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Knowing Victims: feminism, ressentiment and the category ‘victim’

Rebecca Stringer

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University.
I hereby confirm that this thesis is entirely my own original work and that it has not been previously submitted, in any form, for a degree at another university.

Rebecca Stringer  19/3/03
For my father

Kenneth McIntyre Stringer

1940-1998

Steal yourself to ascend
Hold on tight, the night has come
Fasten up your earthly burdens
You have just begun
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii

Abstract ....................................................................................................................... vi

Abbreviations .............................................................................................................. viii

Introduction ................................................................................................................ 1

**Part One: Feminism and Victim Politics**

1. The Category ‘Victim’ and Popular Feminism ......................................................... 19
   Introduction .............................................................................................................. 19
   1.1 Hoff Sommers: engendering resentment .......................................................... 22
   1.2 Roiphe: the ends of feminism .......................................................................... 42
   1.3 Denfeld: Victorianism versus liberalism ....................................................... 60
   1.4 Wolf: victim feminism versus power feminism ......................................... 77
   Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 95

2. Victimhood and its (Dis)contents ......................................................................... 99
   Introduction .............................................................................................................. 99
   2.1 Victimhood and polysemy .............................................................................. 102
   2.2 Victims and/as agents ..................................................................................... 108
   2.3 Sexual violence and victim blame .................................................................. 113
   2.4 Within and beyond dualism: victimology .................................................... 122
   2.5 Being a victim, becoming a survivor: feminist victim activism .................... 135
   2.6 Urging women to identify with powerlessness? ............................................ 144
   2.7 Worthy and unworthy victims ...................................................................... 151
   Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 163

**Part Two: Feminism and Ressentiment**

3. Ressentiment, Radicalism and Reform ................................................................. 166
   Introduction .............................................................................................................. 166
   3.1 Cocks: embodying ressentiment ....................................................................... 171
   3.2 Tapper: feminism in the spirit of ressentiment ............................................ 190
   Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 216

4. Ressentiment, Identity and Difference .................................................................. 220
   Introduction .............................................................................................................. 220
   4.1 Yeatman: ressentiment and the location/locution of politics ....................... 222
   4.2 Brown: ressentiment within and without democracy .................................. 256
   Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 282
### Part Three: Reading Ressentiment

5. *Ressentiment* Reconsidered ................................................................. 291
   
   *Introduction* ..................................................................................... 291
   5.1 *The fragility of strength* ................................................................ 296
   5.2 *The power of the weak* ................................................................. 330
   *Conclusion* ....................................................................................... 343

   
   *Introduction* ..................................................................................... 346
   6.1 *Ressentiment and legalism* ......................................................... 348
   6.2 *Ressentiment and asceticism* ..................................................... 364
   6.3 *Emasculation and the direction of ressentiment* ..................... 372
   *Conclusion* ....................................................................................... 376

*Bibliography* ....................................................................................... 378
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Abstract

Throughout the 1990s feminism was criticised for being centred on a representation of women as 'victims', a representation which purportedly is substantially untrue, inimical to female agency, and politically regressive. This criticism has gained increasingly broad purchase both outside and within feminist circles, and has become something of a mass media truism. The main task of this dissertation is to examine salient articulations of this criticism, firstly within the sphere of popular feminism, and secondly within the sphere of feminist political theory. The concern motivating the dissertation is that this criticism, while illuminating in some important respects, predominantly has operated as a vehicle through which attempts are made to curtail feminism's potential to foster radical social change.

The first part of the dissertation addresses popular feminist critiques of 'victim feminism'. The popular accounts are found to construe the 'victim problem in feminism' as a venue for reasserting traditional liberal feminist edicts and for cultivating a neoliberal feminism. With a view to elucidate the generic turns of 'victim talk' in liberal democratic settings, and with particular attention to the issue of sexual violence, my analysis reveals (inter alia) that the association these accounts set up between 'the victim problem' and radical feminist politics relies on an elision of the latter's guiding construction of 'victims' as agentic subjects.

The second part of the dissertation examines accounts by feminist political theorists in which the question of feminism's relationship with the category 'victim' is taken up under the aegis of Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment. These accounts argue that feminism has become a politics of
ressentiment—a resubordinative disposition which reifies women’s victim-status and encourages apolitical moralism—and ought to construe its political horizon as a move beyond ressentiment. However, my analysis reveals fundamentally conflicting judgements in these accounts regarding which feminist political strategy—liberal/neoliberal or radical—counts as ressentimental and, therefore, which could lead the move beyond ressentiment. With this problem in mind, but agreeing that Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment has explanatory power for interpreting feminism’s relation with the category ‘victim,’ I set out to examine this concept in the third part of the dissertation.

The dissertation’s third and final part offers a critical re-reading of the concept of ressentiment, most notably as it is articulated in Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals. Rather than uphold Nietzsche’s condemnatory attitude toward ressentiment, I present a positive reading of ressentiment as the affective venue in which the relatively disempowered craft the agentic capacity to articulate, problematise and ameliorate their experience of, and vulnerability to, victimisation. On this reading, liberal feminist strategy appears as a containment of ressentiment, while radical feminist strategy appears to mine its energy for far-reaching socio-political change. On the basis of this reading I also articulate my view that feminism’s relationship with ressentiment is twofold in character: feminism is both ‘within’ and ‘against’ ressentiment. This view posits that feminism will move beyond ressentiment when it has successfully redressed the configurations of power which serve to incite ressentiment in the first instance. My reading of ressentiment also suggests that this concept can perform a greater variety of labours for feminist political theory than that of intra-feminist diagnosis. Most notably, I suggest that this concept can be used to interpret aspects of the relationship between men, masculinity and violence.

The analyses presented in the dissertation draw on literatures within feminist theory, political theory, criminology and Nietzsche scholarship.
Abbreviations

All references to Nietzsche's works are footnoted and abbreviated in accord with the standard English title acronyms listed below in alphabetical order. Unless otherwise indicated, Roman numerals, “P” in the case of Prefaces or abbreviated chapter titles are employed to denote sections within single texts, and numbers denote aphorisms rather than pages. For example, aphorism number 21 in the Second Essay of On The Genealogy of Morals would be referenced as GOM: II, 21, whereas the second aphorism in the Preface to that work would be referenced as GOM: P, 2, and aphorism number 6 of the chapter entitled “Why I am So Wise” in Ecce Homo would be referenced as EH: Wise, 6.


Introduction

The new orthodoxy of feminism is abandoning the image of the independent, existentially responsible woman in favour of woman as helpless victim of male oppression—treat her as equal before the law, and you are compounding her victimisation.

—Robert Hughes.¹

In this statement of critical observation, Robert Hughes provides a succinct articulation of an argument about feminism that was to gain increasingly broad purchase throughout the 1990s. Feminism, Hughes argues, has undergone a shift from representing women as responsible and capable agents, to representing women as absolutely unfree ‘victims’. Providing a clue as to what has precipitated this shift, Hughes suggests that it stems from certain feminist reservations about the goal of seeking equality within current conditions—reservations which generally are associated with radical feminist perspectives. By the time Hughes traced this shift in his 1993 book *The Culture of Complaint*, his view was not entirely novel. Criticism of feminism’s relationship with the category ‘victim’ was already underway both outside and within feminist circles. However the period after Hughes’ book saw critical engagement with this relationship reach something of a fever-pitch.

A number of mainstream feminist writers generated highly publicised books addressed to feminism’s “victim problem”.² Among them was Naomi Wolf, whose book *Fire With Fire* argues centrally that feminists have shifted from ‘identifying victimisation’ to ‘identifying as victims’.³ In academic

³ Ibid., 148.
feminist circles meanwhile, a number of political theorists took up the question of feminism's relationship with the category 'victim' under the aegis of Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment. Among them was Marion Tapper, who argued that, having become a regressive “politics of ressentiment,” feminism has instituted a “need to see women as helpless victims”\(^4\). In an intriguing moment of simultaneity, popular feminist writers sought to move feminism beyond the ‘victim problem,’ while feminist political theorists beckoned an apparently similar move: the development of “a feminist politics without ressentiment”\(^5\).

**Questions for Research**

As well as generating what one commentator has referred to as “victim panic”, the critical readings of feminism's relationship with the category 'victim' produced during the 1990s served also to generate a great deal of questions, many of which have remained unaddressed as the image of feminism as a regressive ethos of victimhood has gone on to become firmly entrenched in the popular imagination.\(^6\) Is it the case that feminists have, by and large, regarded women as helpless victims? What kinds of meanings does the word ‘victim’ carry within feminist thought? Does it simply denote ‘non-agent’? Given that the 1980s and 1990s also witnessed a broad diversification within feminist theory and activism, is the ‘victim problem’ as pervasive within feminism as some of its critics claim? If the ‘victim problem’ has to do with certain feminist reservations about the goal of seeking equality within current conditions, would a political strategy which unreservedly embraced

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this goal ameliorate this problem? What is the relationship between the category 'victim' and feminist political strategy? What is the relationship between the category 'victim' and the political disposition Nietzsche named 'ressentiment'? Should feminists aim to overcome the form of victim-centred politics *ressentiment* is said to inspire?

To address these questions, this dissertation sets out to critically examine a selection of popular and academic accounts which delineate the 'victim problem' and the 'ressentiment problem' respectively. These accounts raise a number of important issues for feminism, but they also warrant careful critical attention. My aim in examining these accounts is, firstly, to critically assess the ways in which they represent existing feminist relationships with the category 'victim' and, secondly, to discern and assess their intended ramifications for the future direction of feminist politics. As Hughes' comment hints, the question as to what kind of political agency feminism should assume within current configurations of power is posed centrally by critics of feminist victim-centred politics. In the accounts examined in this dissertation, questions of female agency and questions of feminism's political agency are intimately interwoven. For this reason, of the several questions noted above, two assume central importance for the purposes of this dissertation: What is the relationship between the category 'victim' and feminist political strategy? Should feminists aim to overcome the form of victim-centred politics *ressentiment* is said to inspire?

These questions also assume centrality on account of the main concern motivating the dissertation. With some significant exceptions, critics for the most part have construed the 'victim problem' as a venue for reasserting liberal feminist edicts and for cultivating a neoliberal feminism. This move relies upon an equation of radical politics with victim-centred politics, and it aims to impose a particular set of limits upon the political agency feminism
might assume within current configurations of power. In short, the moral of
the story for most of the critics is that, if a feminist conception of female
agency is to be had, feminism’s political agency needs to be reigned to a
relatively conciliatory posture. The analysis presented in this dissertation
questions rather than accepts the status of this moral as a positive step
toward conceptualising female agency.

Previous Research and Research Remit

This dissertation offers an examination of how the question of feminism’s
relationship with ressentiment and the category ‘victim’ was taken up in
critical discourses of the 1990s. As yet there is no single-authored treatment
of this matter. However, there is a range of previously conducted research on
some of the issues of key importance to the dissertation. Outlining this range
of research will aid in locating the dissertation within the particular debates
to which it is addressed, and indicating the dissertation’s distinctive
contribution to these debates. This range of previous research may be divided
into two categories, both of which are domains of literature to which the
dissertation seeks to contribute: feminist theory and Nietzsche scholarship.

Within feminist theory, popular accounts of feminism’s ‘victim problem’
have attracted a fairly sizeable secondary literature. A number of scholars
have been concerned to delineate and examine the politically conservative
class of these popular accounts, and to critically rebuff the ways in
which they represent existing feminist relationships with the category

7 See, for example, Shane Rowlands and Margaret Henderson, ‘Damned Bores and Slick
Sisters: the selling of blockbuster feminism in Australia,’ Australian Feminist Studies,
Vol. 11, No. 23 (1996): 9-16; bell hooks, Outlaw Culture: resisting representations (New
York: Routledge, 1994), Chapters 8 and 9, 91-99; 101-108; the essays collected in
Jemma Mead, ed., Bodyjamming: feminism, sexual harassment and public life (Sydney:
Vintage Books, 1997); and Pamela Haag, “Putting Your Body on the Line”: the question
of violence, victims, and the legacies of second-wave feminism, differences, Vol. 8, No. 2
'victim'. I share ground with much of this existing literature, which in the course of the dissertation is treated as a rich fund of insight.

However the dissertation also contributes new insights to this literature. Using the scope provided by the dissertation form, it offers a much closer examination of the main themes and claims of the popular accounts of feminism's 'victim problem' than is evident in the existing literature. It also uses this examination as occasion to explore the meaning of the term 'victim' within feminist thought (specifically in relation to sexual violence), while in the existing literature the significantly polysemic character of this term, and the complexity of feminism's relationship with it, remain largely unexplored.

Another distinctive feature of the dissertation is that it considers the popular feminist accounts in combination with theoretical accounts of feminist ressentiment. Considering these in combination positions me to illuminate the role that Nietzsche and the concept of ressentiment plays in the popular accounts, specifically those of Naomi Wolf and Christina Hoff Sommers. Discerning this role underlines the relevance of the concept of ressentiment to the question of feminism's relationship with the category 'victim'.

The existing literature on the popular accounts also aids in carving out the dissertation's particular remit. Although the dissertation has much to say about questions of sexual politics, one particular task the dissertation does not undertake is an examination of how the feminism of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, particularly their anti-pornography politics, is represented in the popular accounts of feminism's 'victim problem'. This task has been directly and very capably undertaken by Chris Atmore in her piece 'Victims, Backlash, and Radical Feminist Theory', and also forms a main feature of Kathryn Abrams' article 'Sex Wars Redux'.

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8 Chris Atmore, 'Victims, Backlash and Radical Feminist Theory,' in New Versions of Victims: feminists struggle with the concept, ed. Sharon Lamb (New York: New York...
INTRODUCTION

While the popular feminist accounts of the 'victim problem' have attracted considerable critical attention within feminist theory, the academic feminist accounts of the 'ressentiment problem' have met a comparatively quieter reception. Of the four accounts of feminist ressentiment I examine in the dissertation—by Joan Cocks, Anna Yeatman, Marion Tapper and Wendy Brown—those of the latter two authors have garnered the most attention.\(^9\)

For the most part, Brown and Tapper's respective calls for feminism to move beyond the politics of ressentiment are affirmed.\(^10\) Their diagnostic use of Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment, and their association of ressentiment with particular forms of feminist politics, have not been subject to critical examination. Most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, their

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understanding of *ressentiment* as a regressive and purely resubordinative posture which serves to reify victim-status and to encourage apolitical moralism, has gone unchallenged.

However, the literature does host exceptions to this trend. Shortly after it was first published, Marion Tapper's account of feminist *ressentiment* was critically assessed by Zoë Sophia and, more recently, Brown's account was the subject of critical reflection in Vikki Bell's book *Feminist Imagination*. Sophia sought to defend the particular kind of feminist politics Tapper impugns against the charge that it may be regarded as an example of *ressentiment*, while Bell challenges the exhaustiveness of Brown's account by moving to locate moments in feminist thought when its parameters exceed those of *ressentiment*.

My own engagement with the question of feminist *ressentiment* pursues a different kind of trajectory. Firstly, by examining a wider range of accounts, my analysis is positioned to reveal that theorists of feminist *ressentiment* offer conflicting judgements regarding how *ressentiment* plays out within feminism and, therefore, conflicting visions of the relationship between feminism, *ressentiment*, and the category 'victim'. So, rather than take up one vision of feminist *ressentiment*, I ask after the conflicts which emerge when different accounts of feminist *ressentiment* are compared. Secondly and perhaps most importantly, the trajectory I pursue includes a critical re-reading of Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*. This re-reading challenges

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INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche's condemnation of *ressentiment* and the subsequent adoption of this condemnation by critics of feminist *ressentiment*. It also questions the idea that *ressentiment* is a purely resubordinative posture. In short, where Sophia and Bell present critical reflections which nonetheless still accept that *ressentiment* is bad for feminism, my reading of Nietzsche suggests a more positive and complex relation between the two.

The dissertation's critical re-reading of Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment* brings us to the second category of previous research. The domain of Nietzsche scholarship contains a great many reflections on the concept of *ressentiment* given that it forms a key element of Nietzsche's philosophy. Less common in this area, however, are readings which call Nietzsche's condemnation of *ressentiment* into question. As Daniel Conway notes, two particular pieces of Anglophone Nietzsche scholarship offer this kind of reading: Richard Solomon's article 'One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment*’ and Henry Staten's book *Nietzsche's Voice*. Solomon crafts a defence of *ressentiment* based on the idea that it inspires a range of democratic values and political ruses that we would do well to preserve. Staten takes a different approach in concentrating on the textual instabilities within Nietzsche's articulation of the concept of *ressentiment* so as to demonstrate the difficulty of Nietzsche's effort to maintain what Staten refers to as his “official attitude of condemnation” toward *ressentiment*.

I draw on both of these scholars, although my approach is closer to that of Staten as it is based on exegetical analysis of Nietzsche's articulation of the concept of *ressentiment*. However my critical re-reading of *ressentiment* also

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departs from those of Solomon and Staten in being especially concerned with the ethics of using this concept to 'diagnose' particular forms of politicisation, and concerned also to reflect upon the labours that the concept of ressentiment can perform for feminist political theory. In foregrounding these concerns my analysis seeks to add a new ground of insight to the re-reading of ressentiment initiated by Solomon and Staten.

In relation to Nietzsche, I do not attempt to provide an interpretation of his philosophy as a whole, nor to provide an account of a specifically Nietzschean political theory. Rather, my particular remit restricts me to specific concern with his articulation of the concept of ressentiment, his thesis on the moralities of master and slave, and the roles these can play for feminist political reflection and auto-critique. On account of these concerns, my analysis of Nietzsche primarily is focussed on two texts: On the Genealogy of Morals and Beyond Good and Evil. While maintaining primary focus on these texts, I do also refer to other works by Nietzsche, and other accounts of ressentiment, including those of Eugen Dühring and Max Scheler.14 My strategy for reading Nietzsche's articulation of the concept of ressentiment is best described as one of critical exegesis. The approach is exegetical in the sense that I seek to unpack key elements of Nietzsche's account of ressentiment, especially those elements which are obscured when the concept of ressentiment is employed diagnostically. The approach is critical in the sense that, with Solomon and Staten, it seeks to call Nietzsche's condemnation of ressentiment into question.

14Eugen Dühring, Der Werth des Lebens: eine philosophische betrachtung (Breslau, 1865); Max Scheler, Ressentiment, trans. William H. Holdheim (New York: Free Press, 1961 [originally published 1914]).
**Overall Argument**

The overall argument of the dissertation is, essentially, that feminist identification of women as ‘victims’ does not in any necessary sense perform an elision of female agency, nor deliver a regressive and resubordinative politics—although this identification does not by itself deliver a conception of agency nor deliver a political strategy.

This argument is drawn on the basis of two main findings of the dissertation. Firstly, the dissertation’s analysis of the popular accounts of feminism’s ‘victim problem’ reveals that these accounts rely on an understanding of victimhood as a simple deprivation of agency, and that they superimpose this understanding of the category ‘victim’ upon existing feminist treatments of this category. However, upon turning to existing feminist treatments of this category, specifically in relation to sexual violence, we find not elisions or denials of agency, but interventions upon the victim/agent dichotomy, a concern to ontologise ‘victims’ as particular kinds of ‘agents,’ and interrogation of the existing forms of (sexual) agency ascribed to women, most notably in juridical settings. We find, in short, that forms of agency are visible, affirmed and examined in existing feminist accounts of the category ‘victim,’ and existing feminist politicisations of victimisation.

The second finding which informs the dissertation’s overall argument is drawn from its analysis of the academic accounts of feminist *ressentiment*, and the critical re-reading of Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* conducted in view of these accounts. The academic accounts construe *ressentiment* as a resubordinative disposition which reifies victim-identity and, as such, inspires a regressive politics. My reading of *ressentiment*, however, seeks to elucidate the extent to which *ressentiment* fosters a conception of ‘victimhood’ which is in fact a potential avenue to ‘agency’. While acknowledging the resubordinative potentialities of *ressentiment*, I find that, at its best, the
conceptual technology *ressentiment* elaborates delivers the idea that victimisation and subordination are not inevitable. I find further that the potential threat this technology therefore poses to the social order it now perceives as potentially contingent forms part of the reason why Nietzsche condemns *ressentiment*. In importing these insights back into the question of feminist *ressentiment* as it is taken up by the theorists I examine, I find that the forms of politics they associate with *ressentiment* do exhibit *ressentiment*'s potentially emancipatory element, and can not therefore be rendered as inevitably inimical to agency nor necessarily resubordinative.

**Chapter Outlines**

The dissertation is divided into three parts, each of which contain two chapters. The first part of the dissertation, ‘Feminism and Victim Politics,’ offers a comparative exposition and critical assessment of a selection of popular feminist accounts of feminism’s ‘victim problem’. The selection of accounts addressed in this part of the dissertation, those of Christina Hoff Sommers, Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfeld, and Naomi Wolf, are the most salient examples of the critical discourse with which I am concerned, and are kindred in having been highly publicised books on international release—hence my reference to these accounts as ‘popular,’ and my concern about the role these accounts have played in shaping popular perceptions of feminism.15

Chapter 1 provides an exposition of each account, compares their respective claims, and illuminates the particular manner in which they go about framing feminism’s ‘victim problem’. The main finding of the chapter is

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that each account constructs a stark dichotomy between a ‘good’ reformist feminism which is cognisant of women’s present agency, and a ‘bad’ radical feminism which persists with a substantially untrue and presently obsolete understanding of women as victims. In Hoff Sommer’s case, the ‘bad’ feminism is referred to as “resenter feminism”, and in Wolf’s account this association of radical feminism with resentment is affirmed. It is through these dichotomies that the popular accounts construe the ‘victim problem’ as a venue for reasserting liberal feminist edicts and, in Wolf’s case especially, for cultivating a neoliberal feminism. However the chapter’s analysis also suggests that these accounts pursue their own kind of victim-politics. In elucidating the ‘harm’ caused by the feminisms they impugn, they each point to a more deserving population of Real Victims. Discerning this aspect of the accounts then forms part of the critical assessment of their claims presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 2 runs two lines of argument in relation to the popular feminist accounts. Firstly, the chapter challenges their equation of radicalism with victim-centred politics by placing these accounts within a wider field of discourses of victimhood and victimisation—a field which encompasses existing feminist interventions upon the language of victimhood, most notably in the sphere of sexual violence. This enables me to demonstrate the extent to which ‘radical’ feminists actually have tended to perceive the ‘victim’ as a particular kind of ‘agent’. The second line of argument I pursue takes up the question as to why the popular critics elide existing feminist discourses of agency and interventions upon the victim/agent dichotomy. I argue that this is because their own brand of victim-politics, which presents what I refer to as ‘reverse victimologies,’ requires that the victim/agent dichotomy remain stable. In showing how the category ‘victim’ also operates as a centre of gravity in the popular feminist accounts, my analysis interrupts the other
side of the core equation they deliver—their association of liberal feminism with a move beyond victim-centred politics.

In pursuit of a more productive approach to understanding feminism’s relationship with the category ‘victim’ I turn, in the dissertation’s second part, to the academic accounts of feminist ressentiment. All of these accounts employ the concept of ressentiment as a vehicle through which resubordinative dynamics within feminist politics, most notably an attachment to victim identity, can be discerned and diagnosed. All are, therefore, concerned to direct feminism beyond the politics of ressentiment, a move which is thought to promise the development of a positive relationship with agency and capacity. As my analyses confirm, these accounts are illuminating a several important respects. What is most interesting, however, is that they offer conflicting diagnoses of feminist ressentiment and, as a result, conflicting judgements as to what kind of political strategy could lead feminism beyond ressentiment. So as to reveal these conflicts, this part of the dissertation, entitled ‘Feminism and Ressentiment,’ assumes the form of two comparative analyses.

In chapter 3, Joan Cocks’ and Marion Tapper’s accounts of feminism and ressentiment are analysed comparatively. It is found that Cocks and Tapper share a concern with feminist willingness to abet state and institutional power so as to forward its political goals, and that both theorists identify feminist appeals to such powers as symptomatic of a ressentimental victim-politics. However the chapter also finds that these theorists deliver very different formulations of the relationship between radicalism, reformism and ressentiment. Cocks understands ressentiment as a psycho-political disposition which curtails radicalism and encourages reformism, suggesting that a return to a properly radical politics will release feminism from the mire of ressentiment. Tapper, on the other hand, understands ressentiment as a
psycho-political disposition which encourages radicalism, arguing that such radicalism is especially problematic given that feminist reforms have been successful enough for it to be bereft of purpose. A similar conflict regarding the relationship between radicalism, reformism and *ressentiment* is traced in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 sets out to provide a comparative analysis of two further accounts of feminist *ressentiment*, those of Anna Yeatman and Wendy Brown. The chapter’s analysis finds that Yeatman and Brown offer similar portraits of the politics of *ressentiment* within feminism. Both theorists conceive of *ressentiment* as a resubordinative form of politics which hypostatises victim identity and entrenches the distance between emancipatory subjects and positive political capacity. However the chapter also finds that these theorists offer conflicting accounts of how the politics of *ressentiment* play out in feminism and, most significantly, how the problem of *ressentiment* may be remedied. Yeatman proposes that feminism’s move beyond *ressentiment* should involve desisting in political radicalism and working co-operatively within the existing politico-economic order, including this order’s institution of neoliberal rationalities of government such as individual contractualism and self-regulation. Brown’s account, however, beckons a more radical challenge to this order and, most significantly, reads its signature powers—liberalism, capitalism, and disciplinarity—as an assemblage which works to incite *ressentiment*. Hence Yeatman’s formulation of feminist politics beyond *ressentiment* would, according to Brown’s account, serve only to intensify *ressentiment*.

The conflicting judgements evident in this literature deliver the proposition which guides the dissertation’s third and final part. The proposition is that the relationship between *ressentiment*, feminist politics, and the category ‘victim’ is more complex, dynamic, and multivalent than the accounts in this
literature acknowledge. This proposition sets two tasks. First, a close and critical examination of the concept of *ressentiment* itself. Second, application of the insights this examination yields to the question of feminist *ressentiment*. These tasks comprise the labour of the dissertation's third part, 'Reading *Ressentiment*'.

Chapter 5 undertakes a critical exegesis of Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*. This approach works to broaden our perspective on *ressentiment* by bringing into view the features of this concept which tend to be elided when it is employed diagnostically, most notably Nietzsche's account of the dynamic struggle between master and slave. Illuminating the sense in which the concept of *ressentiment* describes a complex and dynamic process of revolt provides grounds on which to challenge a range of key assumptions about *ressentiment* made in the literature examined in Part 2. Most notably, these include the assumption that *ressentiment* is unambiguously 'bad' and that it ordains a purely resubordinative, non-transformative politics. According to the interpretation of Nietzsche I offer, *ressentiment* can instead be understood as a vehicle through which the relatively powerless craft a capacity to create an emancipatory conceptual technology through which social being can be opened to contingency. Within this technology, the category 'victim' is not construed as an end in itself, but rather as a potential source of agency.

In short, Chapter 5 delivers a reading of *ressentiment* as an effect of domination which has the potential to become an effective weapon against domination. This reading of *ressentiment* also serves to distil three stages of *ressentimental* revolt: brute, creative, and explosive/contained. I argue that, insofar as feminism has sought to show that women's subordination is neither natural nor inevitable, there is a very basic affirmative relationship between feminism and the emancipatory conceptual technology *ressentiment*.
elaborates in its creative stage. But I also suggest that *ressentiment*’s third stage is of greatest interest and import for purposes of feminist political reflection. According to my reading of Nietzsche, *ressentiment* in its third stage begins to pose a threat to the configurations of power which have conditioned its production and, as such, becomes a ‘problem’ to which the powerful will require a ‘solution’.

The task of Chapter 6 is to examine the strategies Nietzsche describes as providing ‘solutions’ to the threat of *ressentiment*. These strategies are legalism and priestly asceticism and, according to my reading of Nietzsche, they work to contain the threat of *ressentiment* by redirecting its ire. In reviewing these strategies, I make my concluding arguments regarding the relationship between feminism, *ressentiment* and the category ‘victim,’ and articulate my view that feminism works both ‘within’ and ‘against’ *ressentiment*.

Examining the role of priestly asceticism in redirecting *ressentiment* enables me to present a final set of reflections on the discourses of victim identity, blame and responsibility within the popular and academic feminist accounts the dissertation examines. One of the threads running through the popular and academic accounts is that a gesture referred to as ‘taking responsibility’ will aid in ameliorating feminism’s ‘victim problem’. For the most part, reference to this gesture is underpinned by the idea that victim identity involves a self-thwarting evasion of self-responsibility which serves to perpetuate unfreedom. I argue that injunctions to ‘take responsibility’ require scrutiny in view of the labour of the ascetic priest, which is to disarm *ressentiment* by compelling it to self-blame. In making this argument, I suggest that the popular accounts in particular may be interpreted as a form of asceticism. In relation to the academic accounts I register that, when it is operationalised diagnostically, Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* can itself
assume an ascetic guise. This delivers the suggestion that future feminist engagements with discourses of responsibility need to interrogate the relationship between ‘self-blame’ and ‘taking responsibility’.

On a different tack, elucidating the role of law in containing ressentiment provides fresh ground on which to reconsider the conflicting judgements about ressentiment, radicalism and reformism evident in the literature examined in Part 2. Nietzsche's account of the role of law furnishes me with a distinction between two interrelated modalities in the direction of ressentimental desire: a radical modality which hosts a desire for a substantially different socio-political order, and a reformist modality which imposes reform upon the character of rule at the expense of containment. This distinction, then, places both radicalism and reformism 'within' ressentiment. Another feature of this distinction is that it suggests the success of reformism in reshaping the character of rule relies on the possibility that a more radical threat could instead be posed.

On the basis of this distinction I argue that the problematic of feminist ressentiment does not turn on the question as to what kind of political strategy will deliver feminism beyond ressentiment. Rather this issue turns, firstly, on the question as to how feminism ought to inhabit and direct ressentiment and, secondly, on the question as to what kind of political strategy will serve best to redress the configurations of power which incite ressentiment most potently. I also use this distinction to identify the sense in which ressentiment is a political force which always works against itself in the sense that its ‘aim’ is to transform the configurations of power which have conditioned its production. In combination, these lines of argument forward my view that feminism is both ‘within’ and ‘against’ ressentiment, and that, at its best, the articulation of victimisation ressentiment enables does not thwart but rather delivers the possibility of agency.
PART ONE
Feminism and Victim Politics
1

The Category ‘Victim’ and Popular Feminism

From rape redefinitions to feminist theory on the “patriarchy,” victimisation has become the subtext of the movement, the moral to be found in every feminist story. Together, these stories form a feminist mythology in which a singular female subject is created: woman as helpless, violated and oppressed victim.
—Rene Denfeld.¹

The presumption that men are collectively engaged in keeping women down invites feminist bonding in a resentful community.
—Christina Hoff Sommers.²

Introduction

The medium of heavily marketed books on international release has been of immeasurable value to feminism in providing an interface between feminist ideas and large populations of women. From consciousness-raising novels such as Marilyn French’s The Women’s Room through to polemics like Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch, Ann Summers’ Damned Whores and God’s Police, and Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique, feminist books published on broad release are widely recognised for challenging the status quo and making profound and lasting contributions to social change.³ But during the 1990s, popular feminist books shifted in character. A spate of books appeared which were attuned not so much to providing a critical account of

the world, but a critical account of feminism’s critical account of the world. The medium of heavily marketed books on international release became a significant venue for intra-feminist critique, perhaps for the first time. At the centre of the spectacle stood feminism’s relationship with the category ‘victim’. As the plaint rang out that feminism had come to be centred on a representation of women as victims, a particular set of arguments about this relationship emerged. The task of this chapter is to identify this particular set of arguments by providing expositions of the four books in which they are articulated most powerfully: Christina Hoff Sommers’ *Who Stole Feminism?*, Katie Roiphe’s *The Morning After*, Rene Denfeld’s *The New Victorians*, and Naomi Wolf’s *Fire With Fire*.

In many respects these books are prompted by and focussed on questions of sexual politics. For example, they tend to be centrally concerned to offer a critique of the ways in which feminists have politicised sexual violence, contending as they do that such politicisation works to elide and discourage female sexual agency in attempting to recode the erotic sphere as an inevitable site of female victimisation. However as this chapter’s expositions will seek to highlight, in these books questions of sexual and cultural politics are always intimately tied to questions of feminism’s overall political strategy and world view. These books are not solely concerned with the question as to how feminism should envisage its subject—hapless victim or capable agent—but with what kind of political agency feminism should assume within existing politico-economic arrangements. Where earlier popular feminist books were more often than not centrally concerned to agitate against the politico-economic *status quo*, these books are centrally concerned to reassert the politico-economic *status quo*. They deliver a formula in which feminism will be returned to genuine political efficacy and faithful representation of women and their interests so long as it desists in political radicalism. More specifically, they construe what Wolf refers to as “the victim problem in
current feminism" as a venue for a reassertion of liberal feminist edicts. As this chapter aims to demonstrate, this manoeuvre is dependent upon constructing an exclusive relation between feminist political radicalism and victim-centred politics, and providing grounds for a dissociation of liberal feminism from such politics. My view, expressed partially in this chapter and more concertedly in the next, is that neither construction is tenable.

While the task of this chapter is to show how the accounts go about making these manoeuvres, the task of the next is to provide a critical examination of them. That said, cursory critical points in relation to each account will be offered in this chapter as they arise. The chapter does not seek to provide a history of the debate about feminism's relationship with the category 'victim'. Rather it seeks to distil the major themes of the debate as they arise in the contributions to this debate considered here. In tune with this, the order in which we will consider each account is determined according to theme. Hoff Sommers' account is considered first because it is broad in scope and it introduces an idea that will be of concern throughout the dissertation: that feminism represents women as victims when it comes to be motivated by resentment, an 'undemocratic' and 'illiberal' passion. The accounts of Roiphe and Denfeld follow, as they introduce the question of a generational divide within feminism as well as the notion of feminist 'Victorianism'. Wolf marks her book out as an alternative account of "the victim problem": so as to best determine her book's difference from those of the other authors, it is addressed in the final section of the chapter.

4 Wolf, Fire With Fire, 148. Chris Atmore also registers this move in observing that "liberal feminism is generally the only feminism allocated an honourable history, worthy of scholarly appreciation, in this writing." Chris Atmore, 'Victims, Backlash and Radical Feminist Theory,' in New Versions of Victims: feminists struggle with the concept, ed. Sharon Lamb (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 189.
1.1 Hoff Sommers: engendering resentment

The central contention of Christina Hoff Sommers’ book *Who Stole Feminism?* is that throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s feminism was “stolen” by a relatively small and unrepresentative class of women whose brand of feminism departs significantly from feminism’s original, equality-oriented project. Hoff Sommers’ book is governed by a dichotomy between “equity feminism” and “gender feminism” (she also refers to the latter as “resenter feminism” and “the New Feminism”). As she explains, *equity feminism* is the “traditional, classically liberal, humanistic feminism” that demanded not special treatment for women but rather that they be accorded “the same rights before the law that men enjoyed.” This “old mainstream” feminism, originally instituted through the “pure and wholesome article first displayed at Seneca Falls in 1848”, emphasised women and men’s shared humanity and concentrated on a process of legal reform—suffrage, divorce, property rights—which, Hoff Sommers notes, was complemented in more recent times with moves to protect abortion rights. This feminism’s agenda for equality, on Hoff Sommers’ view, is “not yet fully achieved” but

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5 Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, 22; 45. Hoff Sommers explains that “gender feminism” is shorthand for “sex/gender feminism”. With this latter name Hoff Sommers is referring to the sex/gender distinction of second wave feminist theory, although she does not provide references pertaining to the sex/gender distinction. This distinction was introduced into feminist theory by Ann Oakley in her book *Sex, Gender and Society* (London: Temple Smith, 1972) but it is widely recognised than an early articulation of this distinction is made in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Picador, 1988 [originally published 1949]). For Hoff Sommers’ critique of Beauvoir see *Who Stole Feminism?*, 256-257. For an account of the history of the concept of gender in feminist thought see Ann Oakley, ‘A Brief History of Gender,’ in *Who’s Afraid of Feminism? seeing through the backlash*, eds. Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1998), 29-55.

6 Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, 22.

7 Ibid., 22; 275. The “wholesome article” Hoff Sommers refers to is the ‘Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions’ presented and adopted at the Seneca Falls Convention at the Wesleyan Chapel, Seneca Falls, New York on July 19, 1848. The Declaration, drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott among others, was modelled on the American Declaration of Independence and is widely regarded as the founding document of organised American feminism. See ‘Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions’ in ed. Miriam Schneir *The Vintage Book of Historical Feminism* (London: Vintage, 1996), 77-82.
nonetheless has enjoyed success enough so that it no longer can be said that women occupy a subordinate position in relation to men in contemporary liberal democratic settings, most notably the United States.\textsuperscript{8} Hoff Sommers locates equity feminism as the kind of feminism with which most women, including herself, identify.\textsuperscript{9}

According to Hoff Sommers, equity feminism has been replaced by \textit{gender feminism} as the public face and guiding ideology of feminism. Gender feminism, she argues, is neither properly representative of women’s interests nor properly democratic.\textsuperscript{10} The task of her book is to provide a total critique of gender feminism so that its power might be countered and equity feminism restored to its rightful place as feminism’s mainstream. Thereby, Hoff Sommers argues, feminism will be returned to its “true purposes”.\textsuperscript{11} At a later stage in this section I will point out some problems with Hoff Sommers’ account of gender feminism, but let us now summarise what kind of feminism she means to describe with this term. Hoff Sommers places the origins of gender feminism with the advent of the sex/gender distinction and the development of feminist consciousness-raising in second wave feminist theory and practice. She writes:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{8} Hoff Sommers, \textit{Who Stole Feminism?}, 22. In this vein Hoff Sommers also states that “women today can no longer be regarded as the victims of an undemocratic indoctrination”, Ibid., 260.

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{10}In relation to gender feminism’s failure to be representative, Hoff Sommers argues that while gender feminists have “achieved visibility and influence”, they nonetheless “have not succeeded in winning the hearts of American women. Most American feminists, unwilling to be identified as part of a cause they find alien, have renounced the label and have left the field to the resenters” (Ibid., 49). As proof of her claim that gender feminism is unrepresentative Hoff Sommers cites two media-sponsored polls. Both polls found that a majority of women supported the goal of sexual equality, but only 37% of women in the first poll and 16% in the second described themselves as feminists (Ibid., 18). For Hoff Sommers, these results indicate that a majority of women are equity feminists, but that they fail to identify themselves as feminists owing to their alienation from gender feminism.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 21.
\end{quote}
The idea that women are in a gender war originated in the midsixties, when the antiwar movement and antigovernment mood revivified and redirected the women's movement away from its Enlightenment liberal philosophy to a more radical, antiestablishment philosophy ... by the midseventies, faith in liberal solutions to social problems had waned, and the old style of consciousness raising that encouraged women to seek avenues of self-fulfilment rapidly gave way to one that initiated women into an appreciation of their subordinate situation in the patriarchy and the joys and comforts of group solidarity.12

Where equity feminism apprehends a limited set of sexual inequalities which can be remedied through reform of existing socio-economic arrangements, gender feminism apprehends a system of male domination and female subordination which is deeply ingrained within existing arrangements and can only be overcome through a radical transformation of those arrangements, initiated when women individually then collectively perceive the need for such transformation. Hence Hoff Sommers describes gender feminism as “transformationist”.13 Having situated the initial formation of gender feminism with the rise of the New Left, Hoff Sommers argues throughout her book that the institutional support, financial backing and hegemonic status this form of feminism has managed to achieve was consolidated during the 1980s and continued into the 1990s.14

Hoff Sommers does not provide an account of the sex/gender distinction, nor of the extensive feminist debates regarding this concept.15 Rather she

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12Ibid., 23.
13Ibid., 65. See especially the chapter ‘Transforming the Academy,’ Ibid., 50-73.
14Throughout her book Hoff Sommers regularly refers to the financial backing and institutional support gender feminism has attracted (see for example Ibid., 33; 82-3; 124-127). Her comments regarding public funding of feminist anti-rape activities based in universities are typical of the critical line she takes on this support. She argues that feminisms' expanded definition of sexual violence “justifies the salaries being paid to all the new personnel in the burgeoning college date rape industry”, commenting further that "college women are getting a lion's share of public resources for combatting rape", Ibid., 220. As the argument of her book makes clear, Hoff Sommers regards this as a misappropriation of public monies and resources.
15Salient contributions to the debate regarding the sex/gender distinction and the concept of gender include: Moira Gatens, 'A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction,' Imaginary Bodies: ethics, power and corporeality (New York: Routledge, 1996 [originally published
notes that it encouraged women to “view society through the sex/gender prism” and “identify their personal selves with their gender.”\(^{16}\) Although the sex/gender distinction actually encouraged women to disidentify with their gender—that is, to disidentify with existing constructions of cultural femininity so as to entertain self-definition—Hoff Sommers means to argue that this concept formed a platform for establishing political solidarity among women. This is where her characterisation of gender feminism as “gynocentric” and “misandrist” comes into play.\(^{17}\) This form of solidarity among women, she argues, depends upon an “ontology of a society divided against itself along the fault line of gender” and, as such, institutes a “divisive,” “unwholesome,” “doctrinaire,” “illiberal” and “resentful” political imagination.\(^{18}\) Of course Hoff Sommers’ characterisation of this social division as “illiberal” is curious given that liberalism is founded upon just such a gendered division, in the form of a public/private dichotomy.\(^{19}\) This point aside, let us note that one of the main arguments Hoff Sommers makes against gender feminism is that when this form of feminism attempts to “raise” female consciousness it actually works to impute a false consciousness. Hoff Sommers wholeheartedly disagrees with what she takes to be gender feminist belief that women are “under siege” by a malevolent

\(^{16}\)Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?,* 23.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., 22; 256.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., 224; 21; 18; 257; 42.

“sex/gender system” which perpetuates male domination and female subordination in a vast array of obvious and insidious ways. Referring to Virginia Held’s comment that once the “sex/gender system” is discerned, traces of its operation can be perceived “everywhere”, Hoff Sommers argues that “how these feminists regard ... society is more a matter of temperament than a matter of insight into social reality.”

That the world view of gender feminism is untrue, and that its deceptive account of gender relations is sustained through emotions since it can not be substantiated with fact, is the leading idea of Hoff Sommers' critique of gender feminism. She writes that the “gender war” requires a constant flow of horror stories showing women that male perfidy and female humiliation are everywhere, and argues that these horror stories are supplied in two ways. Firstly, such horror stories are contrived through falsification of evidence regarding, for example, the rates of violence against women. Secondly, they are produced when gender feminists sustain an emotional state which combines “anger,” “outrage,” “resentment” and “hypersensitivity”. This emotional state enables the gender feminist to perceive “revelations of monstrosity in the most familiar and seemingly innocuous phenomena”, such as the prevalence of female nudity in modern art or catcalls on the street. Before looking more closely at the connection Hoff Sommers draws between

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21 Ibid., 26. Hoff Sommers is drawing on the following article by Virginia Held, ‘Feminism and Epistemology: recent work on the connection between gender and knowledge,’ Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Summer 1985).
22 Hoff Sommers makes the point that gender feminism’s world view is not factual very clearly in the following statement: “The New Feminists are a powerful source of mischief because their leaders are not good at seeing things as they are. Resenter feminists like Faludi, French, Heilbrun and MacKinnon speak of backlash, siege, and an undeclared war against women. But the condition they describe is mythic—with no foundation in the facts of contemporary American life . . . To the extent that one can speak at all of a gender war, it is the New Feminists themselves who are waging it.” Ibid., 45.
23 Ibid., 19-21, 29-33.
24 Ibid., 27.
emotion and this feminism's political world view as well as what she has to say regarding gender feminism's falsification of evidence, let us note that Hoff Sommers is especially concerned with the extent to which this world view constructs a firm division not just between women and men, but between feminist women and "uninitiated" women.25

Hoff Sommers argues that the gender feminist world view gives rise to a "corrosive paradox": "no group of women can wage war on men without at the same time denigrating the women who respect those men."26 This world view leads the gender feminist to adopt a "patronising," "condescending" and "pitying" attitude toward women who do not regard themselves as "hapless victims of patriarchy".27 Such women, she notes, are regarded with disdain when gender feminism necessarily casts them as "benighted" victims of false consciousness.28 Arguing that an "illiberal authoritarianism" lies at the heart of the gender feminist argument that "women are socialised to want the things the gender feminist believes they should not want"—her examples are heterosexual marriage, homemaking, childrearing, reading romance novels and using cosmetics—Hoff Sommers contends that gender feminism actually hosts not just "misandry" but "misogyny".29 According to Hoff Sommers, the

25Ibid., 257.
26Ibid., 256.
27Ibid., 257.
28Ibid. It should be noted here that Hoff Sommers here repeats a very well-worn and widely held criticism of radical feminism's conception of consciousness-raising. Although Hoff Sommers, like the other critics we address in this chapter, offers this criticism as though for the first time, its status is broad and longstanding. Consider, for example, Jean Grimshaw’s critique of radical feminist Mary Daly, made in the late 1980s: “Daly sees women as not merely brutalised by patriarchy, but reduced to a state of near-robotitude. . . . views such as these . . . are divisive because they implicitly divide women into two camps: those who are liberated and have shaken the dust of service to others from the soles of their feet, and those who are still trapped in the old ways and not sufficiently enlightened even to perceive the depths of their own degradation and dehumanisation.” Jean Grimshaw, Feminist Philosophers: women’s perspectives on philosophical traditions (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1986): 157-159.
29Ibid., 257, 256. Emphasis in original. For Hoff Sommers' examples see the chapter 'The Gender Wardens,' 255-275.
gender feminist desire to counter the forces they think circumscribe women’s freedom actually represents an authoritarian attempt to reprogram and control women. In foisting an “ideologically correct censorious revisionism” upon the public, this feminism does not acknowledge or enhance women’s tastes and choices, but rather prescribes them in accord with its rigid ideology.\(^{30}\)

Let us note, however, that Hoff Sommers herself is led to adopt the posture she maligns here. When discussing those women who find themselves “indoctrinated” into “gender feminist ideology”—women who are “converted’ to a view of the society they inhabit as a patriarchal system of oppression”—gender feminism’s purported distinction between the right-minded and the benighted necessarily is redrawn.\(^{31}\) According to Hoff Sommers, gender feminism’s program of “indoctrination” and “reeducation” is nowhere more evident than in the academy.\(^{32}\) Across four chapters of her book she provides a critique of the academic “gender feminist establishment”.\(^{33}\) Academic gender feminists, she argues, have been taking advantage of “well-meaning government officials” so as to attract vast funds to their “rapid colonisation” of all aspects of university life, from the curricula of all disciplines through to the behaviour of male academics, who now live in fear of being falsely accused of gender-bias or sexual harassment.\(^{34}\) Hoff Sommers’ objection to gender feminism’s seizure of the academy is grounded in her critique of gender feminism’s “women-centred” epistemology.\(^{35}\)

\(^{30}\)Ibid., 269.
\(^{31}\)Ibid., 47. See also Hoff Sommers’ comments on Naomi Wolf’s “indoctrination” into gender feminism, Ibid., 245.
\(^{32}\)Ibid., 97; 95.
\(^{33}\)Ibid., 136.
\(^{34}\)Ibid., 82; 134; 113-116. Hoff Sommers explains that gender feminists are able to win the confidence of “well-meaning officials” because these officials mistake them for equity feminists, Ibid., 82.
\(^{35}\)Ibid., 55.
Referring to salient contributions to the feminist critique of androcentrism, including the feminist standpoint theory developed by Nancy Hartsock and Sandra Harding’s figuration of “the science question in feminism”, Hoff Sommers argues against the idea that subjugated groups bear different ways of knowing and have an epistemic advantage in being positioned to offer a view on the world which is less distorted by interest in power than is the world view of superordinate groups.36 On the contrary, Hoff Sommers argues, “the oppressed and socially marginalised often have little access to the information and education needed to excel in science, which on the whole puts them at a serious ‘epistemic disadvantage’.”37

We must note that this criticism skirts the main point of Hartsock’s and Harding’s arguments—for them the epistemic promise of subjugated knowledges stems precisely from the marginal position they occupy in relation to institutionalised knowledges—and it is also the case that Hoff Sommers’ discussion elides the existing and quite lively feminist debates already underway about these matters. But Hoff Sommers holds that gender feminism’s promotion of “a gynocentric critique of knowledge” is not only “unworthy of a dignified feminism” but also is “educationally harmful” since it creates a “climate of gender mistrust of received knowledge” which lowers


37Ibid., 75.
educational standards and fuels “anti-intellectualism”. As though writing from the MacCarthyist era’s House Un-American Activities Committee, Hoff Sommers contends that the purpose of the discipline of women’s studies, and of gender feminist academics more generally, is not to educate but rather to “train” “crops” of “young feminist ideologues” who will be “even angrier, more resentful, and more indifferent to the truth than their mentors.” In this way, Hoff Sommers effectively redraws the distinction between the right-minded and the duped that she has identified in the form of feminism she impugns.

Let us now return to Hoff Sommers’ claims regarding the role of emotion in gender feminism’s political world view. She provides a very specific account of gender feminism’s relation to resentment. As we will see in the dissertation’s second part, Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment (resentment) forms a central theme in the feminist theoretical writings on feminism and the category ‘victim.’ On my reading, Hoff Sommers’ account is kindred with a certain strain of Nietzscheanism although, unlike Wolf, who as we will see provides a similar account, Hoff Sommers does not refer to Nietzsche directly.

38Ibid., 78. In relation to gender feminism’s lowering of educational standards, Hoff Sommers notes that women’s studies and other “women-centred” courses “are unscholarly, intolerant of dissent, and full of gimmicks.” Ibid., 90. In a sense, Hoff Sommers here provides a feminist version of the arguments made by Allan Bloom in his book The Closing of the American Mind: how higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today’s students (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

39Ibid., 18. My reference to the House Un-American Activities Committee is not intended to be facetious. In the months after Hoff Sommers’ book was published in 1994 it was listed on the website of the National Association of Scholars (NAS), a North American professional association for conservative academics, as one of the publications they “supported.” In context, “supported” denoted “commissioned”. Hoff Sommers is a member of NAS. For her glowing account of their opposition to “the politically correct” forces” see Ibid., 128-131.

40Hoff Sommers is a professor of philosophy who specialises in moral theory. Hence it is not difficult to imagine that her perspective draws on Nietzsche.
Hoff Sommers situates resentment as a motivating and galvanising force in gender feminism. In the following passage she spells out her view of the role of resentment in shoring up gender feminism's bifurcated world view:

[Gender feminism] is a feminism of resentment that rationalises and fosters a wholesale rancor in women that has little to do with moral indignation. Resentment may begin in and include moral indignation, but it is by far the more abiding passion. Resentment is "harboured" or "nurtured"; it "takes root" in a subject (the victim) and remains directed at another (the culprit). It can be vicarious—you need not have harmed me personally, but if I identify with someone you have harmed, I may resent you. Such resentment is very common and may easily be as strong and intense as resentment occasioned by direct injury. In a way it is stronger, for by enlarging the class of victims to include others, it magnifies the villainy as well. Having demarcated a victimised "us" with whom I now feel solidarity ... the next step is to regard the individual who wronged "us" as himself representative of a group ... my social reality has now been dichotomised into two groups politically at odds, one of whom dominates and exploits the other.41

Hoff Sommers' account of gender feminism as a feminism of resentment has three distinct features. Firstly, Hoff Sommers is at pains to distinguish resentment from indignation. She goes on to note that resentment, unlike indignation, is neither a "wholesome" nor "ethical" passion, but that in the case of gender feminism, like other forms of political movement bent on 'political correctness,' resentment parades as indignation and is "made to sound like a commendable passion for social justice."42 The second feature of Hoff Sommer's view is that of false identification. Gender feminism, she suggests, hosts a process through which the real suffering of some women becomes the fictional suffering of all women, and the reasonable object of some women's resentment (particular male 'culprits') is enlarged to become the unreasonable object of all women's resentment (men as a group). Hence

41Ibid., 41-42. Emphasis in original.
42Ibid., 43.
one need not have suffered "direct injury" to enjoin the victim's resentment. Importantly, empathy is not mentioned in Hoff Sommer's account of this process. While feminists such as Andrea Dworkin, a gender feminist par excellence according to Hoff Sommers, do insist that women "empathise with hurt women", Hoff Sommers is arguing that false identification as, as distinct from empathy with, hurt women is the gesture which galvanises gender feminism.43

The third feature of Hoff Sommer's view on gender feminism as a politics of resentment continues the theme of the first two features: falsity. Hoff Sommers reasons that resentment institutes "the habit of regarding women as a subjugated gender".44 This habit primes the gender feminist "to be alarmed, angry and resentful of men as oppressors of women."45 However, given that women no longer are oppressed, evidence of this oppression must be contrived somehow. Hence the gender feminist prepares herself "to believe the worst about [men] and the harm they cause to women" and is "ready", if need be, "to fabricate atrocities."46 Hoff Sommers goes on to devote five chapters of her book to 'exposing' the gender feminist predilection for the fabrication of atrocities through the falsification of evidence. Gender feminism, she contends, is a machine purpose-built for the production of "noble lies" or "myths" regarding the situation of women and the practices of men.47

Hoff Sommers disputes an array of gender feminist "myths" on two counts. Firstly, in tune with her argument that they represent not "insight

44 Ibid., 42.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 See especially the chapter 'Noble Lies,' 188-208.
into social reality” but a symptom of gender feminist resentment, she argues that these myths spring from the gender feminist “need” for “sensational” rather than “accurate” accounts of gender relations.48 That is, she argues that gender feminism has “so great a stake in exaggerating” the injuries women endure that such exaggeration has become an accepted norm among gender feminists and indeed the men they manage to intimidate (the researchers, editors, journalists and academics who publish or otherwise facilitate gender feminist access to the public sphere).49 The second count on which Hoff Sommers disputes gender feminist “myths” is that they impose gendered analysis upon issues which do not warrant such analysis. She argues, for example, that gender feminism treats the “cause of battered women” as “a handy bandwagon for [their] creed”, and works to impose its bifurcated world view upon the analysis of spousal violence when it actually is the case that such violence has “very little to do with patriarchy or gender bias.”50

The array of gender feminist “myths” Hoff Sommers seeks to debunk, aside from its central “myth” that women’s subordination remains a social reality, includes the following: that girls and young women typically have lower levels of self-esteem than do their male counterparts; that women are overrepresented as victims of spousal violence and sexual violence, that a majority of women are a risk of such violence, and that such violence should be regarded as a gendered phenomenon; and finally that there has been a backlash against feminism. Hoff Sommers’ battle against this array of “myths” is waged primarily on the ground of statistical data. She challenges

48Ibid., 198.
49Ibid., 203. Hoff Sommers argues, for example, that “respected medical periodicals” give “research on ‘women’s topics’ an abnormal latitude” and “uncritically indulge the feminists in their inflationary tendencies.” Ibid., 202-203. Assuming that these periodicals are edited and refereed by men, Hoff Sommers writes that their indulgence of gender feminism “is patronisingly sexist.” Ibid., 203.
50Ibid., 188; 200.
the categories feminist researchers employ (for example, definitions of violence against women which encompass psychological abuse), the “pronounced ideological slant” operative within feminist research (which she refers to as “advocacy research”), and feminist use of “overblown” statistics to focus public attention upon the situation of women. Most notably, however, Hoff Sommers garners statistical findings which may be interpreted as contradicting the claims of gender feminists. For example, to argue for the irrelevance of gender to the case of spousal violence, Hoff Sommers lofts studies which show that women, too, practice violence toward their spouses, that violence also occurs in lesbian partnerships, and that spousal violence is more likely to be perpetrated not by “normal men” but by “criminals” and “sociopaths” (i.e. men with criminal convictions other than spousal violence). Although the first two points remain unconvincing when one considers that most forms of violence, whether enacted by a woman or a man, are masculinised in Western culture, on Hoff Sommer’s view this point is likely to be read as a reimposition of gender feminist mythology.

51Ibid., 216.
52Ibid., 253.
53Ibid., 222.
54Ibid., 189-196; 209-219.
55Ibid., 195. Hoff Sommers draws on the following source in making this argument: Richard Gelles and Murray Strauss, *Physical Violence in American Families* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1990). Let us note, however, that Hoff Sommers’ reporting on this source is problematic. Hoff Sommers states that Gelles and Strauss found that “women assault their partners at about the same rate as men assault their partners. This applies to both minor and severe assaults.” *Who Stole Feminism?*, 194. However, Gelles and Strauss also found that “women are far more likely to be injured and to need medical care” and that in violent families “nearly half the violence (though not half the injuries) is perpetrated by women.” *Who Stole Feminism?*, 195. How it is that women and men are assaulting one another at the same rate, yet women are suffering more injuries and causing less injuries, is neither considered nor explained.
56Ibid., 199-200.
57Ibid., 198-199.
Hoff Sommers extends the view that violence has nothing to do with gender into her account of sexual violence. The line of argumentation Hoff Sommers pursues here is significant for our purposes given, firstly, the centrality of the issue of sexual violence to the debate about feminism’s relationship with the category ‘victim’ and, secondly, the critical engagement with this aspect of the debate conducted in the next chapter. So as to counter gender feminism’s production of a mythic “rape epidemic”, Hoff Sommer’s chapter on rape seeks to demonstrate that feminist statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence against women are exaggerated. Hoff Sommers argues that this “epidemic” and its attendant “date rape industry” actually is a junket designed to secure upward mobility for certain feminist researchers and to attract public funding to the institutional rape-awareness activities of “self-preoccupied” “campus feminists.”59 Her aim is to show that the “device” which enables these statistics to be exaggerated is an “expanded definition of rape”, a broadened category which bestows upon women who have not (according to Hoff Sommers) experienced rape the same “moral parity” ordinarily accorded to “the real victims [of rape] in the community at large.”60 Hence, in relation to Dean Kilpatrick’s study in which ‘rape’ is expanded to include unconsensual penetration of the vagina by an object other than a penis, Hoff Sommers finds herself arguing that “there [is] a big difference between being violated by a broomstick and being violated by a finger”.61 Hoff Sommers raises a more compelling objection to an element of Mary Koss’ study, which classified women whose experiences aligned with the study’s

59Ibid., 220; 217; 221; 221.
60Ibid., 220.
61Ibid., 216. Let us note that the objection Hoff Sommers raises here is inconsistent with her earlier argument that violence among lesbians is discounted by feminists. The inclusion of such events in the definition of rape is in part designed to make sexual violence among women visible. Hoff Sommers is drawing on the following research report: Dean Kilpatrick, Rape in America: a report to the nation (Charleston S. C.: Crime Victims Research and Treatment Centre, 1992).
(legal) definition of rape as victims of rape, even if the women themselves “did not believe they had been raped.” To rebuff Koss’s defence that these women were unaware of the legal definition of rape, Hoff Sommers asks “Since when do feminists consider ‘law’ to override women’s experience?” However we must note that Hoff Sommers’ position necessarily leads her to wield very the power she identifies with Koss. In the same way as Koss’s expanded (though legal) definition of rape leads her to register some women as rape victims even as they do not regard themselves as such, Hoff Sommers’ narrow definition of rape leads her to register some women as unworthy of the title ‘rape victim’ even as they themselves identify as such.

Hoff Sommers argues that “high rape numbers”, facilitated by an unreasonably expanded definition of what constitutes sexual violence, “serve the gender feminists by promoting the belief that American culture is sexist and misogynist.” Hoff Sommers bemoans the extent to which the public have been amenable to this belief, and takes particular issue with the level of government support for the (North American) Violence Against Women Act proposed in 1993. This Act, she suggests, has neither “constitutional or moral” grounds for “singling out female crime victims for special treatment under civil rights laws”. Such “special treatment”, she reasons, will cause

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63Ibid., 214.

64For a thoughtful account of the issues called up when a woman who judges that she was not raped has nonetheless had an experience which conforms to feminist and/or legal definitions of rape, see Nicola Gavey, “‘I Wasn’t Raped, but . . .’: revisiting definitional problems in sexual victimisation,’ in New Versions of Victims: feminists struggle with the concept, ed. Sharon Lamb (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 57-81. For an account of the tremendous variety in popular perceptions of what constitutes sexual violence in the North American context see the research of Linda Brookover Bourke in her book Defining Rape (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1989).

65Ibid., 222.

66Ibid., 224.
“social harm” since it accepts “a divisive, gender-specific approach to a problem [sexual violence] that is not caused by gender bias, misogyny, or ‘patriarchy’”.67 Concerned that the Act not only will sanction the gender feminist world view but will obscure “lesbian battering” and “male-on-male sexual violence”, Hoff Sommers argues that rape be recast as “just one variety of crime against the person”, and “rape of women” as “just one subvariety” of this kind of crime.68 Hoff Sommers’ concern that these forms of violence may be obscured is reasonable, and her proposed understanding of rape may be so too—many feminists have argued that gender-specific legislation can have the effect of fixing rather than transforming the particular script of female experience it writes into law.69 Let us note, however, that aside from the fact that rape of men by other men—which, as Hoff Sommers notes, occurs primarily in prisons—is by no means ‘outside’ of gender given the emasculating effect rape has on its male victims, the grounds on which Hoff Sommers would have sexual violence dissociated from gender are curious. She offers the unconvincing explanation that rape is “caused” by “criminal violence, not patriarchal misogyny”, and is “perpetrated by people who are wont to gratify themselves in criminal ways.”70 We are left, then, with a bifurcated world view dividing not women from men but ‘normal people’ from ‘criminals,’ the latter of whom are, for reasons unknown, predominantly male (Hoff Sommers: “most violence is male”71).

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67Ibid., 225.
68Ibid., 225; 226.
69See, for example, Carol Lee Bacchi’s chapter “Equal’ Versus ‘Special’ Treatment,’ in her book Same Difference: feminism and sexual difference (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990): 108-133.
70Ibid., 223; 225.
71Ibid., 225.
As we have seen, Hoff Sommers argues that gender feminism draws on, or rather engineers, provocative yet false statistics so as to "underscore the plight of women in the oppressive gender system and to help recruit adherents to the gender feminist cause." These statistics pertain to issues including "eating disorders, rape, battery, and wage differentials". Interestingly, Hoff Sommers devotes much time to 'debunking' feminist statistics on the first three issues, and considerably less time on the issue of wage differentials. Here, Hoff Sommers' task is to refute the following facts: women not just in America but the world over have not achieved pay parity with their male counterparts, spend significantly more time engaged in unpaid labour than do their male counterparts, experience greater difficulty managing family and work commitments than do their male counterparts, and remain overrepresented in low paid and unprotected wage labour within a

72Ibid., 188.  
73Ibid., 188. My emphasis.  
74The most recent United Nations report on the status of women internationally found that “Although the principle of equal pay for work of equal value has been incorporated in the labour legislation of many countries, in no country for which data are available do women earn as much as men.” United Nations, *The World’s Women 2000: trends and statistics* (New York: United Nations, 2000), 131-132. Among the many measurements of pay inequity the report presents is a set of statistics gathered on pay differentials in manufacturing. Its findings are typical: in Australia in 1990 women's average weekly earnings came to 82% of male earnings, and climbed to only 85% by 1997; in the United Kingdom in 1990 women's earnings, on par with the earnings of women in the United States, stood at 68% of mens earnings, and climbed to 72% by 1997. The situation is most severe in Bangladesh: in 1990 women's earnings came to 49% of men's earnings, and rose only one per cent by 1997. Ibid., 132.  
75The time-use survey data gathered by United Nations researchers indicate that “[w]omen spend 50 to 70 per cent as much time as men on paid work, but almost twice as much more time as men on unpaid work.” Ibid., 128. In Australia, women on average spend 35 hours per week engaged in unpaid labour (the average for men is 18 hours) and 15 hours per week engaged in paid labour (the average for men is 30 hours). Ibid., 125.  
76The United Nations research finds that it still is the case that “responsibility for childcare lies mainly with women, who spend more than twice as much time as men do on childcare.” Ibid., 127. In Australia (in the period 1995-1999), women’s unpaid work rises by an average of 9 hours per week (from 40 to 49 hours) when they have children, while men’s average number of hours of unpaid work when they have children holds steady at 22 hours. Contrawise, women’s paid work rises by an average of 2 hours per week (from 14 to 16 hours) when they have children, while men’s paid work rises by 13 hours per week (from 30 to 43 hours) when they have children. Ibid., 126.
labour market still marked by gender segregation. A ‘gender feminist’ analysis of these statistics is likely to point out that discriminatory gender norms which accord more value to men’s time and capacities, and which figure participation in production with little consideration of participation in reproduction, play a fundamental role in these trends. Hoff Sommers, however, persists with equity feminism’s faith in the present insignificance of sexual difference. Hoff Sommers argues that gender gaps in the labour market are brought on by two factors. Firstly, on the whole, women bring less “experience” to the workplace and, therefore, have lesser remunerative merit. Secondly, Hoff Sommers notes that “many women choose to move into and out of the workforce during childbearing and child-rearing years.” Her use of the term “choice” is key here. Hoff Sommers is siding with that position within the gender and work debate which holds that pregnancy is a “private choice” that, as such, does not warrant compensation from employers and/or the state for loss of earnings or job security. Hoff Sommers argues that women’s loss of earnings and job security “naturally results” from their childbearing role, and can not therefore be regarded as “discriminatory”. According to Hoff Sommers, then, one would have to be indoctrinated into gender feminist ideology to observe that, as Barbara

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77The United Nations research finds that although women now have a much greater share of the labour market (at least one third excepting Northern Africa and Western Asia) they are vastly overrepresented in part-time work and in the informal sector (both of which are characterised by “lack of security, lack of benefits and low income”), and on the whole women “remain at the lower end of a segregated labour market”, “continue to be concentrated in a few occupations” and tend to “hold positions of little or no authority.” Ibid., 109.

