feminists and in all "feminist frameworks" or strands of feminism.³⁰ While

³⁰"Feminist Frameworks" is a concept developed in Alison Jaggar's and Paula Rothenberg's Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men, Third Edition. (New York: McGraw

it is impossible to document each occurrence or use of this strategy, a few examples will serve to demonstrate precisely how the Exclusion and Denial strategy operates.

The Exclusion and Denial strategy, as stated above, operates in and undergirds all feminist frameworks. Because "feminist frameworks" are "theories....[explaining] the conditions which restrict women's freedom to determine [their] own lives,"³¹ these frameworks necessarily privilege the category gender in their analyses. In their definition, Jaggar and Rothenberg make this clear when they define feminist frameworks as

systems of ideas [and] conceptual structures that feminists can use in explaining, justifying, and guiding their action. Typically, a feminist framework is a comprehensive analysis of the nature and causes of women's oppression and a correlated set of proposals for ending it [emphasis added].³²

To the extent that a "feminist framework...analy[zes]... the nature and causes of women's oppression," it does so at the expense of race. "Typically," feminist frameworks (re)produce the gender/race binary by not only privileging the category gender, but by setting race in opposition to it. A Liberal Feminist framework for example, may critique political social contract theory as a patriarchal disguise for the "sexual contract,"³³ but it will fail to see the ways in which the state is fundamentally founded upon a racial contract that cannot be

Hill Book Company, 1993). This volume is currently in its 3rd edition. For a discussion of race in relation to this book in particular, see Chapter 5.

³¹Alison M. Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg Struhl, *Feminist Frameworks*, First Edition, op. cit., . xii.

³²*Ibid.*, Second Edition, p. xii.

³³Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

separated from its gendered component.³⁴ In a like manner, a Marxist Feminist framework is adept at documenting and analyzing the ways in which capitalism extracts and exploits labor from women. It describes the nature of women's work as involving the production of use values, commodities, as well as workers. However, with its emphasis on "women's work" and women's position under capitalism as a separate economic class, a Marxist Feminist framework cannot provide insight into the ways in which "women's work" has been historically racialized. That is, despite its various constructions and critiques of "women's work," a Marxist Feminist framework does not and cannot provide an analysis of Black women's work outside the home as consisting of working inside the homes of white families. Black women's venture into the "public sphere," i.e., into the world of paid work outside the home, consisted of performing duties inside the home of another family unit. Symbolically, Black women's paid work, especially from Reconstruction through the 1960's, was tantamount to trading the work of one "private sphere" for another. Moreover, a Marxist feminist framework is inattentive to those periods in history—slavery, sharecropping, and Jim Crowism—which economically initiated, buttressed or supported capitalism on racially-based grounds. These shortcomings render concepts like "women's work" and "women as a class" inapplicable to Black women and demonstrate that their coherency is built upon the absence of race. Socialist and Global Feminist frameworks, like Liberal and Marxist Feminist frameworks, privilege gender difference and relegate race to a secondary or non-existent role. Borrowing from Marxist and other feminist paradigms, these two frameworks emphasize the ways in which patriarchy is rooted in both class and sexuality issues.

³⁴N. Kly, Race and the Social Contract. See also, Race and Enlightenment, 1997.

Of the traditional feminist frameworks,³⁵ the one that most insists upon the privileged position of gender and, not coincidentally, makes the most use of race to insure that privileged position, is Radical Feminism. Radical Feminism, in all of its varieties, is distinguished by its "insistence that the oppression of women is fundamental."³⁶ There are, according to Jaggar and Rothenberg, several different ways this Radical Feminist claim may be interpreted:

1. That women were, historically, the first oppressed group.
2. That women's oppression is the most widespread, existing in virtually every known society.
3. That women's oppression is the deepest in that it is the hardest form of oppression to eradicate and cannot be removed by other social changes such as the abolition of class society.
4. That women's oppression causes the most suffering to its victims, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, although this suffering may go unrecognized because of the sexist prejudices of both the oppressor and the victims.
5. That women's oppression...provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression.³⁷

While "[d]ifferent radical feminists emphasize different aspects of the fundamental nature of women's oppression...all agree at least on the first three claims listed above."³⁸ If women's oppression is "first," "the most widespread," and "the deepest...[and] hardest form to eradicate" then the category race, following this logic, must be "second," "less widespread," and "more superficial and easier to eradicate." Whether this is "true" or not is not the issue. The point is that feminist discourse, as is articulated through various feminist frameworks

³⁵Listed in Jaggar and Rothenberg, *op. cit.*,

³⁶Jaggar and Rothenberg, 2nd edition, *op. cit.*, 86.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 86.

³⁸*Ibid.*

and feminist texts, constructs race as unimportant, secondary, and irrelevant. Feminist theorists invoke race, and assert its irrelevancy as a way of eliminating it from the analysis. This theoretical strategy, this move to exclude and deny race, produces and insures the unity of the feminist subject "we women." Without race operating either in a secondary position or *in absentia*, the "oppression of women as women" would not exist.

A more concrete example of this occurs in Andrea Dworkin's Woman Hating. On the first page of the introduction, Dworkin explains the purpose of her book: "The core of this book is an analysis of sexism (that system of male dominance), what it is, how it operates on us and in us."³⁹ She goes on to state that "[t]he analysis of sexism in this book articulates clearly what the oppression of women is, how it functions, [and] how it is rooted in psyche and culture."⁴⁰ The "oppression of women," as defined and articulated by Dworkin does not, indeed cannot, encompass race. Her definition of "women's oppression" is predicated on producing race (and class) as irrelevant categories. Dworkin defines "women's oppression" in this manner: "The nature of women's oppression is unique: **women are oppressed as women regardless of class or race [emphasis added].**"⁴¹

As a typical example of the Exclusion and Denial strategy, Dworkin's definition illustrates that race is not "excluded" from the definition of "women's oppression." This definition contains within it the signifier "race," therefore it is visibly "included" within the text. In fact, Dworkin has many racial and ethnic

³⁹Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974), 17.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 22.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 23.

signifiers throughout her introduction. These include: "Black women," "Black Liberation," "the Civil Rights Movement," "niggers," "Black sisters," "Chicana sisters," "Blacks," and "Black Panthers," to name a few.⁴² However, the fact that these racial signifiers are not empirically or visibly excluded from Dworkin's text, does not mean that they do not operate as "excluded variables" in the analysis of women's oppression. Again, as is characteristic of the Exclusion and Denial strategy, race is "spoken of" and invoked only to be silenced and rendered irrelevant. Because Dworkin sees sexism or "male dominance [as] the fundamental psychological, political, and cultural reality of earth-lived-life," it is given primacy over all other forms of domination. Women's oppression as women, according to Dworking, constitutes a "a state of primary emergency." Evenso, this does not prevent Dworkin from acknowledging other types of oppression.

The analysis in this book applies to the life situations of all women, but all women are not necessarily in a state of primary emergency as women. What I mean by this is simple. As a Jew in Nazi Germany, I would be oppressed as a woman, but hunted, slaughtered, as a Jew. As a Native American, I would be oppressed as a squaw, but hunted, slaughtered, as a Native American. The first identity, the one which brings with it part of its definition of death, is the identity of primary emergency. This is an important recognition because it relieves us of a serious confusion. The fact for instance, that many Black women (by no means all) experience primary emergency as Blacks in no ways lessens the responsibility of the Black community to assimilate this and other analyses of sexism and to apply ot in their own revolutionary work.⁴³

⁴²"Introduction," *passim* .

⁴³*Ibid.* 23-24.

Dworkin's brief acknowledgment of oppression based on race or ethnicity does not override her insistence that one's "first identity" is to "be oppressed as a woman." The fact that "all women are not necessarily in a state of primary emergency as women," does not negate the fact that it is the "gendered identity" that occupies the position of "first identity." According to Dworkin, because the "first identity" "brings with it part of its definition of death," some women, will simply not *experience* it as the identity of primary emergency. In other words, being oppressed as women will always be the most basic and fundamental identity, but it will not always be experienced as the first identity. For example, "a [female] Jew in Nazi Germany," according to Dworkin, "would [first] be oppressed as a woman, but hunted [and] slaughtered [secondly] as a Jew." In a like manner, "a [female] Native American...would be oppressed as a squaw, but hunted [and] slaughtered as a Native American." In these instances, Jewish and Native American women are first oppressed as women, but because they are "hunted [and] and slaughtered" because of their race and ethnicity, they do not experience gender as the basic and primary oppression. Even her claim "that many Black women (by no means all) experience primary emergency as Blacks," does not negate her assumption that gender oppression is the primary or first oppression. After all, she admonishes "the Black community" for failing to assimilate this [i.e., the notion that women are in a state of primary emergency as a woman] and other analyses of sexism into their own revolutionary work."⁴⁴

It is important to note that once Dworkin has established that "women are...in a state of primary emergency as women" and that the oppression as women exists "regardless of class or race," there is no other racial signifier or a single reference to race in the remaining chapter or the entire book(!) This

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 24.

suggests that the elimination of race, i.e., the process of invoking and then denying race, is a necessary prerequisite for any narrative or story about women's oppression "as women." The effect of this process, of employing this discursive strategy, is that it removes race from the discursive terrain in order to produce a unified feminist subject whose identity and (primary) oppression is rooted in and based solely upon gender. Dworkin's consistent use of "we" and "us," as pronominal descriptors of the unified feminist subject—Woman—makes sense only after race and class are invoked and then eliminated.

The absence of other racial signifiers following Dworkin's initial dismissal also suggests that once race is invoked and marked as immaterial and irrelevant, it begins to function in silence—upholding and maintaining women's "state of primary emergency as women." The point, of course, is that race is not immaterial and irrelevant. However, in asserting the relevancy of race, I do not mean to suggest that the issue is about whether or not race has any bearing on how different women experience patriarchal oppression. Neither am I implying that the "relevancy of race" should be conceptualized in terms of the connection(s) between racism and sexism as systems of oppression. These approaches to understanding the how "race is relevant" may or may not be fruitful. By contrast, my assertion that race is not immaterial and irrelevant must be seen in terms of how race is used in defining the nature and context of women's oppression. As Dworkin's definition illustrates, race is constituted as unnecessary and irrelevant *to* discursive and cultural definitions of "women's oppression." However, the relevancy and necessity of race to such definitions can be found in the ironic fact that race is deployed in the service of performing its own erasure; it is used to produce its own irrelevancy. In other words, race, as a sign and as a signifying system, is deployed ("included") *within* definitions of women's oppression, but the definition itself constructs and defines race as

existing outside of and irrelevant to women's unique oppression. Dworkin, like so many others, merely mark race as immaterial and irrelevant, even as it functions to insure the cohesiveness of women's oppression. The marking of race as irrelevant to the (definition of) oppression of women as women is both a symptom and a product of a discourse that privileges the category gender.

A more recent example of the use of the Exclusion and Denial strategy can be found in Nancy Hartsock's articulation of the "feminist standpoint." In Money, Sex, and Power: Towards a Feminist Historical Materialism, Hartsock seeks to develop "the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism."⁴⁵ Hartsock argues that the lives of women differ systematically and structurally from the lives of men because of the "institutionalized sexual division of labor."⁴⁶ According to Hartsock, there is a specific epistemology that emerges from the sexual division of labor which allows women to achieve a "deeper and more thoroughgoing" view of reality than that which is available to men. Specifically, Hartsock contends

that like the lives of proletarians according to Marxian theory, women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point that can ground a powerful critique of the phallographic institutions and ideology that constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism, (New York: Longman Press, 1983). See also the reprinted version in, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in Sandra Harding, ed. Feminism and Methodology, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 157-180.

⁴⁶Ibid., 233.

⁴⁷Ibid., 231.

It goes without saying that the general concept of a "women's standpoint" and Hartsock's specific notion of "a feminist standpoint that can allow us [i.e., women] to descend further into materiality to an epistemological level"⁴⁸ in order to understand the nature of patriarchal institutions, has been widely influential.⁴⁹ Precisely because of this influence, I will not attempt to summarize the impact standpoint theory has had on feminist theorizing and politics. Nor will I attempt to retrace the developments and arguments that have recently called the theoretical underpinnings of Hartsock's construction of women's "particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy" into question.⁵⁰ Rather my purpose is to briefly illustrate Hartsock's use of the Exclusion and Denial Strategy in constructing and producing the "feminist standpoint."

As is characteristic of the Exclusion and Denial strategy, Hartsock makes use of race (and other "differences among women") by invoking it and then denying its relevancy to "women's work" under "the capitalist form of patriarchy." Like Dworkin, Hartsock ensures us that the story she tells is a story that privileges gender at the expense of race. In addition she, also like Dworkin, marks race and other "differences among women" as irrelevant and immaterial, especially when compared to the project of identifying a common epistemological basis *as women*. What Hartsock's use of race reveals is that the common epistemological ground women share is a discursive construction that is predicated upon the explicit disavowal of race. In other words, the "feminist standpoint" is a discursive construction to the extent that it does not pre-exist

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Feminists like Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill Collins have constructed theories based upon a standpoint model.

⁵⁰See Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments*, op. cit., 140-143, and special issue of Women and Politics on standpoint theory. Volume 18.

Hartsock's articulation of it. By the same token, "the feminist standpoint" simply cannot exist without Hartsock's assumption that race is irrelevant to those "things common to all women's lives."⁵¹ These different aspects of the Exclusion and Denial strategy are readily apparent from the many claims Hartsock makes about "the feminist standpoint."

First, because the feminist standpoint is based upon the sexual division of labor, Hartsock begins with the assertion: "women's work in every society differs systematically from men's...and that **this division of labor is the first and in some societies the only, division of labor.**"⁵² I should reiterate that my point is not to argue the merits of this claim, but to point out the function of race within Hartsock's construction of the feminist standpoint. The assertion that the sexual division of labor is the first or most fundamental economic division, establishes discursive parameters by framing what will follow and by determining what falls within its boundaries. Because of this, the sexual division of labor becomes an *a priori* and necessary assumption. It is necessary because it: (1) establishes gender as the privileged and foundational category; (2) provides Hartsock with a theoretical rationalization for denying the possibility of a racialized division of labor; and (3) allows *any* question regarding race to be cast as irrelevant because it (would appear) to fall outside the rubric of the sex/ gender framework.

The assumption of the primacy of the sexual division of labor does not prevent Hartsock from raising questions about the role "important differences among women" might have on the construction of a single "feminist standpoint." Hartsock's response to privileging gender through the use of "the institutionalized sexual division of labor" at the expense of other "differences" is

⁵¹Money Sex and Power, op. cit., 234.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 232.

what is significant. Her response to these "differences" is typical of the Exclusion and Denial Strategy. In discussing the relationship between the sexual division of labor and its epistemological correlate—the feminist standpoint—Hartsock writes:

On the basis of a schematic account of the sexual division of labor, I begin to fill in the specific content of the feminist standpoint and begin to specify how women's lives structure an understanding of social relations...In addressing the institutionalized sexual division of labor, I propose to lay aside the important differences among women and instead search for central commonalities across race and class boundaries [emphasis added].⁵³

"Lay[ing] aside [i.e., excluding, ignoring or denying] the important differences among women (i.e., race and class)" is the discursive move that allows Hartsock to "search for commonalities across race and class boundaries." To put it more pointedly, the only way Hartsock can "fill in the specific content of the feminist standpoint and...specify how women's lives structure an understanding of social relations" is to ignore "differences among women"; differences that determine who can and cannot occupy the subject position Woman. As a result, the coherent constituency "we women" and its corresponding category "women's lives" is produced and sustained through the repression of any difference that may disturb its fragile and fictional unity. Hartsock produces or makes visible a "central commonality in "women's lives" by making invisible race and class. On what basis does Hartsock justify this theoretical move?

I take some justification from the fruitfulness of Marx's similar strategy in constructing a simplified, two-class, two-man model in which everything was exchanged at its value. Marx's schematic account in Volume I of *Capital* left out of account such factors as

⁵³Ibid., 233.

imperialism; the differential wages, work, and working conditions of the Irish; the differences between women, men, and children; and so on. **While all these factors are important to the analysis of contemporary capitalism, none changes either Marx's theories of surplus value or alienation, the two most fundamental features of the marxian analysis of capitalism. My effort here takes a similar form, in an attempt to move toward a theory of the extraction and appropriation of women's activity and women themselves [emphasis added].**

In essence, Hartsock builds her notion of the feminist standpoint in the "simplified two-class, two-man model," figured here as women's work versus men's work, because Marx constructed a similar theory based on the relationship of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Using Marx has both her example and theoretical basis, Hartsock notes that Marx failed to take into account numerous differences in the working conditions of the people he categorizes as "the proletariat" and "bourgeoisie." Nevertheless, Hartsock concludes that these differences were not critical enough to render unstable Marx's fundamental assumptions and analyses of capitalism. In a like manner, "important differences among women" are not critical enough to outweigh the search for a common epistemological ground rooted in a theory about "women's work." Hartsock recognizes the dangers in this simplified, two-gender approach that excludes race and class, but she effectively dismisses these differences by assuming and invoking an inherent commonality in "all women's lives." After noting Marx's failure to take into account "such factors as imperialism; the differential wages, work, and working conditions of the Irish; the differences between men, women, and children; and so on" in his "two-man two-class model," Hartsock writes:

Still, I adopt this strategy with some reluctance, since it contains the danger of making invisible the experience of lesbians or women of color. At the same time, I recognize that the effort to

uncover a feminist standpoint assumes that there are some things common to all women's lives in Western class societies.⁵⁴

That Hartsock chooses the conjunction "or" instead of "and" or "and/or" to connect "lesbians" and "women of color" is yet another notable prominent stratagem worthy of attention. It falls, however, outside the scope of the point I want to make which is, namely, that Hartsock's articulated assumption "that there are some things common to all women's lives" *produces* the notion "that there are some things common to all women's lives in Western class societies." In other words, the notion of a commonality among women based upon "women's work," is not simply an articulation of that which already exists. Rather, it is the very act of articulating, of naming and calling into being, that produces "women's commonality" as a commonality among women. As is characteristic of the Exclusion and Denial strategy, this commonality is constructed through the exclusion of race and "other important differences among women."

As noted above, the commonality that Hartsock constructs is based upon the bi-polar notion of women's work versus men's work that is itself a product of the exclusion of race. According to Hartsock, men's lives are governed entirely by commodity exchange whereas women's work consists primarily of subsistence production. As a result, men live lives "at the farthest distance from contact with concrete material life." Again, Hartsock recognizes the "importance" of race and class, but dismisses these factors as having nothing to do with the "commonalities present in the institutionalized sexual division of labor."

There are of course important differences along the lines of race and class. For example, working-class men seem to do more domestic labor than men higher up in the class structure—car

⁵⁴*ibid.*, 234.

repairs, carpentry, and the like. And until very recently, the wage work done by most women of color replicated the housework required by their own households. **Still, there are commonalities present in the institutionalized sexual division of labour that makes women responsible for both housework and wage work.**

Like Dworkin, Hartsock employs race in the service of performing its own erasure. She invokes race, even gives it "importance," but it must ultimately give way to the "commonalities [among women that are] present in the institutionalized sexual division of labor." Twice Hartsock recognizes that the assumption of a "women's commonality" poses a problem with regards to race and class, yet "still" the assumption stands with little more than the assertion itself. That Hartsock's "commonality" is little more than an assertion illustrates the way in which concepts of "women's commonalities" are not only a part of the discourse, but a product of the discourse. Here, as is the case with all discursive strategies, race is conceptualized as an attribute, as merely one of the characteristics that certain "women" and "men" possess. Because of this assumption, race is theorized as extraneous to the more fundamental category of gender.

True to the Exclusion and Denial strategy, both Dworkin and Hartsock mark race as irrelevant and dismiss it from their projects of analyzing the phenomena of "woman-hating" and "women's work." In addition, both justify their claims for dismissing the "importance" of race on the basis of a common women's oppression. The irony (and the point) is that this commonality can only exist when race is constructed and made theoretically irrelevant and invisible. Race, through its invocation and sudden revocation, brings into existence and makes coherent the assumption of commonality that informs both Hartsock's and Dworkin's theories. Moreover, once race is deployed to bring into existence a commonality among women, it maintains that commonality by functioning as a

sign of absence. Hartsock's notions of "feminist standpoint" and "women's work," and Dworkin's definition of a "unique women's oppression," in other words, both rely upon race functioning in absence as absence so as to preserve a commonality presumptuously uninformed by race.

When Exclusion and Denial operates in an implicit form, race is "conveniently left unacknowledged or even deliberately suppressed."⁵⁵ According to hooks, to imply that white women's experience is "women's experience," without acknowledging the racialized construction of that experience, is to "ignore the existence of black women" and to deny the impact of race in the formation of gender relations. In fact, hooks lists several books that purport to be about "women's experience," but are in fact about white women's experience.

From Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* to Barabara Berg's *The Remembered Gate* and on to more recent publications like *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, edited by Zillah Eisenstein, most female writers [write as if]...the white American woman's experience is...synonymous with the American woman's experience. While it is in no way racist for any author to write a book exclusively about white women it is fundamentally racist for books to be published that focus solely on the American white woman's experience in which that experience is assumed to be *the* American woman's experience.

Hence, the implicit form of Exclusion and Denial does not rest upon asserting the irrelevancy of race. In fact, the word "race" or explicitly named racial subjects may never appear within a text. Thus, to *implicitly* deny race is to silently mark race as a "missing" category in the production of Woman.

⁵⁵hooks, "Racism and Feminism: The Issue of Accountability," op. cit., 7.

Analogy and Comparison

The second discursive strategy that is produced by and deployed in feminist discourse is the Analogy and Comparison strategy. The Analogy and Comparison Strategy can be briefly defined as those instances in which feminist scholars construct analogies between gender and race so as to suggest a similarity between racism and sexism. Thus, the major assumption of any gender-race analogy is that "there [is] something to be learned or demonstrated about women's oppression and the struggle against it by comparing it to oppression and discrimination based on race."⁵⁶ Such comparisons may appear productive because they suggest a mutual recognition of a common source of oppression, or at least a similar kind of oppression. This similarity is expressed in the belief that sexism and racism are both relations of domination based on biological differences that are then given social meaning and value. Since "women" and "Blacks" are the devalued subjects of the categories of gender and race, then, so the argument goes, the nature of one oppression should lend theoretical expression to the other. Gender relations and race relations have, in other words, a common theoretical value that is best expressed by analogy.

This assumption underscores much of feminist thinking about the nature of gender relations, and as a result, the gender-race analogy has become a staple of feminist theorizing. As Margaret Simons and others point out, "[f]eminist theorists have often drawn extensively on an analogy with racism and with the struggle of minorities in America against racism, in developing theories of the women's liberation movement."⁵⁷ First and Second Wave feminist used (and

⁵⁶Linda Burnham, "Race and Gender: The Limits of Analogy," in Ethel Tobach and Betty Rosoff, eds., Challenging Racism and Sexism: Alternatives to Genetic Explanations, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1994), 144-45.

⁵⁷Margaret A. Simons, "Racism and Feminism: A Schism in the Sisterhood," Feminist Studies 5 (Summer 1979): 385-401.

continues to use) analogies between gender and race to define and describe the position of "Woman."

During the 19th century Women's Rights Movement, suffragettes often drew attention to the position of women in society by comparing themselves to "slaves," "Negroes," "Sambo," and "Darky." For example, a resolution for the 1850 Women's Rights Convention in Salem, Ohio read: "Resolved, that in those laws which confer on man the power to control the property and the person of woman, and to remove from her at will the children of her affection, we recognize only the modified code of the slave plantation; and that thus we are brought more nearly into sympathy with the suffering slave, who is despoiled of all his rights."⁵⁸ In the eyes of 19th century women's rights activists, their inability to obtain and own property, to earn and keep wages, and to prevent men from taking away their children under the "framed...laws of divorce,"⁵⁹ placed them in a condition not of servitude, but of slavery. This distinction is important because it allowed the women's rights activists of this era to define the social position of "Woman" by drawing upon the reality of African American slavery. Because of the absence of legal rights, First Wave women rights activists went out of their way to equate the position of Woman with that of the slave. They wanted to identify and describe the kind of legal constraints that defined the position of women, as well as customary and social constraints. In addition,

⁵⁸From Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds. *History of Women's Suffrage*, Volume I, 814-815, and quoted in Robert Allen, *Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States*, p. 137.

⁵⁹From the "Declaration of Sentiments," read at the Seneca Falls Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, 1848. Reprinted in Miriam Schneir, ed. *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*.

many of the women rights activists had been members of their local Anti-Slavery Society and had participated in the Abolitionist Movement. Thus, to them, the arguments put forth by abolitionists need only to be applied to the condition of women. In 1848, Emily Collins commented in this vein when she wrote: "All through the Anti-Slavery struggle, every word of denunciation of the wrongs of the Southern slave, was I felt, equally applicable to the wrongs of my own sex. Every argument for emancipation of the colored man was equally one for that of woman; I was surprised that all Abolitionists did not see the similarity in the condition of the two classes."⁶⁰

The institution most often cited as an example of Woman's slave-like condition was the institution of marriage. Under the institution of marriage, the husband is viewed as the master and the wife as the slave. Marriage was perceived of as one of the major sources of women's subjugation. As Susan B. Anthony argued at the Tenth National Woman's Rights Convention in 1860, "[n]early all of the wrongs of which we complain grow out of the inequality, the injustice of the marriage laws, that rob the wife of the right to herself and...that make her the slave of the man she marries..."⁶¹ For Anthony, and other suffragettes of the day, the woman, as "the uncomplaining drudge of the household, [was] condemned to the severest labor, [and] ha[d] been systematically robbed of her earnings, which ha[d] gone to build up her master's power, and [as such] she ha[d] found herself in the condition of the slave, deprived of the results of her own labor."⁶²

⁶⁰"To Keep a Wife in Subjection," in Leslie B. Tanner, ed. Voices From Women's Liberation, (Chicago: New American Library, 1970), 48.

⁶¹"Marriage Has Ever Been a One-Sided Affair," in Leslie Tanner, ed., *ibid.*, 79.

⁶²"WOMAN: The Great Unpaid Laborer of the World," in *ibid.*, 42.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, echoes these sentiments when she asserts that "[m]arriage...is by no means and equal partnership. The silent partner loses everything. ...[The Woman,] like the Southern slave...takes the name of her owner."⁶³ Moreover, according to Stanton,

a married Woman has no legal existence; she has no more absolute rights than a slave on a Southern plantation. A married woman...takes the name of her master, holds nothing, owns nothing, can bring no action in her own name; and the principles on which she and the slave is educated are the same. The slave is taught what is best for him to know—which is nothing; the woman is taught what is best for her to know—which is little more than nothing, man being the umpire in both cases...Civilly, socially, and religiously, she is what man chooses her to be...and such is the slave [emphasis added].⁶⁴

Elizabeth Collins, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady-Stanton were not the only women rights activists to couch their description of woman's lot in the language of slavery. Lucretia Mott, in citing from an Introduction to American Law, agreed with criticisms made against the legal theory designating the husband and wife as one person. Relying upon a comparison to the slave, Mott believed that "[t]he theory of the law degrades the wife almost to the level of slaves."⁶⁵ In a like manner, Ernestine Rose was so appalled at the fact that in "marriage...[woman] loses her entire identity,...[that] her being is said to have become merged in her husband," that she demanded America to "[c]arry out the republican principle of universal suffrage, or strike it from [its] banners and

⁶³"Civil and Political Existence of Women," in *ibid.*, 78.

⁶⁴Quoted in Reluctant Reformers, *op. cit.*, 137.

⁶⁵"A Demand for the Political Rights of Women," in Tanner, *op. cit.*, 52.

substitute 'Freedom and power to one half of society, and Submission and Slavery to the other...'"⁶⁶

The gender-race analogy was also popular during the resurgence of feminism in the 1960's and 1970's. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's classic work, The Second Sex,⁶⁷ contemporary feminists relied upon comparisons to "the Negro," Blacks, racism, slavery, or race in general, to define and construct a discourse on the social position of "Woman." de Beauvoir for example, begins her analysis of the "facts and myths" of women's lives with the central question of her research: "what is a woman?" To answer this question, de Beauvoir uses a series of comparisons to race ("the Jew" and "the Negro") to illustrate the "Otherness" of Woman's existence. Using Hegel's dialectical master/ slave model, de Beauvoir illustrates the ways in which Woman is both the Other and the negation of man. While de Beauvoir's adoption of Hegel's master/ slave dialectic is not unproblematic,⁶⁸ it is important to note that the very application of Hegel's model to Woman is rooted in references and comparisons to race. Throughout The Second Sex, and especially in the "Introduction," de Beauvoir depends upon the racially specific situation of African Americans and Jewish people to demonstrate how one "becomes" Woman. That "...there are deep similarities between the situation of woman and that of the Negro"⁶⁹ is the main assumption undergirding de Beauvoir's analysis. In demonstrating how women

⁶⁶"Remove the Legal Shackles from Woman (Second National Convention Worcester, 1851)," in *ibid.*, 64 & 65.

⁶⁷The Second Sex, Translated and edited by H.M. Parshley. (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1989).

⁶⁸For a critique, see Margaret Simons, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹de Beauvoir, p.

"become inferior," she states that "antifeminists...were willing to grant 'equality in difference' to the *other* sex.. [which] is precisely like the 'equal but separate' formula of the Jim Crow laws aimed at the North American Negroes."⁷⁰ de Beauvoir, like all feminist scholars who employ the gender-race analogy, assume that being placed in the position of the "inferior Other" is tantamount to having equal and thus, comparable inferior subject positions. Moreover, the assumption is not just that "...a race, a caste, a class, or a sex...is reduced to a position of inferiority, [but also that] the methods of justification are the same."⁷¹ This two-pronged assumption: that the inferior Other of sexism is the same as, similar to or like the inferior Other of racism because the "methods of justification are the same" informed the works of the major feminist thinkers of the Second Wave.

A case in point can be found in Helen Hacker's influential article, "Women as a Minority Group." In this article, Hacker uses the Woman-Negro analogy to develop a sociological theory that illustrates how "women often manifest many of the psychological characteristics which have been imputed to self-conscious minority groups."⁷² Hacker was the first scholar to use the term "minority group" in reference to women despite the fact that women were (are) numerically the majority. Defining women as a minority group is significant not only because it would later allow women to enter under the protective status of policies like Civil Rights Act, Title IX, etc., but also because it would serve as the major point of reference, as the major kind of analogy for discussing "women's

⁷⁰de Beauvoir, op. cit., p. xxix.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²First printed in Social Forces 30 (October 1951), 60-69. Reprinted In Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak, eds. Masculine/Feminine: Readings in Sexual Mythology and the Liberation of Women, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1969), 130-148.

oppression." Hacker's article moved from merely making a comparison between women and minority groups to arguing that women *are* a minority group in the same way that racial and ethnic groups form a "minority group." Hacker's argument is significant as well because it lays bare the theoretical assumptions that formed the woman-as-minority group and other like-analogies. By defining a minority group as "any group of people who because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination,"⁷³ Hacker is able to apply a minority group "status" to women. Like "Negroes, Jews, Italians, etc.," women exhibit a "personality distortion" by "denigrat[ing] other members of the group, [and by] accepting the dominant group's stereotyped conception of them."⁷⁴ Moreover, "[l]ike those minority groups whose self-castigation outdoes dominant group derision of them, women frequently exceed men in the violence of their vituperations of their sex. They are more severe in moral judgments, especially in sexual matters."⁷⁵

In addition to psychological and personality characteristics, Hacker argues that women, like racial minorities, are "discriminated against" and "treated unequally." Economically, they are "confined to sedenary, monotonous work under the supervision of men"; they are paid less and given few opportunities for advancement; and they are barred from decision-making positions of large corporations. Hacker goes on to argue that educationally, women are treated

⁷³Ibid., p. 132.

⁷⁴Ibid., 134.

⁷⁵Ibid.

unequally and as a wife, sister—as a woman—she is suffers unequal treatment in her own home.

For Hacker, this kind of discrimination and "unequal treatment" against women parallels that of "Negroes." "The relation between women and Negroes is historical, as well a analogical," and because of that there are "obvious similarities in the status of women and Negroes."⁷⁶ On this basis, Hacker constructs an elaborate chart outlining the similarities of the "castelike status of women and Negroes." She notes that both have "high social visibility"; carry the burden of the "ascribed attributes of inferiority and irresponsibility; occupy a status that is justified through being in their "proper place"; learn and exhibit accommodation attitudes; are discriminated against; have similar problems in their roles."⁷⁷

Although Hacker often uses phrases like "Negroes, Jews, immigrants, etc.," and "Negroes, Jews, Italians, etc.," it is important to note that she nonetheless constructs a chart using "Negroes" as the reference point and analogy. Not once does she use the social or economic status of "Jews, Italians, etc.," as the point of reference from which to describe the status of women, even though, as she states, "Negroes...do not constitute the only racial or ethnic minority."⁷⁸ In fact, once Hacker constructs her chart on the "castelike status of women and Negroes," "Jews, Italians" and "other minority groups" do not appear again anywhere in the text. Moreover, all of her examples and illustrations of comparison are with "Negroes" accompanied by extensive discussions of their psychological characteristics, and economic and social status. No such discussion on "other minority groups" exists in Hacker's analysis.

⁷⁶Ibid., 140.

⁷⁷Ibid., 140-141.

⁷⁸Ibid., 142.

Another noteworthy point is that Hacker often resorts the racist images of African Americans to convey or illustrate a particular idea about women's social status. "Negroes" are presented as illiterate, servile, and plagued with such feelings of inferiority that they has no self-esteem, as a group or individually. In applying the concept of social distance to women and men, Hacker labels women's infrequent or secondary interaction with men as a "complete 'ghetto' status."⁷⁹ Hacker then asks whether or not some women's "ghetto status" would render them to be "classified sociologically as men?" She responds by saying: "perhaps no more so than the legendary Negro who, when requested to move to the colored section of the train, replied, 'Boss, I've done resigned from the colored race,' should be classified as white."⁸⁰ The point is, of course, that Hacker not only uses race or "Negroes" as her point of departure, but in so doing she simultaneously constructs and deploys the meaning of race and how it will be used in the theoretical analysis of "woman as a minority group."

In all fairness, Hacker is mindful of the "differences which impose qualifications on the comparison [between women and Negroes]."⁸¹ She notes, for example, that marriage is a "social elevator for women, but not for Negroes"; that women are of greater important to the dominant group despite the gains that the subordinant position of "Negroes" afford to whites; that "ambivalence is probably more marked in the attitude of white males toward women than toward Negroes"; and that class differences among women does not change a discriminatory treatment against women in the way that it does for the middle-class and lower-class Negro." Hacker continues by acknowledging that

⁷⁹Ibid., 136.

⁸⁰Ibid., 137.

⁸¹Ibid., 142.

"women's privileges exceed those of Negroes"; "that Negroes suffer far greater discrimination than women; and that "Negroes...have borne the brunt of antiminority feeling in this country." Whether or not Hacker's "differences" are in fact *true* is not point. The point is that Hacker acknowledges and then dismisses these differences as irrelevant. "Notwithstanding these and other differences between the position of women and Negroes," she writes, "the similarities are sufficient to render research on either group applicable in some fashion to the other."⁸² That such differences do not render the "Woman-Negro" analogy untenable, is explained by Hacker as having to do with the fact that: "there are only two sexes"; "there is greater polarization in the relationship between men and women"; women's discrimination is "rooted in a biological reality less susceptible to cultural manipulation [and therefore,] prove more lasting"; and "protective attitudes" toward women remain. Hacker's insistence on the applicability of the "Negro's" status to that of women exemplifies an important characteristic of the Analogy and Comparison Strategy, namely that the analogy is constituted through the denial of the differences of the "Negro's" status. In other words, one must always deny, dismiss, ignore, or render irrelevant the particularities that constitute race and racism in order to make race applicable to women as a parallel category of analysis. In essence, the Analogy and Comparison strategy requires the the deployment of the Exclusion and Denial Strategy in order to be effective.

Hacker's theoretical explication of women's status as a minority group paved the way for subsequent theories that would explain women's oppression through an analogy and comparison to race. Hacker's analysis lent legitimacy to the gender-race (woman-Negro) analogy by extending the comparison beyond a

⁸²Ibid.

mere reference to "Negroes" "slaves" and "Blacks" to the notion that women were, symbolically and theoretically, "Negroes" "slaves" and "Blacks." Through a symbolic and theoretical analysis of women as "Blacks", the point was to illustrate that women were socially positioned in relation to men in the same way that Blacks are socially positioned relative to whites.

This theoretical move is important because it placed race and racial(ized) images in a "foundational position," meaning race would become the "authorizing ground" that would enable feminist thinkers to move from merely suggesting that women are treated like minorities to claiming that they were indeed a minority group. As such, housework would become "slave labor," marriage a contemporary form of "slavocracy", and Woman "the Nigger of the world." What would follow, in this Second Wave of feminist theorizing, would be a series of analogies and comparisons to race or racism that would serve to explain and legitimate "women's oppression." More often than not, specific "women are (like) Blacks" analogies would give way to theories that were coded by the gender-race analogy. For example, Gayle Rubin explains the genesis of women's oppression as the product of "the traffic in women," which suggests that women's "exchange" within the sex/gender system is akin the European slave trading of African peoples.⁸³ Others, like Monique Wittig would encourage

⁸³Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in Rayna Reiter, ed., Toward an Anthropology of Women, (New York: Montly Review Press, 1975), 157-210. Rubin begins her analysis of sexual inequality by juxtaposing and comparing the "Negro slave" and "a domesticated woman." Citing Marx she writes:

"What is a Negro slave? A man of the black race. The one explanation is as good as the other. A Negro is a Negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations." Paraphrasing Marx, Rubin applies the "Negro's position to that of women by asking, "what is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a

women break away from their oppressors "like runaway slaves," and still others would erroneously compare some aspect of the racialized subject (e.g., passing) to some aspect of the gendered subject.

Other uses of the gender-race analogy can be seen in the influential works of Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet, Susan Brownmiller, Mary Daly and countless others. In The Dialectic of Sex, Firestone not only employs the gender-race analogy, but she reduces racism to sexism by arguing that "racism is sexism extended."⁸⁴ Applying Freud's theory of the oedipal complex to family relations, Firestone constructs a family in which the white male and female serve as Father and Mother, and all Blacks function as the children. Likewise, Kate Millet's theory of "sexual politics" relies heavily upon the gender race analogy, as does Susan Brownmiller's analysis of rape, and Mary Daly's patriarchal system.

To be sure, the extensive use of and problems associated with the gender-race analogy has not gone unremarked. bell hooks notes several problems with comparing sexism to racism, or gender to race. For hooks, gender-race analogies actively exclude Black women from the women's movement.

When I use the words 'exclude,' [hooks writes], I do not mean that they overtly discriminated against black women on the basis of race. There are other ways to exclude and alienate people. Many black women felt excluded from the movement whenever they heard white women draw analogies between 'women and blacks.' For by making such analogies, white women were in effect saying to black women: 'We do not acknowledge your presence as women in American society.'

The exclusion of which hooks speaks is embedded within the terms of the analogy, "women" and "blacks." By making this analogy, one "unwittingly

chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations." (p. 158.)

⁸⁴Firestone, p.

suggests that...the term 'woman' is synonymous with 'white women' and the term 'blacks' synonymous with 'black men'."⁸⁵ This linguistic construction of the gender-race analogy means that the social positions under comparison could not include Black women. In essence, hooks argues, such analogies make Black women as subjects invisible.

In addition to excluding and making invisible Black women, the prevalent use of the gender-race analogy has been criticized an example of white women's racism. It is "in the context of endless comparisons of the plight of 'women' and 'blacks' that they [i.e., white women] revealed their racism."⁸⁶ According to hooks, "this racism was an unconscious, unacknowledged aspect of their thought," that obscured "two obvious facts." The first fact,, according to hooks, is that it is impossible for a "capitalist, racist, [and] imperialist state" to produce one coherent economic and social status that all women would share. Second, "the social status of white women in America has never been like that of black women or men," and thus makes a comparison untenable.⁸⁷ Thus, the use of the gender-race analogy is "racist" to the extent that it deflects attention away from the privileges white women have as "whites." In addition, hooks observes, the endless comparisons between "women and blacks" makes it possible for white women to act as if alliances...exist between themselves and non-white women." This of course, allows white women to figure the "white male" as the universal

⁸⁵hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, op. cit, p. 8.

⁸⁶Ibid., 136.

⁸⁷Ibid. I am referring specifically the following passage: "There was very little if any similarity between the day-to-day experiences of the black slave. Theoretically, the white woman's legal status under patriarchy may have been that of patriarchy, but she was in no way subjected to the de-humanization and brutal oppression that was the lot of the slave."

oppressor⁸⁸ further legitimating the assumption that "as women" they have no racial privilege.

Likewise, Catherine Stimpson echoes the theme of racism when she admonishes other white women for using the gender-race analogy, even though she herself employs and maintains a distinction between gender and race or "women" and "Blacks" by juxtaposing "Women's Liberation" and "Black Civil Rights." Like hooks, Stimpson views the race-gender analogy as an example of white women's racism. She writes: "the [gender-race] analogy evades, in the rhetorical haze, the harsh fact of white women's racism"⁸⁹ because it glosses over "her participation in what Eldridge Cleaver calls the 'funky facts of life'."⁹⁰

Another oft-cited problem with the gender-race analogy is that it "appropriat[es] the pain of subordination"⁹¹ and more specifically, "the black experience." Trina Grillo and Stephanie Wildman argue that the ability to appropriate another victim's pain is itself a privilege and warns against the neutralizing affect of such comparisons.

When whites speak about race they need to avoid appropriating the pain of subordination. Comparing sexism to racism gives some whites a false sense that they understand the experience of people

⁸⁸Ibid., 140. See also Elanor Smith, "Historical Relationship Between Black and White Women," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed.,

⁸⁹Catherine Stimpson, "Thy Neighbor's Wife, Thy Neighbor's Servants': Women's Liberation and Black Civil Rights." In Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran, eds., Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971), 650.

⁹⁰Ibid., 650-51.

⁹¹Trina Grillo and Stephanie Wildman, "Sexism, Racism, and the Analogy Problem in Feminist Thought," in Jeanne Adeleman and Gloria M. Enguidanos, eds., Racism in the Lives of Women: Testimony, Theory, and Guides to Antiracist Practice, (New York: Haworth Press, 1994), pp 171-180.

of color. White people grasping an analogy between an oppression they have suffered and race discrimination may think that they understand the phenomenon of racism/ white supremacy in all its aspects, and believe that their opinions and judgments about race are as cogent as that of victims of racism. But they are not. They cannot feel the same pain.

Similarly, Stimpson argues:

that women's liberation would be much stronger, much more honest, and ultimately more secure if it stopped comparing white women to blacks so freely. The analogy exploits the passion, ambition, and vigor of the black movement. It perpetuates the depressing habit white people have of first defining the black experience and then of making it their own.

On the whole, the critiques lodged against the use of the gender-race analogy can be summed up as follows: (1) it renders Black women and their experience invisible by equating women with white women and Blacks with men; (2) it casts white men as the omnipotent, all powerful oppressor which in turn obscures the racial privilege of white women; (3) it creates the appearance of a true "sisterhood" and alliance between white women and non-white women; and (5) it appropriates, trivializes, and obscures the "the Black experience"

While these criticisms may be warranted, they fail to speak to the ways in which feminist theory, as a discourse, produces the gender-race analogy as a way of legitimating, maintaining, and regulating what will fall within its discursive domain. If "discursive boundaries are," as de Lauretis argues, "...specific terms, concepts,...rhetorical strategies...shared assumptions, interpretive paths, [and] unstated premises," which are not "simply constraints but also configurations...that delineate a set of possible meanings,"⁹² then the gender-race

⁹²"Feminist Studies/ Critical Studies," op. cit., 4.

analogy must be seen as both a "part of the discourse" as well as a product of the discourse. As such, the gender-race analogy is a "discursive configuration" that articulates and makes possible a set of meaning relative to the category race within feminist discourse.

The criticisms of feminism's use of the gender-race analogy tend to view the analogy as merely a "component," "part," or a "feature," of feminist writings. In each instance, the gender-race analogy is conceptualized as an externally-produced theoretical tool that can be used and then set aside without affecting (and effecting) the nature of the discourse. Linda Burnham's analysis of the gender-race analogy exemplifies this approach. She argues that "analogies between racism and sexism...were a staple of the women's movement of the late 1960's and 1970's [and have since] abated." For Burnham, analogies between sexism and racism was a trend; a popular, but flawed, theoretical tool that lost its magnetism due to the "stinging critiques of the tendency of the analogizing vantage point to 'lose sight' of women of color."⁹³ The corrective to the invisibility problem, according to this line of reasoning, is to "stop" using such analogies.

Burnham's questions are even more revealing. She asks: "what, if anything, is similar about race and gender—in what ways may they be productively compared, and what are the limits of analogy?" More precisely, "what made [the analogy] so compelling in the first place;...are there theoretically legitimate comparisons to be made; [and what is the] basis for the strong negative reaction to comparisons."⁹⁴ While these questions may be useful for a certain kind of

⁹³Linda Burnham, "Race and Gender: The Limits of Analogy," in Ethel Tobach and Betty Rosoff, eds., Challenging Racism and Sexism: Alternatives to Genetic Explanations, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1994), 143.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 144.

project, they are not the type of questions that would assist one in understanding how the analogy operates. Burnham's analysis and questions assume that the gender-race analogy is _____.

Moving from the same set of assumptions, Grillo and Wildman argue that "any analogy to race and gender must be used ethically and with care...[to avoid] perpetuating societal racism."⁹⁵ For Grillo and Wildman, the use of the gender-race analogy is a misapplication of the experience of racism by "progressive white feminists with anti-racists politics [who] merely seek...to educate and explain the experience of sexism."⁹⁶ Such comparisons lead to the erroneous view that white women can "comprehend the experience of people of color and therefore are able to speak about the pain of racism from that point of view."⁹⁷

Again, while these may be valid criticisms, the way in which the analogy itself is conceptualized prevents one from understanding how the analogy operates within feminist discourse. The pertinent questions around the gender-race analogy have little to do with the legitimacy or validity of the comparison. From my perspective, the gender-race analogy is not simply an illustration of "white women's racism," or a misapplication of the concept racism. The use of race in feminist thinking, especially the gender-race analogy, cannot be reduced to a "simple misunderstanding," which warrants more "ethical" and "caring" ways to "use" it. Such views of the gender-race analogy can only provide limited information. We know, for example, that gender-race analogies exist, but not how they have been constructed. We know, to some extent, the reasons and motivations for their use, but not the discursive rules and assumptions that

⁹⁵Grillo and Wildman, *op. cit.*, 178.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p 171.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

generate and permit their appearance. We know that the language of the gender-race comparison works to exclude Black women, but not the process of exclusion. In short, viewing the gender-race analogy as an externally-produced and misapplied theoretical tool precludes us from examining how such analogies operate within feminist discourse. It forecloses the opportunity to explore the inner workings or logics and their theoretical construction. To make such questions possible, one should not view feminist theory as a body of literature that "contains" or "uses" analogies, but as a discourse that produces and in turn, is constituted by its own production of such analogies. As such, the gender-race analogy becomes a specific rhetorical configuration that emerges as a discursive strategy in the process of feminist theory's attempt to clear and claim a discursive space of its own. This simply means, as previously stated, discursive strategies are the product of the discourse's objective to constitute itself as the authority over a specific subject matter. In this case, the gender-race analogy emerges both as a boundary-marking, meaning-producing concept, as well as one of the configurations that fall within the boundaries.

So, what kinds of meanings are made possible with the gender-race analogy? How does this analogy operate or function within feminist thinking? What does the gender-race analogy allow feminist thinkers to do (or not do)? Granted, the answers to these questions are not always obvious or without contention, especially given the fact that the gender-race analogy is not unique to feminist scholarship.⁹⁸ Others discourses may employ the gender-race analogy or use race and "blackness" as productive moments in their narratives. However, what is unique is the way in which the gender-race analogy operates in feminist

⁹⁸See the essays in Sandra Harding, ed., The "Racial" Economy of Science, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), for analyses on the racialization of scientific discourse.

theory, and the position and function of the category "race" within the analogy itself.

First, as stated above, the gender-race analogy, as the Analogy and Comparison Strategy, requires the simultaneous deployment of the Exclusion and Denial Strategy in order to be effective. The gender-race analogy marks race as irrelevant and writes it out of existence even as it uses and relies upon race as a category. Although the category race forms half of the analogy, it must ultimately be "excluded" and written from existence. Race, in its various forms (e.g., "slave," "slavery," "minority," "nigger," etc.) is invoked only to give meaning, legitimacy and importance to gender. The analogy must conceal the processes whereby the racial subjects upon which it depends comes into being. The particularities that make race or racism possible, or even the very nature of these categories are rendered invisible within the gender-race analogy.

This process of "exclusion" and invisibility, is made possible by the very function of the category race in the analogy. Within the gender-race analogy, race serves as the foil for gender; to reflect back into gender all the negativity that word "slave" or "nigger" connotes.⁹⁹ I emphasize the definite article "the," as opposed to "a," to highlight the fact that it is race and only race that functions in this way. Moreover, within feminist theorizing, race has been the only category used in analogical form. As the foil, the category race not only serves to reflect back into gender all of its negative connotations, but in so doing it lends legitimacy to the concept of "the oppression of women" and privileges gender as the central category of analysis. Race and racial configurations become a means to an end, namely to lend theoretical legitimacy and validity to sexism as, not just

⁹⁹ I emphasize the definite article "the," as opposed to "a," to highlight the fact that it is race and only race that functions in this way. Within feminist theorizing, race is the only category used in analogical form.

a similar oppression, but as an equal and perhaps greater oppression. Race in this sense, becomes an expedient way of defining the nature of sexism and garnering support. bell hooks uses this example:

A white woman professor who wants the public eye see her as victimized and oppressed because she is denied tenure is not about to evoke images of poor women working as domestics receiving less than minimum wage struggling to raise a family single-handed. Instead, it is far more likely she will receive attention and sympathy is she says, 'I'm a nigger in the eyes of my white male colleagues.' She evokes the image of innocent, virtuous white womanhood being placed on the same level as blacks....[emphasis added].¹⁰⁰

Hence, a comparison to race, or to "nigger" validates the ill-treatment of women "as women." Or, as Stimpson puts it, to demonstrate that one is "being treated like [B]lacks bec[o]mes proof of exploitation."¹⁰¹

A third unique feature of the way in which the gender-race analogy is used in feminist theorizing is that this process of legitimation and validation requires the use of the most denigrating and insulting racial signifiers. Feminists employ only the most contemptuous aspects of so-called "Black culture," as well as racial epithets to make their comparison to gender. This can be seen in the use of so-called "Black dialect" or "Negro speech," as in Hacker's seemingly benign invocation of the response of "the legendary Negro who [refused]...to move to the colored section of the train," or in her implication that women can occupy a "ghetto status" in relation to men.¹⁰² The most obvious example, however, can

¹⁰⁰bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, op. cit., 143.

¹⁰¹Catherine Stimpson, op. cit., 648.

¹⁰²Helen Hacker, op. cit., 137. See discussion above, pp. 80-81. Lawrence Levine, in his well-known and influential book, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, argues that the language written and recorded as "Black dialect" was recorded by white, southern folklorists, and as such it is a melange of accuracy and fantasy, of sensitivity and stereotype, of empathy and

be found in the assertion that " 'Woman, [as] Japanese feminist/ artist Yoko Ono once [stated], is the nigger of the world'. "¹⁰³ Feminists like Gayle Rubin and Naomi Weisstein, "started thinking seriously about the 'woman as nigger,'" equation and set out to explain "how women are an exploited class, like black people...."¹⁰⁴ In different essays with the same title, "Woman as Nigger," Rubin and Weisstein promoted the idea that:

our culture and our psychology characterizes women as inconsistent, emotionally unstable, lacking in a strong super-ego, weaker, nurturant rather than productive, intuitive rather than intelligent, and—if they are at all normal—suited to the home and family. In short, the list adds up to a typical minority-group stereotype—woman as nigger—if she knows her place (the home), she is really a quite lovable, loving creature, happy and childlike[emphasis added].¹⁰⁵

That the term "nigger" may have been offensive did not occur, for example, to the editors of the volume in which Rubin's essay appeared. In prefatory comments, the editors had this to say about Rubin's essay:

It seemed to the editors remarkable for Rubin's sophisticated grasp of the psychological ramifications of women's oppression, for the depth and breadth of her reading, and for the sense of personal discovery and passion with which her argument is imbued.¹⁰⁶

racism....Negro speech was frequently reduced to what the auditor thought Negroes spoke like." See "A Note on Black Dialect," pp. xxv-xxvi.

¹⁰³Quoted in Pearl Cleage, Mad at Miles: Deals with the Devil and Other Reasons to Riot, 21.

¹⁰⁴Gayle Rubin, "Woman as Nigger, in Betty Roszack and Theodore Roszack, eds. Masculine/ Feminine: Readings in Sexual Mythology and the Liberation of Women. (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1969), 231.

¹⁰⁵Naomi Weisstein, "Woman as Nigger," in Leslie Tanner, ed., op. cit., 302.

¹⁰⁶Rubin, "Woman as Nigger," op. cit., 230.

By contrast, Catherine Stimpson admonished feminists for using the "woman as nigger" equation as the framework for understanding the condition of women.

[The] similarities in the condition of blacks and women add up to a remarkable consistency of attitude and action on the part of the powerful toward the less powerful. Yet for a white woman to say, 'I've been niggerized, I'm just a nigger, all women are niggers,' is vulgar and offensive. Women must not usurp the vocabulary of the black struggle. They must forge their own idiom by showing how they are, for instance, 'castrated' by a language and a tradition that makes manhood, as well as white skin, a requisite for full humanity.¹⁰⁷

Notwithstanding Stimpson's erroneous assertion that the word "nigger" is the "vocabulary of the black struggle," her understanding of its use as vulgar and offensive is well-taken. Nevertheless, it misses the point. Once women forgo the use of words that describe others' social position, Stimpson implies, then women can "forge their own idiom" and construct their own discourse on the social position of women. Stimpson's call to cease the "woman-nigger" analogy in particular, and the "women and blacks" analogy in general, obscures the way in which such analogies in and of themselves constitute the discourse on the social position of women. The "idiom" which Stimpson urges women to "forge" has already been forged with and through the use of the Analogy and Comparison strategy.

On the other hand, that the word "nigger" is offensive is precisely the point. If in fact racial and racial configurations serve as the foil in the gender-race analogy, then the most effective racial signifiers would indeed be "vulgar and offensive." As hooks notes, "when white women talked about 'Women as Niggers,' 'The Third World of Women,' 'Women as Slave,' they evoked the

¹⁰⁷Catherine Stimpson, op. cit., 624.

sufferings and oppressions of non-white people to say 'look at how bad our lot as white women is, why we are like niggers, like the "Third World'.' Hence, feminist's use of the gender-race analogy would necessarily require that the "race" portion of the equation evoke as much negativity as possible because it is the basis of the comparison.

It is important to note that the necessity of using denigrating and "offensive" racial signifiers renders the gender-race analogy incongruous, which is the fourth unique aspect of the analogy. Within the equation, the comparison becomes unequal simply because it is held together by two terms with radically different connotations. In other words, "woman" is compared to a pejorative racial signifier or "race" is always cast in such a way as to suggest a contemptuous and undesirable state. Again, this the point behind the use of the analogy and it also illustrates my point with regard to the function of race in feminist discourse.

Another notable feature of the gender-race analogy in feminist theorizing is that as the foil, race is positioned as a static and unchangeable category. The meaning of race is always already assumed, and as such, it serves as an unquestionable ground of identity. Racism and the "nigger status" is never explained and then condemned as problematic. Within the gender-race analogy, it race is in no need of explanation because it is that which gives explanatory value to the category gender. This construction of race is ironic, given that the analogy is often used to highlight the contingency of gender and the "unnaturalness" of the social position of women.

A sixth and final unique way in which the gender-race analogy operates within feminist discourse is that sexism and gender is always compared to racism and race, never vice versa. An examination of the use of this analogy in feminists texts suggests that it only works, indeed only makes sense, when

sexism is legitimated through a comparison to racism. This is, of course, how feminist theorists have constructed and deployed the gender-race analogy. Black Studies, for example, neither relies upon nor invokes an analogy to sexism or the "oppression of women" to constitute and validate racism or racial differentiation. Analogies to gender or sexism simply do not make up a part of its discursive domain.

Given that gender is always compared to race, and that within the comparison race is negated and rendered invisible, it is not difficult to read the gender-race analogy as a micro-level binary opposition that works to repress and efface race at the larger macro-level. If, according to Derrida, the terms within a binary opposition derive their meaning through a process of affirmation and negation, in which the "superior" term suppresses and negates the "inferior" term, even as it relies upon the negated term for its meaning, then the gender-race analogy must be recognized a binary opposition. In written form, the binary opposition positions the "superior" term on the left, and the repressed and negated term on the right, which accounts for my insistence upon writing "gender-race" analogy as opposed to the "race-gender" analogy.¹⁰⁸ While the gender-race analogy contains within it the processes whereby race is obscured, its deployment as a discursive strategy assures the invisibility, or at least subordination, of race with feminist discourse at the broader, theoretical level.

In sum, the gender-race analogy is a specific rhetorical configuration that emerges as a discursive strategy. As a discursive strategy, it regulates and preserves the primacy of gender. In essence, Analogy and Comparison strategy

¹⁰⁸Deborah K. King discusses this analogy in terms of the "race-gender" analogy. I believe that the difference is significant. See her, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," in Micheline R. Malson, et. al., eds., Feminist Theory in Practice and Process, op. cit., 75-105.

renders race invisible, to casts its outside the discursive domain of feminist discourse even as it relies upon it to mark and fill the its boundaries.

As stated above, the Exclusion and Denial and Analogy and Comparison Strategies are the most often used strategies. Together, they represent most of the ways in which race has been deployed in feminist discourse. In addition, the above strategies were more prevalent in First Wave and early Second Wave feminist works, although both appear in many recent feminist works. The following three discursive strategies, Adjectival Modification, (In)Visible Objectification, and Accusatory Defensiveness, are recent ways of constructing and deploying race in feminist thinking. I should reiterate that these discursive strategies are not mutually exclusive are not always clearly and analytically separated in the way that they are presented here. Often, feminists deploy more than one strategy, and as it is the nature of all discourses to shift, change or rearrange its boundaries, I am sure that more strategies and "rhetorical configurations" will emerge.

Adjectival Modification

The third discursive strategy produced by and deployed in feminist discourse and which effects the erasure of race is Adjectival Modification. Adjectival Modification is the process of modifying the noun "woman" with various adjectives to indicate racial, ethnic, regional, sexuality, and "other" differences. This process of qualifying, of specifying women or a particular "group of women," can be viewed as a direct response to the criticisms made by African American feminists in reference to the hegemony of "white, middle-class

feminism," or "feminism unmodified."¹⁰⁹ Adjectival Modification then, emerges from the discourse as a corrective to the problems of "exclusion and denial" and "faulty" comparison. Marilyn Frye describes it this way:

[W]e [i.e., feminists] have...discovered our own vast ignorance of other women...We have repeatedly discovered that we have overlooked or misunderstood the truths of the experience of some groups of women...We have had great difficulty coming to terms with the fact of differences among women—differences associated with race, class, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexuality, age, physical ability, and even such variety among women as us associated just with peculiarities of individual history.¹¹⁰

According to Frye, if we give credence to the criticisms of "other women, who report that the statements [about women in general] are appallingly partial, untrue, or even unintelligible when judged by their own experience," then "it soon becomes clear that, taken as a whole, 'women's experience' is not uniform and coherent in the ways required" to ground an unique feminist standpoint and corresponding system of knowledge in the traditional way.¹¹¹

To avoid making universal claims about "womankind," which would be a duplication of Western philosophy universal and objective story of "humanity," feminists invented to strategies. According to Frye, feminists have

...response[d] [to claims of false universalism],...[by] retreat[ing] into autobiography or string[ing] suitable adjectives onto the noun *woman*...More moderately we might... narrowing the subject of our

¹⁰⁹Catherine MacKinnon, Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.

¹¹⁰Marilyn Frye, "The Possibility of Feminist Theory," in Deborah L. Rhode, ed. Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 176.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 177.

claims [from women in general] to specific groups of women identified by race, class, nationality, and[original emphasis]."¹¹²

In other words, the goal of Adjectival Modification, whether it consists of "stringing suitable adjectives onto the noun woman" or reducing claims to specific groups of women, is to rectify the problem associated with universalism, namely the problem of having one voice, deceptively positioned as neutral and beneficial, speak for all. If in fact feminism had constructed a universal and exclusionary category, i.e., 'woman,' then the discourse would correct itself by "specifying" which women were under analysis, thereby "including" such women in the discourse. This is the major assumption of the Adjectival Modification strategy; that it does indeed "de-universalizes" woman and "de-privileges" the category gender by "including" specific differences.

There are of course problems with the deployment of this strategy as a corrective to the problem of "exclusion." As Kirstie McClure points out in relation to the changing nature of "the political," there is "difficulty [in] attending [to] any [project of] adjectival specification" because it always raises questions about form, theory, and practice that such naming dictates.¹¹³ To whom would such "modified women" commit their allegiance? What theoretical apparatus would guide their project? In short, these questions imply that Adjectival modification creates, according to the critics of the critics, "relativism." However, as I shall explain below, relativism is not the problem, but only a symptom of the problem.

¹¹²Ibid., 178.

¹¹³Kirstie McClure, "The Issue of Foundations: Scientized Politics, Politicized Science, and Feminist Critical Practice," in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scot, eds., Feminists Theorize the Political, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 342.

A second problem with the Adjectival Modification strategy is that the modification process could be endless. Marilyn Frye uses this example:

Speaking as an able-bodied, college-educated, Christian-raised middle-class middle-aged and middle-sized white Anglo lesbian living in the midwest, I can report that **these strategies [of stringing suitable adjectives onto the noun woman and narrowing the subject from women in general to specific groups of women], both reduce one to silliness and raises serious questions about the adjective ranking in English language [emphasis added].**¹¹⁴

In other words, the process of qualifying, of using adjectives to specify "woman," could go on *ad infinitum*. The "silliness" of which Frye speaks is not simply a way of dismissing those who employ the Adjectival Modification strategy, but a description of how ridiculous, if extended to its logical conclusion, the use of this strategy could become. How many adjectives, or points of qualification, are needed to "adequately identity" the woman under analysis? When are enough adjectives "enough"? If ten or twenty, or thirty adjectives of qualification are "too many" and seem "silly," then on what basis would three or four (e.g., the popular triad race/class/gender and the quadriad race/class/gender/sexuality) be judged as appropriate, as "not too many"?

The idea that this modification process is endless, or could be endless, raises a third and more significant problem, namely that the Adjectival Modification Strategy tends to treat all differences the same. In other words, it places equal weight or value on each "qualifying difference" so that each "difference" is able to stand independently of each other "difference." A better reading of this problem is that this strategy assumes that each signifier of difference rests upon and signifies a univocal signification that yields up

¹¹⁴Frye, *op. cit.*, 178.

different, independent, and equally valid meanings. Because signification does not occur in relations terms, according to the assumption, all differences are the same. As such, *any* adjective becomes an appropriate way to "qualify" woman.

This is illustrated by the "differences" listed on the "Stand Up/Sit Down" exercise in Figure 2.1. This exercise is used in a Women's Studies Program at a major university as a way to explore "commonalities and differences" among women. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, the list includes the well-known differences of race and ethnicity (listed in sub-categories as Lantina/Latino, African American, Asian American, Native American, white, Jewish, etc.) and sexuality (listed as lesbian, bisexual), religion (listed as Moslem, Catholic, Hindu, not religious, Protestant, etc.), and age (listed as under 19 and over twenty). The list also includes other "differences" like: "ever had to wear braces on your teeth," "an art lover," "crazy about chocolate," "a science student," and "a commuter." In addition, this exercise encourages further modification by naming those differences that "haven't [been] named...[but are]important to ...identity." The implication is that the "difference" of being a commuting science student who is crazy about chocolate" is the same kind of "difference" as being an Asian American person of color who speaks English as a second or third language. Racial and ethnic differences, for example, are assumed to be on par, in meaning and in experience, with the differences of being a smoker vs. non-smoker, or a good cook vs. a bad cook.

This suggests that in order for the Adjectival Modification Strategy to be effective must disregard the discursive, legal, social, and customary practices that construct some "differences" as more different and hence, more problematic than other differences.

Figure 2:1 Stand Up/Sit Down

5. STAND UP/SIT DOWN (Class 8)*
 This is a very brief introductory exercise exploring commonalities and differences.

Please stand up if you identify yourself as:

brown eyed	not American
Jewish	a twin
single	someone whose parents are divorced
a person of color	Irish
a commuter	stubborn/determined
a parent	married
vegetarian	Hispanic
Protestant	ever had to wear braces on your teeth
Latina/Latino	sophomores
left-handed	animal lovers
an art-lover	lesbian
African American	over 20
not religious	Italian
Caribbean	often have menstrual cramps
interested in sports/athletic	Hindu
feminist	bisexual
speak English a second or third language	a smoker
Catholic	a good cook
a good listener	a science student
environmentalist	concerned about your weight
white	adopted
under 19	Native American
Asian American	crazy about chocolate
Moslem	something I haven't named that is important to your identity
Native American	

This exercise was adapted from one given by the National Coalition Building Institute. Submitted by Mary Gibson.

Without the assumption that all "differences" are independent of each other and carry equal weight, the process of modification would have to contend with questions like: Which "differences," i.e., adjectives of qualification, will be used? Will some differences have more weight, value or priority in the modification process? Are some "differences" more important than others? If so, which ones? Who will decide the value and on what basis?

That the process of qualification could continue *ad infinitum* and that it treats all differences as equal differences is, as I stated above, symptoms of the

problem and not the problem itself. The major problem with the Adjectival Modification Strategy is that it treats the so-called "qualifiers" of difference (race, ethnicity, etc.) as attributes that the subject "woman" holds. As such, qualifying differences not only mark the "difference" in identity of the subject, they make up the identity of the subject. Put another way, these attributes or characteristics are not only treated as markers of identity (as those attributes that mark one "different" from another), but they are treated *as* identity; each qualified woman is her attributes. This means that the Adjectival Modification Strategy assumes that there is a pre-existent, pre-discursive "subject" which can be identified and whose attributes can be specified. At the same time, the attempt to specify the subject "woman" is also an attempt to complete the subject woman; to provide a comprehensive or adequate representation of Woman through various women. Modifying and specifying groups of women then, becomes a way to "include" those who have been excluded under the sign "we women." But the project to comprehensively represent various women can never be achieved through descriptive categories of identities. It is precisely because the Adjectival Modification Strategy sees such descriptors as merely descriptive, as a signifieds whose meaning are absolute and fixed once and for all, that it will fail to be comprehensive in its attributes of "difference." Judith Butler states it in this manner:

The theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list. Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete.¹¹⁵

Butler however, finds the "exasperated 'etc.' " at the end of phrases like "race, class, gender, sexuality, etc." instructive. The "exasperated 'etc.'," she

¹¹⁵Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, op. cit., p. 143.

writes, "is a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself. It is the supplement, the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all."¹¹⁶ In other words, illimitability of modification allows one to think of the markers of identity as signifiers rather than attributes. The category race, for instance, would be viewed as a signifier, as a sign whose meaning is produced by and embedded within the discourse and not as the signified whose meaning always already fixed. "Woman" then becomes "an undesignatable field of difference, [and not] one that [can]...be totalized or summarized by a descriptive identity category."¹¹⁷

Nonetheless, the deployment of the Adjectival Modification Strategy in feminist discourse does not operate in this manner. For the most part, the Adjectival Modification Strategy is undergirded by a representation-referential approach to conceptualizing difference. Because this strategy posits itself as a corrective to the problem of exclusion, and because it is based upon the representation-referential approach, it defines inclusion as re-presenting the real through appropriate adjectives. One need only to look for racial signifiers, i.e., for the racial qualified woman, to see the inclusion of race. Ironically, it is this very idea that turns the solution of adjectival modification into a problem. To the extent that one modifies or specifies, the Adjectival Modification strategy implies, one has "included" racial and other differences. Thus, the process of specifying differences is taken as the process of analyzing those difference. What this strategy does is that it

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism," in Feminist Theorize the Political, op. cit., p. 16.

...acknowledges that inequalities of race, class, and gender generate different experiences and that woman have a race-specific and class-specific relation to the sex-gender system. However...[a]fter a perfunctory acknowledgment of differences, those ...[who employ the Adjectival Modification Strategy] make no further attempt to incorporate the insights generated by critical scholarship on race and class into...[their] framework...[or analysis]..."¹¹⁸

The inability to incorporate the "insights" of race and class inequality is more of a function of the theoretical and epistemological limitation of the Adjectival Modification strategy than the willful ignorance of those employ it. Nevertheless, like the Exclusion and Denial, and Analogy and Comparison discursive strategies, this strategy effectively obscures and erases race and "other differences," even as it attempts to highlight those "differences." Whereas the Adjectival Modification discursive strategy merely names, or specifies racial and other differences in a "horizontal trajectory of adjectives," the (In)Visible Objectification discursive strategy gives greater visibility to race by focusing specifically on the qualified woman.

(In)Visible Objectification

The (In)Visible Objectification Strategy can best be defined as those instances in which African American women occupy highly visible textual, cultural, or social positions, but whose visibility becomes invisible through various transformative and theoretical moves. I highlight African American women here, and this too is a product of (in)visible objectification, because within feminist discourse they are constructed as "...the most oppressed, the most marginalized, the most deviant, [or as] the quintessential site of difference."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸Maxine Baca Zinn et. al., "The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies," op. cit., p. 34.

¹¹⁹Ann duCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood," op. cit., p. 592.

In feminist theorizing, as well as within the academy at large, "racial and gender alterity....has claimed black women as its principal signifier,"¹²⁰ not Chicana women, Asian American women, Latina women, or any other group of "women of color."

The deployment of the (In)Visible Objectification strategy often begins with "the African American woman" or race which, as stated earlier, is reduced to "Black," as the announced subject or focus of the analysis. However, Black women are not the subject of such analyses. Rather, Black women become "objectified subjects," meaning they are appropriated, co-opted, and "passed along" as subject-objects of study to anyone who can acquire the taste.¹²¹

In feminist theory, this often translates into an appropriation of "blackness," in order to facilitate a discussion about gender. This move, which I have termed a "leap in logic," involves using the experiences of a Black woman as an example of and to foreground a discussion on "women's oppression" or sexism. In these instances African American women are not understood as subjects in their own rights, but a means to illuminating another subject-position. The analysis which follows the "Black-woman-as-an-example" is usually and all of suddenly "race neutral." In essence, race seems to bottom out of the analysis despite the fact that it was a racialized example that made such an analysis possible.¹²²

¹²⁰Ibid., 591.

¹²¹Ibid., 604.

¹²²Elsa Barkley Brown's uses the appropriation of Anita Hill's experience to ground or authorize a public discussion on sexual harassment as a case in point. See, "'What Has Happened Here?' The Politics of Difference in Feminist....

The most prevalent way in which race bottoms out of these kinds of analyses is through silence. More often than not, feminist constructions and readings of Black women draws upon and reproduces the constitutive terms of Other whereby Black women become and operate as the inaccessible Other. Feminist discourse produces race and the Black woman as problems. It attempts to solve these problems by continuously speaking about these problems as problems, and then decides that it cannot solve them. The effect, it that the discourse has much to say about "race" and Black women, and at the same time nothing to say about race and Black women. African American women then become "(in)visible spectacles." To appropriate Marilyn Frye's description of women's position in "men's world story," within feminist discourse Black women are

impossible [racial] beings which populate the [sisterhood] story. [Their] existence is...inherently paradoxical or problematic. [Their] existence *is* an indigestible mass of discrepant data for the [oppression of women] world story. From the point of view of the discrepant data, the story [of women's oppression] appears appallingly partial and distorted—it seems a childish, and fantastic [or better yet phantasmic], albeit dangerous fiction.¹²³

Because feminist discourse produces the Black woman subject as excessive to and outside of its discourse, when it meets the Black woman she is ironically, or better yet, not surprisingly, met with silence. Since feminist discourse has asserted that race is "irrelevant" to "women's oppression," when it attempts to analyze race or Black women it is profoundly silent. I attempt to show this process at work by contrasting the Zoe Baird and Lani Guinier nominations in 1993 in Chapter 4.

¹²³Frye, *op. cit.*, 175.

In sum, the (In)visibility Objectification strategy can be seen as a strategy that positions Black women in a position of hyper(in)visibility. In such a position, Black women are, to use de Lauretis's phraseology, constantly spoken of, but are themselves inaudible; the guarantee of vision, but are themselves invisible. Thus, race and Black women are both everywhere and nowhere.

Accusatory Defensiveness

Like Adjectival Modification, the Accusatory Defensiveness strategy is deployed in response to the claim that feminism, in both theory and practice, is a "white, middle-class" project. However, rather than positioning itself as a corrective to this critique, which implicitly accepts it as a valid criticism, the Accusatory Defensiveness strategy explicitly rejects the assertion that feminism is a discursive terrain centered on and around "the white woman." Instead, it defends the applicability of phrases like "women as a group" to all women by claiming that racial and other "differences" critiques do not undermine theories asserting all women's commonality under patriarchy.

The Accusatory Defensiveness strategy is a relatively recent occurrence in feminist discourse. Rhetorically, the tone of those who deploy this strategy is often hostile, resentful, and defensive, and as such is decidedly different in nature and content when compared to the Adjectival Modification Strategy. Much of the hostility and defensiveness seems to be rooted in the perception that racialized critiques against feminism will fictionalize its constituency and render it ineffective both as a discourse and as a political movement. As result, Black women are often cast as "problematic," "divisive," unyielding, and their criticisms get labeled as harsh and "devastating." Black women are, in this view, the reason for the instability of the category woman, and the current trend in relativizing or modifying women.

In addition to constructing Black feminists as "divisive," another major aspect of this strategy is that tends to view the work of Black feminists as simply criticisms decrying the exclusion of race from mainstream feminist theory. A major response to Black feminist works is that it does not, at least until very recently, constitute a theory in its own right. This response reveals that, as a discourse, feminism is very much in the gate-keeping business; it decides when and if a body of work constitutes feminist works.

A final characteristic of the Accusatory Defensiveness strategy is its tendency to accuse Black women of engaging in the same kind of theoretical myopia that they once criticized white women of doing. This often takes the form of admonishing Black women for focusing solely on Black women; for "leaving out" "other" women of color. The question is usually presented as an appendage to comments on or about some discussion, presentation, talk, or reference to Black women. The scenario might look like this: "Your comments on Black women/racism are well-taken, but what about other women of color?" In my observation, questions which implicate Black women's alleged unfaithfulness to their own principles of inclusivity are raised, not in the spirit of a desire to grapple with and engage issues of race and racism in feminist theorizing, but to imply that an unfaithful transgression has occurred and to avoid the white/Black binary that undergirds feminist thinking. Moreover, the Accusatory Defensiveness Strategy is deployed as a sign that old complaints of Black women's mistreatment "have been frozen by the many winters of [their] discontent."¹²⁴ They fall, in other words, on deaf ears.

To this extent, the Accusatory Defensiveness Strategy is design to skirt around the issues raised by Black women (in particular). The very nature of the responses that exemplify this strategy in operation illustrates that its purpose is

¹²⁴Ann DuCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood," op. cit., 606.

to deny the importance of racialized criticisms. I say "racialized criticisms," because it does not seem to operate in and around other kinds of debates like: the sameness/ difference debate; the debate over "science" in feminism; or various psychoanalytic approaches to the feminist subject. The importance of identifying and highlighting the production and deployment of the Accusatory Defensiveness strategy lies not only in the articulation of this recent and still emerging strategy, but also in the ability to see these responses as forming a part of the contemporary discourse on race.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORIZING "DIFFERENCE" IN FEMINIST THINKING: EXPLANATORY MODELS FOR UNDERSTANDING RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER

Over the last decade, feminists have increasingly realized the importance of focusing also on differences among women, and on the way those differences mediate gender relations. A crucial contribution of recent theory has been emphasis on diversity across class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation.¹

Over the past decade, feminist theory has witnessed a renewed interest in the politics of difference. Several well-known feminists have written articles and books revealing the ways in which race and class has been left out of previous feminist scholarship, and how, if feminist theory is to progress, it must take into account differences among women.² Once an ignored subject, questions of difference, especially those involving the relationship between race, class, and gender has become a staple in the understanding of "difference." The issues of

¹Deborah L. Rhode, "Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference," in Deborah L. Rhode, ed., Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 2.

²These works are too numerous to cite in any comprehensive fashion. A representative sampling might include, Michele Barrett, "The Concept of 'Difference'," Feminist Review 26 (July 1987): 29-41; Linda Gordon, "On 'Difference'," Genders 10 (Spring 1991): 91-110; Gerder Lerner, "Reconceptualizing Differences Among Women," Journal of Women's History 1 (Winter 1990): 106-122; Audre Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," and "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," both in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, eds., This Bridge Call My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983); Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Difference: 'A Special Third World Women Issue'," Feminist Review 25 (March 1987): 5-21; Paula Rothenberg, "The Construction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Difference," Hypatia 5 (Spring 1990): 42-57; and Elizabeth Spelman, Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

difference, and the importance of race and class to the category gender emerged from critiques waged by African American women and other women of color, who charged white feminists with writing from their own experiences. The result of this myopic view of "women's experience," according to the critics, was an articulation of and a universal claim to "woman's culture," and the "patriarchal oppression of women." The universality of the claim necessarily made women and "women's experience" homogenous, thereby effectively excluding issues of race and class.

In this chapter, I examine the various models used to explain the relationship between race, class, and gender. Drawing mostly upon the works of Black feminist thinkers since 1970, I trace the evolution of the concept known as "triple oppression." Used to explain the "compounding effects" of race, class, and gender in the lives of African American women, the triple oppression model is the primary conceptual framework for thinking about these three categories. The "triple oppression" model has several variations, but all view race, class, and gender as separate entities or attributes of the individual. Additive or multiplicative versions "add up" the effects of racial and economic oppression in the lives of Black women. "Mapping" is used to explain how race, class, and gender, as external forces, "impinge" upon the subject or individual at different moments in time depending on the context and the situation.³ Another version sees race, class and gender as "intersecting" variables.

Following a discussion of these different version of the triple oppression thesis, I examine the current use of the concept difference in feminist discourse. I note that difference is often equated with diversity, which produces pluralistic

³See Eudine V. Bariteau Foster, "The Construct of a Postmodernist Feminist Theory for Carribean Social Science Research," Unpublished Paper, 1990.

models of understanding race. I reiterate the idea, as stated in Chapter 1, that difference must be read in the poststructuralist sense—as the process through which meaning is constituted.

Because of the limitations associated with additive, multiplicative, and mapping models, I argue for a view of race, class, and gender that illuminates their mutually productive and constitutive nature. Rather than conceiving of race, class, and gender, as "things" outside of the individual, the concept of mutual constitution tries to illuminate how race, class, and gender *constitute* or make up the subject; they are the very "things" which constitute one's subject position, rather than things that "affect" individual persons. The idea of "adding" or "multiplying" race, class, and gender, only adds to the erroneous assumption that race exists outside of gender and class, and vice versa. Not only does this concept focus on the constitutive aspect of race, class, and gender, but it emphasizes how these categories are mutual. In other words, the focus is on how one category always already inheres in the other.

While this chapter is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of Black Feminist Theory, it is designed to provide a general understanding of the "triple oppression" model at the conceptual level. The purpose of this chapter is to not only provide an overview of the theoretical models Black feminists have constructed to explain race, class, and gender, but to interrogate the usefulness of such constructions in light of the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter One. Put slightly different, the implicit question of this chapter is: if viewing feminist theory as a discourse best explains the role and function of race in feminist theory, to what extent does Black feminist concepts, which often arise out of critiques of mainstream feminist thinking, contribute to, or detract from a discursive analysis? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the

explanatory models used to explain the relationship between race, class, and gender?

I. Race, Class, and Gender: On "Triple Oppression"

During the development of feminist scholarship in the 1970's, much was written about the ill-effects of "adding" women to existing theories and concepts. "part of the problem feminist theorists face[d], ...[was] taking the general 'grammar' and concepts of traditional theory and applying them to women..."⁴ Most argued that such an application increased the possibility of marginalizing women; even though the attempt was aimed at "including" women. Nonetheless, feminist scholars "have stretched the intended domains of [traditional] theories, reinterpreted their central claims or borrowed their concepts or categories to make visible" the lives of women.⁵ It was this application, i.e., the "reinterpretation" and "stretching" of dominant, patriarchal theories, that contributes to the present "instability of analytical categories" within feminist theory.⁶ Unstable categories, it is argued, prompt us to ask: do these revised categories actually reflect the complex lives of women or do they continue to distort the lives of women? In either case, the reinterpretations (themselves infected by and with patriarchal and racist notions) did not include the factors of race or class; further contributing to, not just an instability, but to an inability. It created a feminist theory that was and still is, unable to account for

⁴Jane Flax, "Women Do Theory," in Marilyn Pearsall's, Women and Values: Readings in Recent Feminist Philosophy, (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1986), p. 3.

⁵Sandra Harding, "The Instability of Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," Signs 11 (Summer 1986): 645-64.

⁶See *ibid.*

the lives of women who were, and are not middle-class, white, women. This became particularly evident when Black and white feminists began to describe the "erasure of Black women" or when they identified "a schism in the sisterhood."⁷ These writers noted the ease with which white feminists compared the oppression of Blacks to that of women,⁸ the racist overtones in leading feminist works and the disdainful and contemptuous attitude many white feminists possessed toward African American women. In exposing these attitudes, Black women began the formidable task of "untangling the effects of race and gender"⁹ by showing how both impacted upon their lives. It was not unusual for Black feminists to claim that race and sex were two separate systems of oppression which in turn afforded Black women a "unique status" in American society.¹⁰ Initially, gender or sexual oppression was "added" to the already existing notion that racism was the dominant form of oppression for all Black

⁷I am referring specifically to the works of Margaret A. Simmons, "Racism and Feminism: A Schism In the Sisterhood," Feminist Studies 5 (Summer 1979): 384-401, and E.V. Spelman, "Theories of Race and Gender: The Erasure of Black Women," Quest 5 (1982): 36-47.

⁸To compare racism to sexism was a much used theoretical strategy. I refer to it as the Race-Gender Analogy and discuss it in detail in the previous chapter, pp. 103-127. Exemplary comparisons include, Helen Hacker, "Women as a Minority Group," in Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak, eds., Masculine/Feminine, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969), pp. 130-148; Gayle Rubin's, "Woman as Nigger," in *ibid.*, pp. 230-40; Naomi Weisstein, "Woman as Nigger," in Leslie B. Tanner, ed., Voices from Women's Liberation, (New York: New America Library, 1970), pp. 296-303.

⁹This phrase is Elizabeth M. Almquist's, from "Untangling the Effects of Race and Sex: The Disadvantaged Status of Black Women," Social Science Quarterly 56 (June 1975): 129-142.

¹⁰See for example, Mae C. King, "Oppression and Power: The Unique Status of the Black Woman in the American Political System," Social Science Quarterly 56 (June 1975): 116-28.

people. Thus in a sense, the addition of sexism as a formed of oppression served as a critique to the monolithic assumptions undergirding the effect of race on Black women. The movement to adequately describe and explain the complexities of African American women led to yet another component. By including class status, they produced, what has become generally known as the "triple oppression theory."¹¹

The "triple oppression model" outlined the relationship between race, class, and gender. The relation between the three was, for the most part, conceptualized as extrinsic. This mean that race, class and gender were viewed as three separate systems that existed apart from each other and outside the individual. Neither derived their meaning from the other. They simply interacted to produce a disadvantaged status. This way of thinking, and the notion of "triple oppression," has become the most accepted way of thinking about and describing Black women's status within feminist theory. However, not all Black feminists agree with the additive aspects of triple oppression.

Deborah King, for example, warns us that "[t]o reduce...[the complex lives of Black women]...to an addition problem (racism + sexism + [class status] = black women's experience is to define the issues and indeed black womanhood itself."¹² King seems to be correct in her analysis. It is impossible, even on a

¹¹The triple oppression thesis is best represented by Betinna Aptheker's, Woman's Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex, and Class, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982); Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, (Cambridge: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Angela Y. Davis, Women, Race, and Class, (New York: Vintage Books, 1981); Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Race, Class and Gender: Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood," Feminist Studies 9 (1983): 131-50; Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex In America, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), and Linda Williams, "On the Ethics of Research on the Triple Oppression of Black American Women," Humanity and Society 8 (November 1984): 506-13.

theoretical abstract level, to "add" the effects of race, gender and class. These terms are very controversial and are constantly changing, in both definition and content. Yet, they are presented as fixed categories; as entities whose boundaries are clearly defined and delineated. To avoid the simplistic notion of assuming that the relationship among the various discriminations can in fact be additive, King suggests the adoption of her "interactive model" of "multiple jeopardy." She writes:

The modifier 'multiple' refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to multiplicative relationships among them as well... In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism [racism x sexism x classism]¹³

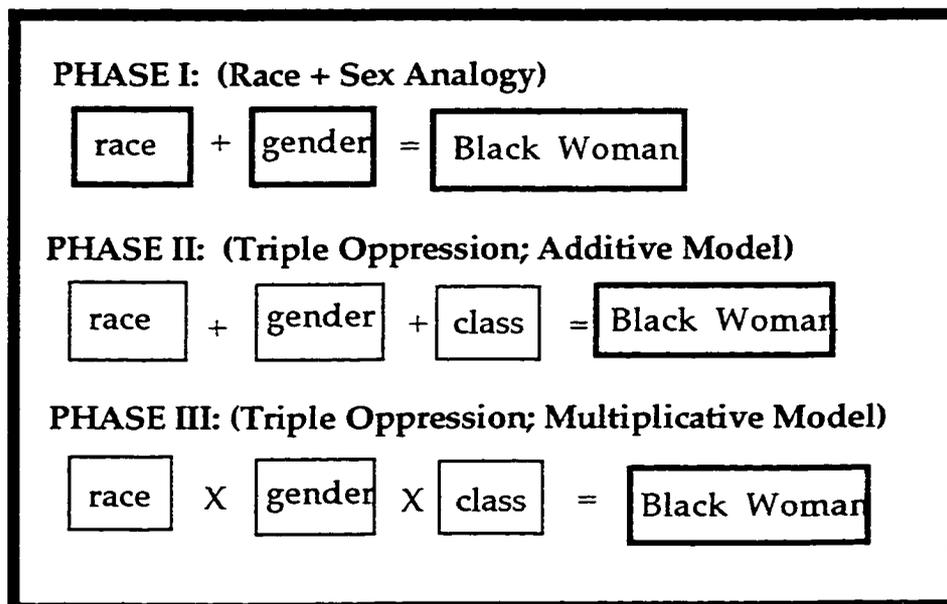
King's attempt to reconstruct the additive model of the triple oppression thesis indicates the problems with trying to "add" race, class, and gender. It also implies that, within the philosophical notion of a relational concept, that race class, and gender are much more "interactive" than the additive model of triple oppression will concede to. Her re-working of this model indicates that grappling with the categories of race, class and gender has been an arduous task within feminist theory. Nevertheless, much of the literature indicates that there has been an evolutionary type of development in feminist theory around race, class, and gender *within* the triple oppression model. Generally speaking, one can represent the evolution of the triple oppression model by three phases (See Figure 1).

¹²Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," in Micheline Malson, et. el., eds. Feminist Theory in Practice and Process, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 75-105.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 84.

Phase One represents the moment when race was thought to be the most dominant factor influencing all African Americans, including women. The addition of gender served both as a critique of and an affirmation to that predominant notion. Within this phase, race was still considered a viable and separate form of oppression. The overlooked problem, it was argued, was that Black women had to contend with both racism and sexism; she was in effect in "double jeopardy."

Figure 3.1: The Evolution of the Triple Oppression Thesis



The recognition of economic exploitation soon compelled Black women to add yet a third category, class. This recognition can be seen as the second phase in the evolution of the triple oppression thesis. In some instance, this theoretical paradigm tended to emphasize the notion the Blacks, as a group constituted a class. In other instance, women were conceived of as a class, and still at other times, everyone who was not "part and parcel of the ruling class" was lumped

into the working class.¹⁴ Nonetheless, even with the addition of the third category of class in Phase Two, Black women bore the brunt of all three categories. Besides the superficially acknowledgment that these three categories were related, discussions about *how* they were related and what made them relational, was conspicuously absent from these debates. Moreover, this early model of additive triple oppression, could not explain why only Black women or "women of color" were the only women who suffered from these three oppressions.

Part of the problem lay in the theoretical assumptions under girding how race, class and gender were viewed. For the most part, the additive model implied that only blacks possessed race (thereby excluding "white" as a race); that only poor people had a class-status (thus excluding the "middle" and "upper" classes); and that gender applied only to women (thus excluding men as gendered subjects). It is a strange paradox to recognize that the triple oppression thesis evolved to included race, or Black women, but in the process it excluded everyone else and ultimately, the intended recipient. For Black women, the triple analogy meant only one thing, that "[t]he Black woman [was] triply handicapped" which created "dilemma of competing identities and priorities."¹⁵

The dilemma of which Murray speaks has its basis in the theory itself and can be directly attributed to the fact that the relational aspects between race, class, and gender were not theoretically articulated and defined. The problems

¹⁴See for example, Marge Benston, "Women as Housewives," in the Political Economy of Women's Liberation, (San Francisco: United Front Press, 1971); and Patty Quick, "The Class Nature of Women's Oppression," 9 Review of Radical Political Economics (Fall 1977): 42-68.

¹⁵Pauli Murray, "The Liberation of Black Women," in Jo Freeman, ed., Woman: A Feminist Perspective, (Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 351-63.

with the additive models, or the first to phases of the evolution of the triple oppression theory, is the idea that race, class, and gender, can in fact be added. As King points out,

Unfortunately, most applications of the concepts of double and triple jeopardy have been overly simplistic in assuming that the relationships among the various discrimination are merely additive... [E]ach discrimination [it is assumed] has a single, direct and independent effect on status, wherein the relative contribution of each is readily apparent.¹⁶

In a manner similar to King, Barbara Smith noted some ten years earlier, that the relationship between race, class, and gender, is not singular, and that Black women cannot be represented by piling on form of oppression on another. The effect(s) of multiple oppression she argued, "is not merely additive."¹⁷

The limitations of the additive feature of race, class and gender model, led King to produce the multiplicative model of triple oppression which effected the third Phase of development in that model. One benefit of this third, multiplicative model, is the unarticulated recognition that no direct, single or causal link among or between race, gender, and class, and the status of African American women can be found. This reconstruction seems to suggest that the scope and depth of the consequences of these forms of domination are much more complex than the additive models of either Phase One or Phase Two can capture. In essence, the effects of race, class and gender are, according to King's revision, interactive and multiple. Her notion of interaction is perhaps the first attempt to theoretically explain the relational aspects between race, class, and

¹⁶Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardies," op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁷"Notes on Yet Another Paper on Black Feminism, or Will the Real Enemy Please Stand Up," Conditions 5 (1970): 123-32.

gender. King wants to move beyond the simple notion that race, class, and gender are singular, and have only very limited external or extrinsic relational values. Instead she wants to reveal how all three are intrinsically relational. However, closer examination reveals how King's model is really not that different from the additive models.

Assessing King's Multiplicative Theory

King's model does point to some of the problems with addition that was used in the earlier models of race, class and gender. However, conceptually speaking, King ends up reinscribing the problems of addition rather than solving them.

First, there is an abrasive and rather crude effort to replace the "simple notion of addition with that of multiplication." This ignores the fact that multiplication is simply a higher form of addition. The only difference is that in multiplication the result is an exponent rather than a summation. This then gives the appearance of a higher, more complex interaction among and between race, class, and gender. To illustrate my point, examine the following: Let racism = 3, sexism = 3, and classism = 3.¹⁸ The old additive model would then become $3 + 3 + 3 = 9$, whereas the new multiplicative model would equal $3 \times 3 \times 3 = 27$. From this it is rather easy to make the erroneous conclusion that the latter model represents the complexity of the variables within the model, simply because the latter model yields a numerically higher product. To conclude that the multiplicative model has more explanatory power is to focus on the "effects" [or products] of race, class, and gender, as opposed to the categories themselves. Thus, to accept either the additive or the multiplicative model, one must accept

¹⁸The numbers here are used strictly for the purpose of the argument and are not meant to place a value on otherwise non-quantifiable concepts.

the notion of fixed, stable, and well-defined categories. In the above example, race, class, and gender, all had equal numerical value, reflecting the assumed uniformity within each category. Any fixed, stable category necessarily denies the particulars within it, and cannot explain the relational aspects of those terms except at a very superficial level.

A second problem with King's multiplicative model, as well as the old additive models, is that the emphasis is placed on the effects of the three forms of oppression. Thus, the goal becomes an attempt to describe the conditions and circumstances that affect the status of African American women. As King puts it, the model is an attempt to "...fully convey the multiple forms of discrimination."¹⁹ The mistake occurs when the focus is to examine the effects or consequences rather than the theoretical constructs themselves and the specific nature of their relationship. Part of the problem is to view race, class and gender as separate and single entities whose culmination is the Black woman. Racism, classism, and sexism are the (single) causes; the Black woman is the effect. If one starts with the single unified category, as is shown in the above example, then the end product will necessarily reflect this unity. In the "mapping" version of the triple oppression thesis, E. Barriteau Foster constructs a model in which "both women and men are equally implicated as "victims" of gendered constructs."²⁰ Building on the theory of King's "multiple jeopardies," Barriteau Foster tries to expose "the differences among different groups of women and to reveal how gendered relations change when they interact with race, class and sexual identity."²¹ (See Figure 2). In this model, the gendered woman forms the core of

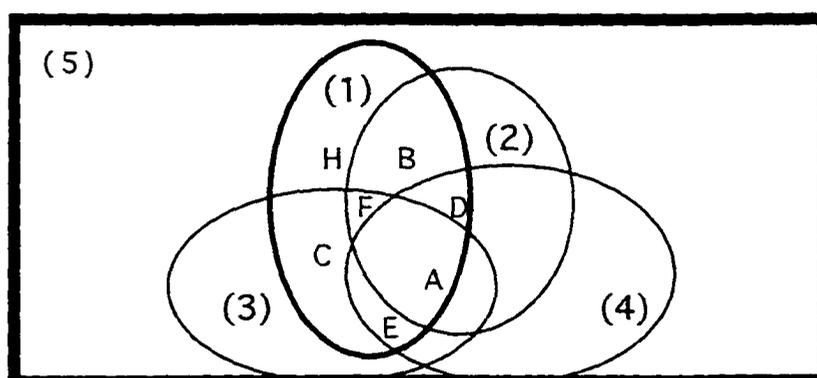
¹⁹King, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

²⁰See Eudine V. Barriteau Foster, "The Construct of a Postmodernist Feminist Theory for Caribbean Social Science Research," *op. cit.*, 12.

the theory. As an active agent within and upon society, the gendered woman's relations with others changes when race, class, and sexual identity intersect at varying points. Each point of intersection represents an awareness of those elements which define the situation. For instance, point (f) represents the interactions of race and class on the gendered woman, while point (e) signifies a

Figure 2

3.2 Mapping the Gendered Woman



1. Gendered Woman
2. Race: Black Indian, Mixed, White identity
3. Class-status: Upper, Middle, Lower/working
4. Sexual Identity: Heterosexual, Bisexual, Homosexual, Asexual
5. Caribbean Environment

Social Interactions

- (a) Woman affecting / affected by race, class, sexual identity
- (b) Woman affecting / affected by race
- (c) Woman affecting / affecting by class
- (d) Woman affecting / affected by sexual identity & race.
- (e) Woman affecting / affected by class and sexual identity.
- (f) Woman affected by class and race.
- (g) Interactions are fluid and constantly changing.
- (h) Potential space in which women actively seek to prevent social intrusion.