78Hoff Sommers, Who Stole Feminism?, 241.

79Ibid., 241.

80Ibid., 241.
Sullivan puts it, "[t]he organisation of work in our society appears unable to accommodate one of the most common life experiences of adult females".81

Before summarising Hoff Sommers' account let me raise a final point in relation to the analysis it forwards. One of the most important features of Hoff Sommers' argument is that gender feminism is unrepresentative. Hoff Sommers needs to represent gender feminism as the predilection of a small but powerful minority, since this conforms with her argument that it fails to achieve what she thinks any feminism must achieve, which is to faithfully represent the "hearts" of a majority of women. This presents a conundrum, however, since Hoff Sommers also wishes to portray gender feminism as an alarming epidemic, the exigency of which her book is acting upon. Ultimately, Hoff Sommers portrays gender feminism as the ideology of a minority and as a pervasive, fashionable and popular epidemic. This gives rise to contradictory statements regarding the representativeness of gender feminism:

All indications are that the new crop of young feminist ideologues coming out of our nation's colleges are even angrier, more resentful, and more indifferent to the truth than their mentors... [t]he large majority of women, including the majority of college women, are distancing themselves from this anger and resentfulness ... [i]t is difficult to estimate the proportions of students who become committed gender feminists. It is surely a minority.82

To some extent Hoff Sommers solves this contradiction by representing gender feminism's "impressionable" young adherents as reeducated dupes, but as we noted earlier this redraws what she regards as one of gender feminism's more problematic tactics.83 As we will see, the problem identified

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82Ibid., 18; 111.
83Ibid., 106.
here regarding how the possible popularity and representativeness of gender feminism is handled by Hoff Sommers also surfaces when the accounts of Roiphe and Denfeld are compared.

To summarise, Hoff Sommers' account has introduced a range of themes which, as we will see, run throughout all four accounts of 'victim feminism' considered in this chapter. Most notably, these include the idea that feminism has been taken over by an ideology which betrays the sensible equality-orientation of feminism's first wave, which persists with a substantially untrue representation of women as the "hapless victims of patriarchy", and which can only sustain this representation by producing "noble lies" regarding the present status of women. Hoff Sommers' contention that the production of such lies obscures the plight of "real victims"—"the victims of true abuse and discrimination"—is echoed throughout the accounts considered here, and forms a major preoccupation in the critical examination forwarded in the following chapter.84 Finally, let us note that two further aspects of Hoff Sommers' representation of gender feminism will remerge as we analyse the accounts of Roiphe, Denfeld and Wolf. The first is Hoff Sommers' central tactic of organising a diverse field of different feminisms into a dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad' feminisms such that forms of feminism which ordinarily would be acknowledged as distinct or opposing—for example, Foucauldian feminism and gynocentric feminism—are merged, and the 'bad' feminism is represented as a unified, seamless whole which hosts neither debate, conflict nor dissent.85 The second aspect is her representation of gender feminism as "ideological" and her corollary dissociation of equity feminism, and its attendant commitment to liberalism and capitalism, from ideology.

84Ibid., 220; 17.
85For Hoff Sommers scathing critique of Foucault (who is "like Marx" in having "little love for the modern democratic state", Ibid., 229) and of gender feminists who purportedly have uncritically adopted his "infantile leftism" (Ibid., 230) see Ibid., 202, 229-232, 253.
1.2 Roiphe: the ends of feminism

While Hoff Sommers' book is quite wide-ranging in scope, Katie Roiphe's *The Morning After: sex, fear and feminism* focuses more narrowly on university-based feminist activism in relation to sexual violence and sexual harassment. Indeed, Roiphe's book may be regarded as an amplification of Hoff Sommers' single chapter on feminist politicisations of sexual violence (a chapter in which Roiphe's book is cited appreciatively\(^{86}\)). Like Hoff Sommers, Roiphe argues that the 1980s and early 1990s saw a significant shift in the character of feminism's mainstream and public face. Stating that her book is motivated by a "deep belief that some feminisms are better than others", Roiphe forges a dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' feminisms similar to that found in Hoff Sommers' book.\(^{87}\) However Roiphe's characterisation of the shift from one to the other feminism is made in less clearly defined terms than in Hoff Sommers' account. In Roiphe's book we do not, for example, find a clear separation between an 'equity' and a 'gender' feminism, although she does, like Hoff Sommers, associate the form of feminism she impugns—'rape-crisis' feminism and 'politically correct' academic feminism—with myth-making and illiberal authoritarianism. In Roiphe's less clearly defined version, it is argued that recent feminism is marked by a shift from an early second-wave focus on female strength, autonomy and sexual liberation, to a focus on female powerlessness, vulnerability and sexual regulation.

The central argument of Roiphe's book is based on her interpretation of the *effect* of feminism's newfound focus on "sexual regulation."\(^{88}\) Her argument is that feminist politicisations of sexual violence and sexual harassment actually have the effect of producing the forms of female

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\(^{86}\)For Hoff Sommers' references to Roiphe's book see *Who Stole Feminism?*, 219, 222.


\(^{88}\)Ibid., 171.
victimisation and vulnerability which they seek to eradicate. By instituting a wide range of regulatory measures which are intended to protect women from forms of sexual violence and harassment (from campus blue-light systems to educational pamphlets, films and workshops about sexual violence and harassment), by broadening the definitions of sexual violence and harassment, and by directing an inordinate amount of public attention to an exaggerated “epidemic” of sexual violence, feminists build a climate of fear which “transforms perfectly stable women into hysterical, sobbing victims.”89 In this climate “female sexual agency” is denied and discouraged while “the image of women as powerless” is reinforced.90 “Again and again,” Roiphe writes, “the rape-crisis movement peddles images of gender relations that deny female desire and infantilise women.”91

Given what she regards as feminism’s representation of women as powerless victims, Roiphe notes that “feminists are closer to their backlash than they’d like to think.”92 By this Roiphe means to argue that the political culture and techniques of rape-crisis feminism itself, as opposed to the anti-feminist forces arrayed against feminist-led social change, are working to revive the very feminine stereotype early second-wave feminism sought to overturn:

The image that emerges from feminist preoccupation with rape and sexual harassment is that of women as victims, offended by a professor’s dirty joke, verbally pressured into sex by peers. This image of a delicate woman bears a striking resemblance to that fifties ideal my mother and the other women of her generation fought so hard to get away from. They didn’t like her passivity, her wide-eyed innocence. They didn’t like the fact that she was perpetually offended by sexual innuendo. They didn’t like her excessive need for protection. She

89Ibid., 112.
90Ibid., 84; 90.
91Ibid., 65.
92Ibid., 6.
represented personal, social, and psychological possibilities collapsed, and they worked and marched, shouted and wrote, to make her irrelevant for their daughters. But here she is again, with her pure intentions and her wide eyes. Only this time it is the feminists themselves who are breathing new life into her.93

According to Roiphe, reinforcing images of women as powerless produces in the women whom feminism would protect a feeling of powerlessness, fear and vulnerability where ordinarily there would be no such feeling and where, according to Roiphe, there should not be such feeling. Like Hoff Sommers, Roiphe argues that the forms of male power this feminism regulates against are to be regarded not as social realities but as products of a priggish, neo-Victorian feminist mythology which is not adequately cognisant of feminism's successful achievement of female liberation.94 For Roiphe, the mythological status of these forms of male power is especially evident in the context of campus feminism given the relative safety of university campuses and the relative degree of privilege and protection already accorded their predominantly middle-class inhabitants. Of the university's female inhabitants Roiphe argues, like Hoff Sommers, that feminist mythology leads them to falsely identify as "innocent," "fragile," "passive," "gullible," and "sensitive" victims who are incapable of assuming the responsibilities which attend freedom.95 As we will see, Roiphe argues further that the university, swayed by forces of political correctness, has built a system of rewards which encourages such false identification. This creates a paradoxical situation in which young women, many of whom already are empowered by their socio-economic location, disingenuously "embrace the mantle of victim status" as a further source of power.96

93Ibid., 6.
94For Roiphe's comments on feminism's neo-Victorianism see Ibid., 67, 69.
95Ibid., 60, 66, 172, 69, 172, 68-69.
96Ibid., 44.
Roiphe's argument is conveyed through a sequence of analyses, based on personal experience and observation, of various elements of rape-crisis feminism's political culture, agenda and techniques. Her first chapter, for example, is concerned with the installation of a "blue light system" across the campus of Princeton university where Roiphe was a student, and which served as her window onto rape-crisis feminism. In the following passage Roiphe links the blue light system to the climate of fear she thinks rape-crisis feminism creates:

A friend shows his younger sister around Princeton ... the blue lights catch her eye. She asks if the lights are for catching bugs. After some hesitation ... her brother tells her what they're really for. In case someone attacks you. In case someone tries to rape you. In case. In the long process of learning what those lights are really for, she'll learn vulnerability and lurking dangers in the bushes. She'll learn to be afraid walking around at night ... the campus is dramatically dotted with glowing blue lights ... They signal reassurance and warning at the same time. Red means stop, green means go, and blue means be afraid.97

Roiphe's anecdote about the blue light system's lesson in fear works in with her argument that rape-crisis feminism is "training [women] in victimhood".98 For Roiphe, the effectiveness of this training is perhaps no where more evident than in the subject of her second chapter, rape-crisis feminism's annual Take Back the Night march.99 In general, Roiphe characterises the march as self-defeating since it creates the very atmosphere that it seeks to overcome—the night no longer feels safe but rather is "suddenly charged with a nameless threat"100—and, although it is "intended to celebrate and bolster

97Ibid., 28.
98Ibid., 163.
99Known in Australasia as the 'Reclaim the Night' march.
100Ibid., 12.
women’s strength, [the march] seems instead to celebrate their vulnerability.”

With this general characterisation in place, Roiphe moves on to table an array of criticisms of the march. The first of these is her argument that the march represents not a moment of collective political action but rather “a substitute for religion” and “march as therapy". Roiphe casts the march’s main feature, an open-microphone speak-out in which survivors of sexual violence tells their stories, as an “obscene ... spectacle of mass confession” in which “students throw stories of suffering to the waiting crowds” who in turn derive an unavowed voyeuristic pleasure from these stories. The speak-outs, she contends, set up a competitive scenario which will award those whose stories are “more Sadean, more incest-ridden, more violent, more like a paperback you can buy at a train station.” The second criticism Roiphe tables is that this competitive scenario and climate of religious fervour inspires duplicity. Suggesting that truth may be the only real victim present in rape-crisis culture, she contends that “students are willing to lie” so as to enjoin this culture’s “blanket warmth”:

The line between fact and fiction is a delicate one when it comes to survivor stories. In the heat of the moment, the confessional rush of relating graphic details to a supportive crowd, the truth may be stretched, battered, or utterly abandoned. It’s impossible to tell how

101 Ibid., 44.
102 Ibid., 38; 37.
103 Ibid., 42-43.
104 Ibid., 42. It is worth noting here that from an Australasian perspective Roiphe’s account of the march is difficult to recognise. The Reclaim the Night marches I have attended in Sydney, Melbourne and Dunedin have tended to be characterised not just by seriousness and emotionality but great humour, diversity of expression, and lively debate about the politics of sexual violence (mostly notably regarding the intersections of race, ethnicity, class and gender in such politics). Perhaps Australasia’s lack of proximity to the idiom of the confessional talk show is significant in making this difference.
105 Ibid., 39.
many of these stories are authentic, faithful accounts of what actually happened. They sound tinny, staged.\textsuperscript{106}

As we will see in the following chapter, the testimonies of sexual violence survivors have always been associated with duplicity and thought to require the ratification of an impartial authority who will discern whether or not a form of violation truly has occurred. But let us note that Roiphe's mention of the "tinny" and "staged" character of survivor testimonies links with her third criticism of rape-crisis feminism's annual march, which is that the testimonies it hosts have a "formulaic" character.\textsuperscript{107}

According to Roiphe, the complexity and nuance of the incidents survivors retell are dropped out as speakers press their stories into rape-crisis feminism's generic vernacular. Referring to phrases which recur within survivor testimonies such as "I am a survivor," "I am finally breaking the silence," and "Thank you for listening", Roiphe writes:

As the vocabulary shared across campuses reveals, there is an archetype, a model, for the victim's tale. Take Back the Night speakouts follow conventions as strict as any sonnet sequence or villanelle. As intimate details are squeezed into formulaic standards, they seem to be wrought with an emotion more generic than heartfelt.\textsuperscript{108}

One of the main themes of Roiphe's account emerges in this discussion of the formulaic character of survivor testimonies. Developing her argument that rape-crisis feminism encourages privileged, empowered women to falsely identify as powerless victims, Roiphe contends that this politics in turn construes the subject position 'powerless victim' as a powerful source of authority. Roiphe reads this theme of 'the power of the powerless' into rape-

\textsuperscript{106}Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{107}Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{108}Ibid., 36.
crisis feminism's "obsession with silence."\textsuperscript{109} She suggests that self-
identification as one who has been silenced by "a shadowy force [which] takes
on many names—patriarchy, men, society" is the signature gesture of her
peers, and is a gesture which has come to yield great authority in the
university setting: \textsuperscript{110}

These Princeton women, future lawyers, newspaper reporters,
investment bankers, are hardly the voiceless, by most people's
definition. But silence is poetic. Being silenced is even more poetic.
These days people vye for the position of being silenced ... It is the
presumption of silence that gives these women the right to speak ...
 Silence is the passkey to the empowering universe of the
disempowered. Having been silenced on today's campus is the ultimate
source of authority. \textsuperscript{111}

Hence Roiphe's explanation for the continuing popularity of Take Back the
Night marches is that "there is power to be drawn from declaring one's
victimhood and oppression."\textsuperscript{112} Before reviewing Roiphe's critical
commentary on the role played by broadened definitions of sexual
harassment and sexual violence in rape-crisis feminism, let us look to where
this theme of the 'power of the powerless' travels in Roiphe's account.

A chapter of Roiphe's book provides a series of portraits of her peers
which are crafted to demonstrate the kinds of people produced by rape-crisis
feminism and 'politically correct' academic feminism more broadly. \textsuperscript{113} The
portraits are punctuated with anecdotes telling of Roiphe's adversarial
encounters with these inauthentic, politically correct types, encounters in
which Roiphe's arguments were shut down and in which she was personally

\textsuperscript{109}Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{110}Ibid., 34-35.
\textsuperscript{111}Ibid., 34-35.
\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{113}The Mad Hatters' Tea Party,' Ibid., 113-137.
insulted. Hence, more than in any chapter of the book, this chapter conveys what appears to be Roiphe’s quite profound sense of alienation from her generation, and conveys as well her understanding that feminism’s newfound political correctness is essentially authoritarian and censorious. The portraits include a young woman whose second-hand clothing and commitment to leftist feminism carefully disguise her upper-class background, a graduate student of literature who reads not literature but feminist literary theory so as to arm herself with enough jargon to “calculate her way into the [academic] profession”, and a young man whose commitment to sexual diversity and immersion in “profeminist reading and activity” situate him as a foolish “new Adam being created out of Eve’s rib”.

In providing these portraits Roiphe aims to describe the emergence of what she refers to as a “Nietzschean breed”, a generation of women who are positioned to take hypocritical advantage of sexual liberation (they wear “less clothing than most people”) as well as feminist-inspired sexual regulation (“It’s great that men stare at you at a party, but they shouldn’t stare if you don’t want them to”). Situating feminism as a store of useful fictions to which opportunistic women feign commitment, she writes:

With their will to power, Lauren and her friends are a Nietzschean breed. They take status where they can get it. Socially and intellectually, the university rewards women for being sexy and rewards them for being oppressed. Declaring oneself oppressed translates into definite social currency, and so does sexual attractiveness ... these women ... are not about to surrender the

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114 Ibid., 114, 115, 117, 118, 121, 127-8, 131.
115 Ibid., 115-120.
116 Ibid., 126-130.
117 Ibid., 135-137.
118 Ibid., 124.
119 Ibid., 125.
opportunities and benefits offered to the flirt or the militant feminist.\textsuperscript{120}

For our purposes, what is most interesting here is Roiphe’s assumption of ‘victim’ as an authorial location. Situating herself as prey to the plethoric yet, as only she can see, hypocritical display of strength and status-gaining in her milieu, her book actually assumes the narrative structure of a confessional which finally breaks the silence about the systematic workings of a shadowy power, feminist political correctness. Setting this narrative structure in place, her Preface declares: “This book comes out of frustration, out of anger, out of the names I’ve been called, out of all the times I didn’t say something because it might offend current feminist sensibility.”\textsuperscript{121}

This suggests that the category ‘victim’ plays a complicated role in Roiphe’s account. On one hand, Roiphe argues that feminism trains women in victimhood when its relentless focus on sexual violence, harassment and systemic oppression generates more and more reason for women to feel powerless, vulnerable and voiceless. In this sense, feminism produces the victims it purports to represent and creates the phenomena of victimisation it aims to remedy.\textsuperscript{122} On the other hand, however, Roiphe also argues that this politics of victimisation empowers those whom it falsely casts as victims, and victimises those who dissent from its world view. The latter, presumably, emerge as the ‘real victims’ in this political scenario, meaning that we glimpse something of Hoff Sommers’ search for the ‘real victim’ in Roiphe’s account as well. We will examine this search, along with the idea that the accounts of ‘victim feminism’ find their centre of gravity when they are able to point to the ‘victims’ of ‘victim feminism,’ in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{120}Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{121}Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{122}For a direct statement that feminism “creates the problem” it aims to remedy see Ibid., 110.
Let us return to Roiphe’s critical commentary on feminism’s expanded definitions of sexual harassment and sexual violence. In relation to sexual harassment, Roiphe is especially concerned with feminist redefinitions of sexual harassment which allow that such harassment “is not confined to relationships involving power inequity.”123 Where the original definition of sexual harassment was concerned strictly with the abuse of direct authority, the redefinition with which Roiphe is concerned allows that sexual harassment can occur between people occupying an ostensibly equal relation (among co-workers, among students) and can be perpetrated by the ostensibly less powerful party to an inequitable relation (such as a student sexually harassing a teacher). Roiphe argues that by broadening the definition in this way, feminists work to institute an “assumption that female students or faculty must be protected from the sexual harassment of male peers or inferiors”, where this in turn “promotes the regrettable idea that men are natively more powerful than women.”124 For Roiphe, in serving only to “reinforce the image of women as powerless”, this redefinition of sexual harassment demeans women, works to “undermine” their hard-won authority, and creates a “hypersensitive environment” which injects “suspicion and distrust” into the many relations which constitute any given workplace or public domain.125 Moreover, given that “unwanted sexual attention is part of nature”, this redefinition’s intervention upon the natural presumably is doomed to failure.126 Working her book’s central argument into her account of sexual harassment, Roiphe contends that it is not sexual

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123Ibid., 87.
124Ibid., 89.
125Ibid., 90, 90, 93, 92.
126Ibid., 87.
harassment itself, but rather feminist efforts to counter it, which “transforms perfectly stable women into hysterical, sobbing victims.”

Roiphe’s further objection to the feminist redefinition of sexual harassment lies with what she regards as this redefinition’s loss of objective criteria for determining whether or not harassment has occurred. In releasing the definition of sexual harassment from its original mooring in relations of inequity, adjudication of this form of harm becomes increasingly dependent upon “the individual psyche”, upon the perceptions of those who think they have experienced sexual harassment. When Roiphe notes that university counsellors “reportedly tell students, If you feel sexually harassed then chances are you were”, her account comes to be animated by an anxiety about the kind of power feminism’s redefinition bestows upon self-identified victims of sexual harassment. Roiphe argues that this redefinition’s amenability to subjective criteria invites false accusation in offering “an ideology that explains “uncomfortable” in political terms”. By distributing “alarmist propaganda” which charges “everyday experience” with the prospect of traumatic victimisation, feminists are inviting a litigious wave of false and trivial accusations. The theme of the ‘power of the powerless’ remerges here, as Roiphe illustrates her argument through reference to a play in which a female student, “puffed large with her sense of her own victimisation”, claims power over her professor by falsely accusing him of sexual harassment. Angered by his inability to prove his innocence, the professor finally does insult and assault the student, who thereby becomes

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127Ibid., 112.
128Ibid., 90.
129Ibid., 92.
130Ibid., 104, 112.
131The play Roiphe refers to is Oleanna, written by David Mamet, Ibid., 106.
"the victim she never was".\textsuperscript{132} With this, Roiphe writes, "the student's charges are seen for what they are: a self-fulfilling prophecy."\textsuperscript{133} Here, the innocent professor emerges as the real victim, while the student is cast as a false victim who desires victimisation on account of her thirst for power.

Roiphe makes a similar set of objections to rape-crisis feminism's redefinition of sexual violence. In unpacking this last aspect of her account I will raise some critical points in relation to Roiphe's argument which will be further developed in the following chapter. In relation to sexual violence, Roiphe argues that feminists are using the issue of rape as a "trump card" to forward their "overtly ideological" interpretation of gender relations.\textsuperscript{134} The moral gravity of "declarations of rape", she argues, is used to "block analysis" of feminism's engineered "rape epidemic", and to prohibit questioning of the vast amounts of university money and resources feminists have attracted to the movement against rape.\textsuperscript{135} Like Hoff Sommers, Roiphe disputes Mary Koss' statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence, contending that these statistics are only possible when one includes events which ought not to be characterised as rape. "Everyone agrees that rape is a terrible thing," she writes, "but we don't agree on what rape is. There is a gray area in which someone's rape might be another person's bad night."\textsuperscript{136} In relation to this gray area, Roiphe is concerned to reject feminist and legal definitions of rape which remove traditional rape law's grounds for distinguishing consensual sex from forcible rape: the use or threat of physical force.\textsuperscript{137} According to Roiphe, definitions of rape which allow that rape has occurred when only "verbal

\textsuperscript{132}Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{133}Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{134}Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{135}Ibid., 56-57.
\textsuperscript{136}Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{137}Ibid., 61.
coercion"138 was used and which promote the idea that parties to a sexual relation ought to have displayed “active consent”,139 work to recuperate Victorian views about “the fragility of the female body and will”.140 Moreover, Roiphe argues, such definitions of rape extend the purview of the law beyond its rightful place and work to recode concupiscent ambiguity as danger and risk.141 Roiphe also expresses concern that feminism’s expanded definition of rape has worked to conjure a genre of “retrospective trauma” which empowers women to “decide afterward” that “a night that was a blur, a night you wish hadn’t happened” was rape.142 This, she argues, trivialises the experiences of real victims of real rape.143 So as to counter such trivialisation, Roiphe reasons that the word “rape” needs to be “reserved” to describe “instances of physical violence or the threat of physical violence”.144 This way, the experiences of women “raped by a stranger at knife point” would not be falsely equated with the experiences of women “raped by their former boyfriend.”145 It is clear from this characterisation of aggravated stranger rape as ‘real rape’ that Roiphe is concerned to reassert traditional rape law’s hierarchy of law-worthy sexual violence.

To demonstrate the neo-Victorian character of feminist redefinitions of rape, Roiphe punctuates her account with excerpts from Victorian guides to feminine manners in which men’s prerogative positioning, and women’s requirement of protection, is assumed.146 These excerpts play a key role in

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138Ibid., 66-67.
139Ibid., 62.
140Ibid., 66.
141Ibid., 62.
142Ibid., 80. This point explains the title of Roiphe’s book The Morning After.
143Ibid., 81.
144Ibid., 81-82.
145Ibid., 82.
146Ibid., 66, 69.
Roiphe's argument against the inclusion of verbal coercion as a criteria for determining rape. Roiphe contends that century-old assumptions about "female passivity and gullibility" are rekindled when feminists express concern that some women's lower levels of self-esteem negatively affect their ability to assert their desires:

[Feminists present] a portrait of the cowering woman, knocked on her back by the barest feather of peer pressure. Solidifying this image of women into policy implies an acceptance of the passive role. By protecting women against verbal coercion, these feminists are promoting the view of women as weak-willed, alabaster bodies, whose virtue must be protected from the cunning encroachments of the outside world. The idea that women can't withstand verbal or emotional pressure infantilises them. The suggestion lurking beneath this definition of rape is that men are not just physically but intellectually and emotionally more powerful than women ... We should not nurture this woman on her back ... we should not support her in her passivity ... The brand of "low self-esteem" these psychologists describe should not be tolerated, it should be changed. Whether or not we feel pressured, regardless of our level of self-esteem, the responsibility for our actions is still our own.

In sum, Roiphe finds rape-crisis feminism's campaign against sexual violence lacking in two respects. Firstly, this campaign forges political leverage by exploiting the moral gravity of the issue of sexual violence and by exaggerating the prevalence of sexual violence. Secondly, the expanded definition of sexual violence which enables this campaign's exaggerated account of sexual violence fosters a neo-Victorian policy of protectionism which elides and is inimical to female sexual agency.

Having tabled Roiphe's perspective on sexual violence let us note that Roiphe does raise compelling concerns regarding an increased imposition of juridical reason upon the realm of sexuality, and the extent to which this

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147 Ibid., 69.
148 Ibid., 67-68.
imposition may preempt female sexual agency. However, let us also register that Roiphe does not provide an adequate account of the *motivations which lay behind* feminist politicisations and redefinitions of rape. Indeed, Roiphe seems studiously to avoid such an account. Apart from her suggestion that rape-crisis feminism’s efforts are motivated by the promise of financial gain, Roiphe makes one vague reference to its attempt to “break down myths like ‘She asked for it’.”¹⁴⁹ By this Roiphe refers to the feminist project to counter the logic of victim precipitation in popular and juridical conceptions of sexual violence. As we will see in the following chapter, the concept of victim precipitation has played a prominent role in casting women who experience sexual violence as responsible for their violation. One of the ramifications of Roiphe’s having dropped consideration of the question of victim precipitation out of her account of feminism and sexual violence is that she elides as well the flipside of her Victorian Madonna: the Victorian whore whose assumed sexual agency is thought to overpower men such that they no longer may be regarded as responsible for their actions.¹⁵⁰ As one of the Ormond College complainants recalled of her media representation when her indecent assault case against the Ormond College Master went to court: “[I was] portrayed as endowed with a type of terrifying sexual power that once unleashed was capable of annihilating a man.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 71.

¹⁵⁰For an account of the role of this notion of female sexual agency in psychoanalytic seduction theory see Jeffrey Masson *A Dark Science: women, sexuality and psychiatry in the nineteenth century* (New York: Noonday Press, 1986).

¹⁵¹XX [Anonymous], ‘Sticks and Stones,’ in *Bodyjamming: sexual harassment, feminism and public life* ed. Jenna Mead (Sydney: Vintage, Random House, 1997), 53. The Ormond College case involved two complaints of sexual harassment lodged by female students against the Master of Ormond College at the University of Melbourne. The alleged harassment took place at the College’s 1991 valedictory dinner. The College Master occupied a position of direct authority over the students. After several failed attempts to pursue their complaint through university channels, the students went to the police and filed criminal charges of indecent assault. The Melbourne magistrate’s court upheld the charges. The case stimulated intense public debate about the issue of sexual harassment. The better part of public sympathy swayed against the complainants. Helen Garner’s controversial book *The First Stone: some questions about*
In positing sexual agency as a given and non-complex element of women's present liberation, Roiphe fails to reckon with the extent to which assumed sexual agency has been the ground on which many women's sexual victimisation has been rendered invisible. She figures female sexual agency, finally achieved when white women overcome their Victorian heritage, as the worldly referent of feminist success. However for many women, most notably women of colour and sex workers, assumed sexual agency has fostered victim-blame and ensured greatly limited access to the category 'law-worthy rape victim'. It would seem that one would require pause before affirming the sexual agency ascribed to the Hottentot Venus or Manet's *Olympia*.

My point, then, is that Roiphe is right to take issue with what she regards as feminism's regulatory rekindling of "myths surrounding female innocence [which] have been used to keep women inside and behind veils", but wrong in her assumption that counter-images of female sexual agency are new to history and necessarily coterminous with liberation—for many women, the opposite is the case.

A further and related matter to be raised in relation to Roiphe's critique of rape-crisis feminism pertains to the alternative her account poses to what she sees as this feminism's reification of female vulnerability. In the quotation cited above, Roiphe argues that certain forms of low self-esteem "should not be tolerated" but rather "should be changed." This suggests that Roiphe links high self-esteem to invulnerability and the capacity to assert

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*sex and power* (Sydney: Picador, 1995) was written in response to the case. The book, which portrays the Ormond College women as false victims and the Master as their prey, became the epicentre of the Australian chapter of the victim feminist debate.


153 Ibid., 72.
oneself, however she does not indicate what kind of intervention or process might stand between low self-esteem and the 'change' toward developing the capacity for self-assertion. As we will see in the following chapter, the very ethos of survivorship Roiphe so maligns in her book is attuned precisely to articulating this process. That is, rape-crisis feminism is marked by an effort to chart and encourage a subjective transition from victim identity (marked by low self-regard) to survivor identity (characterised by high self-regard and the capacity for self-assertion). As Roiphe herself describes, the sexual assault "survivors" hosted at Take Back the Night marches speak of the "ascent toward self-esteem" that rape-crisis feminism has facilitated for them.154

On this point, then, Roiphe and rape-crisis feminists are in accord. Both suggest that low self-esteem is inimical to women's assumption of agency, and both perceive the need for 'change'. The main difference is that Roiphe sees self-assertion exclusively through the prism of women's individual exercise of self-responsibility, while rape-crisis feminism, apart from its discourse of survivorship, takes recourse to the agency of the law owing to its philosophy that the burden of preventing sexual violence should not rest with women alone. A further difference is that Roiphe's account hosts an assumption that contemporary women simply have fully-fledged agentic capacities, while the work of rape-crisis feminists suggests they assume women have partial agency and at this stage require support—here Roiphe uses the word 'protection'—if they are to assume full agency. The conflict between Roiphe and rape-crisis feminism, then, does not just turn on the question of whether feminism's regulatory measures 'support' women to assume agency, or 'protect' women from having to assume agency. The conflict comes down to what kind of generalisation one is prepared to make

154Ibid., 37.
regarding the contemporary relation of women to agency. Roiphe, in accord with traditional rape law, theorises on the basis of an *a priori* blanket attribution of agency to women, while rape-crisis feminism’s perception of the relation of women to agency as dynamic and complex leads them to develop and advance a more cautious understanding of women as partial and potential agents, and indeed potential victims, whose exercise of agency is better facilitated by a reformed public sphere. I would not argue that this logic of facilitation be protected from critique. However Roiphe’s alternative logic—women are agents and where they fail to exercise agency they are to blame themselves—although convenient for her purposes, is insufficient for having skirted the very process through which women come to be constituted as agents, and disturbing in its likeness to traditional rape law’s regime of victim-blame.

In sum, Roiphe’s account seeks to challenge the legitimacy of contemporary feminism in two primary ways, both of which pertain to this feminism’s interpretation of social reality. Firstly, Roiphe argues consistently that this feminism’s representation of women as powerless victims is substantially untrue given the positive relation to agency that second wave feminism has enabled women to assume. Secondly, Roiphe argues that this feminism is the engineer of, rather than the remedy for, the forms of injury it ostensibly is arrayed against. As such this feminism is harmful to the women it purports to protect, harmful to those who will suffer false accusation on account of its alarmism, harmful to the real victims of sexual violence whose plight is trivialised by this feminism’s expanded definition of sexual violence, and harmful to the university in its assault on truth and promotion of “the timid, inarticulate, even dull student who has risen to power on the crest of the multiculturalist wave.”

Roiphe’s remedy for the harmful effects of this

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155 Ibid., 107.
feminism echoes Hoff Sommers' account in calling for a halt to feminism's politically correct reforms, a return to traditional modes of adjudicating sexual violence, and a rekindling of the earlier feminist definition of sexual harassment.

Before turning to Rene Denfeld's account, let us note that Roiphe's portrait of the feminism she impugns prompts one last point regarding the matter of this feminism's popularity and representativeness. Roiphe's representation of her generation as steeped in the form of feminism she impugns would seem to contradict Hoff Sommers estimation that "it is surely a minority" of young women who are committed to this form of feminism. As we will see, Denfeld's account further complicates this matter in being crafted along generational lines: according to Denfeld, this form of feminism is the predilection of an "old feminist order" and is summarily rejected by "young women". Denfeld identifies Roiphe as part of this young generation, but Roiphe identifies herself as a minority of one.\textsuperscript{156} Hence between these accounts—and in Hoff Sommers' case \textit{within} her account—we are not given a stable portrait of this feminism as either 'representative' or 'unrepresentative' of a majority of women, even though stability on this point forms a necessary element of the counter-discourse these accounts pose.

\textbf{1.3 Denfeld: Victorianism versus liberalism}

If one were to go about synthesising Hoff Sommers' and Roiphe's books into one single account, the result would look very much like Rene Denfeld's book \textit{The New Victorians: a young woman's challenge to the old feminist order}. Echoing Hoff Sommers' critique of 'gender feminism,' Denfeld argues that contemporary feminism's radical world view has initiated a departure from

\textsuperscript{156}For Denfeld's identification of Roiphe as representative of young women's resistance to the 'old feminist order' see \textit{The New Victorians}, 81, 202.
and betrayal of feminism's proper path, the pursuit of equality. Echoing Roiphe, Denfeld argues that feminism's radical world view is animated by a priggish neo-Victorian morality which threatens women's successful achievement of sexual liberation when it recasts women as the passive asexual victims of predatory rakish men. Synthesising the complaints of Hoff Sommers and Roiphe, Denfeld refers to the form of feminism she impugns as "New Victorianism", a cast of feminism which has "changed the feminist agenda from fighting for equality and choice to promoting socially, sexually, and politically repressive ideals." For Denfeld, this repressive feminism's neglect of sexual equality is symptomatic of its departure from "good old-fashioned liberalism, the kind that supports freedom of expression and upholds and respects the rights of the individual as fundamental to a free society." Hence her account is centred on a dichotomy between a 'Victorian' feminism and a 'liberal' feminism.

Denfeld's book also features all of the key arguments made by Hoff Sommers and Roiphe. Like these critics, Denfeld impugns Mary Koss' statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence, arguing that broadened definitions of sexual violence trivialise the plight of real victims of real rape. As with Roiphe, Denfeld contends that feminism's neo-Victorian "sexual purity crusade" endorses "state regulation of sexual behaviour" and aims to "revive notions of female sexual purity and helplessness". And Denfeld enjoins Hoff Sommers in criticising women's studies curricula as attuned to indoctrination rather than education, and in objecting to this feminism's representation of women as "helpless puppets" suffering a patriarchally

157 The New Victorians, 239.
158 Ibid., 244.
159 Ibid., 89.
160 Ibid., 237, 235, 237.
induced “false consciousness.” Given our acquaintance with these lines of argument, our exposition of Denfeld will concentrate on distilling the three aspects of her account which distinguish it from those of Hoff Sommers and Roiphe.

The first of these is the way in which Denfeld figures the problem with feminism as one of generational divide. Where Roiphe’s account is set up as an apostatic departure from her generation’s disingenuous investment in feminism’s empowering brand of powerlessness, Denfeld’s account is set up to voice her generation’s alienation from and rejection of feminism’s focus upon “a singular female subject ... woman as helpless, violated and oppressed victim.” Interestingly, in the Australian chapter of the ‘victim feminist’ debate, this generational divide was figured the opposite way around: second wave feminists angrily opposed what they regarded as the younger feminist generation’s righteous insistence upon female powerlessness. But the primary concern motivating Denfeld’s North American account is that young women, even as they are committed to sexual equality, “refuse to call themselves feminists” and “want nothing to do with women’s organisations” because they are unable to identify with the brand of feminism which now stands as feminism’s mainstream and public face. Like Hoff Sommers, Denfeld contends that feminism has been ‘stolen’ by a small and unrepresentative group of women. But in Denfeld’s case these women are

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161 Ibid., 164.
162 Ibid., 62.
163 This view was put forward most saliently in the following books: Helen Garner, *The First Stone* and Beatrice Faust, *Backlash? Balderdash! Where Feminism is Going Right* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1993). Garner’s argument, that the litigiousness of young feminists betrays the eros-affirming politics of their sexually liberated antecedents, is similar to that of Roiphe. Significantly, Beatrice Faust wrote the forward for the Australian edition of Denfeld’s book (*The New Victorians*, ix-xii). Two particular books were devoted to rebuffing the plaint voiced by Garner and Faust: Virginia Trioli, *Generation F: sex, power and the young feminist* (Melbourne: Minerva, 1996) and Jenna Mead, ed., *Bodyjamming: sexual harassment, feminism and public life* (Sydney: Vintage, Random House, 1997).
164 *The New Victorians*, 203.
THE CATEGORY 'VICTIM' AND POPULAR FEMINISM

represented as old, embittered radicals, and the project to reclaim feminism is conceived as an inter-generational battle in which youthful proponents of sexual equality will rally against their misguided antecedents. This project is conceived of as a battle rather than an interlocutory negotiation because, according to Denfeld, New Victorianism is marked by an authoritarian intolerance of dissent. Denfeld observes that women who “dare to step forward” and criticise the political culture and agenda of this form of feminism are “dismissed” as “backlashers” or as having been “manipulat[ed] by negative male ideas.”165 “[C]urrent feminists”, she writes, “ensure that fresh ideas, differences of opinion, true diversity, and honest debate aren’t welcome in their movement.”166

So Denfeld’s account is designed to operate in two ways. Firstly, given that her generation’s alienation from feminism has been “shrouded in silence”, her account seeks to break this silence and operate as a mouthpiece for her generation.167 Secondly, her account is designed to operate as a rallying cry to her generation to “reclaim feminism”.168 To forward her account’s role as a mouthpiece, Denfeld punctuates her chapters with lengthy excerpts from interviews she conducted with women in their twenties, excerpts which are designed to act as testimony to young women’s shared alienation from New Victorianism.169 Aside from the manner in which New Victorians handle the issue of sexual violence, Denfeld singles out a range of New Victorian traits

165Ibid., 202, 164.
166Ibid., 203.
167Ibid., 19.
168 Ibid., 266-279.
169In her Introduction, Denfeld describes the intended function of these testimonies as well as how she gathered them: “Throughout this book, you will hear voices from other women of my generation. These women come from a variety of backgrounds—from struggling young mothers, to students, to women in the workforce—but despite a tremendous diversity in their lives, all believe in women’s rights. Yet almost all refuse to call themselves feminists. I sought these women out in a variety of places, and I make no claim that I conducted anything even remotely resembling a scientific survey. But I do think that these women speak for many.” Ibid., 21.
which serve to alienate young women. These include misandry (or “male-bashing” as Denfeld puts it\textsuperscript{170}), “exclusive focus on lesbian rights”,\textsuperscript{171} and opposition to pornography.\textsuperscript{172} Given its importance to the issue of feminism's representativeness in Denfeld's account, let us consider her criticism of the New Victorian focus on lesbian rights (without, however, dwelling on the point that supporting lesbian visibility would seem to be at odds with Victorianism).\textsuperscript{173}

According to Denfeld, emphasis upon lesbian rights, and idealisation of lesbian relationships as truly liberatory, is a primary feature of this feminism's misandrist “anti-phallic campaign”.\textsuperscript{174} This campaign alienates not just young women in general but young heterosexual women in particular, for their interests are sidelined in favour of the interests of lesbian women, and they “are made to feel they have to justify their sexual choices” in the face of the campaign's “antiheterosexual” focus.\textsuperscript{175} Fusing identity politics with a concept of proportional representation, Denfeld reasons that because lesbian women's issues pertain to “gay” as opposed to “gender” discrimination, and because heterosexual women outnumber homosexual women, the interests of heterosexual women should in fact take priority within feminism:

... for many women, feminism should be concerned with representing all women—regardless of race, class, or sexual orientation—and the idea that any one group of women should be overrepresented is offensive. White women have always been overly represented in feminism, but no one would herald that as positive ... many lesbian rights centre on issues of gay discrimination, not gender

\textsuperscript{170}Ibid., 25-57.
\textsuperscript{171}Ibid., 202.
\textsuperscript{172}Ibid., 90-123.
\textsuperscript{173}Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{174}Ibid., 25-57.
\textsuperscript{175}Ibid., 26.
discrimination—and the women’s movement should be fighting gender discrimination first and foremost... If feminism is the struggle for all women’s rights, then lesbian issues would have to come after efforts for such things as political parity, child care, and an end to job discrimination.176

By referring to the historical centrality of white women’s interests in western feminism, Denfeld appears to enjoin the ongoing feminist debate about the practices of exclusion and exnomination which have attended feminist circumscriptions of the category ‘women’.

Let us note, however, that even as Denfeld aligns herself with this project to critique feminism’s exclusionary tactics, she employs the very tactic this project presses against: the representation of women who do not conform to the heterosexual norm as somehow unable to be registered as straightforward examples of ‘women.’ Assuming that political gains for lesbian women will not benefit “all women”, and assuming further that lesbian women are discriminated against not as “women” but as “gays”, Denfeld puts lesbian women ‘in their place’: a sidelined minority whose issues must “come after” the primary business of feminism lest heterosexual women—the proper referent for feminist politics—be alienated from their movement. As we will register at greater length in the following chapter, the manoeuvre Denfeld performs here is a crucial element of the critique of feminism offered in the accounts we address in this chapter. The manoeuvre involves taking on the style of radical politics so as to recode mainstream values and practices (in this case heterosexuality) as transgressive departures from feminism’s oppressive ‘norm’. But for the moment let us note simply that the population of women Denfeld’s account is designed to speak for are marked out by her not just as ‘young’ but as ‘heterosexual’. These are

176Ibid., 42-43. My emphasis.
the particular traits she attaches to that “majority of women” whose alienation from feminism she seeks to counter.\textsuperscript{177}

The second operation of Denfeld’s account, to issue a rallying cry to her generation to reclaim feminism, is articulated very clearly in Denfeld’s final chapter:

New Victorian causes hurt the pursuit of equality and often directly infringe upon our rights as individuals ... We should not feel we have to tolerate this because New Victorians claim that criticising their causes makes one an agent of the “backlash.” This is a lie, used to squash dissent and keep the movement closed off to the majority of women ... I believe that standing adamantly against New Victorianism is crucial to creating a new, truly inclusive movement concerned with equality. We need to make it clear we do not believe they speak for women. We have got to make the movement more open to women, and the only way to do that is get [sic] rid of those who are driving women away ... as long as New Victorians are allowed to own the feminist label, more and more women will be alienated from any organised movement for equality ... and progress will continue to be stalled.\textsuperscript{178}

This statement has much in common with Hoff Sommers’ formulation: when feminism returns to the project of equality, the “ideologically narrow” New Victorians will give way to true inclusivity and representativeness.\textsuperscript{179} However this statement, particularly its final comments regarding feminism’s stalled progress, may also be used to identify the second respect in which Denfeld’s account may be distinguished from those of Hoff Sommers and Roiphe. The difference has to do with how Denfeld represents the political character and effectivity of the feminism she impugns.

Two points are to be made in relation to this difference. Firstly, in tune with Hoff Sommers’ argument that feminism’s agenda for equality “is not yet

\textsuperscript{177}Ibid., 277.
\textsuperscript{178}Ibid., 277. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{179}Ibid., 278.
fully achieved", Denfeld holds that feminism's progress toward equality has been "stalled" at the point of near-equality. However, unlike Hoff Sommers, Denfeld does go on to indicate what remains to be achieved. Denfeld tables an agenda for a "final wave" of feminism, a final round of reforms which will see feminism achieve equality.\(^{180}\) The second point to be made is that, while the accounts of Hoff Sommers and Roiphe act as testimony to the vast political efficacy of the form of feminism they impugn, Denfeld argues that this form of feminism is politically *ineffectual* on account of its adoption of an "outsider stance".\(^{181}\) This gives rise to confusions about how we are to understand this feminism's political strategy. Let us expand on this second point before looking at Denfeld's agenda for feminism's final wave.

According to Denfeld, New Victorianism incarnates feminism as apolitical moralism rather than publicly engaged politics. The New Victorian turn, she argues, has involved a retreat from "political and economic activism".\(^{182}\) New Victorian "ideological" indulgence in issues of sexuality, popular culture, spiritualism and self-development, as well as its stubborn anti-capitalism and distrust of the strategy of reformism, has resulted in its being ever more ineffectual when it comes to concrete political issues. Hence progress toward equality has stalled and political "inertia" and "passivity" have set in.\(^{183}\) Denfeld explains that this feminism's "women-centred" ideology has spawned an "absurdly unattainable" utopian political vision which aims to substitute "patriarchal systems" with "an ill-defined, feminist-inspired matriarchy."\(^{184}\) For Denfeld this vision is absurd since its attainment would involve jettisoning a number of social necessities: "free markets, capitalism,

\(^{180}\) Ibid., 267.
\(^{181}\) Ibid., 186.
\(^{182}\) Ibid., 132.
\(^{183}\) Ibid., 185.
\(^{184}\) Ibid., 14, 186.
democracy, education, all forms of hierarchy, meat-eating, and objective thinking."\textsuperscript{185} This vision, in which "[social] transformation is passivity masquerading as activism", has enabled feminism's "retreat from the daylight world of public involvement" in carving out three roles for its proponents: "outsider", "moral leader" and "martyr".\textsuperscript{186}

There are a number of confusions at play in Denfeld's portrayal of this feminism. Firstly, even as Denfeld defines this feminism as a moralism rather than a politics, her account, like those of Hoff Sommers and Roiphe, illustrates very clearly the political efficacy of this feminism and, as with these other critics, her account draws its reason for being precisely from this efficacy. If the New Victorians were not a political force to be reckoned with, Denfeld's account surely would be bereft of purpose. Denfeld and the other critics seek to demonstrate that this feminism, quite apart from its regulatory and extra-legal influence upon behavioural mores, has managed to yield a considerable degree of institutional power, public visibility, and political clout. This feminism, they argue, is so publicly visible that 'ordinary women' know to identify it as feminism's new 'mainstream'. According to Denfeld, one of the main proponents of this feminism is Catharine MacKinnon. However, during the late 1980s and into the 1990s, MacKinnon arguably enjoyed more public attention than any other Western feminist the world over. And her anti-pornography politics pursued the strategy of legal reform, as distinct from the revolutionary utopianism Denfeld attributes to New Victorianism. MacKinnon's anti-pornography politics may resemble what Denfeld describes as New Victorianism's "sexual purity crusade", but it certainly does not read as an "outsider stance".

\textsuperscript{185}\textsuperscript{185}Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{186}\textsuperscript{186}Ibid., 186, 185.
Secondly, at Denfeld’s time of writing, the “feminist leaders” she identifies as proponents of an apolitical outsider New Victorianism—Gloria Steinem, Susan Faludi, Naomi Wolf, Eleanor Smeal, and representatives of the (North American) National Organisation for Women—were explicit in their support of the Clinton administration, partly on account of Clinton’s masterful construction of his centre-right politics as left-leaning and feminist-friendly. Indeed, these feminist leaders exhibited such faith in Clinton’s ability to effect concrete political change through congress that many publicly withdrew support for the allegations of sexual misconduct made against him in connection with Paula Jones, Gennifer Flowers, Kathleen Willey and “that woman, Miss Lewinski.” So it would seem that Denfeld’s portrayal of this feminism as wholly “paralysed” by anti-reformism is vulnerable to substantive rebuff. Anne-Marie Smith’s observation of feminist politics actually is far more accurate: “serious feminist activists no longer

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187 For a balanced and exacting analysis of Clinton’s public image (specifically in relation to feminist and minority concerns such as abortion, affirmative action, childcare, parental leave, same-sex marriage and gays and lesbians in the military) versus his actual policies see Anne-Marie Smith, ‘Feminist Activism and Presidential Politics: theorising the costs of the ‘insider strategy,’ Radical Philosophy 83 (May/June 1997): 25-35. Smith argues that “Feminist rhetoric was used by the Clinton camp to sell his centre-right agenda, in spite of the fact that it includes several major anti-feminist elements. Clinton himself was skilfully constructed as pro-feminist while his campaign deliberately preempted and censored feminist critics.”, Ibid., 25. See also Zillah Eisenstein’s analysis of Clinton’s ‘feminism’ in her chapter ‘Feminism of the North and West for Export: transnational capital and the racialising of gender,’ in Feminism and the New Democracy: resisting the political, ed. Jodi Dean (London: Sage, 1997), 29-49; and Nancy Fraser’s analysis of Clinton’s neoliberalism, ‘Clintonism, Welfare, and the Antisocial Wage: the emergence of a neoliberal political imaginary,’ Rethinking Marxism, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1993): 9-23. For Denfeld’s critique of feminists who doubted Clinton’s feminist credentials and the efficacy of his reforms for yielding sexual equality see The New Victorians, 189.

188 The following quotations are drawn from Marjorie Williams, ‘Clinton and Women,’ Vanity Fair (May 1998): 105-107, 163-166. In an interview with Marjorie Williams, Susan Faludi noted that the point of most significance in the Lewinsky case was that “she put the moves on him” (Ibid., 106, emphasis in original) and that Lewinsky has been “sleeping her way to the bottom of the Revlon empire.” (Ibid., 164). More generously, Eleanor Smeal (then president of the Feminist Majority Foundation) argued that focussing on the complaints made against Clinton obscured “the bigger picture [of] what’s best for women.” (Ibid., 106). Gloria Steinem, also interviewed by Williams, noted that seeing Clinton’s behaviour as an abuse of power denied the complainant’s “sexual wills” and goes “against the whole struggle for self-determination and taking responsibility for our own lives” (Ibid., 165).
think politics in terms of a simple choice between pure insider and pure outsider positions.”

This brings us to Denfeld’s agenda for feminism’s final wave. Let us note first that as part of her agenda Denfeld offers a particular vision of how feminist politics should be conducted. Denfeld argues that single issue-based campaigning should replace the formation of umbrella organisations since the latter mode of organising leads to “overextended agendas and demands of ideological purity.” Hence Denfeld would like to see an end to that form of feminist political activism which agitates on the basis of a ‘big picture’ understanding of the array of social, political and economic forces which circumscribe women’s fields of possibility. Although Denfeld’s vision exhibits a measure of naivete about the demands of activism—the resources and political acumen of longstanding organisations and experienced activists are invaluable to effective domestic campaigning and for the making of international networks—she is concerned to point out that women need not “devote [their] lives to the cause” in order to “do something about [their] concerns”.

In tune with this vision, Denfeld’s final wave agenda is organised into a set of discrete issues. The first item on the agenda is state-sponsored child care: she recommends that women “make child care a public issue” and agitate for “a presidential task force on child care.” The “outsider” feminists Denfeld identifies were among those who agitated for this reform, with albeit limited success, in Clinton’s second term. In regard to the issue of abortion, Denfeld argues that feminism’s original “women-centred” tactic of setting up discrete

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189 Smith, ‘Feminist Activism and Presidential Politics,’ 27.
190 Ibid., 266.
191 Ibid., 266.
192 Ibid., 269.
abortion clinics was wrongheaded since such clinics have proven themselves vulnerable to “arson, bombings, and violence”. Hence Denfeld proposes that feminists cease “politicising and marginalising” abortion, and begin treating abortion as a “medical right” to be exercised alongside all other medical procedures in the hospital system. Hospitals, she argues, are more difficult to bomb than small clinics. Interestingly, Denfeld notes approvingly that the ‘pro-feminist’ Clinton administration had initiated this mainstreaming of abortion within the health sector. She does not mention, however, that this administration did nothing to ameliorate the fact that only 24% of American counties hosted abortion providers at this time, and that although Clinton removed the ban on late-term abortions, his health care plan (proposed by Denfeld’s time of writing) left public health cover for abortions to the discretion of individual states, a move which served to perpetuate the limits on poor women’s access to abortion.

Political parity is another issue which appears on Denfeld’s agenda. She argues that an equal number of men and women in parliament “is fundamental to equality.” However Denfeld does note that women’s organisations such as Emily’s List already are working toward this goal. Denfeld also offers a program of action on the issue of sexual violence. Like Hoff Sommers and Roiphe, Denfeld’s critique of feminism’s expanded definitions of sexual violence lead to her champion a return to traditional rape law’s definition of ‘real rape,’ hence her agenda only addresses evidently “brutal” rape. Here Denfeld recommends that women argue for longer jail

193Ibid., 272, 273.
194Ibid., 274.
195Ibid., 273.
196Smith, ‘Feminist Activism and Presidential Politics,’ 27.
197Ibid., 274.
198Ibid., 18.
199Ibid., 275.
terms and rehabilitation programs for convicted rapists.\textsuperscript{200} We will return to examine this recommendation in the following chapter. Finally, Denfeld's agenda for reform includes a recommendation that universities "dump women's studies programs" because they have "proven themselves extremely counterproductive."\textsuperscript{201}

Given Denfeld's complaint that New Victorians neglect economic issues, we must register that her proposal does not comment upon the economic status of women beyond calling for affordable child care for employed parents. Pay equity, gender segregation in the labour force, women's overrepresentation in low-paid wage labour, minimum wage-setting, the increasingly broad gap between rich and poor, the situation of migrant women workers, welfare and health benefit cuts: none of these are mentioned. In relation to this point let us register another confusing element of Denfeld's analysis. Denfeld also impugns New Victorians for their stubborn anti-capitalism. Let me suggest that an anti-capitalist feminism which pays no attention to economic issues is difficult to imagine, and suggest further that Denfeld's own pro-capitalist stance may be one reason why her book invokes but does not actually deliver consideration of the role of capitalist economic arrangements in general, and neoliberal economic policy in particular, in the lives of contemporary women. This, combined with her agenda's vision of feminism's political future as a finite case-by-case sequence of single issue-based campaigns conducted within the parameters of a single nation state, would seem to suggest that Denfeld's agenda would serve to depoliticise rather than repoliticise feminist politics.

The third feature which distinguishes Denfeld's account from those of Hoff Sommers and Roiphe is her emphasis upon New Victorianism's doctrine of

\textsuperscript{200}Ibid., 275-276.
\textsuperscript{201}Ibid., 278.
women’s moral superiority. This theme also appears in Hoff Sommers’ critique of gynocentrism, but the theme is far more pronounced in Denfeld’s account and, as we will see, forms a major preoccupation in Wolf’s account as well. According to Denfeld, the notion that women are “morally, ethically, and spiritually different from men—and, by extension, superior to them” forms the lynchpin of New Victorianism’s gynocentric political vision. New Victorianism, she argues, hosts a purist, separatist and misandrist desire to “overthrow the patriarchy”, counter androcentrism and eliminate the influence of masculine values—aggressiveness, autonomy, rationality, binary logic, hierarchy, competitiveness, objectivity, linear thinking—so as to create a matriarchal society in which women’s better nature will prevail. Women’s better nature consists of traits including peacefulness, pacifism, intersubjective connection, emotionality, intuition, non-linear thinking, non-hierarchical organising, and a nurturing regard for life based in women’s maternal capacities.

Denfeld runs three main lines of argument against this political vision which, she contends, is ascendant among “current feminists”. Firstly, Denfeld objects that this vision recuperates Victorian representation of women as the moral guardians of home and hearth, a representation which historically has been influential in arguments against women’s voting rights.

202Ibid., 14-15.
203Ibid., 157.
205Ibid., 183.
and participation in public life. Secondly, Denfeld notes that this vision romanticises female powerlessness, offers a blanket association of women with powerlessness, and succeeds in casting power as a masculine property. In so doing, some women's participation in "racism, sexism, and violence" is rendered either invisible or excusable, and women who occupy positive relationship with power—women politicians, teachers, scientists and so forth—are registered as "tainted" by male values. Thirdly, Denfeld argues that this vision’s recuperation and universalisation of Victorian gender dimorphism is easily disproven by anthropology: "Any anthropologist will note that there are cultures in which men are the primary nurturers, which ... immediately disproves feminist theory." To my mind, Denfeld’s argument is for the most part correct. Although her treatment of the relationship between oppressed groups and the traits bestowed upon them as part of their oppression is lighthanded, her argument invites general agreement. But what of her claim that this gynocentric vision is ascendant among "current feminists", that it represents the latest in "feminist theory", a realm in which this vision is "entrenched"? Denfeld’s chapter on feminist preoccupation with women’s moral superiority cites only three feminists who offer “dissenting” views, where this aids in creating the impression that this preoccupation is pervasive among feminists, and that Denfeld is among the few who are challenging this preoccupation for the first

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206 Ibid., 167. It should be noted here that Denfeld’s objection is factually incorrect. One of the most powerful arguments for suffrage was that women’s greater ‘moral sense’ would serve the domain of politics well in countering its ‘corrupt’ character. For an account of how this argument played out in New Zealand, the first nation to grant women suffrage (in 1893), see Kay Saville-Smith, Gender, Culture and Power (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1994), 32-48.

207 Ibid., 161, 167.

208 Ibid., 169.

209 Ibid., 183;
time.\textsuperscript{210} It actually is the case that the particular feminism of difference\textsuperscript{211} Denfeld describes has attracted broad criticism among feminists of a variety of political persuasions. For example, the central task of socialist feminist Lynne Segal’s 1987 book \textit{Is The Future Female?} was to call this form of feminism’s “Manichean struggle between female virtue and male vice” into question.\textsuperscript{212} To take another example, Denfeld’s argument that this feminism’s understanding of women as innocent of power replicates the criticism bell hooks made in 1984:

Bonding as “victims,” white women liberationists were not required to assume responsibility for confronting the complexity of their own experience. They were not challenging one another to examine their sexist attitudes towards women unlike themselves or exploring the impact of race and class privilege on their relationships to women outside their race/class groups.\textsuperscript{213}

The book in which hooks voices this criticism, \textit{Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre}, is cited in Denfeld’s chapter, but not as the source of Denfeld’s argument. Rather, hooks is registered as a New Victorian feminist of difference on account of her critique of capitalism.\textsuperscript{214} It also is the case that

\textsuperscript{210}Denfeld (Ibid., 181) cites the following dissenting texts, only one of which is referenced: Catharine Stimpson, \textit{Women’s Studies in the United States} (New York: Ford Foundation, 1989); Carol Travis, \textit{The Mismeasure of Woman: why women are not the better sex, the inferior sex, or the opposite sex}; and a magazine article by media critic Kath Pollit.

\textsuperscript{211}Let us register here that the form of difference feminism Denfeld impugns is to be distinguished from another line of feminist theorising on sexual difference which has emerged from poststructuralist and psychoanalytic feminism. Simply put, this latter feminism is marked by an effort to resist, on the one hand, the erasure of sexual difference symptomatic of what Moira Gatens termed the ‘degendering proposal’ and, on the other hand, the reification of sexual difference which occurs when fixed characteristics are attached to the categories female and male. See Moira Gatens, ‘A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction,’ \textit{Imaginary Bodies: ethics, power and corporeality} (Routledge: London & New York, 1996 [originally published 1983]), 3-20 and, for a summary, Linda Nicholson, ‘Interpreting Gender,’ in \textit{Social Postmodernism: beyond identity politics}, eds. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 39-67.

\textsuperscript{212}Lynne Segal, \textit{Is The Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism} (London: Virago, 1987), xxi.

\textsuperscript{213}bell hooks, \textit{Feminist Theory: from margin to centre} (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 46.

\textsuperscript{214}Denfeld, \textit{The New Victorians}, 158, n.4.
Denfeld's argument against the universalising tendency of the feminism of difference with which she is concerned may be read as a scaled down and simplified version of a longstanding critique of radical feminism's tactic of homogenising female experience so as to carve out a seamless impression of female oppression which might invoke unified political resistance. There is a plethora of feminist literature Denfeld might have drawn upon or referred to here.215 I want to suggest, then, that in Denfeld's dealings with this feminism of difference, her concern with "honest debate" is nowhere evident.216 This is reminiscent of Roiphe's careful omission of the motivations which lay behind feminist politicisations of sexual violence. Indeed, I will be arguing in the following chapter that strategic omission of existing relevant feminist debates, and of the motivations which lay behind the feminist tendencies with which they are concerned, is a central element of the accounts we address in this chapter.

In sum, Denfeld's account portrays feminism as steeped in a Victorianesque reification of sexual difference rather than a liberal pursuit of sexual equality, a portrayal which synthesises the complaints of Hoff Sommers and Roiphe and yet has three features which distinguish it from their accounts. As we have seen, the first of these is Denfeld's use of generational divide as an organising principle for her account, the second is her albeit confusing portrayal of the feminism she impugns as politically ineffectual on account of its outsider stance, and the third is her emphasis

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215For example, at Denfeld's time of writing, the following texts were offering arguments kindred to hers and helping to frame the debate: Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Feminist Encounters: locating the politics of experience,' in Destabilizing Theory: contemporary feminist debates, eds. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 74-92; Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Woman, Native, Other: writing post-coloniality and feminism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Elizabeth V. Spelman, Inessential Woman: problems of exclusion in feminist thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); and Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1988).

upon this feminism’s valorisation of distinctive ‘female’ traits and utopian belief that women’s morally superior nature would forge a more peace-loving world. Before moving on to Wolf’s account, let us make the point that Hoff Sommers’ casting of the feminism she impugns as “ideological”, and concomitant situation of equality feminism outside of ideology, runs through each of the accounts so far. Each critic uses “ideology” to denote a system of beliefs which distorts social reality in such a manner that this feminism’s politico-moral posture is legitimated. In these accounts, adopting a critical posture in relation to liberalism and capitalism is registered as ideological, while an unargued fealty to these politico-economic forms is aligned with possession of objective truth. As we will see, this theme is intensified in Wolf’s account as she presents a more explicit defence of liberalism and capitalism against feminism’s radical ambitions.

1.4 Wolf: victim feminism versus power feminism

Naomi Wolf’s role in the debate about feminism’s relationship with the category ‘victim’ is an interesting one given that Hoff Sommers, Roiphe and Denfeld all argue that Wolf’s feminism, as articulated in her first book The Beauty Myth, is a classic example of the form of feminism they impugn.217 Let us briefly outline this first book before addressing Wolf’s contribution to the victim feminist debate. The Beauty Myth (1990) was figured as an update of Betty Friedan’s landmark book The Feminine Mystique (1963).218 Friedan had argued that women’s assignment to housewifery—justified by a naturalised conflation of femininity with the arts of homemaking which she dubbed the ‘feminine mystique’—served a crucial economic function in providing

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commodity capitalism with a pliable "army of consumers". Wolf updated this argument in 1990 with her observation that women's entrance into the workforce in unprecedented numbers, attended as it was by an opening for redefinitions of femininity, raised fears of obsolescence within those industries reliant upon women's role as the primary consumers (advertisers, women's magazines, the fashion, clothing and textile industries, the dieting and beauty cosmetics industries). Wolf argues that a "violent backlash against feminism which uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement" ensued. The "beauty myth"—"a briefcase-sized neurosis that the working woman could take with her to the office"—took over the function of the "feminine mystique" as ever-more aggressive advertising compelled women to internalise and pursue new prescriptions of ideal female appearance, thus locking them back into patterns of "insecure consumerism". Arguing that advertisers were seeking to induce then exploit female self-surveillance and indeed "self-hatred", Wolf linked this backlash to the steady incline in reported cases of anorexia nervosa throughout the 1980s, as well as a general increase in cosmetic surgery and women's oft-noted "terror of aging". Wolf's argument in The Beauty Myth was not so much anti-capitalist as caveat emptor, and the point of the book was to encourage a greatly expanded understanding of beauty which would be generated by women rather than imposed upon them.
According to Denfeld, *The Beauty Myth* promoted the idea that “women are the hapless victims of men.”\textsuperscript{225} Similarly, Hoff Sommers argues that Wolf, inspired by the “infantile leftism” of Michel Foucault, contributed to gender feminism’s “siege mentality” by portraying women as “Stepford wives—helpless, possessed, and robotic.”\textsuperscript{226} Both critics note that in her second book, *Fire With Fire: the new female power and how it will change the 21st century*, Wolf made a “radical departure” from her initial woman-as-victim theme.\textsuperscript{227} For Hoff Sommers, Wolf’s departure is evidence of her recovery from “the effective indoctrination she got in women’s studies at Yale.”\textsuperscript{228} For Denfeld, Wolf’s departure is not radical enough since, in *Fire With Fire*, “she refers to society as patriarchal”.\textsuperscript{229}

For our purposes, these comments raise an expectation that Wolf’s book might deal with feminism’s relationship with the category ‘victim’ in a less inflammatory and more fair-minded manner that do the other critics. This certainly is what Wolf promises. She notes that *Fire With Fire* will not enjoin “the chorus that calls women’s objections to injustice ‘whining’”, that it will instead “confront the growing voices of critics who are charging that all feminism is puritanical, man-hating, and obsessed with defining women as ‘victims’”.\textsuperscript{230} Importantly, Wolf does not aim to depart from these critics entirely. Part of the task of *Fire With Fire*, she writes, is to “separate the nugget of truth in those charges from the destructive, categorical hype.”\textsuperscript{231} Wolf’s account of feminism’s relationship with the category ‘victim’ does indeed depart from those of Hoff Sommers, Roiphe and Denfeld in some

\textsuperscript{226}Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, 230, 245, 232.
\textsuperscript{228}Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, 245.
\textsuperscript{229}Denfeld, *The New Victorians*, 162.
\textsuperscript{231}Ibid., xvii.
significant respects, and on the whole her account is far more generous. We will see, however, that the difference between them often is only skin deep, and I will be suggesting that one of the ways to read the contrast between Wolf and the other critics is that Wolf's account contains a much more sophisticated impugnation of feminist political radicalism, one that may be identified as kindred with the 'centre-radicalism' associated with the political discourse of the Clinton and Blair governments. In their grave association of feminism with brain-washing and authoritarianism the other critics exhibit a strain of pseudo-McCarthyism. Wolf's account, however, delivers the more carefully packaged claim that feminist anti-capitalism and wariness of reformism is simply irrelevant given that advanced capitalism and liberal democracy are the only politico-economic forms left standing in this, the post-socialist age.

The central argument of Wolf's book is that the early 1990s saw the wealthiest of the first world nations enter "the final throes of a civil war for gender fairness, in which conditions have shifted to put much of the attainment of equality in women's own grasp". The "masculine empire", she argues, has reached its "twilight", and the 20th century is the last century in which men, particularly white men, will predominate. But whether women grasp equality, or "cling to an outdated image of ourselves as powerless", will depend upon how women negotiate the three, related "obstacles" standing in their way: "many women have become estranged from their own movement; one strand of feminism has developed maladaptive

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232Wolf's understanding of the Clinton administration as pro-feminist and post-sexist, and her understanding of Clinton himself as passionately dedicated to empowering women and ending male domination, forms a key element of her argument for reformism, Ibid., xiv, 9, 21, 196. It is worth noting that many of the arguments presented in Wolf's account, as well as the general flavour of its 'centre-radical' political position, were replicated for the English context in Natasha Walter's book The New Feminism (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).

233Ibid., xv.

attitudes; and women lack a psychology of female power to match their new opportunities.”235

These obstacles are related since the “maladaptive” strand of feminism Wolf refers to—“victim feminism”—is, she argues, one of the main reasons why women have become estranged from their movement, and its “obsolete” conflation of femininity with victimisation acts as a counter-force to women’s assumption of an appropriate psychology of power.236 Like the other critics, Wolf carves the field of feminisms up into a dichotomy between a bad and a good feminism—“victim feminism” and “power feminism”, respectively—arguing that power feminism is the brand now required to usher in a third and final wave of feminist reform. Also like the other critics, Wolf constructs this dichotomy around the difference between outsider-style radicalism and insider-style reformism, and between attachment to sexual difference and the goal of sexual equality. And in the same way as Hoff Sommers locates the feminism she valourises, equity feminism, with feminism’s original and proper political orientation as per the Seneca Falls Convention, so too Wolf identifies power feminism with this historical tradition, situating Emmeline Pankhurst and Lucretia Mott as “early champions of power feminism.”237

Redrawing Hoff Sommers association of ‘gender feminism’ with the rise of the New Left, Wolf argues that victim feminism’s customary reflexes—“anti-capitalism, an insider-outsider mentality, and an aversion to the ‘system’”—stem from its association with what she terms the “hard left” of the 1960s.238 However Wolf offers a slightly different perspective on the political character of ‘victim feminism’ to those of the other critics. Where the other critics

235Ibid., xvi.
236Ibid., xvi, xviii.
237Ibid., 157.
238Ibid., xvi, 78.
represent leftist political radicalism as a dangerous diversion from the goal of equality, Wolf argues that the political reflexes noted above were once “necessary and even effective [but] are now getting in our way.” 239 Wolf’s particular argument is that the status of women can and has outgrown left feminist politics:

The focus of some feminists, like Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, and Adrienne Rich, on female victimisation at the expense of female agency, derives from conditions that once applied more than they do now. During the early 1970s women were indeed overwhelmingly silenced and negated but the genderquake means that the rationale for this kind of feminism is becoming obsolete. 240

Since the decline of the backlash against feminism during the 1980s, the “decline of the masculine empire”, and the emergence of what she calls the “genderquake”, the status of women in the first world has improved to the extent that victim feminism has lost its reason for being, which means of course that it had reason for being: something the other critics do not contend. 241 As we will see, Wolf expands on this account of victim feminism’s reason for being when defending the pro-capitalist orientation of power feminism: the loss of the socialist alternative since the fall of Stalinism in Eastern Europe is a determining factor in Wolf’s representation of feminist

239 Ibid., xvi.
240 Ibid., 154. See also Wolf’s argument that women are beginning to behave in ways that “victim feminism consigns to men alone” such as using guns and sexually objectifying the opposite sex, Ibid., 230-246.
241 Wolf is the only one among the critics of victim feminism who accepts that feminism underwent a ‘backlash’ during the 1980s. In Wolf’s book the term ‘genderquake’ refers to an “emerging female power structure” that began to appear as the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill scandal came to dominate the North American media in October 1991, harnessing and sparking productive anger among American women of all walks of life (Ibid., 29). In Wolf’s telling, the Thomas-Hill trial acted as a catalyst for positive feminist agitation (detailed in Ibid., 30-32) and created a political mood in which “something critical to the sustenance of patriarchy died”, Ibid., 5. Wolf’s account of the Thomas-Hill events and subsequent public debate does not address their racial aspects nor the theme of meritocracy versus ‘political correctness’. For a set of essays which do acknowledge and examine these elements centrally 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).
anti-capitalism as obsolete. Her argument at this stage, though, is that victim feminism, a potentially effective political ruse in certain climates, is symptomatic of dark times for the status of women, and that power feminism must come into play now that women’s socio-economic situation has substantially improved. Let us now examine the meanings Wolf attaches to these terms ‘victim’ and ‘power’ feminism.

Wolf’s portrait of victim feminism associates this form of feminism with many of the traits we have encountered across this chapter. These include: neo-Victorianism, misandry, a tendency to be doctrinaire, a belief in women’s moral superiority, categorical antiheterosexism, preference for collectivism over individualism, intolerance of dissent, understanding of power as a male property, registration of empowered women as ‘tainted,’ registration of violent or prejudiced women as not responsible, and identification of women in general as powerless, innocent victims.242 Like the other critics, Wolf also singles out academic feminism for severe impugnation. To demonstrate the irrelevance of feminist theory to genuine feminist imperatives Wolf quotes a passage “taken at random” from Luce Irigaray’s *Speculum of the Other Woman*, arguing that academic feminism has “glamourised the margins”, alienated non-academic women from feminism, and sealed itself off from “the real world of politics and action”.243

Aside from these points of commonality, Wolf’s handling of the theme of victimisation is more nuanced and carefully argued than are those of the other critics, and it aims to depart from their lines of argument in important respects. Most significantly, Wolf does not dispute feminist statistics which


indicate the scope of male violence. Indeed, she argues that feminist political activism centred on issues of sexual violence, domestic violence and child sexual abuse have made a powerful contribution to casting the masculine empire into its twilight.\textsuperscript{244} Directly challenging the argument shared among the critics we have examined that feminism exaggerates women's victimisation and, in so doing, portrays women as inevitable victims, Wolf writes:

\begin{quote}
Roiphe ... paints an impressionistic picture of hysterical “date-rape victims” who have made it all up, but she never looks squarely at the epidemic of sex crimes that has been all too indelibly documented by police forces the world over ... The ‘victim culture’ critics assail even the mere act of analysing real harm done to women ... but these critics seem to believe themselves that women have no will or critical intelligence. The act of documenting the way others are trying to victimize women is the very opposite of treating women as natural victims. The premise of such documentation is that women are not natural victims ... There is no way around it: women are not natural victims, but they certainly are victimised.\textsuperscript{245}
\end{quote}

We must note that even as Wolf registers this criticism of Roiphe, at another point in \textit{Fire With Fire} she does enjoin Roiphe’s argument that the testimonies at sexual violence survivor speak-outs can strike “a false note”.\textsuperscript{246} Wolf also enjoins these critics in arguing that victim feminism glamourises victimisation and encourages women to falsely identify as victims.\textsuperscript{247} In arguing that victim feminism is marked by a “misuse of the reality of women’s victimisation”, she also suggests that this feminism’s

\textsuperscript{244}Wolf, \textit{Fire With Fire}, 21.
\textsuperscript{245}Ibid., 147-148, 153. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{246}Ibid., 207.
\textsuperscript{247}For example, Wolf notes: “The fashionable lapse in logic among the left right now is that you can’t identify \textit{with} victims of oppression unless you identify \textit{as} a victim” and “middle-class college students scramble to identify downward, thinking they have to pretend to \textit{be} oppressed in order to \textit{champion} the oppressed.” Ibid., 217, 125. Emphasis in original.
identification of women as victims trivialises the plight of real victims.\textsuperscript{248} And she uses rape-crisis feminism as the basis of her "case study" of victim feminist politics in action, a feature of her analysis that we will examine in the following chapter.\textsuperscript{249} These factors aside, let us ask: given Wolf's statement of support for feminist documentation of women's victimisation, where does her primary objection to feminism's relationship with the category 'victim' lie?

Wolf's objection has two main components. Firstly, she objects to the way in which 'victim feminism' lofts victimhood as an identity category with which women are encouraged to identify personally. She writes: "There is nothing wrong with identifying one's victimisation. The act is critical. There is a lot wrong with moulding it into an identity."\textsuperscript{250} Part of Wolf's point is that women who either experience or feel vulnerable to victimisation will benefit if they refuse to allow victimhood and a sense of vulnerability to become dominant and abiding aspects of their identities as women. We will return to this point in the following chapter: as with Roiphe's comments on self-esteem, Wolf here elides existing and extensive feminist efforts to counter 'victim identity,' especially among survivors of sexual violence. The other aspect of Wolf's point is that victim feminism encourages women to seek power through an identity of victimisation, rather than an identity as the equals of men. Clinging to old scripts of female passivity, dependency and innocence, victim feminism induces guilt in its political opponents so as to claim power indirectly, rather than "honestly" and "straightforwardly."\textsuperscript{251} Insofar as victim feminism casts women as good on account of their suffering, and petitions for their rights on that basis, women are once again fettered by a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{248}Ibid., 147.
\item \textsuperscript{249}Ibid., 164-169.
\item \textsuperscript{250}Ibid., 148.
\item \textsuperscript{251}Ibid., 148, 190-191.
\end{thebibliography}
Victorianesque code of female virtue and effectively tied to a strategy in which they will only be regarded as ‘good’ so long as they ‘suffer.’252 We will return to this argument in the dissertation’s second part as it forms a major theme in the feminist theoretical literature on feminism and ressentiment.

The second component of Wolf’s objection is that victim feminism portrays women as innocent victims—innocent of power, aggression and responsibility.253 This is where the argument Wolf shares with Denfeld—that victim feminism is a feminism of difference which idealises women as naturally virtuous and men as naturally villainous—comes into play. Wolf argues that this portrayal of women and men, the “core mythology” of victim feminism, delivers a “belief system in which all evil—from environmental desecration to meat eating to child abuse—is seen to derive from the will to power, which is confined to men and institutionalised in patriarchy.”254 This belief system works not only to rekindle Victorian gender dimorphism, but also to revive “the old female stereotype that discourages women from appropriating the power of the political and financial world to make that power at last their own.”255 Rather than encourage women to claim “their own will to power” and “take responsibility for the power they do possess”, victim feminism “stigmatizes the female use of power” and sets up “taboos on ego, money, aggression and power”.256 For Wolf, victim feminism’s aversion to worldly power has effectively “stymied a generation of young activists who inherited a critique of power in which power itself was not morally neutral, useable for good or for evil, but evil in itself.”257

252Ibid., xvii.
253See especially Ibid., 221-215.
254Ibid., 157.
255Ibid., 160.
256Ibid., 161, 191.
257Ibid., 158.
Let us note at this point that, as with Hoff Sommers, a Nietzschean theme runs through Wolf's account. Although encrypted, this theme has a strong and decisive presence. Nietzsche's *On The Genealogy of Morals* appears in Wolf's bibliography, and apart from her use of Nietzschean themes and phrases such as will to power, agonism and twilight of the idols, Wolf seems especially cognisant of Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment* when she claims that victim feminism's negative ethos of self-sacrifice "fosters resentment of other's recognition and pleasures" while power feminism's future-oriented, life-enhancing positivity is "without resentment". Victim feminism's resentment of male power, its subsequent casting of power itself as "evil", its emphasis on "collective identity" rather than "strong individuals", and its translation of "suffering into virtue"—all appear to align with the psycho-political force Nietzsche named *ressentiment*. As we will see in the second part of this dissertation, Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment* plays a more overt role in the writings of feminist political theorists concerned with feminism's relationship with the category 'victim'—these accounts also beckon a feminism that can be 'without resentment'. Let us register, then, that Nietzsche's concept of

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259 The phrase 'will to power' recurs throughout *Fire With Fire*, and is key to Wolf's argument that girlhood is marked by an untrammelled will to power which gradually is curtailed as girls mature and "learn to conceal and deny" this will (*Ibid.*, 277). Hence Wolf's power feminism is conceived of as a project to recapture women's wills to power. In relation to agonism, Wolf argues that victim feminism's emphasis upon collectivity and consensus, and its understanding of conflict and competition as masculine, inhibits the development of agonistic feminist discourse in which "evenly matched" and mutually respecting opponents vye for ascendancy (*Ibid.*, 222). This recalls Nietzsche's distinction, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, between the noble and base approaches to having an enemy (GOM: I, 10, 11). Finally, Wolf refers to the "decline of the masculine empire" as a "twilight of the gods" (*Fire With Fire*, 20). This is the title of one of Wagner's operas (Götterdämmerung) which Nietzsche plays on in naming one of his books *Twilight of the Idols* (Götzendämmerung).
ressentiment will require our further investigation given the role it is playing within this debate.

Another important difference between Wolf's account and those of the other critics is that they conceive of feminism's return to the goal of equality and the strategy of reform as a break with feminist radicalism. Wolf, by contrast, conceives of this return as radicalism's true beginning. Wolf performs an interesting manoeuvre here: feminist dissatisfaction with existing politico-economic arrangements is cast as an apolitical, conservative attitude leftover from a dead age, while power feminism's "use of realpolitik and capitalism" is cast as a timely course change toward the true sources of female empowerment: parliamentary representation and private sector entrepreneurship.262 "Nothing is more radical", she writes, "than going to the root of power".263

To argue for her position, Wolf characterises the politics of those who entertain "cynicism about the social contract" as pseudo-radical. Such cynicism, she argues, combines with protestation about the exclusion of "differently situated" groups to create a dead-end tactic of "reverse injustice".264 This in turn delivers a pseudo-radical strategy of "opting out, staying pure, and changing nothing."265 Arguing that American liberal democracy—not attempts to critique and counter its exclusionary, normative and pro-business dimensions—is the true seat of radicalism, she writes:

Sure, dead white men formulated the principles of representative democracy and the free press. But the flaws lie not in the ideals themselves, but in the fact that the founders' blindness, in structuring citizenship as white, male and propertied, and the self-interest of

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262Ibid., 336.
263Ibid., 336.
264Ibid., 125, 126.
265Ibid., 127.
those who hold power now, prevents the ideals from unfolding according to their own logic. If 'radicals' take these ideals lightly or turn their backs on them, they defeat themselves. But if we compel these values to open up and work fairly—the goal that is, rightly understood, that all multicultural and feminist movements seek—then there is no more 'radical' system imaginable than the one we have inherited ... [a] real radical does not stand in the margins, admiring her own purity. She is a warrior to bring outsider's views into the centre, asking, 'How can my actions spark change for the good in the real lives of as many people as possible?' A true radical is not content to tear down and turn away; these are the skills of the weak.  

Wolf is arguing that exclusion and marginalisation of “differently situated” groups from political participation and recognition is an abherent rather than endemic element of liberal democracy's universalist political culture. Hence she locates true radicalism as a project to separate and preserve liberalism's principle of universal inclusion from its heretofore erroneous manifestation. Her 'skills of the strong' consist in bringing the margins to the centre so as to compel liberalism's ideals—such as equality, meritocracy, and participation—to manifest in true, all-inclusive form and so to reach their "logical conclusion".

A great many critical points may be made in relation to this argument and the manner in which Wolf represents her adversaries. At minimum we may note that Wolf elides the fact that it is the logic of inclusion itself that gives rise to exclusivity as imperative since it necessarily creates a constitutive outside, and that her account skirts questions arising from the nexus of inclusion, pluralism and homogenisation, preferring to assume that the “differently situated” wish to cast off their impoverished particulars so as to enjoin liberalism’s preestablished norms. But let us reserve engagement with these matters until Chapter 4, where they arise in relation to Anna Yeatman’s account of ressentiment and modern emancipatory politics. For our

266Ibid., 126-127.
current purposes it suffices to note that Wolf’s recasting of true radicalism as a social democratic insider strategy guided by basic fealty to the politico-economic status quo prepares the way for her later argument about feminism and capitalism.

Aside from rescinding the link between femininity and ‘victim identity,’ the main task of Wolf’s proposed “third wave of power feminism” is to foster a new “psychology of power” among women as a group.267 For Wolf, such a psychology would return women to their native state of girlhood will to power: “We are at first unsocialised little power feminists, almost every squalling one of us”.268 Guided by the equation of money with power and a conception of economic self-reliance and individual self-interest as key elements of complete personhood and democratic citizenship, Wolf proposes to ameliorate the feminisation of poverty in the first and third worlds by calling an end to women’s longstanding aversion to money and replacing this aversion with entrepreneurial acumen and a willingness to exercise consumer power. Wolf argues that feminism’s anti-capitalist orientation reflects and has entrenched women’s aversion to money:

Feminism often seems more comfortable with the important tasks of pointing out economic discrimination against women, or with legislating for more money for women, than it is with the ‘masculine’, potent act of putting the means to generate profits in women’s own hands.269

In Wolf’s vision, increased female entrepreneurship will perform an immanent revolution: the means of production will at long last be in the hands of a few women, as well as a few men.

267Ibid., 323.
268Ibid., 275.
269Ibid., 263.
Let me suggest at this point that, in retrospect, Wolf's argument may be understood as a feminist version of a Third Way or 'radical centre' political position since it echoes this position in a number of key respects—not the least of these being its recoding of social democratic postures as truly radical. As with proponents of the Third Way, Wolf's point of departure in assailing anti-capitalism is "the fall of communism in Eastern Europe".²⁷⁰ Given the collapse of Stalinism and, therefore, the triumph of capitalism, Wolf argues that left-leaning social democrats need to pursue a new path.²⁷¹ For proponents of the Third Way, this new path cuts between the state-centric social democracy of the old left, and the free market-centric neoliberalism of the new right (however as critics of the Third Way point out, in practice this approach tends to fully maintain rather than amend the neoliberal policy agenda).²⁷²

Wolf's pursuit of this path is evident in a number of respects, the first of these being her argument that while capitalism cannot be countered, it can be tamed:

Capitalism is innately exploitative. It does oppress the many for the benefit of the few; its excesses must be tempered by compassionate policies ... the progressive community serves its values better by engaging with capitalism to fund social change than it does by professing an aversion to it ...²⁷³

²⁷⁰Ibid., 263.
²⁷¹Ibid., 263.
²⁷³Ibid., 263. Emphasis in original.
Wolf does not explain how capitalism's "innately exploitative" character fits with her goal of equality. She writes that the impact of misogyny would be reduced "if women were no poorer than men" without mentioning, however, that women's "equal" wealth would of course be distributed unequally among women, as is already the case given the vast and growing gap between rich and poor within the advanced capitalist countries. Nor does Wolf indicate what policies are required to temper capitalism's "excesses". The obvious disparity between capitalism's system of exploitation and the liberal goal of equality is dealt with among proponents of the Third Way by shifting the focus from equality of outcome to equality of opportunity. This same kind of shift is evident in Wolf's account when she provides a range of tactics women might employ so as to increase their individual wealth, presenting this as more caring and progressive than the "condescending" attitude of anti-capitalist feminists.

In tune with her individualism-versus-collectivism theme, Wolf advises that women become confident enough to bargain for more money from their employers within the confines of individual employment contracts, dropping the role of unions and the effects of anti-union industrial relations policy—including increased employer prerogative—completely from her account. Following the logic of 'a hand up rather than a hand out,' Wolf advises that women's organisation host "economic empowerment zones" in which women learn the arts of personal finance and consumer activism, dropping from view the role publicly funded welfare can play in these times of high unemployment, declining security of employment, declining real wages, declining small-business viability, and declining private sector

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274 Ibid., 265.
276 Ibid., 265.
accountability. Wolf argues that victim feminist anti-capitalism is guided by a credo of “self-sacrifice”, and as such “fosters resentment of other’s recognition and pleasures.” But Wolf does not reckon with the extent to which this very credo of self-sacrifice would seem to underpin the culture of exploitation she regards as endemic to capitalism: a few shifts in a free trade zone, meat-packing factory or deep cleaning job might just be enough to foster the form of resentment to which she refers.

In making these points, I do not mean to contend that Wolf’s concept of power feminism is bereft of value. Wolf’s argument that women fear money and tend to undervalue their capacities, and that this represents a key “pillar of women’s oppression” that women should be encouraged to counter, is not only sound but tends to replicate the main themes of three decades worth of feminist debate about gender, work and political economy. My concern lies with the schema within which these arguments and remedies are articulated, this schema’s dependence upon a denigration and indeed caricature of feminist anti-capitalism, and the unconvincing claim that these arguments connect to the real world and to real lives in a way that anti-capitalism does not.

A further concern is the extent to which Wolf aligns anti-capitalism with a desire that women remain poor. Wolf claims that victim feminism has

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277Ibid., 264.
278Ibid., 149.
279Naomi Klein provides an account of working conditions in free trade zones, drawing particular attention to deskilling, deunionisation, long working hours and low minimum wage setting, in No Logo: taking aim at the brand bullies (New York: Picador, 2000). For an account of the working conditions prevailing within the ‘de-skilled’ meat-packing industry see Eric Schlosser’s chapter ‘The Most Dangerous Job’ in his book Fast Food Nation: what the all-American meal is doing to the world (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 169-192. Deep cleaning refers to the job of dismantling public toilet facilities so as to clean their components thoroughly.
impeded women's progress because it "sees money as contaminating", and moves to lend power feminism a monopoly on women's well-being: "Power feminism ... knows that poverty is not glamorous".281 This is the first of two transferences of blame for the feminisation of poverty in Wolf's account. The second inheres in her combination of a doctrine of individual responsibility on the one hand, and omission of the economic policies which have contributed powerfully to the feminisation of poverty on the other. If one goes to Fire With Fire asking 'Why are women poorer than men?', a partial and deceptive answer is delivered: because victim feminism has discouraged women from generating wealth and, relatedly, because women have not equipped themselves with an appropriate psychology of wealth. Wolf's use of psychology to address economic issues, while insightful at times, enjoins an all-too-familiar refrain that the source of an individual's unfreedom is to be traced within that individual rather than in the patterns of economic distribution and opportunity framing their particular situation, over which they are likely to have profoundly limited control. Wolf's emphasis upon a future of female empowerment and plenty most certainly is laudable. However her equation of empowerment with, as Anne-Marie Smith puts it, "any socio-economic gain that is achieved by any individual woman by any means necessary" would seem not so much to recognise, as though at long last, women's potentials to partake of worldly power, but rather to underestimate women's potentials to participate in changing the world's future power structures.282

To summarise, Wolf's contribution to the debate about feminism's relationship with the category 'victim' differs from those of the other critics in important respects, while at the same time echoing many of their salient

281Ibid., 149.
282Anne-Marie Smith, 'Feminist Activism and Presidential Politics,' 33.
features. Like the other critics, Wolf uses a dichotomy between a ‘bad’ victim feminism and a ‘good’ power feminism to argue that feminism return to the goal of equality and to an insider strategy, but Wolf adds the caveat that this would not represent a departure from radicalism, rather its true beginning. Where the other critics employ an unargued distinction between ideology and objective truth to discount feminist critiques of existing politico-economic arrangements and rhetorically establish their fealty to these arrangements, Wolf offers an explicit defence of her account’s political orientation—an orientation that, I have argued, may be regarded as a centre-radical or Third Way style of politics. Hence Wolf’s account, more than those of the other critics, may be read as a feminist version of an ‘end of history’ argument: the future, as Wolf envisions it, is one in which liberalism and capitalism will prevail indefinitely, extending their logic into the third world so as to expand the free world, and consumating the ideals of feminism by ensuring that women as a group and men as a group are suitably class-stratified so that they may share equally in the burdens of exploitation and, for the best psychologically equipped among them, the pleasures of wealth.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen that the accounts of Hoff Sommers, Roiphe, Denfeld and Wolf share three particular commonalities. The first of these is a central objection to what they regard as feminism’s representation of women as victims. This representation, they contend, is alienating, substantially untrue, and indeed harmful in the sense that it discourages women from assuming agency and responsibility, encouraging them instead to falsely identify as victims, where this in turn trivialises the plight of ‘real victims.’ The second commonality the accounts share is their joint alignment of feminist political radicalism (or as Wolf would have it, pseudo-radicalism) with victim-centred politics, and their joint association of liberal feminism and the
goal of equality with a move beyond victim-centred politics. The third commonality may be deduced from the second. It is their joint contention that feminism's relationship with the category ‘victim’ is a key determinant of the character and direction of feminist politics, meaning that for these accounts “the victim problem” is intimately tied to questions of political strategy. The way in which feminism envisages its subject—hapless victim or capable agent—is key to the mode of politicisation feminism will adopt and the interpretation of the world feminism will generate.

The main task of this chapter has been to reveal how the accounts go about establishing the second point of commonality, their joint construction of “the victim problem in current feminism” as a venue for a reassertion of liberal feminist edicts. We have seen that a number of lines of argument are employed across the accounts in the making of this construction. They include: situating the goal of equality as more worthy in being clean of misandrist equations of women's victimisation with their moral superiority; casting feminism's ‘original’ orientation toward equality as feminism's proper political orientation; portraying feminist political radicalism as unrepresentative of women's interests and general orientation toward equality; construing feminist political radicalism as undemocratic on account of its ‘ideological’, ‘authoritarian’ and intellectually dishonest character; portraying feminist political radicalism as either politically ineffectual or politically dangerous; and treating agency as a given, non-complex element of women's present liberation, an unshakeable fact that victim feminism's obsolete political imagination cannot digest. Many of these lines of argument depend upon providing highly schematic or simply incomplete renditions of

283Wolf, Fire With Fire, 148.
existing feminist debate, which is where the most salient tactic that these accounts employ comes in.

Above and beyond these lines of argument stand the accounts’ joint assumption that feminist politics is reducible to an either/or decision between valourising sexual difference or pursuing sexual equality, between adopting a radical or a reformist strategy. This assumption is forwarded through their shared tactic of representing the diverse and dynamic field of feminisms as reducible to a dichotomy between a ‘good’ reformist feminism which is cognisant of women’s present agency, and a ‘bad’ radical feminism which persists with a now obsolete understanding of women as victims. This tactic’s symptomatic tendency toward homogenisation works to elide important differences between the feminisms under consideration, and works also to redraw the very melodrama of good versus evil that these accounts cast as inimical to democratic politics. The tactic also gives rise to confusions when the accounts are read together as a single discourse. Taken together, these accounts present an unstable and indeed unconvincing portrait of feminist victim-centred politics as obscurantist yet simplistic, transformationist yet reformist, the predilection of a minority yet the fashion statement of a majority, unrepresentative and alienating yet broadly persuasive, anti-democratic yet politically successful within democracies, politically successful yet politically ineffectual, the fault of the old and the idiom of the young.284 It would seem that if feminism does have a ‘victim problem,’ these accounts either partially enlighten its parameters, or actually obscure them. So it is reasonable to conclude that these accounts deliver more questions than they do answers. What is the relationship between feminist politics and the category ‘victim’? Have feminists explicitly or implicitly conceived of women as non-agentic victims, as these accounts claim? And what of the

284 'Transformationist' is Hoff Sommers' term. *Who Stole Feminism?*, 65.
discourse of 'real victimisation' running through these accounts—is this not an alternative victim-centred politics rather than an alternative to it?
Victimhood and its (Dis)contents

The word “revenge” is said so quickly, it almost seems as if it could not contain more than one root concept and feeling ... as if all words were not pockets into which now this and now that has been put, and now so many things at once! Thus “revenge,” too, is now this and now that, and now something very composite.
—Friedrich Nietzsche.¹

Ironically, while the media and psychology books have increasingly pointed out that everyone wants to be a victim, victims have vehemently argued that they are not victims.
—Sharon Lamb.²

Introduction

The task of this chapter is to offer a critique of the popular feminist accounts of the ‘victim problem in feminism’ surveyed in Chapter 1. In general, the chapter’s discussion is designed to situate these accounts within a broader field of discourses on victimhood and victimisation so as to better examine the particular manner in which they treat the category ‘victim’ and represent, or perhaps misrepresent, feminism’s relationship with this category, most notably with regard to feminist politicisations of sexual violence.

In this chapter I am especially concerned to disrupt the alignment of ‘radicalism’ with victim-centred politics, and ‘liberalism’ with a movement beyond such politics, which we discerned in these accounts in Chapter 1. In this regard I present two lines of argument. Firstly, in taking on the first element of this alignment, I dispute the idea that feminists—most notably

¹ WS: 33; GOM: Appendix, WS, 33.
those identified as taking ‘radical’ approaches to the issue of sexual violence—have in fact uncritically adopted the word ‘victim’ as an appropriate signifier for ‘women’ in the first instance. Taking my cue from the popular feminist critics’ use of the term ‘victim’ to denote ‘non-agent,’ I explore the victim/agent dichotomy so as to reveal the variety of ways in which victims are construed, by feminists and others, as agents. In relation to the concept of victim precipitation, I show how a blurring of the victim/agent dichotomy can have the problematic ramification of victim-blame. But in turning to the criminological discourse of victimology, and then to feminist victim activist accounts of survivorship, I show how the agentic capacities of victims can be acknowledged and positively affirmed in a manner which avoids victim-blame. This survey of discourses of victimhood and victimisation reveals the polysemic character of the word ‘victim.’ As such it enables my argument that while the popular feminist critics may be correct in observing that ‘radical’ feminists have described women as ‘victims,’ they are incorrect in their assumption that, for such feminists, the word ‘victim’ simply denotes ‘non-agent.’

This first line of argument enables us in turn to make a significant observation regarding the way in which agency and empowerment are treated in the popular feminist accounts, particularly that of Naomi Wolf. Through our exploration of feminist victim activist discourses of survivorship, in which ‘victims’ are termed ‘survivors’ and are understood as active and agentic subjects, it becomes clear that Wolf’s vision of ‘power feminism’ is indebted to these discourses. Wolf’s (mis)representation of feminist victim activism erases its ethos of survivorship completely. But, in a finely crafted legerdemain, it reemerges in Wolf’s account as the apparently novel ethos of ‘power feminism.’
The second line of argument I pursue has to do with the second element of the above noted alignment: the idea that a return to liberal feminism’s political posture will enable a move beyond victim-centred politics. In relation to this idea, I am especially concerned to reveal the extent to which the popular feminist accounts are themselves steeped in the form of victim-centred politics they associate with ‘victim feminism.’ Recalling the mass media analysis of Herman and Chomsky in their book *Manufacturing Consent*, in particular their emphasis upon the dichotomy between ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ victims which still is widely evident in the popular media, I suggest that the popular feminist accounts have appropriated the tactics of victim-centred politics which they impugn, primarily through their construction of what I term ‘reverse victimologies.’ This term refers to the counter-sets of ‘victims’ of ‘victim feminism,’ arrays of ‘worthy’ victims set in contrast with the ‘unworthy’ victims feminism constructs and purports to represent, presented in the popular feminist accounts. This enables my argument that there is a very strong sense in which the category ‘victim’ also is operating as a centre of gravity for the popular feminist accounts, meaning that radicalism and victim-centred politics are not mutually dependent, and liberal feminism’s fealty to the politico-economic status quo does not in any necessary sense mark the move beyond victim-centred politics, and its attendant ‘politics of resentment,’ that these accounts beckon and purport to have made.

The chapter’s discussion also works to bring poststructuralist feminist perspectives on sexual violence into view. These perspectives, like the popular feminist accounts of ‘victim feminism,’ also express concerns regarding the inability of a simple victim/oppressor dichotomy to capture the

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relation of gender to power. I argue, however, that these perspectives offer ways of grappling with this issue without entertaining the reversals and legerdemains evident in the popular feminist accounts.

2.1 Victimhood and Polysemy

In a recent edition of one of New Zealand's weekly national newspapers, *The Sunday Star Times*, an article entitled 'The Rape Survivor Who Faced Fear to Fight Back' appeared. It told the story of a courageous South African woman, a journalist called Charlene Smith, who experienced rape and has since written a book about her experience, including the "battle against fear" which troubled her path to recovery. The book, *Proud of Me*, urges rape survivors to "stop their quivering" and offers the counsel that "the word victim is a term of abuse". In her book Smith documents her nightmarish confrontations, in the period after the rape, with a paralysing fear, an overwhelming sense of vulnerability and an incapacitating depression. But she also speaks of finding her strength, making the "choice to live", and realising that "he cannot imprison my mind. I have the power." Smith, who "has no time for excuses or self-pity", construes her recovery as a necessarily self-generated movement from being a "victim" to becoming a "survivor".

She explains to the columnist that "she hates the word victim" and that those who have experienced sexual violence ought to be referred to as "survivors". The columnist in turn describes Smith as an "active survivor" as opposed to a "passive" one as Smith is working to increase public

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5 Ibid., C5.

6 These quotes are from Smith's book, *Proud of Me* (London: Penguin, 2002), and are reprinted in the article, C5.

7 Ibid..

8 Ibid..

9 Ibid..
awareness of sexual violence and also has worked hard to pursue her rapist through the criminal justice system to the point of his conviction and imprisonment.\footnote{Ibid.}

In this article, Smith’s experience of sexual violence is narrativised in what is, in some significant respects, a conventionally feminist manner. Many of the staple themes of feminist victim activist discourse are present. For example, Smith’s book, along with her other activities tuned toward increasing public awareness of sexual violence, are spoken of in terms of “breaking the silence”.\footnote{Ibid., C10. As Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray describe, the “strategic metaphor of “breaking the silence”’ is “virtually ubiquitous” within feminist victim activism: “survivor demonstrations are called “speak outs,” the name of the largest national network of survivors of childhood sexual abuse is VOICES, and the metaphor figures prominently in book titles such as I Never Told Anyone, Voices in the Night, Speaking Out, Fighting Back, and No More Secrets.” Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray, “Survivor Discourse: transgression or recuperation?,” Signs Vol. 18, No. 2 (Winter 1993): 262, n.7.} Her determination to see her attacker convicted and imprisoned is rendered as the assertion of an inalienable and appropriately state-adjudicated right to bodily integrity. Most saliently, Smith rejects the term “victim” and embraces the term “survivor” so as to signal that her attacker may have impinged upon, but did not quash, the self-determined character of her being.

However, in the article these themes—breaking the silence, bodily integrity construed as right, and survivorship—are represented, firstly, as initiated by Smith herself and, secondly, as distinctly “postfeminist”.\footnote{Ibid.. It should be noted that I am not seeking to dispute Smith’s ‘ownership’ of the notion of survivorship, but rather to point out that this notion has a longstanding history within feminist work on sexual violence.} To buttress these representations, the columnist writes: “Smith’s outspoken, often unconventional views have riled many, including feminists who she says would ‘have us all blame men.”\footnote{Ibid.. No evidence of feminist criticism of Smith’s ideas is provided in the article.} On the whole, the effect of this is that ‘feminism’ is associated with the term ‘victim’ while the term ‘survivor’ is
employed to mark a move beyond feminist negativity. Moreover, when this is coupled with Smiths’ registration of ‘victim’ as “a term of abuse”, the association crafted here between ‘feminism’ and ‘victim’ suggests that the former can only compound the fruitless suffering characteristic of the latter.

One of the things I will be arguing in this chapter is that a similar manoeuvre to the one evident in this article—a manoeuvre which involves dissociating ‘feminism’ from a range of staple feminist edicts and, in turn, appropriating these edicts for a move beyond feminism or toward an alternative feminism—is at play in the popular feminist accounts examined in Chapter 1, and is especially evident in Wolf’s account with her construction of a dichotomy between ‘victim’ and ‘power’ feminism. That is, I will be arguing that the figurations of empowerment offered up as novel elements of a new ‘power feminism’ actually may be regarded as recycled and repackaged elements drawn from the very forms of feminism that Wolf and the other critics impugn. To cut a path into this argument, however, a set of questions about the word which is pivotal in all these matters—‘victim’—needs to be addressed.

One of the most surprising aspects of the accounts of ‘victim feminism’ is that they offer little or no reflection on the meaning of the word ‘victim.’ As against this, we must ask: What is a ‘victim’? What kind of subject does this word purport to describe? What kinds of concepts have informed attributions of meaning—feminist and otherwise—to this word? Does the meaning of this word in accounts of ‘victim feminism’ square with how this word has been understood by those identified as ‘victim feminists’? What is the power of this word such that it may be referred to as “a term of abuse”?

In the accounts of ‘victim feminism’ the word ‘victim’ is loaded with a particular meaning and set of connotations which do accurately reflect how this word often is employed in common usage, but which are nonetheless
made strange when the history of the word, including feminist intervention upon its meaning, is considered. In forming their arguments regarding feminism's having foisted victim identity upon women as a group, the critics invariably marry the word 'victim' with a range of adjectives which paint this figure as one who does not *act*. Victims are 'passive,' 'guileless,' 'paralysed,' 'innocent,' 'helpless,' 'violated,' 'pathetic,' 'fragile,' 'self-pitying,' 'pitiable,' 'fearful,' 'oppressed,' 'needy,' 'hapless,' 'hopeless' and so forth. Victimhood is rendered as a kind of stasis to which only one action, albeit one which merely ensures continued passivity, may be attributed: the deflection of responsibility, the outward direction of blame. But as we address the questions noted above and survey the kinds of meanings that the word 'victim' carries, we will find major constructions of victimhood which run contrary to these two central aspects of the 'victim' in popular feminist parlance—non-action and deflection of responsibility.

We will find, for example, that in traditional legal contexts, specifically those involving the adjudication of sexual violence, to qualify as a 'victim' one must have been anything but passive. One must, rather, have engaged in 'actively resistant' and 'properly agentic' behaviours. We also will find that in some quarters, namely those of feminist victim activism, qualifying as a 'victim' is thought to involve precisely the *inability* to deflect responsibility—that is, a persistent tendency toward self-blame. And we will encounter that complex set of circumstances in which those who have been victimised seek to overcome victim identity through recourse to the law—a gesture which entails moving beyond victim identity and toward a reclamation of agency only upon having victim status confirmed by a higher power. In short, and as against the image of an army of feminists encouraging the female population
to swap their existing garb for the easy\textsuperscript{14} suits of victimhood, we will encounter victim identity as a difficult, contradictory, vexed, relational and above all \textit{complicated} phenomenon.

In his discussion of the word "revenge" in \textit{The Wanderer and His Shadow}, Nietzsche makes an argument which is fruitful for our purposes here—not only because the word ‘victim’ often is associated with the desire for revenge. Pointing out that the concept “value” is a unity in name only, Nietzsche impugns the efforts of economists to locate “the original root concept of value” as though this would deliver the singularly true meaning of that word as against the distortions it has suffered since its inception.\textsuperscript{15} Reminiscent of his claim in \textit{On the Genealogy of Morals} that “only that which has no history is definable”, Nietzsche suggests that we embrace the polysemic or “composite” character of words, conceiving of them as “pockets into which now this and now that has been put, and now so many things at once”.\textsuperscript{16} Making this embrace for an analysis of “revenge”, Nietzsche goes on to distil two profoundly different meanings of this word, two profoundly different “types” of revenge: immediate, self-defensive counter-blow, and calculated revenge designed to exact compensation from a specific opponent, a revenge for which “\textit{time is needed}”.\textsuperscript{17}

Nietzsche’s approach to the word ‘revenge’ is, for two particular reasons, instructive for our dealings with the word ‘victim’ in this chapter. Firstly, following Nietzsche, we may think of this word as a pocket which carries many meanings and connotations. We will survey an array meanings and connotations this word carries in common usage, in the discourse of the

\textsuperscript{14}Denfeld notes that assuming victim identity is “far easier than taking responsibility for those aspects of our lives we can control.” \textit{The New Victorians}, 87.

\textsuperscript{15}WS: 33; GOM: Appendix, WS, 33.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.; GOM: II, 13.

\textsuperscript{17}WS: 33; GOM: Appendix, WS, 33. Emphasis in original.
victimiser-as-victim and the concept of victim precipitation, and in the arenas of criminological victimology and feminist victim activism. These meanings and connotations will then be compared with those attributed to this word in the accounts of 'victim feminism' specifically so that disjunctions between how feminists have conceived their relationship with the category 'victim,' and how this relationship is represented in accounts of 'victim feminism,' may be exposed.

Secondly, Nietzsche's approach is useful for this survey of meanings insofar as his distillation of two distinct sets of actions which travel under the same name—'revenge'—involves a dichotomy which, as we will see, also cleaves the distinction between two major kinds of 'victim' that we will encounter below. For Nietzsche, the first kind of revenge has an aura of innocence: it is an immediate and "almost ... involuntary reflex" propelled by an instinct for self-preservation. The second kind of revenge, however, bears no such aura as it is marked by calculation, deliberation and premeditation. The process of distinguishing between a 'victim' and a 'victimiser' tends in general to be informed by a dichotomy between passive innocence and calculated activity such that 'victim' is associated with innocent passivity while 'victimiser' has a monopoly on calculated action. However, as we will see, it is also the case that the word 'victim' itself houses this very dichotomy. It will become clear that what Martha Minow refers to as "victim talk"—by which she means public and counter-public discourses invested in offering and contending popular and officio-juridical designations of victimhood—is riven through with dichotomies between innocent victims and calculated victims, between 'real' and 'false' victims, 'blameless' and 'blameworthy' victims, 'deserving' and 'undeserving' victims, 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims.¹⁸

Victim talk tends to begin and end with the question 'Will the Real Victim please stand up?', and we will come to discern the prevalence of this attachment to Real Victimisation in the accounts of victim feminism. We also will discern that the main problem with this attachment is that it forecloses rather than opens investigation as to how victimhood itself is constructed and may be understood.

2.2 Victims and/as Agents

‘Victim’ is an unruly word. Its meanings and connotations, its capacity to invite scorn or sympathy, seems to depend on what category of victim is being addressed, on whether ‘victim’ is supposed to denote a kind of agency or an utter lack of agency, and on what reading of power relations the denotation is servicing. The etymology of the word ‘victim’—which, in the OED, is nestled aptly between the etymologies of ‘vicissitude’ and ‘victor’—gives a sense of how the meaning of this word has shifted since it initially appeared in the late fifteenth-century to name any living creature offered in sacrifice to a deity or supernatural force. This initial definition, which is still in circulation, was quite ‘amoral’ in the sense that this victim—more commonly beast or bird than human—does not connote deserving innocence, their experience of suffering is not foregrounded and, contestation of pagan ritual notwithstanding, this cast of victimisation stands at a great remove from conceptions of preventable or individually culpable criminal action. We must note too that this usage of ‘victim’ names a particular kind of death. To be a victim on this definition is to have had one’s life sacrificed: one becomes this victim only in death.

A layer of moral adjudication, along with attentiveness to the experience of suffering and an undoing of this necessary association of victimhood with physical death, had come into play by the mid seventeenth-century as the word is made to refer to any subject "reduced or destined to suffer under some oppressive or destructive agency" or who "perishes or suffers ill health from some enterprise or pursuit voluntarily undertaken." Here, the word finds broader reference and comes to contain a quite nuanced calculus of human action, relations and experience as it is made to encompass incidental and systemic victimisation attributable to the actions of an exterior agent, as well as unforseen misfortunes suffered as a result of one's 'voluntary' activities.

This later definition sees the word 'victim' lent a classificatory character, and at least three classes of 'victim' may be discerned under its auspice. The first two—victims of incidental or systemic victimisation—are set in a dichotomous relation with an exterior agent or 'cause' of victimisation, where this relation facilitates a direction of blame toward that agent. The victim status of the third class of victim is not quite so straightforward. This victim is, albeit not deliberately, self-made: they are the inadvertent author of their own victimisation. The slings and arrows of fortune as well as the limits of the concept of blame find reference here, but given the emphasis in this definition

20Ibid..
21My particular interest here lies with this definition's reflection and construction of human relations, but it must be noted that the "oppressive or destructive agency" referred to is not necessarily human: it may be a natural phenomenon such as a storm or a drought. It is worth noting further that this is consistent with a Nietzschean analysis to the extent that such an analysis would emphasise the imposition of a grammar of causation and intentionality upon the action of such phenomena, as in Nietzsche's complaint that the "popular mind"—structured by a language of cause and effect which separates doer from deed to yield a conception of subjective intentionality—will "separate the lightening from its flash and [take] the latter as an action, for the operation of a subject called lightening." GOM: I, 13. Emphasis in original.
22Although it should be noted that the term "victimisation," along with "victimiser" and "victimise," is first recorded much later, in 1890. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 2355.
on imposing a grammar of causation and, hence, a structure of blame upon the relations and events to which it refers, the possibility of self-blame and victim-blame do quietly attend this third class of victim.

This general definition and the dichotomous relation it sets up between ‘victim’ and ‘agent’—or, by the mid-nineteenth century, victim and “victimiser”—still formally hold sway in the contemporary vernacular, but have not of course been lent safe passage. In the following passages we will examine two salient interventions in the legal and criminological arenas designed to rework this dichotomy such that its distinction between a victimised subject who is ‘acted-upon’ and a victimising subject who ‘acts’ is lent lability and ambiguity. These two interventions—the discourse of the victimiser-as-victim and the concept of victim precipitation—lend complexity to this general definition of victimhood in calling its customary applications and apportionment of blame into question. However they are best thought of as surface interventions since they rework the victim/agent dichotomy by reversing its terms. They do not call into question the gesture of apportioning blame—rather than intervene upon this dichotomy’s logic of blame they maintain its categories and work to redistribute blame—nor do they interrogate the normative function of this dichotomy, which is to posit the self-determining individual as generic and ideal.

According to Martha Minow, the discourse of the victimiser-as-victim has been a penchant of criminal justice reformers for over two hundred years. Arguing that a staple feature of victim talk is “the classic example of the rejoinder to victimhood, which takes the form, ‘Don’t blame me; I’m a victim too’”, Minow notes that this discourse and the rejoinder it installs have been fuelled by the argument that “individual defendants—or defendants as a

23Minow, ‘Surviving Victim Talk,’ 1415.
group—violate legal rules because of their own histories of deprivation." Minow links this with the emergence of the insanity defence and, relatedly, we can add that in its contemporary form this argument finds its most common expression in the idea that practices of unlawful violence and abuse have a cyclical character such that child victims of violence and abuse are marked by a tendency to become adult perpetrators of them. Reminiscent of Nietzsche’s argument that state-sponsored dispensation of punishment inhibits “the development of the feeling of guilt” since a criminal will perceive the likeness between their deed and the punitive measures “practised in the service of justice”, Minow notes further that situating the victimiser as a victim also has extended to the idea that “criminal defendants suffer victimisation at the hand of the state”. Hence this discourse reworks the victim/victimiser dichotomy by recasting the victimiser as a victim in two ways: the victimiser’s own experience of victimisation in turn prompts their practice of victimisation, and secondly this practice in turn prompts their own victimisation, at the initiation of their accuser, by a punitive state. Here, the victimiser-agent emerges as a victimised non-agent, and the legitimacy of the justice system’s customary distribution of blame is challenged. But this challenge remains at the level of a surface intervention insofar as it consists of a redistribution of blame. In appropriating the system’s logic of blame the challenger protects this logic, as distinct from its customary application, from critique.

24 Ibid.
25 GOM II, 14; Minow, ‘Surviving Victim Talk,’ 1415. For a classic and oft-cited articulation of this argument see Robert Cover, ‘Violence and the Word,’ Yale Law Journal No. 95 (1986), 1601-1626. My reference to Nietzsche is not meant to align him with the discourse Minow refers to. While his comment in GOM is reminiscent of this discourse he nonetheless impugns those “in the habit of taking the side of criminals” for assuming “a sort of socialist pity [as] their most attractive guise.” BGE: On the Prejudices of Philosophers, 21.
The concept of victim precipitation is the mirror opposite of the discourse of the victimiser-as-victim in the sense that they perform the same kind of surface intervention but with opposite results with regard to the redistribution of blame. We saw with the third class of victim discerned above—the victim who unwittingly authors their own victimisation—that there is a sense in which this dichotomy might be made to construe one as both ‘victim’ and ‘agent’ such that the possibilities of self-blame or victim-blame arise. This figuration of the victim as the author of their own victimisation is accelerated somewhat with the criminological concept of victim precipitation which arose to some salience in the late 1950s. This concept interrupts the sense in which ‘victim’ may denote a pure instance of being ‘acted upon’ as it is centred on the possibility of contributory, precipitant, provocative, negligent, consenting, or indeed lack of non-consenting behaviour on the part of the victim, who may not therefore be understood as blameless.

Minow renders such attentiveness to the behaviour of the victim as another staple element of victim talk which, she argues, hosts a volatile struggle “over whether noting the fact that a victim could behave differently implies that the victim is to blame.” The concept of victim precipitation is by now a well-worn instrument of criminal defence, and in the legal arena it has operated rather like a filter for juridical vision as it provides further grounds on which classificatory distinctions between ‘law-worthy’ and ‘law-trivial’ victims may be produced. Apart from raising the ire of conservative law-and-order-driven factions in the victim’s rights movement—whose will is to have the law bend to the victim’s desire for justice through, for example,

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26This concept was first developed by Marvin Wolfgang in his work on homicide, Patterns of Criminal Homicide (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958).

27Minow, ‘Surviving Victim Talk,’ 1417.
longer jail terms and the reintroduction of capital punishment\textsuperscript{28}—the concept of victim precipitation has been of longstanding concern to feminists in its application for adjudicating cases involving sexual violence and abuse.\textsuperscript{29} The concerns feminists have raised about this concept are worthy of review for it is in cases of sexual violence and abuse that the concept of victim precipitation's reinscription of the victim as a blameworthy pseudo-victim finds its most complex and indeed contentious manifestation. Reviewing these concerns also suits our purposes since, as we saw in Chapter 1, they come as part of the very kind of feminist politicisation of sexual violence centrally at issue in the popular feminist accounts of 'victim feminism.'

\textbf{2.3 Sexual Violence and Victim Blame}

Feminist engagement with the concept of victim precipitation has come as part of a broader project to reform the law so as to reconstruct its hitherto narrow figuration of the 'law-worthy rape victim.' In the case of sexual violence, the concept of victim precipitation has a dual operation: it can work to indict the victim for behaviours and actions that they did perform, or for behaviours and actions that they failed to perform. Before elucidating this operation let us note that such spotlighting of the behaviour and actions of the victim has been a longstanding element of rape trials owing, firstly, to the role that 'non-consent' has played in the legal distinction between consensual sex and forcible rape and, secondly, to the longstanding legal equation of non-

\textsuperscript{28}For a critical account of the evolution of victims' rights legislation in the United States, specifically in relation to race, capital punishment, and the introduction of the 'victim impact statement' to the prosecution process, see Angela P. Harris, 'The Jurisprudence of Victimhood', \textit{Supreme Court Review} No. 77 (1991): 77-102.

\textsuperscript{29}Marvin Wolfgang's concept of victim precipitation (see Note 26) was adapted for analysis of sexual violence by Menachem Amir, \textit{Patterns in Forcible Rape} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). As Susan Estrich outlines, Amir argues that a victim may be regarded as precipitant where she "acted in a way that 'could be taken as an invitation to sexual relations'—agreed to drinks, rides, or dates or failed to react strongly enough to sexual suggestions and overtures." Susan Estrich, \textit{Real Rape: how the legal system victimises women who say no} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 25; Amir, \textit{Patterns in Forcible Rape}, 259.
consent with active resistance.\(^{30}\) Prior to feminist intervention the tradition has been that for an event to be legally described as 'rape,' for the event to be distinguished from 'consensual sex,' and for a complainant to sit comfortably within the law's figuration of the 'rape victim,' a victim must prove that they met the assailant's use of physical force with utmost resistance, and that their self-protective effort nonetheless was thwarted.\(^{31}\) That is, to qualify as a 'victim' in these circumstances one must have been able to render oneself as an agent whose agentic capacity was expressed as physical (and in some cases verbal) resistance and whose momentary deprivation of agency was physically enforced by the assailant. Hence, as Kristen Bumiller puts it, rape cases have tended to rely heavily for their adjudication on "the image of the rape victim as a reactive agent."\(^{32}\)

Bumiller, writing in the late 1980s, enjoins many other feminists in highlighting the main problem with this 'resistance requirement' and the manner in which it conducts adjudicatory attention. Arguing that traditional legal parameters work to blindspot the perspective of victims whose non-consent was not, for compelling reasons, actively demonstrated, she contends that "[w]omen who are sexually attacked are concerned with their survival, not with the demonstration of nonconsent."\(^{33}\) Bumiller's point is that the

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\(^{31}\)As Estrich notes, this is formally termed the 'resistance requirement', *Real Rape*, 31. The formal factors influencing the adjudication of rape cases do vary tremendously according to location, but it is the case that the resistance requirement has formed a common denominator between the American, English, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand legal systems.

\(^{32}\)Bumiller, 'Rape as a Legal Symbol,' 84.

law’s equation of agentic self-protection with physical and/or verbal resistance failed to recognise the sense in which, in some circumstances, acquiescence constituted not consent but a self-protective measure against greater harm. This equation also failed to take into account what Susan Brownmiller refers to as women’s “training” in acquiescent victimhood: that element of the broader culture which maintains a dissociation of femininity from aggressive self-assertion.34 Such self-assertion can represent an effective strategy for preventing rape, but the law’s elevation of it to a requirement set up what feminists regarded as an unfair distribution of responsibility for preventing rape.

Bumiller’s concerns about the resistance requirement reflect those of Susan Estrich’s book Real Rape where it is it argued that this requirement, coupled with the legal conception of force as coterminous with physical coercion, has worked to situate the phenomenon of “aggravated rape” as the benchmark for legal reckoning of serious, law-worthy rape.35 Such benchmarking in turn has situated cases of ‘simple’ or ‘technical’ rape as contrastingly ambiguous, suspect, less serious, and therefore less amenable to the processes of legal redress.36 Laura Hengehold elucidates this point:


34Brownmiller writes “Women are trained to be rape victims. To simply learn the word “rape” is to take instruction in the power relationship between males and females . . . [e]ven before we learn to read we have become indoctrinated into a victim mentality”, Against Our Will: men, women and rape (London: Pelican Books, 1986 [originally published 1975]), 309.

35As Estrich elucidates, ‘aggravated rape’ is defined as rape involving “extrinsic violence (guns, knives or beatings) or multiple assailants or no prior relationship between the victim and the defendant”, Real Rape, 4.

36As Estrich elucidates, ‘simple’ or ‘technical’ rape is defined as being characterised by “a single defendant who knew his victim and neither beat her nor threatened her with a weapon”, Real Rape, 4.
The easiest rapes to prosecute are those in which the event of sexual violence stands out as a clear anomaly from the victim's everyday life ...

Cases in which the victim was previously acquainted or socially involved with her attacker present the most difficult problems for prosecution, since rapes occurring in the context of a prior relationship are often treated as "private" (not amenable to public adjudication), less serious or frightening, or the result of contributory negligence on the victim's part.37

Bumiller observes that with the parameters of legal definition set in this way, "indictment of the victim" emerged as the best avenue for a defence team in a rape trial.38 This is where the concept of victim precipitation has found its primary point of purchase.

There is a cluster of classic examples of actions and behaviours which have been cast as 'precipitant' in cases of sexual violence. They include hitchhiking, allowing the assailant into one's home, wearing 'revealing' clothing, going out with or accepting drinks, food or gifts from the assailant, and having a prior relationship with the assailant. Drawing on Judith Butler's commentary on a rape trial in which the defence took a victim precipitation line, let us note that each entry on this list bears a trace of what she identifies as that "line of reasoning [wherein] the "sex" of a woman is claimed as that which establishes the responsibility for her own violation."39

Hitchhiking, answering the door to a stranger and wearing a short skirt would be robbed of significance in the absence of a conception of female sexuality as inevitably violable property where a certain code of public propriety has not

39Judith Butler, 'Contingent Foundations: feminism and the question of "postmodernism,\"' in Feminists Theorise the Political, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 18. The case Butler refers to is the New Bedford, MA gang rape case which received a great deal of media attention and later formed the basis for the film The Accused. The case is officially known as Commonwealth Vs. Rapozo, Cordeiro, Silva and Viera (Massachusetts Supreme Court, March 17, 1984).
been pursued by the ‘owner’ of that property. We will encounter a new entry on this list of ‘precipitative’ behaviours shortly, but for now let us note that counterpoised to this cluster of classic examples is what is by now an equally classic line of feminist criticism, a succinct articulation of which can be found in Susan Brownmiller’s book Against Our Will.

Brownmiller’s primary objection to the concept of victim precipitation is that “it rests in the final analysis on a set of arbitrary standards”. Brownmiller’s point is that the principles which underpin the nomination of certain behaviours as precipitative inevitably will reflect particular kinds of values regarding female sexual availability and the nature of ‘normal’ heterosexual sex. Offering her own interpretation of ‘precipitative’ behaviours as “insufficiently wary” rather than as precipitative, Brownmiller points out that these same behaviours may indeed be interpreted by a “rape-minded man” as “tantamount to an open invitation.” Hence, where the law is amenable to the nomination of such behaviours as precipitative, it actually is ceding neutrality so as to ratify the latter perspective and sanction the values regarding female sexuality which underpin it.

At first glance the concept of victim precipitation does promise to lend visibility to the kinds of complexities that the victim/victimiser dichotomy stubbornly elides. However this concept does not disturb the role of this dichotomy in legal settings: the apportionment of blame. As Brownmiller suggests, in the context of the rape trial—where interest in the credibility of the victim’s perspective tends to be especially acute and her authority hard-won—this concept has tended to simply reaffirm an existing social reflex of victim-blame and an existing tendency to greet rape victims with mean-spirited suspicion of duplicity, as well as to preempt open interpretation of a

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40Brownmiller, Against Our Will, 353.
41Ibid., 354.
victim’s behaviour in a pre-rape situation and to preserve precisely the narrow figuration of the law-worthy rape victim that feminist interventions have sought to broaden and revise.42

As Laura Hengehold has commented, given the level of scrutiny imposed upon the behaviour and actions of rape victims—not only at the time of the rape but also in court—it is little wonder that rape trials often are referred to as ‘second rapes,’ as sites of a second-order victimisation.43 The defining gesture of the rape trial is that which oversees the complainant seek to align herself with the legally prescribed ideal victim while distancing herself from its counter-image: the pseudo-victim who perpetrates a victimisation of her own in having brought unconvincing accusations to court.44 Bumiller gives some sense of how this alignment can play out in the courtroom in her study of the rape case to which Butler refers above, and which was made famous after it formed the basis of the film *The Accused*:

As she testified in a calm monotone, she tried to present herself in society’s image of an innocent victim rather than revealing weakness and anger. Adopting the pose of the innocent victim required her to show that her actions conformed to what is expected of a person of good character: consistency, sobriety, and responsibility.45

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43Hengehold, ‘Remapping the Event,’ 198.

44It is worth noting that one of the reasons why ‘simple’ or ‘technical’ rapes are less likely to go to trial is that they may be received as an attempt by the accuser to exact ‘private revenge’ from the accused, where this would contravene the role of the law to provide an orderly alternative to ‘wild justice.’

45Bumiller, ‘Fallen Angels,’ 133.
Here, victim identity is lent a convoluted character as the second order victimisation often mentioned in feminist work on sexual violence consists of the very process through which the rape victim seeks to be recognised as such. For our purposes, and as against the popular conception of the victim as a passive non-agent, what is striking about this gesture of alignment is that it involves not a disavowal of agency but rather identification with a particular prescription of agency. Both the resistance requirement and the concept of victim precipitation construct the victim as an agent with a capacity for a certain form of self-protection, self-determination, self-control and personal responsibility. Where these particular agentic capacities evidently have been exercised—yet ultimately thwarted—the victim qualifies as a victim; where they have not, the victim appears as a blameworthy pseudo-victim, one who in some way ‘asked for it’ and so may be regarded as having actively visited the passivity of victimisation upon themselves. Hence we have here not just a distinction between an ideal victim and a pseudo-victim, but a good agent and a bad agent.

A recent development in the deployment of the concept of victim precipitation adds a further twist to these calculations of victimhood, agency, passivity and blame. When lent a pathological dimension this concept can function to reinscribe the victim as a type of agent who precisely can not act agentially, as in the psychologistic portrait of the accuser who suffers a ‘victim personality’ and of the ‘battered woman’ whose ‘learned helplessness’ ‘allows’ sustained battery.46 Here, the victim is registered as a victim of a

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46 For an account of how the concept of “learned helplessness,” as articulated in theorisations of Battered Women’s Syndrome, can function as an argument for victim precipitation in spousal violence defence cases see Neville Robertson and Ruth Busch, ‘The Dynamics of Spousal Violence: paradigms and priorities,’ in Psychology and Family Law: a New Zealand perspective, eds. M. E. Pipe and Fred Seymour (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1998), 51-54. See also Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray’s discussion of the notion of the “victim personality” as steeped in the language of victim-blame, ‘Survivor Discourse,’ 262, n.7.
pathology—in this case the pathology appears as the ‘agent’—but this pathology is one which in some way ‘solicits’ victimisation by another. That other may thereby be relieved of some blame for having acted upon an ‘invitation’ to victimise, while the victim is set up for a therapeutic encounter with their ‘true assailant’—themselves. This example exhibits the labour of the concept of victim precipitation with particular clarity. To reverse the victim/agent dichotomy’s customary distribution of blame, the concept of victim precipitation reproduces this dichotomy as a sub-individual economy such that we may speak of a self-assailing subject, a subject whose measure of blame is more readily calculable and whose inter- and intra-subjective relations are, therefore, law-ready.47

Let us register at this point that our encounter with the concept of victim precipitation links directly back to the popular press accounts of victim feminism. Arguably, where these accounts advocate a return to traditional conceptions of ‘real rape’ so that the law-trivial complaints of pseudo-victims may be jettisoned—as is the case with the accounts of Denfeld, Hoff Sommers and Roiphe rather than Wolf—they behave rather like the concept of victim precipitation and, like that concept, channel the force of victim-blame to great effect.48 This is perhaps most evident in Roiphe’s account given her argument that blame for women’s sexual victimisation be transferred from a system of male dominance to feminist agitation against such a system. Recall Roiphe’s claim that women assume victim identity as a ruse so that they might benefit from the kudos it provides. With this claim,

47It should be noted that this logic is non-partisan to the extent that it will apply equally where legal amenability to Battered Women’s Syndrome (BWS) works in a female defendant’s favour. Where BWS is cited to defend a woman who has killed her spouse against the charge of murder—the original circumstances of legal amenability to BWS—it is her spouse who is most likely to appear as the self-assailing, pseudo-victim.
48Wolf’s account acknowledges the problem of victim-blame (Fire With Fire, 192-193) but, as we will see at a later point in this chapter, this problem can not be said to be integrated into her account of victimisation. I will be arguing that her ‘power feminist’ emphasis upon ‘taking responsibility’ redraws the gesture of victim-blame.
Roiphe uses the word 'victim' to refer to the very kind of 'bad agent' we have traced in the concept of victim precipitation: in this case, a fully-fledged, calculating and duplicitous agent engaged in a cynical feminist performance.