²¹Ibid., 20.

convergence of class and sexual identity. Theoretically, these specific meeting points “allow for differences among women of the same race, but differing historical experiences.”²² In other words, the theory attempts to account for differences among women of the same race and class, for example, but who may have differently constructed sexual identities. The notion of “interactions” among these concepts is critical to understanding the theory’s effort to explain the varying multiple jeopardies that exist among women. Barriteau Foster’s theory even allows for a “potential space in which women actively seek to prevent social intrusion.”

Taken as a whole, this theory goes beyond refining the traditional race, class and gender models. Perhaps the most significant advancement is that it conceives of race, class, and sexual identity as fluid concepts, that is, having the ability to change over and within time. The same is true of the gendered being, whose ability to change is in part, dependent upon the fluidity of race, class and sexual identity. Another plus for this theory is that it repudiates, to some extent, the additive and multiplicative features of the older models. Here, race, class, gender (and sexual identity) are shown as intersections, not things to be “added.” Certainly, these theoretical considerations prove to be a vital improvement over the models presented in Figure 1. The Barriteau Foster model however, is not completely free of the problems intrinsic to the previous theories. In fact, it creates some of its own.

First, the theory continues to utilize distinct, finite categories—race, class, gender, sexual identity (and even “the gendered woman”). Regardless of how fluid these concepts are, within this model that fluidity can only exist within the given boundaries. Since no questions arise about the content or nature of these categories, then one can only assume that the author sees them as unproblematic,

²²Ibid.

i.e., as legitimate categories of in/exclusion. Barriteau Foster's acceptance of these constricting categories leads her to make the same error that King made. For example, she argues that "[t]he overlapping and interaction of gendered woman, class, race, and sexual identity at (a) in Figure [2], says there are times when all of these social interactions come into play simultaneously."²³ At other times, these competing forms of domination are not present, because "a woman may either choose to be black, (b) that is occupy race, working class (c), or privilege a lesbian sexual identity (e)," or a combination of the above. King made a similar argument when she, like Barriteau Foster, tried to dispel the notion of a predominant factor effecting the lives of (black) women.

The importance of any one factor in explaining black women's circumstances thus varies depending on the particular aspect of our lives under consideration and the reference groups to whom we are compared.²⁴

Thus, like King, Barriteau Foster illustrates the idea of multiple jeopardies by "showing the variety of ways race, class, sexual identity, and gendered relations affect women and are affected by them differently at different times and in different social contexts."²⁵ Despite the insights that both King and Barriteau Foster bring to the development of race, class and gender theories, both seem unable to discard the notion of choosing or privileging one form of oppression over another. In essence, what these two authors are arguing is that depending

²³Ibid., 21.

²⁴Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness..." op. cit., p. 81.

²⁵Barriteau Foster, op. cit., 21.

upon the social context in which one finds herself, a woman can choose which identity best expresses her in that situation. The other forces simply disappear!

For Barriteau Foster, this unconscious process of choosing compels her to “map the social constructs of race, class, and sexual identity on to a gendered woman...”[emphasis added].²⁶ As I shall argue below, there is no race or class outside the “gendered woman.” These social constructs do not merely “interact” at some whimsical moment. The subject is at all times (re)constituted in/by/through all of these social forces. The same is true of Barriteau Foster’s concept of “social spaces,” i.e., “spaces women occupy in which they do not permit the intrusion of social constructs.”²⁷ This seems to be a very odd claim, because there are no spaces where the social does not impinge. The space that she designates for “preventing social intrusion” is actually, according to the model, the part of the gendered woman that is not affected by race, class, gender and sexual identity (Refer to Figure 2). Not only does this ironically undermines Barriteau Foster’s claim that the gendered being affects and is affected by the society, but it accepts “gendered woman” as an unproblematic category, thus falling prey to the same pitfalls of race, and class. If the “gendered woman” is (re)constituted through multiple jeopardies, then the whole meaning of being “gendered” changes. A different conception of gender would necessarily include race, class, (and sexual identity) as an integral part of that being. Even with such a conception, the meaning of gender would vary by the very elements that define it, i.e., what it means to be gendered can vary by race, class and sexual identity. Hence, race class and sexual identity cannot be conceptualized as existing

²⁶Ibid. 19.

²⁷Ibid., 10.

outside of that gendered being. Any potential for space must be (with)in the mutually constituted gendered being.

This seems to suggest that: (1) the multiplicative model does not make substantial conceptual advances beyond those of the additive model, which are all based upon the notion of "fixed categories;" and (2) the emphasis should begin with the theoretical constructs and the nature of their relationship to each other, and not on the illusory effects of the categories.

II. Race, Class, and Gender as Mutually Constitutive and Productive

The idea that race, class, and gender are always imbricated in each other, grew out of the shortcomings of the triple oppression model. The mutual constitution model argues that there is no clear-cut distinction between the content of the category and the category as a "thing" in and of itself. The current distinctions that are made between race class and gender, is related to the way in which those terms are presently conceived. The mutually constituted model portends to move beyond the idea that categories are separate and can thus be added, to the idea that they are "mutually constituting." The argument for this is predicated on several criticisms of the "triple oppression" model.

First, in the "Triple Oppression" Model, race, class, and gender are viewed as abstract entities. The concepts have no particularities; they exist only as intangible ideas. This in turn results in fixed, uniform and exclusive notions of race, class, and gender, that are "squashed," as Haraway describes it, into "isomorphic slots or cumulative lists."²⁸

²⁸Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," Feminist Studies 14 (Fall 1988): 575-99.

The mutually constitution model, argues that race, class, and gender do not have fixed, and uniform meanings. Each concept has both internal and extrinsic relational meanings. For example, within the category race, there exists, among other things, the notions of "black" and "white." The meaning of black is determined by its relationship to white, so that a person who is white is "white" only by virtue that he is "not-black." In other words, he can only be white, because someone else is black, or more appropriately not-white. This idea expresses the internal or intrinsic relationship within the concept of race.

This same mode of analysis can also be applied to the category gender. "Woman" derives its meaning from its relationship to "Man." In fact, it is difficult to imagine thinking about "woman" without simultaneously thinking about "man." The definition of each depends upon and is derived from their relationships as opposites: to be a woman mean to be feminine or "not-masculine." The intrinsic relational meaning within categories is one of the highlights of the newer mutually constituted model.

Beside intrinsic relations, the mutually constituting model also argues for and extrinsic relationship between the ternary notions of race, class, and gender. The extrinsic relationship within the mutually constituted model is the result of the problems with trying to re-present race, class, and gender in graphic diagrams. Presenting race, class, and gender in "models" merely reinscribes the idea that these categories are abstract entities that merely "interact" upon or in the lives of African America women. The "Triple Oppression Model," in both its addition and multiplicative variant, viewed race, class, and gender as existing outside the woman, subject, and as result thought of them as interactions occurring in certain situation. They imposed or impinged upon the subject at fleeting and sporadic moments. Under these old models, race, class, and gender

really had no relevancy unless it was sketched on paper. Teresa de Lauretis explains it this way:

...[T]he claims of race or color, ethnic, and sexual identification have been adopted and given equal status within the axis of gender in feminist discourse. These various axes are usually seen as parallel or co-equal, although with varying 'priorities' for particular women. For some women, the racial may have priority over the sexual; for other the sexual may have priority; for others still it may be the ethnic/ cultural that has priority at a given moment. But what this string of seemingly co-equal oppression along parallel axes of 'difference' does not grasp is their **constant intersection and mutual implication or how each one may affect the others—for example, how gender affect racial oppression in its subjective effects**²⁹ [emphasis added].

In other words, race, class and gender are mutually constituting elements, and mutually inclusive terms. Thus, the definition of mutual constitution starts with the idea that race is internally pervade with notion of gender and class, and vice versa. One prime example of this can be found in the symbolic act of lynching. After Reconstruction, and again in the early 1920's African Americans, especially African American men, were the target of lynching by Ku Klux Klan members or white terror mobs. Lynching was certainly a racial crime because white men target black men, in which the objective was the "kill" as many targets as possible for political and social reasons. However, to the extent that lynching involved racist modes of thinking, it also involved a particular view of gender. Many of the bodies of lynched black men also revealed that their reproductive organs had been cut off and sometimes kept as souvenirs by the lyncher.³⁰ The fact that lynchers targeted the reproductive organs suggests that they felt

²⁹"Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," *Feminist Studies* 16 (Spring 1990): 115-150.

³⁰See The Black Book

threatened by the black man as a sexually being.³¹ Certainly, much of this had to do with miscegenation laws, and it is true that many lynchings occurred on trumped up charges involving the rape of a white woman by a black man. But these facts merely reflect the idea the race always involves some notion of gender identity and vice versa.

The fact that race "makes up" gender and class (and vice versa) means that these elements are a part of the subject of the individual. They are not simply attributes or characteristics; they form and make up the very psyche of the individual. The Triple Oppression Model does not recognize race, class, and gender as core elements that make up the subject in varying and contradictory ways. Thus they were unable to avoid prioritizing or choosing one category over another. The mutually constituting model argues that there can be no prioritizing of one of the other, because the product is

the concept of a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity, a subject that is not divided in, but rather at odds with language; an identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representation of gender, race, and class and often indeed across languages and cultures.³²

The multi-dimensional and contradictory conception of subjectivity as defined by the mutually constituted model, will allow African American women to define for themselves how race, class and gender come to constitute the self. Since these are core elements of the self, they can never be added, subtracted or

³¹It should be noted that black men were not the only targets of a lynching mob. Black women, especially pregnant black women were lynched. In this case, the unborn fetus was often ripped from her body as she hung from the tree. See Angela Davis, Women, Race, and Class, op. cit., and Vincent Harding, There is a River.

³²Dona Haraway, op. cit., p. 586.

lost in the periphery. Thus the knowing self will be "partial in all its guises, never finished, [never] whole, simply there and original; it ...[will] always [be] constructed and stitched together imperfectly."³³

To some extent, the contemporary interrogation of the category "woman," and its invocation of difference as a strategy to undermine the essentialism associated with "female identity," allows for this imperfectly stitched together subject. However, the current use of difference in feminist discourse reconstitutes gender as a privileged category. Despite the emphasis on "difference," feminist theory, as a discursive field, is still unable to *theorize* (and I emphasize the verb form here) race as a constituent component of gender. The category "race" is seen as separate from gender, even in terms of the "gendered subject." At best, race is subsumed under "gender relations," "patriarchy," or conceived of as "intersecting" with gender at sporadic and sometimes explainable moments. These conceptions of the relationship between race and gender as categories stem from traditional definitions of gender difference and from a misreading of postmodernism's focus on multiplicity, fragmentation, and instability, as a call for "multiplying the subject" as opposed to a "multiply constitutive subject." Below, I discuss the tension in and around the gender difference debate and the usage of the concept *difference* in this debate. In addition, I examine how the category gender can continue to function as a privileged category under certain modes of deconstruction. In examining how feminists have theorized "gender difference," one can observe how feminists have (unwittingly) worked to reify of the category "gender" in spite of (or because of) postmodern emphases on the project of de-essentializing and deconstruction.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 586.

III. Gender, "Difference" and Race

With the postmodernist invocation of *difference*, there is a popular misconception that "gender difference" arguments refer to differences among women. In fact, many feminists have equated "difference" with the notions of diversity, race, multiculturalism, and even "women of color." The equating of difference as primarily racial is customary because of an assumed alliance between postmodern critics of universal claims and Black women's denouncement of the middle-class, white posture of feminist theory.

However, the enterprise of defining and articulating theories of gender difference in feminism involves distinguishing the "difference" between the sexes. In general, gender difference theories contest or affirm the view "...that women are fundamentally different from men, and that these differences must be recognized, theorized, and maintained"³⁴ The difference between men and women, whether it has been celebrated or de-emphasized under calls for equality, rests on a "claim of solidarity or common cause among women as a group across lines of religion, class, race, and other historically significant divisions". Although the idea that women, as women, are oppressed by men as a group, "is not a given today", what is a given is that race is conceptualized as existing outside of gender relations. Even though there is much discussion about "differences," such differences are seen as "mediat[ing] gender relations" (footnote Rhode). The task has been to "understand how common biological characteristics [i.e., biologicality of "being" a "female"] are differently experienced by different group of women in different social and historical circumstances"

³⁴Nancy Julia Chodorow. "Gender Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective." In Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds. The Future of Difference. Fourth Printing. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985)

(footnote Rhode). Thus, the experience of gender is merely "experienced" differently by women who are perceived of as "different."³⁵ Even when differences are acknowledged, the assumption of a female commonness—through gender—remains the underlying factor.

Despite popular belief, gender difference theory does not *theorize* "racial difference" or the equally complex notion of how gender is also racial. Feminists who theorize gender difference do mention race, but only as an analogy to gender, and/or as "important" but separate from the task of understanding gender difference. It is precisely this absence of theorizing the racial as constitutive of gender construction, and not as separate, that needs to be explored.

For example, Chodorow argues that there is a difference between men and women but that "gender difference is not absolute, abstract, or irreducible; it does not involve an essence of gender". For Chodorow, the difference between men and women can be explained by psychoanalytic theory and its emphasis on development, differentiation and the perception of difference in early childhood. Differences "are socially and psychologically created and situated". Race however, is never figured in Chodorow's account of gender difference. Does this mean that one's perception of race is not a part of the psyche? or that race is not psychologically and socially constructed as well? In Chodorow's model, the answer is a resounding yes. According to Chodorow, race and other differences belong to a different realm of theorizing. She writes:

³⁵The idea that some women are "perceived of as different" on the basis of "race," as opposed to actually "being (ontologically) different," is based on the notion that race is a social construction, and that what is "white" and "black" are merely legal and cultural definitions that have no basis in either biology or science.

I will not discuss differences among women. I think we have something else in mind when we speak of differences in this connection. Differences among women—of class, race, sexual preference, nationality, and ethnicity, between mothers and non-mothers—are all significant for feminist theory and practice, but these remain concrete differences, analyzable in terms of specific categories and modes of understanding. [emphasis added]³⁶.

In essence, Chodorow dismisses (the possibility of) race as a crucial component of one's perception of gender. Theorizing racial and other differences is an altogether different task.

Similarly, Sara Ruddick constructs a theory of gender difference that is rooted in women's social experience of mothering. Ruddick argues that there are changeable and unchangeable features of the mothering experience. Such features make it "possible to identify interests that seem to govern maternal practice throughout the species"³⁷. However, Ruddick admits that "it is impossible even to begin to specify [those] interests without importing features specific to the class, ethnic group and particular sex-gender system in which the interests are realized." Thus, her goal, in reference to race and class, is "to see the universal [i.e., maternal thinking] in particulars." Ruddick's conception of "importing features" undermines the universality of maternal thinking. It suggests that she is imposing the "maternal thinking" model in/on specific (racial) groups. There is some recognition of imposition when she writes:

³⁶[*ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁷Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking," in Joyce Trebicolt, ed., Mothing: Essays in Feminist Theory, (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allenheld, 1984), p. 215.

[a]lthough I have tried to compensate for the limits of my particular social and sexual history, I principally depend on others to correct my interpretations and [to] translate across cultures...³⁸

Therefore, I am dependent on others, morally as well as intellectually, for the statement of differences, the assessment of their effects on every aspect of maternal lives, and finally for the radical correction as well as for expansion of any general theory I would offer.³⁹

Clearly, Ruddick sees maternal thinking as a universal principle that needs only to be qualified by the particulars of certain features. Her dependence on others to give an "assessment" of how maternal thinking operates in their lives underscores the idea that race, and class are added as afterthoughts. Like Chodorow, Ruddick does not consider how race and class construct maternal thinking or how such a construction questions the very possibility of a universal mode of "maternal thinking." Certainly, these criticisms are not new. In fact, given the postmodern emphasis on essentialism, such criticisms have become fashionable. It has become evident that "the unity of the gendered 'human,' that is, the 'masculine' or 'feminine' subject prove[s] to be as much of a fiction as the universal 'man' that gender [difference] theory has divided into two."⁴⁰

The apparent unity of gendered subjects has come under critical scrutiny by at least two camps: women of color and postmodernists.⁴¹ (DiStefano, 1991;

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Quoted in footnote number 5, Ibid., p. 228.

⁴⁰Christine Di Stefano, "Who the Heck Are We? Theoretical Turns Against Gender," Frontiers Vol. XII (1991), p. 88.

⁴¹Ibid. See also, Linda Gordon, "On 'Difference'." Genders No. 10 (Spring 1991): 91-110.

Gordon, 1991). The first round⁴² of attacks accused gender theory for its failure to analyze issues of race and racism, and economic stratification. The response to such criticisms was to create more genders (i.e., more "specified" women and men) by adding the particulars of race and class to gender. The second round of criticisms are being waged by postmodernists. They claim that feminist theory is engaged in "a misplaced search for the essence of women."⁴³ Postmodernist feminists have been quick to point out that "sexual difference is always and already gendered, that gender constructs our understanding of those very sexual differences and bodily experiences"⁴⁴ we hope to explain. Hence, in trying to articulate the construction of "women" and "men," gender difference theory begins with the heterosexist and essentialist assumption that the gendered subject positions are merely a reflection of the biological, sex-based, dualism, male and female. The response to this set of criticisms has been an increased effort to deconstruct the category gender and to move away from ahistorical and essentialist claims. The subject and subject position of "woman" has become more tenuous and less legitimate. In other words, gender is no longer a non-disputable category; we cannot (easily) define it.

Despite the convincing and often sophisticated arguments made by the critics, very little has been said about how the two camps can come together. As stated previously, women of color and feminists postmodernists are mistakenly

⁴²DiStefano uses the concept of "boxing rounds" to convey the notion that there is a continuous struggle (or fight) within feminist theory over the definition and use of gender as a theoretical construct. I continue this analogy in the section below, suggesting that there is (should be?) a "third round" in which we examine how gender remains a privileged category and prevents the theorizing of race and gender as already always mutually connected.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

thought of as allies, unwittingly conflating the postmodernist concept of difference with the primarily racial claim of diversity. The uneasiness produced around this conflation is the result of misreading the general tenets of postmodernism and the specific elements of deconstruction. To this end, feminist deconstructions of gender lack an understanding of how difference works both within and outside the category gender, and how feminist theory itself works as discourse even though it is positioned within a discourse. African American women's insistence upon the importance of race, class, and sexual preference coupled with a different postmodernist reading of deconstruction, can provide us with a better model for "thinking about how we think".

"Women of color" and postmodernists have raised, albeit in very different ways, serious questions about the stability of gender as an explanatory category. Nevertheless, feminists have insisted upon the usefulness of gender as a category of analysis.⁴⁵ Despite claims of historicity, heterogeneity and non-essentialism, feminists continue to discuss gender in ways that privilege gender as the analytic category to the exclusion of other categories. This is not to suggest that race, class, sexual "preference," or any other category, should be privileged instead of gender, or that we should conceptualize all four as existing co-equally along axes of power. Neither of these approaches is adequate. Rather, the goal should be to continue to "find ways (however imperfect)...to subject our categories to criticism, [and] our analyses to self-criticism".⁴⁶ Such a goal necessarily requires the method of deconstruction, where deconstruction means "analyzing in context the way any binary opposition operates, reversing and displacing it hierarchical

⁴⁵I am referring, of course, to Joan Scott's now classic essay, "Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis," in Gender and the Politics of History, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 41.

construction, rather than accepting it as real or self-evident or in the nature of things".⁴⁷ As Scott points out, "feminists have been doing this for years," but only in reference to the construction of male/female as subdivisions of the category gender. In other words, feminists see the category gender as divided along the oppositions male/female or masculine/feminine. As a result, a feminist deconstructive method might show the ways in which the definition of one term in the male/female dichotomy depends upon the definition of the other; or how one of the two terms (usually "male") holds the superior position; or how the terms are invested with biological meanings that make it appear that the opposition and the terms themselves are "natural."

Joan Scott illustrates this method by examining the problematic assumptions in the difference vs. equality debate.⁴⁸ She argues that it is not

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸The difference vs. equality debate is an ongoing debate in feminist theory over how the question of women's treatment should be conceptualized and practiced in policy. On the one hand, there are those who argue that the difference between men and women is significant and that sex-conscious laws and policies should be constructed based on this recognition. On the other hand, there are those who argue that to highlight the difference between men and women would only serve as a basis to discriminate further against women. Thus, the goal should be to craft sex-neutral laws and policies that would not categorize women having a "special difference." Both sides argue that "equal treatment" is the only way to end discrimination against women, but the problem occurs when one attempts to define "equal treatment." Does treating women "equally" mean focusing on differences (like the ability to give birth) and crafting sex-conscious policies that prevent women from being hired or fired based on this biological difference? Or, does treating women "equally" mean ignoring differences by crafting sex-neutral policies which can become the basis for discrimination through a lack of attention to women's particular needs? The risk of **not focusing** on sexual difference might mean that women's particular needs are not met. However, by **focusing on differences** between men and women, one runs the risk of providing a basis on which to discriminate against women. This is, in Minow's terms, "the difference dilemma." See Leslie Friedman Goldstein, ed., Feminist Jurisprudence: The Difference Debate, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992), and Martha Minow,

useful for feminists to use "difference" and "equality" as theoretically opposing concepts because the dualism erroneously assumes that equality means sameness. In addition, the equality/difference pairing creates a dilemma when "choosing" one of the other. "If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it. If one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable."

The difference/equality dualism fails to see the ways in the term equality "...includes, indeed depends on, an acknowledgment of the existence of difference".⁴⁹ In other words, for women to assert that they should be equal to or treated as the equal of men is to assume beforehand that women are "different from". Men are the standard and women are considered deviations from that standard.

Scott extends her deconstructive criticisms to the male/female dualism. According to Scott,

...the duality this opposition creates draws one line of difference, invests it with the biological explanations, and treats each side of the opposition as a unitary phenomenon. Everything in each category [male/ female] is assumed to be the same; hence **differences within either category are suppressed. [Thus], our goal is to see not only the differences between the sexes but also the way these work to repress differences within gender groups. [In other words],...[t]he generalized opposition male/ female serves to obscure the differences among women in behavior, character, desire, subjectivity, gender identification, and historical experience [emphasis added].**⁵⁰

Here, Scott's main criticism is that the male/female opposition creates separate gendered categories that obscure the differences within each. Both

Making All the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion, and the American Law, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 142.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 144-143.

"male" and "female" are taken to be monolithic, homogeneous, and universal constructions. As such, the "differences within gender groups" are hidden or repressed.

At first glance, Scott's call to disrupt the homogeneity created by the simple opposition of male vs. female is commendable because it is a call for historicity and specificity. However, two flaws should be apparent in Scott's version of the problem with the male/female opposition hidden within the category gender. First, despite the fact that she is arguing for "differences among women" (read here as diversity), race is not even mentioned in her string of relevant differences. She cites "behavioral" differences, differences in "character", "desire", "subjectivity", "sexuality", "gender identification", and "historical experiences". Does the absence of race suggest that the category and racial identification is not a constituent part of subjectivity? of desire? of historical experiences?

My instinct is that a likely answer would be no, and that Scott did not intend to exclude race and racism from the social and cultural forces that make monolithic notions of gender impossible. However, the theoretical erasure of race from gender is rarely about any one individual's "intentions" or deliberate actions. Rather, the inability to conceptualize race as a mutual and constitutive part of gender, as well as an analytic category in its own right, is a product of the normalizing and regulatory practices of feminist theorizing. Those practices suggest that a focus on gender necessarily means that other categories, like race, fall outside the domain of its analytic focus.

Because one of Scott's goals is to highlight that which the male/female dualism has obscured--namely, differences among women--one could assume that differences in "historical experience" is an implicit reference to race. However, to make such an implicit reference is to reduce the effects of racism to a

mere by-product of history. In this instance, neither the category race, nor the particular kinds of racisms, are treated as organizing principles of society. Rather, they are treated as epiphenomena of (patriarchal) history.

The second and related problem with Scott's analysis, is that in her attempt to reject the invested, biological, presuppositions of male/female, she ultimately accepts this dualism. By calling for "differences among women" on a subjective, individualistic basis, and by excluding collective identities shaped by and through racial classifications, Scott (re)constructs and (re)privileges gender and the male/female dualism even as she attempts to undermine it. In Scott's schemata of difference, gender is the prioritized, indeed, the only category of analysis. In order, as Scott phrases it, to see "differences within gender groups" and to illuminate "differences among women in behavior, character desire, subjectivity, sexuality, gender identification, and historical experience," one must accept the category gender as the point of departure, which in turn requires an acceptance of the male/female dualism.

Bear in mind Scott's critique of the male/female opposition, namely that "[it] draws one line of difference...and then treats each side of the opposition as a unitary phenomenon. Everything in each category (male/female) is assumed to be the same; hence differences within either category are suppressed".⁵¹ Because Scott is asking us to see the ways in which the male/female opposition obscures differences, how, one might ask, does her analysis preclude the category race as a difference "that confound[s], disrupt[s], and render[s] ambiguous the meaning of [the] fixed binary opposition male/female" ?⁵²

⁵¹Ibid., p. 144.

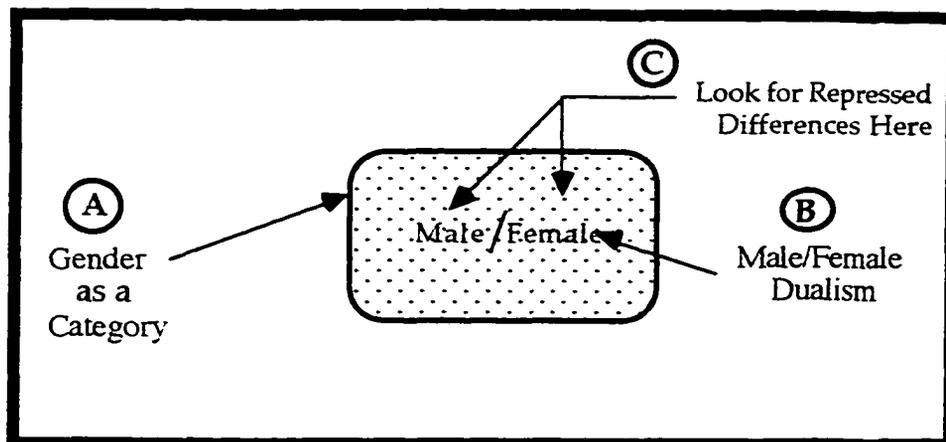
⁵²Ibid., p. 145.

The diagram below (Figure 3.3) graphically illustrates Scott's critique of thinking about gender in homogenous and categorical terms. In brief, the diagram shows gender as a "category of analysis," and the male/ female dualism as one component that make-up or form the category gender. The diagram graphically depicts what Scott sees as the assumed homogeneity set up by male/ female opposition. "Male" and "female" appear to be unitary, and coherent categories in and of themselves. The apparent unity of "male" and "female" is a function, according to Scott, of the negated or repressed material within each, which she defines as differences among men and differences among women. The male/ female opposition seems only to pose the question of difference as one between men and women. Thus, the goal is to de-homogenize, if you will, the terms on both sides of the opposition. Given this, why can't we consider race as one of the "de-homogenizing" differences? What would be problematic about inserting race into Scott's conceptual schema?

First, as mentioned above, Scott does not mention race among the differences that need our analysis. Second, and this is the most important point, even if Scott viewed race as an important and, to use her words, a "confound[ing] [and] disrupt[ive]" difference, it would be subsumed by or made secondary to the category gender, and therefore made non-disruptive. As Figure 3 illustrates, Scott asks us to look for differences on both sides of the male/ female dichotomy. This type of "difference" does not "confound", "disrupt," or make less ambiguous the male/ female dualism or the category gender. Particularities or "differences" do exist, but they exist only *within* the category gender. As a result, differences become mere variations of one's "gendered identity." Instead of undermining, disrupting, and "rendering ambiguous the fixed meaning" of the male/ female opposition, the placement of racial difference(s) within the category gender serves only to re-legitimate the coherency of the opposition. By placing

differences within "gendered identities", the categories become simple modifications and embellishments. The category gender, the unity of the dualism, as well as its implicit hierarchy appears in a new but still recognizable form; its boundaries untouched and its authority as a cross-racial, and cross-cultural phenomenon unchallenged. Race, when figured as difference "within gender groups" can not reverse or displace the hierarchy of that binary opposition it is the category gender, and one's "maleness" or "femaleness" that gives the particularities or the "repressed differences" a coherence, and a foundation, or a grounding. Gender, and by extension male and female, remain whole, complete, coherent, and unquestioned. Differences are simply written

Figure 3.3 The Male/Female Dualism of Gender



(A) Gender as a "useful category of analysis."

(B) Male/Female is an opposition that makes up or constitutes the category gender.

~ The Male/Female dualism creates two seemingly different and homogenous categories which is also characterized by a hierarchical relationship. The erroneous assumption of homogeneity gives the dualism a false appearance of unity and stability.

(C) Goal: To not only see differences between men and women, but to analyze the ways in which the male/female opposition represses differences within each of its gender groups. Thus, we must begin to look for differences within the "male" category and within the "female" category.

into the category gender or, subjectively speaking, onto the gendered being. Race in this instance would not be disruptive or confounding to the category gender, because its grounding, its very existence depends upon and stems from "gendered" identities and the male/female dualism.

The end product is a set of qualified women: a white, middle-class, woman; a working class, black woman; a lesbian, Chicana; a single, white unemployed, welfare mother, etc. This list of possibilities is endless. The fact that these are "qualified women", and that the list could go on *ad infinitum* is precisely the tension that feminist theory is unable to see, and it is precisely what

Scott's otherwise insightful discussion on difference illustrates. Illustrative of the Adjectival Modification Strategy, Scott's analysis produces qualified women. "Qualified women" are all "different," but they are women nonetheless; bound together by the assumption of a universal "patriarchal oppression." Difference is allowed as long as the category "gender" and its dualism remain intact.

The alternative is not to privilege another category, like race, but to take the postmodern concepts of language, discourse, difference, and deconstruction to heart. Admittedly, this is Scott's argument as well, but ironically she is unable to extend her poststructuralist insights to its logical end. At the very least, we must begin to view feminist theory as a discursive field, that has its own meaning-constituting system, which in turn produces its own legitimating truths. Further, "difference" must be conceptualized and deployed as "the notion...that meaning is made through implicit or explicit contrast, that a positive definition rests on the negation or repression of something represented or antithetical to it"(Footnote). Further, by using the Derridean notion of *differance*, which means both to be unlike, other, or dissimilar and 'to defer', to delay or postpone, we can avoid "looking" for "features" or "characteristics" to add on to an already existing gendered being. Feminist theorizing cannot afford to conflate the postmodern conception of *differance*, as the production of meaning through affirmation and negation, with the popular understanding of difference as diversity. Maintaining this non-distinction would result in the loss of a very important concept needed in the task of deconstruction. The (re)privileging of gender under various "postmodern" interpretations would lose its privileged status if we take deconstruction to mean "analyzing the operations of difference [i.e., meaning made through implicit or explicit contrast] in texts, [including] the ways in which

meanings are made to work."⁵³ This involves at least three steps: (1) recognizing that "race" exists as a socially constructed category, with its own binary oppositions; (2) deconstructing all categories, emphasizing operations of affirmation and negation within each category; and (3) conceptualizing how each category constructs and reconstructs the other in a way that makes it difficult to analyze one as being separate from the other. In other words, examining the ways in which race and gender, for example are mutually productive and constitutive. In this manner, difference no longer takes place (solely) within a specific category, rather it is constructed through the simultaneous existence of seemingly separate categories. This view not only exposes categories as unstable, incoherent, and shifting, but as ultimately fraudulent.

As stated previously, with this reading of deconstruction and difference, there are really two processes of affirmation and negation at work. The first process of affirmation and negation occurs **within** the category gender with the male/female dualism. The unity and meaning of "male" is established through the explicit negation of "female" and vice versa. The other process of negation takes place **with** the category of gender functioning *as a category in opposition to* other categories like race and class. Gender becomes the dominate or affirmed category through its negation of race, class, etc. The discursive domain of feminist theory is constructed in such a way that race is not a part of its discourse; it is excluded, repressed, negated. As such, gender works in opposition to race and when an attempt is made to "include" race as a "feature" of gendered beings, it reproduces the homogeneity it seeks to undermine.

This broader perspective not only sees binary oppositions at work embedded within categories, but it sees those oppositions at work with the

⁵³Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Post-Structuralist Theory for Feminism," in Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, eds., Conflicts in Feminism, (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 137.

categories. This re-reads the current (mis)usage of difference and employs the concept in a way that underscores its meaning of repressed and negated meanings. Even Scott admits that "the [traditional] assertion of differences in the face of gender categories is not a sufficient strategy. What is required in addition is an analysis of fixed gender categories as normative statements that organize cultural understanding of sexual difference . To this I would add that what is required is an analysis of gender as a fixed category in which difference is *asserted with* the category gender, instead of differences simply being *inserted into* the category gender.

In this chapter, I have discussed variations of the "Triple Oppression," thesis, including the additive and multiplicative models, the "mapping" model of intersectionality, and mutual constitution. I have also tried to provide an example of how analysis of difference end up (re)privileging the category gender. I have noted that while the "triple oppression" model tended to add or multiply race, class and gender, the "mutually constituted" conception attempt to go one step further by explaining how they those categories are related. This, of course, does not suggest that the two models are unrelated. To the extent that the the "mutually constituted" model improves upon additive and multiplicative models in explaining the nature of the relationship between race, class and gender, it could have only done so by examining and critiquing the problems of that inhere within an intersectionality framework. In other words, the old triple oppression model provided an insight and basis for the emergence of a newer improved model.

PART II: EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES

CHAPTER FOUR
THE SOCIO-SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF LANI GUINIER: THE
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN AS THE "UNKNOWN OTHER"

We've spent so much time pacing our respective corners that the common ground between us is really empty. We have a fear of this unknown Other. If only we could make the Other look less strange.

——Lani Guinier ¹

[Lani] Guinier has been demonized in a fashion unequal by an attack on a public figure since the pillorying of Anita Hill. It bears asking why only African American women inspire such ill-treatment from the Judiciary Committee and the body politic as a whole.

——Editorial,
The Nation ²

Political Scientists and other scholars have taken many approaches to Bill Clinton's nomination and subsequent withdrawal of Lani Guinier. Dianne Pinderhughes, for example, analyzes the Guinier nomination within the context of the Clinton Administration's effort to place and keep in office African American public officials.³ Pinderhughes argues that Clinton's lack of public involvement in and support of Guinier's nomination was one of many indicators

¹Quoted in Patricia L. Ewalt, "On Not Knowing," Social Work, 39 (May 1994), p. 246, from D. Russakoff, "Lani Guinier in Person," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, (December 20-26, 1993).

²"Sinking Guinier," The Nation, Editorial Section, Volume 256 (June 21, 1993), p. 856.

³"Time After Time: An Analysis of the Clinton Administration's 'Efforts' to Nominate and Keep in Office Black, Civil Rights and Other Officials." Paper Presented for Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the national Conference of Black Political Scientists, March 8-11, 1995, Baltimore, MD.

of the Clinton Administration's ambiguous and luke-warm support for strong Civil Rights policy. In the third and final presidential debate of the 1992 campaign, Clinton vowed to make his cabinet "look like America" through the appointment of women and minorities to key positions in his administration. "I owe the American people," he declared, "a White House staff, a cabinet, and appointments that look like America but meet the high standards of excellence, and that's what I'll do."⁴ "While Clinton never mentioned affirmative action...there was no mistaking the degree to which he was implicitly embracing affirmative action principles."⁵ However, after the failed nominations, resignations and/or controversies of high-ranking Black nominees and officials like Bobby Ray Inman (Secretary of Defense), Joycelyn Elders and Henry Foster (Surgeon General and Surgeon General nominee, respectively), Mike Espy (Secretary of Agriculture), the late Ron Brown (Secretary of Commerce), and of course Lani Guinier, it might be well worth asking: Why are so many of Clinton's African American nominees and cabinet administrators the object of controversy in which race is always a subtext? Why does President Clinton, the first Democratic President in over a decade, seem to take a moderate or "silent" position on Civil Rights issues and nominees who are cast only in racial terms?

The Lani Guinier nomination has also been analyzed within the context of Clinton's inability to serve as Chief Executive Officer of the United States, especially on the issue of race relations. Emerging mostly from conservative and neo-conservative think tanks, this view of Guinier's nomination is seen as just one of many bungled nominations, political mishaps, and personal scandals that

⁴Quoted in Nicolaus Mills, ed., Debating Affirmative Action: Race, Gender, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Inclusion, (New York: Delta, 1994), 1.

⁵Ibid.

reflect Clinton's political ineptitude, incompetency, and damaging left-wing ideology.⁶ Clint Bolick, co-founder of the "libertarian-oriented" Institute for Justice, and initiator of the opposition against Lani Guinier, stated that "Clinton has done nothing, absolutely nothing, to find common ground on race issues. Instead he has given over the entire federal civil rights apparatus to ideologues who cut their teeth in left-wing advocacy groups, unleashing them to pursue militant, in your-face policies..."⁷ In a more light-hearted tone, one author summed up Clinton's political ineptitude as "some grand design...[to] send up politically damaged African-Americans to twist in the wind to prove to white folks that affirmative action has run amuck and their only salvation is the Republican Party. [Thus], Clinton is really a Republican Trojan horse, masquerading as an incompetent Democrat to drive voters, in droves to the Republican Party."⁸

A third method scholars have taken in analyzing Guinier's nomination has been to view Guinier as a female political actor circumscribed by moral boundaries set by men. Patricia A. Sullivan and Lynn H. Turner, in their recent book, From Margins to Center: Contemporary Women and Political Communication, provide case study analyses of Lani Guinier, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Janet Reno as "political women" who either deny, confront and accommodate, or re-vision barriers that attempt to define their position as women

⁶For a list of some conservative think tanks and their anti-Civil Rights/ anti-Clinton position, see Pinderhughes, op. cit.

⁷"The Future of Civil Rights in America," May 4, 1995. Retrieved from The Heartland Institute Website.

⁸"Clinton & Abortion Politics: Incompetency at the White House--- Again!," Meanderings (February, 1995). Retrieved from the internet at the Gravity website.

in political discourse.⁹ Sullivan and Turner argue that Lani Guinier "denied the politics" of moral boundaries designed to silence women in the public sphere. Women who employ denial as a rhetorical strategy "express faith in a rationalist paradigm" by believing that "moral boundaries are nonexistent or permeable."¹⁰ "Because Guinier trusted the Clinton Administration and had faith in the rules," they write, "she denied that the boundaries could be operating to put her nomination in jeopardy. She accepted the administration's ban on her speech (and her ability to defend herself), and remained silent..."¹¹

A more popular approach to Guinier's nomination is to examine the "negative" and "distorted" portrayals of her scholarly work and ideas.¹² Under this mode of analysis, one might ask: Were Lani Guinier's views really radical, "racially extreme," and politically infeasible? Is it accurate to assert, as does Mitchell Perlstein, that Lani Guinier "reflects and leads a school of legal and social thought that not just deviant, [but] divisive, counterproductive, racist...[and] profoundly incongruent with our ideals as a nation..." Those who would defend would try to illustrate that Guinier and her ideas were "misrepresented," and then attempt to "set the record straight" by providing a "more accurate" and correct interpretation of her political ideas. Lisa Cooper

⁹Patricia A. Sullivan and Lynn H. Turner, From Margins to Center: Contemporary Women and Political Communication, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996).

¹⁰Ibid., 46.

¹¹Ibid., 66.

¹²Stephen Carter, "Foreword," The Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy, (New York: The Free Press, 1994); Lisa Cooper, "The Misrepresentation of Lani Guinier to the Head of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice," Paper Presented at the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, Baltimore, MD, March 8-12, 1995); and Pinderhughes, op. cit.

follows this method of analysis when she argues that Lani Guinier "was judged by her writings rather than the person she is and the work that she has done."¹³ In Cooper's analysis, Guinier's downfall was facilitated by a "misleading negative campaign by the opposition, lack of positive support from President Clinton and his administration, and the slow rise of support from African-American leaders and organizations."¹⁴

While each of these approaches have merit, neither is appropriate for addressing questions relative to the gendered and racial construction of Lani Guinier and the symbolic significance of that construction for feminist theorizing. The approach that focuses on Black political nominees as they relate to Clinton's stance on civil rights, rarely gives as much value to the category gender as it does to race. Those studies that emphasize Clinton's incompetence and lack of Machiavellian skill uses Clinton as the point of and are often unable to discern the racial, not to mention the gendered subtext of political discourse. A gendered analysis often conceptualizes race as an attribute and as such continues to privilege a private versus public domain in which the actors are simple male and female. The "misrepresentation" approach is adept at exploring how "misrepresentation" occurs, but not the function of the "misrepresented image." None of the approaches to the Guinier nomination explore its implications for feminist theorizing. To date, no analysis of the Guinier nomination has examined its racial and gendered subtext from a feminist perspective, and none

¹³"The Misrepresentation of Lani Guinier to the Head of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice," Paper Presented at the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, Baltimore, MD, March 8-12, 1995), 1.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

have explained the lack of feminist support for Lani Guinier when compared to other female nominees whose nominations were jeopardized.

This chapter analyzes the Lani Guinier nomination from such a perspective. While I focus on the ways in which Guinier was "presented" in media, I do not characterize such a "presentation" as a "mis-representation" or a "distortion." Rather I view the "presentation" of Guinier as a configuration, as a product of the myriad of voices that named and marked her as "Other." I argue that the Lani Guinier nomination is significant not only because the tensions that propelled it to the forefront continue to play such an important role in American politics, but because the story that was constructed and subsequently told about Guinier as an African American woman, is as much a story about feminism and feminist theorizing, as it is about Clintonian politics and Civil Rights policy. In what follows, I argue that the Lani Guinier nomination is instructive for feminist theorizing because it is one illustration of the African American woman as always already outside of and excessive to feminist interpretations of Black women in political and social spaces. At the same time, I argue that the configuration of Black women as excessive is both necessary to and constitutive of feminist discourse. I emphasize constitutive because much of feminist thinking produces the Black Woman, and the category race, as that which exists outside of and thus irrelevant to notions of "women as a group." To the extent that the configuration of the Black woman as "unreadable," "inaccessible," and "unknowable" is constitutive of feminist discourse, it is also necessary to feminist discourse; necessary because feminist discourse needs the Black Woman (or race) to be configured as the "unknown other" in order to bring into existence and make coherent the notion "women as a group." Consequently feminist theory has no way to speak of the Black Woman because it is complicit in the process that constructs the Black Woman as the "unknown Other." Moreover, the

production and use of a symbol assumes, at some level, the erasure of identity; the erasure of nuanced particularities that constitute one's subjectivity. Nell Irvin Painter, describes the process in this manner: "Rather than a person in history, she works as a symbol. To appreciate the meaning of the symbol—Strong Black Woman—we need to know almost nothing of the person."¹⁵

I believe that Lani Guinier's controversial nomination, and most importantly, the absence of feminist support or defense and an accompanying gendered analysis provides an empirical example for thinking about racial difference, the symbolic nature of the Black Woman as chaotic, and the function of race in feminist theorizing.

I begin by explaining the boundary marking process endemic to the construction of the Other. Next, I apply the concept of "stories" defined in Chapter 1 to the specific case of Lani Guinier. Using the notion of feminist stories, I outline my concept of the "Black Woman" as a symbol of chaos, excess, and irreducible and inexplicable difference. I then examine Lani Guinier's nomination and her construction as "looney," as a point of departure for exploring feminist theory's inability to speak to the specificities of Black women. I do this by comparing Lani Guinier's nomination to that of Zoe Baird, two female Clinton nominees whose nominations failed under controversy. Using articles, editorials, and Op-ed pieces from the Washington Post and the New York Times, as well as articles in Time magazine, U.S. News & World Report, and other sources, I outline the facts of each nomination and analyze the feminist responses (or lack of such responses) to both nominees. I define "feminist responses" as (1) feminist formal support, especially public, vocal and verbalized

¹⁵Painter's remarks on the Black Woman symbol are analyzed in reference to Sojourner Truth. See, Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), p. 4.

support; and (2) sustained and visible analysis of Baird's and/ or Guinier's nomination in specifically gendered terms. Finally, I connect these empirical examples back to my theoretical framework, by briefly analyzing two areas within feminist discourse that rely upon the construction of race as inaccessible in order to insure a coherent notion of "women as a group."

I. Marking the "Other": On Boundaries and Stories

Creating Boundaries

Reflecting upon her failed nomination, Lani Guinier made the comments of the opening epigraph framing this chapter in reference to race relations in America, where the "we" and the "us" is presumed to be invariably represented by a late-twentieth century version of DuBois's color line. For Guinier, this antagonistic demarcation is most problematic in the political arena and can only operate if the majority creates and tyrannizes a "strange Other"¹⁶. But the division between "we" and "us" is not always as distinct and clear as this polarization suggests, and politics is not the only arena where such a division can emerge. Depending on the context, the "we" and the "us" can overlap or change altogether. More often than not, the presumed difference(s) between the opposing spheres of identity are predicated on complex and shifting grounds, whose meanings are derived from a host of culturally encoded signifiers. This view of the division between "we" and "us" exposes the fictive nature of boundaries and implies that boundaries are both transgressive and fungible.

Despite Guinier's seemingly clear marking-off between "we" and "us", her observation actually suggests these ambiguities. There is, she acknowledges,

¹⁶Guinier's scholarly work on democracy are contained in her book, The Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness in a Representative Democracy, op. cit.

"common ground", an overlap that could bridge the "empty" space between what appears to be two complete, separate sides. There is a desire to transgress or blur boundaries in an effort to "make the Other look less strange." The irony in her call to familiarize the "Other" doubles back in on itself, for it was Guinier herself who became the "strange unfamiliar Other" in a debate in which she came to symbolize, in both literal and symbolic terms, the implacability of racial politics.

Thus, the most important intimation one can glean from Guinier's comment is that it is the unknown "strange Other" who occupies the empty space between "we" and "us." It is the "stranger" who marks the boundary; makes the boundary possible; and in many instances *becomes* the boundary. Thus, the subject marking the boundary and occupying the space between "we" and "us" exists outside of, as well as in between, two identities. In a sense, this marginalized, interstitial space becomes an identity in itself.¹⁷ But to note the existence of a marginalized, strange, "Other" is not enough. We must contend with a set of questions that will illuminate the constructed nature of such a subject-position. For example: How does the subject-position of the "Other" come into being? In what ways, and through what mechanisms is this subjectivity produced? How is the marginalized "Other" constituted and what purpose does it serve? How does it operate in a given discursive domain and what is significant about the "strange Other" in relation to the discourse from which it emerges?