As we saw in Chapter 1, in Roiphe's telling feminism first implants the idea that women are victimised, then encourages women to play out the role of the victim. This delivers the strange formulation that women who believe they have experienced sexual violence or harassment are to be regarded as self-assailing subjects who are 'performing feminism':

At the most uncharted moments in our lives we reach instinctively for the stock plots available to our generation, as trashy and cliched as they may be ... now, if you're a woman, there's another role readily available: that of the sensitive female, pinched, leered at, assaulted daily by sexual advances, encroached upon, kept down, bruised by harsh reality. Among other things, feminism has given us this.49

In suggesting that sexual violence and harassment are 'stock plots' scripted by feminism rather than social realities that feminists agitate against, Roiphe confuses the valid argument that feminists can not claim to be dispossessed of discursive power as they engage such agitation with the anachronistic view that women who claim to have experienced sexual violence are blameworthy, untrustworthy and duplicitous. The logic and logical outcome of the concept of victim precipitation are thereby redrawn.

That these accounts exhibit a tendency to behave like the concept of victim precipitation explains why, in their dealings with feminist work on sexual violence, they contain little or no mention of the problem of victim-blame: that is, little or no mention of the main problem feminists were pressing against as they sought to make the law more hospitable to women who believe they have experienced sexual violence. In the context of these

49Roiphe, The Morning After, 172. My emphasis.
accounts, an admission that compelling reasons lay behind feminist efforts to make it more possible for more women to legally be regarded as ‘victims’ would work against their representation of such efforts as unwholesomely resentful celebrations of victimhood. Moreover, withholding such admission enables a blindspotting of the fact that in their efforts feminists were attempting to shore up a viable line of *agentic action* for women, in the form of legal redress.\(^{50}\)

We turn now to two further conceptions of victimhood, both of which may be regarded as meditations on the question raised by the matter we have been discussing: How can one speak of the agentic capacities of the victim—in Minow’s words, their capacity to “behave differently”—without blaming the victim?\(^{51}\) Criminological victimology and feminist victim activism share an interest in formulating a conception of victimhood which can lend visibility to the agentic capacities of victims, and which can avoid a connotation of permanent incapacity, without taking a slide into victim-blame. In addressing these, we will be able to illuminate the extent to which feminism’s relationship with the category ‘victim’ has in fact been one of careful negotiation rather than uncritical embrace. We turn first to victimology.

### 2.4 Within and Beyond Dualism: victimology

Of the four critics addressed in the previous chapter it is Hoff Sommers who adopts the term ‘victimology’ to describe the form of feminism she critiques.

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\(^{50}\)This point is indebted to Jenny Morgan. In her chapter ‘Sexual Harassment: where did it go in 1995?’ (in *Bodyjamming: sexual harassment, feminism and public life*, ed. Jemma Mead (Sydney: Random House, 1997), 101-115), Morgan suggests that pursuing redress upon the experience of sexual harassment or sexual violence should be regarded as a form of “agency” and “resistance”, rather than as a gesture which betrays a desire to wallow in victimhood. Morgan points out that in their responses to the Ormond College case (see Chapter 1, note 152) the Australian media in general and Helen Garner in particular failed to recognise “the agency the [Ormond College] women had in fact exercised” (Ibid., 114) and were instead intent upon registering the complainants as self-appointed victims.

\(^{51}\)Minow, ‘Surviving Victim Talk,’ 1417.
As we saw in that chapter, when Hoff Sommers refers to “resenter feminists” who play “the victimology game” she means to render their brand of feminism as one which focuses exclusively on, and which exaggerates, women’s status as passive victims, where such focus works to obscure women’s status as capable self-determining agents and indeed to discourage women from assuming such status. While respecting Hoff Sommer’s prerogative to load the term with her own particular meaning, let us note that ‘victimology’ in the criminological sense actually refers to a theoretical approach which is attuned precisely to a conception of the victim as an active subject.

Since its advent in the 1950s—and its development into the title of an expert discourse in the 1970s—the term ‘victimology’ has had a dual meaning in criminological settings. Firstly, a victimology is a list of the names of those victimised by one person or by a particular kind of crime; secondly, victimology names that approach to the study of criminality which trades exclusive focus on the perpetrator for a focus on the intersubjective dynamics of the criminal-victim relationship, a focus which encompasses the victim’s role in and perspective on the crime. As Anne McLeer notes, the word ‘victim’ in criminological settings generally denotes “recipient or object of criminal action”. Without challenging the distribution of culpability embedded in this definition, victimology seeks to overturn its rendering of the victim as a mere ‘passive object’ who has little to offer the investigative process. That is, victimology seeks to reinscribe victimhood as a subject position which, if recognised and examined as such, can yield significant information about the nature and ramifications of the crime and, therefore,

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52 Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, 79.
53 The two meanings of ‘victimology’ are related: part of the practice of victimology is to generate statistical data on crime victims, which in turn are referred to as ‘victimologies.’
the agency of its executor. Victimology's focus on the victim is not intended to overhaul conventional understandings of criminal responsibility, but rather to elaborate more nuanced geographies and demographies of crime in the interests of improved predictive and preventative measures and enhanced ratiocinative technique.

Anne McLeer's account of victimology is especially interesting for our purposes as it is directly concerned with feminism's relationship with the category 'victim.' McLeer argues that the particular manner in which victimologists conceive of victimhood is useful for feminist theorists primarily because it elaborates a method for recognising and examining the "role" a victim plays in their victimisation, and the ways in which a potential victim might resist or prevent victimisation, while managing to avoid a slide into victim-blame. Before we address the grammar of victimisation through which victimology attempts this, we should note that Martha Minow for one remains unconvinced by victimology's capacity to succeed where the concept of victim precipitation fails to avoid victim-blame. For Minow, victimology's side-stepping of victim-blame is really only achieved by fiat, and "in their very disclaimer, victimologists confess how close their work is to blaming victims themselves for failing to avoid situations in which they are victimised."55 McLeer, however, offers a subtle distinction between victimology and the concept of victim precipitation: while the former examines victim subjectivity with a view "to explain the agency of the criminal", the latter performs such examination so as to "deflect agency from the criminal".56

According to McLeer, victimology seeks to provide "a neutral and elucidative construction of victim subjectivity".57 This involves a manoeuvre

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55Minow, 'Victim Talk,' 1417.
56McLeer, 'Saving the Victim,' 43. My emphasis.
57Ibid., 44.
through which the victim/agent dichotomy is at once preserved—it still sets the terms of engagement—and reworked as its dualist identification of victimhood as a lack of agency is called into question. To forward this reworking, victimology offers a definition of the word ‘victim’ which is inherently unstable. In accord with the fact that the ‘role’ of victims in events of victimisation “varies from passive to quite active”, victimologists offer a definition of the word ‘victim’ wherein the capacity for action, resistance and prevention on the part of the victim is posited as variable, and the word is dislodged from any necessary tie with either pole of the active/passive dichotomy.58 The victim is not prohibited from agency by this definition, yet to retain the sense in which victimisation involves a deprivation of agency a third term is introduced into the equation, a term which captures the not-necessarily-passive and yet typically non-agentic character of victimisation: ‘subjectivity.’ Following victimologists, McLeer mainly reserves ‘agency’ to describe the perpetrator while employing the terms “active subjectivity” and “subjectivity” in referring to the victim.59 Adopting this language in the following passage, McLeer indicates that within the victimological framework the victim/agent dichotomy is both preserved and, in view of the complexity of victimisation, reworked:

Although the victim was the “done-to” (to borrow from the terminology of feminist film theory) ... she is not automatically presumed to lack subjectivity in this situation. The relationship between criminal and victim of a crime is posited as having a more complex configuration than that of subject-object, doer-done-to dualisms ... the term ‘victim’ in the language of victimology contains an understanding of an active subjectivity that does not imply the helplessness and lack of resistance implied by the term in other discourses.60

58Ibid., 42.
59Ibid., 51.
60Ibid., 42-3; 51.
McLeer's primary interest in victimology lies with its radical variant. In noting this aspect of her account our survey of meanings of the word 'victim' begins to come full circle in the sense that radical victimology, in moving beyond individual criminal circumstances to allow "institutions and classes to be considered within the existing parameters of victimology", encompasses the discourse of the victimiser-as-victim and is addressed to the victim of systemic (rather than 'incidental') victimisation.61

Drawing on the work of radical victimologist Lech Falandysz, McLeer notes that victimology in its radical variant "not only sees criminals as victims of the criminal justice system but uses a class analysis to critique the victimising effects of society's existing institutions."62 In radical victimology the categories elaborated by victimologists are writ large onto relations of power more generally. On this scale, agencies which may be regarded as involved in the exercise of domination, for example the state, the criminal justice system, or the prevailing religious creed, come to stand in for the criminal or perpetrator. Those subjects positioned under their auspice are identified as 'victims' in the victimological sense of 'active subject.' The interaction between and beyond these figures, the crime, is now writ large as oppression. Rendered as such, oppression now can be examined: the agency of the perpetrator may be read off the subjectivity of the victim such that the victim—their actions, reactions, identity and attributes—becomes the heuristic key to an interpretation of their presence within relations of power. Although, as we will see, McLeer demonstrates the usefulness of this framework by referring to intercultural feminist theorising, let us note that

61Ibid., 45.
her recommendation of this framework would carry considerable ramifications for the use of the term 'victim' in case of sexual violence.

If the case of sexual violence is read in accord with the radical victimological idea that the criminal justice system may be regarded as an agent of domination, the convicted rapist would have to appear in the categories ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator.’ In relation to the victim he would stand as the perpetrator, but in relation to the criminal justice system he would appear alongside the victim in the radical victimological category ‘victim.’ Both are subject to the agency of this system, its categories, assumptions, the expert discourses it houses, its individualising case-by-case protocol. For the radical victimologist, both would therefore provide information for an account of the agency of the justice system as it is brought to bear on the adjudication and penal management of sexual violence. Hence the kinds of violence recognisable as active within events of sexual violence would broaden to encompass factors such as the manners in which these events are discursively managed by the justice system, where prerogative positioning within public discourses of sexual violence is understood as part of the “agency” and “role” of that system.

Here, radical victimology can be made to open onto the kind of analysis of sexual violence that poststructuralist feminists have recently beckoned. Laura Hengehold beckons such an analysis when she tables the following set of questions:

*Where* does the injustice that characterises rape lie? What characterises its eventfulness? Does it take place between individual bodies or within the discourses that allow those bodies to be interpreted in certain ways and not in others? ... Does the law participate in the violence of rape when it treats a black or Hispanic victim as less credible than a white victim? ... *Is the violence practised*
This kind of analysis asks for a feminist perspective on sexual violence which can address intersections of sexism and racism, in part by recognising the ensemble of potential victim/perpetrator relations that sexual violence may encompass. These would include the relationship between the convicted rapist and the prison system, the rape victim and the police force or media, the relation of rapist and raped to gender norms which see violence masculinised and vulnerability feminised, the relation of rapist and raped to racial norms which attach innocence to whiteness and perniciousness to blackness, and the role of the legislature in constituting, rather than merely transparently expressing, a living grammar of sexual violence. When we return to poststructuralist perspectives on sexual violence in the final stages of this chapter we will see that they, like the accounts of 'victim feminism,' ask for a feminism which can relax the woman-as-victim/man-as-victimiser configuration, but that unlike those accounts they do so in a manner which interrogates rather than employs the legitimacy of existing public discourses of sexual violence and the familiar turns of victim talk.

To argue for the usefulness of radical victimology's *modus operandi* for intercultural feminist theorising, McLeer employs as an example the (outlawed) Hindu practice of sati (the ritual burning of women upon their dead husband's funeral pyre). McLeer argues that conventional interpretations of

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63Hengehold, 'Remapping The Event,' 192. Second emphasis added.
65It is estimated that 25 per cent of young men in prison in New South Wales have been raped, in some cases on a daily basis. Australia's rate of incarceration is rising (currently at 150 persons incarcerated per 100,000) but is a long way from reaching the North American rate (700 persons incarcerated per 100,000). These figures are drawn from Greg Bearup's excellent piece 'The Jungle Inside,' *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 19, 2002: 'Good Weekend,' 20-24.
the victim of sati—including western feminist ones—have tended to employ a narrow conception of the victim as a non-subject for whom the capacity to resist is foreclosed. As a consequence, the victim of sati alternately has been represented as either “a victim of unthinking adherence to Hindi culture” or as “a pathetic victim of fanatics.”66 This use of the term ‘victim’ has worked to “void that subjectivity of agency” and to suggest a permanence and inevitability of incapacity, where these connotations appear as symptoms of an imperialistic attitude which confirms rather than interrogates the distance between indigenous women and their capacities to negotiate cultural tradition agentially. For McLeer, these are the very connotations of the word ‘victim’ that victimology overcomes so as to invite a new mode of interpretation, one which neither denies the victim subjectivity and agency nor blames the victim:

Placing the sati in the role of the victim of victimology, where she is assumed to have both role and function, allows us to go beyond the limiting questions of motivation. Victimology asks, who is the victim, what are her attributes and how do they influence the circumstances of the crime? In India there is no tradition of widowers burning themselves on their wives’ funeral pyres. In victimological terms, the sati is a victim because she is a woman living in a specific system of patriarchal oppression. Seeing her in this way opens up for discussion the question of who plays the role of the perpetrator in the case of sati.67

McLeer concludes that by refiguring, along radical victimological lines, the process of interpreting traditional cultural practices which involve violence

67Ibid., 51.
against women, feminists will be positioned to “reinstat[e] the idea of woman-as-victim” without voiding the agentic potential of victims and with a view to illuminate the culturally specific patterns of male domination to which they are subject and which they may resist. For our purposes, McLeer’s account of victimology offers two important and interrelated insights. Articulating these insights will enable us to answer two of the questions noted at the outset of this survey of meanings: What is the power of the word ‘victim’ such that it may be referred to as a “term of abuse”? and What is a victim?

As we have seen, one of McLeer’s motivations for locating an alternative language of victimhood is that use of the word ‘victim’ (in the non-victimological sense) to describe women who are subject to traditional practices involving violence against them may be regarded as an imperialist, patronising and injurious gesture, one which bespeaks a power relationship between the one who describes the ‘victim’ and the one who is described as a ‘victim.’ In McLeer’s terms, this gesture works to “void that subjectivity of agency”. That is, unreflective use of the word ‘victim’ can itself perform a second-order victimisation. First, in being victimised, one is separated from what one can do; second, as one’s ‘victim-status’ is registered by another, one’s separation from one’s capacities becomes what one is, what one is called, what one is identified with. The word ‘victim,’ then, can work to (re)perform what it purports to describe and as such can take on the character of a performative utterance. Hence Charlene Smith’s ‘hatred’ of the victim label: she disappears beneath its testimony to the lasting success of her assailant, and it fails to identify—and as such threatens—her successful efforts toward recovery. For our purposes this first insight raises the question as to whether feminist use of the word ‘victim’ in the sphere of sexual violence has in fact been unreflectively complicit with this performative dimension of the word. This question may be addressed in relation to the second insight to be gleaned from McLeer.
The second insight McLeer offers is simply that when one uses the word 'victim'—or the notion of 'woman-as-victim'—one need not necessarily be referring to a subject for whom the capacity to exercise agency is foreclosed. That is, for McLeer, it is possible to use this word in an actively reflexive manner such that its performative dimension, as outlined above, is curtailed. This much is evident from McLeer's elucidation of victimology's attempts to construe the victim as an active subject and to bear witness to their potential to resist victimisation. Much of the force of the popular feminist accounts of victim feminism is drawn from the idea that when feminists use the word 'victim' they do indeed mean to identify women as devoid of agency. They argue that this identification is both damaging and substantially untrue. Then, as Pamela Haag describes, they move to counter this identification by identifying women instead as "John-Wayne-like individuals, fully self-determining nonvictims." But is it the case that feminist dealings with the notion of woman-as-victim—particularly in the case of sexual violence—have in fact centrally involved identification of women as utterly powerless in the first instance? For Haag, the slide that the popular press critics make from "the victim" to "the individual" is problematic because this pair of figures, "insofar as they require full abjection or full self-determination, respectively, are both distortive models of subjectivity and social roles." However, Haag agrees with the popular press critics that feminists concerned with sexual violence have indeed regarded women as utterly powerless in the first instance: "The feminists of identity politics ... stylise the victim, exaggerating her vulnerabilities and indignities to enshrine her as a

68 In terms of the 'damaging' character of this identification, Denfeld noted, for example, that it is as a form of "assault" which does women "great harm". The New Victorians, 77; 89.


70 Ibid..
singly damaged subject who deserves cultural and legal redress."71 I would argue, however, that feminist use of the word ‘victim’ in the sphere of sexual violence has been a good deal more reflective, and more cognisant of the subjective and social distortion Haag mentions above, than either she or the popular press critics suggest.

As we have seen, victim talk certainly is set up for the popular feminist critics to argue for this transition from ‘the victim’ to ‘the individual’ as the generic subject of feminism. Excepting its original definition and that attributed to it by victimologists, the word ‘victim’ is generally taken to refer to one who is momentarily or repeatedly (systemically) separated from what they can do—or, more specifically, separated from their capacity to be self-determining.72 This conception of victimhood assumes the presence of an exterior or, in the case of victim precipitation, an interior agent who forces the separation, and its normative function assumes the existence of an anterior and potentially posterior subject who was not and will not be separated from what they can do: an agentic, self-determining individual whose action, will and circumstance are, in normal conditions, in agreement.

For the critics of victim feminism, whose dealings with the word ‘victim’ do not extend beyond this general definition, victimisation—taken to mean a complete deprivation of the capacity for self-determination—is to be regarded as an exceptional rather than an endemic circumstance in liberal democratic settings. From within this understanding of victimhood, feminist dealings with

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71Ibid.

the category 'victim' will indeed appear as exaggerated negations of women's capacities. I want to argue, however, that feminist usage of the word 'victim' actually has had more in common with the victimological meaning of that term, and that the popular press critics have had to misrepresent feminist dealings with the category 'victim' so as to lend ground to their corrective counter-image of women as 'John Wayne-like individuals.' Let me illustrate this point with the first of several examples of such misrepresentation to be offered in this chapter.

We noted earlier that the word ‘victimology’ performs a different labour in Hoff Sommer's account to that which it performs among criminologists. For Hoff Sommers, this term describes a relentless feminist practice of delineating female powerlessness and incapacitation. Among other salient examples of such a practice that Hoff Sommers employs is Sandra Bartky's article 'Towards a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness.' The following quotation is drawn from Bartky's piece: italicised is the only portion of the article quoted in Hoff Sommers' book:

_Feminist consciousness is a consciousness of victimisation ... to come to see oneself as a victim, to have such an altered perception of oneself and of one's society is not to see things in the same old way while merely judging them differently ... [t]he consciousness of victimisation is a divided consciousness. To see myself as a victim is to know that I have already sustained injury, that I live exposed to injury, that I have been at worst humiliated, at best diminished in my being. But at the same time, feminist consciousness is a joyous consciousness of one's own power, of the possibility of unprecedented personal growth and the release of energy long suppressed. Thus, feminist consciousness is both a consciousness of weakness and a consciousness of strength. But this division in the way we apprehend ourselves has a positive effect, for it leads to the search both for ways of overcoming those_
weaknesses in ourselves which support the system and for direct forms of struggle against the system itself.\textsuperscript{73}

Bartky envisages the subject of feminist consciousness as at once produced by and struggling against masculinist social norms, which designates this subject as neither pure victim nor pure individual. Her use of the category ‘victim’ is complex and does not accord with popular associations of this word with innocence, weakness, passivity and deflection of responsibility. This is because Bartky presents the realisation of victimisation as an opening onto a realisation of strength, and with racism and imperialism in mind goes on to warn against the realisation of victimisation operating to blindspot the extent to which one may be “implicated in the victimisation of others.”\textsuperscript{74} This victim, then, is both \textit{non-innocent and strong.}

Hoff Sommers may be correct in objecting to the prerogative positioning Bartky \textit{initially} gives to the ‘consciousness of victimisation,’ and in any case her own political world view is bound to stand in basic disagreement with Bartky’s idea that there is actually a ‘system’ of male dominance—as opposed to a limited set of gendered inequalities—which feminism must oppose. Nonetheless it is clear that in order to locate Bartky as emblematic and symptomatic of a broad feminist tendency to identify women as non-agents, Hoff Sommers has had to \textit{omit} Bartky’s clear articulation of the consciousness of victimisation as standing in productive tension with a “consciousness of strength”, the latter being replete with connotations of power, agency, positivity, creative self-making and responsibility. As we will


\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., 16. The tendency for realisation of victimisation to blindspot implication in racism is identified and deftly critiqued by bell hooks in her piece ‘Sisterhood: political solidarity between women,’ \textit{Feminist Theory: from margin to centre} (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 43-66.
see, this form of strategic omission runs through the accounts of victim feminism, and is most potently evident in their general omission of the feminist ethic of survivorship in their representations of feminist victim activism *qua* 'victim feminism.'

### 2.5 Being a Victim, Becoming a Survivor: feminist victim activism

In the previous section I argued that we have good reason to rethink the idea, forwarded in the popular feminist accounts, that feminism is marked by uncritical adoption of the category 'victim' to describe 'women.' Further reason for this argument will be found in this section as we explore the ethic of survivorship within feminist victim activism centred on the issue of sexual violence. This arena of activism is marked by politicised and therapeutically-oriented interventions upon popular and legal languages of victimhood. Hence our task to discern what 'victim' denotes in this arena is relatively straightforward: the word is charged with a definite set of meanings and connotations, as is the word often put in its place to describe those who have experienced sexual violence, 'survivor.' That said, this arena of activism also is marked by an ethos of self-definition. Like victimologists, feminist victim activist dealings with victimhood are concerned not just with the 'moment' of victimisation but with the aftermath of, or process of recovery from, victimisation.

The victim activist emphasis on self-definition comes as part of the idea that victimisation involves a loss of control over one's fate and identity. Concentrating on self-definition, then, is designed to restore a sense of self-control. This in turn represents a strategy for displacing the historically prerogative positioning of the male expert (psychologist, psychiatrist,
psychoanalyst) in the therapeutic encounter such that analysands may become “theorist[s] of their own experience.”75 Here we uncover one of the characteristic tensions of feminist victim activism. On the one hand, its general ethos and attendant literature offers a fairly definite taxonomy of what might constitute the meanings and identities of ‘victim’ and ‘survivor,’ as well as what one’s passage from the former to the latter might look like.76 Yet this form of activism is, on the other hand, committed to self-definition, meaning that the potentially normative and prescriptive character of its taxonomy—its role in ‘conducting’ recovery—must permanently be subject to revision and contestation.

In view of this tension, our best guide through this arena of activism is the research of Dawn McCaffrey.77 McCaffrey’s in-depth interviews with women who have experienced sexual violence, have used feminist victim activist support services and who have, in some cases, become activists themselves, offers insight into their various processes of negotiation with the two key terms in this arena, ‘victim’ and ‘survivor.’ Let us note from the outset that none of the women in McCaffrey’s sample “wished to be labelled a victim”.78 Contrary to the argument shared among the popular press critics that this realm of activism “urges women to identify with powerlessness”, those taking recourse to, and working within, this realm tend, rather, to disidentify with the word ‘victim,’ the powerlessness it connotes and the pity it may elicit.

75 Alcoff & Gray, ‘Survivor Discourse,’ 283.
76 The key text here is Liz Kelly, Surviving Sexual Violence (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). We will see, however, that Kelly’s recent work argues for a move beyond the victim/survivor dichotomy.
78 Ibid., 272.
McCaffrey's main finding is that this pair of terms, 'victim' and 'survivor,' have two distinct sets of meanings among the women interviewed, and in this arena of activism more generally. The first set of meanings recalls the original definition of the term 'victim.' For some, this word simply denotes the dead: sufferers of fatal assault or abuse. Hence the original equation of victimhood with death is echoed here (this is also the sense in which this word is used in Holocaust vernacular). In accord with this understanding of what a 'victim' is, a 'survivor' is simply to be regarded as one who literally survives assault or abuse. As McCaffrey describes, this "defacto" conceptualisation of survivorship "ascribes that status to any woman who has experienced sexual violence and is alive to talk about it".79 It also accords certain kinds of inherent qualities to such women for having lived through assault or abuse, including strength, skill and perseverance.80 Recalling that the popular feminist accounts of victim feminism surveyed in Chapter 1 are replete with references to this realm of activism as a key site for the representation of women as powerless victims, let us note that in accord with this first set of meanings the only 'victims' in view are in the hereafter, while the 'survivors' are not understood as powerless but rather as inherently powerful. As McCaffrey notes, the women in her sample "strive to minimise feelings of weakness and vulnerability by emphasising strength and agency in the definition of survivorship."81 This is true also of the second set of meanings attached to the terms 'victim' and 'survivor.'

The second set of meanings is most interesting for our purposes since it will allow us to broach an element of victimhood which has gone largely unmentioned and unexamined not just in the popular press accounts of victim

79Ibid., 271.
80Ibid., 271-272.
81Ibid., 273.
feminism, but in victim talk more generally. That is, self-blame. In this second set of meanings, ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ refer to forms of self-identity and are lent meaning through reference to emotional states, mental attitudes and behavioural practices. ‘Victim identity’ is rendered as indigenous to the experience of victimisation in being cast as a kind of generic starting point, stage or phase. It is posited that the task of the victim is to survive not just victimisation, but the ‘victim identity’ which tends to follow in its wake. This identity is understood to have very particular components: it is associated with those mired in an initial stage wherein they “blame themselves,” “carry shame” and “continue to let others victimise them.” That is, within this second set of meanings, self-blame, shame and acquiescence are regarded as the typical components of victim identity, and as the typical immediate effects of victimisation. Here, ‘victim’ is made to refer to one whose experience of victimisation threatens to become a central and abiding aspect of their self-identity and social being. Self-blame is situated as that which lends victim identity a self-perpetuating character since the logic of self-blame (‘I deserved it’) can set the scene for repeated victimisation (‘I deserve more’).

In feminist victim activist accounts, self-blame (or the ‘internalisation of blame’ as it is also called) is not represented so much as a conscious choice or reasoned adjudication. Rather it is understood either as an effect of an abuser’s manipulative tactics, a reflection of a wider cultural tendency toward victim-blame—in both cases it emerges as an especially cruel technology of victimisation—or indeed as an effort on the part of the victim to retrospectively regain some measure of control over their situation (the logic

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82 McCaffrey, ‘Victim Feminism/Victim Activism,’ 272.
here being that if one caused one’s victimisation one did not lose command over oneself). This latter explanation situates self-blame as an attempt to shore up an impression of agency in the moment of, and so as to deny the actuality of, victimisation. McCaffrey’s findings reflect those of victim support workers more generally: victims of sexual violence are, at least initially, much more likely to direct blame internally than externally.84

This stands in stark contrast to how the ‘victim’ is understood in the popular feminist accounts, namely as a figure marked by a reflex to deflect responsibility and a tendency to entertain a mode of perpetual accusation. For the popular feminist critics, victim identity is characterised by deflection of responsibility, which ensures continued passivity. For feminist victim activists, however, victim identity is characterised by self-blame, which ensures continued passivity. This raises the question as to whether it is survivorship, the feminist victim activist alternative to victim identity, which hosts the call to deflect responsibility through the making of accusations that the popular feminist critics describe. We will find, however, that although the ethos of survivorship is attuned to reversing self-blame such that appropriate accusation (as distinct from a generally accusatory attitude) may be made, it also institutes a gesture much called for among the popular press critics, namely that of ‘taking responsibility’ for one’s situation out of cognisance of one’s potential or present capacities.

We saw that within the first set of meanings survivorship is accorded a 'de facto' status since it refers to one who literally survives sexual violence. Within the second set of meanings, however, survivorship is regarded as an 'earned status' since its achievement involves certain existential manoeuvres attuned to overcoming the mire of victim identity. Whereas victim identity is understood as indigenous to the experience of victimisation, survivorship is understood as an active intervention upon or interruption of the experience of victimisation and, in this, as a reclamation and exercise of agency. Noting that feminist victim activism is centrally concerned to "redefine what it means to be victimised by sexual violence" by making available alternative discursive constructions of such victimisation, McCaffrey observes that:

... survivor constructions seem designed to evoke respect or admiration. Survivor rhetorically establishes that one has been victimised, yet also implies that one should be recognised for overcoming the often debilitating effects of sexual victimisation. The women in this sample used the power of discourse to transform a stigmatised identity, victim, into a valorised self-definition, survivor. 85

This process of transformation is especially visible within the construction of survivorship as an earned status. According to McCaffrey's findings, survivor status is earned by its proponents through a process of "taking responsibility for ending dysfunctional patterns in their lives, desisting in self-blame, and focusing on emerging from a traumatic event alive." 86

Before returning to this combination of "taking responsibility" and "desisting in self-blame", let us register some further elements of this understanding of survivorship. McCaffrey notes further that "[u]nder the survivor-as-earned-status configuration, each woman decides for herself whether and when she becomes a survivor", citing as an example a woman

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85Ibid., 278-279.
86McCaffrey, 'Victim Feminism/Victim Activism,' 273.
who apprehends herself as having just “one foot in the survivor kind of realm.”87 Another common element of this conception of survivorship is politicisation. McCaffrey notes that survivorship or its pursuit often involves converting the experience of sexual violence into a “political tool” for movement against sexual violence.88 Such politicisation tends to entail a willingness to speak publicly about the experience of sexual violence, a practice regarded as “empowering” by women in the sample owing to the break it signals with the shame associated with victimisation as well as its subversive potential to disrupt what Alcoff and Gray have described as “the smooth flow of patriarchal social commerce.”89 Although the popular feminist critics argue that the public work of activists against sexual violence represents attention-seeking behaviour, glamorises victimisation, and sets up a competitive scenario which will reward those most victimised, McCaffrey’s findings suggest that such work—proceeding as it does at the risk of re-stigmatisation—is done not so much for personal gain but out of a commitment to raise public awareness about the nature and effects of sexual violence so as to “effect change in the larger social structure.”90

We must pause at this point to register that the combination of “taking responsibility” and “desisting in self-blame” is a curious aspect of this second conception of survivorship. Even as it may make sense experientially, it does appear to be something of a working contradiction. A survivor’s ability to transcend self-blame is understood to issue from two things: the ability to attribute guilt to the victimiser and so cease to blame oneself; and secondly a preparedness to ‘take responsibility’ for protecting oneself from further

87Ibid., 272.
88This can mean anything from volunteer work in rape crisis centres and participation in speak-outs against sexual violence through to policy work for the education system, police force or government. Ibid., 276.
89Ibid., 277; Alcoff and Gray, ‘Survivor Discourse,’ 286.
90McCaffrey, ‘Victim Feminism/Victim Activism,’ 276.
victimisation, most notably through employment of one’s newly realised or developed capacities to be resourceful, discerning, active, strong, courageous, skilful and resistant. ‘Taking responsibility’ is presented, then, as a vigorous form of empowerment, but by its own logic it also stands as a reinstallation of the possibility of self-blame. The women in McCaffrey’s sample conceive of ‘taking responsibility’ as the means by which one’s ‘allowance’ of further victimisation might be overcome, which in the context of this survey of meanings is starkly reminiscent of the language and logic of victim precipitation.91

Here again we encounter the difficulty associated with speaking of the agentic capacities of the victim without blaming the victim. ‘Self-blame’ and ‘taking responsibility’ generally are presented as diametrically opposed in the victim activist taxonomy of victim and survivor identity in order to retain the sense of achievement, progress and overcoming that a leap from victim to survivor must be made to promise. Nonetheless the two are kindred, conceptually at least, since both posit that ‘responsibility’ for potential future victimisation is not only on the heads the potential victimisers, but responsible survivors and acquiescent victims as well. This would explain why there is a debate among victim activists regarding the dichotomising of victim and survivor identities.

According to Liz Kelly, Sheila Burton and Linda Regan, positioning individuals as “either ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’ ... misrepresents both material and emotional reality” primarily because traits associated with both identities can be experienced simultaneously:

91For example, one interviewee notes that “You’re a victim if you ... blame yourself in any way, shape or form ... [because] the perpetrator is 100% wrong ... I've got one foot in the survivor kind of realm, where I'm not being abused, not opening myself up to any kind of ... abuse.” (my emphasis). As McCaffrey puts it, this “opening up” of the self is equal to “continu[ing] to let others victimise” that self. Ibid., 272. My emphasis.
Anyone who has worked on their own experiences, and/or with individuals who have experienced sexual violence knows that the two sets of understandings/feelings/responses/meanings [attached to the categories 'victim and 'survivor'] co-exist; that strong, courageous children and adults can simultaneously feel hurt and damaged. We also know that the balance between these shifts, and that not all of the issues which experiences of abuse raise emerge at the same time. There is no absolute resolution, since changes in life experience and over the life cycle produce new areas of difficulty.92

We may note here the similarity between these author's representation of the experience of victimisation and that presented in Bartky's account of feminist consciousness. Both tread a dualist terrain—weakness and strength, incapacitation and power, fear and courage—while at the same time pressing against dualism in resisting an unequivocal, unambiguous description of the experiential state with which they are concerned. Kelly, Burton and Regan argue that the dichotomising of 'victim' and 'survivor' identities, insofar as it involves rendering victimhood as wholly negative and survivorship wholly positive, works to reinforce rather than challenge the stigmatisation of victimhood.93 They point out that such dichotomisation has worked to deliver up an injunction which has found increasingly broad purchase among clinicians and within popular culture more generally: an injunction to "stop behaving like a victim".94 Like the injunction to 'take responsibility,' this injunction, they argue, works in turn to redraw self-blame and victim-blame.95

With feminist victim activist understandings of and debate about 'victim' and 'survivor' identities in view, we are now positioned to reflect critically upon the representation of this realm of activism in the accounts of victim

92Kelly, Burton and Regan, 'Beyond Victim or Survivor,' 94. My emphasis.
93Ibid., 92.
94Ibid.
95Ibid.
feminism surveyed in Chapter 1. We already have seen that the victim as the popular press critics construct her—a resentful figure who deflects responsibility, denies the agency she possesses and adopts an accusatory posture—is not obviously present in the realm registered by these critics as one of her primary domains, feminist victim activism.

This suggests two things. Firstly, it suggests that this realm has been misrepresented in popular feminist accounts of victim feminism. What remains to be discerned is the purpose that misrepresentation of this realm serves for the accounts of victim feminism, and the extent to which this misrepresentation may in fact be necessary to the logical integrity of these accounts. Secondly, it suggests that there are in fact some salient yet necessarily unavowed similarities between feminist victim activism and its popular feminist critics. Both express faith in a dichotomy which distinguishes the strong from the weak, both reject victim identity, and both offer an injunction to women to 'take responsibility' for their situations. In the following section, we will pursue these suggestions particularly in relation to Wolf's account, where the issues they refer to find stark manifestation.

2.6 Urging women to identify with powerlessness?

Let us recall that one of Wolf's central concerns in *Fire With Fire* is that “victim feminism ... urges women to identify with powerlessness” such that traditional dissociations of women from power are redrawn, and women are discouraged from “taking responsibility for the power they do possess.”96 So as to ensure that her impugnation of victim identity is not coterminous with the claim that women's sexual victimisation is not a serious issue for feminism, Wolf writes that “[t]here is nothing wrong with identifying one's victimisation. The act is critical. There is a lot wrong with moulding it into an

identity." Wolf distinguishes between ‘identifying one’s victimisation’ and ‘identifying as a victim’ so as to make the point that women who either experience or feel vulnerable to sexual violence or harassment will benefit if they refuse to allow fear, passivity and a sense of vulnerability to become dominant and abiding aspects of their identities as women.

This is consistent with other comments Wolf makes regarding the malaise of victim identity:

Victim psychology is bad for women ... [a] growing body of research about the development of the self is proving that defining oneself as a victim results in a ‘debilitating primary identification’: that is, a lousy self-image. A person who identifies chiefly as a victim will do less well than someone who sees herself chiefly as powerful and effective. If a woman sees herself as a victim she becomes less competent, less happy, and even more likely to be victimised.

We have seen that feminist accounts of victim and survivor identities may be placed within the ‘growing body of research’ Wolf refers to here. However this is not mentioned by Wolf, and I want to suggest this is because it would interfere with the dissociation her account sets up between feminist victim activism and female agency.

As against the process of identification she describes above, Wolf would have women adopt a ‘power feminist’ ethos whereby they might retain or gain cognisance of their strengths and capacities. It would appear, then, that the dichotomy which runs through Fire With Fire—‘victim feminism’ versus ‘power feminism’—bears a strong resemblance to the victim/survivor dichotomy of feminist victim activism. Wolf’s portrait of ‘power feminism’ has much in common with feminist victim activist understandings of survivorship insofar as both constructions seek to ontologise women as capable agents.

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97Ibid., 148.
98Ibid., 228.
who might transcend ‘victim identity.’ Why, then, is there no discussion of the victim/survivor dichotomy in Wolf’s account? What does Wolf have to say about feminist victim activist elaborations of female agency? To address these questions we must turn to Wolf’s “case study” of victim feminism.99

In seeking to provide an exemplary case study of victim feminism in action, Wolf offers an account of the internal climate of the rape crisis centre in which she worked as a volunteer over a two year period.100 The case study operates emblematically to describe the general political culture of feminist victim activism. It is a story of bad politics, bad air and bad decor, of a place suffering “the hangover of an obsolete femininity”—partly on account of a lingering attachment to consensus decision-making but primarily, it seems, because of a negative central focus upon weakness, trauma and pain:101

[I]t was not the traumas themselves that were sucking the oxygen out of the rooms, but the way in which we pursued the fight against them ... the shabbiness of the centre reinforced the ‘moral’ of the rape: you were made to feel like nothing by the crime; now come and try to recover in a place where we treat ourselves like nothing, too. Even worse than the decor was the political culture of the place ... since consensus involved hearing from everyone, our level of irritation with one another rose exponentially ... [t]he emotional culture of the place seemed to cling to pain in a way that made us ever more ineffectual ... in time, looking only at our weaknesses, and never at our strengths, wore us down ... [f]orbidden as we were to compete or to do battle in public, overt ways—through elections, or with conflicting points of view—our little group turned those repressed impulses inward and evolved a hierarchy of miserable saintliness.102

Survivorship is mentioned in Wolf’s case study only insofar as those using the centre’s services are referred to as “survivors”. In other words, any

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99Ibid., 164.
100Ibid., 164-169.
101Ibid., 169.
102Ibid., 165-169. Emphasis in original.
distinction that might exist between ‘victim feminism’ and ‘feminist victim activism’—given the latter’s investment in the elaboration of female agency under the rubric of survivorship—is obscured, leaving no impediment to the argument that this form of activism does indeed appropriately exemplify victim feminism.

This habit of using the term ‘survivor’ without avowing the ethos underpinning it is shared by Hoff Sommers and Roiphe (the term is simply omitted from Denfeld’s account), although these critics cloak the term with a tone of cynicism which is not evident in Wolf’s account. Careful not to impugn the survivors serviced by the centre, Wolf levels her criticisms at fellow volunteers whose victim feminist edicts, she suggests, brought about the centre’s eventual closure. She writes, “[i]t was not the survivors who drained us; their resilience was energising. It was the volunteers themselves whose culture of hopelessness was so different from the quality with which survivors brought themselves back into life.” Although this distinction between ‘volunteers’ and ‘survivors’ is deceptive in the sense that, as McCaffrey’s work shows, many women volunteering in this arena of activism are survivors themselves, Wolf renders her fellow volunteers as mired in victim identity, suggesting that this mire threatens rather than facilitates

103For example, drawing on articles from The Washington Post and The New York Times attuned to debunking the ‘myth’ of date rape, Hoff Sommers writes “On most campuses, date-rape groups hold meetings, marches, rallies. Victims are “survivors,” and their friends are “co-survivors” who also suffer and need counselling. At some rape awareness meetings, women who have not been raped are referred to as “potential survivors.” Their male classmates are “potential rapists.”” Who Stole Feminism?, 218. This is Hoff Sommers’ only mention of survivorship. The tone of cynicism I refer to is conveyed through the use of apostrophes (“survivors”). Hoff Sommers’ association of survivorship with suffering and the need for counselling enables her to blindspot its actual association with strength and agency. Roiphe’s cynicism is expressed slightly differently. She writes that survivor speak-outs prompt “rhapsodies of self-affirmation” through which it becomes “entirely acceptable to congratulate yourself for bravery . . . and to praise yourself for getting out of bed every morning and eating breakfast.” The Morning After, 36-37. Here, survivorship’s connotations of agency and strength are recognised but trivialised as the vanities of an ersatz religion, Ibid., 38.

104Ibid., 169.
105Ibid., 169.
the recovery process of survivors (who heal autonomously, bringing “themselves back to life”).

My concern with Wolf’s case study has less to do with its veracity than with the way it functions in the context of her overall argument and the extent to which it recalls the mode of strategic omission identified earlier with Hoff Sommers’ treatment of Sandra Bartky’s concept of feminist consciousness. I take the case study to be an accurate rendition of Wolf’s perspective on the politics of one rape crisis centre, but am concerned with its emblematic function, the movement it is designed to make from the particular to the general. A particular narrative strategy that Shane Rowlands and Margaret Henderson have observed in Denfeld’s account is relevant for our purposes here. Rowlands and Henderson observe that Denfeld’s account employs a “zoom lens effect” which involves a process whereby “an event, a tendency, a version, a current, a localised practice becomes magnified and distorted into the current condition of feminist politics and activism everywhere.” The zoom lens effect is evident in Wolf’s treatment of feminist victim activism in the sense that the task of her case study is to operate as a commentary on the general culture and politics of feminist victim activism (qua victim feminism). In Wolf’s case, the zoom lens effect enables a particular form of misrepresentation.

In Wolf’s account, a sleight of hand is performed in which the strengths of feminist victim activism, in particular its elaboration of and investment in the agentic capacities associated with survivorship, are taken out of view and divorced from feminist victim activists themselves, only to reappear, at a later stage in *Fire With Fire*, as the novel insights offered as part of Wolf’s

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107 Ibid., 12.
inauguration of ‘power feminism.’ That is, Wolf’s ‘power feminist’ goal to promote among women the kinds of capacities associated with survivorship—strength, autarchy, self-definition, agency—is not so much a radical and timely departure from but a legacy of the very form of feminism Wolf, through her case study, impugns. This sleight of hand is not incidental but necessary to the logical integrity of Wolf’s account. Had Wolf acknowledged the ethos of survivorship, her representation of ‘power feminism’ and ‘victim feminism’ as opposed forms of feminism would have been unsustainable since the political form her case study lofts as ‘victim feminism’ actually may be regarded as characteristically ‘power feminist.’

In her commentary on Roiphe’s book, bell hooks makes a similar observation. hooks observes that by focusing exclusively on moments of “feminist excess” Roiphe consistently avoids mentioning existing feminist debate about the very issues or moments of excess to which her book is addressed. This strategy, hooks notes, “makes it appear that [Roiphe’s] ideas offer a new and fresh alternative to feminist dogmatism.” hooks then contends that “[h]ad [Roiphe] insisted on acknowledging the range of dissenting voices within feminism, the multi-dimensional critiques that already exist, the underlying premise of her book would have lost its bite.” Put together with hooks’ observations as well as those of Rowlands and Henderson, a clear image of a particular narrative strategy, one which is shared across the accounts of victim feminism, emerges. With this strategy, longstanding feminist efforts to elaborate and encourage alternatives to ‘victim identity,’ along with feminist debate about victimhood and agency, are omitted in the interests of delivering an unequivocal image of a feminism

108 hooks, Outlaw Culture, 104-105.
109 Ibid., 104.
110 Ibid., 105. My emphasis.
whose ideology—'gender feminism,' ‘new Victorianism,’ ‘politically correct feminism,’ ‘victim feminism’—disavows female agency and must be rejected on that basis. With the complexity of feminism’s relationship to the category ‘victim’ thereby written out of their accounts, existing yet disavowed feminist discourses of agency are then repackaged as the novel elements of a new feminism.

In Wolf’s case, neglecting a thorough-going engagement with the victim/survivor dichotomy means that her account also elides the complexities surrounding the term ‘victim.’ Wolf employs ‘victim’ to denote a resentful person who lays blame and deflects responsibility, suggesting that the key to adopting ‘power feminism’ is withholding blame and taking responsibility. But as feminist victim activists point out, the problem with victim identity is self-blame, precisely the inability to lay blame on others. The ‘victim’ who remains a ‘victim’ because they blame themselves for their victimisation—that is, see themselves as a ‘bad agent’ who actively caused their victimisation—is absent from Wolf’s account. Thus her account inherits the problematic relationship noted earlier between ‘self-blame’ and ‘taking responsibility,’ and neglects the crucial question as to how power feminism, or indeed any feminist version of agency, might be approached from the disposition of self-blame. Similarly, her dichotomisation of ‘victim’ and ‘power’ feminism inherits the problems identified earlier with the victim/survivor dichotomy. Such dichotomisation, insisting as it does on the complete negativity of victimhood, risks redrawing self-blame and victim-blame as part of its injunction to ‘stop behaving like a victim.’ Even as power feminism is represented as a timely successor to obsolete dogmas, it actually may be regarded as a regressive reassertion of a dichotomy that, as Kelly, Burton and Regan show, feminist victim activists already have begun to rethink.
2.7 Worthy and Unworthy Victims

We have seen that victimology and feminist victim activism are characterised by an effort to destabilise and rework dominant conceptions of victimisation and victimhood, which in the case of feminist victim activism extends to the construction of a counter-discourse of women as admirable, capable survivors rather than pitiable incapacitated victims. I have argued that the critics of victim feminism strategically omit the complexity of feminism's relationship with the category 'victim' in general, and feminist victim activist articulations of survivorship in particular, because these would interfere with the seamless construction of a 'victim feminism' that their accounts are set up to require. In offering a final set of remarks regarding the mode of critique of the accounts of victim feminism in this last section of the chapter, I will argue further that popular feminist accounts of victim feminism do not acknowledge or enjoin the project to destabilise dominant conceptions of victimisation and victimhood because they themselves employ these conceptions and so require that they remain stable. Grounds for this argument emerge when we discern the status of the accounts as reverse victimologies which mimic the very strategy of victim-centred politics which they associate with feminism.111

Insofar as the accounts base much of their political purchase on pointing to and speaking for a new population of victims—the victims of 'victim feminism'—they require that the word 'victim' perform its traditional labour

111This argument initially formed part of my early work on the accounts of victim feminism, where the questions these accounts pose were taken up as part of an undergraduate art history study of self-presentation in Australian feminist art. See Rebecca Stringer, 'Feminism and Victimology,' Feminism In Transit 2: Conference Occasional Paper Series, ed. Fiona Symington (Melbourne: Monash University Centre for Women's Studies, 1994): Paper No. 27. Upon returning to this material at a later stage, I was positioned to revise the argument and connect it to the question of ressentiment in Rebecca Stringer, "A Nietzschean Breed": feminism, victimology, ressentiment, in Why Nietzsche Still? Reflections on drama, culture and politics, ed. Alan D. Schrift (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 247-273.
of naming a deserving population whose freedom has been sacrificed to the exercise of another's agency and whose unfreedom must be brought to light. Hence these accounts open rather than answer the question as to what we are to object to: a particular cast of victim-centred politics, that which they albeit deceptively identify with feminism, or the very idea of victim-centred politics, of which they themselves partake. Recognising that these accounts partake of victim-centred politics has an important corollary: it interrupts their construction of liberal feminism and victim-centred politics as mutually exclusive.

We noted earlier in the chapter that one of the characteristic elements of feminist victim activism is its move to “break the silence” about sexual violence. Survivors of such violence are construed as alienated from and silenced by the status quo such that their dissonant speech promises to interrupt the “smooth flow of patriarchal social commerce.” The critiques of victim feminism, motivated in large part by concern about the consequences of such survivor discourse, are crafted via the very same conception of political purchase, their aim being to interrupt the smooth flow of victim feminist social commerce. Their authors maintain that they are writing as against an injunction to silence and construct victim feminism as pervasive, fashionable and powerful, an illegitimate orthodoxy which presents itself as the bearer of moral and therefore incontrovertible truth, and which thereby wards against dissent, silencing its detractors. We registered in Chapter 1 that this leads Roiphe to adopt ‘victim’ as an authorial location. But Hoff Sommers also makes this move:

The women currently manning—womanning—the feminist ramparts do not take well to criticism ... male critics must be “sexist” and

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112 Alcoff and Gray, ‘Survivor Discourse,’ 286.
113 Bell hooks also comments on this aspect of Roiphe's account in Outlaw Culture, 105.
"reactionary," and female critics "traitors," "collaborators," or "backlashers." This kind of reaction has had a powerful inhibiting effect. It has alienated and silenced women and men alike.114

Anticipating and so preempting criticism in advance in the same way as victim feminism is said to do, the accounts of victim feminism, like their object, are pitched in accord with a logic of apostasy. Let us register what other commentators have made of this mode of critique before considering the idea that it involves the creation of what I term reverse victimologies.

In her engagement with Wolf, hooks notes that Wolf's "construction of a monolithic group of "mainstream women" who have been so brutalised by feminist excess they cannot support the movement seems to exploit the very notion of victimhood [Wolf] decries."115 Kathryn Abrams makes a similar observation. For Abrams, the accounts of Roiphe and Camille Paglia, and to a lesser extent Wolf, take recourse to a mode of critique which was pioneered by champions of anti-political-correctness Rush Limbaugh and Dinesh D'Souza.116 This mode of critique is marked by an effort to "present those who are privileged as under siege, and those who occupy normative, as opposed to marginal, social roles as courageously defending those roles and their attendant norms against a powerful radical onslaught."117 This has the effect of making "qualities or ways of life that are utterly mainstream appear

115hooks, Outlaw Culture, 99. My emphasis.
116Kathryn Abrams, ‘Sex Wars Redux: agency and coercion in feminist legal theory,’ Columbia Law Review, Vol. 95, No. 305 (1995): 331. As Abrams explains, Dinesh D'Souza wrote Illiberal Education: the politics of race and sex on campus (New York: Free Press, 1991) which "assails the ostensibly ascendant and coercive force of the movement for "political correctness" on college campuses" (Abrams, 331). Abrams notes further that "Rush Limbaugh is a popular [North American] talk radio commentator who popularised the term "feminazi" to describe the threatening and coercive pressure toward homogenisation imposed by feminists" (Abrams, 331). In the Australian context, the radio talkback host John Laws appropriated Limbaugh's term, and as part of his anti-feminism infamously ran a policy at his radio station 2GB whereby female employees were asked to wear skirts or dresses rather than trousers. See John Laws, The Book of Irreverent Logic (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1994).
117Ibid., 331.
transgressive.” According to Abrams, in the case of the popular feminist critics of victim feminism, the mainstream way of life in question is heterosexuality, the ‘natural pleasures’ of which are construed as threatened by victim feminist attentiveness to the overrepresentation of men as perpetrators of sexual violence. We saw in Chapter 1 that this theme was especially evident in Denfeld’s argument that ‘lesbian rights’ be demoted within feminism’s political agenda given that heterosexual women form a ‘majority.’ Just as Margaret Walters sees the accounts of victim feminism as a “backlash within feminism”, so too Anne-Marie Smith conceives of the accounts as “anti-feminist feminism”, describing their mode of critique in terms similar to those of Abrams:

These discourses have been masterfully constructed as the rebellious underdog voices against an omnipotent ‘Goliath’—the mythical ‘feminist establishment’—when they are, of course, serving the hegemonic neo-conservative and anti-feminist forces quite nicely.

A similar reading of the accounts of victim feminism is made by Mark Davis, who regards them as agents of the “moral panic business” and draws particular attention to their portrayal of men “as under siege by feminism.”

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118 Jbid..
119 Jbid..
These critics, rightly I think, situate the accounts of victim feminism as a revenge of the mainstream against the visibility and redistributive potentials of radical political movement. This revenge mimics the general form radical politics customarily assumes, hence as Smith notes its proponents are positioned to “represent themselves as more ‘democratic’ and more ‘feminist’” than their radical-democratic and feminist opponents.\textsuperscript{122} In Wolf’s account, this recasting of the mainstream as the radical, besieged underdog is most evident during her critique of “radical cynicism” about liberal democracy’s ability to institute its ideals of inclusion, equality and freedom from exploitation.\textsuperscript{123} We saw in Chapter 1 that, without engaging with any of the debates surrounding this issue, Wolf simply casts American liberal democracy as the “most ‘radical’ system imaginable”, and renders capitalism as an unproblematic economic stage on which female power can, at long last, be performed.\textsuperscript{124} Liberal democracy and capitalism are imbued with an extraordinary innocence of power, while their radical-democratic critics are portrayed as “self-defeating” bearers of “the skills of the weak.”\textsuperscript{125}

To build on the line of critical engagement initiated by the commentators mentioned above, I want to suggest that the mode of critique operative within in the popular feminist accounts of victim feminism draws heavily upon a feature of popular media texts identified in the late 1980s by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in their book \textit{Manufacturing Consent}. Herman and Chomsky argue that a primary means by which media texts secure public sympathy on behalf of elite interests is through strategic representation of populations of victims as comparatively ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy’:

\textsuperscript{122}Smith, ‘Feminist Activism and Presidential Politics,’ 34.
\textsuperscript{123}Wolf, \textit{Fire With Fire}, 126.
\textsuperscript{124}Wolf, \textit{Fire With Fire}, 127.
\textsuperscript{125}Ibid..
Our hypothesis is that worthy victims will be featured prominently and dramatically, that they will be humanised, and that their victimisation will receive the detail and context in story construction that will generate reader interest and sympathetic emotion. In contrast, unworthy victims will merit only slight detail, minimal humanisation, and little context that will excite and enrage.\\footnote{Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, \textit{Manufacturing Consent}, 35. Herman and Chomsky refer to this form of strategic representation mainly in relation to mass media accounts of international and domestic political relations. Hence one ordinarily would apply this analysis to, for example, representation of the Palestine/Israel conflict or the playing out of unemployed beneficiary/employed taxpayer tensions at budget time. The events of September 11, 2001 provided an especially rich example of this mode of representation. In mass media accounts of these events, the suffering of American victims was intensely humanised and richly textured while the suffering of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Indonesian, Chilean, Argentinian, El Salvadorian, Nicaraguan, Lebanese, Libyan, Iraqi, Haitian, Palestinian, Mexican, Cuban, Russian and Somalian civilians killed, maimed or otherwise detrimentally affected as a result of American foreign policy since 1965 remained, as always, unspecified, dehumanised or invisible.}

Although Wolf's account, unlike those of Roiphe, Hoff Sommers and Denfeld, exhibits sensitivity to the legerdemains of the mass media, the strategy of representation Herman and Chomsky describe is evident in all four accounts to the extent that each are invested in the production of a reverse victimology comprised of 'worthy' victims who can be cast as such when others are implicitly or explicitly deemed 'unworthy.'\\footnote{See chapter seven of \textit{Fire With Fire}, entitled 'Media Omission and Intellectual Polarisation: how to suffocate the ideas of a revolution,' where Wolf offers a critique of how feminism is represented in the popular media, 83-118.} As Davis suggests above, men feature prominently in this reverse victimology given what the critics deem to be victim feminism's capacity to inspire false accusation, reverse sexism, intellectual authoritarianism, and lack of consideration for the difficulties men experience as they find themselves policed by legally endorsed feminist mores.\\footnote{See for example Hoff Sommers, \textit{Who Stole Feminism?}, 112-117 and Wolf, \textit{Fire With Fire}, 197.} Aside from the spate of sexual harassment cases Hoff Sommers retells solely from the perspective of the accused, a case in point here is Wolf's lofty humanisation of "the Naked Guy", a student whose rejection of the \textit{status quo} inspired him to wear "nothing but a sun hat and sandals" to class each day. In laying down "his power along with his clothes", he had
“offered himself up naked to the female gaze” and was “tender”, “honest”, “vulnerable” and “beautiful”. A generous, full-page description of him is followed by a short paragraph in which a familiar media move to equate feminism with dogmatic humourlessness is used to impugn the “women students” who exhibited an inability to feel “affection” “amusement” and “pleasure” when they had him “forcibly clothed in the name of feminism”.129

But the reverse victimology which emerges from these accounts is largely comprised of women whom the popular feminist critics think are harmed in various ways by victim feminism. This includes groups of women—variously demarcated as ‘young,’ ‘ordinary,’ ‘mainstream,’ ‘normal,’ ‘powerful,’ ‘equality-oriented’ and/or ‘heterosexual’—whom victim feminism alienates and disenfranchises when it fails to represent their experiences. It also includes women identified as ensnared by victim feminist ideology, whom Wolf affords sympathy given her forecast that when women’s wills to power are cloaked in the mantle of victim identity they will become “less competent, less happy, and even more likely to be victimised.”130 But the most salient kind of victim that these accounts seek to represent is the Real Victim of sexual violence, harassment or discrimination. From Wolf and Roiphe’s shared observation that some testimonies at sexual violence survivor speak-outs strike “a false note”,131 through to Denfeld and Hoff Sommers’ repudiation of statistics regarding the scale and frequency of sexual violence generated by feminist researchers, the accounts exhibit an anxiety that sites of genuine, law-worthy innocence cease to be locatable in, and are trivialised by, victim

129According to Wolf the students argued that some women experienced the Naked Guy’s nakedness as a form of sexual harassment. Wolf, Fire With Fire, 198.
130Ibid., 228.
131Wolf, Fire With Fire, 207; Roiphe, The Morning After, 29-50. Wolf’s account of survivor testimonies is greatly more generous than is Roiphe’s, although I concur with hooks that the distance Wolf places between her account and that of Roiphe is more finessed than substantial. hooks, Outlaw Culture, 94.
feminism's broadened definitions of what might constitute sexual violence, harassment or discrimination. This anxiety about a flood of unworthy victims stems not so much from a will to contribute productively to the jurisprudence of victimhood, but rather from a will to abide by the general structure of the victim/agent dichotomy so as to maintain a conception of Real Victimisation as an exceptional circumstance which may be encountered by liberalism's otherwise self-determining citizen-subjects, as against a 'radical' conception of victimisation as a pervasive yet sociologically, discursively and existentially complex element of male domination. This is perhaps nowhere more clearly evident than in the last popular press offering that we will examine: Denfeld's proposed 'realpolitik' solution to the problem of sexual violence in the United States.

In the fourth section of this chapter, I referred to an emergent poststructuralist feminist approach to sexual violence. I want now to bring this approach back into focus as a way to situate Denfeld's proposal. Like the critics of victim feminism, poststructuralist feminists also have directed critical attention to the nexus of sexual violence, the law, and feminism's relationship with the category 'victim.' However, what we find in poststructuralist accounts is not an anxiety that feminism will flood the courts with unworthy victims, but rather that the feminist strategy of marshalling the agency of the law so as to eliminate sexual violence involves a renaturalisation of sexual violence as well as ratification of the law's status as an appropriate and neutral arbiter of socio-sexual culture. This line of inquiry opens discussion of the rape trial not only as a site in which victims experience a second-order victimisation but, relatedly, as a site where a particular form of agency—namely a capacity to separate a female agent from her capacity to resist—is masculinised, in some circumstances racialised, and is in turn both confirmed and punished, naturalised and outlawed. This view recognises that the law then confers a similar but this
time legitimate agency upon itself as its dispensation of punishment promises to enact a separation of the male agent from his capacities, where the threat of such emasculation is designed to deter men as a group from practising sexual violence.

According to Sharon Marcus and Renee Heberle, the main ramification of this strategy to "stop rape through legal deterrence" is that it entails writing into law an assumption "that men simply have the power to rape", where this assumption constitutes men as naturally capable of rape and women as natural victims of this capacity.\textsuperscript{132} For Marcus, this "concede[s] this primary power to [men], implying that at best men can secondarily be dissuaded from using this power by means of threatened punishment from a masculinized state or legal system".\textsuperscript{133} On this view, representation of men's capacity to rape as "written into the nature of things" has two problematic ramifications.\textsuperscript{134} Firstly, it renders rape as the inevitable effect of a power men always already have over women, rather than as a practice through which men apply for this power so as to shore up an impression of its permanence.\textsuperscript{135} Here, Marcus suggests rape be rethought as "a process of sexist gendering which [women] can attempt to disrupt."\textsuperscript{136} The second ramification is that this representation functions to legitimate state employment of domination: if male violence is 'inevitable,' state domination of men—and protection of women from men—is lent a perennial mandate.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{133}Marcus, 'Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words,' 388.
\textsuperscript{134}Hengehold, 'Remapping the Event,' 194.
\textsuperscript{135}As Laura Hengehold puts this point, "the fact that men rape women reveals that masculinist social institutions are never complete and that their power over women is never finalised but must be constantly demonstrated and reinforced," Ibid., 194.
\textsuperscript{136}Marcus, 'Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words,' 391.
\textsuperscript{137}A third ramification is articulated by Christine Helliwell in her article "It's Only a Penis": rape, feminism and difference, Signs, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring 2000): 789-816.
Hence for Heberle, feminist recourse to “state-centred, bureaucratic, and legalistic strategies” can have the counter-intuitive effect of doing “more to normalise violence as a constitutive aspect of political life than to prevent sexual violence as a constitutive aspect of social life.”

For both theorists, the strategy of law reform keeps feminism focused on the aftermath of, rather than prevention of, sexual violence. Insofar as this strategy involves associating sexual violence with sheer facticity, it forecloses rather than invites a radical reconceptualisation of sexual somatics which might render rape unthinkable when it constitutes women as capable of taking “the ability to rape completely out of men’s hands.” Although neither theorist appreciates the extent to which the ethic of survivorship attempts this very kind of reconceptualisation, their work has an important ramification for our understanding of feminism’s relationship to the category ‘victim.’ Their line of inquiry suggests that feminist representation of women as victims in the sphere of sexual violence may or may not reflect feminist belief that women are natural victims, but most certainly does reflect the strategy of law reform, which necessarily involves tactical identification of women with a recognisable script of victimhood so as to demonstrate their law-worthiness and shore up political purchase. On this view, feminism is constituted as a victim-centred politics not so much prior to, but upon, its encounter with the law.

Pointing out that the naturalisation of sexual violence goes hand in hand with its universalisation, Helliwell argues that feminist universalisation of rape as a distinctly female fear tends to involve a “racist iconography” whereby specifically Western conceptions of sexual difference are projected onto non-Western cultural settings: “Because the practice [of rape] is widespread in “civilised” Western countries, it is assumed to pervade all other societies as well, since these latter are understood as located closer to the savagery end of the evolutionary ladder.” Referring to her field work in a Dayak community whose conception of sexual difference could not host a Western conception of sexual violence, Helliwell emphasises that feminist accounts of rape need to be local in character, 798.

139Marcus, ‘Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words,’ 388.
Let us now consider, in comparative mode, Denfeld's proposed solution to the problem of sexual violence. Throughout her book Denfeld's impugnation of feminist 'victim mythology' fuels an argument for a return to a traditional conception of 'real rape' so that the law-trivial complaints of pseudo-victims can be filtered out. In tune with her concern that feminism's broadened definitions of sexual violence do real, worthy rape victims "great harm" since "[t]heir experiences, lost in numbers that include consensual sex, are trivialised", her proposal is centred on a conception of 'real rape' as evidently "brutal". This departs from traditional rape law only to the extent that Denfeld allows that aggravated rape may be practiced by an acquaintance or husband, not necessarily a stranger. Her proposal combines this return to a more traditional understanding of rape with measures to bolster state power such that convicted rapists may spend "lots more time" in jail. Arguing that rape victims deserve to have this crime taken seriously, Denfeld adopts a recognisably Clintonite policy recommendation in taking a 'three strikes and you're out' line:

Sentence first-time rapists to at least ten years with the possibility of parole, if they complete a treatment program. On the second offence, double the sentence with no chance of parole. On the third offence, recognise that they will always pose a threat and throw away the key.

Denfeld devotes a chapter of her book to impugning the efforts of feminist sexual violence awareness campaigns on the grounds that they manufacture and disseminate 'victim mythology' and intrude upon the private lives of the citizenry. Her own proposal, however, emphasises the need for "[s]ocial education" since "we need to make it clear that sexual assault is not

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140Denfeld, The New Victorians, 89; 275.
141Denfeld, The New Victorians, 276. See also 88-89; 274-276.
142Ibid..
143Ibid., Chapter 2, 58-89.
acceptable, no matter if it's by a date, acquaintance, husband, or stranger." Denfeld risks negating her own previous analysis in failing to detail how such social education may avoid 'victim mythology' and intrusion, but what is more interesting is that she goes on to note that such public awareness campaigns will be of limited efficacy in any case because rape is to be regarded as an inevitable element of human society. Even though Denfeld rejects feminist claims that the particular form of male domination prevailing in western industrialised countries fosters a 'rape culture,' as she nears the end of her proposal she asserts: "We will never be able to rid our society of rape completely."

When set against the poststructuralist feminist approach to sexual violence discussed above, Denfeld's proposal stands out as a generic law and order-driven victim's rights position, rather than as a fully critical perspective on public discourses of violence, justice and victimisation. Like Marcus and Heberle, Denfeld problematises the extent to which feminist law reform has extended the purview of the law in the realm of sexuality. However this extension is problematised on entirely different grounds in their respective lines of critical engagement. Working from an overarching concern to re legitimate "good, old fashioned liberalism" Denfeld's proposal situates feminist law reform as a misappropriation of the law on behalf of unworthy victims, which protects the role of the law in the sphere of violence from critique. This stands in contrast to Marcus and Heberle's interrogation of the appropriateness of the law for the adjudication of sexual violence given its corollary constitution of women as natural victims. Denfeld impugns feminist representation of women as victims who require protection, and yet sanctions

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144 Ibid..
145 Ibid..
146 Ibid., 244.
the law's constitution of women as violable subjects who naturally require its protection. Denfeld affirms the law's prerogative to determine who will and will not count as a law-worthy rape victim, yet this reinstates the myth of feminine duplicity and the idea that victims of sexual violence can not reliably explain their experiences in the absence of impartial paralegal experts.

In other words, the only forms of female agency apparent in Denfeld's proposal are either conferred and secured by a paternalistic state or evident in a decision to name everything but aggravated rape 'consensual sex.' Ultimately, Denfeld enjoins, rather than departs from, feminist anti-rape discourses which, as Marcus and Heberle argue, run the risk of foreclosing women's capacities to prevent rape when they partake of a legalistic discourse which will affirm the inevitability and naturalness of rape. This explains why Denfeld's proposal—like the feminist campaigns to redefine sexual violence that she apparently opposes—emphasises legal deterrence rather than strategies which "will empower women to take the ability to rape completely out of men's hands".147

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have situated the popular feminist accounts of victim feminism within a broader field discourses on victimhood and victimisation so as to refute their joint alignment of radicalism with victim-centred politics and liberal reformism with a move beyond such politics, and also in order to reveal their (neo)conservative character. Their alignment of radicalism with victim-centred politics is problematic since, in the case of feminist victim activism especially, existing feminist efforts to disrupt and rework the language of victimisation so as to reveal and encourage the agentic capacities of 'victims' can be found in the place where the popular feminist critics claim

147 Marcus, 'Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words,' 388.
there is only a maudlin celebration of non-agentic victimhood. The popular feminist critics' alignment of liberal feminism with a move beyond victim-centred politics is deceptive in the sense that the mode of critique these accounts employ redraws the moves of such a politics in giving rise to a reverse victimology which exhibits traces of a generic brand of victims-rights discourse. Finally, these accounts are (neo)conservative in the sense that they may be regarded as surface intervention-styles of victim talk which abide by the general structure of the victim/agent dichotomy and ratify a dominant conception of victimhood as a simple deprivation of agency, where this works to recuperate a legalistic discourse of claims to victim status as either real or pseudo, worthy or unworthy, in character.

These accounts do raise valid concerns regarding feminist protectionism and the inability of a simple victim/victimiser dichotomy to capture the relation gender to power. However they omit existing feminist debate about these matters so as to present their own insights as novel, negate the complexity of feminism's relationship with the category 'victim,' and muddy the waters of what is taken to be feminist moralism only to shore up a newly clean place to stand. On this basis we may conclude that feminism's relationship with the category 'victim' requires more nuanced treatment than it is given in the popular press accounts. In pursuit of such treatment we will evaluate, in the following part of the dissertation, the ways in which the issues that the popular feminist accounts raise have been taken up among feminist political theorists.
PART TWO
Feminism and Ressentiment


3

Ressentiment, Radicalism and Reform

However ugly it is as a politics on its own, Nietzsche's theory of *ressentiment* offers an antidote to the sanctimonious inclinations of any politics of the oppressed.

—Joan Cocks.¹

Women have quite reasonably wanted power, but perhaps, entangled in the spirit of *ressentiment*, we have failed to be sufficiently critical about what it was we wanted in wanting power. We wanted what we believed others had: power over.

—Marion Tapper.²

**Introduction**

All of the popular feminist accounts examined in Part 1 situate academic feminist theory as something of a headquarters for 'victim feminism.' However, it actually is the case that the category 'victim,' in tandem with the category 'women,' was subject to extensive rethinking among feminist theorists during the 1980s and, perhaps more intensively, the 1990s. In this part of the dissertation we will examine four select contributions to this process of rethinking, each of which address the question of feminism's relationship with the category 'victim' under the aegis of Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*. So as to introduce these accounts effectively, let us outline the general context in which they have appeared and briefly register the ground they share, and do not share, with the popular feminist accounts examined in Part 1.

Put schematically, rethinking the categories ‘victim’ and ‘women’ came as part of two broad and deeply interconnected developments within feminist theory: engagement with the politics of difference among women, and interrogation of the equation of power with domination which informed much second wave radical feminist theorising of women’s subordination. These developments worked to challenge some of the leading ideas of second wave radical feminist thought, most notably the idea that gender is to be ranked first among the forms of oppression to which women are subject, and that this primacy might serve as a basis for common identity, and so political unity, among women. The often stark vision of male dominance and female subordination at play in these ideas was critically engaged on two interconnected fronts. Firstly, the centrality of Western middle-class whiteness to the manner in which this vision defines and prioritises female subordination was discerned, a gesture reminiscent of feminism’s own discernment of the androcentric character of much Western social and political thought. The character and purpose of feminist politics necessarily were rethought as it became clear that attempts to locate feminism as an “encompassing political home for all women” were implicated in practices of exclusion and exnomination.³

Secondly, this process of rethinking necessarily also extended to feminist conceptions of power. As Joan Cocks argued in her book *The Oppositional Imagination*, second wave feminist theory is marked by a tendency to lend male domination the status of a synchronic and unflinching regime—“the primary power relation from which all others spring”—and to conflate power with male domination while rendering women as innocent of power.⁴ Generally


⁴ Joan Cocks, *The Oppositional Imagination: feminist, critique and political theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 5. For an excellent summation of recent feminist
speaking, this conception of power and sexual difference has been critically engaged for what it obscures and, relatedly, its reifying function. Obscured are women's apparent capacities to resist domination (through, for example, feminist struggle) and to exercise power over other women and some men (through, for example, participation in racism). In relation to this vision's reifying function, the subject position 'woman-as-victim' is lent an air of inevitability and facticity as this vision affirms in advance, rather than intervenes upon, the effectiveness of victimisation as a feminising agent. Among academic feminist theorists, it is along these two broad and interconnected lines of critical engagement that feminism's relationship with the category 'victim,' no longer seamlessly identifiable with the no-longer-seamless category 'women,' has been called into question.

It should be clear from this brief sketch we have good reason to treat with suspicion the popular feminist account's clear intimation that their criticisms of feminism are novel apostasies. These lines of critical engagement within academic feminist theory actually share ground with the popular feminist accounts: both are concerned with the reificatory and regressive effects of posing an all too neat demarcation between dominant men and victimised women. As registered in Part 1, the popular feminist accounts do raise valid concerns about this kind of demarcation. But they ignore existing feminist engagement with these issues—most notably in the arena of victim activism—so as to exaggerate their prevalence, and then they actually adopt, rather than deconstruct, the tactics of stark demarcation they associate with the feminisms they impugn. It also is the case that, where academic feminist theorists problematise the second wave radical feminist vision of male domination and female subordination as a false universal, the popular

feminist critics we examined problematise this vision as an *irrational fiction*, a move which serves to obscure the extent to which relative male privilege does persist. As Wendy Brown, whose work we will examine in this part of the dissertation, puts this problem: feminists do require "different tools of storytelling than the phenomenon of hegemonic or ubiquitous formations of power", but this does not mean that "feminist claims about masculine domination ... thereby disintegrate."\(^5\)

So in examining four feminist theory accounts of feminism's relationship with the category 'victim' across this chapter and the next, we can expect to find echoes of the salient themes of the popular feminist accounts, but to find also that, for the most part, these themes are framed and treated differently. Two themes in particular are shared across the two sets of accounts. Firstly, the role of 'resentment' in feminist politics—a theme which formed a shadowy but significant presence in the accounts of Hoff Sommers and Wolf—plays a more explicit role in the feminist theory accounts we will examine. All of these accounts mobilise Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment* as a vehicle through which to read feminist approaches to the category 'victim.' Forms of feminism which reify victim identity are read as 'politics of *ressentiment*,’ and each theorist suggests that the future of feminist politics ought to involve a move 'beyond *ressentiment*.’ Secondly, then, as with the popular feminist accounts, the feminist theory accounts present the 'victim problem' as intimately linked to the question as to what kind of political agency and direction feminism can and should assume within current politico-economic arrangements.

What is most interesting about how this question about feminism's political agency and direction plays out in the feminist theory accounts is

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that, as the analyses presented in this part of the dissertation will reveal, where the popular feminist accounts all construe the 'victim problem' as a venue for asserting liberal and neoliberal feminist edicts, the feminist theory accounts, although greatly illuminating, nonetheless exhibit fundamentally conflicting judgements about what kind of feminism ought to be diagnosed a politics of *ressentiment* in the first instance. For some, feminism engages a politics of *ressentiment* when involved exclusively in liberal reformism; for others, feminism engages such a politics when it entertains a more radical orientation. The feminist theory accounts show how fruitful an interlocutor is Nietzsche, and we will see that his concept of *ressentiment* is a useful tool for feminist auto-critique, a key concept for feminist political theory, and a vehicle through which feminism’s relationship with the category ‘victim’ can indeed be examined productively. But, as I will argue centrally in this part of the dissertation, Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* will require our further attention given that the nature of feminism’s relationship with *ressentiment*, and the victim politics it inspires, is not lent decisive treatment in the accounts we will examine. These accounts open rather than resolve the question as to the precise relationship between feminism, *ressentiment* and the category ‘victim,’ and as such they animate the close and critical re-reading of Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* undertaken in the dissertation’s third part.

So as to illuminate the conflicting judgements evident within the feminist theory accounts, the expository work of this chapter and the next assumes the form of comparative analysis. The current chapter compares the accounts of Joan Cocks and Marion Tapper, while the next chapter compares those of Anna Yeatman and Wendy Brown. For the purposes of this chapter, the use of comparative analysis helps to reveal that Cocks and Tapper share a concern with feminist involvement in a politics of *ressentiment* which fosters an understanding of women as ‘victims’ and centres on an equation of justice
with revenge. However, comparing these accounts also reveals that beyond these shared concerns stands a conflict regarding the role of radicalism in feminist politics, and a further conflict regarding radicalism's relation with *ressentiment*.

In this chapter I argue that these conflicts are reflective of a major difference in Cocks' and Tapper's respective interpretations of the concept of *ressentiment*. Both theorists offer the idea that a feminism of *ressentiment*, as part of its representation of women as victims and men as victimisers, will ally itself with forms of state and institutional power so as to regulate its domains of interest. However, for Cocks, the concern is that *ressentiment* ordains a set of reformist preoccupations which subdue radicalism at a time when radicalism is precisely what feminism needs, while for Tapper, the concern is that *ressentiment* ordains a brand of radicalism which should, in fact, be subdued owing to the level of success feminism already has achieved. My comparative analysis will demonstrate, then, that while these theorists are united in their recourse to Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment* for interpreting the 'victim problem' in feminism, their accounts ultimately point feminism in vastly different directions in their respective figurations of feminism's political future, especially as regards the manner in which feminism should negotiate state and institutional power. Joan Cocks' account is addressed in the first section of the chapter, and Marion Tapper's in the second section.

### 3.1 Cocks: embodying *ressentiment*

In stark contrast to the aura of grand public declaration with which the popular feminist accounts of 'victim feminism' are enunciated, Joan Cocks' account of feminist *ressentiment* begins with a quiet note that the feminist
political form it will address “is best crept up on with delicacy and
indirection.”6 The main task of Cocks’ article ‘Augustine, Nietzsche and
Contemporary Body Politics’ is to offer “a critique of victim politics”.7
However for Cocks, who refers to this task as “a hair-raising enterprise”,
such a critique should not be conducted in a straightforward and direct
fashion.8 That is, in this case, critical form must follow critical function: one’s
mode of critique must anticipate and reflect the moral sensibilities and
sensitivities of victim politics itself. If, as Cocks suggests, victim politics is
characteristically defensive, if its key move is to place its claim to
powerlessness beyond reproach and so to register any challenge to this claim
as further victimisation, then it bequeaths little room for critical negotiation.9
Thus the critic of victim politics must be strategic and make such room.
Cocks’ strategy is to sidestep the pre-ordained ‘pro’ and ‘anti’ of victim politics
and pursue a circuitous approach.

Her article and argument are structured around this approach: she begins
with an analysis of Saint Augustine’s The Confessions of St. Augustine, moves
on to a reading of Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals, before finally
“meet[ing] head-on” with the object of her critique. In an understated fashion
when compared with her later descriptions, Cocks initially describes the
object of her critique as

a contemporary hatred of the body that masquerades as love, and a
contemporary suppression of political relations between masters and
slaves through their rearticulation in psychotherapeutic terms as the
relations between victims and victimisers.10

7 Ibid., 158, n. 19.
8 Ibid., 158, n. 19.
9 Ibid., 155.
10 Ibid., 145.
As Cocks reveals eventually, the two tendencies she outlines here are, in her view, dominant aspects of a broad "degeneration" of "modern radical politics", which she also describes as a "malaise of oppositional politics". For Cocks, ressentimental victim politics has become the primary conceptual and rhetorical idiom of modern radical politics. Her particular concern is with feminism's degeneration into ressentimental victim politics, and the implications of this degeneration for feminist conceptions of power and bodily pleasure. Let us retrace the lessons she draws from Augustine and Nietzsche before meeting up with her critique and diagnosis of feminist victim politics.

Cocks' engagement with Augustine operates as a vehicle through which "lessons about power and the body" might be learned. Her analysis of Augustine's Confessions unveils a disjuncture at the heart of this text between "a stylistic embrace and a substantive repudiation of sensuous and sensual life":

... Augustine's attachment to the bodily world is palpable in the Confessions not merely and perhaps not even primarily because it is a central subject of the text. Any contemporary reader will know how easily the body can be killed by the word that writes it. Augustine's feverish prose, to the contrary, duplicates the extreme force of bodily experience, with the curious result that an invitation to the body is

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11Ibid., 152. By 'modern radical politics' Cocks is referring specifically to "socialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and radical feminism", Ibid..

12The themes of Cocks' article bear close relation to the themes of the book she published two years before this article, The Oppositional Imagination: feminism, critique and political theory (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). While an exposition of this text is not my task here, it is interesting to note that Cocks does not employ Nietzsche's genealogy of morality for the reading of radical feminism she presents in that text, even as she is concerned with radical feminism's conceptions of power and bodily pleasure, and with the way in which claims regarding female virtue and victimage are bound up in these conceptions. Instead, Cocks' analysis identifies "the [non-feminist] theoretical avant-garde... fascination for Nietzsche" as a "dangerous" development for radical feminism, since it created a sensibility which would prohibit in advance radical feminism's "political critique of sexuality made in the name of an emancipatory moral ethos." The Oppositional Imagination, 126. Thus her turn to Nietzsche in the present piece might be understood as a fairly significant shift.

Augustine’s *Confessions* is “voluptuous” and “preoccupied with bodily desires”, but it is at the same time an ascetic repudiation of bodily pleasure, a “spiritualist condemnation of the body”. Cocks perceives at least two lessons which are to be drawn from the contradictory character of this text. She surmises that Augustine’s “denial of the body” is based on “a love of the body and recognition of its multiple delights”. Here, she writes, “a lesson in reversals” can be learned: “a great hatred of bodily pleasure can veil a great love of it, from which we can infer that a great love of the body can veil a great hatred.” As we will see, Cocks will go on to identify the latter configuration—a love which veils a hatred—with the conception of embodiment operative within feminist victim politics. She will argue that this political form *appears* to love the female body as it casts this body as vulnerable and in need of protection. However, this will to ‘protect’ the body, operating at a great remove from earlier feminist celebrations of its concupiscence, expresses an “urge to bring authoritative power to bear on bodily life”, and in this betrays its foundation in an essentially ascetic malevolence for “bodily intensity and pleasure.” We will see in the following chapter that feminist protectionism also forms a major preoccupation in the accounts of both Yeatman and Brown.

Cocks then draws a further and related “lesson in disjunctures” from the *Confessions*. On the basis of this text’s disjuncture between style and substance, Cocks surmises that “a substantive repudiation of the sensuously

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14 Ibid., 148.
15 Ibid., 146.
16 Ibid., 155.
17 Ibid., 145.
18 Ibid., 154; 155.
concrete can go hand in hand with a stylistic embrace of it".\textsuperscript{19} After the fashion of the first lesson, Cocks will identify this configuration with the treatment of power particular to feminist victim politics. Noting that the agents of this political form "speak not in the peevish, hurt tones of the victim but in the proud, angry tones of the militant slave", she will argue that this politics posits a substantive repudiation of power per se, but one which coextends a stylistic embrace of power.\textsuperscript{20} Contradictorily, that which is repudiated ('power') is at the same time that which 'styles' the repudiation. This leads Cocks to ask whether "style can signal the will to power", and to suggest that it is an underlying, authoritarian will to power which drives the "fervent declarations" of those "women who deny the existence of power for women and denounce power as a political ideal".\textsuperscript{21} So in the same way as Augustine can be read as stylistically embracing but substantively repudiating sensuality, feminist victim politics can be read as stylistically embracing but substantively repudiating power: in both cases, 'style' betrays an underlying desire for that which is repudiated.

In terms of how Cocks suggests we interpret the contradictions she unveils, it would seem that she casts them in two lights. On one hand, to use Penelope Deutscher's term, Cocks treats them as 'operative contradictions'.\textsuperscript{22} Rather than representing them as inconsistencies which might be corrected or otherwise neutralised through secondary explanation,

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 145.  
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 153.  
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 153. It is worth noting here that this is the very kind of paradox I sought, in Part One, to identify as operable within the popular press accounts of 'victim feminism': victimology is repudiated, but it at the same time styles the repudiation. Given the caution Cocks adopts in devising her mode of critique, we might surmise that an attempt to resist this disjuncture of style and substance has been formative of her account.  
\textsuperscript{22}See the chapter 'Operative Contradiction in Augustine's Confessions' in Penelope Deutscher, Yielding Gender: feminism, deconstruction and the history of philosophy (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 141-168. For Deutscher's discussion of Cocks' treatment of the Confessions, see Ibid., 151.
Cocks allows for these contradictions to be seen as constitutive of the feminist conceptions of power and embodiment they enable, with their rival terms operating ‘hand in hand.’ On the other hand, however, Cocks’ account does seem to suggest that we assume a recuperative approach. In the case of the first lesson, we are to understand Augustine’s underlying somatophilia and feminism’s underlying somatophobia as the truth behind the contradiction. In the case of the second lesson, her account suggests that we consider ‘style’ to be a more reliable informant of the actual character of the text’s political disposition and intent. So Cocks’ Augustinian lessons, to some extent, ‘resolve’ the contradictions they bring to light by gesturing toward the potential consistency the contradictions obscure, where this potential consistency rests with the rival term of the contradiction which Cocks takes to be closer to the truth. As a result, these lessons prepare ground for the psychologistic element of Cocks’ interpretation of feminist victim politics. The ‘actual’ affective economy of this politics already has been lent a repressed, subterranean quality: it can be glimpsed in the fervent style of its advocates and is betrayed by the new tyrannies permitted by its ostensibly altruistic will to protect the female body. It will take Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment to bring this subterranean affective economy fully to the fore.

Cocks’ Augustinian lessons are lent great force when combined with the lesson she moves on to draw from Nietzsche. Cocks initially describes the lesson Nietzsche offers her analysis in the following way:

However ugly it is as a politics on its own, Nietzsche’s theory of ressentiment offers an antidote to the sanctimonious inclinations of any politics of the oppressed. Nietzsche shows us how a critique of dominative power can turn into a sanctification of powerlessness, a celebration of weakness, a championing of victim status, a witch hunt against strength, talent, charm, or any other positive distinction, and finally, with respect to the body as well as what used to be called the
spirit, intellect, and will, a tyrannical suppression of all in life that is forceful and fierce.  

While the textual disjunctures which mark Augustinian asceticism enable Cocks to unveil the contradictions of feminist victim politics, Nietzsche's theory of *ressentiment* promises to account for how feminism arrived at victim politics. Leaving aside, for the moment, certain disagreements with Nietzsche's theory that she will eventually tally, Cocks holds that this theory will illuminate the process through which feminism has gone from being 'a critique of domination' to 'a sanctification of powerlessness'. To put Nietzsche to work in this role Cocks provides an account of the basic architecture of Nietzsche's theory: his distinction between 'noble' and 'base' modes of valuation, between 'master' and 'slave' moralities. *Ressentiment* designates the affective economy which conditions the advent of slave morality.  

Drawing on the first essay of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche's task is to write the noble inauguration of the concept 'good' back into the history of morality, Cocks explains that the noble mode of valuation from which 'master morality' arises consists in active self-affirmation. The noble's concept of the 'good' is indigenous to himself, it is elaborated from his "own happy condition" and equates "the good with the powerful, the vigorous, the joyful, the privileged, the pure." This particular 'good' is the "basic concept" of the noble, and precedes his conception of 'bad.' As Nietzsche puts it,

*[T]he noble mode of valuation ... acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly—its negative concept "low," "common," "bad" is only a

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23Cocks, 'Augustine, Nietzsche and Contemporary Body Politics,' 145.
24Ibid., 150.
subsequently-invented pale, contrasting image in relation to its positive basic concept ... 25

These, then, are the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ of master morality, the products of the noble mode of valuation. As Cocks explains, slave morality can be seen as a reversal, or revaluation, of master morality. Where the noble is actively self-affirming, the slave “derive[s] their notion of themselves and the good only reactively”. 26 The slave achieves self-identity only through negation of the master. Cocks draws on the following from Nietzsche for this point:

In contrast to [the noble man’s reverence for his enemy], picture “the enemy” as the man of ressentiment conceives him—and here precisely is his deed, his creation: he has conceived “the evil enemy,” “the Evil One,” and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a “good one”—himself! 27

The slave has replaced the noble’s less-than-complex distinction between ‘good and bad’ with a complex, metaphysical distinction between ‘good and evil.’ Moreover, he has achieved self-identity only through a prior negation of the master. Where the master’s “value-positing eye” is self-affirming, the slave’s “venomous eye” is other-negating. 28 Unlike the master’s autarkic ‘I am good’, the slave’s syllogistic ‘He is evil, therefore I am good’ establishes a self-identity which, contradictorily, negates and requires ‘evil’. 29 As Cocks writes, “[t]his reactive constitution of self is the mark of the man of ressentiment.” 30 Elaborated by a self so-conceived, slave morality is, as Cocks explains, “founded on [a] transvaluation of good and bad into good and evil,

25GOM: I, 10.
27GOM: I, 11.
28GOM: I, 10. Cocks does not draw on these terms in her exposition of Nietzsche, however owing to their explanatory value I have inserted them here.
29As Nietzsche puts it, “in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction.” GOM: I, 10.
and the derivation of the good of those who suffer from the evil of those who make them suffer.”31 That is, the slave is only ‘good’ insofar as they ‘suffer’; in this way, Nietzsche’s theory shows how a ‘critique of dominitive power’ can become an essentially non-transformative ‘sanctification of powerlessness’. One would expect that at this point Cocks will go on to identify the general condition of Nietzsche’s “slave” or “man of ressentiment” with the state of feminism in particular, and modern radical politics in general. Her elaboration of the basic architecture of Nietzsche’s theory certainly does set things up for her to suggest that feminism is mired in ‘slave morality,’ so described. However, while Cocks does make this identification, she also provides room for this Nietzschean lesson to be taken a step further.

In making her move to Nietzsche, Cocks notes that the Confessions is a “perfect autobiography” of the religious asceticism Nietzsche vigorously maligns in his Genealogy of Morals.32 Saint Augustine, she suggests, might be aligned with the figure of the ascetic priest in Nietzsche’s Genealogy. Importantly for our purposes, this carries the implication of a further alignment of this figure—as distinct from the figure of the slave—with “the great orators and writers of victim politics”.33 The Confessions, in part an argument for “dominative social power”, counsels “unquestioning obedience of all servants to all masters” and renders such obedience as the slave’s passage to spiritual virtue. In this, Augustine lends moral value to the slave—they will stand in for all that is ‘virtuous’ and ‘good’—while simultaneously withdrawing any possibility of factual power from the slave since their value is contingent upon their maintenance of slavish obedience. Moreover, in this schema, the slave’s hatred of the master is redirected back

31Ibid., 151.
32Ibid., 151.
33Ibid., 153.
toward the slave themselves: their suffering no longer is interpreted as the questionable deed of the master, but as an ill brought on "as punishment for their sins."  

Thus, for Cocks, Augustine’s Confessions performs that "translation of the lowness and self-abasement of the weak into the humility and obedience of the virtuous" which Nietzsche identifies as central to the complex spiritual labour of the ascetic priest.

The ascetic priest ‘redirects’ the ressentiment of the slave and encourages him toward self-blame: the power of the master is preserved thereby. As Cocks explains:

For Nietzsche ... religious asceticism ... provides a solution for the strong to the ressentiment against them of the weak. By representing the natural characteristics of the weak as spiritual virtues, religious asceticism flatters the weak without allowing their will to power an outward outlet, forcing them instead to stamp out any tendencies to pride, strength, and aggression in themselves; teaching them to blame themselves for the ills they suffer as punishments for their sins ...  

Cocks’ Nietzschean lesson does imply that we are to read feminist politics in particular, and modern radical politics in general, as having assumed something of the role and character of Nietzsche’s ascetic priest, as distinct from his man of ressentiment. While this furnishes her account with

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34Ibid., 151.
35As Nietzsche writes, the ascetic priest “alters the direction of ressentiment” GOM: III, 15. Emphasis in original.
36Cocks, 'Augustine, Nietzsche and Contemporary Body Politics,' 151.
37This echoes an argument made in Daniel Conway's Nietzschean reading of feminist standpoint theory wherein the figure of the feminist epistemologist (specifically, Sandra Harding) is aligned with the ascetic priest. As Conway explains, “Like the ascetic priest, Harding presents herself—qua feminist epistemologist—as the theoretical spokesperson for various subjugated standpoints, which she describes as instantiating the position of the ‘slave’. Attempting to empower these disadvantaged agents as ‘slaves’, Harding resorts to a quick fix. In order to alleviate the pain and alienation of their victimage, she promises these ‘slaves’ the (illusory) epistemic privilege that derives from a ‘less distorted’ perspective on the world. The subjugated standpoints, she insists, afford their otherwise dispossessed residents a more accurate glimpse of the world as it really is.” Daniel Conway, 'Das Weib an Sich: the slave revolt in epistemology,' in Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory, ed. Paul Patton (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 124.
suggesiveness and complexity, it is problematic that Cocks does not pursue the implications of these different alignments for her diagnosis of feminist victim politics.

Two points may be made here. First, in Nietzsche's theory, the ascetic priest and the man of ressentiment hold distinctly different relationships to ressentiment. The former 'conducts' the ressentiment of the latter, and is tenuously placed both 'without' and 'within' ressentiment.38 Our understanding of feminist victim politics as a 'politics of ressentiment' will differ according to which Nietzschean figure is invoked. Secondly and most importantly, as Cocks notes the role of the ascetic priest is to conduct ressentiment such that the slave will blame themselves for their condition, where this inward direction of blame works to protect the powerful from impugnation by the slave: in this way, asceticism is a 'solution' for the powerful to the problem of the powerless. However, as Cocks also notes, feminist victim politics precisely does not direct blame in this way: rather, it directs blame externally, stepping up its demands on the powerful, and so undoes the above mentioned 'solution.' In Nietzschean terms, to undo this solution is to return ressentiment to its 'explosive' character, its unruliness, its propensity to effect a radical revolt which will oversee the destruction of the higher power.39

Aside from the question as to whether such explosive power is precisely that which Cocks will later invoke when she recommends that feminism reignite its radical potential, let us register that, as in the popular feminist accounts of 'victim feminism', Cocks leaves the question of self-blame entirely unexamined. This undermines her critique of victim politics to the extent that, in suggesting that there is a correlation between the ascetic

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38 For an account of this contradictory relation of the priest to ressentiment, see Chapter 2 of Aaron Ridley's Nietzsche's Conscience: six character studies from the "Genealogy" (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 41-63.
39 GOM: III, 15.
priest and the 'writers and orators of victim politics,' but then neglecting to think through the fundamental difference between these figures as regards the matter of self-blame, Cocks sidesteps the sense in which victim politics' external direction of blame can be seen as a rejection and reversal of injunctions to self-blame prevailing in contexts of masculinist domination. We will be returning to the matter of self-blame, not only because it surfaces also in Brown's account in the following chapter, but because it is of great interest in being the one element of victim identity which is most neglected by the critics and most unsettling to their accounts.

Cocks' circuitous route foreshadows the severity of her eventual critique of the state of modern radical politics. In the remainder of her piece, she tallies the series of 'degenerations' to which, in her view, radical politics has fallen prey. The crucial first degeneration might be summed up as a transition from following Marx to illustrating Nietzsche. For Cocks, radical political forms initially entertained "a noble hatred for the master" and aimed at a "dissolution of mastery and servitude via the slave's political action." This transcendent aim was conceived in relation to the categories of oppression, revolution and emancipation, and sought to "posit its own transcendence through the activity of the slave." But this discourse has been replaced with "a discourse that, denying that slave the capacity for action, gains its moral purchase through a recitation of the slave's suffering." As Cocks vividly describes,

> The degeneration ... occurs with the metamorphosis of the master/slave relation into a relation of victimizer and victimized. The slave relies for its understanding and articulation of enslavement less and less on the discordant triptych oppression-revolution

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40 Cocks, 'Augustine, Nietzsche and Contemporary Body Politics,' 153; 152.
41 Ibid., 152.
42 Ibid..
-emancipation, more and more on an endless series of synonyms—violation, degradation, humiliation, abuse—for the passive recipience of evil ... there is not a challenge to the master but a stepping up of demands to the victimiser: demands for a guilty conscience ("Look what you've done to us!") and for reparations ("Look what you owe us!") ... the slave's noble hatred for of the master's monopoly on freedom and pleasure decays into the victim's determination to outlaw for everyone any freedom and pleasure that any kind of victim is unable to enjoy.43

For Cocks, the shift from a transcendent language of revolutionary political change to a litigious language of compensation for pains suffered enables a second, then a third, degeneration. The second degeneration consists in the appearance of a protectionist brand of authoritarianism which is particularly potent in feminist dealings with sexuality. As we saw earlier when retracing her Augustinian lessons, Cocks reads the protectionist drive of contemporary feminist body politics as 'a hatred of the body which masquerades as love.' For Cocks, radical feminism's original "Yes to the body", its "expansive celebration of female eros and of eroticisms conventionally claimed to be perverse" has given way to a broad feminist repudiation of "sexual desire per se" which offers only "a No, a refusal of power and pleasure to the female body for the sake of protecting it from victimisation."44 This will to protect the body is, for Cocks, merely a suit of love. It sanctions an authoritarianism which contradictorily repudiates and recuperates the very phallocentric hatred of the (female) body that radical feminism originally sought to counter.45

Cocks identifies Catharine MacKinnon as a major author and representative of this perspective on sexuality, and refers also to Andrea

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43Ibid..
44Ibid., 154.
Dworkin and Mary Daly. But she notes that this perspective “has its most vital life outside of texts” and is present more generally in the “speech, common sense ... and practice of counter-publics and individuals influenced by oppositional ideas.” Perhaps referring to the proliferation of feminist critiques of MacKinnon and Dworkin’s anti-pornography campaign, Cocks notes that challenges to the perspective they represent “are mainly confined to academic texts”. This, she fears, has not been enough to prevent this perspective on sexuality from gaining “increasing purchase in the dominant culture and the legal-political arena.”

Indeed, the amenability of feminist victim politics to the processes of legal and state regulation appear to be Cocks’ primary concern. She writes that this form of politics, in “broaden[ing] the meaning of the body’s violation”, broadens in tandem “the scope for authoritative rule.” Through the prism of sexual abuse, feminist victim politics directs state power toward “strict censure” of bodily life. While “a fast shrinking up of the instances in which sexual pleasure can be said to be good” is set in motion, “condemnation of hard passion, fierce bodily meetings, and violent physical contacts” becomes more widespread. Such contacts are rendered as “constituting by definition and without exception the abuse of one body by another.”

Reminiscent of the thread running through popular critiques of victim feminism which holds that the spectre of political correctness has come to

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46 Ibid., 157. n.16; n.17.
47 Ibid., 157. n.17.
48 Ibid., 152.
49 Ibid., 154.
50 Ibid..
51 Ibid..
52 Ibid., 155.
53 Ibid., 154.
54 Ibid.
haunt all known privacies, Cocks airs her concern that this second degeneration of radical politics casts a suspicion over bodily life which commissions strict government of the body:

... we find in segments of the population hyper-alert to the sexual harassment and abuse of women and children (a real enough harassment and abuse, to be sure), a suspicion of all socio-physical entanglements, a distaste for the confused, opaque jostling in life which, barring the grave offence, people must fend for themselves. There is an urge ... to question every flicker of reaction on the surface of one body to another; to interrogate every point at which bodies touch; to unmask all libidinal responses to social situations ... to prohibit an increasing number of bodily gestures and movements that might be expressions of sexual power ...\(^{55}\)

Therefore, for Cocks, the second degeneration which marks radical feminism's descent into victim politics has created a context in which "embodiment itself" is "the fundamental crime": "having a body makes one a potential victim of physical and sexual abuse and/or a potential abuser".\(^{56}\) The contradictory terms of Augustinian asceticism are reversed: feminism victim politics "is based not on a love of the body and a recognition of its multiple delights, but on a hatred of the body and an insistence on the body's multiple horrors."\(^{57}\)

Cocks does not elaborate in full the third and final degeneration her article tables. However the form her article assumes can itself be seen as a direct response to it. She explains that this third degeneration oversees a transfiguration of politics into psychology. Victim politics trades the "struggle for power" for elaboration of "psychotherapeutic techniques for treating and

\(^{55}\)Ibid..

\(^{56}\)Ibid., 155. She writes "This new twist of body politics, in which having a body makes one a potential victim of physical abuse and sexual abuse and/or a potential abuser, pits itself directly against the view that having a body makes one a potential subject of sensuous experience and giver or taker of sensual passion and delight." Ibid..

\(^{57}\)Ibid.
eradicating the will to power”, while truth-claims which are amenable to argument are traded for testimony to subjective feelings which, as such, are posited beyond hermeneutics.58 Prohibiting criticism in advance, this latter discursive form has necessitated Cocks’ circuitous approach. As she writes, “in an age of victim politics the subjective feelings of victimisation will always have the moral edge.”59 As we will see in the following chapter, Wendy Brown’s use of the concept of ressentiment to read salient features of modernist feminist epistemology has the effect of amplifying and developing the argument Cocks begins here.

Cocks’ article does not provide a vivid account of how the ground of feminist politics might be shifted away from the politics of ressentiment. The force of her critique suggests that it is intended to be exemplary rather than prescriptive. Two related suggestions can, however, be discerned with reasonable clarity. Both gesture toward a positive form of avatism which might restore radical politics to radicalism. The first suggestion is that the categories of revolution and emancipation, as well as the concept of transcendence, sustain precisely the sense of political movement which ressentimental victim politics, as a “dead end”, curtails.60 While Cocks does not advocate an uncritical return to these terms among political theorists,61 she does cast them as crucial for warding off what she sees as the atrophy of ressentiment in radical political life. Thus, in her account, these terms emerge as crucial to the maintenance of radical political movement. The second suggestion which can be discerned is for a return to a ‘harsh’ and ‘blunt’ Augustinian “depiction of the world as made of relations between mastery

58Ibid., 155.
59Ibid., 155.
60Ibid., 154.
61Cocks notes that where radical political activists have eschewed these terms on account of their increasing involvement in victim politics, “critical intellectuals have dropped the categories of revolution and emancipation for quite different reasons”. Ibid., 152.
and servitude”, but one which eschews Augustine’s recommendation of obedience.\textsuperscript{62} Such a depiction, Cocks suggests, might prompt rebelliousness in the slave, who in turn might counter not just domination, but the rejection of aggressive self-assertion and antagonism which attends the anti-violence emphasis of victim politics.\textsuperscript{63} Ultimately, then, Cocks’ account invokes the figure of the ‘rebel,’ the ‘militant slave’—who, in style \textit{and} substance, directs their will to power toward the imposition of “a new imprint on the world”—as a possible antidote to the malaise she has diagnosed.\textsuperscript{64}

One final task remains before we cross to an exposition of Marion Tapper’s account of feminist \textit{ressentiment} which, as we will see, draws on Cocks’ account. The task is to register Cocks’ disagreements with Nietzsche. Given that we bring to Cocks’ article a specific interest in the terms on which she employs Nietzsche, these disagreements are significant for our purposes. The first disagreement has to do with ‘master morality’. Cocks notes that Nietzsche is “starry-eyed ... about the morality of the master” since it would seem that “the substance of the master is determined by the dialectic of the master/slave relation and not by physiology or instinct.”\textsuperscript{65} Cocks suggests two things here. The first is that we trade a Nietzschean for a Hegelian framework in order to understand how mastery is achieved. The second, implicit suggestion is that to do so would not affect how we understand slave morality, \textit{ressentiment}, and the vision of politics these concepts might enable. That is, to replace Nietzsche’s autarkic master with a master—or indeed a

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., 156.
\textsuperscript{63}Ibid. There is a tension here between this suggestion and the central argument of Cocks’ book \textit{The Oppositional Imagination}. In that book Cocks works through Foucault’s conception of power and argues that feminists can no longer entertain the ‘simple’ view that ‘power’ equals ‘domination’ and that the terms ‘domination’ and ‘subordination’ will provide an exhaustive account of power. In the current article, however, Cocks suggests that precisely such a ‘simple’ account is what is required.
\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., 152.
\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., 155.
political regime—who requires a debased other for self-recognition would not, for Cocks, affect our understanding of the ‘reactive constitution of self’ which enables the politics of ressentiment. Surely, however, once both parties to a relation of domination are understood as reactively constituted, our vision of a politics of ressentiment would shift to a vision of the politics of emancipation as a theatre of competing reactions. That is, our interpretation of feminism as a politics of ressentiment would have to take into account the forms of reaction and ressentiment feminism presses against. To foreshadow our later dealings with this point in Part 3, this suggests that for a full account of feminism’s relationship with ressentiment we would have to situate feminism not just ‘within’ but ‘against’ ressentiment, and consider the respective characters of these two quite different encounters with ressentiment.

This brings us to Cocks’ second disagreement with Nietzsche. She locates radical politics as having been a political form which “Nietzsche would have called a noble politics were he able to see nobility in any kind of slave revolt.” However radical politics, in assuming the mantle of victim politics, has come to exhibit “degenerations of thinking and valuing reminiscent of what made Nietzsche cry out, “Bad air! Bad air!” Two things are set in place with these comments: something of a disassociation from Nietzsche’s political views and, relatedly, an invocation of radical politics’ noble past.

Cocks’ disassociation from Nietzsche’s political views rests on her understanding that Nietzsche’s concepts of slave morality and ressentiment, translated into political philosophy, will not allow for any kind of politics of the slave to be read in a positive light. Cocks does, however, want to read the original incarnation of radical politics as a positive politics of the slave: it was a “vigorou and passionate” project to “sieze freedom, power, and pleasure

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66Ibid., 152.
67Ibid.
from the monopoly of the master and to impose a new imprint on world".\textsuperscript{68} Now, however, it has “succumbed to \textit{ressentiment}” and is “more aptly called resistance politics”.\textsuperscript{69} To resolve her disagreement with Nietzsche over whether there can be a noble kind of slave revolt, Cocks intervenes upon Nietzsche’s theory of \textit{ressentiment}. Specifically, she distances ‘slave morality’ from ‘\textit{ressentiment}’. She writes “[i]f slave morality is not, as Nietzsche supposed, a morality of \textit{ressentiment} by definition, it is always in danger of succumbing to \textit{ressentiment}.”\textsuperscript{70}

So Cocks suggests that for the question of feminist \textit{ressentiment}, we need to treat ‘slave morality’ and ‘\textit{ressentiment}’ as separable elements of Nietzsche’s theory. Where Nietzsche places slave morality and \textit{ressentiment} in a continuum and, on Cocks’ reading, casts both of these things as ‘bad,’ we should interrupt this continuum, recuperate ‘slave morality,’ but maintain agreement that \textit{ressentiment} is ‘bad.’ Essentially, this is Cocks’ strategy for negotiating the difficulties of using Nietzsche for radical feminist political theory. Situating Nietzsche as a conservative thinker who nonetheless offers radicals important truths, Cocks opts for a selective appropriation of Nietzsche, suggesting that, for radical ends at least, he can not be appropriated ‘as is.’ Put together with Cocks’ disagreement with Nietzsche’s concept of master morality, and with the tension identified earlier regarding her invocations of the ascetic priest and the man of \textit{ressentiment}, we might conclude that Cock’s employment of Nietzsche—although packaged as the simple extraction of a single lesson—is actually quite complex. Let us now consider Marion Tapper’s account of feminism, \textit{ressentiment} and the category ‘victim.’

\textsuperscript{68}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{69}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{70}\textit{Ibid.}, 155.
3.2 Tapper: feminism in the spirit of *ressentiment*

Marion Tapper’s chapter ‘*Ressentiment* and Power: some reflections on feminist practices’ at first appears to be consistent with the formulation of feminist *ressentiment* offered by Cocks. Like Cocks, Tapper casts *ressentiment* as a ‘psycho-political’ force which has entered the political scene upon a recent and regrettable shift in feminist thought and practice. Tapper suggests that her account might be seen as operating in tandem with Cocks’ account.71 Where Cocks covers feminist *ressentiment* as it plays out in the domain of “feminist political and theoretical concerns with the body and sexuality”, Tapper’s account will cover *ressentiment* in the case of feminist epistemology and institutional practices in the university setting.72 However as we unpack Tapper’s account, we will see that this notion of a tandem operation between she and Cocks is misleading in important respects. While these theorists do share some ground, my exposition of Tapper will demonstrate that she brings a significantly different political sensibility to the question of feminist *ressentiment* than does Cocks, and that her account points feminism in a different, perhaps opposite, political direction when it comes to shifting feminism away from the ground of *ressentiment*. Provisionally, let me note that the distance between Tapper and Cocks is cleaved by major differences in their respective interpretations of Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* and, relatedly, their respective attitudes to the role of radicalism in feminist politics. We turn first to Tapper’s key claims.

Tapper’s chapter marries Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* with Foucault’s analysis of power to form the conceptual backdrop of an inquiry into contemporary feminist institutional practices. The main argument of Tapper’s chapter has two key components. The first key component consists

71Tapper, ‘*Ressentiment* and Power,’ 133.
72Ibid..
of the claim that there has been a major shift in the practices of feminists located within educational institutions, among other professional contexts. Where feminist practices were oriented by the laudable goal of 'equality,' they are now motivated by a problematic desire for 'power over.' Tapper will represent this as a shift from a liberal feminist agenda to a radical feminist agenda. The second key component of Tapper's argument consists of the claim that the kinds of (radical) feminist institutional practices issuing from this shift represent a "specific feminist configuration of power/knowledge", and should be understood as "motivated ... by the spirit of ressentiment".

As we will see, Tapper argues that feminist institutional practices, now oriented by a ressentimental desire for 'power over,' have come to co-opt rather than resist the disciplinary powers of the institutions they seek to reform. In this, they bring a "specific feminist configuration of power/knowledge" into being. In combination, these two key components deliver the thesis Tapper notes early in her chapter:

The thesis is that some feminist practices, in so far as they are motivated by the spirit of ressentiment, have been preoccupied with power as control and that this involves a double-edged danger. On the

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73 Tapper's treatment of the categories 'liberal feminism' and 'radical feminism' in the present article differs markedly from her earlier piece of writing 'Can a Feminist be a Liberal?' (Australasian Journal of Philosophy, Supplement to Volume 64 (June 1986): 37-47). In that piece, Tapper runs a critique of liberal feminism's recourse to the strategy of de-gendering, arguing that a rhetorical erasure of sexual difference will leave the liberal subject and the public/private dichotomy dangerously in tact (a position close to that of Carole Pateman in The Sexual Contract [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988]). As we will see in what remains of this chapter, in the current article, written six years later, Tapper's critical eye is turned not to liberal feminism, but to radical feminism as it is practiced by feminists in institutional settings (who, owing to their institutional locations, might be called 'radical liberals'). As we will find as the chapter's exposition of Tapper unfolds, one of the ramifications of Tapper's argument is the idea that such feminists need to acknowledge the success of liberal feminism, the achievements won through equal opportunity, anti-sex discrimination and sexual harassment legislation. In her former article, however, such legislation is identified with the inevitable failures of the de-gendering proposal. Similarly, whereas in the former piece Tapper aims suspicion at the liberal feminist goal of equality, in the current piece this goal is affirmed and protected from critique (Ibid., 37). In short, in the current chapter on feminist ressentiment, Tapper occupies the very position she had subject to critique in her earlier article.

74 Tapper, 'Ressentiment and Power,' 130.
one side it risks playing into the hands of, rather than resisting, the modern mechanisms of power that Foucault identified as operating by techniques of surveillance, normalization and control. On the other, it involves blindness to or forgetfulness of other forms of the will to power which are positive, those active forms concerned with self-formation and autonomy.75

In general, then, Tapper's chapter aims to provide a critique of feminist institutional practices which is cast along the lines of a cautionary tale about feminism's relationship with institutional power. One thing which needs to be noted from the outset about this cautionary tale is that it exhibits a degree of internal lability. Perhaps as part of the sensitive nature of victim politics which, as we gleaned from Cocks, can trouble its critics, Tapper's 'pro and contra' is not always clear nor stable. Her sympathies seem to shift which, at times, creates interesting and contradictory tensions for her path of argumentation. With this in mind, let us examine the two key components of her argument in greater depth.

We begin with the first key component of Tapper's argument: that feminist institutional practices have undergone a major shift. Tapper describes this shift as a movement from "identifying and seeking to redress injustices to finding 'evil' everywhere ... from wanting equal power within existing institutions to attacking these institutions themselves, from criticizing practices and discourses to finding everything 'evil'."76 In her description of this shift, Tapper posits feminism's relationship to the goal of equality as a key factor in determining a tenable direction for feminist politics. Moreover, she suggests that recent feminist movement beyond "wanting equal power" has enabled an untenable form of feminist radicalism to emerge. As the above quote indicates, in Tapper's view, this form of

75Ibid..
76Ibid. She notes further that this shift can be conceived as one from "resisting power" to being "complicit in it." Ibid., 131.
radicalism has launched a generalised attack on "everything", reads this "everything" as "evil", and is not prepared to work non-combatantly "within existing institutions". In seeking to substantiate her claim regarding the occurrence and the nature of this shift toward radicalism, Tapper will critically appraise feminist institutional practices, encompassing the bureaucratic and the pedagogical. However, in focussing on feminist practices, Tapper's analysis does not exclude critical consideration of feminist thought. To the contrary, Tapper will suggest that the shift she perceives in feminist institutional practices has been precipitated by a prior shift in feminist epistemology. We turn, then, to her treatment of feminist epistemology.

The general shift in feminist epistemology Tapper considers is reminiscent of Sandra Harding's figuration of a movement from 'the Woman Question in science' to 'the Science Question in feminism.' Of course, Harding endorses this movement: a cursory account of her schema can be used to illustrate what Tapper will critique. In Harding's schema, a feminist project oriented by 'the Woman Question in science' will craft a responsiveness to exclusion and injustice primarily through a language of equal representation and opportunity. While seeking to counter androcentric bias, this politics will not necessarily or centrally challenge the epistemological and institutional architecture it will earn women the right to inhabit. Such a challenge is offered when feminism refigures its concerns and arrives at 'the Science Question in feminism'. In the introduction to her book *The Science Question in Feminism*, Harding tells us that the variety of political projects enabled in the name of this question will engage broad examination of the values and politico-ontological situations which have conditioned the very formation of

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existing epistemologies.\textsuperscript{78} Such projects will prise open the question as to "what kind of experience should ground the beliefs we honor as knowledge".\textsuperscript{79} In so doing they shift the ground of feminist inquiry from the question as to "how women can be more equitably treated within and by science" to the question as to "how a science apparently so deeply involved in distinctively masculine projects can possibly be used for emancipatory ends."\textsuperscript{80}

While she does not refer to Harding's schema, Tapper's first example of a general shift in feminist epistemology, drawn from the arena of feminist art history, traces precisely the contour of this schema. Tapper writes,

Take, for example, art history. Earlier art historical critiques were concerned to establish that women artists were ignored, excluded from institutions and from recognition through critical appraisal of the formation of canons. In the process they discovered or retrieved and documented the work of women artists and argued that they should be included in the canon. It is worth noting that the fact that this was possible showed that, despite being excluded and ignored, women artists were not rendered powerless, much less non-existent. Since the early 1980s the focus of attention has shifted from getting women included in the canon to questioning the process of canon formation. More specifically it is claimed that the problem is not so much that the history of art and the practice of art history excludes women artists. The problem concerns the reason why art criticism and art history needs to assert a feminine stereotype, sensibility and art.\textsuperscript{81}

We might say that, as with the feminist epistemologists Harding endorses, feminist art historians have, according to Tapper, moved beyond 'the Woman Question in art' and toward 'the Art Question in feminism.' So too, Tapper will add, have feminist philosophers made such a move.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid..
\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{80}Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{81}Tapper, 'Ressentiment and Power,' 132. Tapper cites the work of feminist art historians Rosika Parker and Griselda Pollock as examples of the latter tendency. See Parker and Pollock, \textit{Old Mistresses: women, art and ideology} (London: Routledge, 1981).
Approvingly, Tapper notes that feminists philosophers started out by engaging in a project to “catalogue the absurdly sexist remarks made by male philosophers about women” and to “re-read the canon to reveal sexist bias in even those texts that said nothing explicit about women.” Tapper then asserts that this project “has been completed”. That is, ‘the Woman Question in philosophy’ has been addressed successfully now that sexism and male bias in the history of philosophy have been exposed, and women’s inclusion within philosophy has been sanctioned. However, rather than rest on their completed work, feminist philosophers have shifted their sights to ‘the Philosophy Question in feminism’, engaging deep and radical questioning of the very formation of philosophical knowledge in relation to sexual difference.

Tapper’s suggestion as to why feminists have made this shift toward a more radical project is important for our purposes. Tapper muses that “perhaps in part because [their initial project] has been completed”, feminist philosophers have moved on to generate “much more broadsweeping” and “wilder” claims about philosophy than their previous project called upon them to make. These include the claim that “philosophy itself—logic, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophical forms of argument and analysis—is patriarchal.” Tapper’s suggestion is that this move among feminist

82Ibid., 133.
83Ibid.
84Ibid. My emphasis.
85Ibid. Tapper refers to the work of two feminist philosophers to evince her claim: Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason: ‘male’ and ‘female’ in Western philosophy (London: Routledge, 1993 [second edition]) and K. B. Jones, ‘On Authority: or, why women are not entitled to speak,’ in eds. Diamond and Quinby, Feminism and Foucault: reflections on resistance (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988). It seems important to note that, as against Tapper’s intimation that an analysis such as Lloyd’s casts the practice of reason as ‘patriarchal’ and therefore deserving of feminist rejection, Lloyd actually argues that the practice of reason is recoverable despite its implicit metaphorical and symbolic association with maleness. In addition to this detail, it is worth noting here that Tapper’s treatment of feminist epistemology actually is quite startling. Tapper accords value to feminist philosophers and art historians only when they are performing the labour of ‘discovering,’ ‘retrieving,’ ‘documenting,’ ‘cataloguing,’ and ‘re-reading’ that
philosophers toward ‘the Philosophy Question in feminism’ has not so much been prompted by compelling and legitimate concerns, but rather by the prospect that feminist philosophy’s reason for being vanished upon the completion of feminist philosophy’s initial project. As a corollary, then, Tapper is casting feminist philosophy’s initial, liberal project as its only real or legitimate project, and its subsequent, radical project as illegitimate and somewhat gratuitous. Tapper is hesitant about making this suggestion (thus her qualification: “perhaps in part because …”), and at this stage she does not posit it as a definitive explanation of the shift feminists have made. However, as we will see, Tapper’s suggestion that feminists have shifted their epistemological outlook in order to preserve a reason for being in the face of completed work actually plays a crucial role in her analysis. This is because it forms the basis for her use of Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment. But for now let us address Tapper’s view that the emergence of ‘broadstepping’ and ‘wild’ claims among newly radical feminist epistemologists has precipitated a shift in feminist institutional practices.

is, precisely not when they are interpreting, philosophising or historicising on the basis of the material they have discovered, regardless of how agreeable or otherwise the substance of their interpretations, philosophies and historicisations might be.

86It is appropriate at this juncture to supplement Tapper’s account with some indication as to why a number of feminist philosophers have not been content to rest on ‘including’ women in the philosophical enterprise while leaving the character of that enterprise itself unchallenged. A brief account of Michèle le Déeuff’s exemplary argument in her chapter ‘Long Hair, Short Ideas’ should suffice (The Philosophical Imaginary, trans. Colin Gordon (London: The Atheneum Press, 1989), 100-128). This chapter analyses the terms on which women have been included within the philosophical enterprise, offering the persuasive argument that philosophy’s permissiveness toward women has been a “sly form of prohibition” (Ibid., 103). Philosophy’s amenability to the inclusion of ‘less knowledgeable others’ (a category which might include children, the ‘common man’ and ‘savages’ no less than women) operates crucially to maintain the conception of the philosopher as the bearer of complete knowledge: less knowledgeable others operate as a source of contrast against which philosophers can perceive themselves as complete knowers, since knowledge alone does not foster this self-perception. In this way, the strategy of ‘inclusion’ can operate to “atrophy”, rather than counter, women’s marginality within philosophy. In the context of Tapper’s analysis, Le Déeuff’s argument alone would lend the move toward what I am calling here ‘the Philosophy Question in feminism’ considerable legitimacy.
Although Tapper already has suggested that the shift in feminist epistemology might be ('perhaps in part') bereft of legitimate foundation, she writes that "whatever the meaning and validity" of the claims of newly radical feminist epistemologists, and "whatever [their] intentions", the negative effects of the shift they have made prevail in the university setting. Most immediately, Tapper points out the pedagogical ramifications of this shift. She notes that it has had a "baneful effect" on women students, who now can use feminist antipathy toward the canon "to justify refusing to read the classics of philosophy on the ground that they are written by men and hence patriarchal." Tapper laments that the new feminist epistemology has created "a form of discourse in which it is enough to say that a text is written by a man to dismiss it." But Tapper is primarily concerned that the shift in feminist epistemology has played an at least precipitous role in reformulating non-pedagogical feminist institutional practices. She argues that this shift has contributed to "the likelihood of [a] shift from wanting a place in [the] academy to wanting power in that academy."

In questioning the foundations of knowledge through a prism of sexual difference, and through principled rejection of the prospect of mere 'inclusion,' feminist epistemologists have precipitated feminism's practical trade of an equality-oriented desire for institutional place, for a radically-oriented desire for institutional power. In the following passage Tapper makes it clear that she sees this as a shift from a liberal to a radical feminist agenda, and she also offers a vivid portrait of the brand of radicalism with which she is concerned:

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87Tapper, 'Ressentiment and Power,' 133.
88Ibid.
89Ibid., 133; 134, my emphasis. By her conclusion, Tapper will have placed feminist epistemology and feminist institutional practices in a praxis relationship, referring to the "specific power effects... induced" by feminist epistemology (Ibid., 142).
In general we might say that early liberal feminists, and their contemporary counterparts, saw themselves as arguing within a theory of justice and social practices for the transformation of those practices so that women could share in the good things available while the bad things were removed. In contrast some contemporary radical feminists tend to proclaim themselves against the whole of western discourse and society. We find wholesale denunciations of men, patriarchy, sex, language, philosophy, and so on. We find claims that men have all the power and women none and that men use that power to repress women; differences are acknowledged between women and men and between women, but not between men; everything considered unacceptable is associated with men; and monolithic univocal explanations of this are proposed: either by such concrete things as 'the nature of men' or more abstractly, the institution of 'compulsory heterosexuality'.

Unlike liberal feminists, the new radical feminists exhibit a penchant for "wholesale denunciation", entertain misandrisim, and lend the character of their political opponent/s a "monolithic" quality. In describing these factors in an aghast tone, Tapper makes it clear that they are outrageous in her view. But Tapper's aim is not just that of exposition-as-critique. She aims to provide a concrete connection between the emergence of this kind of feminist thinking and a shift in feminist institutional practices.

Her analysis asks after the institutional function of this tendency toward "wholesale denunciation". To answer this inquiry, Tapper argues that feminists "with institutional power" who work in contexts wherein "women have roughly achieved equal power" (ie. universities) have a vested interest in shifting beyond the liberal feminist project of inclusion and toward a radical feminist project which involves "wholesale denunciation". Wholesale denunciation, Tapper reasons, will lend such feminists renewed political

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90Ibid., 134. It should be noted here that Tapper does not provide textual evidence in support of her claims regarding the character of these lines of feminist critique. It may be that she is drawing on personal experience and wanting to avoid singling out particular feminist proponents of the view she describes.
purchase now that (liberal) feminism's goals "roughly" have been achieved, and feminism has been "reasonably successful". She writes:

Where those with institutional power cannot justifiably claim that they are being discriminated against at the level of actions and practices they can maintain their political integrity, their claim to ideological purity and sense of powerlessness by resorting to finding 'evil' and injustice in wider and wider circumstances and at deeper and more concealed levels.91

This passage suggests that Tapper would have us interpret the views of newly radical feminist epistemologists as gratuitous and indeed self-interested. Feminists are conducting an increasingly broad and deep search for traces of political opposition in order to furnish themselves with renewed political purchase and professional longevity. Where Cocks argued that feminists are "broaden[ing] the meaning of the body's violation" and so broadening "the scope for authoritative rule", Tapper contends that feminists are broadening their conception of sexist injustice so as to maintain a political foothold and gain institutional power. Tapper's argument, then, is that feminist claims that androcentrism and sexism have a deep and endemic rather than a superficial and incidental presence in institutionalised knowledges, functions institutionally to extend feminism's reason for being at a time when liberal feminist successes threaten this reason for being. As such these claims operate as a mandate for further practical reforms which will lend feminists not just institutional 'place,' but institutional 'power.'

Tapper examines a range of feminist institutional practices in this light. In the following passages, she maps out what she sees as the practical shift mandated by feminism's epistemological shift:

What started out as a campaign to get women appointed and promoted, to introduce women's studies courses and to eliminate sexist

91Ibid..
bias from teaching practices and course content has now become somewhat different—and in accordance if not collusion with broader changes in the academies. These broader changes involve an increasing bureaucratisation which operates with definite techniques of surveillance and normalisation ... [f]eminists are co-opting these procedures. The academic must now establish that they teach, research and administer not only in a way in general acceptable to bureaucrats but also in a way which is deemed satisfactory to feminist bureaucrats... [c]ourse content must be relevant to women, teaching materials must not be sexist, students’ essays must not use sexist language, all committees must include at least one woman, and so on.\textsuperscript{92}

and:

At least some feminist academics now want all courses and preferably all appointments, at least in arts faculties, to incorporate or evidence a concern for women’s issues. And mention is even made of the need to retrain male staff about disciplinary masculinism.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{92}Ibid., 137.

\textsuperscript{93}Ibid., 132. One aspect of Tapper’s view deviates from my expository task but is nonetheless noteworthy. It has to do with the character of affirmative action in the Australian setting. For the portrait of feminist institutional practices Tapper provides here, she is relying on two sources (aside from her experience as an academic): Judith Allen’s article ‘Women’s Studies in the 1990s: problems and prospects’ and Jill Matthews and Dorothy Broom’s article ‘Orphans of the Storm: the attrition of the ANU women’s studies program,’ both in The Australian Universities’ Review Vol. 32, No. 2 (1991). In interpreting the practical recommendations made in these articles as manifestations of a shift in feminist epistemology, Tapper is to some extent eliding the political, or legislative, context in which these articles appeared. In particular, Tapper does not make mention of the distinctive character of affirmative action in the Australian context, as per the Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act of 1986 (AAA). The distinctive feature of the Act is its non-punitive, non-prescriptive and indeed non-regulatory approach to countering sexual discrimination in the workplace, where this approach was designed to leave some room for employers and employees to take responsibility for interpreting the Act as per their existing business practices, among other factors. As such the Act invited—indeed demanded—secondary interpretation. I would suggest that Allen, Matthews and Broom, along with many others working in the public and private sectors in the wake of the Act, were responding to this invitation as they formulated their proposals for institutional change. Thus Tapper’s argument that a shift toward radicalism within feminist epistemology accounts for the kinds of recommendations these authors offer is not, in my view, an adequate explanation. For an account of the AAA see Valerie Braithwaite, ‘Designing the Process of Workplace Change through the Affirmative Action Act,’ in Gender and Institutions: welfare, work and citizenship, eds. Moira Gatens and Alison MacKinnon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 107-130.
In tune with the new feminist epistemology, which envisages a monolithic and omnipresent enemy, feminist practices are broadening so they might encompass every aspect of institutional life, from “what we teach and how” through to professional behaviour, appointments procedures and research criteria.94

However it must be noted that Tapper’s description of this shift in feminist institutional practices is problematic since the very same kinds of practices appear on both sides of the opposition she sets up. For example, in the first passage, she notes approvingly that feminists first attempted to “eliminate sexist bias from teaching practices and course content”, but that they have moved on to an apparently more radical insistence that “teaching materials must not be sexist”. Similarly, in affirmative actions settings, attempts to “get women appointed and promoted” have tended to go hand in hand with insistence that “all committees must include at least one woman”, meaning that the opposition Tapper sets up here between such elements of the feminist affirmative action agenda is not altogether convincing.