These questions indicate that the "unknown Other" subject-position is both the explanans and the explanandum; i.e., it is simultaneously that which explains and that which is in need of explaining. In other words, one must begin the process of unravelling the complexity of the "unknown Other" as it relates to the

¹⁷Hortense Spiller, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," from Carole Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger*, New York: Routledge, 1984.

Black Woman and feminist theorizing. In the case of Lani Guinier, one must ask: How did Lani Guinier come to be figured as the hopelessly marginalized and "unfamiliar Other"? What purpose or function does this "unknown Other" serve?

I maintain that the construction of Lani Guinier as "radical", as a wild-woman gone amok, has everything to do with her (perceived) racial identity as a "Black Woman."¹⁸ In addition, the absence of public, feminist support for Guinier, and the absence of a feminist analysis¹⁹ on the specifically gendered nature of the racial images produced as representative of Guinier, speaks to the way in which feminist theory as a discourse, produces and conceptualizes the Black female subject. It appears that within feminist discourse, the Black Woman represents the boundary between "us" and "them." Despite her many variations, the Black woman is already always the unknown "Other." This may seem contradictory given that one of the "fundamental goal[s] of feminist theory is...to analyze gender relations [by examining] how gender relations are constituted

¹⁸I characterize "racial identity" as a perception rather than one of an ontological or biological nature for two reasons. First, I treat the category race as a social construct with no basis in nature, despite the fact that skin color is read in precisely this manner. The markers delineating racial identities are re-drawn and re-negotiated each time someone is named as belonging to a "particular race." Second, Lani Guinier's self-proclaimed racial identity is "black" even though her mother is Jewish, (i.e., white) and her father is African American. In other words, as Katya Gibel Azoulay states, "...on the individual level, Professor Guinier herself did not dwell on the issue of being Jewish and it was unclear if she identified herself with the Jewish community." See Black, Jewish, and Interracial: It's Not the Color of Your Skin, but the Race of Your Kin, & Other Myths of Identity, (Durham: Duke University Press 1997), 15.

¹⁹The idea that feminist analyses were absent is relative and should not suggest that there were no *single* or *individual* feminists analyzing the racially gendered nature of the Guinier nomination. I do however, think that the lack of support from nationally known women's organization and the absence of a meaningful, public discussion from the feminist community on the methods used to disparage and dismiss Guinier is significant. When compared to Zoe Baird, Lani Guinier's fallen nomination was not defended on grounds relating to gender.

and experienced."²⁰ "Gender relations" necessarily includes "what are often considered the distinctively feminist issues: the situation of women and the analysis of male domination."²¹ Given this, how can feminist discourse tell stories about women in which Black women are either absent or rendered invisible? After all, "the story" is in part about them. *Isn't it?* They are "women". *Aren't they?*

Telling Stories

The notion of telling the "woman's story," or *any* story is an important theoretical concept. In fact, the re-writing of "His-tory" has become a much revered project. For the most part, the project of "re-writing history" has been taken up by groups who see themselves as marginal to the "legitimate" narrative of history—African Americans, women, Third World peoples, and other "Others."²² Although there are widely varying approaches to how one should re-write the his-tory of the marginalized other, there are some common assumptions re-visionists share about traditional history.

First, there is the belief that the traditional or dominant account of history does not take into account the specific experiences of people who have been

²⁰Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory, in Micheline R. Malson, et. al., eds., Feminist Theory in Practice and Process, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 52.

²¹Ibid.

²²See for example, Russell Ferguson, et. al., Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990); Ann-Louise Shapiro, ed., Feminists Re-Vision History, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics, (New York: Routledge, 1988); Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Perennial Library, 1980); and Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

historically oppressed. This criticism is generally raised to highlight the exclusion of race, class, and gender as categories of analyses.

Second, it is believed that the problem of exclusion is generated by and is a symptom of the methodological flaws that undergird the traditional paradigm. According to that paradigm, history is essentially a narration of events; the chronological ordering of important and crucial episodes in the shaping of society. As a consequence, the historian must be objective, and the sole task is to provide the reader with only the facts, or to use Leopold von Ranke's much-quoted phrase, to tell 'how it actually happened.' Thus, historical knowledge is "true knowledge" because it is arrived at through a dis-interested, impartial, and scientific investigation of the "facts."

Third, traditional historians tend to focus on the elite, offering the accounts of statesmen, clergymen, military leaders, and other great men of deeds. Those who do not occupy elite social and political positions are relegated to minor, supportive roles, or they are ignored altogether. The assumption of course, is that only certain people can make history, given that it is grand in scope and universal in its impact.

A final common notion shared by re-writers of history is the belief that the traditional method of recording history is based on formal documents, which stand as symbols of achievement. Here the narration and the importance of events is based on the "authenticity" of the evidence— official records, governmental documents, recorded laws and statutes, birth certificates, deeds, titles, etc.—all of which must be carefully catalogued and preserved in archives. The problem here involves an effacing of other kinds of "evidence." Personal journals, diaries, auto-biographies, oral accounts of history, and even art and literature are often considered "primitive" forms of "pre-history" and therefore are not considered as "authentic" documents of history.

The limitations of traditional accounts of history point to a host of methodological and epistemological questions. Who decides on what counts as history? How is the process of producing "authentic" historical knowledge in and of itself related to one's social identity? In what ways do traditional accounts of society circumvent questions related to race, class, and gender, and how is that circumvention connected to the narrative of history as the producer of "actual truth"?

At the very least, challenges to the traditional narrative mode of history has highlighted the problems of thinking of history, or of any discourse, as one that simply records the facts and reports the "truth." As Hayden White points out, the debate of history's status as the producer of "objective" and "true knowledge" is bound up in the very history of history as a scientific and cultural narrative.²³ It seems that the ability to tell a story—to narrate—and then to legitimate that story with the claim of scientific objectivity and discovery is itself the product of another type of power/knowledge scheme.²⁴ This suggests that

²³See The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); and Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

²⁴My reference is to Michel Foucault's concept of "bio-power," which articulates the relationship between truth and power. Generally speaking, Foucault argued that the search for the truth or falsity of specific claims is misplaced because it assumes that power and the production of knowledge are unconnected and external to one another. For Foucault, knowledge is one of the defining components for the operation of power in the modern world, but he does not reduce power and knowledge to identical elements. Rather, power and knowledge are correlative, not causal, and are produced mutually. See the collection of essays in Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977, edited by Colin Gordon, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977); Paul Rabinow, ed., Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Second Edition, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983).

the narrativity of history, or (of the history) of any discourse, issues from a set of values that sustain and reinforce what it counts as "truth."

However, the problems of narrativity—of constructing and creating a story—must not be confined to the discipline of history alone. In fact, the contemporary debates around diversity, multi-culturalism, and canon reformation, have named as suspect any hegemonic mode of articulating the "Truth." Needless to say, feminist theory, as a discursive field, has not escaped the criticisms about how it produces its own claims to "truth."²⁵ As noted in Chapter 1, the story that feminist theory tells—in all its variations—is a story of the oppression of women as women. However, like any narration of "reality," the process of constructing and presenting a story "entails ontological and epistemological choices with distinct ideological and even specific political implications."²⁶ This point has not been entirely missed by those who are engaged in the production of knowledge in feminist theory. In fact, feminism itself is a product of the many challenges that were made to the epistemological and theoretical assumptions that undergirded traditional accounts of history, philosophy, science, and even political science.²⁷ Initially, those challenges pointed out how women were excluded from the analysis of traditional paradigms. Women were, it was argued, missing objects from the pages of

²⁵See for example, Mary E. Hawkesworth, "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth," in Micheline R. Malson, et. al., eds., Feminist Theory in Practice and Process, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 327-351.

²⁶Hayden White, The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 7.

²⁷See for example, Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, eds., Feminist Epistemologies, (New York: Routledge, 1993), and Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, Transforming Knowledge, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

history. In time, this discussion would advance beyond the women-are-excluded model to one that theorized exclusion on an epistemological level. In these instances, feminists argued that women were not simply excluded as the product of an incidental oversight, but that the specific configuration of women as absent and invisible, made hegemonic discourse both possible and coherent. In other words, the discourse under question needed women to be figured in a certain way in order to tell a coherent story.²⁸

In addition to this, feminists exposed how epistemologies, standards, and accounts of experiences that claim neutrality and universality were themselves expressions of the masculine experience. The discovery of an inherent masculine experience led feminists to theorize the difference between men and women. Much of this theorizing emphasized the uniqueness of women, and debated whether or not this difference should be a central organizing concept for feminist politics.²⁹ The difference between men and women was articulated in many, often contradictory ways, but the premise that there was a fundamental difference between the two sexes remained an undisputed assumption. Out of this emerged notions of "women's work," "the woman's sphere," and even "women's ways of knowing." Women were oppressed as women because they were women, and other factors, such as race and class, were either secondary or

²⁸For an example of this in political science, see Christine Di Stefano, Configurations of Masculinity: A Feminist Perspective on Modern Political Theory, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), and Linda M.G. Zerilli, Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

²⁹See for example, Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice, (Cambridge: Harvard university Press, 1982), Deborah L. Rhode, ed., Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); and the collection of essays in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., The Future of Difference, Fourth Paperback Printing, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

simply not important to the task of theorizing sexual difference. This circular argument did not go unchallenged. African American women, and "other women of color" challenged early versions of feminist thinking as representative of the white, middle-class, heterosexual experience.³⁰ For women of color, the absence of race and class in theories of "women's oppression" relegated them to an invisible and silent subject position. On both ends of the spectrum—with African American scholarship on one end and feminist scholarship on the other—Black women were caught in the "interstices" of race and gender and deafened by the "sound of silence" that their descursive subject-position had demanded of them.³¹

Recently, however, the question of race, ethnicity, and even sexuality has come to preoccupy discussions of gender. Falling under the giant rubric of "difference theory," these debates attempt to explore the differences among women, as opposed to focusing only on the presumed "unique" and "fundamental" difference between men and women.³² The current focus on

³⁰See for example, Toni Cade, ed., The Black Woman: An Anthology, (New York: New American Library, 1970); Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Me, But Some of Us Are Brave, (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1982); and bell hooks, Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism, (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

³¹Hortense Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," in Carole Vance, ed., Pleasure and Danger, (New York: Routledge, 1984); Darlene Clark Hine, "Lifting the Veil, Shattering the Silence: Black Women's History in Slavery and Freedom," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women in History," Gender & History 1 (Spring 1989): 50-67.

³²See the works by Rhode and Jardine, op. cit., as well as Gerder Lerner, "Reconceptualizing Differences Among Women," Journal of Women's History 1 (Winter 1990): 106-122; Linda Gordon, "On 'Difference'," Genders 10 (Spring 1991): 91-110; and Paula Rothenberg, "The Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of Difference," Hypatia 5 (Spring 1990): 42-57.

"difference" in feminist theory represents an advancement to the extent that it expands the concept of difference from the male/female opposition to include differences among women, and in the degree to which it acknowledges and foregrounds the importance of social systems based on race, class, and heterosexuality. On the question of race in particular however, feminist theory and theorizing falters in both the kind of attention it pays to (racial) difference and the methodological strategies employed to explore the mutual connections between race and gender. By "kind of attention", I am referring to the degree of intensity, the level of scrutiny, the depth of analysis, and the scope and breadth of the inquiry. By "methodological strategy employed", I am referring to the epistemological assumptions that guide, motivate and/or inform the framework of an inquiry on race. The most problematic of these assumptions has to do with the content and nature of race as a conceptual category. Usually, there is an absence of clarity on: (1) the notion that race is in fact a theoretical and analytical category and not an embodiment of natural difference; (2) that race cannot be reduced to black; (3) that whiteness is a "racial" designation and signifies racial messages often in opposition to blackness; (4) that race is an ever-changing category whose meaning changes over and within time; and (5) that meanings of race and even the boundaries delineating "the races" are often contradictory, complex, and even ambiguous. Feminist discourse also falters methodologically in its presumption that race and gender have separate and distinct theoretical histories in which the former was aimed as (producing) blacks, and the latter women. These limitations are not acknowledged as such. In fact, the implied or explicit claim to universality is one characteristic of feminist methodological

styles, succinctly summed up as the "traditional, Eurocentric methodological strategy" by Ann duCille.³³

This is not to suggest that an examination between race, gender, class, and/or sexuality does not top the list of priorities in feminist theory. Feminists have argued for analyses that examine the inter-relationship between race, class, and gender, but the discussion usually stops there. Beyond the call for an examination of the interaction between race, class, and gender, little else is accomplished. In fact, race and class are rarely mentioned—let alone theorized or analyzed—after the initial acknowledgement of its necessity in contemporary feminist analyses. This peculiar state of affairs has produced a paradox in which there seems to be a steady proliferation of scholarship on race, class, and gender within feminist discourse on the one hand, and a solidification and re-privileging of gender and sexual difference as the primary difference on the other. Even where there is significant acknowledgement of the totalizing effects of "woman" as a homogenous category, its coherency is not disrupted with an analysis of race. Contemporary feminism, much like its position in its initial phase, is unable to theorize race despite a decade of burgeoning Black feminist scholarship. The result is a fieldmine of discursive strategies that flirt with the concept of race, and then dismiss its potentially disruptive nature altogether. The lack of attention to race in relation to gender is not necessarily the product of individual oversight or mere exclusion as previously stated. Rather the exclusion of race from feminist discourse is a function of the nature of the discourse itself.

³³"Othered Matters: Reconceptualizing Dominance and Difference in the History of Sexuality in America," Journal of the History of Sexuality 1 (July 1990): 102-127.

As a discursive field, feminism is that body of knowledge entrusted with the task of articulating a coherent story about "women's oppression" and to articulate the dynamics of gender relations. Since feminist theory's narrative is about "women", gender becomes the category of analysis. The category race automatically becomes a part of that which exists outside the boundaries of sexual difference. In order to maintain a coherent narrative about the nature of women's oppression, something must be made incoherent; something must represent that which cannot be articulated. For Black women, the result is not simply "silence," exclusion or lack of attention. The Black female becomes the figure that cannot be captured and represented within the discursive field of feminist theory, as well as the figure that *embodies* and *captures* that which cannot be captured. The story told to us about Black women within feminist narratives is that it has no access to the Black female because she is excess.³⁴ The excessive Black woman phenomena can be summed up as "The-Black-Woman-(As)-Symbol(ic)." The images constructed of Black women are so readily accepted and so rarely contested that the phrase "black woman" becomes itself a symbol. Whether constructed within a text or produced visually, the "black woman" conjures up and signifies a host of images and meanings thought to be intrinsic to her nature. To this extent, the black woman is symbolic. She symbolizes all that cannot be explained and is usually invoked precisely at the point where explanation runs out.

³⁴I use "excess" here in its full meaning. I want to suggest that Black women are constructed as "excess" in at least two ways: (1) the Black woman is excess in that she is eccentric and "too much". Always painted as "too bossy," "too sensual", "too immoral", or "too masculine," the Black woman is simply "more than" and "too much". Her excess exudes her, defines her, constricts and constricts her, and simply allows her to "exist"; (2) the Black woman is "excess(ive)" to the discourse of feminist theory because she exists outside (literally and figuratively) of the domain of gender boundaries.

This phenomenon exists even in contemporary feminist theory where "difference" and questions of identity marked by race, class and sexuality have reshaped the theoretical terrain. In a space that should be open to thorough examinations of the ways in which Black women are characterized, the black-woman-symbol is deployed to maintain the narrative structure of the "woman's story." To this end, the Black woman has become the principal signifier of the "marginalized Other." Her configuration as the "marginalized other" has made her "unrepresentable" and inexplicable.³⁵ Usually, this posturing of Black women as unrepresentable is centered around the meaning of race, reduced to some racial aspect, or relegated to a system of racism that is then interpreted as existing outside the domain of sexual difference discourse. The construction and articulation of Black women as "too different" for explanation and comprehension is, I believe, *necessary* to the feminist theory in general and to the specific narratives of rape and the "private sphere" in particular. In both instances, universal claims are made about (all) women in relation to rape and the "private sphere" without any consideration as to how those concepts are already always produced through the category of race. The coherence of these narratives depend on that which cannot be explained, (i.e., Black women), such that the inexplicable becomes the explanation.

My point is not that the Black Woman *is* unrepresentable, (as if this is intrinsic to her nature), but that she gets *produced* as unrepresentable. Given this, questions about whether or not Black women can be represented, how she should be represented, or about her exclusion from representation within feminist discourse, seem at best specious inquiries. Rather than assuming that

³⁵For an excellent discussion of this phenomenon, see Ann duCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies," *Signs* 19 (Spring 1994): 591-629.

there is some "true," "real," or accurate image of Black women that can be duplicated and re-presented in the narrative of women's oppression, I argue that the African American Woman has been represented within feminist theory, in so far as she has been figured as the un-representable, the unreadable, and the invisible.

To this extent, the Black female subject has a peculiar relationship with(in) feminist discourse. On one hand, the Black Woman and "otherness" is the prized topic of contemporary postmodern academia.³⁶ On the other hand, issues of race and ethnicity continue to be theorized as secondary to gender. As a result, the African American female subject finds herself in the position of the (in)visible object—the unseen spectacle. As noted in Chapter 1, (In)Visible Objectification is a strategy that emerges from a narrative mode and a discursive structure that produces the African American woman as hopelessly marked by race and therefore inexplicable within the story of "women's oppression." My analysis of the Lani Guinier nomination is an attempt to theoretically connect the symbolic nature of the African American Woman to the notion that fundamental concepts within feminist discourse, like rape and the private sphere, require the a discursive construction of the Black Woman as the "unknown Other" in order to tell a coherent story in the name of women. In the case of Lani Guinier, I read her configuration as the "radical other"³⁷ as coinciding with both the dominant view of the Black women in society, and the (implicit) story told by feminist theory. Because I view Lani Guinier's position as symbolic, and the rhetoric surrounding her nomination as an empirical example of the (In)Visible

³⁶Ann duCille, *op. cit.*

³⁷By "radical other," I am referring to both her popularly perceived leftist political persuasion and her social subject position as marginal.

Objectification Strategy, I find it necessary to outline in my notion of Black women's invisibility amidst the growing "attention" to "race, class, and gender."

II. The Contemporary Paradox: The (In)Visibility of the African American Woman

They said to us: That flesh, darker or lighter than your own, encloses a foreign country. You cannot know it. It speaks another language, it is alien territory: otherness.

—Adrienne Rich³⁸

Although Black women and race have not been "excluded" from feminist discourse, as a subject, the Black Woman has always occupied a position of alterity. Through the production and deployment of the Exclusion and Denial and Analogy and Comparison Strategies, feminist theories of the 1970's wrote about the "condition of women" by declaring that race and racism were unimportant and/or unrelated to the feminist project. A few examples will illustrate the nature of this theoretical "absence."

For instance, Andrea Dworkin, as noted in Chapter 1, proclaimed that "[t]he nature of women's oppression [was] unique [and] that women are oppressed as women, regardless of race or class."³⁹ In another instance, Ann Oakley begins her book, Woman's Work, by asserting that her "book is about

³⁸From On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979).

³⁹Woman Hating, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1974), p. 23.

women."⁴⁰ She goes on to describe the nature of "women's work" by illustrating the connections between womanhood, marriage and the home. In claiming that "housewife" and "woman" are synonymous terms, Oakley defines the housewife as "the person, other than the domestic servant, who is responsible for most of the household duties (or for supervising a domestic servant who carries out these duties)."⁴¹ The fact that Black women were confined to the homes of white women as domestic servants, or "performed manual labor so physically arduous it was usually considered men's work,"⁴² does not prevent Oakley from maintaining the housewife equals woman equation. In fact, the move to "other" the domestic servant ("other than the domestic servant), not only prevents an analysis of domestic work, but it places the domestic servant outside of what it means, in Oakley's terms, to be a woman. Yet another example can be found in Nancy Hartsock's development of a "particular and privileged feminist standpoint," in which she "lay[s] aside the important differences among women and instead...search for central commonalities across race and class boundaries."⁴³ Finally, as bell hooks points out, many other books were written as if Black women simply did not exist.⁴⁴

⁴⁰Ann Oakley, Woman's Work: The Housewife, Past and Present, (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1976), Preface, p. ix.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 1, emphasis added.

⁴²Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present, (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1986), p. 4. See also, Mary Romero, Maid in the U.S.A., (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁴³"The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism, (New York: Longman Press, 1983), p. 233. It should be noted that Hartsock has begun to rethink her position on the question of difference. In a more recent article, Hartsock argues that "[f]eminists need to develop [their] understanding of difference by creating a situation in which hitherto

Adrienne Rich commented on this predicament when she noted that "much [of] feminist scholarship has been written as if black women did not exist, and many a women's studies course or text pays [only] token reference, if any, to black women's lives and work."⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, Rich was merely echoing the sentiments of black feminists who were concerned about "the assumption that the herstory and myth of white women is the legitimate and sole herstory and myth of all women."⁴⁶ The steady proliferation of works by "women of color" that argue for an analysis of woman's position that considers the simultaneous

marginalized groups can name themselves, speak for themselves, and participate in defining the terms or interaction..." Nevertheless, Hartsock's projects remains a project that attempts to uncover and illuminates "...common claims [that] can be made about...white women and women and men of color." See "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories," in Abdul R. Janmohammed and David Lloyd, eds., The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 17-36.

⁴⁴Ain't I a Woman, op. cit.,

⁴⁵"Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia," in On Lies, Secrets and Silence, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 281. Rich rightly attributes her understanding of this issue to Barbara Smith and other Black feminists who pointed out the shortcomings of early feminist works.

⁴⁶Audre Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly," in Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, eds., This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983, p., 96. Other works that critique the exclusiveness of feminist scholarship and politics include, Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. All the Women Are White, All the Black are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave, (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1982.); bell hooks, Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism. (Boston: South End Press, 1981.) Gloria I. Joseph and Jill Lewis, Common Differences, (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Toni Cade (Bambara), ed. The Black Woman: An Anthology, (New York: New American Library, 1970); Gloria Anzaldua', ed. Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminist of Color, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1990); Laura E. Donaldson, "Decolonizing Feminism: Race, Gender, & Empire-Building, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), and Vron Ware, Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History, (Londo: Verso Books, 1992).

effects of race, class, as well as gender, appears to date Rich's and Lorde's observations.

The inclination to regard the "absence" of race from feminist discourse as a relic of the past stems from two related phenomena: (1) the current academic and economic commodification of the "Black Woman" as the principal signifier of difference, or the emergence of "The Occult of True Black Womanhood"⁴⁷; and (2) the rhetorical attention within feminist circles given to "difference," "diversity," and the "intersection" of "race, class, gender, sexuality, etc...." Both phenomena have rendered invisible or "other-ed" the Black Woman even as she is held up of the "Subject." In mainstream feminist theory, many texts are written that acknowledge the intersection and importance of "race, class, and gender," giving the appearance that race is as central a category as gender. A cursory examination of recent texts will serve to illustrate this point..

In Women and the Politics of Empowerment, Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen argue that the "[s]ocial relations of power are so fundamentally structured in contemporary American society by the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and class that women's struggles for empowerment cannot be understood without making these factors central to analysis."⁴⁸ Zillah Eisenstein, argues in a recent book, The Color of Gender: Reimagining Democracy, that we live in a "racialized patriarchy," and as such should rethink democracy and the doctrine of universal rights in order to recognize individual needs.⁴⁹ She continues this theme in her more recent Hatreds: Racialized and Sexualized

⁴⁷Ann duCille, op. cit.

⁴⁸Women and the Politics of Empowerment, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 23.

⁴⁹The Color of Democracy: Reimagining Democracy, (Berkeley: University of California Press,

Conflicts in the 21st Century.⁵⁰ Elizabeth Spelman's, Inessential Woman: The Problem of Exclusion of Feminist Thought, and Diana Fuss's Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference, are two recent feminist texts that focus the exclusion of race and the construction of "difference" within feminist theory.⁵¹ In addition, a recent spate of books have emphasized the division between Black and white women and attempt to social identities based upon that division. Nancie Caraway's Segregated Sisterhood, Vron Ware's Beyond the Pale, Midge Wilson and Kathy Russell's, Divided Sisters, and Marita Golden and Susan Richards Shreve's Skin Deep: Black Women & White Women Write About Race, in varying degrees, discuss the "politics of race" in feminist thought and practice.⁵²

These few examples give the illusion that we no longer need to concern ourselves with the idea of the white woman's story as the story of all women. Such visibility could erroneously lead one to assume that Black women, or at least the category race, is no longer "invisible." However, if Jane Flax's observation is correct, then most feminists merely claim race, class and gender as "important" categories and proceed with nothing more than the assertion itself.

⁵⁰Hatreds: Racialized and Sexualized Conflicts in the 21st Century, (New York : Routledge, 1996).

⁵¹Elizabeth Spelman, Inessential Woman: The Problem of Exclusion of Feminist Thought, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); Diana Fuss's Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference, (New York: Routledge 1989).

⁵²Nancie Caraway, Segregated Sisterhood: Racism and the Politics of American Feminism, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Vron Ware, Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History, (New York: Verso Books, 1992); Midge Wilson and Kathy Russell, Divided Sisters : Bridging the Gap Between Black Women and White Women, (New York : Anchor Books, 1996); and Marita Golden and Susan Richards Shreve, Skin Deep: Black women & White Women Write About Race, (New York : Anchor Books, 1995).

According to Flax, the trend in contemporary feminist discussions is to note the importance of race and class, and then "continue as if this very noting...permits [one] to ignore or render neutral...[the] elision of internal differentiation of th[o]se categories."⁵³ In Flax's view, the tendency to merely note the importance of these categories is both the product and generator of the belief that including "other voices," and "other experiences" by simply acknowledging them is indicative of fairness and equal representation. The idea that the problem is one of a failure to include or represent everyone's experiences recapitulates the problems of previous integrationist approaches by leaving unquestioned the existing structures of which one must be "let in." Under such an approach, "women of color" remain the only "race-d" group; questions about how racialized and gendered subjects are mutually produced is insufficiently articulated; and the belief that "one relatively harmonious reality available for a singular mode of representation rests undisturbed."⁵⁴

Thus, even within this explosion of literature on race, class, and gender, little or no attention is given to race, either as a theoretical construct, or as that which is potentially disruptive and mutually constitutive of gender narratives. This trend seems especially problematic, and perhaps even ironic, given that it has taken shape within, what Alcoff has called, "the identity crisis in feminist theory."⁵⁵ The "crisis" of which Alcoff speaks is the problematizing of the

⁵³Jane Flax, Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics and Philosophy, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 6.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵"Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," in Micheline R. Malson, et. al., Feminist Theory in Practice and Process, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 295-336.

category "woman"; the questioning of Enlightenment concepts like reason, the humanist subject, binary oppositions and experience as foundational; and the increasing emphasis on language, discourse, and deconstruction as constituting subjectivities. This type of feminist scholarship prides itself on theorizing "the other." It relies in intense discussions which enunciates the politics of location, particularity, contestation, and counter-modes of thinking and doing.⁵⁶ Thus, it seems paradoxical that such "discourse[s] are often exclusionary even as they call attention to, [and] appropriate, the experience of 'difference' and 'Otherness...'"⁵⁷ Higginbotham sums it up best:

⁵⁶This strain of thinking in feminist theorizing has become associated with postmodernism or post-structuralism, despite the fact that there is very little agreement over the meaning of the term, and that there exist a variety of post-modern "strategies," some of which contradict other postmodern feminists. A representative reading of those works would include, Linda J. Nicholson, ed., Feminism/Postmodernism, (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds., Feminists Theorize the Political, (New York: Routledge, 1992); Jane Flax, Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," in Marianne Hirsch & Evelyn Fox Keller, eds., Conflicts in Feminism, (New York: Routledge, 1990); Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?": Feminism and the Category 'Women' in History, Second Printing, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); and Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, (New York: Routledge, 1990). For texts that discuss postmodernity and postmodernism in general, see Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism, (New York: Routledge, 1989); Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds., A Postmodern Reader, (Albany: State University of New York, 1993); Margaret A. Rose, The Post-modern & the Post-industrial, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Madan Sarup, An Introductory guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

⁵⁷bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness," in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, (Boston: South End Press, 1990), pp. 23-31.

Feminist scholars have moved rapidly forward to addressing theories of subjectivity, questions of difference, the construction of social relations as relations of power, the conceptual implications of binary oppositions such as male versus female or equality versus difference—all issues defined with relevance to gender and with potential for intellectual and social transformations.

*Notwithstanding a few notable exceptions, this new wave has little to say about race. The general trend has been to mention black and Third World feminists who first called attention to the glaring fallacies in essentialist analysis...Beyond this recognition, however, white feminist scholars pay hardly more than lip service to race as they continue to analyze their own experience in ever more sophisticated forms [emphasis added].*⁵⁸

Hence, the question remains: what accounts for the (continued) absence of theorizing the specific nature and production of the African American female subject in relation to race and gender? In cases where race, class and gendered have been noted as important categories, how have they been theorized? Are such theoretical articulations insightful? What is the nature of the narrative that undergirds stories about "women's oppression," and how does that story depend on the elision of race, and by extension, the (in)visibility of Black women?

Here, I want to suggest that the theoretical specificity on race and Black women within contemporary feminist theory can be partially explained by arguing that Black women occupy a subject-position that does not coincide with that of the category "woman." Since feminist theory, takes as its subject, "woman," and attempts to problematize and capture a set of social relations between "men" and "women," feminist theory, as a discourse, must first define "woman." It is this defining process that has established all women as either the "same" or as "sharing commonalties," that prevents an analysis of the way in

⁵⁸Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992), p. 251 & 252.

which race disrupts such monolithic conceptualizations. Despite the current emphasis on "diversity," and "difference" feminist theorizing is still unable to provide the intellectual tools to do any thing other than re-create grand theories about "all" women. Therefore, when the question of race, or the specificity of Black women is raised as an indictment against the myopia of feminist discourses, it is quickly de-radicalized, co-opted, and re-articulated as "new" and inclusive of such issues. This strategy keeps in place the stability or coherence of the category woman or gender, by differentiating women. The differentiating process usually consists of noting that "different women exists" in so much as "different women experience sexism differently." However, sexism, as the primary form of oppression, and "gender" as a category remains privileged in this way of thinking. Part of the reason for this is that the Black female (body) is, as the epigraph at the beginning of this section states, "alien territory, otherness." In American society, the black female body has been invested with various, often contradictory, symbolic meanings, and feminism is as much invested in those meanings as is the larger society. The black female body has been, and continues to be, as is illustrated by the case of Lani Guinier, held up as a spectacle; seen both as the source and embodiment of confusion, and chaos. Thus, in the eyes of contemporary cultural and feminist theory, the African American woman is, in a word, inexplicable.

III. Reading Lani Guinier, Or "The-Black-Woman-(As)-Symbol(ic)"

Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar," "Sapphire" and Earth Mother," "Aunty," "Granny," or God's Holy Fool," a "Miss Ebony First,"..."Black Woman at the Podium," or [Quota Queen]: I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury or rhetorical

wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented."

————Hortense Spillers⁵⁹

Symbols are used for or regarded as representing something other than the symbol itself. Although, connotatively speaking, the symbolic nature of an object is not suppose to have a literal translation, in the case of African American women, this may very well be the case. Nothing stands in for the black female as is the case for most symbols. In a strange, awkward manipulation of linguistic form and psychological projection, peculiar only to the "American Grammar Book,"⁶⁰ one might argue that the black female is a symbol that symbolizes herself. Not only do Black women serve as an icon of radical otherness and chaos, but this chaos is literally transferred from an abstract, metaphorical level to material realm of the flesh and body. As a result, the Black woman does not only represent chaos, she *is* chaos.⁶¹ The case of Lani Guinier is illustrative of this point.

Lani Guinier is an African American law professor who was nominated by President Bill Clinton on April 29, 1993 to be the chief civil-rights lawyer in the Justice Department. With little forewarning, President Clinton called a news conference on June 3, 1993, in which he announced the withdrawal of Guinier as the nominee for the Justice Department's position. Clinton's withdrawal came on

⁵⁹"Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," *Diacritics*, 1987.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹There is a difference between stating that the symbolism of an object is that what it symbolizes versus stating that the symbolism is merely representative. In most cases, this distinction can be made. For example, the American flag is believed to symbolize "freedom," "equality," and "justice for all." However, it would be silly to argue that the flag itself—a peice of cloth—is freedom and equality. However, for Black women, this distinction is at best tenuous.

the heels of acknowledging that he had not read Guinier's academic writings, and therefore, did not know that her ideas were so "divisive."

The significance of this episode in Clintonian politics, is cannot fully be understood by the odd fact that the President endorsed a nominee without reading her scholarly works; neither can its significance be grasped solely within the context of the political dispute between Clinton and the Congressional Black Caucus. Rather, the significance of the Lani Guinier withdrawal is to be found within the discursive formation of the debate itself.

For the purposes at hand, it should be disregarded, at least momentarily, that Guinier did not get the opportunity to defend her views before the Senate Judiciary Committee, as did Zoe Baird, an earlier female nominee for the position of Attorney General.⁶² The lack of support Clinton displayed toward Guinier once attacked by both Democrats and Republicans, should also be temporarily overlooked. Instead, the focus of the Lani Guinier withdrawal must be on the *discursive construction* of Guinier. The manner in which Guinier was constructed in the media and by political pundits and Congressmen, illuminates how Black women are perceived to be the incomprehensible, unknown Other. When compared to the Zoe Baird and Kimba Woods nominations, the implications are more discernible.

Zoe Baird and the Gender Trap: A Woman's Work is Never Done

In December of 1992, President Bill Clinton nominated Zoe Baird to become the first woman Attorney General of the United States. Baird's

⁶²Guinier talked about the politics of her nomination at a lecture given at Rutgers University on December 9, 1993. See also, "Lani Guinier's Day in Court," The New York Times Magazine, (February 27, 1994/Section 6): 38-44, & 54-55, & 66; and her book, The Tyranny of the Majority, op. cit.

credentials were impressive, including a senior level position as an attorney at Aetna Life and Casualty in Hartford, Connecticut. It wasn't until January 14, 1993 when the New York Times broke the story concerning Baird's hiring of "illegal aliens," that she became a controversial figure.⁶³ Baird and her husband, Paul D. Gewirtz, a Yale University law professor, hired a live-in Peruvian couple as their baby-sitter and driver in the summer of 1990. Technically, this was in direct violation of the 1986 Simpson-Mazzoli Immigration Law, which makes it illegal to "knowingly" employ undocumented workers. At first, Baird's seemingly blatant disregard for the law was not problematic for the Clinton administration or the Senate Judiciary Committee, the body that confirms all presidential appointees. Clinton continued to support Baird early on, stating that she had done nothing illegal given that she was sponsoring the woman's citizenship application. Likewise, Senator Orrin Hatch, the ranking Republican member of the Senate Judiciary committee supported Baird arguing that her evasion of the law was "no big deal."⁶⁴ Hatch's position was that

No one is above the law, but people make honest mistakes, and that [i.e., hiring undocumented workers] should not deprive [Zoe Baird] from serving her country. She is a very fine person who has the qualifications to be Attorney General.⁶⁵

⁶³David Johnston, "Clinton's Choice for Justice Department Hired Illegal Aliens for Household," New York Times, January 14, 1993, A 1 and A20.

⁶⁴Quoted in Clifford Krauss, "A Top GOP Senator Backs Nominees in a Storm," New York Times, January 16, 1993, p. A.7.

⁶⁵Ibid.

Baird never denied hiring the Peruvian couple and even paid fines and unpaid Social Security taxes before her confirmation hearings began.⁶⁶ After only two days of Senate hearings, Baird submitted a letter to the President withdrawing her nomination as Attorney General.⁶⁷ Soon thereafter, President Clinton nominated another woman, Federal District Judge Kimba Wood, for the Attorney General position. After reluctantly admitting that she too had a "Zoe Baird problem," Judge Wood also withdrew her name as Attorney General nominee. Despite the fact that Wood did not break any laws related to the hiring of undocumented workers, the fury spawned by Zoe Baird's actions made the issue one of political importance. For Bill Clinton, the issue was one of political savvy and setting the tone for his then embryonic presidency. For others, the "Zoe Baird problem" represented something entirely different.

It is the interpretation of the "Zoe Baird problem" that is of relevance here, rather than the facts chronicling her appearance and disappearance onto the political stage. The popular rhetoric that characterized the content of the discussion around Zoe Baird and what her "problem" means, privileged certain questions and repressed others. The debate produced its own set of priorities and questions, that were and are reflective of more broader questions in politics, especially feminist politics.

⁶⁶Clifford Krauss, "Nominee Pays Fine for Hiring Illegal Aliens," New York Times, January 17, 1993, Section E, p. 22.

⁶⁷See, President Bill Clinton, "Statement on the Withdrawal of the Nomination of Zoe Baird to be Attorney General." Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, 29 (January 25, 1993): 57-91; and "Letter Accepting Zoe Baird's Withdrawal as a Nominee to Be Attorney General," *ibid.* See also, Felicity Barringer, "Clinton Cancels Baird Nomination for Justice Department," New York Times, January 22, 1993, p. A1 and A14.

In general, there are two camps, with varying strains, that formed the content of the Baird debates. The first camp, representing those who were against Baird's confirmation, cited Clinton's promise to change the government by setting higher ethical standard. Moreover, they believed that if confirmed, Baird's position would represent a double-standard. For all purposes, Zoe Baird's confirmation would create one standard for ordinary citizens and one standard for public officials. In fact, "[i]t would be potentially embarrassing for the country's top law enforcement officer, who as Attorney general would supervise the Immigration and Naturalization Service," to have broken that law.⁶⁸

The focus on Baird's dismissal of the law, also raised class issues. Newspaper accounts reported that senators' offices were flooded with phone calls and letters criticizing Baird's actions. "[C]riticisms came from both men and women, especially working class women who noted that they had to pursue their jobs without the opportunity to hire illegal labor that Ms. Baird's much higher income had given her."⁶⁹ "The anger across the country had come in varied tones, like a musical chord. The dominant note was one of class, of resentment over what seemed like a double-standard that favored the rich."⁷⁰ At a more visceral level, there was some admonition that Zoe Baird was "just being greedy"

⁶⁸Johnston, New York Times, op, cit., A 20.

⁶⁹Clifford Kraus, "Baird Apologizes to the Senate Panel for Illegal Hiring," New York Times, January 20, 1993, A 16.

⁷⁰Felicity Barringer, "Clinton Cancels Baird Nomination for Justice Department: Much Outrage, Little Sympathy on Main Stree," New York Times January 22, 1993, A1, and A14.

and not paying her workers a decent salary whatever their legal status.⁷¹

Similarly, Diane Rehm was quoted as saying that "[t]here were also feelings that this was a so-called 'yuppie crime.' That people in positions of power and money were feeling they could do whatever they wanted, and to hell with the rest of the country."⁷²

By highlighting the class issue, the issue became one of either the "ordinary citizen" against the "big, corrupt government" or "the rich," embodied in Zoe Baird's actions, versus those who could not afford live-in help. Those who took this position were usually against Baird's confirmation.

The second set of arguments actually represent a response to those that emphasized the class dimensions of the public outcry. This group maintained that the question was one of gender, not class, and that Baird was being harassed because she was a woman. Moreover, the argument goes, her actions represent those of any mother and should not be the basis of denying her public service. For this group, the child-care issue was (and is) still yet another strategy to keep women out of high-profile, government.

Not surprisingly, feminists seized the opportunity to explain what Baird meant when she told the Senate Judiciary Committee that she "was forced into this dilemma to care for [her] child."⁷³ Some thought it no coincidence that the first woman chosen to be Attorney General "was caught with her child-care

⁷¹The couple was paid 2,000 per month plus room and board. Baird and her husband earned \$660,345.00 in 1992. Cited in "Baird's Nomination for Attorney General Withdrawn," Facts on File, January 28, 1993.

⁷²Felicity Barringer, *op. cit.*, p. A14.

⁷³Clifford Krauss, New York Times, January 16, 1993, A 16.

down."⁷⁴ Others argued that the issue could not possibly be a class issue because the "supposedly class-conscious American public" didn't rail against the other rich members of Clinton's administration.⁷⁵ Consequently, as Katha Pollitt explains, "it was gender that did in Ms. Baird. Nothing but gender explains why the public—including the female public—visited wrath on Ms. Baird."⁷⁶

What precisely do these commentators mean when they say that "it was gender that did in Ms. Baird?" At one level, it means that Baird was targeted because she was a woman. Disregarding the fact that at least two other women had already been confirmed to serve in Clinton's cabinet, the feminists who took to the OP-ED pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post, argued that Baird was deliberately asked questions about her family and children because of her gender. They noted that "...no one on the Judiciary Committee asked any of Clinton's male nominees who cleaned their houses or minded their children [because] [t]hat's the little woman's department."⁷⁷ By refusing to ask all the nominees personal questions, this came to be seen as obvious gender bias.

At another related level, gender as the explanation of Baird's rejection, was seen as perpetuating the idea that women are natural suitors of child-care. It kept women and moms unabashedly linked. It sent the message that it is the woman's job—and only the woman's job—to take care of the children and other

⁷⁴Anna Quindlen, "The Sins of Zoe Baird," OP-ED in the New York Times, January 20, 1993, A 23.

⁷⁵See Katha Pollitt, "Just Ask Zoe," The Nation, February 15, 1993, p. 185 and 199.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 185.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

domestic duties. This assumption was reinforced when Baird claimed that it was her husband who had been responsible for hiring the undocumented couple that worked for them. At this assertion, a burst of laughter rang out in the Senate chambers, indicating that it is not easy for women to place the blame on their husbands when the issue is domestically oriented. On the other hand, men are able to blame their wives for mishaps in the household, because the private sphere is their socially acceptable domain. For example,

[t]wenty years ago, it was learned that the then-Deputy Attorney General, William Ruckelshaus, had an alien woman with an improper visa working in his home. The arrangement was attributed to his wife, Jill, and the story quickly died down.⁷⁸

Many of the writers who analyzed Baird's nomination from a gendered perspective, noted that the age-old link between women and childcare was made clear in Baird's own testimony. It was Baird, they insisted, who pointed out that she "was acting at that time [i.e., at the time of hiring the undocumented workers] really more as a mother than as someone who would be sitting here designated to be Attorney General."⁷⁹ The "chasm between what is expected as a mom and what is demanded as a professional"⁸⁰ resonated with quite a few feminists who went to absurd lengths to defend Zoe Baird. Some argued that breaking the Simpson-Mazolli law was commonplace and that she should not be the one targeted for a much-violated act. "True, what Baird and Gewirtz did was illegal," Pollitt acknowledges, "[b]ut the great secret of the American life is

⁷⁸Anthony Lewis, "It's Gender Stupid," OP-ED in the New York Times, February 8, 1993, A17.

⁷⁹Anna Quindlen, January 20, 1993, op. cit.

⁸⁰Ibid.,

that almost everyone breaks the law."⁸¹ Paupuso Molina, Director of the University of Iowa's Women's Resource Action Center was quoted as saying, "I'm sure hundreds of thousands of 'regular' citizens end up employing undocumented immigrants. She wasn't so out of line. It's something many middle and upper-class citizens do."⁸² Still others discussed the design of the bill, arguing that its creators never intended to actually enforce violators, especially homemakers. They argued that "[i]n practice, the immigration service rarely prosecutes people who employ illegal aliens in their homes."⁸³

Such justifications of Baird's actions were made because of the unmasked connections that were made between her gender and her expected social role in the private sphere. Hence, it is no wonder that Zoe Baird (and Kimba Wood) became symbols of the feminist struggle. As Mary Frances Berry put it,

Women [were] right to feel frustrated and astounded that Zoe Baird and Kimba Wood...should withdraw over matters related to child care. They are justifiably angry with talk shows, the President, and the Senate, but there is a deeper issue here: the tradition of 'mothercare' for children. The nominations ran into difficulty because women still accept principal responsibility for child care.⁸⁴

To reveal the sexist assumptions underlying both Baird's and Wood's withdrawal, was an opportunity to break the connection associated with gender and the public/private split. The rhetoric surrounding the debate took to task

⁸¹The Nation, op. cit., 199.

⁸²Barringer, New York Times, January 22, 1993, op. cit.

⁸³See David Johnston, op. cit., p. 4, and Jeffrey Rosen, "Race, Immigration, and Nannies: Good Help," The New Republic, February 15, 1993, 12-15.

⁸⁴"The Father's Hour," Op-ED in the New York Times, February 10, 1993, A23.

beliefs about housework, women and their natural role. Feminists have long since understood the link and have defined it in these terms:

A housewife is a woman: A housewife does housework...The synthesis of 'house' and 'wife' in a single term establishes the connections between womanhood, marriage, and the dwelling place of family groups. The role of the housewife is a family role: it is a feminine role. Yet it is also a work role. A housewife is 'the person, other than a domestic servant, who is responsible for most of the household duties (or for supervising a domestic servant who carries out these duties)'" [emphasis added].⁸⁵

Thus, "gender" and "gender roles" became key concepts in the Zoe Baird debates. The point was to highlight the connections that are made between women and the role they are expected to play as housewife and mother. As a result, "women's subordination" and "sexism" were the privileged categories. Certainly, in this case, there

was indeed an issue of gender, and that in many significant ways Baird was unfairly treated because she was a woman, [but] to articulate it solely in those terms and not to articulate the underlying class, and to some extent race issues, perpetuates the idea that these issues come in separate identifiable packages. It also might perpetuate the notion among many people who do not identify with feminist theory, feminist politics, or feminist discourse, that it is primarily concerned about one particular elite group of women.⁸⁶

Because the debate took as its point of departure "women" and their assumed or natural roles as mother and child-care providers, it overlooked the racial constitution of those gender roles. For example, the definition provided by

⁸⁵AnnOakley, Woman's Work, op. cit., 1.

⁸⁶Kimberle Crenshaw Williams, Lecture given at Rutgers University, February 25, 1993. Transcribed from audio cassette which is available from the Institute for Research on Women, 27 Clifton Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08903.

Ann Oakley above, associates the role of wife and motherhood with femininity. "A housewife is a woman," she claims, and it is "a feminine role." If we can define femininity as a certain "virginal innocence," an "exquisite aesthetic," and the "principle [that] is composed of vulnerability, the need for protection, the formalities of compliance and...an appeal of dependence,"⁸⁷ then we know from history that by definition Black women are excluded both from the category "woman" and "feminine." Moreover, Oakley's definition unwittingly clarifies the hidden race and class assumptions embedded within the universal notion of "gender issues." The definition she uses distinguishes between the "housewife" and "a domestic servant," i.e., the person supervised by the housewife. This distinction *necessarily* implies an unequal social relationship, which makes the concept of housewife and gender subordination less universal, and thus less applicable. In addition, given that historically, domestic workers have been composed mostly of African American women, the distinction challenges the very notion of a sole gender issue.

These unarticulated aspects were repressed in the Zoe Baird debate precisely because gender was the privileged category. The "unacknowledged subtext of the Baird hearings concern race, not law [or gender], and it threaten[ed] to confuse the debate about immigration policy"⁸⁸ and to disrupt feminist identity politics. The racial subtext(s) of the Zoe Baird debate fell into at least three categories: (1) Immigration Policy; (2) Employment Discrimination; and (3) Domestic Work.

⁸⁷Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity*, (London: Grafton Books, 1984), 4 & 5.

⁸⁸Jeffrey Rosen, "Race, Immigration, and Nannies: Good Help," op. cit., 12.