The point that does come across clearly here is that “feminists are co-opting” the procedures and techniques which attend the “increasing bureaucratisation” of universities. We will inspect this point more closely as Tapper expands on it through her use of Foucault for the second key component of her argument. Nonetheless we must recall that Tapper’s initial description of the feminists practices she critiques cast them as “attacking ... institutions themselves”. Tapper contrasted this with the liberal feminist project to reform institutions. Thus a tension opens up here within Tapper’s representation of the practices she critiques.

94Tapper, ‘Ressentiment and Power,’ 139.
We are to understand that radical feminists are at once "attacking institutions themselves" and "co-opting", in apparently reformist mode, the institution’s procedures (as Tapper notes, they are "using the rules and regulations of the institution to achieve [their ends]"95). That is, the feminists Tapper critiques as radically anti-institutional also appear to adopt the feminist strategy to which she has explicitly offered sympathy: liberal feminist reformism. It could be that this contradictory tension belongs to the feminist phenomena Tapper is engaging with, rather than to her textual representation of it.96 However, given that her argument explicitly relies on a clear demarcation of radical feminist attack from liberal feminist reform, the apparent co-existence of attack and reform in the radical feminist practices she critiques would seem to have required further explanation. This problem can be left aside as we address the further criticisms Tapper makes of feminist institutional practices.

For Tapper, insofar as feminists have come to lend their political opponent/s a monolithic and omnipresent character, they have crafted a mandate for a wide-ranging set of reforms to the institutions they inhabit. Over and above her albeit hesitant criticism that these reforms may well have their basis in an illegitimate epistemological vision, Tapper tables

95Ibid., 137.
96I would suggest that the feminist phenomena Tapper is engaging with is “femocracy” or what Hester Eisenstein has called “official feminism”, where these terms refer in general to self-identified feminists who agitate from within government institutions, for example from with universities as academics, by occupying key government positions and/or contributing significantly from a variety of positions to the policy-making process. A related term here is “insider strategy”, thus the title of Eisenstein's book on the topic Inside Agitators. The tension between a radical feminist sensibility and a liberal feminist strategy is a salient theme in the literature on femocracy in the Australian context. Although not referred to in Tapper's analysis, the key texts in this literature at her time of writing include: Hester Eisenstein, ‘Femocrats, Official Feminism and the Uses of Power,’ in Playing the State: Australian feminist interventions, ed. Sophie Watson (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 87-103 (and, more recently, Inside Agitators: Australian femocrats and the state (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996)); Marian Sawyer, Sisters in Suits: women and public policy in Australia (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990); Anna Yeatman, Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats: essays on the contemporary Australian state (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990).
several criticisms of feminist institutional practices which are designed to mitigate against disciplinary masculinism and to promote affirmative action. She argues that these practices would be both "ineffective" and "dangerous". They would be ineffective insofar as they extend demands which too easily are met with disingenuous tokenism. For example, if feminists insist that all researchers and job applicants exhibit a concern for women's issues, "every ambitious candidate, or anyone with any sense, will tack on to whatever else they do a project concerning women's issues."

These practices would be dangerous since, in authoritarian mode, they would introduce feminist concerns into areas where they are not relevant: "[s]ome research areas have no immediate socio-political implications, much less any particular relation to women as a group, mathematics and some areas of philosophy for example." Here, Tapper perceives room for a troubling development: that feminism's institutional presence will take the form of "a kind of intellectual authoritarianism, or at least an excessive privileging of some interests". It is at this point—when she tables this criticism—that Tapper's position exhibits internal lability and indeed inconsistency.

On one hand, Tapper will then go on to note that she is not "ethically ... opposed" to the idea that, "in the present context", "special consideration" should be extended to female applicants for academic positions, nor to the idea that disciplinary masculinism is to be countered. That is, the practices Tapper has been critiquing on the basis that they are gratuitous in a context in which liberal feminist reforms have been satisfactorily successful, now are validated as in some way viable "in the present context".

97 Tapper, 'Ressentiment and Power,' 138.
98 Ibid.
99 139.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
It is not immediately certain whether this is a qualification lending subtlety to her position on the nature of the context at her time of writing and how feminists should negotiate it, or whether it is a different position to the one she has been adopting. Tapper's comments are to some extent consistent with her note at the beginning of her article that she sees the present context as one in which feminism's actions have been “reasonably successful, though by no means completely. (In any case at least it is clear what further would be required to fulfil the intentions of these actions.)”.\textsuperscript{102} But Tapper's bracketed qualification suggests that all that is required for feminism's success to be completed is for liberal feminist actions to run their course, as they have done in the case of feminist philosophy, whose project now “has been completed”.\textsuperscript{103} Is Tapper suggesting that feminism's success is incomplete but guaranteed? Although Tapper seemingly makes explicit her position on the status of feminist success, she does not offer a satisfactory or stable answer to this question. Thus the issue as to whether feminist political action \textit{is still required} in the settings with which she is concerned is unresolved in her analysis.

On the other hand, however, through her mention of “intellectual authoritarianism”, Tapper also is setting things up to make the rest of her argument, in which she returns to her position that the radical feminist approach to institutional reform is invalid. But Tapper will return to this position from a different angle this time. Rather than argue that these feminist practices are invalid on account of their gratuitousness in the present context, Tapper will argue that their authoritarian bent is

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{102}Ibid., 131.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{103}Tapper provides further reason to read the meaning of her bracketed qualification in this way when she argues that the incomplete status of equal gender-representation in the academy “has a largely historical explanation in that it is only relatively recently that women have been undertaking postgraduate degrees and applying for jobs in large numbers.” Ibid..}
unreflectively “complicit with modern modes of power” which operate via “techniques of surveillance, normalization and control”\(^\text{104}\). Here, Tapper’s position is that radical feminist practices might attract ethical sympathy (or, at least, not attract our ethical opposition), but that the ‘means’ they employ—institutional techniques of surveillance, normalization and control—do not justify the ‘ends’ they seek.

This why I suggest that Tapper’s chapter contains internal lability: this latter argument is quite different, perhaps contrary, to her previous one. Feminist institutional practices have gone from being invalid owing to their gratuitousness in the present context, to being in some way valid in the present context except for the “means” they are employing. Moreover, and as we have seen, Tapper has moved from criticising feminist practices for rejecting liberal reformism, to criticising these practices for taking on a classically reformist gesture: employing existing institutional procedures and techniques (or ‘means’) in order to reshape the institution. It is this somewhat inconsistent move which takes Tapper into the second key component of her argument, to which we now turn.

As noted earlier, Tapper’s perception that feminists have adopted an increasingly radical perspective in order to preserve a reason for being in the face of nearly-completed work forms the basis for her use of Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment*. In her analysis, the role of Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* is to “explain ... why it is that now that women have achieved considerable formal and substantial equality—at least in the institutions I am concerned with—this has not proven enough.”\(^\text{105}\) Why, Tapper has asked throughout her piece, have feminists become ‘radical’ when a reasonable degree of—perhaps “enough”—success has been achieved? Her question

\(^{104}\text{Ibid., 130.}\)
\(^{105}\text{Ibid., 134-135.}\)
lights up the issue as to whether feminism’s success—as long as we agree that success means the achievement of a degree of “formal and substantial equality”—has not also brought about the demise of feminism’s necessity. In Tapper’s account, questions about feminism’s relationship to ressentiment are bound up with questions about whether feminism has, in an evidential or empirical sense, succeeded. Does successful attainment of formal equality not mean the demise, at least the erosion, of the necessity of feminist political action? Is formal and substantial equality, at least in some key domains, not success enough for feminist political action to cease to be necessary, and certainly cease to be radical? Is it not ressentimental to persist with, or turn to, a radical feminist perspective in light of such feminism’s success? This is why it is significant that Tapper vacillates on the question as to whether feminism, in the present context, actually has been satisfactorily successful. As we will see, Tapper’s argument that feminism has become “entangled in the spirit of ressentiment” relies on the idea that feminist success in the attainment of formal equality is success “enough” to at least erode feminism’s necessity, its political reason for being.106

In introducing Nietzsche to her analysis, Tapper explains that a main feature of ressentiment is

an inability to ‘let go’, to forget ... [ressentiment] is both a backward-looking spirit—it needs to keep on remembering past injustices—and an expansive spirit—it needs to find new injustices everywhere ... [t]he person motivated by the spirit of ressentiment looks for ‘evil’, needs to recriminate and distribute blame, to impute wrongs, distribute responsibilities and to find sinners. As Nietzsche says, they want others to be evil in order to be able to consider themselves good.107

106Ibid., 135.
107Ibid., 134.
Drawing on Nietzsche's characterisation of the man of ressentiment as one who “understands ... how not to forget” and is endowed with a “prodigious memory”, Tapper interprets Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment as describing a political spirit steeped in remembrance of past injustices, and bent on 'discovering' new injustices (GOM: I, 10). The main implication of this interpretation is that such a political spirit will have a history of oppression, but will lack contemporary oppression (owing, in this case, to its successful elimination of oppression through the attainment of equality). This spirit ‘needs’ to have injustice, evil, wrong and sin—these phenomena provide the contrast which has enabled its self-identification as ‘good’—but, importantly, such things do not necessarily exist outside of its ‘need’ for them. Its perception of evil and injustice arises out of its ‘need’ for evil and injustice. Thus its complaint about contemporary evil and injustice, as distinct from the historical evils and injuries it has suffered, can be seen as gratuitous.

This interpretation of the concept of ressentiment fits neatly with Tapper's argument that feminists have come to entertain a radical vision of a pervasive and subtle political enemy on account of the need to “maintain their political integrity, their claim to ideological purity and sense of powerlessness”.108 Entertaining such a vision in a context which (according to

108Ibid.. Before its publication in Paul Patton's collection Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory, Tapper's article originally appeared in Arena Magazine (1, October 1992: 41-45). It was soon followed up with a reply article by Zoë Sophia ('Position Envy and the Subsumption of Feminism,' Arena Magazine (April-May 1993): 34-36). Sophia rebuffs Tapper's argument that feminists are entertaining radicalism so as to renew their political purchase. Sophia suggests that the kinds of thinking and practices Tapper interprets as symptoms of ressentiment can instead be interpreted as responses to the “subtle covert forms of anti-feminism” which appear in contexts wherein anti-feminism is "no longer sayable in policy". She writes: "... feminist philosopher Marion Tapper criticised a feminist tendency to 'ressentiment', hanging on to old grudges and self-definitions as victims, refusing to accept that desired reforms have taken place. In universities at least, Tapper proposed, feminists do exercise power in the form of moral censorship, determining limits to what is and is not sayable. Yet attainment of this moral legitimacy means that the tactics in what Joanna Russ called 'the suppression of women's writing' have been partly superseded by what I am calling 'the subsumption of feminism', efforts to contain and minimise the damage feminism might wreak on male-centred norms, especially in the academy. Feminist moral authority acts as a censoring super-ego, forcing resistance into devious and ambivalent forms. No longer sayable in policy, anti-feminism is marginalised, like the unconscious, into unofficial or disguised
Tapper) is marked by the achievement of formal and substantial equality requires explanation: the concept of *ressentiment* provides the explanation that feminists require this vision so as to maintain their self-identity as ‘good.’ In elaborating on this point, Tapper notes that *ressentiment* “makes sense of two aspects of feminist thought”:

First, the need to see women as helpless victims, as abused, misrepresented, as powerless in the face of such an onslaught of sexist, patriarchal, male power in every dimension of life and thought. Second, in the now frequently asserted claims of women’s moral superiority: that women are caring, nurturant, their relations non-hierarchical, and so on.109

Not only has the achievement of equality “not proven enough”, this achievement actually stands in the way of feminism’s self-identity, insofar as it threatens to shift the character of that social being (‘victim’) feminism identifies with the category women. This achievement leaves feminism bereft of those forms of sexist injustice against which its politico-moral purchase as a counter-force to women’s victimisation might be constituted. Thus bereaved, feminists are “resorting to finding ‘evil’ and injustice in wider and wider circumstances and at deeper and more concealed levels”, where the term “finding” here can be said to connote ‘imagining’ since the actual existence of sexist injustice in a context marked by feminist success is in question.110

The main ramification of Tapper’s particular operationalisation of *ressentiment* is that agreement with the idea that feminism is *ressentimental* entails simultaneous agreement with the idea that sexist injustice does not

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110 Ibid., 134.
necessarily exist outside of feminism's 'need' for it, that it may no longer be a contemporary issue requiring political opposition. That is, commitment to Tapper's interpretation of feminism as a politics of ressentiment requires tandem commitment to the interpretation of feminist success, and the albeit unstable evaluation of this success as reasonably secure, offered in her analysis. As a corollary, Tapper's interpretation of ressentiment carries the implication that feminist ressentiment would be unproblematic if sexist injustice could be said to exist independently of feminism's 'need' for it. If sexist injustice persists even in contexts in which women are formally and substantively accorded equal status, then the ressentimental notion that feminism's political opponent is more pervasive and subtle than the goal of equality allows for emerges as reasonable rather than imaginative or gratuitous.

This point aside, we are positioned now to note that it is in light of Tapper's interpretation of ressentiment that the distance between she and Cocks is most visible. As we have seen, Cocks reads ressentiment as anathema to feminism since it replaces a vitally needed radicalism which actively will fight injustice, with a comparatively tame and reactively authoritarian sanctification of powerlessness. Contrastingly, Tapper reads ressentiment as anathema to feminism since it fosters a form of radicalism which actively obscures feminist success in maintaining that injustice still exists, that women still are victims, that 'evil' has not effectively or assuredly been vanquished. Put another way, Cocks objects to the interpretation of injustice which ressentiment inspires, whereas Tapper objects to the imagining of injustice which ressentiment inspires. Thus the role of 'radicalism' in feminism's relationship to ressentiment is conceived in opposite ways in their analyses. For Cocks, if ressentiment is be overcome, radicalism must be restored. For Tapper, if ressentiment is to be overcome, radicalism must be disbanded.
In Tapper's analysis, *resentiment* not only lends feminists eyes with which to perceive the forms of injustice they are 'looking for.' Relatedly, *resentiment* also provides a particular way of seeing power. In gauging the "extent to which the spirit of *resentiment* may be shaping the form and direction of feminist struggles", Tapper asks:

May it not be that, under the sway of reactive forces, we have been too inclined to seek power ... to want to dominate? That this might be so would be invisible to us while we think of power as power over, while we think that whatever men do is exercising power or control over us such that if we are to become powerful we will have to gain control ... it would also ... make it difficult to see how the ways in which we are exercising power may be complicit in larger strategies of power that we otherwise might object to, such that instead of resisting domination we are creating another form of it.111

Tapper's point is that *resentiment* encourages feminists to entertain a narrow conception of 'power' as 'power over' or, more specifically, male domination. When this conception of power is in effect, feminist attempts to redistribute power will be directed toward the reversal of existing power relations since gaining power is conflated with ascending to dominance. Thus *resentiment* leads feminists to "want what we believed others had: power over."112

This point provides the main ground on which Tapper will connect her Nietzschean argument regarding feminist *resentiment* and her Foucauldian argument regarding feminism's relationship with institutional power. In combination, these arguments enable Tapper to describe a situation in which *resentiment* has furnished feminism with the goal of “seeking power over men” at the same time as “an increasing bureaucratisation” of the university

111Ibid., 136.
112Ibid., 135.
delivered feminists the very means by which they could gain such power.\footnote{Ibid., 136; 137.} As noted earlier, these 'means' include "techniques of surveillance, normalisation and control". In co-opting these techniques, feminists enter into "unreflective complicity" with the institutional will to govern academic life.\footnote{Ibid., 139.}

In "supporting and proposing criteria and techniques of surveillance and appraisal", feminists are aiding the established processes through which institutions are "undermining the autonomy of individual academics".\footnote{Ibid., 140.}

For Tapper, these developments lay the ground for a "specific feminist configuration of power/knowledge" to emerge.\footnote{Ibid., 130.} I quote her at length as she fleshes out this point:

Some feminist bureaucrats and academics are providing [Australian universities] with further criteria of acceptability and avenues for surveillance and in the process are gaining power for themselves ... [a]s with other areas of disciplinary power which employ experts to label and make us conform, these new procedures will require and produce a new set of experts and a new regime of power/knowledge. As Foucault says relations of power require the production of discourses which involve an ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and which have specific effects of power attached to them. And this is what we are already beginning to see. Arguments from authority—a feminist text says that Plato is sexist, so he is, that logic is masculine, so it is; women's studies research shows that multiple choice tests disadvantage females and that males and females employ different learning styles, so they do. Will the content of a course be challenged because its text is sexist and so the teaching of it discriminatory? Will certain methods of teaching and assessment be banned? Women claim that if they feel harassed

\footnote{Ibid., 138.}
then they have been harassed, and if need be will call in a range of
experts to assert that this is so.117

In allowing the institution to bestow upon them an unchallengeable form of
authority, and in feeding the institutional processes which increasingly
circumscribe academic life, feminists are positioned to consummate their
\textit{ressentimental} desire for power and control. Tapper notes that the forms of
power and control she thinks feminists are exercising are not equivalent to
"the sort of power that those who manage institutions have. Clearly very few
women are senior managers, professors, deans or heads of department."118

Rather, feminists are exercising "forms of power which operate by
structuring the possible field of actions of others": they are erecting
regulatory norms of discourse and behaviour which are effectively dominative
for the manner in which they will 'conduct' the individual.119

In the final stage of her analysis, Nietzsche’s concept of \textit{ressentiment}
combined with Foucault’s analysis of power deliver Tapper to the heart of
what might be termed the ‘master’s tools’ debate in feminism. As befits Audre
Lorde’s famous phrase “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s
house”, Tapper is addressing the question as to what exercises of power or
‘tools’ are fit for feminist appropriation.120 Should feminists employ the tools
provided by the institution to make their arguments for institutional change,
or should they reject these tools where they ordain exercises of power which

\begin{footnotes}
\item[Ibid., 140-1. Tapper notes that her characterisation of Foucault’s position draws on the
following: Michel Foucault, \textit{Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings
\item[Ibid., 136.]
\item[Ibid..]
\item[Audre Lorde, \textit{The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House}, \textit{The Audre
Lorde Compendium: essays, speeches and journals} (London: Pandora, 1996 [originally
\end{footnotes}
are at odds with the feminist goal to “rule out oppressive ways of structuring fields of action”?

In tune with this question, and as she approaches her conclusion, Tapper entertains the idea that it might be necessary for feminists to “use the tools of the enemy” as part of their attempt to institute women’s autonomy. Leaving aside the question as to who feminism’s enemy might be—for, by this stage of her analysis, Tapper has at least destabilised the notion that feminism still has an effective and recognisable enemy—Tapper considers that it might be unreasonable to expect feminists to step outside of “how power works” so their contestation of domination might itself stay clean of unsavoury exercises of power. However Tapper is not convinced of this. Her ultimate conclusion is that, in the case she has been considering, “the tools of the enemy” are unfit. Returning to the radical epistemological vision which mandates the feminist institutional practices she has critiqued, Tapper concludes that feminists are simply reproducing domination:

If we reject as patriarchal any discourse that is committed to truth and objectivity or any model of intellectual inquiry that requires formal logic or aims for unambiguous, precise modes of articulation then it is not clear how such feminists could conduct themselves in the academy without denying the autonomy of most of its members. If feminism started out with the laudable intention of increasing the kinds of individuality available and acceptable, and to dissociate them from forms of domination, it is now, I suggest, in danger of doing the opposite. The use of feminist discourse, the specific power effects it has induced, and its deployment in and use of existing structures of

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121 Tapper, ‘Ressentiment and Power,’ 137.
122 Here it might be countered that Tapper’s analysis has alerted feminists to the idea that the forms of institutional power they have co-opted actually are their proper enemy. However, on my reading, Tapper does not necessarily call on feminists located in institutions to resist these powers as feminists, but as academics, since she does make the argument that feminism might now be disbanded fairly clearly.
123 Ibid..
power in institutions is not acting as a 'road block' to repression but introducing a new form of it.\textsuperscript{124}

Tapper's closing contention, then, is that feminism's \emph{ressentimental} complicity with institutional power involves feminism in a form of mimesis: by way of such complicity, feminism has sketched anew the relation of power it contests.

On this point, Tapper's account is in accord with Cocks' account, as well as those to be examined in the next chapter. The mimetic character of \emph{ressentiment} is a major theme in the feminist \emph{ressentiment} literature—in Cocks' account, it is figured as feminist victim politics' reinstallation of the phallocentric hatred of the female body—and as such will it require our attention in Part 3. Before we may depart from Tapper's account, one final point regarding her conclusion must be tabled.

There does appear to be room to question Tapper's claim that feminist critique of traditional epistemological categories such as truth, objectivity and formal logic necessarily will deny proponents of these categories their autonomy. Our agreement with this might only be secured by way of two prior agreements. First, we must agree that feminists actually do "reject" these categories on the basis that they are "patriarchal". That is, we must agree that feminists do not aim to \emph{transform} these categories in light of their hitherto \emph{androcentric} character. Second, we must agree that these traditional epistemological categories are not themselves implicated, to an extent which requires some redress, in the repression of subjugated knowledges and so the denial of autonomy and authority to those not cut from the cloth of the classic 'one who knows.' That is, we must agree to follow Tapper into an application of Foucauldian and Nietzschean insight into the production of

\textsuperscript{124}Ibid., 142.
knowledge which counter-intuitively is exclusive, indeed defensive, of traditional knowledge. What is to be made of this aspect of her conclusion?

A main feature of our engagement, in Part 1, with the popular feminist accounts of ‘victim feminism’ was the argument that these accounts trade on a dichotomy between worthy and unworthy victims. This dichotomy also can be traced in Tapper’s account to the extent that her critique of feminist interventions upon traditional epistemology also acts as a defence of traditional epistemology, where such a defence is by no means a necessary element of her account. In Tapper’s account, feminist claims to the status of ‘worthy victims’ are rebuffed, but it can not be said that this status is itself thoroughly problematised. Rather, it ultimately and implicitly is cast as proper to feminism’s opponents: those engaged in traditional knowledge-making and, one might also suggest, those who no longer would “dare” to engage in sexual harassment owing to the unquestioned authority the institution apparently now bestows upon victims of such harassment.125

Tapper does suggest that feminism’s ressentimental policy drives have become the object of ressentiment on the part of men: “now that women are getting jobs and so on we can see the same type of response on the part of men: she got it only because of affirmative action policies or because of her sexual behaviour.”126 Here, men do not emerge as the new innocents in any direct sense, for we are presented with what I suspect is an apt vision of competing ressentiments. However it must be noted that the very analysis of feminist affirmative action Tapper presents—that is, affirmative action as a means by which feminists might exercise power over men through the regulatory curtailment of their physical and cerebral behaviours—would seem to validate men’s ressentiment. Thus I conclude with the suggestion that

125Ibid., 131.
126Ibid., 135.
a subtle version of a popular press manoeuvre is evident here: the 'right to ressentiment,' like to 'right to victim politics,' is withdrawn from feminism but is redistributed rather than deconstructed.

This matter connects directly to another point on which Tapper’s analysis (unlike that of Cocks and, as we will see in the next chapter, those of Brown and Yeatman) is reminiscent of the popular accounts. That is, Tapper’s interpretation of ressentiment as a political form which needs, and so imagines, injury, where the imaginary status of such injury is confirmed in light of feminist success. For Cocks, it is the mode of interpretation and response to sexual discrimination, harassment and abuse offered by feminist victim politics which is to be problematised, but these injuries remain “real enough, to be sure”. However in Tapper’s analysis, despite explicit statements to the contrary, the manner in which feminists interpret and respond to injury is not the central issue. The central issue—explicit in the first component of her analysis and largely implicit in the second—is the contemporary facticity of injury, whether there actually still are injurious events to which feminists might respond, or whether existing feminist reforms successfully have eliminated the conditions of possibility for such injuries.

**Conclusion**

Despite the significant differences between Cocks and Tapper which have been delineated in this chapter, one clear and consistent aspect of "feminist

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128 Tapper notes that her primary interest is “in why and in what ways women have not been satisfied with [an extensive] level of institutional reform”, 131-2. She also notes that her primary question is “What are feminists doing in the way in which we are attempting to redress [. . .] injustices?”, Ibid., 139. However, as we have seen, Tapper’s account actually argues that women should be satisfied with the level of reform feminists have achieved. And Tapper’s goal to separate questions regarding the means feminists employ and the ends they seek is not achieved in the sense that these ends are, from the outset, negated by the ‘fact’ of feminist success.
Ressentiment has emerged from their accounts. According to both, a feminism motivated by ressentiment will represent women as victims whose requirement of protection or redress sanctions feminist alliance with repressive and authoritarian forms of power. In both cases, this alliance is understood as paradoxical and contradictory. For Cocks, the amenability of ressentimental victim politics to the processes of legal and state regulation leads ultimately to a recuperation of the very attitude toward the body which feminism contests, namely, phallocentric hatred for the wilfully concupiscent female body. For Tapper, when feminist attempts to institute women’s autonomy proceed in the spirit of ressentiment, the achievement of such autonomy is equated with the exercise of power over men, an equation which “plays into the hands” of the institutional will to govern academic life.\(^{129}\) Thus autonomy is sought through recourse to a form of power which ultimately will thwart autonomy. To distil this aspect of feminist ressentiment into a working shorthand, we might say that, according to these accounts, a feminism motivated by ressentiment conceives of justice as revenge (or indeed affirms a prevailing, official conception of justice as revenge). This equation sanctions the turn to a higher power—the state, the law, the administration—readily equipped to administer prohibitions, compensations, punishment and, of particular concern to Cocks, well-positioned to affect the popular imagination. In Tapper’s account, the equation of justice with revenge is betrayed in institutionally-administered feminist exercises of power over men. Heavy with the memory of women’s history of oppression, feminism’s achievement of justice no longer resides with the attainment of “equal power”, but with the attainment of “power over”. In Cocks’ account, the equation of justice with revenge is betrayed in the compensatory drive of victim politics. Justice-as-revenge voices not an active call to arms but an uninspiring plaint: “Look

\(^{129}\)Ibid., 130.
what you owe us!". As we will see in the following chapter, the theme of justice as revenge also is pronounced in the accounts of Yeatman and Brown.

Although a definite moment of commonality between Cocks and Tapper can be found in their joint repudiation of justice-as-revenge, we nonetheless can conclude that these accounts differ in crucial respects. Their different, indeed contrary, treatment of the role of radicalism in feminist politics arguably is linked to their different interpretations of Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment. Cocks is certain that feminism is joined by a variety of radicalisms in being overcome by ressentiment. And she is certain that this has resulted in a mode of politicisation wholly inadequate for the task of combating domination. But she is not certain why this has occurred. She ventures the suggestion that this development reflects “a general shift in the Zeitgeist of the West”, and is underpinned by “a complex sets of reasons”. Tapper, on the other hand, is certain that feminism has been overcome by ressentiment and so has become radical, and in this has not just combated but reversed relations of domination in the institutional settings with which she is concerned. Tapper also is quite certain as to why this has occurred: successful attainment of equal power has left feminism bereft of political purchase. In other words, Cocks interprets ressentiment as a dangerous source of consolation for the powerless when their political goals are far from being achieved, while Tapper interprets ressentiment as a revenant spirit which acts to deny political success and, therefore, demise. The line of inquiry opened up here will require that we ask: How is ressentiment to be situated in relation to feminist radicalism? Is radicalism, as a political disposition which urges movement beyond equality within existing arrangements, inevitably

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131 Ibid.
bound up with *ressentiment* or, as Cocks suggests, does its transcendent orientation promise antidotal release from *ressentiment*?


Ressentiment, Identity and Difference

[B]ecoming something other than that which we presently are is after all the *sine qua non* of movements for social change.
—Moira Gatens.¹

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster.
—Friedrich Nietzsche.²

Introduction

This chapter considers two further accounts of feminism’s relationship with *ressentiment*, those of Anna Yeatman and Wendy Brown, adopting the strategy of comparative analysis employed in the last chapter. The accounts of Yeatman and Brown bear many points of confluence with those examined in the last chapter, including diagnostic use of Nietzsche and concern for the equation of justice with revenge apparently attendant upon feminist attachment to victim identity. However, where the accounts addressed in the previous chapter were centred on specific issues—sexual politics, university politics—the accounts addressed here locate the question of feminist *ressentiment* on broader terrain, namely feminism’s relationship with liberal democratic politics and theory. They open up the question of feminist *ressentiment* to the categories of universal and particular, identity and difference, state and citizen-subject, and they put the concept of *ressentiment* to work for a reading of feminism as an identitarian moralism which may be regarded as ‘undemocratic.’ In this, both Yeatman and Brown offer much

² BGE: 4, 146.
amplification on what, as we saw in the last chapter, is a key issue for the question of feminist ressentiment. That is, the link between identity and the 'non-transformative' character of ressentimental politics. In her account of Nietzsche's theory of ressentiment, Cocks wrote of how the morality of ressentiment works to fix the identity of the powerless: the powerless are 'good' so long as they 'suffer'. In a different vein but to the same effect, Tapper wrote of ressentiment as a spirit which oversees feminism's continuing identification of women as "helpless victims".

Yeatman and Brown, each in their own way, provide accounts of how this non-transformative character of ressentiment is set in place. Yeatman offers an analysis of how, as she puts it, ressentiment works to hypostatise identity and so to "foreclose politics" in liberal democratic settings and 'within' feminism. On a different but related tack, Brown's analyses of modernist feminist epistemology and identity politics probe the resubordinating effects of politicising disenfranchised identities. In both their analyses, ressentiment emerges as the motor of an identitarian moralism which takes as its signature a substitution of democratic political argument promising identificatory transformation and political change, for undemocratic moral plaint which preserves victim identity and thwarts even as it calls for change. Hence, as in the last chapter, questions regarding the sorts of claims feminism should make, how these claims are to be couched, and what sort of political agency feminism might assume within existing configurations of power are called up by and might be addressed in relation to their accounts. However, as will be argued as part of the comparative analysis forwarded in

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3 Cocks, 'Augustine, Nietzsche and Contemporary Body Politics,' 145.  
4 Tapper, 'Ressentiment and Power,' 135.  
the chapter, the commonality between Yeatman and Brown’s figurations of
the relation between feminism, liberal democracy and *ressentiment* ends with
their shared argument against undemocratic moral plaint.

Over and above this shared argument stand vastly different treatments
of *ressentiment* in relation to liberalism. Simply put, while Yeatman proposes
that feminism will overcome *ressentiment* and return to a more properly
democratic politics when it works (re)constructively within the established
liberal-democratic political order, Brown treats this established political order
as a configuration of powers which work to incite *ressentiment*, and in this way
beckons a challenge to this order which far exceeds that presented in
Yeatman’s analyses. As my comparative analysis will demonstrate, the
major ramification of this is that Yeatman’s and Brown’s respective
figurations of feminist politics beyond *ressentiment* pull in significantly
different political directions with respect to liberalism. It also will be argued
that Brown’s treatment of liberal democratic settings as precipitative of
*ressentiment* cuts new ground for the question of feminist *ressentiment* and
stands in tension with the diagnostic use of the conception of *ressentiment*
evident in engagements with this question, including her own. We turn first to
Yeatman’s work, beginning with an examination of her article ‘Voice and
Representation in the Politics of Difference’, before addressing a later article
which continues and develops the work of the first, ‘Feminism and Power’.

### 4.1 Yeatman: *ressentiment* and the location/locution of politics

As her point of departure in this first article, Yeatman refers to the fact that
“the contemporary era of multiply contested oppressions” has thrown into
relief the *partial* character of feminist politics. This, she writes, has meant a
‘loss of innocence’ for feminism:
... feminism has been forced to lose its innocence ... [it] has had to discover its partiality in a context where its insistence on the primacy of gender oppression is incommensurable with the emphases of emancipatory movements oriented to different axes of oppression.6

Feminism's sense of innocence was attendant upon is claim to universality, its positioning of itself as the political force which can discern and represent the interests of the category ‘women.’ When conceptualised on the basis of the assumption that gender oppression is to be prioritised, the category ‘women’ emerges as an identity group sharing roughly the same interests vis-à-vis men. Such a conceptualisation would, for example, place racism below sexism on feminism’s political agenda, effectively demoting or indeed blindspotting the interests of women for whom racism looms large.7

Although a well-intentioned politicisation of the category ‘women’ which aspires to political unity among women so as to effect their emancipation, this claim to universality at worst obfuscates and at least de-emphasises differences and indeed incommensurabilities among women.8 As Yeatman writes, the assumption of the primacy of gender oppression “is always going to be most compelling for those women who do not experience ethnicity, race

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7 In speaking of ‘women for whom racism looms large’ I do not wish to suggest that racism is an issue for those subject to racism alone. That is, I support perspectives on racism which offer a corrective formulation of whiteness as a racial identity which is lent an unmarked status only on account of the subordination of other racial identities, where this formulation works to emphasise the responsibility of those in the privileged category to problematise and combat racism whether or not they understand themselves as ‘direct practitioners’ of it. See, for example, Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s formulation of “racism as a relationship” in her book Talkin’ up to the White Woman: indigenous women and feminism (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 126-149.

8 In referring to the aspiration of polity unity among women I have in mind the second wave feminist idea—captured in the phrase “sisterhood is powerful”—that the achievement of female political unity would carry revolutionary force since it would transgress a very basic patriarchal ruse by which women are divided from, and set in competition with, one another. See, for example, Robin Morgan, ed., Sisterhood is Powerful (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976) and Mary Daly’s concept of ‘conflagration’ in Gyn/Ecology: the metaethics of radical feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).
and class as additional bases of oppression." Hence the loss of innocence: feminism discovered its partiality by way of the realisation that a prioritisation of gender oppression comes at the expense of adequate cognisance of other bases of oppression, and adequate acknowledgement of the role of women, including feminist women, as direct and indirect practitioners of such oppressions. Most importantly for Yeatman's purposes, and as is widely acknowledged in the literature on feminism and the politics of difference, the realisation of feminism's partiality yields the idea that feminist universalism hitherto has been tailored to the particular interests of white Western and middle-class women. For Yeatman, much can be gained in the way of knowledge of the political as a result of this realisation and its attendant loss of innocence.

As a thematic, 'feminism and the politics of difference' has a double meaning. Traditionally, feminism is a politics of difference, an emancipatory political project concerned with inequality in relation to sexual difference. Feminism also 'houses' a politics of difference, "a politics of contestation in respect of dominant and marginalized voices within feminism." Among other things, Yeatman's article offers a substantial rethinking of feminism's work as a politics of difference in view of its internal politics of difference. Specifically, Yeatman will rethink feminism's customary apprehension of its primary political interlocutor, the "custodians of the established order", in

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9 'Voice and Representation,' 228. This quote suggests that Yeatman adheres to the 'additive' model of social identity, an approach which has been widely problematised in the literature on subjectivity and identity. However, Yeatman actually offers her own critique of this approach elsewhere in her work, hence her alignment with it in this quote is grammatical rather than conceptual. See her piece 'Interlocking Oppressions,' in Transitions: new Australian feminisms, eds. Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 42-56.

10 'Voice and Representation,' 229. Yeatman's description of feminism as a nation-like grouping which houses an internal politics of difference has been problematised by Ien Ang in her piece "I'm a Feminist, but . . .": 'Other' Women and Postnation Feminism,' in Transitions: new Australian feminisms, eds. Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 57-73.
view of the positioning of white, western, middle-class feminists as the 
custodians of feminism’s established order. Yeatman’s leading suggestion is 
that recognising the correspondence of position between these two sets of 
custodians offers a new perspective on the interplay of ‘interest’ and ‘ethics’ in 
the politics of emancipation. Yeatman notes that emancipatory movements 
typically have viewed custodians of the established order as interested, where 
interest is that which precludes ethics. With this view, the custodian’s 
attachment to an “ethical universal” such as equality emerges as a mere 
“rhetorical mask for interest”:

For reasons of their critical rejection of established policy, 
[emancipatory movements] focus their attention on how the 
custodians ... discursively cast the universals of politics in ways which 
preserve their own privileged relationship to voice and representation. 
When it is understood that the universal has to be particularised in 
order to exist, it is all too easy to assume that there is no universal 
dimension to politics, but only ‘interest.’

Yeatman goes on to note that this assumption that interest alone drives 
politics is “easy and even comforting” for those whose positioning as 
emancipatory subjects is not obviously complicated by implication in 
custodianship. However, no such comfort is afforded to those “positioned as 
custodians of the established order within an emancipatory politics ... [y]et 
this is precisely the positioning of white, western and middle-class women 
within contemporary feminism.”

Given that the emergence of a politics of 
difference within feminism has cast light on the extent to which the 
universals of feminism have been particularised around the interests of this 
category of women, and given also that these same women are answerable to 
the demand that this particularisation be recast, their position complexly

11 ‘Voice and Representation,’ 229.
12 Ibid., 229.
13 Ibid.
combines 'interest' and 'ethics', where the latter denotes an "ethical orientation" to such recasting. Yeatman will identify this same complex combination of interest and ethics with feminism's interlocutor, the custodians of the established political order. To grasp the import of this identification we must first work through the basics of Yeatman's political theory.

Drawing on the work of Jacques Ranciere, and arguably occupying a kindred relation with recent radical democratic thought, Yeatman provides a very clear definition of 'politics' in this piece, one which emphasises its relational and dynamic character. I quote her at length as she provides the basic schema of this definition:

14 Ibid., 231.
15 Yeatman refers to the following piece by Rancière: 'Politics, Identification and Subjectivization,' October 61 (Summer 1992): 58-65. The themes and presuppositions of Yeatman's political theory, including its Arendtian geist, are largely in accord with the project of 'radical democracy' as formulated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, initially in their book Hegemony and Social Strategy: towards a radical democratic politics (London: Verso, 1985). Reminiscent of Isaiah Berlin's insistence on the inevitable plurality of human values, and drawing of a cast of philosophers of power and difference from Wittgenstein, Nietzsche and Heidegger to Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, this theory of democracy presses against rationalist attempts to lend democracy's universal principles a final ground and meaning. Generally speaking, the central task of poststructuralist, post-Marxist radical democratic thought is to theorise a form of democracy capable of conducting a pluralist mode of coexistence without, on the one hand, suppressing antagonisms arising from difference in the interests of achieving final harmony and, on the other hand, treating differences as given identities which simply require valourisation (as in 'interest group' pluralism and identity politics). The goal of achieving final harmony, of establishing a state of unanimity in which every citizen-subject is 'at home' in identity with the whole, is understood on this view as a disavowal of the exercise of power and exclusion attendant upon any attempt to craft a 'one' from the 'many'. In Chantal Mouffe's telling, radical democracy does not rescind the goal of collective identity. Rather it asks that its necessary construction of a constitutive outside be avowed and that the antagonisms such construction invokes be affirmed as bases for an ongoing process of political contestation and deliberation. Hence the 'achievement' or reificatory substantiation of such identity is never complete, power, antagonism and contestation are affirmed as ineradicable elements of a properly democratic politics, and interlocutory political argument is cast as the political currency of democracy. As Mouffe explains: "To acknowledge the existence of relations of power and the need to transform them, while renouncing the illusion that we could free ourselves completely from power: this is what is specific to the project that we have called 'radical and plural democracy' ... In a democratic polity, conflicts and confrontations, far from being a sign of imperfection, indicate that democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism." Chantal Mouffe, 'Democracy, Power and the "Political",' in Democracy and Difference: contesting the boundaries of the political, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 248; 255. See also Mouffe's The Return of the Political (London: Verso, 1993) and The Democratic Paradox (London: Verso, 2000). Although, as we will see in
Political contestation is always in the name of an ethical universal, equality in this case. Equality is claimed but its achievement is perpetually deferred. This is because each reforming achievement, which transforms policy in the name of equality, establishes a new regime of governance. All governance works in terms of a bounded community, a community of identity, and thus establishes insiders and outsiders. Reformed policy may radically alter the established political community’s identity and thus the nature of its distinction between insiders and outsiders, but this distinction is always generated by policy.16

The ethical universals which express the values of a democratic polity (participation, freedom, equality) “must be particularised in order to exist”, where particularism necessarily undercuts universalism. Thus the proper achievement of an ethical universal such as equality is perpetually deferred. But with particularity comes the possibility of ‘politics.’ Particularism, in establishing a bounded community which centres some while marginalising others, calls into being or “interpellates” contestation from the margins. That is, particularism always wrongs the universal it particularises, where this wrong-doing positions custodians of the bounded community as answerable to the wronged who, in being wronged, are positioned to show how this community’s political discourse “fails to live up to its own professions of universalism.”17

Articulation of the wrong on the part of the emancipatory subjects, and answerability to the wrong on the part of the custodians, comprise the “interlocutory” relation that is ‘politics.’ As Yeatman elaborates:

Politics is the space between established policy and an emancipatory movement’s claims on equality. These claims are made through

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16 ‘Voice and Representation,’ 229.
17 Ibid., 231.
showing how policy wrongs the emancipatory subject by excluding or marginalizing the category of persons to whom the subject belongs. Politics requires and depends on the interlocutory and performative dynamics of what is a contestatory relationship, demanding an ethical response from both those who are positioned as privileged by policy and those who are positioned as wronged by policy.18

And:

Universalism not only interpellates the contestatory other but, when this contestatory other argues that established policy wrongs equality, this process and relationship of contestation is politics.19

This places ‘politics’ as that process which is brought into being by and will intervene upon the wrongs particularism must commit. By extension, democracy is here understood as constitutively unstable: between the promise and failure of universalism lies what must be a site of restless contestation.

In locating ‘politics’ in this way, Yeatman seeks to establish that professions of universalism on the part of custodians of an established order do not proceed solely in the name of interest. Rather, all such professions have an “ethical component” insofar as they are “continually accountable to politics”, so described.20 However, this is not say that this ethical component, or indeed the demand that it be brought to account, necessarily will engage politics. Yeatman also details the various ways in which politics can be “foreclosed” by either party to a political relation—the custodians and the emancipatory subjects—where foreclosure is that which stills the relational dynamism necessary for politics to occur. As we will see, this is where Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment enters her analysis.

18Ibid., 230. Emphasis in original.
19Ibid., 234.
20Ibid., 234; 230.
Reminded that Yeatman’s account of politics and its foreclosure has a dual purpose—it is applied to feminism’s work as a politics of difference and to the politics of difference within feminism—we look first at the way in which the custodians might foreclose politics, where ‘custodians’ here refers equally to those in custody of the established political order and those in custody of feminism’s established order. Noting that “[t]he first temptation of the custodians of established policy is to monopolise the arbitration of how this policy is to be interpreted in the face of ... contestation”, Yeatman elaborates two ways in which custodians can operate to foreclose politics:

Such foreclosure can happen [through] the simple re-assertion of established policy and a correlative refusal to listen to the contestatory voices of emancipation; or a more subtle version, the appropriation of the contestatory and emancipatory voice by the custodian subject voice.\(^\text{21}\)

The second mode of foreclosure—appropriation of the contestatory voice—is Yeatman’s primary concern. The latter part of her piece is concerned with demonstrating how this mode of foreclosure has operated within Australian feminism, specifically through the appropriation of indigenous women’s voices on the part of non-indigenous feminists.\(^\text{22}\) But both modes of foreclosure exhibit the same symptom: an unwillingness to engage in the “act of listening”, where this act entails opening up political space to the full participation of contestatory voices so as to enable their articulation of the wrong.\(^\text{23}\) For Yeatman, the act of listening on the part of the custodians is key to the possibility of politics. When performed, this act is transformative in its necessary renegotiation of “the established procedures of who gets to

\(^\text{21}\)Ibid., 235.
\(^\text{22}\)Ibid., 238-243.
\(^\text{23}\)Ibid., 236.
participate within the process of governance". Indeed, a further aspect of Yeatman's political theory can be tabled here.

As we have seen, achievement of the ethical universal 'equality' is perpetually deferred since its proper ontologisation necessarily is undercut by particularism. However, as part of this vision of the workings of universal and particular Yeatman offers the insight that “[e]quality exists only within the relationship of political contestation.” Alternative to the view that equality is the outcome of politics, this insight allows politics, an “equalising process”, to be regarded as that moment in which equality might be glimpsed. As a relaxation of custodianship which renegotiates existing strictures on participation, the act of listening and the politics it allows have the effect of “equaliz[ing] the voices of those who represent respectively both established policy and the emancipatory movement.” Of course, Yeatman holds that the act of listening is vital as a starting point for politics. Its renegotiation of political participation properly is consummated when an invitation is extended to the contestatory voices to work with the custodians “to determine how established policy needs to change to become more inclusive.” When engaged, the act of listening and its corollary (the extension of such an invitation) actualise the “ethical component” of the custodians’ political position, which can not therefore be reliably reduced to ‘interest.’ Yeatman writes of the custodians: “theirs, then, is by no means a consistently conservative role even if, at the point at which they enter the

24Ibid..
25Ibid., 235. My emphasis.
26Ibid..
27Ibid..
28Ibid., 236.
universalism of an equality-oriented politics, their mode of entry must always be inflected by their privileged discursive positioning.”

On the part of the emancipatory subject, Yeatman holds that politics is foreclosed precisely when the ethical component of the custodian’s position is not recognised. Yeatman will argue that this failure tends to precipitate a conversion of the “politics of emancipation” into a ressentimental “politics of identity”, where the latter is in fact to be regarded as a “pseudo politics”. She writes:

Politics can be foreclosed from the other direction, by the emancipatory subject when it attributes to the custodians of the established order nothing more than an interest in perpetuating it. The result of this type of foreclosure is that the subject is forced to define itself in terms of the status of exclusion, namely as lying outside positive, political capacity. A politics of ressentiment follows whereby the emancipatory subject turned victim alternately practices moral appeal to and blackmail of what is now hypostatised as the dominant subject custodian of the established order. This is a pseudo-politics oriented to the exercise of force, moral terror in this case.

This moment in Yeatman’s analysis is significant for our purposes, and so warrants careful exposition. We look first at Yeatman’s treatment of identity before considering the nexus of ressentiment, victimhood and morality as it appears above, and as it articulated and developed in her later piece, ‘Feminism and Power’. Yeatman describes a situation in which politics is foreclosed through a certain ‘hypostatisation’ of identity. Yeatman already has established that the identity of the emancipatory subject is to be regarded as interpellated (“these are movements of subjects who have been interpellated within the terms of modern democracy as immature, emotional,

29Ibid.
30Ibid., 237.
31Ibid., 230. Here, Yeatman draws on the following work of Joan Landes to evince the interpellated character of modern feminism: Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).
irrational and uncivilised.

In the context of this piece, the concept of interpellation is used to override identity understood as the outward expression of an authentic personhood which precedes and will abide the political encounter, in favour of identity understood as the unstable achievement of particularism's subjectivising labour. The identity of the emancipatory subject—the outsider, the other, the minority—is not found but conferred by particularism as it nominates, necessarily and contentiously, a specific humanity as the insider, the one, the majority. For Yeatman, the point of emancipatory politics is to challenge and destabilise this conferral of identity, to take its enunciation of difference to task in a move toward subjective resignification and political reconstruction. However, she argues, emancipatory political efforts typically have confirmed and stabilised the work of particularism in claiming 'outsider status' as a first and last political posture. Registering such a posture as a conversion of "marginality into an oppositional relationship to established political discourse", Yeatman argues that "[w]hen these movements 'stand outside looking in' they act to confirm [their] interpellated identities, not to challenge them."

In Yeatman's telling, this conversion of marginality into oppositionality, which involves the assumption of what I will call 'antagonistic outsidership'
on the part of the emancipatory subject, is where emancipatory politics run aground. Like photographic fixer which stills light sensitivity so as to render the image permanent, such oppositionality renders static—'hypostatises'—the identities which comprise the political relation. In turning to how such oppositionality plays out politically, Yeatman argues that it involves a political strategy which is in fact to be regarded as pseudo-political, as a foreclosure of politics, on account of its non-transformative character. For Yeatman, this strategy involves a reduction of politics to economics, by which she means that politics comes to be regarded as "a contest ultimately settled by force, where force is directed by interest." As we have seen, Yeatman's concern is that antagonistic outsidership fosters non-recognition of the ethical component of the custodian's position. The custodian is fixed as the enemy who has and inevitably will "subordinate claims on equality to their interest in conserving their privileges". According to Yeatman this is the starting point for what she terms a "no-change politics":

When (in this way) the politics of emancipation is converted into a politics of identity, the potential for change contained in the former is made over into a no-change politics. For if those who are positioned differently, in terms of privilege and its lack within a politics of emancipation, are simply articulating given and opposed interests, there can be no change. One interest must dominate the other, and politics be subordinated to economics.

One of the concrete manifestations of this no-change politics is its production of a necessary but insufficient critique of the status quo.

Arguing that antagonistic outsidership involves the assumption of a fundamentally contradictory position which combines "dependency on and critical rejection of the status quo", Yeatman notes that the antagonistic

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36Ibid., 237.
37Ibid.,
outsider's critique of the status quo rarely develops into "a positive contribution to contemporary policy debate about how the extant institutions and culture of democracy need to be changed so as to become more inclusive." For, Yeatman notes, such a contribution

would have to be linked into an explicit appreciation of what has already been achieved by way of these institutions, and thus into a metaphor of building on and extending these achievements. This would accord what is typecast as the oppressor/exploiter dominant group something other than that status, namely one of possessing a more or less shared ethic with the minority movement.

We might note that at least some of the critiques of the status quo Yeatman may be referring to here are likely offer a vision of how the existing culture of democracy might be changed. If I am right in thinking that she has socialist critiques in mind—those which are commonly referred to as 'crude economism'—their vision is one in which democracy is sundered from capitalism and moves from representative government to a form of direct participatory democracy in which the majority govern society. This aside, let us note that in Yeatman's schema, critique of the status quo is registered as crucial to the emancipatory subject's articulation of the wrong. However, where such critique remains antagonistic rather than interlocutory—where it is accompanied by a refusal to admit of "common ground" and a concomitant unwillingness to "contribute positively and creatively to the reconstruction of a democratic polity"—it forecloses politics and is to be regarded as pseudo political.

But there is another layer to this account of the antagonistic outsider's foreclosure of politics in favour of a 'no-change politics.' This is through their

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38Ibid., 233; 232.
40Ibid., 232; 233.
assumption of “victim” identity. So far, we know that ‘no-change politics’ involves fighting fire with fire: what is interpreted as the custodians’ inevitable enforcement of interest is met with the antagonistic outsider’s employment of counter-force in the name of counter-interest, which Yeatman sees as a reduction of politics to economics. But we are not yet at the stage of understanding precisely how it is that the emancipatory subject comes to wreak “moral terror” and, in this, to perform a tandem reduction of politics to victim-centred moralism.41 In the passage cited earlier, Yeatman wrote of the emancipatory subject’s identification with outsidership as entailing self-definition “in terms of the status of exclusion, namely as lying outside positive, political capacity.”42 Here, then, is the idea that with such self-definition the emancipatory subject confirms and stabilises their existing position of relative exclusion from political participation. Yeatman then registers this gesture as the assumption of “victim” identity: “a politics of reessenment follows whereby the emancipatory subject turned victim alternately practices moral appeal to and blackmail of... the dominant subject custodian”.43 To unpack this claim thoroughly we shall have to turn to Yeatman’s more developed articulation of it in her subsequent piece ‘Feminism and Power’. However, before we do this, let me raise three issues which have emerged so far.

Firstly, on the face of it, this image of ‘moral appeal’ and ‘blackmail’ does not immediately correspond with the image of ‘counter-force’ addressed above. Neither live up to Yeatman’s model of an emancipatory politics which seeks to work with the custodians toward a reconstructed polity. But counter-force suggests a form of staunch insubordination tuned to active

41 Ibid., 230.
42 Ibid..
43 Ibid..
resistance of authority, whereas moral appeal and blackmail suggest passive-aggressive, oddly obedient forms of extortionary plaint. Is Yeatman crafting something similar to Cocks' distinction between the 'style' and the 'substance' of ressentimental victim politics, meaning that counter-force degenerates into, or is outwardly expressed as, moral appeal and blackmail? Does this mean (contra Cocks this time) that we are asked here to regard those forms of radical politics which eschew co-operativeness to the extent that their ultimate investment resides with a vision of broad socio-economic transformation as inevitably non-transformative, pseudo-political and ressentimental? If so, how are we then to read those courageously confident and creatively vital dimensions of such radical politics—as Saturnalian moments ultimately trapped in a power relation they themselves, perversely, affirm?44 In any case, as we continue to address the emancipatory subject's ressentimental assumption of victim identity we shall have to track its apparently Janus-faced resistance so as to achieve a clear view of the range of radical political dispositions Yeatman interprets as ressentimental.

Secondly, to some extent Yeatman's analysis so far depends on the making of a compelling distinction between such moral appeal and what is interpreted as the emancipatory subject's properly ethico-political

44I have an admixture of examples of radical political creativity and courage in mind here: the audaciously critical humour often encountered in political posters and cartoons; the craft of banner-making practiced by 'pit crew wives', recently recalled in the work of Spanish-Australian artist Raquel Ormella; Joseph Beuys' entire oeuvre; the 'community art project' undertaken by picketing Melbourne wharfies in April 1998, which saw them piling and welding railway tracks in the way of scab labour; the ripe blend of hilarity and gravity which characterised those feminist demonstrations outside beauty pageants during the 1970s; the burlesque arts of parody, satire and mockery evident in many street demonstrations; the non-violent, direct action themes—days of 'embrace the base' and 'reflect the base' at Greenham Common in the 1980s [for accounts of these see Sasha Roseneil, Common women, Uncommon Practices: the queer feminisms of Greenham (London: Cassell, 2000) and Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins, eds. Greenham Common: women at the wire (London: Women's Press, 1984)]; the strange, confusing, temporary, affinity-based coalitions of en masse demonstrations such as, in recent times, those of Seattle, Genoa, Melbourne, Prague, and Seoul; newly emergent practices such as culture-jamming and adbusting, as well as videography and other independent media practices, largely employed for radical political ends.
articulation of the wrong. It is clear that, in the passage cited above, Yeatman is situating moral appeal as issuing from an identity politics which, as it were, confirms in advance the failure of that appeal, meaning that the plaint of the “victim” is, in effect, a speaking silence. But how might we reliably distinguish between such moral appeal and the cadence of the properly ethico-political? How might we reliably discern the difference between the moral speech of the self-identified “victim” and the ethical speech of the emancipatory subject who wishes to transform their status as “victim”? To what extent is this distinction drawn in the ear of the arbiter?

On a related tack, and admittedly at the risk of simply reinstalling the hypostatised identity of the custodian-subject as more interested than ethical, let me suggest that a cast of questions concerning the reception and regulation of dissonant political speech is opened up here. Yeatman envisages a political speech which is not appropriated but actively heard by its custodian-audience. But could it be that such speech would require some prior appropriation in order for it to be heard? Insofar as it issues from a voice positioned as liberal democracy’s constitutive outside, it would seem to require the assumption of a pre-ordained format in order to be ‘assimilable.’ Hence it would engage a necessarily paradoxical dissonance: a disobedience which pledges obedience to the format, a transformativeness which is transfixed by the imperative to be assimilable (no-longer-Other) in some measure. This is not a paradox of Yeatman’s making, but it could be that we encounter here a problem with the status of “change” (and “no-change”) in her account. The distinction drawn between ressentiment’s “no-change” pseudo-politics (its speaking silence, its already thwarted plaint) and the emancipatory subject’s properly transformative politics (its listenable voice) would seem to de-emphasise, or elide, the level of no-change, of making-same, required for the latter.
Thirdly, Yeatman writes of the respective manners in which the custodians and the emancipatory subjects foreclose politics, but does not detail what actions the latter might take *when the former enact their foreclosure*: that is, when the custodians’ ears appear merely decorative. Of the two modes of foreclosure, this would appear to be the decisive one owing to the custodian’s prerogative positioning. Could it be that this is the moment in which emancipatory politics are most prone to the resort to moral plaint, the entertainment of Saturnalian separatism, and the exercise of force? If so, would the question then become not how these gestures are to be exorcised from feminism’s political future, but how they might be rethought into tactical rather than foundational roles? Moreover, might these already represent tactics borne of persistence?

In her later piece ‘Feminism and Power’, Yeatman provides an expanded account of the emancipatory subject’s *ressentimental* assumption of victim identity, and so it is to this piece that we turn in order to unpack this aspect of her engagement with modern emancipatory politics.45 Here, Yeatman’s task is to examine feminism’s encounter with the liberal democratic state by way of a delineation of the manners in which feminism, among other emancipatory movements, have conceptualised power. Through such delineation, Yeatman will demonstrate the role an emancipatory movements’ conception of power plays in shaping the kinds of claims it makes on, and the relationship it assumes with, the state. Noting from the outset that many salient forms of social change achieved by feminism have involved recourse to “the state’s power of legitimate domination”, Yeatman takes on a particular concern with what she sees as an unresolved tension between feminism’s desire that the state paternalistically “protect” the personhood of

women, and its desire that the state democratically "respect" such personhood.\textsuperscript{46}

As we will see, Yeatman draws a relationship between claims on paternalistic protection and negative conceptions of power which proceed from \textit{ressentiment}, while claims on democratic respect are seen as issuing from a positive conception of "power as capacity".\textsuperscript{47} Hence, as we address what Yeatman sees as negative conceptions of power and the kinds of claim they animate, we shall gain a closer view of the aforementioned reduction of politics to moralism. Perhaps most importantly, we also will gain a more starkly articulated version of an idea which assumed a quieter presence in the piece addressed above: that \textit{ressentiment} is to be regarded as a fundamentally undemocratic economy of affect. This piece is structured around a delineation of three conceptions of power: "coercion", "protection", and "capacity". Let us pursue this schema and address each conception in turn, with primary focus on the first.

'Feminism and Power' continues the work of the first piece we addressed in establishing early on that emancipatory political movements run aground when they fail to assume a "positive relationship to a democratic politics" owing to a conviction that "the powerful have no interest in democratic process, but manipulate a pseudo-democratic process to serve their own ends of domination."\textsuperscript{48} However in this piece Yeatman deepens her objection to this rendering of the powerful by exploring its basis in what she sees as an unnecessarily narrow conception of their power as purely coercive. This reduction of power to undemocratic coercion, she argues, elides the positive, democratic form that state domination can assume: namely, a

\textsuperscript{46}Feminism and Power,' 145.
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., 146.
“nonextractive” form which serves to enhance (rather than curtail or ‘extract’) the powers and capacities of citizen-subjects.\textsuperscript{49} Yeatman argues that emancipatory movements too often have neglected this aspect of state domination in favour of a conception of such domination as limited to “all the coercive and non-benign senses of “power over.””\textsuperscript{50} She argues that this narrow conception of power fosters the following political vision:

... the emancipatory movement sees itself as representing those who are dominated by some kind of ruling class: the bourgeoisie, the colonialists, men, etc. The focus for change thereby becomes this movement’s efforts to throw off this relationship of domination and exploitation by a mix of various means: ideological contestation of this relationship, mobilisation of mass resistance, revolutionary struggle. Since power is equated with force, counter-power has to be a counter-force. This being the case, the emancipatory movements including feminism tend to pursue an undemocratic and often non-political practice of counter-force ... [t]his is a politics which cannot discern within modern statist systems of domination the difference between the democratic and undemocratic features of such systems.\textsuperscript{51}

Yeatman then offers a battery of points to flesh out her subsequent alignment of this political vision with the “moral-political passion and world view of ressentiment”.\textsuperscript{52} Before addressing a selection of these points let me note that this passage speaks to our interest in the range of political dispositions Yeatman interprets as ressentimental. Clearly, Yeatman is here

\textsuperscript{49}Here Yeatman is drawing on Paul Patton’s exegesis of Hobbes’ account of power in his article ‘Foucault’s Subjects of Power,’ Political Theory Newsletter Vol. 6, No. 1 (1994): 64-5 and refers also to Patton’s ‘Politics and the Concept of Power in Hobbes and Nietzsche,’ in Nietzsche, Feminism, and Political Theory ed. Paul Patton (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 144-161. It would seem that the form of power Yeatman refers to here belongs to the order of powers Foucault registers as ‘productive’ in operating through certain forms of regulation and discipline. However in the context Yeatman sets up this power is clean of the quite grim character it wears in Foucault.

\textsuperscript{50}Feminism and Power,’ 145.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid.. Emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 147-8.
casting the many forms of leftist non-electoral political agitation grouped under banners such as socialism, anarchism, anti-colonialism and feminism as implicated in the politics of ressentiment.

Yeatman argues that such a political vision closes itself off from a positive relationship to power not just in eliding the state’s ability to ‘enhance’ the power of its citizen-subjects but, relatedly, in preempting any appreciation of the instructive “historical achievements in regard to self-government” that the powerful have made. Rather than ask “what [these] constructions of freedom of action may offer us now”, those engaged in a politics of ressentiment...

... locate their resistance to their relatively powerless status in a hatred of those to whom they attribute all power, and, it follows, all evil ... [a]ll that is identified with the world of the powerful is rejected as participating in the oppressor's evil. Thus, feminism tends to identify all that is worldly with the evil of patriarchy, and thereby to reject all values—including reason, an individualised striving for excellence, heroism, dispassionate judgement, ambition—that are associated with the “triumphant self-affirmation” of the powerful class, men.

As we will see, in theorising the uses of power as ‘capacity,’ Yeatman will argue that the historically aristocratic form of active affirmation Nietzsche associates with the figure of the master is worthy of appropriation and may be approximated in liberal democratic settings when the state constitutes citizen-subjects as self-regulating persons. But for now let us note that the foil for the repudiation of the values and capacities of the powerful Yeatman

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53Ibid., 146.

54Ibid., 147; 148. Yeatman draws the term “triumphant self-affirmation” from Nietzsche (GOM: I, 10). We might note here the confluence between Yeatman’s argumentation and Tapper’s association of ressentiment with a radical feminist rejection of the categories of traditional epistemology. Indeed, in this and the other piece we addressed Yeatman refers to the article by Tapper examined in the last chapter: ‘Feminism and Power’, 156, n.5; ‘Voice and Representation,’ 245.
describes above consists in the emancipatory movement's celebration of all that is associated with the oppressed.

Perceiving in feminism the signature move of ressentiment, a move which Nietzsche describes as "a radical revaluation of [the] enemies' values", Yeatman writes:55

... a feminism oriented by rancor and ressentiment casts women as good, men as evil. Such a feminism ... accords value to the oppressed subject because it views the subject as beyond domination ... the confusion of power with domination means that the emancipatory movement ends up celebrating as virtues all those aspects of the identity of the oppressed which are associated with strategic self-preservation in a condition of weakness: acuity of perception of the other's feelings; the masking of assertive and direct modes of leadership in those of indirect suggestion and persuasion; the assertion of power through goodness where this works to occlude the subject's interest in power and makes it appear that all they are doing is operating on behalf of the needs of others.56

At this point we are positioned to register that, in Yeatman's telling, the politics of ressentiment proceeds in two stages. First, the power relationship this politics will contest is lent a Manichean character insofar as the political field is carved up into two, mutually antagonistic and homogenous groups: one victimises, the other is victimised. Second, this figuration of the political field is overlaid with a moral drama wherein the powerful—and 'power' itself—is cast as 'evil' while the powerless, on account of their powerlessness, claim monopoly on the 'good.' Here lies ressentiment's substitution of politics for a pseudo-political and 'undemocratic' moralism. Yeatman suggests that these contestatory acts of interpretation betray an "interest in power", but that this interest necessarily is masked as altruism owing to the repudiation of

55GOM: I, 7.
56'Voice and Representation,' 148.
power and the assumption of a position which putatively is outside of and against power.

To link this back to Yeatman’s concern in the previous piece with feminism and the politics of difference, and keeping in mind Nietzsche’s characterisation of ressentiment as that which “says No to what is “outside,” what is “different,” what is “not itself””, it is clear that a feminism which proceeds along the lines of ressentiment would act to suppress differences among women, especially where these differences betray the complexity of relations of power. To take a straightforward example: racism on the part of white women is either rendered illegible or is made legible as a practice implanted by the powerful, where both of these act to permit an eschewal of responsibility.

We must note, however, that Yeatman does not portray engagement in the politics of ressentiment as a matter of calculated deliberation, although she does suggest that this politics can and must be rethought from the inside. Nor does she connect her diagnosis with an allegation that the relations of power from which ressentiment emerges are less dominative than a politics of ressentiment announces them to be, even as she would dispute ressentiment’s subsequent equation of power with coercion as well as the idea that the dominated are to be understood as innocent of power. Rather, she notes:

A politics of ressentiment is a politics which makes sense to a subject who is systematically brutalized and exploited by more powerful forces, and who proceeds to translate a reactive project of survival into the more generalized moral-political passion and world view of ressentiment.58

57GOM: I, 10.
58‘Voice and Representation,’ 147.
Here, Yeatman is making a point very similar to Naomi Wolf's point encountered in Part 1: that *ressentiment*, or in Wolf's terms "victim feminism", can be understood as a first-base strategic response to conditions of inequality, exclusion and oppression. This suggests that politicised *ressentiment* be regarded as a form of emotional labour attendant upon such conditions. But this disturbs Yeatman's characterisation of *ressentiment* as 'undemocratic' in raising the question as to what it means to interpret something which consistently emerges within a political regime as not of that regime. Insofar as democracy's necessary acts of particularism posit as constitutive its failure to fulfil the promises of universalism, its mode of perpetual deferral would seem to provide a potent condition of possibility for *ressentiment*. Read this way, the affective economy of *ressentiment* emerges not as foreign to democracy, but as first base on its never-quite-levelled 'level playing field'. It would seem, then, that there is a conflict between Yeatman's earlier emphasis upon democracy's necessary acts of particularism, and her subsequent distancing of *ressentiment* from democratic politics proper, as in her claim that *ressentiment* is an 'undemocratic' form of conduct.

Before turning to the second conception of power—protection—let me make some foregrounding comments, again regarding the status of 'change' and 'no-change' in Yeatman's account. We have seen that, for Yeatman, the politics of *ressentiment*, in the form of antagonistic outsidership and armed with a conception of power as coercion, is at a stand-off with the state. It turns toward the state to voice critique, but turns away from the state to resist a despoiling dialogue (again reminiscent of Wolf, specifically her reference to the radical who 'tears down and turns away')\(^{59}\). Owing to a belief that the powerful are responsible for initiating and perpetuating the causes of the suffering it politicises, this politics wants to transcend their regime, but is

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blind to the possibility that in the case of the liberal democratic state a transcendence of present conditions can be achieved within the regime, through the participatory undertaking of reconstructive work.

So a politics of ressentiment, from this angle, paints itself into a corner. In assuming victim identity it confirms its existing exclusion from political participation. All its efforts are directed toward maintaining malevolent distance from the powerful. However, we also have seen from some of Yeatman's comments that this politics does make a certain sort of claim on the state: it wreaks moral terror, alternates between moral appeal and blackmail, develops an inverted moral vernacular, and harbours an ambition for revolutionary upheaval. Can the revaluation of values and 'moral activism' involved here properly be registered as "not transformative" such that we might conclude, as Yeatman does, that "[a]ll that is permitted a feminism oriented by rancor is a separatist retreat from the world"?

When we address Brown's work in the following section (and if we recall the accounts of Cocks and Tapper in the last chapter) we will see that on her reading a politics of ressentiment attempts no less than to 'fashion a culture' amenable to its distaste for violence, inequality, domination, and abuse, and which is reflective of its taste for security, formalised lines of redress, equal status, predictability and peace. For Brown, such fashioning is attempted most notably through recourse to the legal system and by turning to the state. This might account for Yeatman's quite different statement elsewhere regarding the political direction ressentiment pursues:

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60 'Voice and Representation,' 148.
61 Here I am paraphrasing Brown, States of Injury, 44.
62 As I will indicate in Part 3, in Nietzschean terms such a culture would be a 'democratic' one. One of the central aspects of Nietzsche's genealogy of ressentiment—that democratic culture is an expression of ressentiment par excellence—is disregarded in Yeatman's characterisation of the politics of ressentiment as 'undemocratic.'
Nietzsche refers to ressentiment's revaluative labours as an "imaginary revenge", but by this he does not mean that revenge is restricted to mental or insular enactment. So let us note provisionally that, at the least, a question mark hangs over the 'transformativeness' of ressentiment. As Gilles Deleuze puts it, it achieves a "triumph of the weak as weak": its identity, and that of its opponent, are preserved (no-change), but an attempt is made to fashion a culture in which its identity is valued over that of its opponent (change, in the form of inversion).

Yeatman’s statement regarding ressentiment's bid for rescue operates as a vignette for her subsequent distillation of the feminist conception of power as protection. However, in writing of this conception of power Yeatman does not refer directly to ressentiment, but rather to what, as have seen, are its salient symptoms: an implication in power and eschewal of responsibility masked as selfless benevolence, identification of women as good victims and men as bad aggressors, revaluation of non-agentic weakness as feminine goodness, paradoxical turn to a higher power for rescue/protection.

My assumption, then, is that Yeatman's account contains the suggestion that a ressentimental mode of valuation is at work in this conception of power. This suggestion perhaps does not appear as an explicit argument since, as we have seen, the politics of ressentiment has been represented as steadfastly

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63 'Voice and Representation,' 147.
64 QOM: I, 10.
66 'Voice and Representation,' 151.
refusing to work with the state, whereas Yeatman furnishes her account of this second conception of power with the example of the feminist turn to the state so as to secure its power to protect women against violence, sexual abuse and economic dependence within marriage. This is an important matter since, as will become clear, in her criticism of this particular turn to the state Yeatman actually is describing a second way in which a feminist politics of *ressentiment* preserves rather than transforms victim identity, where such preservation serves to perpetuate the power relationship this politics is contesting. This time, victim identity is not just the given identity to which the antagonistic outsider pledges abiding allegiance, it is the identity feminists attach to the women whose interests they represent and *which they seek to have inscribed into law*. As we work through this aspect of Yeatman’s argument we will emerge with a clear view of her figuration of feminism beyond *ressentiment* be positioned to summarise her account and develop some questions in relation to it.

Yeatman’s overall concern with the conception of power as protection is that feminist arguments for state recognition of and intervention upon circumstances in which women are victimised by men—her particular example is spousal violence—have deleterious effects of their own. She argues that the moral adjudication often attending such arguments—in particular the equation of “women’s victim status with goodness, and men’s aggressor status with badness”—allows an assumption that men always already are endowed with “the power to rape and batter women”, and that women always already are vulnerable to this power. Yeatman notes that such *reification* of men’s power and women’s vulnerability can only give rise to paradox:

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67Ibid..
... democratic state intervention into domestic violence is designed both to rescue and protect women from violent men, and to constitute the rights of women not to be battered or raped. Whether these rights can have any effectiveness under conditions where it is assumed that men already have such a primary power to abuse women is a moot point.68

Here Yeatman is working with Sharon Marcus' argument, which we encountered in Chapter 2, that feminist politicisations of sexual violence too often have focused their efforts on harnessing the prohibitive and punitive power of the state so as to dissuade men from practising sexual violence, a strategy which has the effect of leaving the decision in men's hands and officially inscribing—thereby naturalising—men as capable of sexual violence and women as vulnerable to it.69

Marcus argues instead for a feminist anti-rape strategy which would avoid such reflection of the existing grammar of the rape script. This strategy would overturn this script's construction of women as violable property in favour of an appropriation of a capitalist-contractualist language of property in the person.70 Noting that intraracial subject-subject violence among men takes the form of a "gentleman's agreement" which figures the participants as involved in a "contractual exchange of aggression", Marcus argues that women can disrupt the exclusion of rape from this economy—the relegation of rape to subject-object violence—through developing their capacities for subject-subject violence, situating themselves as subjects who own, control, and are capable of violently defending the property in their persons.71 In agreement with the general direction of Marcus' argument, Yeatman holds that feminist treatments of domestic violence have tended to reinscribe

68Ibid..
70Ibid., 397.
71Ibid., 396-7.
women as "innocent victims" who "lie outside power and [are] powerless", where such reinscription works against the positive constitution of women as capable, powerful, self-governing agents.72

Yeatman brings to these matters a concern with the terms on which women have and might be admitted to the status of rights-bearing persons. Whereas traditional liberal discourse figures the state as that agency which recognises men's status as naturally rights bearing, "women's accession to the rights of the modern individual is understood to have followed from the state's conferral of these rights."73 Yeatman notes further:

Liberalism interprets state intervention on behalf of women's rights as the legitimate extension of state protection to a vulnerable group. This being the case, women's rights-bearing status may be a qualified one, namely one that exists only to the extent that it is reconcilable with the idea of state-sponsored patriarchal protection of women.74

For Yeatman, feminist employment of the state's power to protect women ratifies this general backdrop of democratic paternalism.75 Protectionist feminism, she argues, is underpinned by an assumption that "those who are weak become powerful only as they are "empowered" by the strong arm of the state."76 Hence protectionist feminism emerges in her account as

72 'Voice and Representation,' 151. Here Yeatman refers specifically to 1970s Australian feminist arguments for the commitment of public monies to the provision of emergency accommodation for women and their children upon separation from a violent spouse, and for the establishment of the Sole Supporting Parent Benefit.

73 Ibid., 149. My emphasis.

74 Ibid.

75 It is worth noting here that we may dispute the gendered metaphorics of Yeatman's argument since New Right and neoliberal discourses tends to characterise the Keynesian state as the 'nanny state'—a maternally protective figure who, in safeguarding the welfare of the citizenry, keeps it in a state of childlike dependence. According to this metaphor, self-governance—a competitive risk-taking enterprise—is construed as a form of mature masculinity. For an analysis of neoliberal discourses of welfare dependency see Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, 'Decoding “Dependency”: inscriptions of power in a keyword of the US welfare state,' in Reconstructing Political Theory: feminist perspectives, eds. Mary Lyndon Shanley and Uma Narayan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 25-47.

76 Ibid., 151.
problematic in its willingness to risk “reproducing” the relationship of tutelage between powerful protector and those who, being powerless, are seen to need help, and in contributing to the continued exclusion of women from equal status with men within the category of ‘rights-bearing, self-governing, agentic individual.”

That Yeatman endorses the third conception of power her article addresses, ‘capacity,’ should by now be clear. This is the conception of power which might dislodge feminism from its ressentimental moorings, countering its refusal to assume a positive relation to power and its “separatist orientation to the virtue of women.” With this conception of power, Yeatman’s earlier invocation of the characteristics particular to Nietzsche’s ‘master’—autarky, active agency, self-affirmation, self-legislation—come into play. Of course, in Nietzschean terms the power of this figure precisely is not universalisable: it can be what it is because it is beyond rule, no claim can be made on its bearer, and democratic-statist ways of life spell its fate. However, as noted earlier, Yeatman suggests that the defining characteristics of such mastery might be approximated when the liberal democratic state acts to constitute its citizen-subjects as self-regulating persons, employing legitimate domination in non-extractive form so as to underwrite their exercise of agency and right, to enable their constitution as origins of power.

As we will see in the following section, there are grounds on which we may doubt that the forms of legislation Yeatman calls up to evince this process

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77Ibid., 151; 152.
78Ibid., 153.
79For an excellent characterisation of the power of Nietzsche’s master and its relation to democratic values see Yirmiyahu Yovel, ‘Nietzsche, the Jews, and Ressentiment’ in Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: essays on Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 214-236. This element of Nietzsche’s account will be addressed in Part 3.
actually represent a break with protectionism, but for the moment let us register that Yeatman counsels a move toward a "feminist counter-discourse of women as subjects of power" which treats women as "capable of [developing and] exercising the full range of agentic capacities", and which beckons a democratic state which "respects, not simply protects, the rights of women". This counter-discourse may be understood as a poststructuralist reconstruction of the liberal feminist tradition, with the line of feminist questioning shifting from primary anchorage in concern for the hitherto masculinist character of established democratic freedoms toward a future-oriented mode of examining and experimenting with the forms of self-legislating subjectivity such freedoms have and might yet bring into being. The key here, in fact, consists precisely in futurity: as against ressentiment's advance prohibition of change on account of deep investment in the preservation of victim identity, what might be termed its calcification of interest and identity, this feminism cultivates an openness to future self-making, to what women might become. Let us register, however, that this kind of feminist project is presented by Yeatman not just as a timely reshaping of feminism's affective drives and political imagination, but also a force of circumstance. It is no accident that this would be a neoliberal feminism which envisages a deregulated individual whose proclivities might weather those of neoliberal government: the de-unionised, managerialist workplace and a 'less is more' welfare state, inter alia.

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80Voice and Representation,' 154.
82Cf. Gatens, Imaginary Bodies, 77-91.
Yeatman notes that such a subject is interpellated by contemporary legislation which attaches rights “neither to property nor to protection but to personhood”, naming “anti-discrimination, affirmative action and equal employment types of legislation” as her examples. However, it is also the case that such interpellation works through the political economy of neoliberalism as it forges what Yeatman refers to as an “environment shaped by contemporary values of self-regulation”, especially with regard to labour relations and welfare provision. In this regard, Yeatman ventures a glimpse of the political agency this feminism beyond ressentiment might assume in contemporary settings. Warning against ressentimental nostalgia for previous incarnations of labour and welfare arrangements—indeed, there is a sense in which Yeatman issues a general warning against ressentiment’s antagonistic ‘against’—Yeatman emphasises the effectivity of a feminism which can work, critically but (re)constructively, within the terms set by the established order. Something of an example of such work is provided in Yeatman’s discussion of the emergent “equal opportunity approach to income support” in the contemporary policy arena, an approach which “withdraws paternalistic support from women” and “requires [that] women on welfare participate in labor market programs whether they are mothers of small children or not.”

I suspect that Yeatman is pointing to a dilemma here. On one hand, such ‘equal opportunity’ can be justified as an adequate response to feminist demands that women be regarded as worthy of self-reliance. On the other

83 'Voice and Representation,' 154.
84 Ibid., 155. For an account of neoliberalism which is tailored to feminist concerns specifically see the subsection entitled ‘Cultural Management Under Neoliberalism’ in Chapter 3 of Rosemary Hennessey, Profit and Pleasure: sexual identities in late capitalism (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 74-84.
85 'Voice and Representation,' 155.
86 'Feminism and Power,' 155.
hand, such a policy is likely to further entrench, then obscure, existing unfairness when implemented in a context riven with gendered inequalities such as inadequate provision of childcare and the feminisation of poverty and low-paid wage labour. Rather than arguing that the clock be turned back so that women on welfare are reinscribed as financially dependent upon “individual patriarchs or the state as a corporate patriarch”, Yeatman advises that feminists should “work with rather than against the self-regulatory features of this situation.”

She notes that this kind of work would involve, among other things, arguing that “the employment contract become more adequately contractual” through the elimination of employer prerogative (so that, for example, women are positioned to negotiate effectively the terms of prospective employment). Having tabled this example let us summarise the trajectory Yeatman’s writings have enabled us to pursue and pose some questions in relation to it.

As we have seen, Yeatman makes several criticisms of ressentiment in its feminist incarnation: its essentially Manichean reading of power relations brings forth a moralism which confirms and preserves individual and collective victim identity, furnishing feminism with a false universal and

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87Ibid., 155.
88Ibid.. It must be noted here that the introduction of individual employment contracts and enterprise bargaining in the Australian context (as per the Howard government’s Workplace Relations Act, 1996) was designed precisely to increase employer prerogative rather than provide a platform on which the argument that it be eliminated could be made (which is not to deny the possibility of the latter but rather to register its very real preemption). Most notably, the Act created a means through which the power of the Australian union movement, in particular the Maratime Union Association (MUA), could be countered with impunity (thus the tremendous levels of organised protest on the wake of the Act, especially the MUA versus Patrick Stevedores dispute between January and September, 1998). On this reading, the Act worked to substantiate employer prerogative, in part to ensure Australian openness to the free flow of international trade. Put in context, the goal Yeatman tables here—to eliminate employer prerogative—actually is an enormous, indeed revolutionary one. Although the current revitalisation of politicised anti-capitalism would have to be registered as ressentimental if read along the lines set up in her writings, the elimination of employer prerogative is one of its central goals, particularly as regards the many thousands of women working in Free Trade Zones in Taiwan, Korea, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Phillipines, and the maquiladoras of Central and Latin America.
delimiting future femaleness in advance; its attendant antagonism and revaluative effort translates as political impotence or else plays to democratic paternalism; it recasts democratic politics as moralism or else economism, refusing the process of contestation liberal democracy allows: 'politics.' Having moved through these criticisms, we arrived at Yeatman's tentative figuration of feminist politics beyond ressentiment: a form of politics which makes a promising shift from 'being' to 'becoming' through openness to the possibilities attendant upon the conception of power as capacity.

But let me suggest, in cautionary mode, that we might also track this movement in the following way: the agentic capacities and possible identities of the subjects of feminism have broadened in the same measure that the agentic capacities and possible identities of feminist politics have narrowed. The subjects of feminism, finally dislodged from the twin mires of goodness and sameness, are positively constituted as potential subjects rather than objects of fear, as bargaining subjects rather than bargained objects, as many and changing rather than ultimately the same. Simultaneously, however, feminist politics is reigned into what may be regarded as an essentially conciliatory posture within the established order, its field of movement and vision delimited by the liberal democratic nation state and the category of citizenship.

While the significance of this field and category is not to be underestimated—I would not suggest they should or could be disregarded—this does raise the question as to whether we can have the former without being limited to the latter, and the further question as to what prior set of political decisions is underpinning the baseline level of support for the established liberal democratic order, and its unmentioned marriage with
capitalist economic arrangements, offered here. To employ the language of existentialism, it would seem that feminism here risks an exchange of one act of bad faith for another: the possibility of authenticity is returned to feminist representations of women while feminist dealings with current politico-economic arrangements court Fukuyama-esque inauthenticity. Is it that feminism, as an affinity-based collectivity of politicised agents, is to advocate for the individual exercise of power as capacity but pose particular advance constraints on its own exercise of such power? Moreover, is it that feminist conceptions of power as capacity are to be based on an existing, statist imagining of this power, such that the self-*regulating* subject of neoliberalism—whose self-regulation, we must be reminded, is an effect of a specific mode of state regulation, a conducted conduct—emerges as a workable trade for Nietzsche's self-*legislating* subject of mastery?

In view of these matters we might conclude that Yeatman's emphasis upon the general conception of power as capacity as a break from *ressentimental* conceptions of power is highly convincing, but that the particular conception of such power called up threatens to undercut this general valence in being closely tied to a curtailment of feminism's political possibilities and an insufficiently critical embrace of a distinctly neoliberal rationality of government. Indeed, this particular conception of power as capacity would seem to exhibit traces of what Brown, to whom we now turn,

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89 For an account of the process through which radical democratic theory works to sunder, at the level of theory, the liberal democratic nation state from capitalist political economy see Hennessey *Profit and Pleasure*, 209-28.


91 For an exacting account of the discourse of self-regulation in the Australian context as per the case of the 'unemployed citizen' see Mitchell Dean, 'Administering Asceticism: reworking the ethical life of the unemployed citizen,' in *Governing Australia: studies in contemporary rationalities of government*, eds. Mitchell Dean and Barry Hindess (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 87-107.
calls an "attachment to unfreedom": an ostensibly emancipatory gesture which risks resubordination in ceding political freedom to the state.\textsuperscript{92} Moreover, as we will see, Brown's analysis gives reason to suspect that the discourse of self-regulation to which Yeatman refers fosters not power as capacity but \textit{ressentiment} when it prevails in a context marked by the combined dominative workings of liberalism, capitalism and disciplinarity: that is, a context in which self-regulation forms the "assumed nature" of the liberal citizen-subject who simultaneously and unavowedly is regulated by and dependent upon forces which increasingly are beyond their control.\textsuperscript{93}

As we work through Brown's account of the relationship between \textit{ressentiment}, feminism and identity politics we will find a number of commonalities with Yeatman's work, most notably a concern with power conceived as protection and a characterisation of moral plaint as 'undemocratic.' Significantly for our purposes, however, we also will find that the two political directions which in Yeatman's analyses are situated as paths beyond \textit{ressentiment}—the quest for inclusive reconstruction provoked by failed universalism, and state constitution of citizen-subjects as self-regulating—are regarded by Brown as precipitous of \textit{ressentiment}. Ultimately, this adds up to a very different vision of the relation between the politics of emancipation, \textit{ressentiment} and liberal democracy to that presented in Yeatman's analyses.

\textbf{4.2 Brown: \textit{ressentiment} within and without democracy} \\
Across two consecutive chapters in her book \textit{States of Injury}, Wendy Brown uses the conception of \textit{ressentiment} as a diagnostic tool as she investigates, in the first of these chapters, the terms on which modernist feminist thought

\textsuperscript{92}Brown, \textit{States of Injury}, xii. \\
\textsuperscript{93}Ibid., 67.
opposes postmodernism and, in the second of these chapters, the production and direction of political desire in the case of "the dominant political expression of the age: identity politics." Both of these chapters will be examined in this section and, as we will see, the second chapter's reading of the relation between emancipatory politics, ressentiment and liberal democracy cuts decidedly new ground when compared with the accounts of feminist ressentiment examined so far.

We have seen in this chapter and the last that each theorist of feminist ressentiment has noted but not developed the idea that ressentimental political expression is an effect of and a reaction to domination. In Cocks' terms, political contestation of domination always is "in danger of succumbing to ressentiment"; in Tapper's terms, feminist ressentiment is "quite unsurpris[ing] given [women's] oppression throughout history"; in Yeatman's terms, ressentiment "makes sense to a subject who is systematically brutalised". Brown's analysis develops these ideas in providing an account of the specific manner in which ressentiment is "incited" through the paradoxical workings of prevailing forces within contemporary liberal democratic contexts: namely liberal universalism and individualism, disciplinary-regulatory power, and advanced capitalism. Hence, with Brown's work, we travel from a relatively under-articulated notion that emancipatory politics may be regarded as 'prone' to ressentiment to a deftly crafted vision of the historically specific manner in which the very desire of contemporary emancipatory political subjects, and liberal citizen-subjects more generally, is produced as ressentiment.

94 Brown, States of Injury, 74.
95 Cocks, 'Augustine, Nietzsche, and Contemporary Body Politics,' 155; Tapper, 'Ressentiment and Power,' 135; Yeatman, 'Feminism and Power,' 147.
96 It should be noted that Brown's work is concerned with the United States in particular (thus the triple connotation of the term "states" in the book's title: that nation, the ensemble of governmental institutions, a psychic disposition).
Most immediately, this aspect of Brown's account has consequences for this chapter in contrasting sharply with the treatment of liberal democracy in Yeatman's account of ressentimental politics. As the exposition of Brown unfolds I will illuminate this contrast so as to delineate the ultimately different understandings of ressentiment as 'undemocratic' which may be drawn from these theorists. More generally, however, this aspect of Brown's account provides something of a springboard for the investigation of ressentiment in the dissertation's third part. We turn now to a consideration of Brown's chapter 'Postmodern Exposures, Feminist Hesitations', before moving on to the chapter 'Wounded Attachments'.

The central argument of the first chapter under consideration is that modernist feminism's rejection of the discourse of postmodernism may in fact be regarded as a ressentimental reaction to the condition of postmodernity. Brown registers as a “political move” the extent to which postmodernism's feminist antagonists neglect the distinction between “postmodern conditions and theory, between epoch and politics”, and so preempt appreciation of the idea that “the “postmodern turn” in political/feminist theory represents, at its best, an attempt to articulate and engage the characteristic powers of our age”.97 That is, for Brown, feminist antagonism toward postmodernism betrays “a desire to kill the messenger”.98 In tune with the overarching project of her book—to investigate the production and direction of emancipatory political desire—Brown's task in this chapter is to delineate and diagnose this desire.

In providing a sketch of characteristically postmodern conditions, Brown refers to the proliferation of technical reason, a pervasive sense of temporal and spatial disorientation, and the prevalence of reactionary foundationalism

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97 States of Injury, 32; 33.
98 Ibid., 33.
as a “coping strategy for our “lost” condition of postmodernity”. Brown also refers to the latter as a “fundamentalism” evident not just on the right but on the left of the political spectrum. Such fundamentalism, she argues, functions through “moral utilitarianism, presenting and legitimating itself as the indispensable threads [sic] preserving some indisputable good, for example, Western civilisation, the American way of life, feminism, or left politics.” Brown will go on to identify this strategy with the responses to postmodernism on the part of those attempting scientific consolidation of a feminist standpoint or ‘women’s point of view,’ most notably Nancy Hartsock and Catharine MacKinnon, and with the politico-epistemological disposition of modernist feminism more generally.

Hartsock is joined by a great many feminists in contending that the discourse of postmodernism is depoliticising in its deconstruction of the epistemological technology emancipatory knowledge-making requires if it is to be politically effective: a sturdy if revised conception of the knowing subject, the esteem of truth, a clear-sighted account of real social relations, the objective capacity to discover norms. As part of her argument that to position postmodernism as the sole deconstructing agent in this configuration is to obscure its responsiveness to postmodernity, Brown mounts particular objection to the fact that this contention is offered in the name of realpolitik. She argues, to the contrary, that “feminist wariness about postmodernism may ultimately be coterminous with a wariness about politics”, and goes on

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99 Ibid., 35.
100 Ibid., 36.
101 Ibid., 36-7.
to show how "feminist panic" in the face of postmodern deconstruction of the subject, truth and normativity is less an assault on feminism's political health than it is an intervention upon what she terms feminism's "well of truth". 103 By this term Brown is referring to modernist feminist investment in a conception of the oppressed subject as positioned to provide an account of the world and of power which has greater truth value in being undistorted by interest in power, an investment which operates most clearly in the use of consciousness-raising as a method for generating an account of the world from 'women's point of view.' 104 Brown refers to consciousness-raising as "feminism's epistemologically positivist moment": the feelings, experiences and perspectives attested to in consciousness-raising are treated as the truths which, in their immunity to hermeneutics, can provide feminist knowledge with a solid foundation, even where this procedure is accompanied by the conflicting doctrine of strong social constructionism which apprehends women as "socially constructed to the core". 105

In a move which recalls the division set up between politics and morality in the analyses of Cocks and Yeatman, Brown identifies this epistemological procedure as an evasion of politics in favour of morality, a denial of situatedness within and interest in power in favour of claiming exclusive custodianship of Truth and "singular purchase on "the good."" 106 In making her argument that "much North Atlantic feminism partakes deeply of both

103 Jbid., 37; 39; 40.
105 States of Injury, 42. In making this point, Brown refers specifically to MacKinnon: "Consider Catharine MacKinnon's insistence that women are entirely the products of men's construction and her ontologically contradictory project of developing a jurisprudence based on "an account of the world from women's point of view." 41. Here, Brown cites the following from MacKinnon: Feminism Unmodified: discourses on life and law (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 48-50.
106 States of Injury, 47. Brown provides an expanded account of the division between politics and morality in Chapter 2 of her most recent book Politics Out of History (Princeton University Press, 2001), 18-44.
the epistemological spirit and political structure of ressentiment”, Brown demonstrates how this epistemological procedure follows that which Nietzsche associates with ressentiment: a procedure which lodges Truth “on the side of the damned or the excluded” such that it is cast as “always clean of power, but therefore also always positioned to reproach power.” As she explains:

In Nietzsche’s account ... [r]ather than a codification of domination, moral ideas are a critique of a certain kind of power, a complaint against strength, an effort to shame and discredit domination by securing the ground of the true and the good from which to (negatively) judge it.

In offering the conclusion that “[p]ostmodernity unsettles feminism because it erodes the moral ground that the subject, truth and normativity coproduce in modernity”, Brown poses the question as to whether feminism can develop a “politics without ressentiment”, whether it can prevail without that “moral apparatus” which preoccupies its host “with discerning and discrediting the nature of what it seeks to undercut”, and proceed instead on “the strength of an alternative vision of collective life”.

Figuring postmodernity as an “opportunity to radically sever the problem of the good from the problem of the true”, Brown urges feminists beyond preoccupation with developing a science of woman, with “assumptions or arguments about “who we are””, and toward an exercise of “political judgement” centred on ““what we want””. There is a sense in which Brown already has answered her question regarding whether feminism can develop a politics beyond ressentiment, not just in providing a glimpse of what such a

107 *States of Injury*, 46.
108 Ibid., 44-5. For Brown’s account of Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals and concept of ressentiment see Ibid., 43-45.
109 Ibid., 48; 47; 44; 47.
110 Ibid., 49.
feminism would focus on, but in positioning poststructuralist feminism as the politico-philosophical starting point for such a politics. Indeed, one respondent to Brown's argument reads it as heralding, as though at long last, the creation of a Nietzschean feminism, a "feminism beyond good and evil" which takes its bearing in "a postmodernist critique of truth." However, for reasons to be spelled out shortly, there are grounds for reading Brown as cautious on this point. First let us address more closely the specific recommendations Brown does make for shifting feminism from the ground of ressentiment.

Brown makes it clear that her book is not geared toward providing blueprints for political action: with a clear-sighted view of the role of political theory, she figures the task of the book as one of offering diagnoses of political tendencies as grounds for their contestation such that they will not "metamorphose unchecked into political expression". However in this chapter and in the next one we will address, Brown does provide some specific insights into the task of shifting feminism from the ground of ressentiment. Noting that resistance politics, however vital, is insufficient in being empty of vision and direction, she turns to two themes: space and speech. Of course, both of these factors are central to the practice of consciousness-raising, but in Brown's recasting of them space is dislodged from its connotation of privacy and speech is unmoored from its basis in self-identity and confessional locution. Referring to the acute paucity of political space especially since the decline of movement politics, Brown tables the task of "developing feminist postmodern political spaces" which can house collective

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112 *States of Injury*, xiii.

113 Ibid., 49.
conversation about “the nature of “the good” for women” and in which “the skills and practices of postmodern judgement” might be cultivated.114

Brown’s treatment of speech clearly is reminiscent of Yeatman’s distinction between moral plaint and the cadence she associates with the emancipatory subject’s properly ethico-political articulation of the wrong. To this extent, Brown and Yeatman are in accord in respect to their figurations of ressentimental politics as undemocratic. In turning to matter of speech and speaking positions to convey a sense of non-ressentimental political locution, Brown refers to a shift which might be made from identity-based speech focused on the self (“who I am”) and toward “postidentity”, “public” speech turned toward the world and the common (“what I want for us”).115 This latter locutory mode, which Brown also refers to as “political argument”, moves beyond moral reproach in dispensing with the defensiveness of identity-based speech in being relatively impersonal, contestable, and accountable. As in Yeatman’s account, the latter carries the connotation of being properly democratic while ressentimental moral plaint implicitly is rendered undemocratic.116 Having tabled these insights, let us return to the question of the role of poststructuralist feminism in moving feminism beyond ressentiment.

114Ibid., 49; 50. Emphasis in original.
115Ibid., 51.
116These associations reach explicit argument in Brown’s most recent book Politics Out of History. She writes: “Moralism . . . is animated by a tacitly antidemocratic sentiment: it does not want to talk or argue but rather seeks to abort conversation with its prohibition and reproaches.”, 38. In that text, Brown revises her treatment of the distinction between politics and morality in States of Injury. Specifically, she distinguishes ‘morality’ from ‘moralism’: by “paying closer attention to the difference between a galvanizing moral vision and a reproachful moralizing sensibility” Brown singles out moralising as “a kind of posture or pose taken up in the ruins of morality by its faithful adherents; it is thus at once a “fall” from morality, a “reversal” of morality, and an impoverished substitute for, or reaction to, the evisceration of sustaining moral vision.” Politics Out of History, 23.
Brown undertakes a critical engagement with the work of Catharine MacKinnon in a later chapter of *States of Injury*. On my interpretation, this engagement with MacKinnon contains the counter-intuitive suggestion that, in order to wield political weight, feminism may require some form of recourse to the strategy of *ressentiment*, the effectivity of moral reproach, that "weapon" which Brown explicitly has associated with MacKinnon's politics in the chapter we have addressed.

As we have seen, Brown argues that feminists needs to come to grips with the condition of postmodernity rather than entertain one of its most prominent symptoms, the fetishistic modernism of reactionary foundationalism. However, during her engagement with MacKinnon, Brown characterises contemporary *judicial and governmental power* as "formally dominated by a modernist political idiom". This suggests that even as we are immersed in postmodernity, official politics—its logics, categories, procedures, and so forth—itself is still 'modern.' This has consequences for how we are to understand the relationship between feminism, state power and the imperative to overcome *ressentiment*: or, more specifically, it raises the question as to how or whether a feminism without *ressentiment* would approach state power.

On my reading, this matter is linked to the doubt Brown expresses in the course of her engagement with MacKinnon regarding poststructuralist feminism's political purchase:

Can a radical postfoundationalist feminist political discourse about women, sexuality, and the law—with its necessary partial logics and

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117 *States of Injury*, 77-95.
118 Ibid., 44.
119 Ibid., 79. At another point in her book, Brown characterises the US state as "both modern and postmodern" (Ibid., 174) but this complements rather than contradicts the representation of judicial and governmental power currently under consideration since the "modernism" of the state would seem to consist precisely in "formal domination".
provisional truths, situated knowledges, fluid subjects, and decentred sovereignty—work to claim power, or to contest hegemonic power, to the degree that MacKinnon's discourse does? Or do the commitments of postfoundationalist feminist analysis condemn it to a certain political marginalisation, to permanent gadfly status, to a philosopher's self-consolation that she is on the side of "truth" rather than power?¹²⁰

This reversal of the truth/power configuration as it appears in the chapter we have addressed sees postfoundationalist feminism associated with "truth" as distinct from Truth, and replaced by MacKinnon's modernist feminism in association with power. This 'power' stems from the fact that MacKinnon's feminism—its self-certainty, jurisprudential acumen, mass translatability and moral gravity—speaks the modernist state's language (even as the anti-pornography campaign she mounted with Andrea Dworkin was largely unsuccessful in achieving its stated aims). Brown's argument for a feminism without ressentiment is in part an argument for reclaiming feminism's political freedom from those who would trade it for partnership with the state's punitive, protective and regulatory powers: what Brown calls "uncritical statism".¹²¹ However this raises the question as to how such a feminism might spend its freedom, and whether non-statism or critical statism can bring about substantive political change and access that level of effectivity or 'power' Brown associates with MacKinnon's ressentimental politics.

At the least, the questions raised here suggest that Brown does not posit postfoundationalism/poststructuralism/postmodernism as natural sources of political health or effectivity for feminism—as 'messengers' they may enable us to see some things more clearly, but that in itself is no guarantee of success. At most, it prompts us to consider whether a feminism beyond the form of ressentiment Brown describes should not jettison but strategically

¹²⁰Ibid., 79.
¹²¹Ibid., 26.
recast or emulate the moral force of ressentiment, where this force is understood as a potent source of official political efficacy. I have in mind here, for example, the practical considerations involved in negotiating policymaking environments, and the sorts of rhetorical and methodological strategies such environments demand of those who wish to negotiate them effectively. To make a convincing argument that a policy needs to change or be developed such that the state is made to ‘recognise’ the ‘interests’ of a particular sector of the population, modernist social-scientific method, both quantitative and qualitative, must be deployed.

To take but one example, recent (and successful) arguments for state provision of twelve weeks paid parental leave in the New Zealand context relied heavily on three decades worth of data which demonstrated clearly that women’s labour force participation rates tended to decline sharply upon the birth of their first child (adversely affecting earning-capacity and career trajectory over the life course), and on an interpretation of this data which situated New Zealand women as ‘victims’ of a discriminatory employment culture. That is, the argument was persuasive in part because it ‘spoke the modernist state’s language’ in providing ‘scientifically sound’ back up and deploying a cause-and-effect logic through which a form of ‘morally reprehensible victimisation,’ construed as an abrogation of entitlement, could be proven to exist.

\[122\]Arguments for this policy, public debate about it, and the policy itself also referred to men/fathers: either parent can sign up for paid leave (but not both). Indeed, the inclusion of men/fathers was an important factor in the public popularity of the policy, perhaps on account of the contemporary salience of father’s rights discourse no less than substantial shifts in men’s participation in parenting. However, women formed the primary focus throughout, and statistics regarding women’s labour force participation played a central role, such that it could be argued that the subject of the policy is implicitly female. It should be noted further that the policy was devised by a core group of feminists of the electoral left Alliance Party which at the time stood in coalition government with New Zealand Labour. This formed part of a context wherein parliament housed unprecedented numbers of female representatives (34%) and in which women occupied most key government positions, from Prime Minister (Helen Clark) and Opposition Leader (Jenny Shipley) through to Governor General (Dame Sylvia Cartwright).
This manoeuvre is far from satisfying Brown’s goal to develop a “vital politics of freedom” which contests rather than corroborates existing forms of unfreedom (most notably, in this case, the compulsion to engage paid employment), but the passage from Brown’s engagement with MacKinnon that I have cited raises the question as to whether feminism can afford to dispense with such a manoeuvre, and the modernist entanglements it entails, if it is to avoid auto-marginalisation and make effective, if profoundly incremental, improvements to the material conditions of women’s lives in the present. In the context of Brown’s chapter, a reform such as the one I have discussed reads as an effect of ressentiment, not just in its deployment of distinctively modernist knowledge-making (the world of work from ‘women’s point of view’) but in turning to the state as a “neutral arbiter of injury rather than as ... invested with the power to injure”, especially where this turn is understood as an end in itself, as feminism’s final political horizon.\(^{123}\)

Contrastingly, in the context of Yeatman’s work, this reform’s non-protectionist and pro-entitlement language, as well as its determination to work positively with the state to recast, however minimally, the category ‘worker,’ reads as a break with the politics of ressentiment.

This contrast lends the impression that between Yeatman and Brown (as with Cocks and Tapper) there are in fact two distinctly different feminist political postures—respectively, antagonistic outsidership which preempts non-protectionist, participatory reformism, and reformism construed as political end—being diagnosed as ressentimental. Hence, with both their work in view, the question as to the existing and desired relationships between feminist politics, ressentiment and state power appears to remain open and indeed vexed as their analyses pull in different directions in respect to reformism. We turn now to the second of Brown’s chapters to be considered,

\(^{123}\)Ibid., 27.
'Wounded Attachments,' where a closer view of Brown’s treatment of state-sponsored reform can be gained.

The defining element of Brown’s approach to the study of emancipatory political forms is attentiveness to their *symptomatic* character: the extent to which emancipatory political desires are not autarkically achieved but are produced “by and within the regimes of power [they] contest”, where the consequences of this circumstance include what Brown refers to as “resubordination” and “self-subversion”.124 For the case of identity politics, Brown builds an account of the forces conditioning the production of its political animus—its “disciplinary, liberal and capitalist parentage”—which elucidates the extent to which this political form works to annex rather than confront these forces, and so to curtail its transformative potential in reiterating rather than contesting “the “political shape” of domination in our time.”125 Here, of course, Brown’s analysis is especially similar to that of Tapper. The terms of Tapper’s more microcosmic analysis, which saw feminist academics taking recourse to, and so strengthening and legitimising, institutional powers they might otherwise contest, are writ large in Brown as she describes the foreclosure of political freedom and of thorough-going contestation entailed in the identitarian pursuit of legal recognition, protection and inclusion.126 We might note, however, that even as their analyses pursue similar trajectories, Tapper’s view of feminist success as exhausted by formal equality and inclusiveness stops well short of Brown’s interest in cultivating a “vital politics of freedom” whose terms are not set in necessary relation with those of liberalism.

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124 Ibid., 3; 55. As Brown notes in her Preface, her analyses “work heuristically from Foucault's relatively simple insight that political “resistance” is figured by and within rather than externally to the regimes of power it contests.” Ibid., 3.

125 Ibid., 62; 28.

126 Ibid., 28.
It is also the case that Brown's apprehension of political desire as produced recalls Yeatman's insistence on the interpellated character of emancipatory politics and politicized identity. However, in Yeatman's frame of reference liberal universalism's necessary acts of particularism alone do the interpellating, and moreover this labour is affirmed as part of the proper workings of liberal democracy: the universal must be particularised, the wrong must be politicised, the universal must be re-particularised, and politics proper consists in enabling the perpetual replaying of this loop while pseudo-politics consists in obstructing it. Brown, on the other hand,\textsuperscript{127} envisages the production of emancipatory political desire as a complex and contradictory collaborative effort between liberal universalism and its "companion powers: capitalism and disciplinarity", and she argues that part of the problem with identity politics' politicisation of exclusion is that it operates to legitimate its tripartite parentage.\textsuperscript{128} Both Yeatman and Brown take issue with the ratification of outsider identity which identity politics has involved, and both read this ratification through the concept of ressentiment, but where Yeatman sees politics foreclosed when the disenfranchised refuse to work with the custodians toward re-particularisation and so improved inclusiveness, Brown sees precisely such work as a depoliticising foreclosure of political freedom, especially insofar as it fails to "subject to critique ... the economy of inclusion and exclusion that liberal universalism establishes" and, as such, requires rather than contests that economy's capitalist measure of

\textsuperscript{127}In a footnoted discussion of Ernesto Laclau's affirmative treatment of liberal universalism's element of perpetual deferral, Brown builds on the critical stance she assumes in relation the 'radical democracy' school (States of Injury, 11-13) in penning the following question: "... [h]ow, if universal discourse may always be revealed to have this strategic function, can it also be taken seriously as a substantive value of democracy?", 57, N.7. Brown's critical stance contrasts with Yeatman's embrace of the general heuristic direction of radical democracy, producing important differences between these theorist's treatments of identity politics in universalist political culture.

\textsuperscript{128}Ibid., 57.
exclusion: “the white masculine middle-class ideal.”129 Let us now address Brown’s account of identity politics’ self-subversive reiteration of the powers which condition its production, noting from the outset that Brown’s account is intended to intervene upon and rewire rather than critique and oppose the political form to which it is addressed.130

Complementing yet departing from the work of cultural theorists who take recourse to a “linguistic frame” in their analyses of identity formation, Brown situates her analysis in an “historically specific cultural-political register” in order to elucidate the particular context in which identities are produced and become available for politicisation.131 Like Yeatman, Brown’s account of identity’s production begins with a discussion of liberalism’s “détente between universal and particular”.132 However, unlike Yeatman, this détente is not treated as productive of identities which are available for positive and effective politicisation. Rather, aside from a concern with “the individuating effects of liberal discourse”, Brown locates the production of identity primarily with disciplinarity and capitalism, and situates liberal universalism as that which works to depoliticise the identities they produce, where this movement from production to depoliticisation is understood as the circuit in which identity politics is ensnared. For Brown, the potentially deconstructive force of politicised identities is curtailed when liberalism converts such identities into “essentialized private interest”, diffusing their

129Ibid., 61.
130Ibid., 55; 75-6.
131Ibid., 54-5. Brown cites a number of cultural theorists who have worked productively within a “linguistic frame”: William Connolly, Stuart Hall, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Aiwah Ong, Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak and Anne Norton, Ibid., 54, n. 2.
132Ibid., 57.
potential force in casting them as “generic claims of particularism endemic to a universalist political culture.”

Importantly, then, particularism emerges in her account as liberalism’s tactic for depoliticisation, rather than as the opening for democratic politics proper it represents in Yeatman’s account. But in her discussion of liberalism’s “détente between universal and particular” Brown’s aim is to describe the specific manner in which its ideological function has been “thoroughly unravelled by two features of late modernity”. These features are, firstly, the liberal state’s increasingly naked investment in “particular economic interests, political ends, and social formations”; and secondly the vast proliferation, classification and regulation of particular identities performed by disciplinary powers working within and outside the state. In regards to the latter, Brown names, for example, “classificatory schemes” enabling “the welfare state’s production of welfare subjects” and “consumer capitalism’s marketing discourse in which individual (and subindividual) desires are produced, commodified and mobilised as identities”.

Brown’s vision, then, is one in which state *universality* wears increasingly thin while the production of *particular* identities proliferates. These identities are to be understood as “available for politicisation because they are deployed for purposes of political regulation”. In describing the emergence of identity politics from this configuration, Brown writes:

In this story, the always imminent but increasingly manifest failure of liberal universalism to be universal—the transparent fiction of state universality—combines with the increasing individuation of social

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133 Ibid., 59.  
134 Ibid., 56.  
135 Ibid., 57-8.  
136 Ibid., 58.  
137 Ibid..
subjects through capitalist disinterments and disciplinary productions. Together, they breed the emergence of politicized identity rooted in disciplinary productions but oriented by liberal discourse toward protest against exclusion from a discursive formation of universal justice.\textsuperscript{138}

From the outset, then, Brown represents identity politics as \textit{misdirected} and, in this, self-subversive. Politicisations of identity categories inhabit and confirm rather than interrogate and contest the articulation of these categories on the part of disciplinary power, then seal this confirmation in tailoring politicisation along the lines set out by liberalism: generic claims of particularism baited by failed universalism, excluded orders of interest seeking inclusive recognition. Hence, liberalism's mitigation against the "articulation of differences \textit{as political—as effects of power}" is effectively obeyed as politicised identity claims emerge as eminently digestible complaint—that is, they are \textit{depoliticised}—rather than as deep challenges to the forces which have conditioned their production.\textsuperscript{139} In this way, liberalism's \textit{economy} of inclusion and exclusion, as distinct from its exclusiveness, is protected from critique. Moreover, politicised identity comes to be invested in its own exclusion. As Brown explains:

\begin{quote}
[P]oliticized identity ... reiterates the terms of liberal discourse insofar as it posits a sovereign and unified "I" that is disenfranchised by an exclusive "we." ... politicized identity emerges and obtains its unifying coherence through the politicisation of exclusion from an ostensible universal, as a protest against exclusion: a protest premised on the fiction of an inclusive/universal community, a protest that thus reinstalls the humanist ideal—and a specific white, middle-class, masculinist expression of this ideal—insofar as it premises itself upon exclusion from it.... [p]oliticized identities generated out of liberal, disciplinary societies, insofar as they are premised on exclusion from a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{138}Ibid.,

\textsuperscript{139}Ibid., 56.
universal ideal, require that ideal, as well as their exclusion from it, for their own continuing existence as identities.140

As we will see, the reiteration of liberalism Brown discerns here connects, firstly, to her account of identity politics’ protection of capitalism from critique and, secondly, to her account of how identity politics, in its recourse to the law to redress “social injury”, annexes rather than challenges disciplinary power.

Regarding the first connection, and as against the view that identity politics centred on gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity are to be understood as “a supplement to class politics” and “an expansion of left categories of oppression and emancipation”, Brown theorises that the “invisibility and inarticulateness of class” evident in this political form is not incidental but “endemic”.141 Arguing that the white, bourgeois, masculinist ideal functions as the yardstick by which politicized identities measure their exclusion and envisage their inclusion, Brown suggests that identity politics may be interpreted as “a peculiarly shaped and peculiarly disguised form of class resentment” which works to displace the injurious effects of capitalism away from the category of class and onto the explicitly politicized, non-class category. Having noted that identity politics, “like all resentments ... retains the real or imagined holdings of its reviled subject as objects of desire”, she writes:

... when not only economic stratification but other injuries to the human body and psyche enacted by capitalism—alienation,

140Ibid., 64-5.
141Ibid., 59; 61; 60. Nicola Field makes a very similar argument in her analysis of “pink economy” identity politics: ‘Identity and the Lifestyle Market,” in Materialist Feminism: a reader in class, difference and women’s lives, eds. Rosemary Hennessey and Chrys Ingraham, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 259-271. However, it must be noted that Field’s argument that identity politics is premised upon an eschewal of a critique of capitalism is figured as a final critique of identity politics while Brown’s argument, “rather than seeking to oppose or transcend identity investments”, ultimately is attuned to reworking the structure of its political desire (States of Injury, 76).
commodification, exploitation, displacement, disintegration of sustaining albeit contradictory social forms such as families and neighbourhoods—when these are discursively normalized and thus depoliticised, other markings of social difference may come to bear an inordinate weight; indeed, they may bear all the weight of the sufferings produced by capitalism in addition to that attributable to the explicitly politicized marking.¹⁴²

Brown then contrasts this dependence of politicized identities upon “a standard internal to existing society” for the formation of their political claims with the revolutionary Marxist vision of total transformation through the elimination of capitalism.¹⁴³

This suggests that the latter’s revolutionary orientation be registered as prevailing beyond the particular form of resentment Brown addresses here (which is not to say it does not involve other orders of resentment¹⁴⁴), and as such this suggestion is reminiscent of Cocks’ point that radical politics’ original categorical triptych—oppression, revolution, emancipation—promises release from the atrophy of ressentiment. Like Cocks, Brown is not recommending politico-epistemological adoption of this particular revolutionary tradition. Rather, on my reading, she is beckoning a renewal of the critique of capitalism so as to counter identity politics’ “renaturalization” of it, and she invokes this tradition’s emphasis upon the possibility of total

¹⁴²Brown, States of Injury, 60.
¹⁴³Ibid., 61.
¹⁴⁴In the first of Brown’s chapters we assessed, Marxism also serves as her object of critique to the extent that modernist feminism’s epistemological protocols largely are drawn from that tradition (cf. 47; for Brown’s extensive engagement with Marx’s thought see especially her discussion of his treatment of identity in States of Injury 96-134 and her account of Marx’s conception of power and historical materialism in Politics Out of History, 62-90). However I would argue that, key to her interest in a “vital politics of freedom”, Brown does not discount the revolutionary orientation of Marxism. Arguing that a postfoundationalist feminism must break with “Marxism’s promise . . . of meticulously articulated connections between a comprehensive critique of the present and norms for a transformed future”, she notes that this promise involves a “science of revolution rather than a politics of one” (49) and so, on my reading, retains the latter as a viable orientation for radical political projects, as she does here in contrasting revolutionary Marxism with identity politics.
transformation, and the connotation of autarky, freedom and futurity this bears, as an instructive point of contrast with the geist of identity politics.\textsuperscript{145}

The second connection, Brown's concern with identity politics' annexation of disciplinary power, is interesting for our purposes since it proceeds in contrast with Yeatman's analysis, specifically her link between feminism beyond ressentiment, power conceived as capacity, and legislation which engages a relatively transparent process of citizen-subject formation in attaching rights to personhood rather than property or protection. This contrast will come into view most clearly if we first consider the main point of commonality between these theorists. Yeatman and Brown share a concern with the reiteration of victim identity entailed in the conception of power as protection.\textsuperscript{146}

Recall that for Yeatman, to beckon the protective powers of the state is to risk reproducing "the relationship of tutelage between powerful protector and those who, being powerless, are seen to need help."\textsuperscript{147} Brown makes a very similar point in her discussion of identity politics' recourse to the law to redress "the "injury" of social subordination":

... the effort to "outlaw" social injury powerfully legitimizes law and the state as appropriate protectors against injury and casts injured individuals as needing such protection by such protectors ... in its economy of perpetrator and victim, this project seeks not power or emancipation for the injured or the subordinated, but the revenge of punishment, making the perpetrator hurt as the sufferer does.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{145}IBrown, \textit{States of Injury}, 60.

\textsuperscript{146}Aside from her concern with protectionism in the chapter under consideration, Brown also discusses it at length in her chapter 'Finding the Man in the State,' \textit{States of Injury}, 166-196.

\textsuperscript{147}Yeatman, 'Feminism and Power,' 152.

\textsuperscript{148}\textit{States of Injury}, 27.
Both theorists tie the conception of power as protection to the equation of justice with revenge, and to a self-subversive reinscription of victim identity. The point of departure between them, however, consists most immediately in Brown’s extension and Yeatman’s retraction of this line of critique to a consideration of legislation which attaches rights to personhood (anti-discrimination, affirmative action and equal opportunity legislation). Where Yeatman perceives in such legislation a break with the discourse of natural rights and a potentially positive deployment of non-extractive power for the constitution of capable, self-regulating citizen-subjects, Brown, as we will see, perceives a “strikingly unemancipatory” reiteration of disciplinary power and the formation of a “disciplinary subject”.\textsuperscript{149} Where Yeatman detects a leap from protected persons to capable persons whom command respect, Brown perceives the bid for protection resculpted to suit disciplinary manners of writing personhood into law.

This indicates that their analyses again are pulling in different directions in respect to reformism. Yeatman’s analysis figures a feminist discourse which can beckon a non-paternalistic state, while Brown’s analysis, especially in its attentiveness to disciplinarity, casts radical doubt upon the very idea of turning to the state. In this, it beckons also a rethinking of feminism’s political agency such that it might practiced at most independently of, at least at some remove from, the state’s ensemble of institutions and discursive formations.

To flesh out her perception of such legislation as reiterative of disciplinary society, Brown refers to an anti-discrimination ordinance “devised and promulgated by a broad coalition of identity-based groups” in her local

\textsuperscript{149}Ibid., 64; 65.
political scene. The ordinance pursues the format of much anti-discrimination, equal opportunity and affirmative action codes in naming an array of markers of social difference, from height and ancestry to “known or assumed homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality”, as unworthy bases of discrimination. On the whole, Brown interprets the ordinance as “a perfect instance of the universal juridical ideal of liberalism and the normalizing principle of disciplinary regimes conjoined and taken up within the discourse of politicized identity.”

Brown’s objections to the ordinance are many, but a summary should be as follows. Firstly, in relation to difference, the ordinance aims to “count every difference as no difference”. That is, it works to normalize differences which emerge as effects of power, and to diffuse the subversive potential of differences which issue from a “rejection of culturally enforced norms”. So even as differences are made visible and ostensibly are ‘affirmed’—the intention of the ordinance—their basis in disciplinary articulations is obscured or, alternatively, their political bite is neutralized through a universalist gesture of ‘acceptance.’ Secondly, in relation to identity, the ordinance impresses into law a calculus of the subject which reduces and then fixes persons to their empirically observable attributes and practices, “ensuring that persons describable according to them will now become regulated through them”. Hence, for Brown, the attachment of rights and entitlements to personhood installs a fetter where it appears to be removing

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150 Brown is referring to a draft of “An Ordinance of the City of Santa Cruz Adding Chapter 9.83 to the Santa Cruz Municipal Code Pertaining to the Prohibition of Discrimination.”, 65, n.21. The aim of the ordinance was to “ban discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of “sexual orientation, transsexuality, age, height, weight, personal appearance, physical characteristics, race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, sex, or gender.” Ibid., 65.

151 Ibid., 65.

152 Ibid., 66.

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid.
one, constructs a subject where it appears to be allowing for one and, in deploying the classificatory tactics of disciplinary power, risks aiding in the fabrication of a ‘plastic cage’:

> When contemporary anxieties about the difficult imperatives of freedom are installed in the regulatory forces of the state in the form of increasingly specified codes of injury and protection, do we unwittingly increase the power of the state and its various regulatory discourses at the expense of political freedom? Are we fabricating something like a plastic cage that reproduces and further regulates the injured subjects it would protect?\(^{155}\)

The final point Brown makes regarding the ordinance is that its negotiation of state power is “not simply misguided” but, more complexly, that its self-subversiveness is symptomatic of the context which has conditioned its production.\(^{156}\)

This point takes Brown into a consideration of the extent to which constitutive elements of liberalism may be regarded *incitations* of *ressentiment*, and it is here that her analysis cuts new ground for the understanding of *ressentiment* as an effect of and reaction to domination. Let us review this important point by way of conclusion to our engagement with her account.

In drawing up a portrait of the late modern liberal subject as “starkly accountable yet dramatically impotent” and, therefore, “quite literally seeth[ing] with *ressentiment*” Brown refers first to the paradox between freedom and equality which lies at the heart of liberalism, and secondly to the tensions which attend liberal individualism, both of which are situated as key to liberalism’s “generalized incitement to *ressentiment*”, and the latter of


\(^{156}\)Ibid., 66.
which forms her main focus. Of the relation of ressentiment to liberalism's discourse of sovereign individuals she writes:

... it is not only the tension between freedom and equality but the prior presumption of the self-reliant and self-made capacities of liberal subjects, conjoined with their unavowed dependence on and construction by a variety of social relations and forces, that makes all liberal subjects, and not only markedly disenfranchised ones, vulnerable to ressentiment: it is their situatedness within power, their production by power, and liberal discourse's denial of this situatedness and production that cast the liberal subject into failure, the failure to make itself in the context of a discourse in which its self-making is assumed, indeed, is its assumed nature. This failure, which Nietzsche call suffering, must either find a reason within itself (which redoubles the failure) or a site of external blame upon which to avenge its hurt and redistribute its pain.

In this passage, Brown situates the discourse of social being particular to liberalism as an occasion which is, to employ Max Scheler's phrase, "charged with the danger of ressentiment." That is, at this point in her analysis, Brown is not only using the conception of ressentiment as a tool with which to diagnose a political condition: she is also providing a specific account of ressentiment's conditions of possibility, what Scheler would call a sociology of ressentiment.

Brown then argues that these conditions of possibility are heightened in late modernity as the reach of liberalism's companion powers expands "to create an unparalleled individual powerlessness over the fate and direction of one's own life, intensifying the experiences of impotence, dependence and gratitude inherent in liberal capitalist orders and constitutive of

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157Ibid., 69; 66.
158Ibid., 67. Emphasis in original.
ressentiment."\textsuperscript{161} Let us address Brown's vision of the place of identity politics in the condition she describes here before concluding with a delineation of the ramifications of this for a comparison of Yeatman and Brown.

Brown argues that politicisations of identity on the part of markedly subordinated subjects emerge as "both product and reaction" to the conditions constitutive of liberalism's incitation to ressentiment.\textsuperscript{162} She situates ressentiment as that which springs from and attempts to ameliorate suffering: it reworks pain into enraged righteousness and locates the "cause" of suffering, a specific site toward which blame may be directed and pain may be redistributed through the dispensation of punishment.\textsuperscript{163} Hence ressentiment engages a vengeful "economy of victim and perpetrator": in the case of the ordinance with which she is concerned, "the "injury" of social subordination" is made over into a criminal matter of individual enactment and case-by-case litigation which "fixes the identities of the injured and the injuring as social positions, and codifies as well the meaning of their actions against all possibilities of indeterminacy, ambiguity, and struggle for resignification and repositioning."\textsuperscript{164}

The 'self-subversiveness' of this political effort consists in the fixity of identity it entails: ressentiment's amelioration of the injuries of subordination and exclusion proceeds on the basis that the identity 'subordinated' and 'excluded' be preserved. In this way, politicised identity becomes "invested in its own subjection":

This investment lies not only in its discovery of a site of blame for its hurt will, not only in its acquisition of recognition through its history of subjection ... but also in the satisfactions of revenge, which ceaselessly

\textsuperscript{161}\textit{States of Injury}, 68. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{162}Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{163}Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{164}Ibid., 27.
reenact even as they redistribute the injuries of marginalization and subordination in a liberal discursive order that alternately denies the very possibility of these things and blames those who experience them for their own condition. Identity politics structured by ressentiment reverse without subverting this blaming structure: they do not subject to critique the sovereign subject of accountability that liberal individualism presupposes, nor the economy of inclusion and exclusion that liberal universalism establishes.\textsuperscript{165}

With Brown’s interpretation of identity politics in full view, we are positioned to register that her characterisation of this political form’s ressentimental structure as self-subversive exists in tension with her account of liberalism’s incitation of its subjects to ressentiment. In what sense is a politics responsibly self-subversive if the political field which conditions its production is responsible for inciting it to ‘self-subversion’? Of course, this is a productive tension insofar as it reinforces the need to subvert the “blaming structure” Brown refers to above: Brown refuses to lend neither the ‘self-subverting’ subject nor the forces which are ‘precipitous’ of its self-subversion—liberalism, capitalism, disciplinarity—a clean place to stand, and in this way Brown’s own account eludes ressentiment’s economy of perpetrator and victim.

However, the concern which arises here is that this economy is not necessarily overcome. For this economy may be preserved by the most subtlest of gestures: the making of perpetrator and victim into one in the same subject, that is, self-blame. It is clear from Brown’s account that emphasising the extent to which ressentimental political postures are self-subversive works to place the possibility of overcoming such subversion firmly within the grasp of the politicised subject. This connects to Brown’s hortatory call, in the first chapter we examined, for feminists to “assume

\textsuperscript{165}Ibid., 70.
responsibility for our situations". In agreement with this, Moira Gatens' response to Brown urges feminists to “take responsibility for what we are” and to begin a reconceptualisation of “notions of complicity, responsibility and accountability”, presumably so that the politically marginalised may examine their complicity in their own marginalisation and indeed in the self-subversive failures of their political efforts.

Here again we meet with the injunction to those engaged in emancipatory politics to ‘take responsibility.’ Neither Brown nor Gatens articulate any distinction between the assumption of responsibility and the gesture of self-blame which attends ressentiment—that moment in which the subject “find[s] a reason within itself”. As I see it, there is room here for a troubling development: leaving this distinction unarticulated sets up this auto-critical discourse on feminist ressentiment as yet another venue in which the “markedly disenfranchised” are led back into self-blame, a scenario which surely presses against Brown’s concern to see those engaged in emancipatory politics “critique the sovereign subject of accountability that liberal individualism presupposes”. It is clear from this that the relation between ressentiment, politicisation and self-blame will require our further attention.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, let us draw one final comparison between Yeatman and Brown before summarising the accounts of feminist ressentiment we have examined in this part of the dissertation. The situation Brown describes when she provides a sociology of ressentiment is one in which the “contemporary values of self-regulation” to which Yeatman refers work to intensify the

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166Ibid., 51.
168*States of Injury*, 67.
169Ibid., 70.
incitation to ressentiment.\textsuperscript{170} This is especially so given that neoliberalism’s discourse of self-regulation features alongside a vast, upward and arguably gendered redistribution of wealth facilitated by its sharp reversal of the Robin Hood principle as well as the pronounced increase in employer prerogative attendant upon the shifts in industrial relations it oversees.\textsuperscript{171}

In view of the general valence of Yeatman’s emphasis upon the conception of power as capacity as an opening onto a feminist discourse of women as self-legislating subjects of power, yet mindful of Brown’s figuration of such a discourse as precipitous of ressentiment when it prevails in a context marked by unavowed forces of domination, it is reasonable to conclude that any feminist conception of self-legislative capacity must take into account the political and economic forces which mitigate against self-legislative efforts, and must reckon with the task of curtailing these forces. To refer again to Gatens, who invokes Brown and Yeatman’s ideas in combination: she argues that feminists must “theorize power as a positive capacity as well as acknowledge and fight against power that takes the form of dominance and submission.”\textsuperscript{172}

In view of the foregoing comparison of Yeatman and Brown, we might revise this directive such that the theorization of power as capacity and the fight against domination emerge not as discrete projects which may proceed concurrently but as crucially interlinked and indeed mutually dependent. If, as Brown argues, ressentiment’s reinscription of incapacity prevails where capacity is assumed yet unavowedly undercut, then reckoning with that

\textsuperscript{170}Yeatman, ‘Feminism and Power’, 155.

\textsuperscript{171}The reversal I refer to here is fostered by economic policy which installs tax cuts for upper quintile earners and the private sector and pro-employer industrial relations legislation set in combination with welfare policy attuned to downsizing (ie. tighter eligibility criteria for benefits and cuts to benefit rates).

\textsuperscript{172}Gatens, \textit{Imaginary Bodies}, 88. Emphasis in original.
which undercuts—liberalism, capitalism, disciplinarity—would seem to be not parallel but central to the task of theorising power as capacity.

As my analysis has demonstrated, the figurations of the relationship between feminism, liberal democracy and ressentiment presented by Yeatman and Brown are in accord in the following two respects. Firstly, they both treat ressentiment as formative of an ‘undemocratic’ mode of political locution which trades political argument for moral plaint. Secondly, they both employ the concept of ressentiment to problematise the manner in which the politicisation of outsider identity reiterates victim identity and invites a politics of envy and revenge rather than a politics of emancipation. However, as my analysis has also demonstrated, Yeatman and Brown pursue very different paths from this point, both in relation to their diagnoses of feminist ressentiment and their visions of feminism beyond ressentiment. As for their diagnoses: according to Yeatman, a feminism of ressentiment will evade democratic politics proper in undertaking antagonistic outsidership and/or entertaining protectionism; according to Brown, such a feminism will engage the depoliticising route of democratic politics proper and so forego a more radical critique of liberalism and its companion powers.

As for their counter-images of feminist ressentiment, both theorists emphasise futurity and capacity yet Yeatman’s particular conception of power as capacity may in fact be problematised and revised in light of Brown’s account of liberal individualism’s incitation to ressentiment. And while Brown beckons an extensive critique of liberalism such that doubt is cast on whether emancipation is possible within its confines, Yeatman’s figuration of emancipation and impugnation of antagonistic outsidership would seem to be predicated on relinquishing such doubt. Hence Yeatman’s and Brown’s analyses of feminist ressentiment pull in different, perhaps opposing, directions with respect to feminism’s political future, in much the same way
as do the analyses of Cocks and Tapper. With this thought in mind let us summarise the accounts of feminist ressentiment examined in this part of the dissertation.