The first category concerned immigration policy itself and the ethnocentrism displayed by "legally" allowing certain groups into the United States, while rejecting others. The second category consists of those forms of employment discrimination against undocumented workers and American citizens of color. The third category, which was not raised in any public manner, focuses on who actually performs domestic work. I discuss these three components of the hidden racial subtext of the Zoe Baird nomination at length elsewhere.* The significant points here are: (1) Zoe Baird, and by extension Kimba Wood, received overwhelming public support "as women" from women; (2) Because of this, they became symbols of "woman's plight" by serving as living examples of the double standard placed on women; and (3) their bungled nominations produced a national debate on women in the public sphere, immigration laws, and childcare. Of greater significance is that the interpretation of Baird's and Wood's nomination as symbolic of "woman's lot" did not transfer to the case of Lani Guinier. In fact, Guinier's gender was never linked to her nomination, or to the manner in which she was constructed. The reason for the absence of commentary on Guinier's political and social position as a woman stems from the fact that Guinier is an African American woman. This is not to suggest that Guinier was "discriminated against" or that the silence on her political position constitutes racism. Rather, the point is that this silence can be, in part, contributed to the perception and the production of the African American female (body) as hopelessly incomprehensible, chaotic, and unreadable. In the final analysis Guinier, like the Black Female Subject, is really "not like women at all."⁸⁹

⁸⁹Farred Grant, "'Not Like Women at All': Black Female Subjectivity in Laretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die*," *Genders* 9 (Spring 1993):

Lani Guinier: 'Not Like [a] Wom[a]n At All'

Unlike the Zoe Baird and Kimba Wood nominations, in which both women were perceived as representing the plight of professional, working mothers thereby, raising issues of childcare, the public/ private split, and even the nature and efficacy immigration laws, the Lani Guinier nomination produced little substantive debate on issues like reapportionment, the erosion of civil-rights laws, the political empowerment of minorities, or the failure of the Voting Rights Act. The most striking feature of the Lani Guinier episode was that it tended to focus on personal features of Guinier. Instead of focusing on issues, the debate surrounding Lani Guinier focused on Guinier—the person— including images of the body, physical features, and even psychological attitude. None of these elements characterized the Zoe Baird controversy, and none prompted a national discussion on race or racism or the position of Black women in society.

Given this, one can read the Lani Guinier controversy as being unique to Black women. The statement most illustrative of this fact is the well-publicized characterization of Guinier in a popular news magazine. The opening sentence from an article on Guinier in the June 7, 1993 issue of the U.S. News and World Report read: "Strange name, strange hair, strange writings—she's history."⁹⁰ The Congressman that uttered this characterization perhaps would have wanted us to translate this statement into a pronouncement of the political defeat of Guinier as a Justice Department nominee. In this sense, "she's history" is interpreted as "she's no longer a viable nominee;" "she's out of the picture;" or "she's unable to win needed support for confirmation." However, there seems to be a double meaning to the Congressman's characterization of Guinier, and part of that meaning can be found between the letters "e" and "s" in the contracted

⁹⁰Donald Baer, "The Trials of Lani Guinier," U.S. News & World Report, June 7, 1993, 38.

word "she's." The omitted letter, "i", which is replaced in the word by an apostrophe, is the grammatical elision that allows for one to read the "she's history" phrase as "no longer in the picture." Since, this reading leaves one wondering what Guinier's name or hair has to do with her nomination as chief civil-rights attorney, the omitted "i" seems to be the only logical way of bridging the physical or bodily interjections of Guinier to the claim that she is politically defeated as a nominee. By replacing the "i" in the contracted word "she's", the statement would read: "Strange name, strange hair, strange writings—she *is* history." With this re-reading, one is able to connect the Congressman's invocations of Guinier's hair and name to Guinier as a "black woman," and the position that Black women have occupied in what Hortense Spillers calls the symbolic order of naming. Spillers argues that Black women exist in a "paradox of non-being" which is the product of the inability of language to name and describe the Black woman. For Spillers, this inability

...originates in the historical moment at which language ceases to speak, the historical moment at which hierarchies of power (even the ones to which some women belong) simply run out of terms because the empowered meets in the black female the veritable nemesis of degree and differences. [Thus], having encountered [in the black female] what... [is] understood as chaos, the empowered need not name further since chaos is sufficient naming within itself.[emphasis added]⁹¹

In other words, the Black female—in all of her bodily characteristics—has historically served as the structuring symbol of difference and chaos. Note for example, the Congressman's repeated use of the word "strange" in the statement "strange name, strange hair, strange writing." The repeated characterization of Guinier as "strange" functions as a signifier in which Guinier—as a black woman—

⁹¹Hortense Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," from Carole Vance, ed., Pleasure and Danger, (New York: Routledge, 1984).

—is figured as unreadable and indecipherable. Not only is the Representative distracted by the impossible pronunciation and spelling of Guinier's last name, but he is confounded by the strangeness i.e., the physicality of her hair, which of course, is an extension of her visible blackness. The "strangeness" of Guinier's writings follow only as a result of the strangeness of the person, or more precisely, the chaos that produced those writings. For implicit in the Congressman's comments is the understanding that he simply cannot "figure out" or decipher Guinier, or her writings— they are to him, like Guinier herself, too "strange" and too different. Thus, the indecipherability or mis-reading of Guinier's writings signify the indecipherability or mis-reading of Guinier, (read here as the Black woman).

The hair as a signifier of blackness and representative of the "inner psyche" must be embraced as an important concept in the Guinier nomination. In a caricature featured in the New Republic (see Figure 4.1), drawing artist Vint Lawrence visually represents Guinier's hair as so uncontrollable, as so terribly excessive and unyielding, that it virtually exceeds the frame that outlines the drawing. The importance of the visual representation of (black) hair can not be overstated for it signifies, as it did during the Black Power Movement of the 1960's, that which is most clearly "black." Unlike the "Black is beautiful" aesthetic, symbolized by the hairstyle known as the "afro", the image of Guinier's hair operates as all that is "wrong" with blackness. In an earlier drawing of another Black woman, Nobel Prize recipient Toni Morrison, Vint Lawrence shapes the hair in such a way that it literally "jumps out at you!" (See Figure 4.1). In the drawing of Morrison, she is literally caricatured as the Black Medusa, and considering that the drawing strategically accompanies an article entitled "Aunt Medea" in which Morrison is described as the "literary conjure woman," it seems

Figure 4.1 Lani Guinier and Toni Morrison



Caricature of Lani Guinier by Vint Lawrence
The New Republic, June 14, 1993



Caricature of Toni Morrison by Vint Lawrence
The New Republic, October 19, 1987

Used With Permission.

more than obvious that the Black woman's hair is at least one way of signifying her presumed insanity.⁹²

In recounting the reference to her hair as strange, Lani Guinier wrote, "I endured the personal humiliation of being vilified as the 'madwoman' with the strange name, strange hair—you know what that means—[someone] with strange ideas."⁹³ As Sullivan and Turner point out, "few male political figures receive media attention on their hair styles," but a strictly gendered analysis can not account for why white women do not receive media attention on their hairstyles as well. Because hair, along with skin color, is one of the most visible signifiers of race, its significance in the construction of Black women's intellectual ability and political commitments cannot be underestimated. "The comment 'strange,' " for example, "encodes associations of 'out-of-place,' prompting the notion that people with kinky, African hair do not belong on the public stage assuming positions of power."⁹⁴

⁹²For a discussion on the social and cultural meanings of African American hair, see Paulette Caldwell, "A Hair Piece: Perspectives on the Intersections of Race and Gender," in Adrienne Katherine Wing, ed., Critical Race Feminism: A Reader, (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Deborah Grayson, "Is it Fake?: Black Women's Hair as Spectacle and Spec(tac)ular," Camera Obscura No. 36 (September 1995): 13-30; bell hooks, "Straightening Our Hair," Zeta Magazine (September 1988): 33-37; Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," in Russell Ferguson, et. al., eds., Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, op cit., Noliwe M. Rooks, Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, "Hair: The Straight and Nappy of it All," in The Color Complex, (New York: Anchor Books, 1992);

⁹³"Lani Guinier: The Making of a Cause Celebre," Crisis 100 (August-September 1993): 23-26.

⁹⁴Patricia A. Sullivan and Lynn H. Turner, From Margins to the Center: Contemporary Women and Political Communication, op. cit., 55.

Other constructions of Guinier that appeared in national magazines and newspapers included images of Guinier as "radical," "racist" and even "insane." Again, the focus is on the person(al), in this case Guinier's attitude or psychological disposition. For example, Ray Kerrison authored a commentary in the New York Post in which he referred to Guinier as "Loonie Lani." Kerrison warns readers to ignore Guinier's articulate speech, conservative dress, and educational credentials. "In a word," Kerrison writes, "Lani Guinier may appear to be learned, presentable and articulate, but at heart she is a crackpot." In addition, as Sullivan and Turner note, odd comparisons were made of Guinier to Anita Hill and Tawana Brawley (a fifteen year old Black girls who accused two New York City police officers of rape) with the explicit characterization that each were "loony, out-of-control black women crazed by the repeated spurnings of men they just couldn't let go of."⁹⁵ The editor of a local newspaper in Guinier's hometown dubbed her as a "mad woman" and Ben Wattenberg crafted sensationistic puns in which Guinier became the "Vicar of Victimization," and the Czarina of Czeparatism."

Perhaps the most notorious of the names given to Guinier was "quota queen," a label that, not surprisingly, sounds like its close relative the "welfare queen," which is a coded and negative term for "black women on welfare." Appearing in the Wall Street Journal⁹⁶ only one day after Clinton announced Guinier as the nominee, the "Quota Queen" label effectively collapsed the complex issues of affirmative action, welfare, and voting rights legislation into a single phrase and then mapped it onto the body of Lani Guinier. The connection between the labels "quota queen" and "welfare queen" is not merely cerebral.

⁹⁵Ibid., 59.

⁹⁶Clint Bolick, "Clinton's Quota Queens." The Wall Street Journal, April 30, 1993, Section A., p. 2, col. 4

Newsweek published an article in May of 1993 in which it crowned Guinier as the "Quota Queen", and by quoting one of her former colleagues, suggested that Guinier was "trying to fatten the welfare state." Commenting on the connections being made between quota queen and welfare queen, Guinier remarked, "[a]s if, conveniently enough, as a black woman, I wasn't a welfare queen, so I must be a quota queen."⁹⁷

Some political observers argued that Guinier was perceived as a welfare queen and thus treated accordingly, especially by Bill Clinton. On the day that Clinton withdrew Guinier's nomination, he waited, literally until minutes before the press conference, to call Guinier to inform her of his decision, despite the fact that he had met with her earlier that evening.⁹⁸ After the press conference, it was reported that

Clinton sat down at a lavish dinner party in the White House and told his guests... 'I just love her [i.e., Lani Guinier].... If she called me and told me she needed \$5,000, I'd take it from my account and send it to her no questions asked.' As one observer remarked, 'he was treating her like a welfare queen—read Quota Queen—looking for a handout. [His statement] had the instant effect of putting her

⁹⁷It is worth noting that since the Reagan administration, the word 'queen' has been negatively attached to Black women in three different areas: (a) politically, (b) economically, (3) sexually. Politically, the word queen has been attached to "quotas" (Lani Guinier), economically to welfare recipients (which in the public imagination connotes Black women), and sexually to condom distribution and sex education in public schools (Joycelyn Elders). Pinderhughes attributes her observation of a similar use of the word "queen" to Wade Henderson. See Pinderhughes, *op. cit.*, 27.

⁹⁸Newspaper accounts reveal that Clinton drafted a press release on Guinier's nomination on the morning of June 3, 1993. Thus, at the time of the 6:00 meeting with Guinier, Clinton had already made a decision and that meeting would not have affected it.

[i.e., Guinier] in a subservient position and him in a position of great generosity.⁹⁹

One must keep in mind that the image of the Quota/Welfare Queen, the reading of Guinier as "radical", "dangerous" "looney," and "mad," were all said to have emerged from Guinier's writings; that it was she who had made herself look "radical" and "dangerous" not the political pundits. After Guinier published her book, The Tryanny of the Majority, one journalist decided to take a "second look at Lani Guinier" in which, not surprisingly, Guinier looked exactly as she had in the "first look".¹⁰⁰ Leo paints Guinier as a vascillating ideologue and a sloppy academic. He describes her writings as "convoluted" so that one has "to struggle to put her ideas in plain English...even for an academic." Furthermore, Leo adds, Guinier as someone who is "hard to pin down" primarily because "[she] has a real problem with clarity and directness." In addition, Leo continues, Guinier insists upon advocating "exotic remedies" based upon a distorted understanding of race in electoral politics. "'Exotic' is, as Turner and Sullivan note, "an unusual word choice for someone's legal views with its connotations of primitivism, nativeness, and sexuality. [Afterall], it is the same word that was used to describe the performer Josephine Baker, an African American woman known for her sexually explicit dances."¹⁰¹

In this sense, Leo's characterization of Guinier's proposals for change as "exotic" is merely an extension of the Black Woman's symbolic position. The

⁹⁹Karen Branan, "Lani Guinier: The Anatomy of a Betrayal," Ms., op. cit., 57.

¹⁰⁰John Leo, "A Second Look at Lani Guinier," U.S. News & World Report, March 14, 1994, 19.

¹⁰¹Patricia A. Sullivan and Lynn H. Turner, From Margins to the Center: Contemporary Women and Political Communication, op. cit., 59.

"strangeness" of Guinier's hair, the image of quota/ welfare queen, and the references to Guinier's volatile nature and psychological instability, all seem to rely upon the black female body as excessive and therefore inexplicable.

Guinier's writings are "convoluted" and "exotic" because they issue from the body constructed, preceived and accepted as such. Again, Spillers has argued that the black female (body) is the

principle point of passage between the human and the non-human world...[t]he focus of a ...[range of] difference[s]—visual, psychological, and ontological—...by which the dominant male decides the distinction between humanity and the 'other.'¹⁰²

If in fact "the black female, [as] the veritable nemesis of degree and differences, [is] understood as chaos," then we can re-read and re-write the Congressman's proclamation "she's history" into "she is history," meaning that Guinier represents the repertoire of conflicting and confounding identities that have historically symbolized and continues to inform the Black Woman's subject-position. Even Guinier did not fully realize the connotations of the Congressman's consignment of her to the annals of "history" in writing the following:

According to one Democratic staffer (quoted anonymously in U.S. News and World Report), I was 'history' because I had a 'strange name, strange hair and strange writings. Likewise, civil rights issues have been consigned to a similar fate: issues of race and racism are 'history'; they once were important, but unless we want to be known as race-obsessed, we are no longer to discuss race in polite conversation or law review articles.¹⁰³

¹⁰²Hortense Spillers, "Interstices," op. cit., 76.

¹⁰³Quoted in "Lani Guinier: The Making of a Cause Celebre," *Crisis*, op. cit.

As history, the symbolic character of the Black Woman is not simply a "forgotten part of the past," or an antiquated relic of a bygone era. Rather, she is the past; that which provides both the substance and the reason for the future. She is "the principle point of passage between the human and non-human world"; the dark, mysterious soil within which "humanity" and "civilization" would anchor its roots. She is the legitimating ground for (white) purity, morality and virginal innocence.¹⁰⁴ In short, the Black Woman is unknown and unfamiliar territory.

The idea that Black women see themselves in (the demonization of) Lani Guinier is illustrated by the historic meeting of Black women academicians in January 1994. As the first keynote speaker of a conference, appropriately titled, "Black Women in the Academy: Defending Our Name: 1894-1994," Guinier spoke ardently about how the "repressive construction of black women as social pathogens...sanction the tyranny and inequalities of the social order."¹⁰⁵ The first question directed at Guinier began with the assertion, " 'You are me and I am you'."¹⁰⁶ That Black women recognized themselves in Guinier suggests that the images produced by Guinier's nomination re-constructed and reinforced the Black woman as, not just "other," but as the "radical other." Guinier, in all of her "strangeness" merely became to embodiment of this Otherness. Thus, the references to and images of Guinier's "physicalness" can only be explained by her social and symbolic position as a Black woman.

¹⁰⁴Sander Gilman.....

¹⁰⁵Saidiya Hartman, "The Territory Between Us: A Report on 'Black Women in the Academy: Defending Our Name: 1894-1994,'" Callaloo 17 (1994): 439-449.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 442.

The lack of a feminist or gendered analysis on the construction of Guinier as a "quota queen," "strange" and "radical," is quite disturbing, particularly when one considers the tremendous response to Zoe Baird and Kimba Wood.¹⁰⁷ While the politically explosive topics of gerrymandering and reapportionments may partially explain the less than enthusiastic support for Guinier's nomination, only her position as a Black woman can explain the absence of critiques from feminists of Guinier's projection as "radical," "looney," and "insane." In all fairness, Ms. magazine did publish an article three months *after* Lani Guinier's nomination had been withdrawn.¹⁰⁸ More importantly, that essay discussed Guinier's characterizations within the context of the "appropriate ideological stance on Civil Rights policy," not in terms of gender or in terms of (Black) women's position in public and political spaces. In fact, the article seemed to admonish "the 40 member Congressional Black Caucus [for]...showing quiet support" and chided members of the legislature because "no one man or woman stood up in the House of Senate to champion Guinier's cause."¹⁰⁹ Yet, between April 29 and August 30, 1993, the dates spanning Guinier's nomination, withdrawal, and media coverage, Ms. magazine never carried one article,

¹⁰⁷See the attached Bibliography for a small sample of the numerous articles written (mostly defending) about Zoe Baird and Kimba Woods. It is also interesting to note that initially, Zoe Baird did not have the support of various feminist or women's organizations, yet during the controversy they stood with Baird as a woman. Guinier, on the other hand was supported by the National Organization for Women (NOW), National Rights Abortion League (NRAL), and several African American and civil rights organizations including the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC).

¹⁰⁸Karen Branan, "Lani Guinier: The Anatomy of a Betrayal," op. cit.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 56.

commentary, or editorial defending Guinier's nomination or at questioning the media's characterizations of her.

However, the absence of a discussion over the racial and gendered constructions of Guinier bespeaks of a larger theoretical problem in feminist theory. It suggests that theoretically, feminist theory and feminist politics is unable to come to terms with the historical enunciations of the Black female (body), and is thus unable to grasp her symbolic significance in contemporary cultural terms. This inability manifests itself in the continued elision of Black women's experience from "women's issues." However, the most problematic consequence of this inability is that Black women's experience, when it is included, is devalued, trivialized or reduced to that of white women's experiences. In an effort to analyze "women's issues," like rape, domestic violence, and the public and private spheres, Black women are subsumed under the ambiguous phrase "women as a group." We understand "women's issues like public/private barriers, rape, and sexual harassment, as "women's issues" only because the historical constructions of Black women have been elided within the phrase itself. The only way to make the category "woman" coherent and legitimate, is to make the (historical) experiences of Black women incoherent, and illegitimate. This homogenization process prohibits a theoretical examination of how race defines who can (and cannot) occupy and claim the subject-position "woman." The internal structure, indeed the very coherence of contemporary feminist theory, depends upon the incoherence and allegedly unreadability of the female body. Given this dependence, it is theoretically impossible to discuss issues about "women as a group" without eliding the specificity of African American women.

IV: Disrupting Gender Narratives: Racializing the Story

At the beginning of this chapter, I stated that feminist "stories" of women's oppression are stories that privilege gender at the expense of race. More precisely, I argued that in order to maintain a coherent narrative about the nature of women's oppression, race must be figured as incoherent; as inaccessible. I used the Lani Guinier nomination in comparison to the Zoe Baird nomination, as an illustration of the Black Woman's symbolic position as the "unknown Other." The inability of feminists to produce a "gendered" analysis of the Guinier nomination suggests that as a discourse, feminist theory, reads the Black Woman as incomprehensible. In this section, I want to briefly outline how the construction of the African American Woman as incomprehensible insures the coherence of "women are oppressed as a group" narrative. Using the concepts of the public versus the private sphere, and the issue of rape, I want to illustrate that feminist articulations of "woman's condition" are predicated on the theoretical erasure of Black women. Critically reading the Lani Guinier nomination, in terms of its implications for feminist theorizing is, I believe, the most significant point of the preceding analysis. Since the problem of Black women's erasure is not simply one of "including" the experiences of Black women, it is worthwhile to explore the ways in which a racialized understanding of the public and private spheres and rape, actually disrupts homogenous notions of "women as a group."

Whose "Private Sphere"?, or Better Yet, What "Private Sphere"?

In Justice and Gender,¹¹⁰ author Deborah L. Rhode attempts to outline the ways in which law "illumines as well as influences the cultural construction of

¹¹⁰Justice and Gender, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

gender."¹¹¹ In situating the cultural construction of gender within the social text of the law, Rhode is implying that the law is a concrete way of measuring sex-based discrimination, as well as a method for telling a story about gender in American society. The story that Rhode tells is a story that is premised on the notion that inequalities between "the sexes," and its articulation in the law, is a *fundamental* difference; and a difference that is not constituted through racial differentiation. In fact, Rhode makes it clear that the subject of her book is "women as a group."¹¹² But this notion of "women as a group" does not pre-exist the story that Rhode tells. The homogeneity inherent within the phrase is in part, constituted by and in the story that unfolds in Justice and Gender. Rhode's apparent political necessity to speak *as a woman for women*, is prefigured by the assumption that we know what a "woman" is and how that subject position is constituted.¹¹³ For Rhode, the cultural construction of gender is separate from, and indifferent to the construction of racial difference. In fact, Rhode is only able to claim the category "women as a group" with the specific disavowal of race and the history of racism.

In the opening chapter of the book and before the "story" of sex-based inequality in the law begins, Rhodes establishes women *as* a group by explicitly relegating race and the experience of African American women as existing outside the context of gender difference. She writes:

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 2.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹³For an excellent discussion of the problems with such thinking, see Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., Feminists Theorize the Political, (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992), pp. 3-21.

American feminism developed in response to a social structure in which male and female roles were largely separate and anything but equal. From its very beginning, this nation inherited a tradition in which gender defined the geography of social life. For the most part, men occupied the "public" sphere of political and commercial activity, women occupied the "private" sphere of domestic life, and the law respected those boundaries. *Women of color were of course, subject to vastly more restrictive formal and informal codes. However for purposes of understanding the general evolution of sex-discrimination law, it makes sense here to focus on mandates applicable to women as a group, outside the particular context of slavery.*[emphasis added]¹¹⁴

The idea that it only "*makes sense...to focus on mandates applicable to women as a group, outside the particular context of slavery,*" seem so obviously problematic that a critical dissection of this statement hardly seems fair.

First, Rhode hasn't the political savvy to name the specific group of women to whom she is referring. Instead she uses the ambiguous phrase "women of color."¹¹⁵ We can assume with some confidence that she is referring specifically to African American women, because she advises us that it would "make sense" to focus on women as a group "outside the particular context of slavery." Since African American women were the only women legally enslaved on the basis of race, Rhode successfully and ironically, captures the dilemma of Black women. That is, Rhode's not-mentioning-but mentioning of the bonded-woman depicts the non-being of black women. It signifies

¹¹⁴[*ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁵[characterize the popular phrase "women of color" as ambiguous because it forces me to ask, which women, and what color? Moreover, it is simply another "other" category that uses white women as the norm or standard from which "other" women, i.e., women of color, are to be measured. It divides the world into white women and not-white women. This is not to deny the political significance of the term. African (American) women have used the phrase "women of color" as a form of political empowerment. It is often used to indicate the global connections between and among women across the globe who are victims of white imperialist patriarchy.

the paradox of a being that is at once captive and absent in discourse, constantly spoken of but itself inaudible or inexpressible, displayed as a spectacle and still unrepresented as unrepresentable, invisible yet constituted as the object and the guarantee of vision; *a being whose existence and specificity are simultaneously asserted and denied, negated and controlled.*¹¹⁶ [emphasis added]

¹¹⁶Adapted from Teresa deLauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," Feminist Studies 16 (Spring 1990): 115-150. de Lauretis describes this paradox as one of three "moments of self-conscious reflection" in feminist theory. She is, of course, speaking about "women as women," and how that subject position has been theorized and positioned in both malestream and feminist discourses. I am adapting this concept to describe black women within feminist scholarship. I believe that the paradox of Black women being both absent and present is the first and only moment of conscious reflection for African American women feminist scholarship and in African American Studies scholarship. African American feminist scholars have long since recognized how both discourses represent an erasure of Black women in their specificity. The call for "Black Women's Studies," and the increase in the number of writings by and/or about African American women are responses to this recognition. On Black Women's Studies, see, Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., All the Women Are White, All the Black Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies, (New York: The City University of New York: 1982); and Delores Aldridge, "'Womanist Issues in Black Studies: Towards Integrating Africana Women into Africana Studies,'" Journal of the National Council for Black Studies, 1 (May 1992): 167-182. For some recent works on African American women, see, Margaret Busby, Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writings by Women of African Descent from the Ancient Egyptian to the Present. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992); Nancie Caraway, Segregated Sisterhood: Racism and the Politics of American Feminism, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Stanlie M. James and Abena P.A. Busia, eds., Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women, (New York: Routledge, 1994); Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Race and Sex in America, (New York: William and Morrow and Company, 1984); Darlene Clark Hine, ed. Black Women in American History: The Twentieth Century. Sixteen Volume Series. Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1990. Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, From Slavery to the Present, (New York: Basic Books, 1985);

Second, a strong argument can be made against the unqualified statement that "men occupied the 'public' sphere of political and commercial activity, [and] women occupied the private sphere of domestic life." Under slavery there were no "public" and "private" spheres as it is conceptualized in feminist theory.

Feminists have long used the public/private concept to "distinguish between the domain of personal relations and the domain of political and other forms of political life."¹¹⁷ Women and men had different economic, social and familial roles. According to Scott, "...women were considered adjunct and secondary to men in economic life...[T]he husband's [job was] to supply or provide [for the wife and family]; the wife's, to use the goods frugally and obey."¹¹⁸ These arguments sought to indicate the ways in which women's lives were regulated by invisible or informal codes. It became a powerful tenet of feminist theory that women's oppression originated in the family or the private sphere where unequal sexual and social relations defined "woman's existence." The fact that women could not own property, or that "a wife's property and earnings legally belonged to her husband,"¹¹⁹ is often cited as evidence of the legal sanctification of private and public spheres.

However, little evidence supports that the public/private split applied to slaves in general, and slave women in particular. The public sphere as the

¹¹⁷Carol C. Gould, "Private Rights and Public Virtues: Women the Family and Democracy," in Carol C. Gould, ed., in Beyond Domination, p. 3. See also, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: Women's Shpere in New England, 1780-1835, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977);

¹¹⁸Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood, op. cit., pp. 22-23, *passim*.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 21. See also, Carol Smart, ed. Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality, (Routledge: New York, 1992)

sphere of political participation and economic independence, was made impossible by the institution of slavery. In fact, it wasn't until 1965, a full century after the passage of the "slave amendments," that the voting was legally enforced. The existence of the private sphere, as Rhode (and feminist thinking in general) wants us to understand it, did not exist for Black women. Marriages between slaves, when they did occur, did not carry the same legal weight, if any at all, that the marriage of a white couple did. The strict familial roles that feminists have used to characterize women's private sphere are historically inaccurate in the specific case of Black women. Under slavery, Black women performed arduous and masculine-like tasks in equal proportions to slave men.¹²⁰ After slavery, their continued association with "dirty work" and hard labor, coupled with racism and economic restrictions, made it necessary for Black women to continue their work outside the home for economic survival. Thus, while most white women complained about their confinement to the home, Black had already been economic supporters in their families.

A third problem with Rhode's insistence on focusing on "mandates that are applicable to women as a group," is that she professes to focus on the law. Yet, in a single sentence, she is able to dismiss the legal sanctifications that defined a whole race of people as, not merely sub-human, but as non-human. For the bonded, the law did not "respect boundaries" of public and private as Rhode believes, the law *was* the boundary. It defined the very existence of the slave *as a slave*, and regarded men and women as property, not as persons. As such, black women (and men) were not subject *to* the law, as Rhode wants us to

¹²⁰Jacqueline Jones, " 'My Mother Was Much of a Woman': Slavery," in Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present, (New York: Vintage Books, 1985); Deborah Gray White, Air'nt I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985).

believe, because they were subjects *of* the law. Rhode's failure to understand this is evidenced by her description of Black women under slavery as being "subject to vastly more restrictive formal and informal codes." Needless to say, such language does not begin to capture the social and political situation that defined, and continues to define, African American women.

The importance of this opening paragraph cannot be overstated, for it is the historical dismissal of slavery and racism, that allows Rhode "to focus on women as a group," and to begin the history of "women" with the English common-law notion of coverture. The doctrine of coverture, according to Rhode, was popular in eighteenth century legal treatise, and regarded husband and wife as "one person in law."¹²¹ Note that it was also in the eighteenth century that slavery gained its foothold, and that it was this same legal legacy that defined Black women as chattel—all of which are ignored by Rhode.

The history of slavery and racism that "makes no sense" to Rhode is what I am contesting. It is precisely this history of slavery that makes it impossible to impose on African American women, notions of a social life (i.e., "public/private") defined exclusively by gender and that is "applicable to all women." In the final analysis Rhode's opening paragraph should be re-written to state the following:

American feminism developed within a social structure in which male and female roles were constructed on the basis of race and gender. From its very beginning, this nation inherited a racist and sexist tradition. For the most part, white men occupied the "public" sphere of political and commercial activity, white women occupied the "private" sphere of domestic life, and the law, for the most part, respected those boundaries. African American women were, of course, subject to different types of codes, both formal and informal, all of which denied not only her "womanness" but her humanness. After all, she was nothing more than chattel—property to be sold at the whim of a greedy master or a jealous mistress.

¹²¹Quoted in Rhode, *op. cit.*, p., 10.

Hence for purposes of understanding the general evolution of sex-discrimination law, it makes no sense to focus on mandates that seem applicable to women as a group, given the particular, historical context of slavery.

The tradition of slavery challenges the notion that women as a group were affected by sex-based laws. The history of racism, and the legal establishment of racial categories disrupts the coherence of the private sphere narrative. But this is not the only issue in feminist thinking that erases the racial. The issue of rape is also cast in terms that do not account for its specific racial construction.

The Politics of Race and Rape

The claim that all women can be raped, and is thus a potential rape victim is not an uncommon one.¹²² Crimes against women, like rape, physical brutality, wife abuse, and sometimes murder, are considered specific "crimes of gender." "Women are targets of violence because of their sex," Lori Heise argues; "this is not random violence; the risk factor is being female."¹²³ Although there has been some recent criticism against positing the so-called "reality of rape" or a "rape culture,"¹²⁴ rape is still discussed as if there were no racial constructions of rape. In other words, rape is still conceptualized as if it affects "all women as women,"

¹²²See for example, Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975); Kate Millet, Sexual Politics, (London: Virago Press, 1977); and Andrea Dworkin, Pornography: Men Possessing Women, (London: The Women's Press, 1981)

¹²³Lori Heise, "Crimes of Gender," World Watch Magazine, (March/April 1989), Reprinted in Women, Culture, and Society: A Reader, (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1992).

¹²⁴See Sharon Marcus's excellent essay, "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention," in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., Feminists Theorize the Political, (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 385-403.

or "women as a group," without considering the history of slavery and racism or the symbolic nature of the black female body. Thinking of rape, and women in this manner denies the role that the category "race" plays in the production of "woman." The definition of rape, has it has been defined in society and by feminists, is also telling in its racial implications.

For example, Deborah Rhode argues that "rape has long been recognized as a serious legal offense,' [but] [w]hat is new is an understanding of such offenses that reflects women's experience."¹²⁵ However, Catherine MacKinnon, another well-known feminist theorists, argues that rape has never been considered a serious crime because it is legally defined from the male standpoint. Rape therefore can never reflect the experience of the woman because it is designed to perpetuate itself and uphold male supremacy.¹²⁶ MacKinnon argues that "rape is indigenous...to women's social condition."¹²⁷ Her main concern is the state's definition of rape, which is defined as intercourse with coercion or force and without consent, is defined from the male viewpoint. MacKinnon describes the legal definition of rape as "redundant," properly noting that the definition merely repeats itself—force is present because consent is absent. She also notes a sadomasochist element in the legal definition of rape. If rape is sex with force and without consent, then that which is not rape, (i.e., "regular" sex) is sex with force and with consent. If one consents to force/ dominance, then it is not rape, it is sex. MacKinnon also rightly notes that consent is connected to who can and cannot consent, or more aptly put, who is

¹²⁵Justice and Gender, op. cit. p. 244

¹²⁶Toward a Feminist Theory of the State, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 172

¹²⁷Ibid.

believable in a court of law. "Virtuous women, like young girls, are consenting, virginal, rapable. Unvirtuous women, like wives and prostitutes, are non-consenting, whore(-like) unrapable."¹²⁸ Rapable women have something to loose, something to "protect"—their (presumed) virginity. Rhode too, mentions the court's tendency to invoke the "chaste vs. unchaste" rule. What both ignore is the specific racial construction of the virtuous and non-virtuous. In fact, the set of questions raised by Rhode, and MacKinnon in particular, only work if one is "[c]ontent to rest their case on a raceless tale of gender subordination."¹²⁹

The idea of consent as racially constructed can be found in the cultural symbols attached to Black and white women. Women in general have been classified by the virgin/whore or Madonna Magdalene symbols. These general classifications however, are themselves constructed by race. For the most part, images about women are constructed along the racial binary white/black. The "good," virgin women are those "who [are] pure, clean, sexually repressed and physically fragile" and refer to white women.¹³⁰ The "bad" women, or the "whores" are "dirty, licentious, physically strong, and knowledgeable about the evil done in the world."¹³¹ In reference to rape, these images construct our beliefs about who can or cannot consent. Black women are never given the option

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 175.

¹²⁹Kimberle' Crenshaw, "Whose Story Is It Anyway? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill," in Toni Morrison, ed., Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality, (New York: Pantheon, 1992), p. 415.

¹³⁰Phyllis Maryknick Palmer, "White Women/Black Women: The Dualism of Female Identity and Experience in the United States," Feminist Studies 9 (Spring 1983), pp. 151-170.

¹³¹Ibid.

to prove or disprove whether or not she consented. It is already always assumed that she did consent because she is by nature whore-like. Patricia Williams explains it this way:

[N]o one will believe that [the black woman] is not a whore. White women are prostitutes; black women are whores. White women sell themselves...because they are jaded and desperate; black women whore as a way of being, as an innateness of sootiness, and contamination...Black women whore because it is sensual and lazy and vengeful. How can such a one be raped? Or so the story goes.¹³²

These ideas are, as Davis argues, the ideological products of the myth of the Black rapist, and its counterpart, the lewd, promiscuous, and sexually free, Black woman.¹³³ The "black rapist" argument is viewed as a political invention, conjured up to justify the lynching of black people. Hence, it is racism, not gender oppression that accounts for the social construction of Black men's and women's sexuality. According to Davis, "[l]ynching was undisguised counterinsurgency, a guarantee that Black people would not be able to achieve their goals of citizenship and economic equality."¹³⁴

The promiscuous image of the Black women was not only the co-creation of the mythic "black male rapist." Many of the images and cultural symbols surrounding the Black female body in this country emerged from two other important moments in history: slavery and the flourishing "scientific" and medical community of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹³⁵

¹³²Alchemy of Race and Rights, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p.175. Williams' discussion is in reference to the Tawana Brawley rape.

¹³³Angela Davis, "Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist," in Women, Race, & Class, (New York: Vintage Books, Edition, 1983), p. 172-201.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 175.

During slavery, black women were often placed on the auction blocks, sometimes nude, where white men probed and fondled their abdomen and other areas. Such actions were "justified" on the basis of testing the woman's potential capability for reproducing. Many auctioneers and potential buyers measured the body organs of black slaves, including their breasts (often one slave woman would nurse all the children), legs, buttocks, teeth, and other orifices. One slave recalled that while standing on the auction block, "the white men [would] come up and look in the slave's mouth just like he was a mule or a hoss."¹³⁶ If the slave woman's reproductive capabilities were questionable, "she was taken by a buyer and a physician to a private room where she was inspected more thoroughly."¹³⁷ In many ways, the master "prepared" their slaves for the auction. Jeny Proctor, an ex-slave from Alabama, describes it this way:

When he [the master] go to sell a slave, he feed that one good for a few days, then he goe's to put'em up on the auction block he takes meat and skin and greases all round the nigger's mouth and make's look like they been eating plenty meat and such like and was good and strong and able to work.¹³⁸

¹³⁵See Deborah Gray White, Arn't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South, op. cit.; K. Sue Jewell, From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of U.S. Social Policy, op. cit.; Patricia Morton, Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991); and Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), especially chapter 4.

¹³⁶B. A. Botkin, Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1973), p. 106.

¹³⁷Deborah Gray White in Arn't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), p. 32.

¹³⁸Botkin, op. cit., p. 91.

For Black women, such "inspections" and public nudity became associated with her perceived sexual looseness.¹³⁹ In addition to the auction block, slave women had to face work conditions on the plantation that produced the same connotation as that of the auction block. Many bondwomen were not given proper clothing, and often wore their clothes until they literally fell off their bodies. In addition, "female slaves on rice plantations worked in the water with their dresses 'reefed up' around their hips, exposing their legs and thighs...The very sight of a semiclad black woman nurtured white male notions of their promiscuity."¹⁴⁰

Perhaps the most brutal element that painted the Black female as promiscuous is that the institution of rape, and her role as breeder. Not only did the rape of the slave serve to satisfy the white male sexual desires, but it allowed such rapes to be justified on the basis of the slave woman's perceived promiscuity. It is not a leap in logic to suggest that idea of the super-sexual bondwoman was created so as to allow the master's transgressions to go unabated, and to accept such behavior as the natural order of things. In other words, they were not virtuous (i.e., women) therefore they could not be raped.¹⁴¹

The medical and "scientific" community also produced and legitimated lascivious images of Black women. The most infamous case is that of Sara

¹³⁹See excellent discussion by Deborah Gray White in Arn't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), Chapter 1.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 32 & 33

¹⁴¹See bell hooks, "Sexism and the Black Female Experience," Chapter 1 of Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism, (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Dorothy Sterling, ed., We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), esp. Chapters. 3 & 4.

Bartmann, or the Hottentot Venus.¹⁴² After being paraded around Europe in exhibitions, Sara Bartmann died at the age of twenty-five in 1815. Her body was dissected and her genitalia was preserved in a glass jar and presented to the Academy, "so as to allow one to see the nature of the labia."¹⁴³ As Gilman points out "Sarah Bartmann was exhibited not [merely] to show her genitalia, but rather to present another anomaly which the European audience found riveting."¹⁴⁴ "In this view of mankind, the black occupied the antithetical position to the white on the scale of humanity."¹⁴⁵ More specifically, the black female "came to serve as the icon for black sexuality in general."¹⁴⁶ The Hottentot Venus, by virtue of her "physiognomy, her skin color, the form her genitalia, label her as inherently different."¹⁴⁷ The Hottentot theory of black women's sexuality is very much a part of a racialized view of rape that still exists today.

¹⁴²For a discussion of the Hottentot Venus, see Sander Gilman's, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward and Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature," in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Race," Writing, and Difference, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), and Sexuality: An Illustrated History, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1989). See also, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). For a discussion of the role of "science" in constructing and legitimating racial difference as a "scientific fact, see Sandra Harding, ed. The "Racial" Economy of Science, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Nancy Leys Stepan, "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science, in David Theo Goldberg, ed., Anatomy of Racism, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), and Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman, "Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism, in Dominick, LaCapra, ed. The Bounds of Race, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

¹⁴³Gilman, Sexuality: An Illustrated History, op. cit., p. 293.

¹⁴⁴Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies....", op. cit., p. 213.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

For example:

One judge admonished jurors not to apply the ordinary presumption of chastity to black women, for if they were to do so, they 'would be blinding themselves to actual conditions.'

[Another judge is quoted as saying], 'Within the Negro community, you really have to redefine rape. You never know about them.'

[In a study as recently as 1991, it was revealed that even jurors had a tendency to disbelieve black women]. One juror, explaining why a black rape victim was discredited by the jury stated, 'You can't believe everything they say. They're known to exaggerate the truth.'

[Still yet another juror] argued for acquittal on the grounds that a girl her age from 'that neighborhood...probably wasn't a virgin anyway.'¹⁴⁸

The fact that rape is adjudicated in courts on specifically racialized assumptions, is only partially the point. What is significant here is, that specific social identities are produced and constituted through various legal, social and political institutions in which race, gender, and even class get blurred. That is, Black women are "black" precisely because white women are "white"; more pointedly, Black women are "Black women" because white women are not. This may sound redundant, and perhaps so obvious that it barely needs stating. However, the tautological nature of the white/black opposition is precisely the point. Sometimes, it is forgotten that the Black woman's perception as sexually promiscuous is the flip side of the mythic virginal, Victorian white woman. Thus, it often needs to be re-stated. On the question rape, the history of black

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁴⁸All quoted in Crenshaw, op. cit., p. 413.

women seems to have been forgotten. Some Black feminists have pointed out that even

the definition of the issue of rape has excluded black women. White women speak out only about brutal rape and sneak attacks in the night, and rarely mention the business rape that women of color face from white men who own factories and head the households where they work as servants. But many black women are also raped by black men, and reporting them to white cops, [not only] rais[ed] questions about the loyalty to black people in the face of common enemies, [but] places them in positions of being ignored, mocked, or even threatened with rape by the policemen themselves.¹⁴⁹

The tendency of (white) feminists to ignore the specific racial construction of rape is to say the least, problematic. That the rape of Black women during slavery (and during Reconstruction) was not considered "rape" because such behavior was justified for what ever reasons, is duplicated in contemporary feminist discourse through an explicit denial of this phenomenon. Moreover, the complicity of white women as agents (active or passive) is elided through this mis-recognition as well. Feminist readings of the public and private also render incoherent the daily lives of both African men and women. To take into account the "formal and informal codes" that defined (and continues to define) the daily lives of the bonded would, I believe disrupte the very foundations of feminist discourse.

In this chapter, I explored the differences between the Lani Guinier and Zoe Baird nominations to articulate a theory about the socio-symbolic meaning

¹⁴⁹Barbara Omolade, "Black Women and Feminism," in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., *The Future of Difference*, (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), p. 255.

of the Black Woman's body. I noted that Zoe Baird, initially having no "feminist" support in terms of her nomination, received a well-spring of support after her nomination was withdrawn. Most of the "support" came in terms of a public outcry in major newspapers which her social position as a "woman" was seen as the basis for her mistreatment. I also noted that Zoe Baird's nomination subsequently produced a nationwide debate over immigration laws, childcare, and women's double workday. I attributed the absence of such analyses on behalf of Guinier to the fact that she symbolizes Black womanhood.¹⁵⁰ Her construction as "strange," unfamiliar, "exotic," and "divisive," not only characterizes the symbolic subject position Black Woman, but it highlights the extent to which race and gender inform each other. By the same token, Guinier's configuration as "strange," and "unfamiliar," and feminists's inability to analyze her position from a gendered perspective, speaks to a larger problem in feminist theorizing. Using the concepts of public vs. private, and rape, I examined the ways in which feminist discourse "disregards" race in order to produce "women as a group." The works by Debra Rhode and Catherine MacKinnon, among others, illustrate how Black women get produced as "undefinable" and as existing outside of "women's issues."

¹⁵⁰I should note that Anita Hill, as a Black woman, is not an exception to my analysis. Rhetorically, Anita Hill did not symbolize Black womanhood. Her race was effaced and her experience appropriated so that her accusation of sexual harassment could stand in for *all women*. To this extent, Anita Hill's case serves to support my understanding of "women's experience" as being predicated on the erasure of race. For a discussion of the appropriation of Hill's experience and the erasure of race, see Kimberle' Crenshaw, "Whose Story Is It Anyway? Feminist and Anti-racist Appropriations of Anita Hill," op. cit., and Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," in Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed, eds., "We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible": A Reader in Black Women's History, (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1995), 39-56.

CHAPTER FIVE
"LIKE RUNAWAY SLAVES": THE LANGUAGE GAME(S) OF RACE AND
GENDER IN THE THEORETICAL WORKS OF MONIQUE WITTIG

For if language is a condition of reason, the games it plays are not always reasonable. We can learn about them, therefore, only by playing along, at least for a while. It is only then that their sense — i.e. their direction — begins to emerge.

—Samuel Weber¹

Chapter 4 explored the Black Woman symbol as it was expressed in the Lani Guinier nomination. Drawing upon the theoretical insights of Hortense Spillers, Ann duCille and others, I argued that the symbolic significance of the Black Woman is to serve as the principal signifier of difference. I also noted that as "the principal signifier of difference," within contemporary feminist theory, the Black woman occupies the peculiar position of the (In)visible Object; that is highly visible, yet silenced and relegated to the realm of the "radically different." The paradox of course is that race, class and gender are now considered to be "fully integrated" into feminists discourse. The "essentialist" nature of the category woman is understood as a problem within feminist theorizing.² Part of what has helped feminists to understand the problems with essentialist theorizing, is a semiotic or productive conception of language. It is precisely this question of the conception of language that I will analyze in this chapter. Often associated with poststructuralism, feminists who critique the category woman

¹Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis. Translated by Michael Levine, Reprint Edition, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 6.

²Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

through a non-representational framework are also seen as contributing to the idea of deconstructing the racial hegemony of the category "woman." However, this assumption is simply erroneous. "Poststructuralist" feminists can, and often do contribute to an essentialist racialized conception of "Woman" or gender even as they deconstruct sexual difference as a foundation. Moreover, race is often used in these poststructuralist critiques, to highlight a particular point about "women." Drawing upon Wittgenstein's notion of "language games," I analyze the use of race within the theoretical works of Monique Wittig. In this chapter, I show Wittig's reliance upon race, which is figured "negatively," to "deconstruct" Woman.

I. Language and Language Games

I have already outlined in great detail the poststructuralist view of language and why I think it is important to the project of theorizing the various roles and functions race plays in feminist discourse. However, my understanding of the need to view language for this perspective is tempered by feminism's contemporary preoccupation with language. My hesitation does not stem from a lack of confidence, if you will, in the usefulness of the poststructuralist conception of language and its application to race. Rather, it stems from the ways in which feminists have appropriated this linguistic conception and applied it to gender relations. For the most part, feminist theory's poststructuralist critique of language, and its use of language in that critique, obscures the racialized aspects of the discourse as opposed to exposing them. The potentially subversive aspects of the poststructuralist conception of language is undermined by feminist discourse's inclination to shore up and maintain its discursive boundaries.

As stated previously, feminists have appropriated a poststructuralist conception of language in which language is defined as "to mean not simply words or even a vocabulary and a set of grammatical rules but, rather, a meaning-constituting system: that is, any system...through which meaning is constructed and cultural practices organized..."³ In this approach, language is thought to be a point of departure from which to discuss how gender and its attending meanings are generated and deployed. Rather than viewing language as the re-presentation of ideas, or as the re-presentation of "real" things, language is conceived of as that which constitutes and "brings into being" ideas and meanings. Words have, in other words, no transparent, fixed or intrinsic meanings. There exists no direct correlation between language and reality, sign and referent, idea and object. In fact, the "real" or material versus the ideal or the abstract, is, at one level, a false opposition to impose on this approach.

For feminists who have adopted this approach, the method is to "analyze specific 'texts'—not only books and documents but also utterances of any kind and in any medium, including cultural practices—in terms of specific historical and contextual meanings."⁴ Some feminists, like Monique Wittig, have taken the subject of language as the focus of their work by arguing that language as a system a/ effects every aspect of our thinking and lends meaning to virtually every aspect of life.⁵ Feminist appropriations of semiotics have been fruitful in

³Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," in Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, eds., Conflicts in Feminism, (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 135.

⁴Ibid.

⁵On works by Wittig, see her collection of essays in The Straight Mind: And Other Essays, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

undermining pre-Saussurian linguistics, especially in relation to sexual difference, discourse and the constitution of the subject. Through such analyses, we have come to think of the category "woman," for example, as a sign rather than a referent. Sexual difference is seen as that which not only organizes the principles of most phallogocentric discourses, but it is that which makes such discourses possible.

However, in the process of this questioning, feminist theory itself has become a kind of language, or to use Scott's phrase, a "meaning-constituting system." Not only has the critiques against "woman" as a referent provided new insights into the internal workings of canonical texts in philosophy, political theory, and psychoanalysis,⁶ but the methods that are employed in those critiques are themselves signs, signifying a particular conceptual view about sexual difference and the category "Woman." In this sense, feminist theory is a discourse, i.e., "a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs,"⁷ that uses a language of its own to produce and legitimate its own "truths" about sexual difference. Put slightly different, feminist theory is a discursive field that generates meanings about what sexual difference is and how it should be theorized, through the critical postures that it takes against what it sees to be "androcentric" or "phallogocentric" discourses. If this is this case, then one should be able to look

⁶In philosophy, see for example, Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, Translated by Gillian C. Gill, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), and The Sex Which is Not One, Translated by Catherine Porter, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); in political theory, see Linda M. G. Zerilli's, Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Burke and Mill, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); and for semiotic works in the psychoanalytic strain, see Julia Kristeva, Desire in Language: A semiotic Approach to Literature and Art, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

⁷Scott, op. cit., p. 135.

at feminism as a "text", and "analyze [its]... utterances... in terms of specific historical and contextual meaning."⁸

I what follows, explore the way(s) in which one feminist in particular— Monique Wittig— has used the concept of language to raise questions about sex, gender, and sexual difference. I will concentrate on how Wittig *deploys language in her critique of language*, to not only highlight the social constructedness of sex, gender, and heterosexuality, but to (unwittingly) establish "race" as existing outside the domain of sexual difference. In other words, it is Wittig's *use of language in her critique of language* that produces "race" as a non-gendered category existing apart from "gender," in a symmetrical or parallel relationship. Not only does Wittig maintain that language is constitutive and productive of (hetero)sexual difference, but her critiques of this difference become examples of how (a certain notion of) race is already always imbued in her conceptualization of sexual difference. The critiques that Wittig wage against language start from a racialized point of view, by assuming for example, that the linguistic signifier "Woman" can be occupied by all "women," or any woman. Using sexual difference as the point of departure, as the place from which to wage a critique against language and the traditional view of subjectivity, is in itself racial(ized) because it privileges "sexual difference" over "race" and implicitly asserts that "race" is constituted apart from gender and sexual difference. This of course, is not recognized or acknowledged in Wittig's work or feminist discourse in general. For even those who are critical of gynocentric formulations of sexual difference, like Wittig, often end-up reprivileging some notion of the subject that purports to be race-less, or "un-marked" by race. This no doubt, highlights the fallacy of the "Other-as-marked" theory, because all subject are racial subjects.

⁸Ibid.

Given that race mediates gender or sexual difference, one cannot analyze or discuss the problem without examining the ways in which language produces mutually raced and gendered subjects. Few critiques of language in feminist theory offer a view on language that points to its productive role in race-ing subjects. Instead, the critiques themselves often rely on racial conceptions and even use race, in analogic form, to make a point about gender and/or sexual difference. This type of analogizing, as stated above, relegates "race" to a domain outside of gender, and in so doing, produces an unmistakable set rules about how to think about gender. The result is a complicated set of theoretical and linguistic moves that constitute what Wittgenstein called a language game.⁹

Wittgenstein argued that words and interpretation of meaning is a bounded process that is governed by a set of rules. The rules that govern the use of words—i.e., application instructions—change through the very process of application; for the application itself becomes yet another item which can be understood as a "move" in the game. Although "nothing fixes...[or] logically determines, an application [of a word] as correct, ...[because we are] confronted with past teachings and applications, we will go a certain way, and we will all go on the same way" in the use and application of the word. This does not mean that a word has a fixed meaning; only that within the discursive framework that gives that word or concept meaning, that meaning will always be attached to rules that define that framework.

Extending Wittgenstein's notion of language games to that of the production of knowledge in a postmodern world, Lyotard makes three

⁹See Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations; See also Nozick's reading of Wittgenstein in Philosophical Explanations, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1981), p. 144.

observations.¹⁰ The first is that the rules of a language game do not carry with them their own legitimation, rather legitimation becomes the object of the language game. Second, the rules themselves constitute the game, for "if there are no rules, there is no game."¹¹ Thus, even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the entire nature of the game, but if that modification or change does not satisfy the rules, then it does not belong to the game at hand. It is relegated to another domain; another language-game. Third, and this is implied by the two previous observations, every "utterance" in a language game is to be thought of as a "move" that is intended to extend the game, or in theoretical terms, to provide new insights.

The notion of language games as it relates to the discursive field of feminist theory and race, and as it is expressed in the theoretical works of Monique Wittig, can be viewed on two levels. The first level is the external level, and refers to the construction of boundaries and rules that dictate the meaning and nature of feminist discourse(s). This is not to suggest that the rules of feminist discourse, or the disciplinary or theoretical boundaries that encapsulate the field, are set-up by some omniscient-all-knowing person who occupies a space outside the realm of the social. The rules or boundaries are not created beforehand and then blindly followed. Rather, the rules or boundaries are constructed *through the production and practice* of feminist theory. In other words, the boundaries are an effect of the discourse; they do not precede it.

At this first level, the concept of "language-game" in relation to feminist discourse refers not only to the preoccupation with language as a meaning-

¹⁰Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Translated from French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Sixth Printing, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988),p. 10.

¹¹*Ibid.*

generating system in sexual difference, but as that which sets the boundaries and separates out what can and cannot fall within the discursive field of feminist theory, or what counts as "sexual difference." Whether one focuses on how words acquire and construct meaning, or whether one focuses on how the production of this meaning is in itself a boundary-setting device, the category "race" figures simultaneously as critical sign of absence and as a point of fixation.

When "race" as a theoretical concept is absent, the discussions about language as a meaning-generating system in the production of sexual difference take place without any reference to the category "race" or (the perception of) "racial difference."¹² In these instances, "race" is assumed to be a "color" that applies only to those considered non-white. The presumption is that "whiteness" is not a racial category and therefore, it is not a "race issue." Hence, there is no explicit discussion of race and its mutual and productive role in the construction of gender and sexual difference. However, the absence of any theoretical discussion of race within most texts on sexual difference is actually an articulation of a certain conception of "race"; namely that raced subjects are "marked" subjects. Not only does this absence imply the "mark of race" theory,¹³ but it produces the meaning of race within sexual difference discourse(s) through that absence. That is, the meaning of race is constructed in absentia. Its meaning articulated through its silence.

Ironically, the absence of a focused, theoretical examination of "race" in the production of sexual difference and within discourses on sexual difference, co-

¹²See for example, Luce Irigaray, The Speculum of the Other Woman, and This Sex Which Is Not One, op. cit., and Jane Gallop, The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).

¹³See Colette Guillaumin, "Race and Nature: The System of Marks, the Idea of a Natural Group and Social Relationships," Feminist Issues, 8 (Fall 1988).

exists with the explosion of texts that assert the need to acknowledge racial and ethnic differences among women. This paradox can be partially explained by the belief that gender and race occupy separate and symmetrical positions. The assumption is that race and gender are produced through different social and historical processes, that may or may not overlap, but which nonetheless results in two different subjects—"a gendered subject" and "a racial subject." When this assumption is at work, the history of 'race' as mutually and internally productive of gender and sexual difference is completely elided. When race is introduced into sexual difference discourses it is only after the concept of "sexual difference" has been formulated, theorized, and articulated. In fact, within sexual difference discourses (and within Wittig's works in particular), "race" functions in one of at least two ways: (1) it serves to highlight or lend legitimacy to sexual difference through analogies and/ or comparisons; or (2) it is used to emphasize the belief that one racial or ethnic group is "more affected" or "burdened" by "sexual oppression."

Generally speaking, the racial critiques of the categories "gender" and "Woman" as totalizing and universal do not satisfy the rules of feminist theorizing. Because such critiques do not start with the premise that sexual difference is the primary difference or is more fundamental, they are often relegated to the field of "African American" or "Black Women's Studies." When race is introduced, the nature of the discourse changes, and for feminist theory, such a change in the discourse constitutes enough difference to label it as not (really) gender-related. In terms of the concept of language games, "race" has the potential to so thoroughly disrupt the assumptions that make sexual difference narratives possible, that it must be viewed as not satisfying the rules of feminist theorizing. Thus, any question concerning "race" becomes a part of a different theoretical discourse altogether.

It is interesting to note that, despite the theoretical tendency to reassert the primacy of sexual difference against the many critiques waged by African American women and other racial and ethnic groups, these racial critiques have themselves become intricate parts of feminist discourse(s). They have not however, undermined the fundamental assumptions at which they were aimed. Rather, these racial critiques function as markers to indicate "how far feminist theory has advanced"—or so the argument goes. The contemporary version of this strain of thinking is best illuminated by "difference" arguments, in which feminists articulate either the need to account for differences among women, or the need to show that differences among women do not outweigh their (subject) position as "women."¹⁴ The practice usually involves listing race or ethnicity (usually the latter), in a long list of modalities that are said to "intersect" in the constitution of gendered identity. In other words, it is commonplace to note or acknowledge the need to analyze race and ethnicity in relation to gender, without actually doing so.

The second level on which one can conceptualize the notion of "language game" refers to language-games in the plural. Here "language-games" are those moves, or "utterances" that reveal how the game itself is to be played. They are the linguistic and theoretical formulations that take place *within* the discursive boundaries of feminist theory. These utterances, or sophisticated theoretical moves, occur even when the focus is not directly on language and its productive aspects. The question of language in any form may not even be addressed in a

¹⁴See for example, Gerder Lerner, "Reconceptualizing Differences Among Women," *Journal of Women's History* 1 (Winter 1990): 106-122; Linda Gordon, "On 'Difference,' *Genders* 10 (Spring 1991): 91-110; Paula Rothenberg, "The Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of Difference," *Hypatia* 5 (Spring 1990): 42-57; and the essays collected in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., *The Future of Difference*, Fourth Printing, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

theoretical analysis, but the analysis itself sets the boundaries by outlining what is acceptable within the discursive limits of feminist theorizing.

In what follows, I examine the theoretical works of Monique Wittig by outlining her theory of language, and the ways in which she uses language to critique specific categories in feminist theory. In so doing, I point out how Wittig's critique of language functions to elide questions of race, even when (or especially when) race is juxtaposed against the category "Woman" or gender. Wittig's deployment of the category race and use of racialized figures in her theoretical work, provides a clear example of the operation of language game(s) in feminist theory. Her works employ both the internal and the external methodological conception of language games as I have articulated them.

II. The Materiality of Language

An important aspect of Wittig's theoretical and fictional work can be found in her theory of language. For Wittig, the oppression of women, or the differentiation between the sexes, manifests itself most poignantly in language. This differentiation is depicted by and illustrated in words and concepts that require an "opposite" to gain its meaning. Oppositions like man/woman, masculine/feminine, and male/female, are naturalized through language. Because these oppositions appear to be natural, i.e., as something that was created by nature and therefore already exists in nature, they resist criticism. For this reason, Wittig maintains that it is not only necessary to question the categories of "man" and "woman," but to abolish them altogether. Her reasons for this stem from the notion that the categories "sex" and "gender" apply only to the woman, while man remains unmarked and universal. In Wittig's view, "...the category of sex is the category that sticks to women, for only they cannot be conceived outside of it. Only *they* are sex, *the* sex, and sex have been made in

their minds, bodies, acts, gestures... Indeed, the category sex tightly holds women."¹⁵ Since, "gender is the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes,"¹⁶ language becomes the weapon needed to destroy that opposition. The assumption here is that the most effective way to eliminate the oppression of women is to get to the source of the problem. In Wittig's world, that source is language.

In Wittig's own view, focusing on the source of women's oppression—language—does not mean that one is necessarily relegated to a world of abstraction. Although she makes a distinction between the philosophical level of oppression and the material level of oppression, she is quite clear in her conviction that both are interrelated, and that their connection is made possible only through language. For example, she criticizes (traditional) Marxism for reducing oppression to one's relationship to the means of production. In this instance, oppression becomes strictly material; something that is measured by one's "class position" and "class consciousness." However, Wittig argues that:

Class consciousness is not enough. We [i.e., women] must try to understand philosophically (politically) these concepts of 'subject' and 'class consciousness' and how they work in relation to our history. When we discover that women are the objects of oppression and appropriation, at the very moment that we become able to perceive this, we become subjects in the sense of cognitive subjects, through an operation of abstraction. [This involves] ...the whole conceptual reevaluation of the social world...from the point of view of oppression...**The movement back and forth between the levels of reality (the conceptual reality and the material reality of oppression, which are both social realities) is accomplished through language.**¹⁷

¹⁵"The Category of Sex," in The Straight Mind And Other Essays, Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, p. 8.

¹⁶"The Point of View: Universal or Particular?, *ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁷"One is Not Born A Woman," *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Here, Wittig makes the distinction between "Woman" the myth or the abstract, and "women", the individuals to whom "Woman" supposedly refer. The abstract oppression of woman (the "natural" role ascribed to that category), and the material oppression of women (the actual effects of oppression in political and economic terms), are for Wittig, two sides of the same coin. The bridge or link that connects the two is language. "Language for a writer is a special material...because it is the place, the means, the medium for bringing meaning to light."¹⁸ Thus, the function of language is to serve as a mediator between these two levels of reality

The idea the language serves as a mediator and as something to be used by the writer is better illustrated by Wittig's re-articulation of the signifier/signified model for her letter/meaning model. Wittig maintains that substituting the word letter for signifier, and the word meaning for signified, "avoid[s] the interference of the referent prematurely in the vocabulary of the sign. For signified and signifier describe the sign in terms of the reality being referred to, while letter and meaning describe the sign solely in relation to language."¹⁹ In other words, the sign in the signifier/signified models refers to a thing, a reality, or a referent—— an actual thing. For Wittig, the signifier/signified model has nothing to do with language, its structure and its meaning(s). In her view, the purpose of language is to describe or to make visible reality. Wittig wants to examine language in its abstractness, and argues that the signifier/signified model precludes this possibility because its reference is to reality itself, not the abstract "meanings" of language or the material structure of language. By replacing the signifier and the signified with letter and

¹⁸"The Point of View: Universal Or Particular?", *op. cit.*, p. 66.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 65.

meaning, Wittig argues that she is moving from the realm of reality where referents dominated, to the abstract world of language, where the material and the "meaning" come together.

Moving from the real to the abstract is an important conceptual distinction for Wittig because focusing on the abstract, i.e., the relationship between the sign and language, prevents one from using words that are over-determined in their meaning. In the signifier/ signified model, "...certain meanings are over-determined to such an extent that the letter is made the meaning and the signifier becomes the signified, [regardless of what] the writer does."²⁰ Thus to prevent the signifier from becoming the signified, or "to avoid the interference of the referent prematurely," Wittig opts to discuss the signifier and the signified in 'abstract terms,' "where letter (signifier) and meaning (signified) do not act separately"²¹ and where "there can be an equilibrium between letter and meaning."²² This equilibrium is achieved not by avoiding the referent altogether, but by avoiding its entrance onto the scene *prematurely*.²³ The operative word is *prematurely*, for it indicates that Wittig's disposition leans toward the he sign-referent theory of language, in which the sign or word stands in for the object. Despite Wittig's re-working of the signifier/ signified model into the letter/ meaning model, her conception implies that language symbolizes referents. Rooted deeply in the metaphysical tradition, this theory of language

²⁰Ibid., p. 66.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 65.

²³"Using the words letter and meaning in place of signified and signifier permits us to avoid the interference of the referent prematurely in the vocabulary of the sign." Ibid., p. 65.

treats language as re-presentation, as the medium through which "things" or "objects" are made present. "Language is...the place, the means the medium for bringing meaning to light."²⁴ Language operates as a transparent film, behind which lies the "original meaning" of a word or "real" thing itself. Thus words already always have meaning in and of themselves.

There is something deeply disturbing about the implications of Wittig's theory of language. Her theory implies that words have a "real" or "true" meaning outside of their usage. For Wittig, there seems to be an "original" meaning behind every word. At the same time, Wittig suggests that it is precisely the (mis)usage of some words that necessitates the creation of the "perfect war machine"—the Trojan Horse— so as to destroy, manipulate, or alter some or all of those words.

What I am saying is that the shock of words in literature does not come out of the ideas they are supposed to promote, since what the writer deals with first is a solid body that must be manipulated in one way or another. ...[I]f one wants to build a perfect war machine, one must spare oneself the delusion that facts, actions, ideas can dictate directly to words their form. There is a detour, and the shock of words is produced by their association, their disposition, their arrangement, and also by each one of them used separately. [emphasis added].²⁵

In essence, some words have been used in ways that they were not intended or in ways that either cover-up or distort the "real" meaning of the word. Words, because they have (an) inherent meaning are "suppose to promote" that meaning. However, this inherent meaning cannot "dictate directly to words their [original] form," because of the way in which writers arrange or

²⁴See footnote #27.

²⁵"The Trojan Horse," op. cit., p. 72.

place the words in context. These words then become so distorted and over-determined that the distorted meaning becomes the "real" meaning. Or, put in Wittigian terms, "...the letter is made the meaning and the signifier becomes the signified."²⁶ This conflation of the signifier and the signified necessitates a Trojan Horse strategy in which the dominated uses the same tactic of dominator (i.e., the method of manipulating words for one's own benefit) to either abolish the over-determined words, or use the same words to articulate the oppressed's point of view.

For Wittig, language is very material. She views words as things one can hold. "Language," she argues, "offers a very concrete matter to grasp hold of." (p. 34) Wittig insists that "words lie there to be used as raw material by a writer, just as clay is at the disposal of any sculptor," but maintains that words are different from clay, stone, or any other medium used to create meaning because *wordshave* meaning.

Words are, each one of them, like the Trojan Horse. They are things, material things, and at the same time they [already] mean something. And it is because they mean something that they are abstract²⁷.

Because it is something to take hold of, like clay, it can be sculpted and shaped. This is a very important aspect of Wittig's theory, because the materiality of language forms the essence of her argument. She wants to focus on the language in its material form as opposed to language in its abstract form. She wants to shift the focus from meaning, i.e., language in its abstract form, to language in its material, visible form. This shift is necessary because, as stated

²⁶Quoted above., see footnote #29.

²⁷*Ibid.* 71

earlier, there has been too much attention on meaning which results in the conflation of the signifier and the signified. In addition, the emphasis on meaning "hides language from sight"²⁸ and one is unable to see the form of the word because of the connotations it may evoke. But Wittig does not want her emphasis on the "form" of the word to be construed as preferring language over the meaning of language. Indeed, for Wittig this would be a gross distinction because meaning does not exist apart from the form or structure of language.

She writes:

Then isn't meaning language? Yes, it is language, but in its visible and material form, language is form, language is letter. Meaning is not visible, and as such appears to be outside of language. ...Indeed, meaning is language, but being its abstraction it cannot be seen.
p. 67.

Thus, meaning is a part of language but it constitutes the abstract sphere of language. The material sphere of language is what can be seen; it is that which is visible to the naked eye; it is the letter or the word itself. Wittig despises the "current use of language" because "one sees and hears *only* meaning."²⁹ "[The] writer's work [then is] to concern themselves with the letter, the concrete, the visibility of language, that is, its material form."³⁰

The notion of language as material allows Wittig to argue for the manipulation of language or words in their spelling, their arrangement, and even their placement in the text. This process of working on language "word by word" is an effort to produce a meaning or set of meanings that are beneficial to

²⁸"The Point of View: Universal or Particular?", op. cit., p. 66.

²⁹Ibid., p. 67.

³⁰Ibid.

"minority writers," or to those condemned to the particular point of view.³¹ The end result is a practice that creates polysemy, i.e., a multiplicity of meanings rather than a single, over-determined meaning.

In spite of Wittig's insistence on the polysemy of words, one is still left with the uneasy suspicion that the multiplicity of meanings that a word may convey is the result of a carefully-planned, and strategically-implemented scheme designed to pulverize mis-used and over-determined words. The method of destruction of course, is the "perfect war machine," or the Trojan Horse, which in language means the use of unconventional form and structure.³² What Wittig is suggesting is that one can create a different meaning for a word, or a multiple set of meanings, if one chooses that and then convey it precisely in the way that the meaning was chosen.

I am unconvinced that words, or even language, operates in this manner. One cannot control the meaning of words, partly because words derive their meaning from the context in which they are used. Put slightly different, words have no meaning outside of their deployment in discourse. Meaning is produced and is therefore contextual. Words do not have, as Wittig would have us to believe, an inherent, original, real, or "full" meaning. Wittig believes that "...work on the level of words and of the letter [i.e., work on the material level], reactivates words in their arrangement, and in turn confers on meaning its *full meaning*..."³³ Reactivates? Full meaning? How should one evaluate Wittig's

³¹See the essay, "The Point of View" Universal or Particular?", Ibid.

³²See Wittig's essay, "The Trojan Horse," in op. cit., and Linda Zerrilli's "The Trojan Horse of Universalism: Language as a 'War Machine' in the Writings of Monique Wittig," Social Text (Summer 1990): 146-170.

³³"The Point of View: Universal or Particular?" op. cit., p. 67.

conceptualization of language, except by arguing that she believes that words have an original meaning or set of meanings, or that words are symbols? At the very least, Wittig is arguing that the only way for words to have more than one meaning (i.e., the meaning that the word already had or was given by the "oppressor) is to "reactivate" words by working on them at the material level which in turn produces many meanings. Thus, words have its "original" meaning and the meaning(s) given to it by the "minority writer" who has decided what new meaning to invest in the word.

Thus, the polysemy of a word in Wittig's theory of language takes on an air of superficiality. In fact, when Wittig argues that "words lie there to be used as raw material by a writer, just as clay is at the disposal of the sculptor," the image that her formulation conjures up is not that of clay, but that of play-dough. The polysemy of words in Wittig's theory is the result of manipulating words and "...despoil[ing] [them] of [their] everyday meaning."³⁴ Before one can "despoil" or add to the "everyday meaning" of a word, the "writer must first reduce language to be as meaningless as possible in order to turn it into a neutral material—that is a raw material."³⁵ This neutral-like material is really a "solid body that must be manipulated in one way or another" to create the meaning(s) that the writer desires.³⁶ Thus, words become like play-dough; an amorphous mass that can manipulated at will and where, in the end the "neutral material" or word is re-shaped until it fits the point of view of the shaper, or it is destroyed altogether. As a result, meaning becomes the product of a "play on words" as

³⁴"The Trojan Horse," p. 72.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

opposed to a "play of words." The writer manipulates words; or better yet, the writer plays *with* words to produce a (desired) meaning, much like a child plays with play-dough to construct a phantasmic toy of the moment. This is not to suggest that there is something silly, trivial or child-like about Wittig's understanding and articulation of the multiplicity of language. It does however, highlight the ways in which Wittig's view of language and meaning suggest that there is something already always there waiting to be re-shaped into a "more appropriate" meaning. She treats language simply as a vehicle for communicating ideas rather than as a system of meaning or a process of signification. Language is "special material" because "it is used by everybody all the time, it is used for speaking and communicating."³⁷ Certainly, Wittig discusses the multiplicity of language—she uses the term polysemy— but the multiple meanings of words in her theory are the result of "adding" meaning(s) to an already existing meaning, rather than a meaning that is, in the Derridean sense, dispersed along a chain of signifiers that cannot easily be pinned down. The operation and function of meaning, or how meaning is produced, remains remarkably problematic in Wittig's usage and as a result, her theory of language loses its theoretical interest and its analytical force.

Although her analysis is informed by a notion of the "materiality of language," it is a materiality that is concerned more with paying attention to particular words that people use (e.g. "Woman", *elles*, *ils*), rather than how these words gain meaning through their usage in specific contexts. The multiple meanings that words have in Wittig's theory are composed of the "original meaning" given to a word by the "dominator" and the re-shaped meaning that results from the "dominated's" manipulation of the word. This view of multiple

³⁷"The Point of View: Universal or Particular?," p. 66.

meanings is very different from the idea that meaning is dispersed along a chain of signifiers that keep transforming into signifieds, and vice versa. This instability of language, as articulated by Jacques Derrida, suggests that one can never arrive at a final signified which is not a signifier in itself.³⁸ For Derrida, the sign or word cannot be taken as a homogenous unit bridging an origin (i.e., referent) and an end (i.e., meaning). Hence, meaning is never identical with itself. It is something that is always suspended or deferred. The "sign" and the "meaning" can never coincide or be made identical because one sign will always lead to another sign, resulting in an endless chain of slippery signifiers.

At one level, Wittig's focus on meaning could lead one to believe that her conception of language repudiates the "sign-as-re-presentation" theory. She is disturbed by the privileged position that meaning occupies in our understanding and study of language. "[I]n the current use of language," she argues, "one sees and hears *only* meaning."³⁹ This overemphasis on "meaning hides language from sight"⁴⁰ and precludes one from seeing meaning as the product of its usage. More importantly, it prevents one from seeing the structural, or the material form of language.

Wittig's desire to focus on the form of language is motivated by her interrogation of the category of difference. She contends that "man" and "woman" are ideological constructions that are naturalized through language at the material level, and which are in turn given a "natural difference" in meaning.

³⁸In general, see Derrida's Writing and Difference, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); "Differance," and "Form and Meaning: A Note on the Phenomenology of Language," in Margins of Philosophy, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1978).

³⁹Monique Wittig, "The Point of View: Universal or Particular?," p. 67.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 66

For Wittig, there is no "natural" difference between "man" and "woman"; only the difference created through language undergirded by a heterosexual, political regime. Heterosexuality is conceptualized not as an alternate sexuality that can adopt, or as an ideology that one can accept as a "worldview", but as a political and social regime that forms *the* social contract of society.⁴¹ For Wittig, "the category of sex (i.e., man/ woman and female/ male) is the political category that founds society as heterosexual."⁴² Heterosexuality is a social and political regime that creates and maintains the domination of men over women. By arguing that heterosexuality is the basis or foundation of society, Wittig threatens to dismantle the "naturalness" of heterosexuality and the "naturalness" of the categories "man" and "woman."

The categories of "man" and "woman" are intricately connected in both the material/structural form and meaning. Materially, "man" forms a part of the word "woman" and this for Wittig underscores the notion that language is an indicator of the dominance of one sex over the other. In addition, the meaning of "man" and "woman" are derived from each other. "Woman" cannot exist without the category "man," and the interrelationship of man/ woman is the product of heterosexuality.

The category of sex is the product of heterosexual society that turns half the population into sexual beings, for sex is a category which women cannot be outside of.⁴³

Thus, the liberation of women depends upon the elimination of the categories of "man" and "woman." The elimination of these categories depend

⁴¹See "On the Social Contract," pp. 33-45.

⁴²"The Category of Sex," p. 5.

⁴³"The Category of Sex," p. 7.

upon a subject whose position is located outside of the linguistic parameters of "man/woman." For Wittig, lesbianism is not only a way of avoiding the totalizing political, sexual, and economic power of a man, but it breaks down the assumption that heterosexuality is natural and undermines the stability of the category sex. For Wittig, lesbians transcend the categories of sex because their existence does not depend upon the existence of (a) man, and their existence is not maintained through the existence of men. Therefore, Wittig argues, "lesbians are not women."⁴⁴

Wittig's re-thinking of language as material, and her notion that heterosexuality serves as the foundation of society, do present themselves as novel within feminist theorizing. Among French feminists, Wittig sets herself apart from others by insisting that the problem of gender is not that of sameness, but that of difference. For Wittig, women are the "marked other," while men parade under the sign of the universal, gender-less, "human." Her ultimate goal is to make the particular point of view, or the view of the "marked other," universal. That is, her goal is to bring "women" out of the totalizing and dominating system of heterosexuality, into a linguistic world where they are speaking subjects. While this may seem to be a laudable objective within the Wittigian framework, what are we to make of Wittig's assumption that "women" form a class in and of themselves? In a like manner, what are we to make of the privileged position that heterosexuality occupies within Wittig's theoretical works? Why must the heterosexual relationship be conceived of as "the parameter of all hierarchical relations,"⁴⁵ including racial hierarchies? How does

⁴⁴"The Straight Mind," p. 32.

⁴⁵"On the Social Contract," p. 42.

"race" and "racial images" figure in Wittig's work, and what are the implications of these racialized configurations? What are we to make of the race-less (lesbian and women) subjects that form the basis of Wittig's theory?

III. "Like Runaway Slaves"—The Gender-Race Analogy

There is a larger and more ambiguous point that I am trying to get at with the above questions, and that is that critiques of sexual difference, regardless of whether they are conceptualized in terms of sameness or difference, must privilege "sex" or "gender" as a theoretical category, and in so doing reduces "race" to a category of analogy, and/or locates it outside the discourse of sexual difference. When language is used as a reference point, as it is in Wittig, language itself becomes the culprit, signifying the ways in which race is made both prominent and invisible.

Let us use Wittig's theory of language as an example. It has already been noted that Wittig views language as the means through which sexual difference is naturalized. As a result, she advocates a type of "working on language" that will destroy our conception of man, woman, and heterosexuality as "natural." In order to work on language, Wittig argues, one must view language as material, as "concrete matter to grasp hold of." This need to focus on the material form of a word is motivated by the belief that meaning is all that one hears and sees in language. Some words are so over-determined in their meaning that it is necessary to abolish the word altogether, as opposed to investing it with new meanings. The words to which Wittig refers to of course, are gender-marked words; words which grammatically indicate sex in language.

For instance, in describing her preference for the French collective pronoun *elles*, over the collective pronoun *ils* in her novel Les Guerilleres, Wittig explains it this way:

In Les Guerilleres, I try to universalize the point of view of *elles*. The goal of the approach is not to feminize the world but to make the categories of sex obsolete in language. I therefore, set up *elles* in the text as the absolute subject of the world... Word by word, *elles* establishes itself as a sovereign subject. Only then could *il(s)*, they-he, appear reduced and truncated out of language.⁴⁶

As a French writer, this distinction was fairly easy to make since the French language recognizes two collective pronouns for "they"; one for each gender. But the problem of choosing the feminine version of a word over its masculine counterpart, became apparent when Les Guerilleres, was translated into English. The English language lacks the lexical equivalent for the word *elles*, and because of this the translator often translated *elles* into "the women."

According to Wittig,

[w]hen *elles* is turned into *the women* the process of universalization is destroyed. All of a sudden, *elles* stopped being mankind. When one says "the women," one connotes a number of individual women, thus transforming the point of view entirely by particularizing what I intended as universal. Not only was my undertaking with the collective pronoun *elles* lost, but another word was introduced, the word *women* appearing obsessively throughout the text...⁴⁷

Wittig's point about losing the universal point of view through the translation of *elles* into "the women" is well taken. For Wittig, "women" is a word that is gender-marked in language, and as such relegates women to something other than an absolute subject. However, what is important here, is

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷"The Mark of Gender," p. 86.

not Wittig's task of pointing out how "women are marked in language by gender,"⁴⁸ but how she goes about illustrating "how women are marked in language in gender." Wittig quickly follows up her observation about the obsessive appearance of the word "women" with the statement that "[women]... is one of those gender-marked words... which I never use in French."⁴⁹

For me, [Wittig explains], women is the equivalent of *slave*, and, in fact, I have actively opposed its use whenever possible. To patch it up with the use of a *y* or an *i* (as in *womyn* or *wimmin*) does not alter the political reality of the word. If one tries to imagine *nogger* or *niggir*, instead of *nigger*, one may realize the futility of the attempt.⁵⁰

The idea that the word "woman" is "the [linguistic] equivalent of" the word "slave" or "nigger" is so obviously problematic that a critical dissection of the analogy hardly seems fair. First, there is an implicit assertion that the word "nigger" functions as the universal linguistic signifier for people of African descent, much like the word "woman" functions as the universal signifier for the female sex. For Wittig, "gender in language... is a mark unique of its kind[;] [it contains] the unique lexical symbol that refers to an oppressed group." The "unique lexical symbol" to which Wittig refers is, of course "Woman," and its pronoun complements, "she," "her," etc. Since, "language is the "first, the permanent, and the final social contract," it makes sense in Wittig's view that gender is the foundational component of all languages. Thus, gender-marking is specific to all languages making it a universal, linguistic phenomenon.

⁴⁸"The Mark of Gender," p. 82.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

Wittig's comparison of "woman" and "nigger" implies that "nigger" operates in much the same way, except that it is a racially-marked word. The assumption is that "nigger" can be as universal in its signification to racially marked groups as woman is to the gender-marked group. What Wittig ignores is the specificity of "nigger" as racial signifier. Emerging out of slavery and the Jim Crow segregation laws, "nigger" is specific not only to a certain time in history, but its usage is confined to the continental U.S. The discursive construction of the category race, and the legal classification of the 'races' is a relatively modern phenomenon. However, Wittig's comparison denies this specificity by positing "nigger" as a trans-global racial identifier that can be likened to what she sees as the trans-global gender signifier—"woman." This is a huge assumption given that racial distinctions vary by culture and country, as well as over and within time. For instance, blacks and whites in South Africa are classified as "coloreds" and "Afrikaners." The negative term is "kaiffer" or "kaiffer boy," not nigger. In a like manner, terms used to describe people of African descent—including derogatory terms—have varied over the past two centuries and continue to change. Thus, the specific historical and social construction of the word "nigger," and the changing contents of the category race, problematizes Wittig's analogy by undermining the assumption that "woman" and "nigger" are symmetrical in the scope of their signification.

Perhaps Wittig's larger point is that despite specific names, each language has within it racial signifiers, and that fact alone is enough to make the comparison to the gender-marked word "woman". Nevertheless, one is still struck by the nature of the racial signifier Wittig chose to make the analogy. For even if we were to accept Wittig's basic proposition that *woman* is as over-determined as *nigger*, why must the word "woman" be compared to a racial

counterpart that is not only derogatory, but also geographically limited and considered as slang?

While "nigger" functions as the ultimate pejorative and derogatory term for African Americans in the U.S.,⁵¹ "woman" does not, in "political reality" (Wittig's term), carry the same cultural weight for women. There are of course, derogatory terms for women that Wittig could have chosen to use in her analogy, including, bitch, cunt, and "piece," to name a few. Instead of the "Woman = Nigger" formulation, which contains a non-derogatory term paralleling a derogatory term, Wittig's equation should have contained either two non-derogatory words (like "Woman = African American") or two derogatory terms (like "bitch=nigger" or "cunt=nigger"). Because Wittig did not choose a negative gender-slang word, her use of the term "nigger" actually serves as a foil. That is, part of the function of the equal sign in her "Woman = Nigger equation," is to reflect back into the word "woman" all of the negativity that is conjured up with the word "nigger." Thus, the racial slur is used here not to highlight the racial formation of language, but to emphasize the problems with the category "woman." Race, even in this explicit usage, is rendered invisible; demeaned in the very act of analysis. The negative connotations of "woman" are made visible, only through comparison with a negative racial term, and only because the "political reality" of the racial term is made invisible. In other words, in order to comprehend the nature of gender in language, the nature of racially-marked words and their mutual construction in gender-marked words had to be made incomprehensible.

⁵¹I will venture to say here that there is no other pejorative term comparable to the term "nigger," and that there is no word used to describe white Americans that carries the same negative connotations.

What all of this shows is that not only is Wittig's analogy incongruous and begins on uneven ground, but that "nigger" or racial(ized) language becomes merely a tool; a means to another end. Race and racial(ized) language becomes the process through which sexual difference in language is illuminated. This process *necessarily* produces race as an absent "marker" within sexual difference discourse, which translates into the notion that race is a category that to exist outside of sexual difference discourse.

Why, you may ask, does the process of analogy *necessarily* produce race as an absent marker, especially when race figures so clearly in the text? Why can't the analogy serve to highlight both sexual difference and racial difference? Where would race stand in relation to sexual difference discourse had Wittig chosen two congruous terms in her analogy?

First, it should be noted that even if Wittig's formulation contained two equally negative-slang terms or two non-negative terms, the notion of comparing race and gender would remain problematic. The problem with the analogy lies not only in the juxtaposition of a derogatory racial term against a non-derogatory gender term, but any such analogy must relegate "race" and racial(ized) language to a position outside of sexual difference discourse. The reasons for this lie in the fact that, the race-gender analogy is only possible when one assumes: (1) that race and gender are separate and distinct theoretical categories with different and independent historical constructions and applications; (2) that the internal composition of race and gender are symmetrical, and therefore each operates linguistically, theoretically, and culturally in parallel ways; and (3) that sexual difference is the fundamental difference, or to use Irigaray's characterization,

"[the] primary and insurmountable division is into two genders."⁵² Each of these assumptions resist notions that view race and gender as mutually constitutive, i.e., as productive of, through, and by one another. The boundaries that define the category "woman" are internally pervaded with and produced through racial differentiation. However, the race-gender analogy makes this understanding of categories virtually impossible. The race-gender analogy cannot serve to indicate the internal and mutual construction of race and gender because the analogy generates and reflects the assumption that the two categories are separate and distinct.⁵³ The process of analogy, of comparison, produces a theoretical boundary-line, if you will, between the two categories. The distinction cannot be reconciled through this comparison because the comparison is what makes the distinction possible and legitimate. This explains how race can be absent even when it is present.

Under these circumstances, the problem in Wittig's case is two-fold. On the one hand, the problem lies within the race-gender analogy, namely the use of incongruous terms. At the same time the problem is the analogy; the comparison itself. But there is also another important element that makes the woman/nigger analogy problematic, and that element is related to Wittig's theory of language.

If we view Wittig's woman/nigger analogy as part of the project to eradicate "marked words," then the move to abolish racially-marked words, underscores Wittig's naive understanding of racial signifiers. This naiveté is underscored by her belief in language as a medium for communicating ideas that

⁵²Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 13.

⁵³I believe this to be the case even when these categories are theorized in terms of "inter" mode, i.e., inter-related, intersection, intertwined, etc. All "inter" conceptualizations must posit two separate entities beforehand.

are already there, as opposed to treating language as a system that which produces meaning.

Language, [she argues], ...gives everyone the same power of becoming an absolute subject through its exercise. But gender, an element of language, works upon this ontological fact to annul it as far as women are concerned and corresponds to a constant attempt to strip them of the most precious thing for a human being—subjectivity.⁵⁴

Notice that Wittig made no explicit reference to race as "an element of language." Neither does she recognize the racialness, if you will, of the concept "human being." But this does not prevent her from claiming that "woman" is the equivalent of "nigger," and since the "imposition of gender...deprive[s] women of the authority of speech,"⁵⁵ one can only deduce that the imposition of race deprives African Americans, (or any other racially "oppressed" group) of the authority of speech. In a like manner, if "gender ...[in language] must be destroyed," then so must race in language be destroyed. "This fact, Wittig tells us, "holds true for every locutor."⁵⁶

Thus, the logic given to us by Wittig's analogy would have us to believe that by abolishing "woman" and "nigger," and their linguistic complements, language would then be clean enough to make everyone who uses it "ungendered, universal, [un-raced, and] whole [subjects]."⁵⁷ As a result, cleansing language of gender-marked words like woman, women, she, her, *elles*,

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 80.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 81.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 80

etc., and of derogatory, racially-marked words like nigger, jap, jew, dego, etc., we would then be left with a language that does not conjure up loaded images with the use of these words. Therefore, in the absence of particularizing words, "minority writers" can now establish themselves as absolute subjects.

Perhaps I have extended the logic of Wittig's analogy a bit too far, but the woman=nigger analogy actually undermines itself given Wittig's theoretical explication of language. I sincerely doubt that abolishing over-determined words would make for a "purer" language. Besides, even if this were possible, what are we to "do with" those racialized words that are not clearly, and specifically recognized as racialized words? What are we to "do with" ordinary words that are products of racialized discourses? How are we to evaluate coded words and phrases that are racial in their meaning and content?

These questions merely highlight the flaws of Wittig's theory of language. One cannot merely "abolish" words to get rid of their images, and connotations. Meaning is not as rigid and foundational as Wittig would have us to believe. Meaning is partially the result of how a word is used, in what context, and in what culture. The meaning of one word will change over and within time, and the images that accompany that meaning will not always be the same. Furthermore, the absence of overloaded, specifically racially-marked words, will not guarantee that other words, although not as derogatory, will not be as equally racial. For instance, Figure 5.1 lists a range of racial signifiers from those that are most obvious (Column A) to those that are rarely considered as racially constructed or racially marked (Column C). The words in Column A are usually racial slurs that are (now) considered offensive and demeaning. Again, there are gender-marked words that can correspond to the racial signifiers in Column A. The words in this column are the words that trouble Wittig the most because they clearly "mark" one as racial. It is unclear however, whether or not she

would argue for the abolishment of racially-marked words that do not connote negativity. Where would African American, black, white, Jewish, or Choctaw fit into Wittig's theory of language and her notion of destroying racially-marked words? How does one make the distinction between "negative" and "non-

Figure 5.1 Comparing Racial Signifiers

Column A	Column B	Column C
Specific Racial & Ethnic Signifiers	Culturally-Coded Signifiers	"Ordinary" Racial Signifiers
nigger kike jap jew dego	welfare cheat gang member rapist criminal drug dealer	stupid lazy uncivilized primitive barbarian savage/ animal-like human rational/intelligent

negative" racially-marked words? At one level, aren't all trouble Wittig the most because they clearly "mark" one as racial. It is unclear however, whether or not she would argue for the abolishment of racially-marked words that do not connote negativity. Where would African American, black, white, Jewish, or Choctaw fit into Wittig's theory of language and her notion of destroying racially-marked words? How does one make the distinction between "negative" and "non-negative" racially-marked words? At one level, aren't all racial markers "negative"?

The words in Column B confound Wittig's notion of language cleansing because these words are "coded" and are not as clearly "marked" as *slave* or *nigger*. In addition, the words in this column do not, in and of themselves,

denote racial marking. Rather, these words are a way of communicating racial ideas and connoting racial images without using specific racial signifiers.

The words in Column C will prove the most challenging to Wittig's understanding of racially-marked words. To implicitly argue for the de-racialization of language through the race-gender analogy by abolishing racial slurs does not take into account the production of racialized subjects in discourse. The discursive construction of racialized subjects often deploys metaphors and "ordinary" adjectives that are then correlated to a specific race. The result is that the "ordinary" adjective then becomes a racial signifier in the abstract sense.

Take for example Hume's observation that "[t]here never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white",⁵⁸ or Kant's elaboration on Hume's essay, in which he claimed that "so fundamental is the difference between [the black and white] races of man, [that] ...it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities in color."⁵⁹ For Kant, as is true of most of the Enlightenment thinkers, reason and rationality were attributes that did not, and indeed could not, belong to the "Negro race." Kant posits the correlation in an anecdotal manner:

Father Labat reports that a Negro carpenter, whom he reproached for haughty treatment towards his wives, answered: 'You whites are indeed fools, for first you make great concessions to your wives, and afterward you complain when they drive you mad.' And it might be that there were something in this which perhaps deserved

⁵⁸David Hume, "Of National Characters," *The Philosophical Works*, ed. Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose, 4 vols. (Darmstadt, 1964), 3:252.

⁵⁹Quoted in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Editor's Introduction: Writing, 'Race' and the Difference It Makes," in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 10.

to be considered; but in short, this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid.⁶⁰

Thus, "the uncivilized," and "the stupid" are posited as innate attributes of those who are, in Kant's pithy phrase, "quite black from head to foot."⁶¹ One cannot dismiss these philosophers as simply "racist" or "products of their times." A dismissal as such would prevent one from recognizing that what counts as "civilized," as "intelligent," or even "human," is racially constructed, and in some ways gendered. The correlation of "ordinary" adjectives to the "Negro race" suggest that racial slurs alone cannot account for the ways in which language is "marked." If this is the case, are we to abolish all loaded adjectives from language?

If we view language as a process of signification, as opposed to "a medium" that merely communicates static meanings, then we are likely to see the facile nature of Wittig's argument to purge language of "marked" words. In following Wittig's logic, all words would in the end disappear, because all words have the potential to signify racial or gendered meanings. That is precisely the function of signification in language, i.e., in its endless chain of referring back to other words, of deferring and conferring meaning, words become fluid in their ability to signify. Thus, the woman=nigger analogy precludes an analysis of both culturally-coded words and "ordinary" racially-constructed words, because it is

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 11.

⁶¹See also Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea in America, (New York: Schocken Books, 1965); Witthrop D. Jordon, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro: 1550-1812, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969); and Louis Ruchames, Racial Thought in America: From the Puritans to Abraham Lincoln, Volume 1, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969);

premised on the assumption that "racially-marked" are negative, derogatory, slurs.

The race-gender analogy in Wittig's work is by no means limited to the woman=nigger equation, and because race and racial language figures so prominently in her work, it has to be placed within the context of (a) language game(s) outlined above. In short, I argued that a language game and language games within feminist theory as is articulated by Wittig, can be viewed on two levels. The first level is the "language game" level, which is characterized by the contemporary focus on language as productive of sexual difference. At this level, the language-game is the theoretical focus that through its analysis separates out what can and cannot fall within the purview of sexual difference discourse. The second level is the level of language games, in the plural, which refers to the ways in which language itself is used within the discursive boundaries of sexual difference. Language-games occur, so to speak within a larger "language game," and refers to those linguistic and theoretical formulations that constitute a particular discursive field.

I have already illustrated how in Wittig's work the woman=nigger analogy necessarily places questions of race outside the purview of sexual difference discourse. The implication is not only the exclusion of race, but the construction of a framework that produces race as a critical sign of absence in the very act of highlighting its presence. Race and racial images become permanent fixtures around which the discourse of sexual difference is built. This is the nature of language games; these are the ways in which language is used to illuminate *how* language is productive of sexual difference. To illustrate, Wittig's comparison of women's lot to that of slaves is a good example.

At the very outset, Wittig made it clear that

*[t]he category of sex is the category that ordains slavery for women, and it works specifically as it did for black slaves, through an operation of reduction, by taking part for the whole, a part (color, sex) through which the whole human group has to pass through a screen.*⁶²

In addition, "the category sex is a totalitarian one,"⁶³ produced through a heterosexual contract by the "straight mind." Because of this, "women may 'choose' to be runaways and try to escape their class or group (as lesbians do), and/or renegotiate daily, and term by term, the social contract."⁶⁴ The only group that stands outside of the category sex, that have resisted or defeated the totalitarian nature of the heterosexual contract are lesbians because "[they] are escapees from [their] class in the same way as the American runaway slaves were when escaping slavery and becoming free."⁶⁵

The reasons why Wittig chose to make these comparisons—to illustrate the reductive nature of language, to argue for the "oppression" of women, to underscore the inherent heterosexism in language and society—may or may not be "good" reasons. But that is not the point. The point to critically examine the *manner* in which she constructs a basis for arguing for the totalitarian nature of heterosexism in language and society, and the ramifications of that construction. Are we to assume for example, that lesbians can "runaway" and become "free" simply because Wittig has deployed that language and image in the comparison?

⁶²"The Category Sex," op. cit., p. 8.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴From the "Preface" to the collection of essays in The Straight Mind, op. cit., p. xiii.

⁶⁵"One is Not Born A Woman," in op. cit., p. 20.

The question is rhetorical, but what I am trying to demonstrate is that we know nothing about the slaves to whom Wittig refers. The comparison itself makes it impossible to theorize about the situation of "runaway slaves" because the lot of slaves is paralleled to the lot of "women". Historically speaking, "runaway slaves" were never safe or free. In fact, they never escaped their masters or the system that held them captive. Constantly looking over their shoulder, tracked by dogs, turned in by suspicious whites, and stealing food for survival, all indicate that runaway slaves did not live a life of freedom, but a life of fear.⁶⁶ Runaway slaves, because they were property, could be returned to slavery either by custom or by law. In a like manner, those Blacks who were not runaway slaves, who had either purchased their freedom, were born free, or were manumitted after the death of a master, were also perpetual victims of the legal and customary system that held them in constant bondage. These free blacks could be kidnapped and sold back into slavery by profiteers, re-enslaved to pay off their master's debts, or jailed and then enslaved for traveling too far below the Mason-Dixon Line. Even when emancipated, former slaves remained bound to a social order that enacted a series of Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws, to disenfranchise and segregate them. Free blacks, regardless how they obtained their freedom, were in every sense, "slaves without masters."⁶⁷

⁶⁶For oral accounts of such episodes, see for example, John W. Blassingame, Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); B.A. Botkin, ed. Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1973); James Mellon, ed. Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember, An Oral History, (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988); and Roy E. Finkenbine, et. al., eds. African American Voices on Race, Slavery, and Emancipation, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

⁶⁷The characterization is from Ira Berlin's Slaves Without Masters, (New York: Pantheon Books, A Division of Random House, 1974). For a discussion of the social and political condition of free Blacks, see Carol Wilson, Freedom as

Thus, Wittig's claim that "slavery for women...works specifically as it did for black slaves" is, at the very least, specious. One must understand, that the problem with this argument lies not in the notion that Wittig did not give an "accurate view" of slavery and runaway slaves. Neither do my contestations stem from a desire to "tell the whole story." Rather the problem lies in the proposition that race and gender are theoretically equivalent categories, and that racial and sexual difference operates in parallel and symmetrical ways. Racial and sexual difference do not function in specifically equivalent ways, and to argue that it does has certain theoretical ramifications, many of which are yet to be understood and articulated.

In this chapter, I have shown that Wittig's constructs and deploys race and specific racialized images throughout her work. Despite its obsessive appearance in the form of analogies and comparisons, race (as productive and mutually constitutive of sexual difference) is never analyzed. Instead, the exclusion of the theoretical content of race, makes the discourse around gender possible by lending legitimacy to the concept of "women as slaves." The race-gender analogy, by its very structure, establishes race outside the domain of sexual difference, even as it forms a part of the discourse. As is the case with Wittig, this structural exclusion, however unwittingly, involves a series of language games that challenges the productive role of language on the one hand (e.g., sexual difference), and reinforces it on the other (e.g., racial difference). When this is the case, race figures paradoxically as the ultimate paradigm of

Risk: The Kidnapping of Free Blacks in America, 1780-1865, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); for an account by a re-enslaved Black, see Solomon Northup's Twelve Years a Slave, edited by Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968). See also Stanley Campbell, The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1970); Samuel May, The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims. (New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1861, Reprinted by Books for Libraries Press, 1970).

"oppression" and as the unrepresentable. As a theoretical category, race becomes a sign of absence in spite of its spectacularity, or better yet, *because* of its spectacularity.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION
"WHAT IS A WHITE WOMAN ANYWAY?" RESPONDING TO RACE IN
THE 1990'S

I frankly dislike some of the assumptions about white women I find in black writings. I am neither the guiding genius of the patriarchy not the creator of my conventional sex role nor a fit subject for rape.

—Catherine Stimpson, 1971

There is a dead weight which can be felt in many discussions of racism in the white feminist movement, a stale and stifling smell, the presence of guilt and self-hatred. I believe that black feminists recognize the uselessness, the stagnancy of those emotions.

—Adrienne Rich, 1979

In recent critiques of feminist work for failing to take account of race or class...it has recently come to my attention that the white woman is the issue...There is, of course, much to[o] much of this, this 'woman, modified,' this woman discounted by white, meaning she would be oppressed but for her [white] privilege.

—Catherine MacKinnon, 1991

In 1832, when Maria W. Stewart stood before the New England Anti-Slavery Society, she became the first "American woman of any race [to speak publicly] before a mixed audience of men and women, blacks and white..."¹ In that public address, Stewart urged the "sons and daughters of Africa to unite" against the treachery of slavery, illiteracy, and economic despair that characterized both the bond and free. At the same time, she admonished Black

¹Beverly-Guy-Sheftall, ed., Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought, New York: The New Press, 1995, p. 25.

women in particular for their "mean and cowardly disposition," and encouraged them to become community leaders and scholars. "How long," she queried, "shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles? ...We have never had an opportunity of displaying our talents; therefore the world thinks we know nothing."² Despite Stewart's insightful comments on the condition of the race and Black women's position in society, her public speaking career would prove to be short-lived. A year later, she left the lecture circuit amidst criticism from Black men who thought it inappropriate for her to speak in public. As such Stewart, found herself in the unenviable position of confronting what Anna Julia Cooper would later call, both "a woman question and a race problem."³ Before Stewart abandoned her public career, she defended Black women's rights, as Black women, to pursue their racial uplift efforts publicly. In addition, she pointed out Black men's contradictory behavior, namely "preaching against prejudice in the white community but being discriminatory in its own back yard."

Unfortunately, this paradox would also exist for twentieth century Black women who would write about themes that were decidedly "feminist" in content. The emergence of a Black feminist consciousness⁴ would be met with criticisms from within and outside the African American community. This Black feminist

²Ibid., p. 29.

³Anna Julia Cooper, A Voice from the South, p. 134.

⁴I am referring primarily to works published after 1970. However, this is not to suggest that Black women's feminist consciousness is a recent phenomena, or that it is a product of "white" or mainstream feminism. For a summaries of the development of Black women's feminist consciousness see Beverly Guy-Sheftall's, "The Evolution of Feminist Consciousness Among African American Women," in op. cit., 1-22; and Katie Cannon's, "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness," in Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, (New York: Continuum, 1995), 47-56.

consciousness would establish its theoretical framework as that which speaks to and explains Black women's identity as uniquely defined by the multiple constraints of race, class, and gender. Black feminism or womanism, as it would later be called, argued that Black women's unique identity "...meant that the problems, concerns, and needs of black women are different in many ways from those of both white women and black men."⁵ Thus, the epistemological, theoretical, and practical claims that constitute Black feminist thought, or womanism challenges discourses that are race-only in its focus, as well as those that focus solely on gender. To the extent that Black feminist thought complicates and challenges the assumptions and methodologies of race-based and gender-based discourses, then a litany of responses and criticisms to the Black feminist project would not be unexpected.

The internal responses are well-known. Most consist of Black male indictments of a wide-range of feminist writings that purportedly cast Black men in stereotypical and negative roles. In the 1970's and 1980's, works that came under this kind of attack included Michele Wallace's Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman,⁶ Ntozake Shange's Broadway play "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf," Alice Walker's novel The

⁵Guy-Sheftall, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁶In all fairness, I should note that Black men were not the only critics of this work. Alice Walker criticized the book in a letter to The Black Scholar, which was later reprinted in her book In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1983), 320-25. In addition, Michele Wallace cites June Jordan as a Black woman who "publicly and vehemently opposed" the book. For Wallace's account of this controversy see, "Variations on Negation and the Heresy of Black Feminist Creativity," in Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory, (New York: Verso Books, 1990), 213-240; and "Introduction: How I Saw It then, How I See It Now," Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman, Verso Books Reprint Edition (New York: Verso Books, 1990), xvii-xxxviii.

Color Purple, and Steven Spielberg's co-produced film of the same name. During this period, the controversy over this growing Black feminist consciousness prompted vitriolic responses in both popular and academic media. Generally speaking, Black women who acknowledged Black male sexism were portrayed as "angry," narcissistic and frustrated, male-haters. Such women were viewed as pawns of white feminists, who duped Black women into "marshall[ing] an all-out attack on black males.."7

This contentious debate over Black feminist writings and their analyses of sexism within the African American community has not been quelled by the passage of time. In fact, the 1990's has witnessed a continuation, if not an increase, in the viciousness of the attacks against Black women who insist upon the centrality of gender in analyzing race. Criticisms against a Black feminist perspective have grown more virulent and bitter, even personal,⁸ given the rise of an insidious form of Black nationalism that is determined to keep Black women in their proper place. Fueled by the Mike Tyson/Desiree Washington rape trial, the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas debacle, Rasheeda Moore's role in the

⁷Examples of these kinds of readings can be seen in articles published between 1973-1986, in the journal The Black Scholar. The Black Scholar published several articles and/or special issues on "Black Women" which succinctly captured the "debate" on sexism during that time period. See the April 1973 issue, "Black Women's Liberation," which includes among others Barbara Sizemore's "Sexism and the Black Male" and Mae C. King's, "The Politics of Sexual Stereotypes"; the March 1975 issue, "The Black Woman," Robert Staples's article, "The Myth of Black Macho: A Response to Angry Black Feminists," in the March/April 1979 issue which spawned the May/June 1979 issue entitled "The Black Sexism Debate," and the 1986 "Black Women and Feminism" issue.

⁸I am referring to the physical assault against Julianne Malveaux, and destruction of personal property for her public and critical stance against the Million Man March. Apparently, members of the Nation of Islam slashed all four tires on her car before physically attacking her. E-mail communication dated January 1996.

arrest of Washington D.C.'s mayor Marion Barry,⁹ the teen sex scandal of U.S. Congressman Mel Reynolds, and the small, but significant, Black feminist opposition to Million Man March, the 1990's has reiterated the sentiments of the previous two decades by labelling the Black feminist as a simple-minded, brainwashed puppet who merely "copies and echoes the white feminist."¹⁰ Familiar themes were repeated. Black women who claimed allegiance to feminism were politically and intellectually naive; traitors to the race; and tools of the "white power structure" used to undermine the validity of race-based (i.e., Black male) claims.¹¹

⁹It is interesting to note that Rasheeda Moore, the Black woman whom the FBI used as their informant, was immediately seen as a traitor to the Black community. Within days of the arrest, local vendors sold thousands of tee shirts that read "The Bitch Set Him Up."

¹⁰Nathan Hare and Julia Hare, "What is Black Feminism?" in The Endangered Black Family: Coping With the Unisexualization and Coming Extinction of the Black Race, (San Francisco: Black Think Tank, 1984), 140.

¹¹For a discussion of these issues as they relate to the Anita Hill/ Clarence Thomas hearings, Black nationalism, and responses to the Mike Tyson and Mel Reynolds rape charges see Toni Morrison, ed., Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill Clarence Thomas and the Construction of Social Reality, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992); Geneva Smitherman, ed., African American Women Speak Out on AnitaHill-Clarence Thomas, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995); Paulette Pierce and Brackette F. Williams, "'And Your Prayers Shall Be Answered Through the Womb of a Woman': Insurgent Masculine Redemption and the Nation of Islam," in Brackette F. Williams, ed., Women Out of Place: The Gender of Agency and the Race of Nationality, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 186-215; Nikol Alexander, "'Carrying the Water': The Black Woman as Traitor in African American Political Thought and Practice," Unpublished Paper Presented at the National Conference of Black Political Scientists, Atlanta, GA, April 8-11, 1998; and Nikol Alexander, "Rethinking the Million Man March: Gender, Nationalism and the Convergence of Political Thought on Race in the Late Twentieth Century," forthcoming dissertation, Rutgers University, 1999.

Despite the prevalence and hence, familiarity of such arguments, very little has been written on the external responses to Black feminist writings. In particular, there has been little to no attention given to the responses of white feminists, or to the meaning(s) of such responses. It is a well-known fact that African American feminists have criticized mainstream feminist theory for its inability to account for racism both as a force that prohibits feminists from engaging issues pertaining to Black women, as a category of analysis in feminist theorizing. The often-cite claim is that feminist politics developed from a "white-middle-class perspective," which inevitable produced theories relevant only to "white women" and their experiences. The limitations of "white middle-class feminism" prompted African American feminists to refine their own stance on the gender and race relations. In addition, the criticisms of "white middle-class feminism" forced white women, as feminists, to respond to claims of racial parochialism. The key questions then are: How have white women responded to the critique that feminism is "about and for white women"? How does feminist discourse view Black feminist theory? How are Black women perceived (and received) within mainstream feminist circles? What do these responses to racial critiques mean?

This chapter explores the ways in which white feminists view both the critiques lodged against its discourse and their perception of Black feminist theory. Specifically, I identify and analyze the types of responses white feminists have made to claims that feminist theory and politics has as its focus white women and their concerns. I also explore the ways in which feminist discourse construct and present Black feminist theory and its practitioners. But why the focus on *white feminist* responses? Why is it important to examine the responses of white feminists to Black feminist critiques? What is at stake in feminism's construction of Black feminist theory as "not-theory"? Of what significance or

weight should, if any, Black feminists place on the such responses? How should feminists, of any race, read such responses?

One might be inclined to answer the above questions by pointing out that the formation and development of Black feminist theory, and Black Women's Studies, need not, indeed does not, depend on a nod of favor from mainstream feminist studies. In 1982 when Gloria Hull and Barbara Smith discussed the politics of Black women's studies as a discipline and outlined four factors that affected this embryonic field, the need for Black Women's Studies to be dependent upon and legitimated by the broader field Women's Studies was not among those factors.¹² Despite the connotations of what it might mean to focus on white feminist responses to racial critiques, I should note that such an analysis is not about seeking legitimation, acceptance, or approval for Black feminist theory as an actual *feminist* framework in its own right. Rather, the goal is to identify and define the nature of such responses; to understand how they have been constructed, as well as how they operate within feminist discourse; and to understand what kind of "story" these responses tell about the position of race in feminist discourse. Hence, there are at least three reasons for considering the responses of white feminists. First, since Black feminist theory is both a critical re-reading of the hegemonic nature of white feminist discourse, as well as a constructionist project designed to describe and explain the particular experiences of African American women, then it is important to assess the degree to which Black feminist criticisms have altered the terrain of feminist discourse. If, in other words, paradigmatic shifts are the result of "theoretical revolutions," to borrow from Thomas Kuhn, then mainstream feminist discourse should

¹²"Introduction: The Politics of Black Women's Studies," in Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, ed. But Some of Us Are Brave, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982), xvii-xxxii.

indicate a re-working and expansion of its epistemological assumptions and theoretical borders. Second, because feminist discourse claims to speak for and about women and has (recently) defined itself as a discourse that gives attention to race, and "other differences," then we need to examine how feminism responds to claims that it is not what it claims to be. Third, a focus on responses to racial critiques will allow one to see what feminism has to "say" about race and racial difference. In other words, the responses themselves form a part of the discourse and as such, represent feminist theory's position on "race."

In what follows, I briefly discuss the nature of Black feminist theory by outlining some its basic features. I then outline the kinds of responses white feminists have made to the Black feminist project through a reading of Alison Jaggar's and Paula Rothenberg's well-known volume, Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men. In this reading I try to demonstrate that Black feminist theory is constructed as "non-theoretical" or as a "special interest" that falls outside the discursive domain of feminist discourse. Although, as stated previously, the amount of scholarship on gender and "whiteness"¹³ has increased over the last decade, little has been published on how white feminists view Black feminist theory or how it operates as an internal critique to feminist studies at large. Nevertheless, the literature on this question reveals two distinct, yet broad categories of responses. The first category of responses covers the period between the late 1970's and the late 1980's. During this period, white feminist responses were generally characterized by what Adrienne Rich and Bernice Fisher calls "guilt and

¹³For example, sociologist Ruth Frankenberg has written on....., white/black stuff

shame,"¹⁴ and were manifested primarily in the paradoxical forms of silence and inaction. As a response, "guilt and shame" created a tone and demeanor tantamount to an apologetic stance on the issue racism in the feminist politics. Various feminists conferences tried to "accommodate" the concerns of Black women with special panel, speakers or "representative" speakers. In many instances, Black women saw these effort to include them in already established forums and conferences, as just another form of racism. They often used their "special panels," lectures, and keynote addresses, to reiterate that racism was still a problem and that the category "race" was still theoretically invisible in most feminist scholarship. From white feminists perspective, it appeared as if "doing nothing would be racist and [also] whatever we did would be racist just because *we* did it [original emphasis]."¹⁵ The idea the Black women would continue to charge feminism with "racism" in the face apparent attempts of atonement eventually gave rise to a different set of responses.

Paralleling the increase in publications by and about Black women and Black feminist theory, this second set of responses mark an astounding shift in white feminist responses to theorizing racial difference among women. Whereas the responses of the 1980's were characterized by silence rooted in guilt producing attempts at "accomodation," the responses of the 1990's are undergirded by hostility, open resentment, and defensiveness. No longer silent, "guilty," or "ashamed," recent works and comments by white women in feminist

¹⁴Adtienne Rich, "'Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia,'" in On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 275-310; and Berenice Fisher, "Guilt and Shame in the Women's Movement: The Radical Ideal of Action and its Meaning for Feminist Intellectuals," Feminist Studies 10 (Summer 1984): 184-212.

¹⁵Marilyn Frye, "On Being White: Thinking Toward a Feminist Understanding of Race and Race Supremacy," in the Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory, (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983), 112.

theory indicate that white feminists are no longer tolerant of the idea that race *needs* to be theorized in theories of sexual difference. In fact, the ever-present "feminist-theory-only-focuses-on-the-white-woman" critique is now seen (along with feminist poststructuralist critiques) as contributing to the "backlash" against women. In other words, by claiming that "woman" does not exist, and that theories produced in that name are fraudulent, contributes to the notion that there are no "practices...done by men to women...[that can be seen] as forming a system, a hierarchy of inequality."¹⁶ The message and tone of these kinds of responses is that too much attention to difference, especially racial difference, is divisive and thwarts any "collective" effort women put forth against patriarchal domination.

In addition to resentment and hostility, I also comment briefly upon what I call the (In)Vocation of "Women of Color." Here, I note the often paradoxical ways in which the term "women of color" is invoked and used in feminist discourse. In general, when the question "what about 'women of color'?" is raised by white feminists it is done to correct other white feminists, to verbally acknowledge race without challenging the theoretical assumptions of a gender-only discourse, or to accuse Black women for "excluding 'other' women of color." In keeping with the popularity of the phrase "women of color" within contemporary feminism, studying and/or claiming allegiance to "women of color" has become a "vocation," or as duCille puts it, "an anybody-can-play-pick-up game"¹⁷ in which "race" and "Black women" are reinvented by each new self-proclaimed "white sister." I read the (in)vocation of women of color as a

¹⁶Catherine MacKinnon, "From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?," *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁷DuCille, *Occult of True Womanhood*, p.

rhetorical device that attempts to avoid the white/ Black racial binary that undergirds feminist theorizing. Because the (in)vocation of the phrase "women of color" assumes an "anti-racist" politics, its use implies that any theorist incorporating this phrase into their work "does race." Again, I view these not merely as responses, but components of the Accusatory Defensiveness discursive strategy produced by the discourse to preserve the prominence of the gender narrative.

Before proceeding, I think it is appropriate to clarify what I mean by "responses" and how they are defined and used in this chapter. As stated above, little has been written on white feminist responses to the "absence" of race feminist discourse and the presence of racism in feminist politics. If this is the case, and it is, then on what basis can one identify Accusatory Defensiveness as a discursive strategy and mark it as a shift in attitudes? Part of the answer lies in the deconstructive "method" of reading employed in this project. In Chapter 1, I defined deconstruction as the "vigilant seeking out of those 'aporias,' blind spots or moments of self-contradiction where a text involuntary betrays the tension between rhetoric and logic, between what it manifestly *means to say* and what it is nonetheless *constrained to say*.¹⁸ Hence, the tension between what the works by white feminists "manifestly mean to say and what they are nonetheless constrained to say" accounts for one of the ways used to identify and understand white feminists perception of Black feminist theory. This kind of close reading also includes, to appropriate the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious, an examination of the "unconscious or hidden discourse" on race within feminist discourse. Like conscious discourse, unconscious discourse often consists of one saying something that is quite different from what one appears to say. From a

¹⁸Christopher Norris, *Derrida*, op. cit., 19. I outline this method on pp. 107-113.

psychoanalytic perspective, unconscious discourse consists of dreams, jokes, slips of the tongue, and physical manifestations or symptoms. In a like manner, the "unconscious discourse" on race in feminist thinking consists of statements in forewords, prefaces, and afterwords, footnotes, (mis)spellings, and rationales that reveal both the position and perception of race in feminist discourse whether such statements intended to or not. This unconscious discourse on race betrays not only the responses themselves, but also feminist discourse's role in producing them.

A deconstructive reading of the unconscious discourse on race is not the only way identify white feminists responses to Black feminists and their scholarship. Both Black and white feminists have written about white feminist responses to charges of racism and racial exclusion. Some of these works, like Catherine MacKinnon's, "From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?," are themselves responses. Most of the work, however, is *about* such responses. Given the nature and tone of the responses that make up the Accusatory Defensiveness strategy, it is not surprising that many of those responses were a part private conversations, whose access is made possible only when recounted anecdotally in published works. Thus, it should be clear that my use of "responses" has very little to do with administering an attitudinal survey or face-to-face interview to measure the attitudes white women have in relation to Black feminism. While this method is useful, it is inappropriate for my purposes in this chapter. Since I am interested in the ways in which feminist discourse produces and deploys discursive strategies that define race as existing outside of its discursive domain, I focus on the rhetorical responses found within feminist works. The goal of course, is to illustrate that: (1) feminist discourse has both a "conscious" and an "unconscious" discourse on race; (2) these levels of discourse articulate feminism's conception of and response to Black feminist

theory and its claims of racial exclusion; and (3) the responses in the 1990's represent a shift in attitude.

II. Black Feminist Theory as "Non-Theory"

It is clear from the works of Black feminists that Black women have developed, over the period of several decades, a systematic and comprehensive theory that outlines the significance of race to both their existence as women, as well as to the general social arrangement of society.¹⁹ The emphasis on race and racism did not mean that Black women overlooked or thought unimportant other forms of oppression. The interaction between race, class, gender, sexuality forms the basis of Black feminist thought. In addition, it is clear from the writings of Black feminists that they view their scholarship as an oppositional discourse which challenges and expands the boundaries of two other oppositional discourses—African American Studies and Women Studies—as well as a theoretical and intellectual field of study in its own right. The underlying theme of Black feminist scholarship is that Black feminist theorizing not only addresses issues that relate specifically to the lives of Black women, but because it focuses on the interrelationship between race, class, and gender, it is the most comprehensive and inclusive. In other words, Black feminists eschew the notion that the reality of any one person's life can be explained by a strict adherence to the primacy of one form of oppression over another. Deborah King explains it in this manner, "[t]o the extent that the adherents of any one ideology insist on

¹⁹See for example, Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought, op. cit., Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought, (New York: The New Press, 1995); Stanlie James and Abena P. A. Busia, eds., Theorizing Black Feminisms, (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1994); Barbara Omolade, The Rising Song of African American Women, (New York: Routledge, 1994); Kesho Yvonne Scott, The Habit of Surviving: Black Women's Strategies for Life, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990);

separatist organizational forms, assert the fundamental nature of any one oppression, and demand total cognitive, affective, and behavioral commitment, that ideology and its practitioners exclude black women and the relatives of [their] lives."²⁰ Since the Black feminist project denies that any *one* oppression is fundamental, it would necessarily view feminism's privileging of gender as problematic, and assert the need for a more "wholistic" approach to understanding the position of women in society. But how does mainstream feminist theory view such claims? If in fact Black feminists view their work as not only challenging the theories and assumptions of traditional feminist theory, but as expanding its boundaries, then one should be able to identify: (1) an acknowledgement of Black feminist theory as a viable and systematic theory of gender and race relations in its own right; and (2) rhetorical responses that reflect moments of expansion or "incorporation."

For the most part, mainstream feminist theory has not recognized Black feminist challenges as being theoretical in nature or as forming a comprehensive and systematic framework of its own. Recently, the question of the most appropriate "competing feminist framework" for feminist theory and politics has been recast in terms of three related but distinct epistemological projects writing against the grain of "bad science."²¹ Even in the re-working of the familiar liberal, marxist, and socialist feminist typology, Black feminist scholarship is not seen as challenging the epistemological basis of traditional feminist knowledge. An examination of Alison Jaggar's and Paula Rothernberg's,

²⁰Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," *op. cit.*, p. 104.

²¹See Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, 1986; *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). Harding recasts the familiar typ

Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men, illustrates the notion that within feminist discourse, Black feminist theory is more critique than theory.

I have chosen the Jaggar and Rothenberg volume for several reasons. First, Feminist Frameworks, has been widely-read and it is often used in undergraduate Women's Studies courses as the most comprehensive survey book available on feminist theory and its philosophical assumptions. Second, the popularity and the demand for this volume, as well as the ever-changing landscape of feminist theory, has produced three revised editions over a period of fifteen years. The first edition of Feminist Frameworks was published in 1978; the second edition in 1983; and the most recent edition in 1993. The editorial changes that were made from one edition to another provides a basis for comparing the ways in which the category race and Black feminist theory were (are) conceptualized. Third, following Kirstie McClure's reading of this volume, I view Feminist Frameworks as an attempt to position feminist theory, in all of its varieties, as a systematic, comprehensive, and reliable form of political knowledge.²² In Jaggar's and Rothenberg's typology, the most adequate explanatory theory would authorize feminists political action. McClure calls this understanding of the relationship between theory and politics "scientized politics." In "scientized politics," she writes

'politics' is strongly identified with problem-solving activities within a bounded social system. Hence, the privileged form of political knowledge is cast as the diagnosis of social problems, the isolation of their underlying causes, and the recommendations of specific sorts of practical interventions in system dynamics as their appropriate 'solution.' Within this understanding, what is taken

²²"The Issue of Foundations: Scientized Politics, Politicized Science, and Feminist Critical Practice," in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., Feminists Theorize the Political, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 341-368.

in the last instance to authorize the production of reliable political knowledge is 'theory,' with paradigmatic status accorded...to systematic, comprehensive, causally explanatory social scientific theory [emphasis added].²³

McClure rightly notes that this "scientific" understanding of theory and politics serves as the basis for granting some forms of feminist practices the status of "theory" and not others. McClure briefly mentions Jaggar and Rothenberg's justification for the omission of Black feminism, among others,²⁴ as having failed to meet the criteria of "systematic, comprehensive, causally explanatory social scientific theory." However, I want to explore in greater detail McClure's intimation that Black feminism is not accorded the status of "theory" within feminist discourse. Furthermore, I want to suggest that the reluctance to name the Black feminist project as a "theoretical" project has more to do with the stability of and coherence of feminist discourse than with meeting scientific criteria. In other words, what is at stake is not simply which theory is the most comprehensive, "scientific," or systematic, or that feminists use such criteria to evaluate and name "feminist frameworks," but the ability of feminism to speak for women *as women* .

In the first edition of Feminist Frameworks, Jaggar and Rothenberg Struhl argue for the necessity of "[a] comprehensive theory of the position of women in society"; one that is able to [offer] a *de* scription of women's oppression and a *pre* scription for eliminating it."²⁵ Any feminist framework must not only describe

²³Ibid., 344.

²⁴McClure also notes the omission of religious and existential feminism, as well as "anarchist or anarcha-feminism," "lesbianfeminism," and the works of "non-black feminists of color."

²⁵Feminist Frameworks, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company), op. cit., x and xi.

social reality, but it must also explain it. Given that "one framework is *not* as good as another," the feminist theoretical accounts are those that "provid[e] a comprehensive explanation of the deeper causes of women's subordination [and thus] can... function as the guide we need to direct our struggles for social change."²⁶ Given this description, Jaggar and Rothenberg Struhl "selected" four feminist frameworks which "sucee[ds] in identifying the conditions which prevent women from freely choosing which of our potentialities we wish to fulfill."²⁷ The four feminist frameworks are Liberal Feminism, Traditional Marxist Feminism, Radical Feminism, and Socialist Feminism. The structure of Feminists Framework consists of three parts. Part I, "The Problem," defines and discusses the limitations of current social arrangements in the areas of work, families and sexuality. Part II presents representative texts of the four feminists frameworks, and Part III showcases articles for each framework in the three areas listed above. Where does race or Black feminist theory fit in?²⁸ The most obvious point is the complete silence on the issue of race. Not only is there not a "feminist framework" called Black feminism or some variation thereof, but this edition does not even include articles by liberal, marxists, radical, or socialist feminists the view race as a central method for organizing and differentiating society. In addition, there are no editorial comments in the "Introduction" that explains this omission and silence. As a theory or as an important conceptual category, race appears trivial at best. Jaggar and Rothenberg Struhl do however

²⁶Ibid., xi and xii.

²⁷Ibid., xii.

²⁸I realize that many of the seminal Black feminist texts---for example, --- had not yet been published. However, by 1978 Toni Cade Bambara had published *The Black Woman*, and plethora of articles had ben published in Black journals and magazines.

include two articles about Black women within the section "Part I: The Problem." Michelle Rusell's and Mary Jane Lupton's, "Black Women and the Market," and an "excerpt...from a lengthy essay written by a group of young blacks who live in a Northeastern suburban community," form the essays that "draw upon the experience of persons of different...ethnic backgrounds."²⁹ The inclusion of these essays under this section of the book trivializes race by presenting the problems of Black women as simply a "woman's problem."³⁰ In the words of Margaret Simons, the content and placement of these articles confines Black women's scholarship "to the level of a pretheoretical presentation of concrete problems" faced by all women.³¹ Because Jaggar and Rothenberg Struhl's discussion of race and racism is

devoted to statements of the concrete problems addressed by feminists...[Black women's] perspectives...are not thought to define alternative theoretical frameworks, in spite of the statements by some minority feminists affirming their autonomy from white women's liberation movement and offering theoretical analyses which differ profoundly from those of other feminist theorists.³²

By 1984, the second edition of Feminist Frameworks looked remarkably different. Retaining the tripartite division of the first edition and the definition of feminist frameworks as "systems of ideas, [and] conceptual structures that feminists can use in explaining, justifying, and guiding their actions," Jaggar and Rothenberg "update the older analyses [and] present a number of new and

²⁹p. xiii.

³⁰The subtitle for this section is: "The Need for Women's and Men's Liberation."

³¹Margaret A. Simons, "Racism and Feminism: A Schism in the Sisterhood," Feminist Studies 5 (Summer 1979), 388.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 388-389.

insightful analyses."³³ "These new theoretical developments," they write, "result primarily from work by radical feminists, socialist feminists, and feminists of color."³⁴ Stated in this manner, Jaggar and Rothenberg suggests that "feminists of color" have, since the first edition, produced theoretical insights that form a "comprehensive analysis of the nature and causes of women's oppression and a correlated set of proposals for ending it."³⁵ However, of the three kinds of feminists scholarship listed as having "new theoretical developments," only the work by "feminists of color" do not constitute a "systematic framework." Although radical feminism, according to Jaggar and Rothenberg, at the time of the first edition, "did not yet constitute a unified theory, but instead...included several diverse strands of thinking," this "diverseness" did not negate its status as a "systematic framework." In contrast, it is precisely this kind of "diverse strands of thinking" that Jaggar and Rothenberg use to deny scholarship by "women of color" the status of "systematic theory." "Similarly, at the time of the first edition, socialist feminism had not succeeded in distinguishing itself clearly from traditional Marxism."³⁶ Since then, Jaggar and Rothenberg argue, radical feminist theorists have pressed further their analysis of women's oppression in terms of male control of women's bodies," and has thus made "clearer [its] distinctive theoretical contribution"³⁷ to systematically understanding the "nature and causes of women's oppression." Socialist feminists have also "deepened and

³³Feminist Frameworks, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984), xii.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., xiii.

³⁷Ibid.

sharpened their analyses so that the contrast between socialist feminism and traditional Marxism is [more] clearly visible."³⁸ These statements suggest that what is at stake in the articulation of radical and socialist feminism is not its *status* as a systematic framework that can be used to explain, justify, and guide feminist political actions, but its *ability* to be "sharp," "clear," and "distinct" in its articulation of women's oppression. However, for scholarship produced by "feminists of color," it is precisely this status of a systematic and theoretical framework that is at issue.

Jaggar and Rothenberg consider the inclusion of the "new theoretical developments" by feminists of color as "the most obvious change between the first and second edition of *Feminist Frameworks*."³⁹ The second edition reprints the Russell and Lupton essay on "Black Women and the Market," deletes the essay on "Black Women in Revolt," and adds Marcia Ann Gillespie's, "The Myth of the Strong Black Woman," and Alexis M. Herman's, "Still...Small Change for Black Women." Like the first edition, all of these articles appear under "Part 1: The Problem" which continues to view the "experiences of Black women" in strictly gendered terms. Nevertheless, this second edition contains a new section entitled "Feminism and Women of Color: The Inseparability of Gender, Class, and Race Oppression," under "Part 2: Alternative Feminist Frameworks," with corresponding "applications" to work, the family, and sexuality under "Part 3: Practice: The Implication of Theories." In a sense, this new section on "Feminism and Women of Color" seems to indicate an expansion in the territorial boundaries that mark feminist discourse. Given Jaggar and Rothenberg's desire to "ensure that [women of color and] their contribution was no longer neglected,"

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., xiii-xiv.

the addition of this new section appears to allow "Black women" speak for themselves in their own words. But here again is the importance between "what a text manifestly means to say or do and what it is nonetheless constrained to mean." Jaggar and Rothenberg do allow, and I do mean "allow," the voices of women of color to be "heard," but their work and voices are only heard through the megaphone of already established definitions of "feminist theory." As a result, scholarship by "feminists of color" is relegated to a "non-framework" status; a move that allows the category gender to be conceptualized apart for race. Jaggar and Rothenberg omit "Black feminism" from the privileged position of a feminist framework because "women of color do not utilize any single theoretical framework"⁴⁰ rather they "...have used a variety of conceptual structures for interpreting and organizing their experience."⁴¹ Jaggar reiterates this position in her 1983 publication, Feminist Politics and Human Nature, when explaining why Black feminism is not presented as a separate theoretical framework. "Black feminism," she writes,

has not been omitted from [this] book, but it has not been treated as a separate theory because black feminists utilize a variety of theoretical approaches....Given the variety in the theoretical orientation of black feminism, I think it is more useful to examine their contributions in the context of the four categories of feminism I identify, [Liberal, Traditional Marxist, Radical, and Socialist Feminism], than to present those contribution as reflective of a single balck feminist perspective.⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid., 89. Jaggar reiterates this statement in her 1983 publication Feminist Politics and Human Nature, (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), when she writes: "Black feminism has not been omitted from the book, but it has not been treated as a separate theory because black feminists utilize a variety of theoretical approaches

⁴¹Ibid., xiv.

That the works of "women of color" are "place[d] in a separate section," should not be taken as according Black feminism "framework" status. In fact, Jaggar and Rothenberg make their position clear when they state:

We do not think that the papers we have placed in this section were designed to present a comprehensive analysis of women's oppression of a complete set of proposals for ending it. In other words, we do not think *that their writers necessarily intended them to constitute a new feminist framework*. Nevertheless, we do think that while the experience of women of color has been varied, it has also been grounded on enough basic similarities to have generated a *distinctive perspective* on social reality.⁴³

In other words, works by feminists of color cannot be considered "comprehensive analys[e]s of women's oppression," but they can (and do) constitute a lower form of knowledge; a "distinctive perspective." What is most intriguing about the passage above is not merely the fact that Black feminism is defined simply in terms of a "distinctive perspective" and not in terms of a theoretical framework, but *how* this process of labelling takes place. The above passage presents Jaggar and Rothenberg as custodians of feminist theory. They articulate a set of criteria for identifying and evaluating what is and is not appropriate or adequate feminist political theory. However, this gatekeeping role is disguised in a transformative move that appears to place the designation of a distinctive perspective in the hands of feminists of color "writers." Throughout the introductory essay, Jaggar and Rothenberg construct themselves as active agents in determining both the inclusion of frameworks as well as whether or not "framework" status would be granted, except in their discussion of the newly

⁴²Feminist Politics and Human Nature, (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 11.

⁴³Feminist Frameworks, 2nd Edition, op. cit., p. xiv.

added section "Women of Color and Feminism." There are numerous instances in which Jaggar and Rothenberg display and affirm their gatekeeping role. For example, they often say: "we made this decision," "we have chosen," "we first considered," and "we do believe." They even state: "we had no doubts about including liberal feminism or traditional marxism as distinct feminist frameworks," but "we debated how best to include" the works by feminists of color. They recalled the "debate" this way:

We first considered integrating work by women of color in our existing frameworks....Ultimately our reason for rejecting this approach was our concern that the unique aspects of the oppression experienced by women of color not be subsumed (an possibly lost or diluted) under a general feminist heading. [Thus], we have chosen to place ...[their works] in a seperate section. We made this decision because we believe that this structure best reflects the importance of the insights offered by women of color [emphasis added].⁴⁴

Clearly, Jaggar and Rothenberg are positioned as active agents. One could argue that this kind of active "decision-making" is a function of the editorship. But to ascribe the judicious and carefully constructed justifications for viewing Black feminism as simply a perspective, overlooks the ways in which Jaggar and Rothenberg, whether they intend to or not, participates in defining race and the works of "women of color" as existing outside the domains of "real" feminist discourse. But Jaggar and Rothenberg deny this agency by retroactively transferring the "naming" of Black feminism as a non-framework to the "feminist of color" writers.

We do not think that the papers we have placed in this section were designed to present a comprehensive analysis of women's oppression of a complete set of proposals for ending it. In other

⁴⁴ibid.

words, we do not think that their writers necessarily intended them to constitute a new feminist framework [emphasis added].⁴⁵

By appealing to the "intentions" of the writers, Jaggar and Rothenberg effectively obscure the regulatory and preservative function of their "naming." In one instance, Jaggar and Rothenberg "chose to place [women of color's work] in a separate section" and in another, the separation and designation of Black feminist theory as a non-framework is in keeping with the claims put forth by women of color themselves. In this slight of hand gesture, the theoretical status of the work of women of color is suddenly a product of "their" intentions and not the result of the ability to cast them as such. In other words, what is at work here is the discourse's ability to position itself as an innocent by-stander in constructing and defining its own discursive boundaries, which ultimately does not "include" race.

That race is as seen as existing outside the boundaries of feminist discourse can also be seen in the very title given to the section designated for issues of race. "Feminism and Women of Color" constructs an antagonistic relationship "women of color" and the implied "feminists." This also positions "women of color" as politically and intellectually unconnected to the production of "feminism," which implicitly assigns them to the realm of non-feminists. Moreover, Jaggar and Rothenberg unwittingly constructs an us/ them and we/ they relationship in which "we" is explicitly defined as "white" and "they" is defined as "feminists of color." More than once, Jaggar and Rothenberg juxtaposes "white women" and "feminists of color." The following passage is instructive:

Like white women, women of color have undergone a variety of experiences..... At this point in our history, the sad reality is that a separation continues to exist between the white feminist

⁴⁵Ibid.

movement on the one hand and feminists of color on the other. Women of color realize that they are never oppressed simply as women but always as women who are not white. Consequently, they regard racism as an enemy that is at least as powerful as male dominance and ultimately inseparable from it [emphasis added].⁴⁶

The problem here is not simply in the use of "white women" and "women of color," but the characterization of individual "feminists of color" opposing the "white feminist movement" because "they" regard racism as an enemy equal to that of male dominance. Jaggar and Rothenberg also exhibit a "we/ they" attitude in stating the following: "...we first considered integrating work by women of color into our existing frameworks."⁴⁷ The "we" and the "our" can be read as "we, the editors," but given the frequent polarization of "white women" and "women of color," and their characterization as separate from and external to feminism, the "we" and the "our" can also be read as "non-feminists of color," whereby Jaggar and Rothenberg are mere proxies.

Thus the newly added section, "Feminism and Women of Color," fails to meet its own criteria—to let the voices of "women of color be heard. By segregating race and then defining the scholarship of those who emphasize its importance as non-systematic and non theoretical, we see Black feminism only through the "lens" of a feminist theory that is already circumscribed by the irrelevancy and externality of race. These limitations seem ironic in the face of Jaggar and Rothenberg's own words: "[i]f feminist frameworks do not take into account the experience of women of color, they are not only incomplete; they are racially biased."⁴⁸

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

In the most recent edition of Feminist Frameworks, Jaggar and Rothenberg acknowledge the shortcomings of the previous two editions. In reflecting upon the first edition, they wrote

The first edition of Feminist Frameworks was conceived in a period of intense excitement and controversy as millions of women in Western Europe and North America came to see themselves as oppressed and moved into action against that oppression...Like their predecessors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these feminists criticized male dominance in education, religion, government, and the economy...The first edition reflected these concerns and placed them within the dominant debates of the day...Although a few articles by or about women of color were included in the first edition of Feminist Frameworks, the issue of race was treated in an extremely perfunctory manner.⁴⁹

Jaggar and Rothenberg view their "perfunctory treatment" of race as a product of that time period. They present themselves as having unwittingly capitulated to the narrow-minded view of the then embryonic "new" feminism of the twentieth century. In other words, feminism had not yet become conscious of its self-constituted racism, thus any one writing under its name would reproduce its racial myopia. They state it in this manner: "[t]he treatment of race in the first edition of Feminist Frameworks, reflected the fact that, in spite of the purportedly comprehensive nature of its social critique, the feminism of that period often was embarrassingly narrow."⁵⁰

The assumption undergirding this explanation for the "perfunctory treatment" of race is that as time progressed so did feminist theory. According to this line of reasoning, feminism grew "progressively" aware of its own racial bias through the writings of feminists of color. If the feminism of the 1970's was

⁴⁹Feminist Frameworks, 3rd Edition, xi and xii.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, xii.

"embarrassingly narrow," then 1980's "feminist theory [was beginning]...to come to terms with what amounted to its racist bias."⁵¹ Read in this manner, the second edition was a part of the process feminism underwent to purge itself of racial myopia. Although the addition of the new section, "Feminism and Women of Color," "appeared at the time as a significant expansion and redefinition of feminist theory," its inclusion was nevertheless problematic. "In retrospect," Jagger and Rothenberg explain,

...it is clear that we still marginalized those voices...Much of the writing by women of color included in the second edition of *Feminist Frameworks* ... reflects a kind of dialogue between women of color and feminism; indeed the very topic heading we chose implied a separation between the two.⁵²

Because Jagger and Rothenberg view history and the production of knowledge as linear and "progressive,"⁵³ the third edition is cast as better than both previous editions. This edition boasts structural changes that includes a new section on theory, a feminist critique of biological determinism, and the inclusion of the lens metaphor to explain how different feminist frameworks operate. With respect to race, the third edition of *Feminist Frameworks* finally "recognizes issues of race and ethnicity as essential to defining feminist discourse."⁵⁴

⁵¹*Ibid.*, xii.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³See Dona Richards, "European Mythology: The Ideology of 'Progress,'" in Molefi Kete Asante and Abdulai S. Vandi, eds., *Contemporary Black Thought: Alternative Analyses in Social and Behavioral Science*, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications 1980).

⁵⁴*Feminist Frameworks*, 3rd edition, op. cit., xii.

Unquestionably the biggest change in feminism since the publication of the last edition of *Feminist Frameworks* is the way in which issues of race and ethnicity have now been recognized as integral to a feminist perspective...[F]eminist theory for the most part has come to recognize the ways in which race and ethnicity, class, sexuality, and a host of other variables are indissolubly linked in the construction of women's experience...⁵⁵

"No longer presented as merely voices of women of color in dialogue with feminism," the two new frameworks added to the third edition, "Multicultural Feminism" and "Global Feminism," were included to address issues of race and ethnicity in North America and the "situation of women in other parts of the world." The "inclusion" of "Multicultural Feminism," as replacement for the old section, "Feminism and Women of Color," indeed seems to be a corrective to the limitations of the first two editions.

The new section 'Multicultural Feminism' succeeds the section 'Feminism and Women of Color' introduced in our second edition. Our change in title, as well as in the readings, is intended to express how, in the time that has elapsed between the second and third editions of *Feminist Frameworks*, the issues raised by women of color have moved from the margin to the center of feminist concern.⁵⁶

However, Jaggar and Rothenberg's construction and "inclusion" of "Multicultural Feminism," as the framework that addresses issues of race and ethnicity, is fraught with problems.

The primary problem is that the promotion of Multicultural Feminism from the status of "perspective" to that of framework coincides with a "modified" definition of "previous understandings of feminist frameworks." Whereas the

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

previous definition of a feminist framework was defined as "offering...comprehensive analyses of the nature and causes of women's subordination and correlated sets of proposals for ending it," the new conception of a feminist framework adopts the "metaphor of 'lenses' to convey the idea that any description of women's position in society "depends upon the condition of [one's] eyes."⁵⁷ Rather than presenting frameworks as comprehensive, systematic, and all-encompassing theories, the metaphor of "'lenses' represent the categories feminists use to organize our understandings of social reality."⁵⁸ The move from complete and comprehensive frameworks to the metaphor of lenses suggests that a new category, one that does not have as its criteria aspects associated with systematic theory, had to be created to bring feminist writings on race and ethnicity to the level of "framework."

Ultimately, Jaggar and Rothenberg's redefinition of a "feminist framework" keeps Multicultural and Global Feminism at the pre-theoretical and non-systematic level. Because "[t]he newer frameworks, unlike some of the older ones, do not pretend to provide final or authoritative accounts of women's subordination," there is some question about "their commitment to feminism...their degree of comprehensiveness, ...and even...their theoretical aspirations."⁵⁹ To be sure, Jaggar and Rothenberg's questions stem from their previous view of "feminists of color writings" as simply an exercise in criticism. That "women of color" no longer engage in simply critiquing the works of white feminists, is one reason Jaggar and Rothenberg give for promoting their work to "lens/ framework" level.

⁵⁷Ibid., xvii.

⁵⁸Ibid., xvi.

⁵⁹Ibid., xiv.

Many women of color writing at the time [of the first two publications] were concerned primarily with pointing out the deficiencies and distortions of writings generated by middle-class women in the name of all women; they were only beginning the process of elaborating the alternative perspectives that would soon become the basis for their radical overhaul of feminist theory.[Consequently], [w]omen of color have moved from challenging their exclusion from (white) feminism to claiming their right, as feminists, to redefine previous understandings of feminist issues and feminist theory."⁶⁰

A third problem with Jaggar and Rothenberg's new section entitled "Multicultural Feminism" is that it frames race in a pluralist framework. Under the pluralist fraework: (1) race and ethnicity are conflated; (2) all races and ethnicities carry equal social and cultural weight; and (3) "multicultural feminism" is presumptuously defined by the skin color or racial/ ethnic heritage of the writer---not by theoretical substance.

In the first instance, the difference(s) between race and ethnicity are obscured. Sociologists, anthropologists, and theorists of racial stratification acknowledge not only the different social meanings of race and ethnicity, but the fact that an ethnic group is often considered a subgroup of a larger racial group.⁶¹ This is an important observation because in the United States, African

⁶⁰Ibid., xii and 123.

⁶¹See for example, Oliver C. Cox, Caste, Class & Race: A Study in Social Dynamics Seventh Printing, (New York: Montly Review Press, 1948); John Rex and David Mason, eds., Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Audrey Smedley, Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993); Karen Brodtkin Sacks, "How Did Jews Become White Folks?," in Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek, eds., Race, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

Americans are denied an ethnic identity and are defined only in racial terms.⁶² Similarly, Jaggar and Rothenberg's "multicultural feminism" assume that every racial and ethnic identity occupies a similar, if not equal, position to the "white" norm. In other words, Jaggar and Rothenberg assume place all "women of color", without a recognition of racial, ethnic, and even national differences, into an "other" category because the "white feminist theorist" is taken as the norm. Like the conflation of racial and ethnic differences, this equalizing move fails to recognize that some racial and ethnic identities are voluntary with no social costs, while others are involuntary with great social costs.

These assumptions about race and ethnicity lead Jaggar and Rothenberg to construct a theoretical category which is based upon and justified by a "rainbow coalition" of various authors. "Our multicultural feminists selections, [they write] are authored, respectively, by a Chicana feminist, a Chinese-American feminist, an African-American feminist, and a white Jewish feminist."⁶³

Hence, "a Chicana," "a Chinese-American," "an African American," and a "white Jewish" person are lumped together on the assumption that each shares similar/equal oppression. This underscores the third problematic feature of Jaggar and Rothenberg's newest "framework": "multicultural feminism" is defined by the "color" of the author and not by criteria that illustrate its theoretical components. Selections for Liberal, Marxist, Radical, Socialist, and Feminist frameworks were included under their respective headings because each article adhered to or reflected certain theoretical and philosophical assumptions. Jaggar and Rothenberg clearly articulate the assumptions of and differences between each

⁶²See F. James Davis, Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); Paul Robeson, Jr. Speaks to America, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

⁶³Feminist Frameworks, 3rd edition, op. cit., 123.

framework, except in the case of "Multicultural Feminism." Liberal Feminism "favors equality in the sense of equal opportunities for men and women"⁶⁴; Marxists Feminists "claim that the establishment of class society was the original cause of women's subordination...[and] assert that it is capitalism...which perpetuates the subordination of women by enforcing their economic dependence on men"⁶⁵; Radical feminists "insist that the subordination of women is primary, not secondary, to other forms of domination...[and argue that] sex and gender are ultimately inseparable."⁶⁶ Socialist feminists "give theoretical primacy to the mode of production...[and] argues that the subordination of women must be analyzed in terms of four interlocking social structures: production, reproduction, sexuality, and child-rearing."⁶⁷ In contrast, the selections for the Multicultural Feminist "framework" are based upon whom the articles are "authored...by."⁶⁸ Put another way, Multicultural Feminism is based upon whether or not its authors are "women of color." The only other distinguishing feature of this framework, as stated previously, is that "women of color have moved from challenging their exclusion from (white) feminism to claiming their right, as feminists, to redefine previous understandings of feminist issues and feminist theory."⁶⁹ Admittedly, Jaggar and Rotheberg argue that Multicultural Feminism views women's subordination through the lens of

⁶⁴Ibid., 117.

⁶⁵Ibid., 119.

⁶⁶Ibid., 120 & 121.

⁶⁷Ibid., 122.

⁶⁸Ibid., 123.

⁶⁹Ibid.

"sex/gender, sexuality, class, and race." However, the framework seems to be held together by a sanguine notion of racial and ethnic commonality as opposed to common theoretical conceptions of "sex/gender, sexuality, class, and race." Hence, as in previous editions, writings by "women of color" appear to have no systematic or comprehensive theoretical formulation.

My reading of Feminist Framework is not simply an exercise in criticism. Rather its significance lies in the specific configuration of "women of color and their writings" in relation to feminist discourse. It illustrates that Black feminist theory is considered more critique than theory; more of an externally imposed "framework" as opposed to an internally generated discourse. Even when elevated to the status of a "framework," the definition of a framework is modified from a more theoretical version to a lesser "lens" or perspective version. The most important point here is not simply the identification of the specific configuration of race and writings by women of color as non-theoretical, but how this configuration operates within Jaggar and Rotheberg's overall conception of feminist theory and politics. In other words, what does the construction of "women of color's writings" allow Jaggar and Rotheberg to do? Based upon the preceding analysis, defining Black feminism and writings by "other women of color" as non-systematic, non-theoretical, or by collapsing all works by "women of color" under one sign, insures that race, as a mutually productive and constitutive category, remains outside of and external to theories about "women as a group." As a segregated body of literature, writings by women of color are figured as different from and critical of mainstream feminist theory. Compared to other theoretical frameworks, writings by women of color are "merely descriptive"; an "other" framework among more (theoretically) sophisticated ones. The consignment of race issues to the "other" category is in the final analysis, a regulatory function of the discourse.

Besides its construction as nontheoretical, Black feminists and other women of color are often figured as divisive, critical, and harsh within feminist discourse. Black feminists in particular, who cite racism as a problem in feminist thought are often described as "attacking," "challenging," and "critiquing" feminism at the expense of "failing" to develop a comprehensive "theory" of their own. These critics of the racial hegemony of feminist thinking are always seen as "overly critical" which often devastates their "victims." Marilyn Frye's reading of the "woman of color as critic" exemplifies this view. Frye writes:

...when...statements and descriptions [that pertain to 'women' unmodified'] are delivered in public, they meet with critics, who are women, who report that the statements are appallingly partial, untrue, or even unintelligible when judged by their own experience and by what is common knowledge among women of their kind, class, or group. This criticism seems to be (and I have felt it to be) devastating [emphasis added].⁷⁰

While Frye does not specifically cite race, it is clear from the context and from the description "among women of their kind, class, or group," that she was referring to the Black woman or woman of color "critic."

In her first collection of essays, The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory," Frye recounts a similar incident in which a 'Black woman critic,' a phrase Frye designates, appears, "angry," out-of-control, "enraged" and "crazy" to her white feminists cohorts, who have organized a white women's consciousness-raising group to address issues of race and racism in feminism. I quote Frye at length:

...[A] group of white women formed a white women's consciousness-raising group to identify and explore the racism in our lives with a view to dismantling the barriers that blocked our understanding and action in

⁷⁰"The Possibility of Feminist Theory," in Deborah L. Rhode, ed., Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 177.

this matter. As is obvious from this description, we certainly thought of ourselves as doing the right thing. Some women of color talked with us about their view that it was racist to make it a group for white women only; we discussed our reasons and invited women of color who wanted to participate to come to the meeting for further discussion. In a later community meeting, one Black woman criticized us very angrily for ever thinking we could achieve our goals by working only with white women. We said...we had decided at the beginning to organize a group open to all women shortly after our series of white women's meetings came to a close. Well, as some of you will know without my telling, we could hardly have said anything less satisfying to our critic. She exploded with rage: 'You decided!'...She seemed to be enraged by our making decisions, by our acting, by our doing anything. It seemed like doing nothing would be racist and whatever we did would be racist just because we did it. We began to lose hope; we felt bewildered and trapped. It seemed that what our critic was saying must be right; but what she was saying didn't seem to make any sense. She seemed crazy to me.⁷¹

From this paragraph, it is clear that Black women are figured as "critics" of (white) feminist theory. No less than three times does Frye refer to the Black woman's comments as criticisms or to her as "our critic." Moreover, the "we" and the "our," as was the case in Jaggar and Rothenberg's three editions of the Feminist Frameworks, is a "we" from which Black women are excluded. Thus, Black women's comments are always figured as "outside" of feminist discourse. It seems equally possible that Black women's understanding and articulation of the problems with mainstream feminist theory can be seen as much as an internal dialogue as it is and external barrage of criticisms. What prevents a discursive construction of Black women and their works as women who are *in dialogue with* other women, and not as *critics opposed to* other (read white) women?

In addition to the position of "critic," Black women or "women of color" are almost always characterized as "emotional" and highly sensitive. In fact, one cannot be an effective "critic" unless she presents her "criticisms" in a visceral and

⁷¹"On Being White: Thinking Toward a Feminist Understanding of Race and Race Supremacy," 111-112.

emotive manner. "Angry," "exploded with rage," "seemed to be enraged," "she didn't seem to make any sense," "she seemed crazy to me," are all Frye's perception of her "Black woman critic." Because "critical comments" from Black women are always already read as visceral and negative, their articulations of feminist theory as a racialized discourse are neither "reasonable," or "logical," nor "theoretical."

In a very real sense, Black women are expected to be emotional, bitter, angry and upset, especially when discussing issues of race. By choosing to frame this essay with the "Black woman critic" incident, and by implicitly invoking a common understanding among white women (*"as some of you will know without my telling, we could hardly have said anything less satisfying to our critic"*) about how Black women (will) react, Frye casts the "Black woman critic" as (potentially) "explosive" and "enraged" *before* "she exploded with rage."⁷² When Black women do not exemplify the expected "performance" of an emotive and enraged critic, they are criticized for being too "academic" or for replicating "masculinist norms of 'value-free scholarship'." Two brief examples illustrate this point.

The first example is Jane Gallop's reading of Majorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers's edited volume, Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition.⁷³ After having a "non-encounter" with Black feminist critic Deborah McDowell, Gallop added a chapter race about Black feminist literary theory to her then yet-to be-published manuscript Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory.⁷⁴ In that chapter, as duCille points out, Gallop assumes that the

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³ Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985). Ann duCille's reading of Gallop's framing of Conjuring is was quite influential in my understanding of Black women's "expectation" to not only be other, but to "perform" as other.

authors are "two black feminist critics."⁷⁵ For duCille, this is a major problem given Gallop's textual and interpretive reading of Pryse and Spillers's volume, but the point that I want to make is that Gallop's assumption informs and explains her reading of Conjuring as too "academic."

When I read Conjuring the first time," Gallop writes, "I was disappointed that the volume was so 'academic.' I disliked the references to Ovid, The Golden Bough, to deism. When I found an essay particularly 'academic,' tracing similarities to classical mythology or simply too dry in style, I would imagine that this critic must be white."⁷⁶

The "academic" style and allusions to classical mythology were uncharacteristic of Black women and their writings. Thus, if not emotional or "folksy", "the critic must be white."

Nancie Caraway, a white feminist political theorist, also assumes that Black feminist writings are inherently emotive and visceral. Caraway admonishes Black feminist, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, for replicating "masculinist norms of 'value-free' scholarship" in her book Daughters of Sorrow, because "we do not hear the pain she, as a Black woman ...felt" when reading materials that denigrated Black women. Caraway explains:

⁷⁴For a description of this "non-encounter, Jane Gallop, Marianne Hirsch, and Nancy K. Miller, "Criticizing Feminist Criticism," in Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, eds., Conflicts in Feminism, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 363-64, and Ann duCille, *ibid.*, 608-609. Jane Gallop, Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory, (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 612.

⁷⁶Jane Gallop, Around 1981, *op. cit.*, 169. In all fairness, I, along with duCille, recognize that Gallop's confessional is meant to problematize the way in which "white academics" fantasize about an "other" they assume to exist in a "pure outside of academic culture" (170). duCille reads this as a "I-once-was-blind-but-now-I-see—you" confessional that demeans and furthers "otherizes" the subject in the very act of analyzing it.

Reading Beverly Guy-Sheftall's study, *Daughters of Sorrow* ...is both a depressing and enraging experience, although the pages contain a crucial scholarly compilation. The negative materials the author brings together, particularly her presentation of the brutal animal metaphors used by whites to describe and devalue Black women's bodies and sexuality must be recorded and subjected to critical analysis. **But the muted objective tone with which Guy-Sheftall discusses them is disturbing. Masculinist norms of 'value-free' scholarship often mean that we do not hear of the pain she, as a Black woman, must have felt in reading such descriptions...I do not think that expressions of violent disagreement with such discourses are a necessary methodological caveat. Still, this does not wholly satisfy the fear that, by repeating such words of horror, one is somehow giving them currency [emphasis added].**⁷⁷

Guy-Sheftall's discussion of the imagery of Black women's sexuality is "disturbing" to Caraway because she, as a white feminist, *expects* her to display more emotion, to share her "pain."

Always already positioned as the critic who is reactionary, uncontrollable and emotional, those whom "women of color" "accuse" are almost always cast as the "victims." Women of color "criticism[s] seems to be (and I have felt it to be), devastating,"⁷⁸ Frye explains. This concept of "devastating" the accused is also prominent in Frye's description of how the white women felt in their consciousness raising group: "we began to lose hope; we felt bewildered and trapped."⁷⁹ What is at stake in the construction of Black women as "the critics," and "the accusers," and white women as "the criticized" and "the accused"? How do these figures operate in the discourse?

⁷⁷Nancie Caraway, *Segregated Sisterhood: Racism and the Politics of American Feminism*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), footnote #16, p. 226.

⁷⁸Quoted above from "The Possibility of Feminist Theory," op. cit., p 177.

⁷⁹Quoted above from, "On Being White," op. cit., 112.

Ironically, there is another aspect to Black women's or "women of color's" "Other" position within feminist theorizing and politics that seems to suggest that the "Black Woman" is not an Other. I have to some extent outlined to this position as (In)Visible Objectification in Chapters 1 and 3. It bears repeating however, within the context of "responding to race" in the 1990's. Within this context, the Black Woman is the "authentic, original" Other, not so much as to be *dismissed* for her radical difference and alterity, but to be *embraced* for her radical difference and alterity *as the radically different Other*. To embrace the Black Woman as "the most oppressed, the most marginalized, the most deviant, the quintessential site of difference,"⁸⁰ is, as Chapter 3 illustrates, to make her invisible through a position of hypervisibility and difference. But what does it mean to "embrace" the Black Woman for her radical difference and alterity? What are the implications of "embracing" the Black Woman for feminist theorizing and politics?

First and foremost, to "embrace" the Black Woman for her radical difference is to accept her "...and other women of color...as mysterious, possessors of magic or special truth."⁸¹ The idea that Black women "possess" a "special truth" is most clearly articulated in the assumption that Black feminism is the product of skin color; this is why Jaggar and Rothenberg select only "women of color" writings for the framework they call "Multicultural feminism." Black feminism becomes the articulated expression of the thought embodied in the Black body.⁸² In other words, Black women's bodies are visible indicators of the truth they possess. This has two implications: (1) Black women become in

⁸⁰Ann duCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood," *op. cit.*,

⁸¹Nancie Caraway, *Segregated Sisterhood*, *op. cit.*, 109.

⁸²This of course is how Lani Guinier's works were read—as the product of a Black Woman.

the mind of white feminists, icons of a unique Black feminist (or "woman of color) aesthetic; (2) Because it is original and authentic, the knowledge produced by Black women falls outside traditional academic scrutiny.

Nancie Caraway describes "the colorfully dressed 'Radical Woman of Color'" feminist archetype.

In recent years, the high visibility of Black feminists, the power of their critiques and texts, the excitement, beauty, and drama of their dress—African robes, scarves, jewelry, elaborate hair fashions, braids, and dreadlocks—has created an entirely new feminist aesthetic. Such women's appearances at feminist conferences carry a brand new kind of visual charisma and female power. No one misses them. They are a presence, a vision. This excites me greatly.⁸³

Caraway points out that this highly visible "Radical Woman of Color" exists in the minds of white women.⁸⁴ Thus, it is white women who insists upon "the 'exotic' image of Afrocentric feminists."

When an outspoken, beautiful Black woman with 'white' features and straightened hair asserts that it is her 'right' to choose to wear blue contacts lenses and 'preppy' rather than 'ethnic' clothing, she is met with admonitions from radical *white* female students. It is they who expect her to be a badge of 'her people'; they urge her not to deny or invalidate her 'Blackness,' her special beauty.⁸⁵

Difference then becomes for the "woman of color" a "otherness" subject-position created by others for her. Otherness is celebrated, and encouraged by white women, but it is demanded only from the "woman of color." In

⁸³Caraway, Segregated Sisterhood, op. cit., 109.

⁸⁴Ibid. 109.

⁸⁵Ibid., 111.

"Difference: A Special Third World Woman Issue," Trinh T. Minh-ha writes of her special otherness. As a Third World woman she writes,

...i am not only given the permission to open up and talk, i am also encouraged to express my difference. My audience expects and demands it; otherwise people would feel as if they have been cheated: We did not come to hear a Third World member speak about the First (?) World. We came to listen to that voice of difference likely to bring us what we can't have, and to divert us from the monotony of sameness...We no longer wish to erase your difference; we demand, on the contrary, that you remember and assert it.⁸⁶

Hence, the "difference" of the 'woman of color' is elevated to a status that appears to accept "otherness," but as Trinh T. Minh-ha points out, "...it constitutes an efficacious means of silencing the cry of racial oppression."⁸⁷ Since white women define the standard of authenticity, the nature of "women of color's" "otherness" each woman of color must be thoroughly authentic, absolutely original—in a word word, utterly different.⁸⁸

This leads to the second implication of "embracing" the difference of the "woman of color—the whole-hearted and uncritical acceptance of her scholarship as authentically true. It is assumed that because she speaks as the "Other" and for the "Other," all knowledge produced is special, original, and authentic. To this extent, many white feminists treat Black feminist scholarship as unproblematic. The academic customs of reading, commenting upon and entering into dialogue with Black feminists seems to be non-existence. Black feminists works are rarely commented upon in any meaningful manner. Often

⁸⁶Discourse (Fall-Winter 1986-87): 11-38

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 26

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

their works are uncritically accepted as non-problematic representations of the Black woman's truth.⁸⁹ Given that not all Black feminists have the same or even similar views.

At a certain level, this uncritical acceptance of Black women's work is tantamount to indifference. Apart from what Caraway and Minh-ha call appropriation and tokenism, there is some question about whether or not white feminists provide the same level of scholarly attention or apply the same kinds of standards to women of color's works as they do their own.⁹⁰ An unwillingness to engage in the familiar academic process of debate and discussion suggests that feminist discourse does not place "women of color" writings inside its discursive domains. Because the issue of "indifference" is not an inconsequential one, I propose that "indifference" be read not in terms of the rhetorical and verbal acknowledgements to "women of color" and their writings, but by reading their position in the texts. In other words, using a deconstructive method, it is imperative to note where and how Black women appear in the text. The indifferent position can be illustrated with two examples from the works of Mary Hawkesworth and Nancie Caraway.

In "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth,"⁹¹ Mary Hawkesworth uses a three model typology, knowers, knowing, and known, to distinguish between three kinds of feminist epistemologies. Following Harding's distinction between feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory

⁸⁹I have written of this at length concerning the response to Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought*. See unpublished essay, "Silenced by Authority: African American Women, Feminism and the Construction of Black Feminist Thought."

⁹⁰duCille, op. cit.

⁹¹In Micheline R. Malson, et. al., eds., Feminist Theory in Practice and Process, (University of Chicago Press, 1989):

and feminist postmodernism, Hawkesworth outlines key problems and tensions between each epistemological model. Feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory, according to Harding, are "at odds with the insight generated by the long struggle of women of color within the feminist movement, that there is no uniform 'women's reality to be known, no coherent perspective to be privileged."⁹² On the other hand, "feminist postmodernists' plea for tolerance of multiple perspectives is altogether at odds with feminists desire to develop a successor science that can refute once and for all the distortions of androcentrism."⁹³ ultimately, Hawkesworth believes that feminists should move from questions about knowers to claims about the known. However, since I am concerned about how and where race and Black women appear in this text, i should note in passing that Hawkesworth misreads feminist postmodernism by defining it in conjunction with "multiple perspectives" and "the insights generated by women of color." This reading of "feminist postmodernism" forecloses crucial questions about language, the subject, concepts of history, etc. However, the most important and greivous error Hawkesworth makes relative to race is her characterization of Black feminists and its corresponding footnote. In a brief overview of the critiques of theories of women's nature Hawkesworth writes: "objections raised by Third World and women of color to the political priorities of white, Western feminists generate profound skepticism about the ability of any particular group of women to 'know' what is in the interest of all women."⁹⁴

⁹²Ibid., p. 331

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid., 328.

In the footnote to this statement Hawkesworth cites "Angela Davis," "Gloria I. Joseph and Jill Lewis," and "Paula Giddens" [sic] as representative of "Third World" and "women of color" who have "raised objections" to theories of women's knowledge. The contents of this footnote are instructive. First, none of the women Hawkesworth cites are "Third World" women in the traditional sense and all of the "women of color" are African American women. This ambiguity allows Hawkesworth to conflate all races, ethnicities, and nationalities into one category. Second, to speak of "women of color" and then to name only African American women is a contemporary theoretical move that enables one to speak of race without referring to the seemingly volatile connotations of White-Black relations. Third, Hawkesworth misspells Paula Giddings's name. The misspelling of Giddings's name is a colossal and grave error for it signifies both the indifference and the inattention mainstream feminist theory gives to Black women and their writings. Certainly one could argue that typographical errors do appear in print—even in academia. I am of course, not arguing against this fact. However, given that no other typographical errors appear in this article, and that Giddings's misspelled last name is written phonetically, as "Giddens", I cannot attribute this misspelling to an editorial oversight. Is it possible for this article, which was first published in a major peer-reviewed feminist journal, to undergo dozens of readings, drafts, and revisions and the misspelling of a major Black feminist's name is overlooked? Would it be possible to overlook an improper spelling of "Simone day Bovewar," author of "Thee 2nd Sex"? Am I to assume that "Giddens" was not corrected because she is unfamiliar?

Perhaps the reader is thinking that I am making too much of "one misspelled name"; after all, the other two names were spelled correctly. Given the importance of names in the social and cultural history of African Americans, I am unconvinced that a "misspelling" is "no big deal" even within (or especially

within) the context of an academic writing. Given the particularities of American racism, to misspell, or mispronounce the name of an African American was a sign of disrespect. Under Jim Crowism (and this is still a practice in the South), adult Black men were called "boys," or "John"; elderly Black women and men were "graciously" given the names of "Uncle" and "Aunty." Married women were never given the respectful title of "Mrs." and no Black man was called "Mr."⁹⁵ To mispronounce or misspell African Americans' names was an indication of indifference; a designation of "just another Negro."⁹⁶ Hence, in the case of "Paula Giddens," this oversight, this not-knowing, this misspelling seems to correspond to the oversight, the not-knowing and the non-reading of Black women's work. This misspelling signifies a level of blindness to race that even Hawkesworth, whose subject, ironically is the production of knowledge.

Hawkesworth misspelling is not an isolated incident. Like Hawkesworth, Nancie Caraway not only misspells several Black feminist's names, but she confuses and conflates highly recognizable Black feminist scholars. More than once Caraway misspells Patricia Hill Collins as "Patricia Hills Collins," and in referring to Collins, she wrote "Patricia Bell Collins" which is an obvious conflation of Patricia Hill Collins, the Black feminist sociologist, and Patricia Bell-Scott, the Black feminist literary scholar and writer. Moreover, the sentence containing the "Patricia Bell Collins" conflation is actually a statement on Collins's understanding of the tradition of Black feminist theory, however, Caraway cites a white feminist scholar in the footnote. "Patricia Bell Collins," she writes, "tells us that the rich tradition of Black feminist thought was orally

⁹⁵See Martin Luther King, Jr. *Why We Can't Wait*; and Robert Baker, "Chicks and Pricks: A Plea for Persons..."

⁹⁶The history of misspelled names on birth certificates, as well as incorrectly recorded birth dates is a cultural phenomenon unique to African Americans. See Charles Frye,

transmitted, that the theorists spoke out of the dailiness of Black women's lives and idioms that arose out of the culture..." The corresponding footnote reads: "The fragmented, episodic, often externally controlled terrain of women's daily lives forms the center of Bettina Aptheker's luminous book, *Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience*."⁹⁷ These "moments of self-contradiction," of "unregarded details," suggest that Black women's works are not really taken seriously. The "inclusion" of the names and works of African American women makes them visible, but the way in which they are included makes them invisible.

Up to this point, I have focused on the production and perception of Black women in feminist discourse by reading closely several feminist texts. I have outlined the ways in which Black feminist thought is constructed as non-theoretical, non-comprehensive, and non-systematic within mainstream feminist theory. In conjunction, I have illustrated how Black women are figured within those texts as "divisive" and "harsh critics," who "accuse" and "devastate" their victims, i.e., white women. As critics, Black women are cast outside of and external to feminist theory and politics. To this extent, Black women, and the issues they raise, are not a part of feminist discourse; merely external challenges to it. I have also noted, that in an interesting and ironic way, this external position as "outsider" has produced an environment in which Black women, and other women of color, are expected to be different and ultimately celebrated for their "difference." The result is a hypervisibility that effectively obscures issues of race within feminist discourse.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 212.

I now turn to examine how feminists have responded to the specific claim that feminist theory focuses upon and privileges the experiences of white, middle-class women. Generally speaking, the responses to this claim can be divided into two major categories. The first category consists of what Bernice Fisher calls "guilt and shame" and what Adrienne Rich has named as "silence." I identify these responses as characteristic of the scholarship of the late 1970's to mid-to-late 1980's.

The second category of responses is characterized by what I call "Accusatory Defensiveness," and is, in my estimation, a relatively recent phenomenon. Developing in tandem with the growing popularity of feminist appropriations of poststructuralist concepts, accusatory defensiveness does not only defend the legitimacy of the category woman, it do so with a hostile and defensive tone. My examination of these kinds of responses are not meant to be comprehensive in scope or method. Rather, my goal is to provide a general overview of the nature of the responses feminist theory has produced around the issue of race, as patterns that have emerged in recent feminist texts.

Silence, Guilt and Shame

Adrienne Rich and Bernice Fisher have written the two most well-known articles on white women's responses to the issue of race and racism in the feminist movement. Adrienne Rich's, "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia," first appeared in her 1979 collection of prose On Lies, Secrets, and Silence.⁹⁸ In that essay, Rich bemoaned "the separation of black and white women from each other" argued that Black and white women needed to work together. She admonishes both Black and white women for buying into the

⁹⁸On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970).

"obvious" and only mechanism at the disposal of "patriarchy" to keep women apart—racism. More pointedly, Rich maintains that She urges white women to repudiate racism and to draw upon their rich and longstanding "anti-racist tradition." Tracing the origins of the feminist movement from the Abolitionist Movement, Rich maintains that white women's commitment to anti-racist work has been "silenced" by Black women's charges of racism and the assumption that racial oppression is more "oppressive" than sexism:

If a shallow, 'life-style' brand of feminism can shrug off the issue of racism altogether, it is also true that more 'political' white feminists still often feel vulnerable to the charge that 'white middle-class women' or "bourgeois feminists" are despicable creatures of privilege whose oppression is meaningless beside the oppression of black, Third-World, or working-class women and men.⁹⁹

Hence, White women were silenced by claims of racism primarily because, as Fisher explains, they felt guilty, ashamed, and possibly embarrassed.

I had noticed certain patterns. First, it seemed clear that the theme of "guilt" had become basic to feminist discourse. Although it surfaces most often in discussions of racism, it had become a continual reference point whenever any kind of injustice within the movement (homo-phobia, class exploitation, anti-semitism, the oppression of the elderly and disabled, and so forth) drew attention. Also I noticed that although we frequently employed the language of "guilt," virtually no one paid attention to guilt as a moral issue...¹⁰⁰

The patterns that Fisher identified often meant that white women operated in "guilty silence." Although not unproblematic, this silence could at

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Bernice Fisher, "Guilt and Shame in the Women's Movement: The radical Ideal of Action and Its Meaning for Feminist Intellectuals," 10 Feminist Studies (Summer 1984): 186.

some level be interpreted as an accommodating stance. Clare Holzman echoes the notion that guilt is a prominent response to critiques lodged against the racial hegemony of feminist theory. She writes: "There is widespread agreement that guilt is an immediate, powerful response of white women learning about racism."¹⁰¹ Holzman also recognizes that women can be "immobilized" by guilt, and that "what [she] and others have been calling guilt may often be shame."¹⁰² Both Fisher and Holzman describe the interconnection between guilt and shame, and both suggest that these emotional responses are the product of feeling as if one has failed to live up to a moral standard. The specific philosophical reasons aside, the point that I wish to stress is that white women felt "immobilized" around the issue of race. Therefore, silence was the expression given to feelings of guilt and shame. Black women recognized guilt as a common response among white feminists. bell hooks notes this reaction when she writes: "when black women involved with women's liberation attempted to discuss racism, many white women responded by angrily stating: 'We won't be guilt-tripped.' For them the dialogue crased."¹⁰³ However, as hooks further explains,

white women refused to listen when black women explained that what they expected was not verbal admissions of guilt but conscious gestures and acts that would show that white women liberationists were anti-racists and attempting to overcome their racism. The issue of racism within the women's movement would have never been raised had white women shown in their writing and speeches that they were in fact 'liberated' from racism.¹⁰⁴

The point of course, is that feminists did indeed respond to questions raised about race and racism. Guilt and shame should not be dismissed as mere

¹⁰¹ "Rethinking the Role of Guilt and Shame in White Women's Antiracism Work," *op. cit.*, p. 325.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ain't I A Woman*, (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 149.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

emotional reactions of a by gone era. Rather, they should be regarded as constitutive components of feminist discourse's "narrative" or "story" on race. This part of the "story" says that feminism responded to race with silence through feelings of guilt and shame. Silence, as well as guilt and shame, become a part of feminism's regulatory strategies. They emerged to keep criticisms of race and racism from threatening to collapse the fragile notion of "common sisterhood."

Anger, Hostility, and Defensiveness

However, if the 1980's was characterized by silence, then the 1990's is characterized by a variety of rhetorical strategies used to disprove claims of white racial hegemony and defend the importance of keeping feminism unmodified. The tone of these comments are hostile, often defensive, and indicate white feminists attempt to maintain the primacy of gender.

Catherine MacKinnon's, "From Practice to Theory, Or What is a White Woman Anyway?" best exemplifies this position. Like many who take this position, the first claim that MacKinnon makes is that the elevated, privileged, white woman is a figment of Black women's collective imaginations. The "white woman" is, according to MacKinnon, used to encourage Black separatist thinking. According to MacKinnon, "there is...much to[o] much of this, this 'woman modified,' this woman discounted by white, meaning should would be oppressed but for her privilege."¹⁰⁵ In order to understand the "tone" of MacKinnon's argument, I quote her at length:

¹⁰⁵Catherine Mackinnon, "From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?" 4 Yale Journal of Law of Feminism, (1991), p. 15.

In recent critiques of feminist work for failing to take into account race or class...it has come to my attention that the white woman is the issue here, so I decided I better find out what one is. This creature is not poor, not battered, not raped (not really), not molested as a child, not pregnant as a teenager, not prostituted, not coerced into pornography, not a welfare mother, and not economically exploited. She doesn't work. She is either the white man's image of her—effete, pampered, privileged, protected, flighty, and self-indulgent—or the Black man's image of her—all that, plus the 'pretty white girl' (meaning ugly as sin but regarded as the ultimate beauty because she is white). She is Miss Anne of the kitchen, she puts Frederick Douglass to the lash, she cries rape when Emmett Till looks at her sideways, she manipulates white men's very real power with the lifting of her very well-manicured little finger....She flings her hair, feels beautiful all the time, complains about the colored help, tips badly, can't do anything, doesn't do anything, doesn't know anything, and alternates fantasizing about f---ing Black men with accusing them of raping her... On top of all this, out of impudence, imitativeness, pique, and a simple lack of anything meaningful to do, she thinks she needs to be liberated. Her feminist incarnation is all of the above, and guilty about every single bit of it, having by dint of repetition refined saying 'I'm sorry' to a high form of art. She can't even make up her own songs.¹⁰⁶

If in fact Mackinnon intended to satirize this construction of the "white woman" she missed it in her hostile tone and by admonishing Black women for the continuing to charge feminism with racism. To claim that feminism privileges "straight white economically-privileged women," is, MacKinnon says, a "dismissive sneer" that "trivializ[es]...white woman's subordination."¹⁰⁷ MacKinnon's claim that white women have no more privilege of power than women of color, coupled with her hostile and defensive tone, prompted a barrage of responses.¹⁰⁸ Given the fact that these comments were originally

¹⁰⁶ Catherine Mackinnon, "From Practice to Theory, or What is a White Woman Anyway?" 4 Yale Journal of Law of Feminism

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ Mackinnon actually presented this to a conference at Yale University Law School in 1990. Many students, and faculty members responded with open

presented at a Yale Law School conference, in which the Collective on Women of Color and the Law served as a co-host, one is prompted to wonder whether or not MacKinnon's comments were a deliberate provocation around the issue of race.

However, MacKinnon is not alone in her hostile tone and implicit accusations of racial separatism initiated and fostered by "women of color" and/or African Americans. Feminist Naomi Wolf, published an article entitled "Understanding White Fear," in the popular magazine *Essence* in October 1995.¹⁰⁹ In this article, Wolf defines herself, her friends, and white people in general, as "well-meaning white people," and as "anti-racist." She juxtaposes these groups against two others; "racist whites," who are "the genuine bigots," and "African Americans." Like MacKinnon, Wolf accuses Blacks of "race-separatist thinking," and believes that as a group they "judge [too] harshly" and are unfair.¹¹⁰ Of course, Wolf's primary complaint, like MacKinnon's, is that African Americans have played the "race card" for too long and have in turn overlooked, ignored, or dismissed the real problem: the "fear" and "loss" of white people who, "when circumstances place [them] at Black people's mercy," Blacks "will override any transracial values such as impartial mercy or justice" and mete out to whites, yes, even the "well-meaning whites," due benevolence.¹¹¹ Wolf places the inaction of "well-meaning whites" squarely on the shoulders of African Americans implying that African Americans engage in a deliberate and vicious form of reverse discrimination. While a full-scale critique of Wolf's

letters in the same volume in which MacKinnon's speech was published. It is interesting to note that MacKinnon requested that

¹⁰⁹ *Essence* (October 1995), pp. 103, 151-2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

article is inappropriate for my task,¹¹² I present these critical remarks to point out the similarities with MacKinnon's. Having authored two popular feminist books, The Beauty Myth, and Fire With Fire,¹¹³ Wolf has positioned herself as a viable member of the feminist community. What is interesting about Wolf's comments is, not what she says about gender, but what she says about race. Like MacKinnon, Wolf's tone is defensive and accusatory. This posture serves to distract attention away from a sincere discussion of race, especially as it relates to gender. More importantly, this method of counter-blaming actually provides a vivid illustration of how feminist react to issues around racism. As a discursive strategy, Accusatory Defensiveness insures that race remains hidden behind counter-attacks.

Another type of accusation that has emerged within 1990's feminist discourse is related to what I call the (in)vocation of women of color. This manifests itself in two ways. First, as Jane Flax points out, "white women deploy 'race' against other white women to evoke shame, monopolize conversation, or paralyze potential speakers."¹¹⁴ For Flax, this deployment of race maybe partially motivated by the inclination to appropriate women of color as "tokens" so that they can appear objective and able to correct the shortcomings of others.¹¹⁵ There is, according to Flax, a "tendency...to accuse other writers of failing to pay attention to the current holy trinity of 'difference':

¹¹²I responded to Wolf's article with a letter to the Editor of Essence Magazine. See the appendix for a copy of the letter.

¹¹³The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women, (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1991), and Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and how to Use It, (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993).

¹¹⁴Jane Flax, Disputed Subjects, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 5

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*

race/class/gender." ¹¹⁶ In this first instance the invocation of race is made toward other white women.

The second type of accusation is directed toward women of color themselves. Here, white women accuse African American women in particular, of being narrow-minded and "exclusive" in their analyses of race. For example, Zillah Eisenstein, in The Color of Gender, argues that African American women are "not perfectly inclusive of the lives of women of color—Latinas, Alaskans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders" are often left out of their analyses.¹¹⁷ This is a peculiar and paradoxical turning of the tables. In the early stages of feminism, Black women accused white women of parochialism; of excluding race and ethnicity from their analyses. In the 1990's, white women are accusing Black women of not going far enough in their discussion of race. It is as if white women are now saying: "you're doing exactly what you criticized us for--- theorizing from one set of experiences and making it appear as it is representative of the whole." The difference now is that the whole here is not all women, but all "women of color." The problem of course, is that this kind of accusation conflates race and ethnicity by lumping all "women of color" into one category which is then juxtaposed to white women. It also keeps the responsibility of analyzing race and ethnicity on the shoulders of African American women. That these kind of responses arise out of feminist discourse illustrates that feminism does indeed tell a story about race.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Zillah R. Eisenstein, The Color of Gender: Reimagining Democracy, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 200

APPENDIX 1
LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF ESSENCE

1744 Linton Rd.
Benton, LA 71006

October 16, 1995

Attention: Diane Weathers, Articles Editor
ESSENCE Magazine
1500 Broadway
New York, New York 10036

Dear Ms. Weathers:

This letter comes in response to an article entitled, "Understanding White Fear" by Naomi Wolf which appeared in the section, *Essence/Family Circle Race in America Report* of the October 1995 issue.

I should first note that I am a faithful reader of Essence. I applaud the efforts of the magazine's Editorial Staff for providing Black women with a well-spring of informative and thought-provoking articles. I often assign readings from Essence to the students in my college level Women's Studies course because they articulate and clarify the experiences of Black women in a manner that highlights our sense of self-dignity and our commitment to family and community.

However, your recent inclusion of Naomi Wolf's ill-conceived and untimely "Understanding White Fear" gives me great pause and to be honest, prompts me to question both the sincerity of the "dialogue" on race included in the October issue, and Essence's unparalleled commitment to African American women.

Generally speaking, Wolf's article is fraught with problems. The analysis she puts forth, if indeed one can call it that, is intuitive and unlike the preceding article by Valerie Wesley, lacks the sophistication of placing a phenomenon like race in historical and social context. In addition, Wolf avoids the real issue of the privileges that accompany white skin by superficially claiming to be on "our side"; she plays on and reconstructs racist stereotypes; and she impugns African Americans for behaving in ways that prevent "well-meaning whites," like herself, from actively combating racism.

Such problems and contradictions are made clear for example, by Wolf's repeated use of the word "anti-racist" and the phrase, "well-meaning White people." Wolf's self-described position as an anti-racist is at best suspect, for she openly admits that she "avoid[s] discussing race" with both white and Black people, and that she lives a "largely White life." In Wolf's fantasy land, it is possible to be both silent on the issue of race and anti-racist precisely because "well-meaning Whites" is contrasted with "the crude hate...of genuine bigots." What Wolf fails to realize is that the absence of a sheet does not

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automatically place one, if you will, within the African American "circle of acceptance." Racism, and those who believe in racist images and ideas, is not reserved for the confederate flag-waving, sheet-wearing, Ku Klux Klan members implied by Wolf's notion of "genuine bigots."

Thus it is not surprising that Wolf can put forth a concept of "white fear" that is based on the "fear of [Black] retribution." In so doing, she relies upon and perpetuates the racist notion that Blacks are inherently volatile, dangerously violent, and prone to attack the nearest wayfaring white that wanders haplessly into the "wrong" community. "If I send my daughter to day care in a Black neighborhood, will she be treated no differently than the other children?, she asks in a whiny, reproachful tone. "When she's older," Wolf continues, "will she be able to just walk over to the 'Black' table in her junior-high cafeteria and sit down?" "Can my family just go worship at a Black church? Really?"

Besides suggesting that African Americans are poised for racial retaliation, Wolf's questions blame African Americans for engaging in what she calls "race-separatist-thinking," thereby making it impossible for whites like herself "to join forces against racism." It is African Americans, Wolf would have us to believe, who have made racism such an impasse because we are either too quick to judge or we "judge [too]...harshly." We shun whites from our churches, our neighborhood day-care centers, and the cafeteria tables at our local junior high schools. We are unfair and have no sense of "transracial values such as impartial mercy or justice." As a result, we "often dismiss" the efforts of 'good white folks' as, to use Wolf's term, "'cultural imperialism'." African Americans are, in Wolf's eyes, connected only by an instinctive sense of consanguinity which, she believes, explains why "so many...[whites] are petrified."

When Wolf speaks of the separation between the races as the product of Black behavior, perhaps what she was really thinking of was the history of Jim Crowism, the brutal, rigid, and denigrating system of racial separation and humiliation initiated by, created by, and maintained by white people. Or, in mentioning the "Black table" at her daughter's junior high school, perhaps Wolf was thinking of that period in history when, otherwise "caring" and "nurturing" white mothers, hurled racial invectives at the Little Rock Nine and hundreds of other children as they tried to integrate their local schools, because "those mothers" did not want their sons and daughters to sit beside a "nigger." Or, perhaps when Wolf asserted that our years of oppression makes "transracial values" such as "mercy or justice impossible," what she really meant was that the "justice" meted out in cases like those of Emmet Till and Medgar Evers indicates that "impartiality" is a rhetorical linchpin upon which whites can hang their guilt, and then accuse others of not having it despite their own misuse of the judicial system.

Wolf's inclination to hold Blacks responsible for the absence of whites in predominantly African American social and cultural spaces, points to what is perhaps her most problematic assumption: that the role of whites in eradicating racism begins with their descent into the African American community. This seemingly benign gesture is in itself racist because, like the missionary quests of the 18th and 19th centuries, it paternalistically assumes that the problem lies not within the white community, but somewhere deep in the "heart of darkness." What Wolf is too defensive and short-sighted to understand is that "joining forces against racism" doesn't mean having whites come into our communities to tell us what we have been doing wrong! Neither does it mean pandering to the fantasy of whites who wish to view themselves as "welcome[d] guests at the rich table of African-

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American culture and values," simply because they are white and find our culture complex, sophisticated, and stimulating.

It is not necessary, as Wolf implies, for African Americans to adopt the attitude that we should be grateful for any contact that whites desire to have in our communities. Anti-racist tactics and strategies cannot, and should not, be defined in such shallow, simplistic, and apolitical terms like whites attending Black churches, or whites "deciding" to send their children to our day-care centers. If and when whites finally do want to work with African Americans on issues that affect our communities, like poverty, crime, health care, drug abuse, homeownership, etc.---they will only do so by discarding the Wolfian notion that their acceptance is granted by the 'indelible goodness' of their white skin.

So the next time that Naomi Wolf "look[s] with grief at [her] own largely White life and do[esn't] know where to turn to take action," perhaps she should turn to her local white country club and inquire about its lack of African American members. Perhaps she should observe the few, if any, African American women who show up at the many lectures she gives on "women's issues" and set out to explain the nature of Black women's erasure within mainstream feminist theory. Or better yet, she and her other "anti-racist" friends could hold town-hall meetings to convince the members of their white communities of the necessity and value of affirmative action; to point out the importance of black congressional districts; and to articulate the historical racial reasoning behind the concept of "state's rights" and African American's understandable skepticism toward its most recent version.

The substance and content of the argument in "Understanding White Fear" is made even less persuasive by the fact that Wolf has given no indication that she understands or considers race to be an important conceptual category. In her own academic work, Wolf either entirely ignores race, except when an occasional analogy lends legitimacy to a larger point about white women and sexism, or find it irrelevant to her larger analysis. In her first publication, The Beauty Myth, Wolf argues that women are constructed and psychologically controlled by the quality called "beauty", and that the "myth of beauty" has been used against women to ward off the political and social gains made possible by the Second Wave of feminism. Wolf even outlines the ways in which certain institutions participate in and maintain the idea that women's worth is to be found in their physical appearance, rather than in their intellectual capabilities.

However, like most white feminists, Wolf begins her narrative with an undifferentiated group of women. Not once does she mention that the standard of beauty which she so vehemently criticizes is racialized; that all that is "pure," angelic," virtuous," "innocent," and "beautiful," is associated with white women; and all that is "immoral," perverse," "dirty," "unchaste," and ugly," is associated with Black women. No where in The Beauty Myth does Wolf mention the multitude of discourses and social and cultural sanctions that have held as "scientific fact" that Black women are a twisted, perverted, and distorted product of nature. Can it be true that after decades of rigorous research and lucid Black feminist analysis that Wolf is unfamiliar with Sarah Bartmann, a twenty-five year old Black woman whom scientists paraded around Europe to "study" her "monstrous" buttocks, her "primitive," "ape-like" sexual appetite, and whose reproductive organs sit, even today, in a museum in France as the quintessential symbol of Black women's intrinsic promiscuity and sub-humanness? Can it be possible, that Naomi Wolf, a Rhodes Scholar, is able to write a book on beauty, and not mention, even in a footnote, that period in American History in which Black men were hung from trees or were scraped from river

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beds because they were accused of desiring the most "precious prize" society has to offer---the "beautiful" white woman? Am I to believe, that a scholar of Wolf's stature has not read and studied the works of our nineteenth-century womanists Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, and Mary Church Terrell, as well as the works of contemporaries like Paula Giddings, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Darlene Clarke Hine, Deborah Gray White, and the late Audre Lorde?

My criticisms here are not merely about what Wolf leaves out of her book, but about what such absences and gaps might mean in terms of presenting Wolf as a legitimate spokesperson on the issue of racism in a national magazine geared toward African American women. On what basis does Wolf have the authority to speak? What evidence can African American women point to that indicates that Wolf is serious about her endeavor to analyze and explain the workings of racism in society, and within feminist theory? Will she pursue the task of highlighting the privileges that whites gain at the expense of Black subordination with the same amount of zealous intensity in which she blames African Americans for engaging in "race-separatist thinking"?

In reading both The Beauty Myth, and the article in Essence, I am convinced that the publication of Wolf's "Understanding White Fear," is both ironic and contradictory. It is ironic because Wolf verbally states her commitment to a "race-blind" society", but ends up reinforcing and re-enacting racist stereotypes by believing that Blacks should be feared and thus "avoided", by holding African Americans responsible for white inaction, and by not working to dismantle racism on a daily basis in her own community. The publication of this article is contradictory, because Wolf's sudden interest in race and racism is inconsistent with her own academic work, and to have the *kind* of comments she expresses debut in a Black women's magazine is both insulting and disheartening.

The fact that Essence has served as the principal signifier of what Black women have always known and what Wolf refuses to acknowledge in her own work---that we will not bear the burden of white imposed definition of femininity; that we are beautiful both physically and spiritually; that we are intellectually incomparable, divinely creative, and undeniably bold---further illustrates the incongruity of reading "understanding White Fear" within the pages of our beloved Essence.

Given our lack of access to major publishing companies, and the paucity of quality magazines like Essence, the only questions before us are: Can Black women afford to listen to yet another white person, male or female, blame us for the inaction of self-described "anti-racists"? Is the "I'm-trying-to-do-good-but-they-won't-let-me" thesis an illuminating argument that moves us to higher ground in the race relations debate? Is it always necessary for white women to publish their musings on race in Black magazines as opposed to primarily white ones? Is really possible for white women to begin their analyses of race with themselves rather than with us? Really?

When all is said and done, Wolf's "article" seems to be little more than a self-indulgent vignette illustrating, yet again, the whimpering woes of the do-right-white-woman-feminist. Wolf has done little more than engage in a feeble and weak rendition of "thinking out loud." Rather than add clarity to the myriad ways in which racism and sexism operates, Wolf reproduces the myopia, amplifies the confusion, and widens the gap between Blacks and whites that your "Race in America Report" attempts to dismantle.. I hope that Essence will find a way to insure that the Wolfian interpretation of racism in America does not go unchallenged.

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Sincerely yours,

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- 8/87-7/89 Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA
Magna Cum Laude , Rank #1 in Department
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- 8/89-7/91 Howard University, Washington, D.C.
Master of Arts in Political Science
- 9/91-5/92 University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA
One Year of Advanced Study Toward the Doctor of
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- 9/92-10/99 Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

Professional Experience

- 10/97-Present Assistant Professor, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
- 5/97-7/97 Instructor, Virginia Tech University, Blacksburg, VA
Women's Studies Program
- 1/96-7/96 Coordinator of Planning and Development/ Assistant for
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Southern University, Shreveport, LA
- 1/96-5/96 Adjunct Faculty, Southern University, Shreveport, LA
- 9/93-7/95 Part-time Lecturer, Rutgers University, New Brunswick,
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- 5/92-8/92 Regulatory Research Assistant, Washington, D.C
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