To forward a general and stabilising summary of the accounts of feminist ressentiment examined in this part of the dissertation, we would say that they all work to interrupt what seems an otherwise reasonable assumption regarding the nature of feminist politicisation, an assumption lent clear expression in Michèle Le Dœuff’s dictum: “For feminism does not create its object for itself. Sexism comes first”. Through their use of Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment to trace feminism’s resubordinating tendencies, its identificatory ‘requirement’ of what it opposes, these accounts do not so much overturn as complicate le Dœuff’s idea that feminism is strictly pursuant and cleanly responsive to forms of sexist injustice. This complication is articulated most sharply when Tapper echoes the popular feminist critics’ claims in arguing that feminist complaint about sexist injustice has reached fever pitch at a time when such injustice is least in evidence, and more gently yet no less resolutely in Cocks’, Yeatman’s and Brown’s joint problematisation of the reiterative attachment to victim identity they discern in feminist protectionism.

To abstract from their particulars, we may note that what these accounts put on the table is the idea that a feminist politics which takes its bearings in a ressentimental mode of valuation, empowerment and identity-formation will recreate its object for itself. So sexism may come first, but we are to assume that precisely how feminism evaluates sexism—how it interprets its object for itself, the nature of its reaction to its object—is key to

whether feminism will actively counter or reactively require and so ‘recreate’ its object.

Insofar as the concept of ressentiment can be interpreted as describing a mode of politicisation which facilitates the triumph of the slave as slave, a feminism of ressentiment will facilitate the empowerment of victims as victims, where this paradoxical transformation spells melancholic dependence upon the contrasting, victimising ‘evil.’ Feminism’s recreation of its object is not limited to its identificatory requirement of it: relatedly, these analyses suggest that a feminism of ressentiment will, in Brown’s terms, “redraw” the very forms of domination it ostensibly opposes, where this may be traced most clearly in feminism’s recourse to a higher power (the state, the law, the administration), its utilitarian ratification of that power’s equation of justice with revenge, and the subsequent formation of what Tapper refers to as “specific feminist configuration[s] of power/knowledge”\(^{174}\).

This much may be said in the way of a general and stabilising summary of the accounts of feminist ressentiment we have examined. What, then, are we to make of the differences between these accounts, those which have been exposed through this and the last chapter’s employment of comparative analysis? What of the different political directions in which these accounts point feminism: toward and away from abetting state and institutional power, toward and away from ‘radical’ posturing, toward greater cooperativeness within existing politico-economic arrangements, toward reigniting radical problematisation of these arrangements? What of the conflicts about which kind of feminism may be regarded as either implicated in or able to overcome ressentiment, and the sheer plurality of ressentimental figures these accounts present: Cocks’ sanctimonious yet strident writer and orator of victim

\(^{174}\text{Tapper, ‘Ressentiment and Power,’ 130.}\)
politics, Tapper's hypersensitive femocrat, Yeatman's anti-statist outsider and statist protectionist, Brown's modernist feminist and statist identitarian? In short, what of the instabilities which can be traced in this discourse on feminist ressentiment? Can they all be right, or does the plurality evident in this literature suggest a deeper relationship between feminism, politics and ressentiment which none of the accounts by themselves capture? This is the first of two related sets of questions that these accounts pose.

The second set of questions has to do with the concept of ressentiment itself. In Elsbeth Probyn's response to Brown's account of feminist ressentiment it is argued that this account should be expanded to include consideration of "all facets, and all generations of feminist thought today". Probyn's enthusiasm is to be affirmed but may also be redirected. If it is the case that the concept of ressentiment has a crucial and broad part to play in feminist theory, so far in the direction of feminist self-appraisal, then an examination of the concept of ressentiment itself is required. Each of the accounts we have addressed provide some description of the concept, but it seems worthy to propose, as I will in the following part of the dissertation, that diagnostic use of the concept of ressentiment, even as it enables what Foucault has called a critical ontology of ourselves, nonetheless serves as a lightening rod which ushers critical attention away from close examination of the concept itself. Indeed, it would seem that ressentiment is one of the most used but the least examined of Nietzsche's major concepts, and in political terms this use has been wide-ranging.


176As Richard A. Smith argues, many aspects of the concept of ressentiment are "yet to be examined", 'Nietzsche: Philosopher of Ressentiment?' in International Studies in Philosophy, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1993): 137. In recent literature one can find the concept of ressentiment used to interpret not just feminist politics, but phenomena ranging from far right politics in the United States, modern nationalism, the Saturnalian psychology of modernity's 'abject hero,' revolutionary politics, and anti-feminism/homophobia. See, respectively: Howard Schuman and Maria Krysan, 'A Study of Far Right Ressentiment' in
The diagnostic procedure pursued by the critics we have examined requires that the concept of *ressentiment* be lent conceptual stability: one must demarcate with some precision what *ressentiment* is so as to match it with a particular mode of political expression. But as we have seen in this part of the dissertation (and even in part one given Hoff Sommers and Wolfs less overt Nietzscheanism), each critic forwards a slightly different version of what *ressentiment* is and, between them, are able to perceive *ressentiment* at work within at least two primary and ostensibly conflicting modes of politicisation available to feminism: radical antagonistic outsidership bent on revolutionary transcendence of the *status-quo*, and liberal co-operative insidership content to work within existing configurations of power (liberalism, capitalism, disciplinarity).

Conversely, between these accounts we also find that both modes of politicisation are registered as lying ‘beyond’ *ressentiment*. In Brown’s terms, which may be aligned with those of Cocks, a feminism beyond *ressentiment* will “fight for a world rather than conduct process on the existing one”, while both Tapper and Yeatman consider that we will glimpse a feminism beyond *ressentiment* precisely when feminism lets go of the idea that another world is possible and limits itself to “wanting equal power” within existing arrangements.177 Hence the discourse on feminist *ressentiment* that we have examined offers fundamentally conflicting judgements regarding the nature of feminism’s relationship with *ressentiment*, and yields fundamentally differing strategic avenues for feminist politics. Among other things, this suggests

that the word 'ressentiment', like the word 'victim,' plays a polysemic role in this literature.

Aside from this predicament, it also is the case that the analyses of Cocks and Brown suggest that further examination of the concept of ressentiment is required. Recall that Cocks' diagnostic use of the concept of ressentiment prevailed even as she registered concern regarding the stark typology on which it is based: the self-defining master versus the inauthentic slave. And consider Brown's brief but highly suggestive construction of a sociology of ressentiment. How does this approach differ from diagnostic employment of the concept of ressentiment and, if developed, what bearing might this approach have on our understanding of the relationship between feminist politics and ressentiment? Both caveats will be taken up in the following part of the dissertation as we examine the concept of ressentiment with a view to address the above noted sets of questions.
PART THREE
Reading Ressentiment
Ressentiment Reconsidered

The position of subordination, while it requires the loss or absence of many of the rights and privileges of the dominant position, also produces certain skills and modes of resourcefulness, the capacity precisely for self-sustenance and creativity that are lost for the dominator. They become complaisant and self-satisfied, while the subordinated must sharpen their wits and continuously develop themselves or succumb to their oppressed positions.
—Elizabeth Grosz.¹

There are indeed many precautions to imprison a man in what he is, as if we lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition.
—Jean-Paul Sartre.²

Introduction

Given that the accounts of feminism’s relationship with ressentiment examined in Part 2, while illuminating in many respects, exhibit conflicting judgements regarding the relationship between feminism and ressentiment, the task of this part of the dissertation is to address the questions which arise from this predicament by way of a close and critical reading of Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment. This reading seeks to deepen our understanding of the relationship between feminism and ressentiment, although I do not claim to present a final or exhaustive account of this relationship nor of the concept of ressentiment itself. My guiding proposition simply is that the plurality evident in the literature we have examined indicates that the relationship between

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feminism, politics and ressentiment is more complex, dynamic and multivalent than the accounts in that literature acknowledge. I also bring to this reading a suspicion that when Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment is employed diagnostically, as in the accounts we examined, only part of the story of ressentiment is told. This diagnostic gesture asks that we take at face value what Henry Staten refers to as Nietzsche’s “official attitude of condemnation” toward ressentiment, but it is by no means clear that this approach to ressentiment is the best way to put this concept to work for political reflection.3

By adopting an exegetical approach to the concept of ressentiment across this chapter and the next, the aim is to bring out features of ressentiment which have been elided in the literature we have addressed, and which have a significant bearing on our interpretation of the modes of politicisation diagnosed as ressentimental in this literature. This part of the dissertation is arranged into two chapters which work together to broaden our perspective on ressentiment by bringing into view the other key elements of Nietzsche’s articulation of this concept—Nietzsche’s thesis on the moralities of master and slave, his account of the dynamic struggle between master and slave, the distinct modes of self-relation Nietzsche associates with their respective moralities, and the role of legalism and religious asceticism in mediating between them. As we will see, our perspective on ressentiment shifts considerably once the general political schema informing Nietzsche’s impugnation of ressentiment is in view. Diagnostic use of the concept of ressentiment, as in the accounts we examined in Part 2, tends to isolate that concept from the remainder of Nietzsche’s account. By addressing not just ressentiment but the other key elements of Nietzsche’s theory, we will be positioned to rethink Nietzsche’s condemnatory attitude toward ressentiment.

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and, therefore, the manner in which we conceive of the relationship between feminism and ressentiment. My analysis also suggests that we rethink how we use the term 'ressentiment' itself: it demonstrates that this term does not occupy a stable presence in Nietzsche's account, but rather describes a dynamic process of slave revolt which proceeds in at least three distinct stages.

The current chapter is divided into two sections, the first of which addresses the struggle between master and slave from the perspective of master morality, the second of which concentrates on slave morality and ressentiment. The chapter's analysis calls into question three main assumptions about ressentiment made in the literature we have examined: that ressentiment is unambiguously 'bad,' that it ordains a 'non-transformative' politics, and that it is something to which the politics of the oppressed are 'prone'. In relation to this last assumption, my analysis does not refute it so much as demonstrate that the very existence of a 'politics' of the oppressed betrays that a ressentiment existed prior to this politics, a ressentiment which 'became political' and, as such, refused to be contained by the regime which conditioned its production. While the accounts we have examined hold that feminism may be regarded as 'motivated by,' 'steeped in' and 'prone to' ressentiment, where these are construed as points of serious political weakness, the analysis presented in this chapter confirms the motivating role ressentiment plays in the politics of emancipation, but shows how this works as a political strength, and demonstrates as well that feminist politicisation is amelioratively, perhaps transfiguratively, responsive to ressentiment. By examining that strand in Nietzsche's account which associates ressentiment with those whose lives are in large part and in non-trivial ways determined by the wills of others, my reading seeks to illuminate the positively and justifiably subversive properties of ressentiment. This cuts against the emphasis, in the literature we have examined, upon ressentiment
as a necessarily self-subversive style of politics which entrenches the distance between the oppressed and positive political capacity.4

Taking Nietzsche at his word when he associates ressentiment with a dynamic process of political revolt, my analysis will highlight the role of ressentiment as the affective venue in which the factually powerless craft positive political capacity as well as the ability to articulate, problematise, and attempt to ameliorate their experience of, and vulnerability to, victimisation. With this dimension of ressentiment in view, we will be positioned to see that ressentiment is neither a novel nor a wholly negative element of feminist politics, but rather forms a basic element of the impulse toward feminist politics—such that it may be said that all feminisms take their bearings in what Nietzsche called ressentiment, and are attuned to transforming the conditions under which their ressentiments are made possible. Seen in light of this argument, the two main political strategies associated with ressentiment in the literature we have examined emerge not as novel moments in which feminism and ressentiment meet, but rather as two strategies available to feminism in its necessarily broad campaign

4 To my knowledge, apart from Zoë Sofia’s initial critical response to Tapper’s account (Zoe Sophia, ‘Position Envy and the Subsumption of Feminism’), the diagnosis of feminism as a politics of ressentiment has been subject to critical re-appraisal in one other text. In an excellent work of feminist theory, Vikki Bell takes up Brown’s account, and refers also to Tapper’s, asking “Is ressentiment the basis of feminism?” (Vikki Bell, Feminist Imagination: genealogies in feminist theory (London: Sage, 1999), 41). Essentially, Bell agrees with Brown’s understanding of what feminist ressentiment looks like (a Manichean moralism which impugns yet envies the attributes and possessions of its opponent), but then challenges the exhaustiveness of Brown’s reading by moving to locate moments in feminist thought when its parameters exceed those of ressentiment. More specifically, Bell offers a reading of the relationship between Simone de Beauvoir and Richard Wright, identifying moments in Beauvoir’s thought when the centrality of women’s suffering and the primacy of gender cede to “modes of connectivity across race and gendered boundaries” (15). There are two main differences between my critical re-appraisal and that of Bell. Firstly, as established in Part 2, I do not accept that we have achieved a stable portrait of what feminist ressentiment is, nor a stable account of how ressentiment plays out politically. Rather, my analysis has found that the concept of ressentiment exhibits political mobility and diagnostic elasticity. Secondly, our critical reappraisals take different points of departure: in my case, analysis of Nietzsche’s articulation of the concept of ressentiment; in Bell’s case, analysis of moments in feminism which exceed the parameters of Brown’s particular diagnosis. Bell’s argument is presented in Chapter 3 of Feminist Imagination (40-61).
against the forces which produce those ressentiments to which women still occupy a discernibly privileged relation—most notably the ressentiments incited by heavily circumscribed access to the pleasures of self-government and the exercise of worldly power.

Over the course of the chapter we will move from thinking of ressentiment as a psycho-political state which exhibits a particular and unchanging set of symptoms, to regarding ressentiment as a dynamic process which is interpellated by, and which has the capacity to transform, the power relation from which it springs. This interpretation of ressentiment provides the division of labour between this chapter and the next. The next chapter is concerned with the mature stage of ressentimental revolt, and focuses on the strategies Nietzsche identifies as those which aid the powerful in disarming the threat of ressentiment: legalism and religious asceticism. I will argue in that chapter that this stage is of greatest significance for feminist political reflection, and as I address this stage I will reconnect with the accounts of feminist ressentiment that we have examined and make my concluding arguments regarding the relationship between feminism, ressentiment and the category ‘victim’. In this chapter and the next, my analysis of ressentiment draws on two particular texts: Nietzsche’s Beyond Good and Evil (1886, hereafter Beyond), where he first presents his thesis on the moralities of master and slave, and On the Genealogy of Morals (1887, hereafter Genealogy),5 where

5 I will be focussing on these books given their centrality for understanding what the concept of ressentiment offers Nietzsche’s treatment of morality. However by focussing on these books I do not suggest that the complex of ideas within them are novel to them. See, for example, Richard Ira Sugarman’s analysis of the constitutive themes of ‘ressentiment’ as they are expressed in Nietzsche’s early work, especially in his treatment of the pre-Socratic philosophers, in Rancor Against Time: the phenomenology of ressentiment (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1987). Other noteworthy contributions to the literature on ressentiment include: Bernard Reginster, ‘Nietzsche on Ressentiment and Valuation,’ Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 57, No. 2 (June 1997): 281-305; Irving Wohlfarth, ‘Resentment Begins at Home: Nietzsche, Benjamin and the university,’ in On Walter Benjamin: critical essays and recollection, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 224-259; Claudia Crawford, ‘Nietzsche’s Mnemotechnics, the Theory of Ressentiment, and Freud’s Topographies of the Psychical Apparatus,’ Nietzsche-Studien Band 14 (1985): 281-297; and Eric Gans, ‘The Culture of
this thesis is developed as Nietzsche introduces the concept of *ressentiment* to his account of morality.\(^6\)

### 5.1 The Fragility of Strength

Because our encounter with Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* has been filtered through the diagnostic employment of that concept on the part of the theorists we have examined, we come to this exegetical approach with fairly mixed messages about how *ressentiment* plays out politically, but also very little discussion of the form of morality Nietzsche contrasts with *ressentiment*: master morality. Recall that Yeatman’s analysis lofts master morality as a worthy model for feminist theorisations of power as capacity, while Cocks’ analysis registered doubts about master morality. Nietzsche, Cocks suggests, is “starry-eyed” about the self-evaluative integrity he associates with master morality.\(^7\)

Following an initial commentary on Nietzsche’s

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\(^6\) The term ‘*ressentiment*’ first appears in one of Nietzsche’s unpublished notebooks from 1875 (Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Werke*, ed. Colli & Montinari, Berlin, 1973-, Band IV/1, 256), 12 years before it was to appear in his published work (GOM: I, 10). In that notebook Nietzsche writes up a critical appraisal of Eugen Dühring’s book *Der Werth des Lebens: eine philosophische betrachtung [The Value of Life: a course in philosophy]* (Breslau: 1865). This is the same Dühring that Frederick Engels critiqued in his book *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring’s revolution in science* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969 [originally published 1894]). As will be discussed Chapter 6, Nietzsche gleaned the term ‘*ressentiment*’ from Dühring. Although Nietzsche loads the term with his own meaning, his penchant for using the French *ressentiment* was, contrary to popular understanding, borrowed from Dühring. For an account of this see Robin Small, ‘Ressentiment, Revenge, and Punishment: origins of the Nietzschean critique,’ *Utilitas*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 1997): 39-58, and Chapter 10 of Small’s book, *Nietzsche in Context* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), 171-188.

\(^7\) Cocks, ‘Augustine, Nietzsche and Contemporary Body Politics,’ 155.
approach to the question of morality, the point raised by Cocks in particular is addressed in this section as we begin our exegetical approach with an analysis of master morality, deferring full engagement with slave morality and ressentiment until the following section.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche intervenes upon the modern democratic imagination in presenting a thesis which runs counter to its self-understanding as aristocracy's decisive historical opponent. Read through Nietzsche's genealogy, modern democracy's apparent redistribution of power to the people appears as one among many reverberative consequences of an original "slave revolt" which began two thousand years earlier, a "protracted" revolt which "we no longer see because it—has been victorious."8 The project of the *Genealogy* is to make the slave revolt's victory visible, critically expose its manifold and protean effects, and recall what it conquered. The realm of moral values, treated as a window onto the "structure" of the human soul, is the primary ground on which this project is undertaken, for the victory of the slave revolt consists in its having usurped "master morality" to gain the dominion of "slave morality".9 Slave morality has come to stand in for morality as such, its value and its values taken "as given, as factual, as beyond question".10 In directing a "corrosive scepticism" toward reigning moral values—their mode of distinguishing good from evil, faith in the greater value of the "good man" over the "evil man", their "unegoistic" instincts of "pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice"—Nietzsche will reveal their roots in slave morality. But his task is not merely that of "hypothesis-mongering ... on the origin of morality".11

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8 GOM: I, 7
9 "The values of a human being betray something of the *structure* of his soul and where it finds its conditions of life, its true need." BGE: 268.
10 GOM: P, 6
Nietzsche will ask “under what conditions did man devise these value judgements good and evil?”, but also will venture a deeper line of inquiry:

... what value do [these value judgements] themselves possess? Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plenitude, force and will of life, its courage, certainty, and future?12

By returning to the “twofold prehistory of good and evil”, a prehistorical co-existence of master and slave moralities, our ‘morality as such’ can be revealed in its particularity, its values and value can be judged against its original competitor, and our investment in it can be rethought. Nietzsche’s gesture of returning to prehistory so as to disconcert our current and future investments is central to the project of the *Genealogy*. For Nietzsche, modernity’s “good man” may live “more comfortably, less dangerously” than did the masterful ancient, but his slavish mediocrity is bound to preempt “the type man” from attaining the “highest power and splendour” possible to him.13 For the prudent comfort and warm security of our “good man”, *man’s* potential is sacrificed. Hence Nietzsche perceives within our conception of good and evil “a symptom of regression . . . likewise a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic” through which the present lives “at the expense of the future”.14

Nietzsche’s laborious decipherment of “the entire long hieroglyphic record... of the moral past of mankind” has been conducted in the service of a future in which “a man who justifies *man*” might find conditions of possibility.15 In calling for readers capable of like acts of exegetical

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12GOM: P, 3
13GOM: P. 6; I, 11.
decipherment, esoteric readers with ears for the future he beckons, Nietzsche invests his book with a potent role in generating this future.\textsuperscript{16} Hence, as a number of commentators on the \textit{Genealogy} have argued, this text has a \textit{performative} dimension and, with all the vigour of a manifesto, aims to incite a level of self-reflection in the reader.\textsuperscript{17} The \textit{Genealogy} is something of a pirate ship cutting through the finer sensitivities of the modern soul, exposing the antecedent forms, indeed the inception, of that soul, and moving to call its orientation toward the values of liberal democracy into question.\textsuperscript{18}

Nietzsche’s first specific mention of the moralities of master and slave appears in the closing stages of \textit{Beyond}, and the twofold prehistory of morality then forms the subject of the \textit{Genealogy}’s first essay.\textsuperscript{19} Let us turn first to what Nietzsche has to say about these moralities in \textit{Beyond}, for he adds an interesting range of qualifications to his thesis. Nietzsche writes of having wandered through “the many subtler and coarser moralities which

\textsuperscript{16}GOM: P, 8.

\textsuperscript{17}See, for example, Richard White’s argument that the \textit{Genealogy} is a performative critique in his chapter \textit{The Return of the Master: an interpretation of Nietzsche’s \textit{Genealogy of Morals},} in \textit{Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy, Morality: essays on Nietzsche’s \textit{Genealogy of Morals}},} ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 63-75 (A revised and developed version of this piece forms Chapter 6 of White’s book \textit{Nietzsche and the Problem of Sovereignty} (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1997), 124-149). Kelly Oliver’s insightful reading of the \textit{Genealogy} highlights that the performative dimension of this text begins with the act of reading it: “... just as Nietzsche proposes an active and a reactive morality in \textit{Genealogy}, he proposes an active and a reactive reading.” \textit{Womanizing Nietzsche: philosophy’s relation to the “feminine”} (New York: Routledge, 1995), 18. Malcolm Bull makes a similar observation in his account of strategies for reading Nietzsche, ‘Where is the Anti-Nietzsche?’, \textit{New Left Review} No. 3 (May/June, 2000): 121-145.


\textsuperscript{19}BGE: 260. See also BGE: 195, 261 and HAH: 45.
have so far been prevalent on earth” until he “finally discovered two basic types [of morality] and one basic difference.”20 I quote him at length as he introduces this discovery and qualifies it:

There are master morality and slave morality—I add immediately that in all higher and mixed cultures there also appear attempts at mediation between these two moralities, and yet more often the interpenetration and mutual misunderstanding of both, and at times they occur directly alongside each other—even in the same human being, within a single soul. The moral discrimination of values has originated either among a ruling group whose consciousness of its difference from the ruled group was accompanied by delight—or among the ruled, the slaves and dependants of every degree.21

In this passage Nietzsche presents us with a dyad of two discrete types, inhabiting discrete realms within one social order (ruling and ruled), before leading us to imagine these types “mixing” (or, as he puts it in the following aphorism, “intermarrying”22): mediating with one another, interpenetrating yet misunderstanding one another, co-existing alongside one another, and all of this not just within the bounds a single culture but, most interestingly, a single human being.

This is not surprising in the sense that Nietzsche’s discernment of two distinct types does not bind him to a vision of them as static or statically discrete, and his argument in the Genealogy that one type has overthrown the other, as well as his albeit less straightforward concern with overcoming slave morality, necessarily involve envisioning their interaction. Unlike Hesiod, Nietzsche resists separating and serialising the master and slave types, and their respective perspectives on the same social order, into

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20BGE: 260.
21BGE: 260.
22BGE: 261.
distinct epochs: rather, his point of departure is the co-existence of and struggle between these types (within cultures, within persons).23

These qualifications form a prelude to the drama Nietzsche will weave around these typical moralities in the *Genealogy*, a drama which works at one level to place us as the heirs of slave morality, cut off from the masterful ancients and left to consider whether and how this chasm may be breached. But one of the means by which Nietzsche injects the *Genealogy*’s drama with performative energy is by returning to a firmly dyadic articulation of the master and slave types, confining their co-existence to prehistory, and treating the struggle between these types as the beginning of the end for master morality. So Nietzsche makes a shift away from an initial openness, in the passage from *Beyond* cited above, to slave and master morality’s various modes of co-existence, toward a firmly dyadic typology in the *Genealogy*. Let us register, then, that diagnostic use of Nietzsche’s thesis draws specifically on the latter text since such use imposes the impression of stasis and static discretion Nietzsche mitigates against with these initial qualifications, avoiding consideration of what co-existence and admixture of these types might look like or mean, and buttressing a conception of the object of diagnosis—a culture, a person, a politics—as unified, purely one or the other ‘type’.

Nietzsche’s first articulation of his thesis in *Beyond* foreshadows the etymological labour of the *Genealogy*’s first essay in discussing the contradistinction between the noble mode of distinguishing ‘good’ from ‘bad’ and the slavish mode of distinguishing ‘evil’ from ‘good’.24 As we will see, in sketching these distinct modes of valuation Nietzsche allows us to envisage two distinct forms of self-relation and paths to self-affirmation. But let us for

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23For Nietzsche’s comments on this move of Hesiod see GOM: I, 11.
24BGE: 260.
the moment note that Nietzsche maintains from the outset that the concept 'good' has a double origin (hence there is no universally true 'good'), and that 'bad' and 'evil' are of different origin (noble and slavish respectively). To further advance his alternative account of morality, Nietzsche also moves to counter the view prevalent among historians of morals that the origins of the concept 'good' lie in the positive evaluation of beneficial acts on the part of those who benefit from them (and contrawise for the concept 'bad').

Disputing this belief in an inextricable link between morality and utility, Nietzsche claims, rather, that "moral designations were everywhere first applied to human beings and only later, derivatively, to actions." This point is especially important for clearing the ground so as to foster recognition of the mode of valuation Nietzsche will uncover in the case of master morality. Firstly this is because master morality is a mode which posits values: "the noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval ... it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating." The noble derives his values autarkically and authentically, without need of external criteria—"approval"—of any kind. The evaluative perspective of those who benefit or suffer from his deeds does not figure in his evaluation of his deeds, he is not "selfless" in that sense. Indeed, Nietzsche will attribute the eventual centrality, within moral thought, of the utilitarian distinction between selfless and selfish actions to the triumph of slave morality—which is, he notes in Beyond, "essentially a morality of utility"—and will in turn construe the victory of the value of selflessness as the matrix of asceticism, of self-denial.

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26BGE: 260. Emphasis in original.
28BGE: 260.
Secondly, the point that moral designations originally were applied to human beings rather than actions is important for fostering recognition of master morality since it is a mode of valuation which begins with self-evaluation. As befits the noble’s evaluative autarchy, nobility is both the matrix and first object of valuation: “Everything [the noble] knows as part of itself it honours: such a morality is self-glorification.”29 The ‘good’ of master morality—and, moreover, the first origin of the word ‘good,’ as Nietzsche’s etymologies show—pertains, therefore, to the nobles themselves:

... the judgement “good” did not originate with those to whom “goodness” was shown! Rather it was “the good” themselves, that it to say, the noble, the powerful, high-stationed, and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is, of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common and plebeian. It was out of this pathos of distance that they first seized the right to create values and to coin names for values: what had they to do with utility!30

Key to Nietzsche’s distinction between the moralities of master and slave is their respective manners of directing the evaluating look. The mastery of the master’s “value-positing eye”31 consists in its having been directed firstly toward self-evaluation, where it posits ‘good’ as “its positive basic concept—filled with life and passion through and through—‘we noble ones, we good, beautiful happy ones!’”.32 Nietzsche notes further that “the noble man ... conceives the basic concept ‘good’ in advance and spontaneously out of himself”.33 The crucial point here is that the noble’s high self-regard does not, therefore, require a foil. As Gilles Deleuze puts it, “no comparison interferes

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29BGE: 260. For Nietzsche’s further characterisations of nobility in this vein see also BGE: 265, 287 and 293.
30GOM: I, 2. Emphasis in original.
31GOM: I, 10.
32GOM: I, 10.
33GOM: I, 11.
with the principle" of the master’s affirmative self-evaluation.\textsuperscript{34} Rather, Nietzsche writes:

the noble mode of valuation seeks its opposite only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly—its negative concept “low,” “common,” “bad” is only a subsequently-invented pale, contrasting image in relation to its positive basic concept ...\textsuperscript{35}

Deleuze’s analysis insists that the ordering of valuation—the sequential manner in which the evaluating look is directed—is crucial for Nietzsche’s account. As Deleuze puts it, what distinguishes the master is that he “begins by saying: ‘I am good’ ... [he] does not wait to be called good.”\textsuperscript{36} Working from Nietzsche’s language in Beyond, we might say that the noble’s evaluative perspective has a foreground and a background.\textsuperscript{37} In the foreground lies the noble’s celebratory experience of himself as politically, existentially and abundantly powerful: “the feeling of fullness, of power that seeks to overflow, the happiness of high tension, the consciousness of wealth that would give and bestow”.\textsuperscript{38} In the background (beyond, below, at a distance) lies his “subsequently-invented pale”: the low, the common, the ‘bad’—that is, the ruled. Nietzsche notes that the noble despises and feels contempt for the ruled, where these terms enhance his spatial metaphor. As distinct from the term hatred, which Nietzsche reserves to describe the attitude of the slave, ‘despise’ and ‘contempt’ connote “looking down from a superior height”.\textsuperscript{39}

Hence the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ of master morality pertain, respectively, to “noble’

\textsuperscript{34}Gilles Deleuze, \textit{Nietzsche and Philosophy}, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Colombia University Press, 1983), 120.
\textsuperscript{35}GOM: I, 10.
\textsuperscript{36}Deleuze, \textit{Nietzsche and Philosophy}, 119. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{37}BGE: 260. For a discussion of the use of foregrounding and backgrounding as a trope in Nietzsche’s writing see Penelope Deutscher, “Is it not remarkable that Nietzsche... should have hated Rousseau?” Woman, femininity: distancing Nietzsche from Rousseau,” in \textit{Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory}, ed. Paul Patton (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 162-188.
\textsuperscript{38}BGE: 260.
\textsuperscript{39}BGE: 260, GOM: I, 10.
and 'contemptible', and that at this stage these pertain, respectively, to rulers and ruled, high and low.\(^{40}\)

Shortly we will consider Joan Cocks' scepticism about the evaluative autarchy Nietzsche identifies with the figure of the master. But let us for the moment register that, for Nietzsche, the master's mode of evaluation makes possible a self-relation which appears to be characterised by *perfection* and, relatedly, *honesty*. This relation is 'perfect' in the sense that it appears to enable an absolute form of self-appropriation. To employ Derrida's term, this masterful self does not have a constitutive outside. His 'opposite,' Nietzsche argues, is not necessary to his affirmation of self, making his self-relation non-dialectical: his 'good and bad' is not a *unity* of opposites, his mode of valuation is in this sense anecmonic as it need not trade on a debt to the other. The other is not "needed" but rather is "sought" as a further source of self-affirmation: the other provides a "contrasting shade" rather than a contrast as such.\(^{41}\) Nietzsche's notes on the happiness of the well-born exemplify this: "The 'well-born' felt themselves to be 'happy'; they did not have to establish their happiness artificially by examining their enemies, or to persuade themselves, *deceive* themselves, that they were happy".\(^{42}\)

The 'perfect' character of the master's self-relation links directly to the 'honest' character of this relation. This can be seen most clearly in Nietzsche's discussion of nobility in relation to that mode of self-deception he calls vanity—it is no accident that his first presentation of his thesis on the moralities of master and slave in *Beyond* is followed immediately by a

\(^{40}\)BGE: 260.

\(^{41}\)GOM: I, 11.

\(^{42}\)GOM: I, 10. Emphasis in original.
discussion of vanity. In *Beyond*, Nietzsche suggests that vanity is unknown to nobility:

> Among the things that may be hardest to understand for a noble human being is vanity: he will be tempted to deny it, where another type of human being could not find it more palpable. The problem for him is to imagine people who seek to create a good opinion of themselves which they do not have of themselves—and thus also do not “deserve”—and who nevertheless end up believing this good opinion of themselves ... He will say, for example: “I may be mistaken about my value and nevertheless demand that my value, exactly as I define it, should be acknowledged by others as well—but this is no vanity ...”

These comments effectively foreshadow Nietzsche’s portrayal, in the *Genealogy*, of the master as one who “lives in trust and openness with himself”. The master, at once self-defining and self-affirming, is essentially impervious to others, leaving no room for him to deceive himself about himself since he defines and affirms all that is and of his self.

So while the master may be egoistic and self-glorifying, he is not vain. Nietzsche construes vanity as a form of self-deception rife among those unused to “positing values” and, therefore, unacquainted with the arts of autarchic self-definition—the ‘bad,’ the common, the weak, the low and, interestingly for our purposes, women. This distinction between noble self-honesty and slavish self-deception, between truth and mendacity, also has its basis in Nietzsche’s etymological labours. As part of his unpacking of a range of words denoting ‘good’ he finds that noble self-designations, mostly notably those of ancient Greece, associate nobility with truthfulness: “we truthful

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43I am grateful to Ruth Abbey for discussing this aspect of Nietzsche’s account with me.
44*BGE*: 261.
45*GOM*: I, 10.
46*GOM*: I, 10.
47*BGE*: 261. A discussion of ‘feminine ressentiment’ is undertaken via Max Scheler’s work on *ressentiment* in the following chapter.
ones”. This is complemented by a conception of “the common people” as “liars”.

The key feature of Nietzsche’s distinction between the moralities of master and slave is the inability of the slave to value himself without first devaluing the master—the slave thereby reverses the evaluating look, pursuing a path to self-affirmation which begins, rather than ends, in negation of the other. As we will note in more detail in the following section, the slave’s sense of self is predicated upon an initial devaluation of the master, hence this sense of self depends upon another (Nietzsche writes: “this need to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of ressentiment”). As such it can only proceed as an artificially contrived vanity, a counterfeit version of the master’s truly autarchic mode of valuation—the slave lacks integrity, in both senses of the term. This places the evaluative autarchy of the master at the centre of Nietzsche’s distinction between the moralities of master and slave as modes of self-relation. But will this centre hold? It is precisely this autarchy which Cocks would have us call into question. Nietzsche, she argues, is “starry-eyed ... about the morality of the master” since it would seem that “the substance of the master is determined by the dialectic of the master/slave relation and not by physiology or instinct.” Cocks is suggesting that the “substance” of the master—his position within an order of rank as evaluatively equal to dominance, and his ability to affirm this experience—is achieved relationally and, in Nietzsche’s sense from above, ‘artificially,’ rather than autonomously and naturally. Hence, for Cocks, the master can only be posed in being opposed, he can only

48GOM: I, 5.
50GOM: I, 10.
51GOM: I, 10. Emphasis in original.
52Ibid., 155.
appear to himself and to others as ‘good’ by standing in contrast to that which he devalues as ‘bad,’ making his ‘good and bad’ a unity of opposites—a unity to which Nietzsche would not readily admit.53

Cocks does not want to allow Nietzsche to confound a conception of dominance as wrought through a system of valuation in which a devalued alterity provides the condition of possibility for the politically superior’s apparently inherent preeminence—a conception of dominance which, since Simone de Beauvoir, has been central to feminist understanding of the relation between sexual dualism and male domination.54 Here, Cocks goes against Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche. For Deleuze, Nietzsche’s treatment of the relation of master to slave aims precisely to press against dialectic treatment of this relation.55 Moreover, to correct Nietzsche’s treatment of this relation through recourse to the dialectic is to apprehend this relation through the eyes of the slave: the dialectic, Deleuze argues, is “the ideology of ressentiment.”56 However, there is support for Cocks’ point. To begin with,


54As Beauvoir writes, “The terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. . . . She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the other. . . . Things become clear if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed—he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object.” Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Picador, 1988 [originally published 1949]), 15-17, my emphasis. In de Beauvoir’s schema, man’s situation as the One is conditional upon woman’s alterity.

55Deleuze argues centrally that Nietzsche had a “profound knowledge of the Hegelian movement, from Hegel to Stirner”, and that it is against this movement that Nietzsche directs his “polemic” (Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals carries the subtitle ‘A Polemic’), Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 162.

56Ibid., 121. In this vein, Deleuze notes: “Underneath the Hegelian image of the master we always find the slave.” Ibid., 10.
Nietzsche’s etymological labours reveal a “rule” in which “a concept denoting political superiority always resolves itself into a concept denoting superiority of soul.”

This rule reconvenes the process of evaluation Nietzsche, and certainly Deleuze’s Nietzsche, associates with the master. With this rule, the master’s political superiority, his commanding position, his capacity to inspire obedience—that is, his distance from and contrast with the slave—in turn is cast by the master as evidence of his essential superiority. In view of this rule, the master’s self-affirmative movement from, as Deleuze describes, ‘I am good therefore he is bad’ appears to contain a further move: ‘I govern him, therefore I am good and he is bad.’

This is not the reactive constitution of self that Nietzsche will identify with slave morality. However there is a basic reactivity within this self-evaluation, a “need to direct one’s view outward,” an other against which this self-constitution must press, and most significantly an other present in the first moment of evaluation. The master does not wait for the other to call him good, but in calling himself good he is indebted to the other’s distant demonstration of reverent obedience, which signifies his goodness to him.

This is the role of the relational pathos of distance in this mode of evaluation. It would seem, then, that the master’s self-evaluation is not so much independent of the other, but differently dependent upon the other. Hence Nietzsche’s characterisation of aristocracy’s elite class as dependent upon the lower orders for their capacity to achieve “higher states of being”—as in his statement in *Beyond* that this class “needs slavery.”

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57GOM: I, 6.
58Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 119.
59I suspect this is why Rosalyn Diprose argues that the “one limitation” of Nietzsche’s approach to self-constitution is his suggestion that “an aesthetics of self can avoid incurring a debt to the other.” *The Bodies of Women: ethics, embodiment and sexual difference* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 101.
60BGE: 257. My emphasis.
Further support for Cocks' desire that the relation between master and slave be read as containing a dialectical movement can be found when we pursue her suggestion that the political superiority of the master is, for Nietzsche, based on "physiology" and "instinct". In pursuing this element of Nietzsche's portrait of the master we will collect the basics for a reading of the relation of non-reciprocal recognition between Nietzsche's master and slave as directly precipitous of the slave's *ressentiment*. Nietzsche's 'official attitude of condemnation' toward the slave, I will suggest, wears most thin when we discern that the form of nobility he prizes has, by his own account, the character that Jacob Burckhardt ascribed to Renaissance despotism: "As despotisms rise, grow, and are consolidated, so grows in their midst the hidden element which must produce their dissolutions and ruin."

Cocks' claim regarding the role of physiology and instinct in Nietzsche's account suggests that Nietzsche *naturalises* the political superiority of the master, presenting him as inherently equal to rule. What is the basis of this interpretation? It proceeds from Nietzsche's reference to this figure as the consummate embodiment of the will to power in its healthiest, strongest and least fettered guise. At several points in *Beyond* and the *Genealogy*, the noble is presented as an unregulated, uncalculated, naturally occurring creature, a piece of fate conducting instinctive drive and will, whose animal capacity for active, violent creativity is bound to inspire fear and obedience in, so as to impose ordered form upon, those of weaker physiology and more peaceful disposition. In these moments Nietzsche sets the noble in relation to

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63 In this vein, Nietzsche characterises the body politic of the noble class as "an incarnate will to power", BGE: 259.
a primordial Barbarism reflective of man in his bestial state—hence his use of the image of lightening to capture the violence and spontaneity of action of this figure ("they appear as lightening appears"\textsuperscript{64}), as well as his reference to him as a bird and beast of prey.\textsuperscript{65} For Nietzsche, this primordial incarnation of the noble—"whose nature was still natural", who was "still in possession of unbroken strength of will and lust for power"—acts as life itself acts.\textsuperscript{66} Life, he writes,

\begin{quote}

is \textit{essentially} appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation ... life simply \textit{is} will to power.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Nietzsche's alignment of the noble with the essential operation of life forms a core theme within Nietzsche's account of the inception of politically organised society at the beginning of history—an account which aims to displace "that sentimentalism which would have [the state] begin with a "contract"".\textsuperscript{68}

In tune with his alignment of the noble with life, Nietzsche uses maternity as a metaphor to describe "how the 'state' began on earth".\textsuperscript{69} The natural, instinct-governed process of reproduction aligns with the "instinctive", "involuntary, unconscious" artistry of the noble-Barbarian as he performs a violent imposition of formal organisation upon (European) humanity.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{64}GOM: II, 17, see also GOM: I, 13.
\textsuperscript{65}See GOM: II, 17 and BGE: 257.
\textsuperscript{66}BGE: 257.
\textsuperscript{67}BGE: 259, Nietzsche makes the same claim in GOM: II, 11: "To speak of just or unjust \textit{in itself} is quite senseless; \textit{in itself}, of course, no injury, assault, exploitation, destruction can be "unjust," since life operates \textit{essentially}, that is in its basic functions, through injury, assault, exploitation, destruction and simply cannot be thought at all without this character."
\textsuperscript{68}GOM: II, 17; see also BGE: 257, where Nietzsche refers to such sentimentalism as "humanitarian illusion".
\textsuperscript{69}GOM: II, 17.
\textsuperscript{70}GOM: II, 17. A number of Nietzsche's feminist commentators have provided excellent accounts of the role of maternity in Nietzsche's metaphors. See, for example: Kelly Oliver, \textit{Womanizing Nietzsche}, 129-193 and 'Nietzsche's Abjection,' in \textit{Nietzsche and the}
Nietzsche describes this process in the following passage from the Genealogy's second essay:

... the welding of a hitherto unchecked and shapeless populace into a firmer form was not only instituted by an act of violence but also carried to its conclusion by nothing but acts of violence—[...] the oldest "state" thus appeared as a fearful tyranny, an oppressive and remorseless machine ... I employed the word "state"; it is obvious what is meant—some pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race which, organised for war and with the ability to organise, unhesitatingly lays its terrible claws upon a populace perhaps tremendously superior in numbers but still formless and nomad ... He who can command, he who is by nature "master," he who is violent in act and bearing—what has he to do with contracts! One does not reckon with such natures; they come like fate, without reason, consideration, or pretext ... wherever they appear something new soon arises, a ruling structure that lives ... Their work is an instinctive creation and imposition of forms; they are the most unconscious artists there are ... They do not know what guilt, responsibility, or consideration are, these born organisers; they exemplify that terrible artists' egoism that has the look of bronze and knows itself justified to all eternity in its "work," like a mother in her child.71

In Nietzsche's telling, the inception of politically organised society proceeds from the noble-Barbarian's imposition of custom through the establishment of an order of rank ("a ruling structure that lives"), an imposition which performs a transfiguration of beast and prey ('artist' and 'raw material') into master and slave.

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71GOM: II, 17.
Let us attend to two striking features of Nietzsche's account of this event. The first is Nietzsche's emphasis upon the guiltless character of the noble-Barbarian's violent and oppressive deeds. The moral technology required to derive the concept of guilt so as to interpret these deeds as blameworthy—that is, as the deeds of one who could have behaved otherwise—is yet to appear, and as we will see it will only appear when the ressentiment of the slaves becomes creative and conditions the possibility of "bad conscience" through the formation of the concepts of guilt and free will. At this stage, then, the noble-Barbarian is a guiltless imposer of form. As violent and oppressive as he is, he literally can do no 'wrong': to rail against his deeds would be as fruitless as asking lightening not to flash or a lion not to feast.

The second striking feature, however, is Nietzsche's persistent switching between the language of nature and that of second nature or culture. Any sense that these may exist in a strictly dichotomous relation is displaced as the noble-Barbarian appears at once as "beast" and "artist"—the odd juxtaposition of the two is captured in the phrase "born organiser"—while the state, we are to assume, arises organically from the instinctive deeds of the noble-Barbarian, but is referred to via the decidedly inorganic term "machine". At this point, we certainly have the option of dismissing these intimations that the noble-Barbarian is more than a creature of instinct and confirming Cocks' interpretation that, for Nietzsche, the political superiority of this figure simply is based on his being a naturally superior beast of prey. Alternatively we can, as I suggest, ask after the complicating factor of Nietzsche's apparent equivocation on this point.

In the passage above, as in others, Nietzsche does appear to engage a straightforward naturalisation of the nobility of the noble by presenting his political superiority as an organic fait accompli. But there is also something disingenuous about this presentation of the noble-Barbarian as an utterly...
unrepressed pure medium of natural instinct. The noble-Barbarian may be a “born organiser” but his “ability to organise” signifies a capacity to mediate—ie. control, repress, hold in check, regulate—instinct: it signifies, in short, that the noble-Barbarian does not just initiate the cultivation of a second nature in man through his state-building artistry, but has himself already made a leap into a second nature. Perhaps, as the initiator of socio-political organisation, the noble-Barbarian must necessarily be regarded as a liminal figure who oversees rather than fits neatly into one side of the divide between “beast of prey” and “civilised animal”.72

This explanation finds support when we consider those moments in which Nietzsche’s characterisation of the noble-Barbarian simply does not square with his presentation of him as an unrepressed, instinct-governed beast of prey. In these moments Nietzsche upholds his characterisation of the noble-Barbarian as guiltless—ie. free of bad conscience—but he nonetheless attributes “conscience” to this figure. In the Genealogy he calls it an “innocent conscience”, while in Beyond he calls it “good conscience”, noting that the “predominance” of original noble castes “did not lie mainly in their physical strength but in strength of soul”.73 Moreover, in a passage from the Genealogy’s first essay Nietzsche presents the nobles as “men who are held so sternly in check inter pares [among equals] by custom, respect, usage, gratitude” and who “in their relations with one another show themselves so resourceful in consideration, self control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, and friendship”.74 Nietzsche’s attribution of conscience, soul and self-control to the noble-Barbarian is at odds with his presentation of him as incalculably bestial. Lions and lightening are, by his own account, lacking in these, and

72GOM: II, 11.
73GOM: I, 10, BGE: 258, 257. My emphasis.
74GOM: I, 11.
conscience necessarily implies some repression of and mastery over instinct, some level of subjective intentionality and calculation, some development of a faculty through which instinct may be 'held in check' so as to permit deliberation in relation to custom.

This explanation is confirmed and developed by Aaron Ridley in his illuminating reading of the *Genealogy*. Ridley reveals that Nietzsche's equivocation about the noble-Barbarian's relation to conscience is an effect of Nietzsche's effort to maintain the *Genealogy*'s firmly dyadic articulation of the master and slave types. Because the *Genealogy* sets up an exclusive relation between the slave and the possibility of bad conscience (the consciousness of guilt, an understanding that one could have chosen to behave otherwise), Nietzsche strategically but confusingly understates that "neutral, ubiquitous" form of conscience that the noble-Barbarian shares with the slave: a form of conscience "that man, insofar as he is at all social" possesses. This neutral, ubiquitous form is the bad conscience "in its beginnings", conscience in its "raw state": a minimally formed capacity for self-reflection and self-directed action attendant upon an initial repression and internalisation of instinct. Even though we can not doubt his admiration for the noble in his bestial guise, Nietzsche's presentation of the noble as a pure conductor of untrammelled instinct is a textual device which serves a conceptual purpose. Ridley explains that to forward his effort to "distinguish the nobles from the slaves ... as sharply as possible", Nietzsche "decides to make his nobles as unpressed as he can: he turns them into

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76 Ibid., 21. This element of Nietzsche's account also is discussed in Bruce Detweiler's book *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 123-125.

77GOM: II, 17.
beasts”. Ridley then pinpoints the conceptual issue which arises from Nietzsche's presentation of the noble as a beast of prey: “the problem, of course, is that only the custom governed—that is, the repressed—can become custom imposers.” Ridley's corrective posits that the “bad conscience in its ‘raw state’ ... characterises nobles and slaves alike. Both are repressed to some degree, both are internalised to some degree.” After noting the significance of the terms 'repression' and 'internalisation' in Nietzsche's account of man having been “‘imprisoned in the “state”’”, we will see that the political situation which ensues from the noble's state-building artistry is characterised by degrees of repression determined by class stratification. This, I will suggest, is where a dialectic movement can be traced in the civilising process Nietzsche describes.

The concept of repression is key to Nietzsche's account, in the Genealogy's second essay, of the particular cast of human experience and the particular kind of human potential made possible by “the most fundamental change” man has experienced: “that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and of peace.” This enclosure initiates a “forcible sundering [of man] from his animal past ... a leap and plunge into new surroundings and conditions of existence, a declaration of war against the old instincts upon which his strength, joy, and terribleness has rested hitherto.”

Nietzsche's answer to the question as to how man's relation with instinct shifted during this fundamental change is very precise. The “wild” instincts—

78 Ibid., 20.
79 Ibid., 20.
80 Ibid., 22.
81 GOM: II, 22.
82 GOM: 16.
83 GOM: II, 16.
“hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction”—were repressed, “turned inward”, such that the quality and quantity of their force was directed against man himself:

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward—this is what I call the internalisation of man: thus it was that man first developed what was later called his “soul.” The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth, and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was inhibited.84

Nietzsche conceives of the civilising process as a form of sickness which proceeds as frustrated yet generative self-torture. The instincts, in being repressed, nonetheless retain their force: “they had not suddenly ceased to make their usual demands! Only it was hardly or rarely possible to humor them: as a rule they had to seek new and, as it were, subterranean gratifications.”85 The instincts are present yet inhibited by social straight jacketing and the threat of punishment, and action increasingly is mediated through consciousness. This generative state of tension creates a mode of being marked by an expanded interiority, which is in turn the seat of a new, second nature range of human capacities and potentials. Hence Nietzsche’s characterisation of this “animal soul turned against itself” as “pregnant with a future”.86 Importantly, the agents of this process of internalisation are “those fearful bulwarks with which the political organisation protected itself against the old instincts of freedom—punishments belong among these bulwarks.”87

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85GOM: II, 16.
87GOM: II, 16.
For our purposes, this signals that the narrative of Nietzsche’s second essay is one in which the state-building artistry of the noble appears as the primary agent of that “paradoxical task” which forms the subject of that essay: “To breed an animal with the right to make promises—is not that the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man?” The generative self-torture enacted within the walls of society makes possible an agentic human who is “calculable, regular,” who can “think causally” and posit goals, who has “a real memory of the will” with which to “ordain the future in advance”.

Nietzsche suggests that the telos of this process, which has not yet been attained, is the sovereign individual: a new breed of noble in whom “responsibility”—“power over oneself and one’s fate”—has become “the dominating instinct.” However in the Genealogy’s first essay Nietzsche already has foreshadowed his account of how the journey toward this sovereign individual was derailed: the slave and his “descendants”, in resisting their oppression, took over as the “instruments of culture”, thus initiating a “regression of mankind”.

Keeping the second essay’s treatment of repression in mind, when we return to the first essay’s account of the struggle between master and slave we can read this struggle as one between a noble class which is minimally

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88 GOM: II, 1. Emphasis in original.
90 I conceive of the sovereign individual as a new breed of noble owing to the language Nietzsche uses in the one aphorism in which he sketches this figure. This language has a discernible rapport with the first essay’s characterisation of the original nobles as fear-inspiring and superior: “This emancipated individual, with the actual right to make promises, this master of a free will, this sovereign man—how should he not be aware of his superiority over all those who lack the right to make promises and stand as their own guarantors, of how much trust, how much fear, how much reverence he arouses—he deserves all three—and of how this mastery over himself also necessarily gives him mastery over circumstances, over nature, over all more short-willed and unreliable creatures.” GOM: II, 2. Emphasis in original.
91 GOM: II, 2.
repressed and a slave class which is *maximally* repressed. One of the sources of Nietzsche's admiration of the original noble is that the particular form his rule assumes within the aristocratic polis is one which allows him a flexible, active and agentic relation with the civilising process, not only as he imposes this process upon others but as it is imposed upon his own self. The noble's delight in cruelty is sated as he imposes civilising form upon "some other man, other men" (ie. the previously "shapeless populace") but it is sated also as he imposes civilising form upon himself and, in so doing, exercises that mode of autarchic self-making Nietzsche casts as the sacred labour of nobility: "enhancement of the type 'man' ... the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states."\(^9\)

Aristocratic arrangements furnish the noble with the *pathos* of distance required for him to cultivate a rich inner distance. Nietzsche describes this self-making as a "secret self-ravishment", an "uncanny, dreadfully joyous labour of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes itself suffer out of joy in making suffer".\(^9\) Importantly for our purposes, at several points Nietzsche further illuminates the agentic relation the noble assumes with the civilising process by referring to his ability to step outside of it and "compensate" himself for its painful effects. Nietzsche shows us this capacity in the following passage:

... once [the nobles] go outside, where the strange, the *stranger* is found, they are not much better than uncaged beasts of prey. There they savor a freedom from all social constraints, they compensate themselves in the wilderness for the tension engendered by protracted confinement and enclosure within the peace of society, they go *back* to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey, as triumphant monsters who perhaps emerge from a disgusting procession of murder, arson, rape, and torture, exhilarated and undisturbed of soul, as if it were no

\(^9\)GOM: II, 18, BGE: 257.

\(^9\)GOM: II, 18.
more than a student's prank, convinced they have provided the poets
with a lot more material for song and praise ... the hidden core needs
to erupt from time to time, the animal has to get out again and go back
to the wilderness.95

This freedom of action and movement, this ability to exercise agency over
one's relation to civility, is in turn characterised by Nietzsche as the means
by which the noble remains immune to ressentiment: "Ressentiment itself, if it
should appear in the noble man, consummates and exhausts itself in an
immediate reaction, and therefore does not poison ... Such a man shakes off
with a single shrug many vermin which eat deep into others ..."96 Unlike the
slave, the noble has, as Nietzsche puts it in Beyond, recourse to "drainage
ditches" for his affects: means of venting the frustration, distress and
suffering which attend the civilising process.97 This is the key to his mastery
over this process and his immunity to its worst depth: its potential to inspire
the rancorous frustration of ressentiment. The noble is entitled to 'act his
reaction,' while the slave is denied precisely this: he is, as Nietzsche puts it,
"denied the true reaction, that of deeds".98

In turning to the slave in the following section we will see how the slave
conjures "secret paths and back doors" to escape imprisonment and

95GOM: I, 11. Emphasis in original. It is worth noting here that the concept of
reconnecting with the wild so as to vent repressed energy remains a vivid theme in
contemporary Western practices of masculinity. Apart from the sports arena, this is
evident in a range of fictional narratives of masculinity. For example, the protagonist in
the film Fightclub embodies Nietzsche's notion of an 'animal soul taking sides against
itself' with uncanny precision, and this theme also finds potent expression in the male
protagonist of Bret Easton-Ellis' American Psycho (London: Picador, 2000 [originally
published 1991]) no less than the protagonists of Dostoyevsky's Notes From
Underground (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [originally published 1864]) and
Crime and Punishment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [originally published
1866]). The beginnings of an account of the rapport between practices of masculinity and
Nietzsche's treatment of mastery and the man of ressentiment appear in Michael André
Bernstein's study of the modern 'abject hero' in his book Bitter Carnival: ressentiment
and the abject hero (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), see especially his
chapter on Charles Manson, 157-184.

96GOM: I, 10. Emphasis in original.

97BGE: 260.

98GOM: I, 10.
anaesthetise his pain.\textsuperscript{99} But what we have gleaned so far is the \textit{reason why} these paths and doors must be conjured. We noted earlier that Nietzsche’s presentation of the noble as a beast of prey is a textual device which serves a conceptual purpose. Let us now elucidate the \textit{twofold} conceptual purpose this device plays. Most immediately, I suggest, Nietzsche’s insistence on the noble’s aura of animal innocence, his insistence that he could not have behaved otherwise, serves the conceptual purpose of discouraging an interpretation of his account in which the noble’s state-building artistry—that is, his violent institution of a system of oppression which situates the slave as maximally repressed—is understood to have directly precipitated the slave’s \textit{ressentimental} invention of the bad conscience, the innovation with which the slave will “confound” and “overthrow” the noble.\textsuperscript{100}

Two comments from Nietzsche are especially telling for this reading:

\begin{quote}
... one can see who has the invention of the “bad conscience” on his conscience—the man of \textit{ressentiment}!\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

They do not know what guilt, responsibility, or consideration are, these born organisers … it is not in them that the “bad conscience” developed, that goes without saying—but it would not have developed \textit{without them}, this ugly growth … \textsuperscript{102}

Let us note that Nietzsche \textit{deploys} the innovations of the bad conscience in these moments. He is concerned to assign guilt for the invention of the concept of guilt, and in fact the paradoxical character of this move informs Nietzsche’s condemnatory attitude toward the slave at every turn. The question Nietzsche is addressing in both quotes is: \textit{Who} has the invention of the bad conscience on his conscience? When the two responses are

\textsuperscript{99}GOM: I, 10.
\textsuperscript{100}GOM: I, 11.
\textsuperscript{101}GOM: II, 11.
\textsuperscript{102}GOM: II, 17.
juxtaposed (they appear five aphorisms apart in the second essay) they lend ground to an interpretation of the bad conscience as the joint ‘responsibility’ of master and slave, as a product of their particular relation, which assumed the form of domination and submission. Both master and slave have blood on their hands, and the waters between them are irretrievably muddy: the bad conscience, as a co-production, “could not have developed without” the masters. But this narrative of Nietzsche’s is not stable in the sense that he has already ‘blamed’ the slave, who alone has the bad conscience “on his conscience”. The slave is blamed for perverting the course the noble’s artistry could or should have taken for humankind. In singling out the slave for impugnation, Nietzsche distracts attention from the noble’s share of responsibility for the development of ressentiment and the invention of the bad conscience, and his status as a character whose actions effectively ensured his own political demise.103

This is why it has been suggested in the literature on Nietzsche that in singling out the slave for impugnation in this way he “blames the victim”.104 Indeed, this interpretation may be extended by pointing out that Nietzsche not only blames the victim, but fully reverses the customary democratic victimology informing interpretations of the master/slave relation by presenting the master as the victim of the slave. As Rosalyn Diprose puts it, Nietzsche singles out a “sole aristocratic victim” in his account of how slave morality overthrew master morality using the invention of the bad conscience as its weapon.105

103 As Ridley puts this point, “The original noble was doomed from the moment he oppressed the first slave.” Nietzsche’s Conscience, 133.
Why does Nietzsche strive to keep the master clean in this way, positioning him as the 'real victim' of the struggle between master and slave? Is this reversed victimology symptomatic of a melancholic attachment to a thwarted form of nobility, and testimony to the idea that aristocratic relations of domination form the essential political orientation of Nietzsche's philosophy? We have seen that Nietzsche's laudatory attitude toward the noble does lend ground to the interpretation these questions imply. As Henry Staten puts it, throughout his work “Nietzsche continually reiterates his belief that there are higher human beings who are more valuable than the mass and for whose sake the mass exists and may be sacrificed.” However, a competing interpretation emerges when we consider the effect Nietzsche's reversed victimology is designed to have on his liberal democratic readers. Here, a further conceptual purpose for Nietzsche's laudatory treatment of master morality may be discerned. This reversed victimology works as an effective shock tactic to those “innocent” and “effeminate” [read: liberal democratic] ears he was anticipating as he penned Beyond and the Genealogy. As Diprose elucidates, “It was the noble man, embellished by a memory of Greek nobility, who, more than any other, symbolised what was thrown into relief by the rise of the liberal individual in the nineteenth century.” Glorifying the noble and blaming the slave forms a central part of Nietzsche's narrative strategy for forwarding his project to disconcert our democratic political orientation and have us rethink the value of our values.

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106 For a subtle reading of the role of the aristocratic polis in Nietzsche's treatment of human potential see Chapter 2 of Daniel Conway's *Nietzsche and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 28-42.
108 See GOM: I, 9 where Nietzsche refers to his hypothetical reader/interlocutor as an honest “democrat.”
On this view, Nietzsche's reversed victimology may or may not be received as an expression of his political sympathies, but most certainly can be interpreted as a device through which he aims to disturb our political sympathies. Nietzsche notes that we may be "quite justified ... in being on [our] guard against" the tyrannical noble, but he urges us nonetheless to reconsider our investment in the forces which served to expel the noble's particular form of autarchy from the world—forces which are more readily discerned when the noble's role in his own demise is consistently understated. Let us consider the ramifications of this interpretation for our reading of feminism before moving on to examine the perspective of the slave.

In the schema Nietzsche sets out in the *Genealogy*, master morality is that which thrives outside democracy, it is consummately 'undemocratic,' while slave morality, the 'triumph of the mob,' lays the groundwork for the European human's eventual orientation toward liberal democracy. With this schema, Nietzsche casts liberal democracy as a political regime which effectively 'enslaves' distance, distinction and difference: hence the critique which runs through his work of the normative function and levelling effect of liberalism's ethics of equality. For our purposes, two points may be deduced from this schema. Firstly, we may deduce that the figure of the master represents a form of self-relation and self-world relation which is monstrous from a liberal democratic perspective—not just on account of its tyrannical tendencies, but also on account of its unruly capacity for freedom of action and autarchic self-definition. Read in this way, the figure of the master can be made to operate metonymically for orders of difference which are unassimilable within the confines of liberal democracy.

\[\text{GOM: I, 12.}\]
As Diprose’s analysis suggests, feminist claims to female agency evince precisely this kind of unassimilable character. Liberal democracy can digest female agency so long as it is not marked as ‘female,’ so long as it may be aligned with “the rational subject as he is positioned at the norm of a politics of equality”—an alignment that in any case will enjoy only partial success so long as femaleness provides the devalued other against which liberalism’s normative subject is wrought.112 Although we have good reason to treat Nietzsche’s views on feminism with caution, this reading shares something with Nietzsche’s own critique of the feminism of his day, specifically that element of his critique which held that the masculine norm women aspired to “imitate” was not worthy of their efforts.113 His critique of feminism, like his

112Diprose, ‘Nietzsche, Ethics and Sexual Difference,’ 27.
critique of liberalism more generally, is motivated in part by his rejection of the subtle violence of this political regime's "certain actual rendering similar": its monotheistic reduction of difference to an economy of the same, its blunting of all particulars to form an edifice of universalism.\textsuperscript{114}

Importantly for our purposes, in view of this point feminist wariness about liberalism's ethics of equality and the potential loss of political integrity attendant upon liberal reformism may be read not as a moment in which feminism becomes mired in a politics of ressentiment, but as the juncture at which feminists expound most keenly the desire to resist circumstances which incite ressentiment: circumstances in which one's own creativity is forfeited as one is compelled to adopt values and ways of being that are not of one's own making.

Secondly and conversely, we can deduce from this that the figure of the slave and the political shape of liberal democracy stand in a metonymic relation in Nietzsche's account, making for an intimate relation between...


\textsuperscript{114}TI: 91, cited in Diprose, 'Nietzsche, Ethics and Sexual Difference,' 27.
ressentiment" and liberal democracy. We can expect, that is, that Nietzsche’s figuration of the slave or “man of ressentiment” is designed to hold a mirror up to his liberal democratic readers. In seeing how Nietzsche’s glorification of the noble and impugnation of the slave works with his critique of liberal democracy in this way, the characterisation of slave morality and ressentiment as ‘undemocratic’ in the literature we examined in Part 2 is made strange.\(^{115}\) So too is Tapper’s argument that feminism enjoins ressentiment when it moves beyond the liberal project of “wanting equal power” within existing politico-economic arrangements, and Yeatman’s argument that submitting to liberal democracy’s politics of equality will overcome ressentiment and permit access to Nietzschean mastery. The argument common to Tapper’s and Yeatman’s accounts (and present also in the popular feminist accounts examined in Part 1), that feminism becomes an ineffectual politics of ressentiment when it holds out for more than equality within current conditions, is mooted once we perceive the intimate relation Nietzsche sets up between ressentiment and the desire for a normatively operative ethos of equality.

Having registered these points let us note that reading between the lines of Nietzsche’s laudatory attitude toward the noble does not mean adopting this attitude—and adopting, in turn, his condemnatory attitude toward the slave. We do not need to enjoin Nietzsche’s praise of the noble to glean the political message he sends with this figure—that the form of strength which hosts the possibility of autarchic self-creation becomes fragile in the presence of normativity. We have seen that our reading of the master presents an opportunity to metonymically align feminist politics with Nietzsche’s master rather than with Nietzsche’s slave. But the will to rest on a clean alignment

\(^{115}\)Recall that this characterisation features in the accounts of Yeatman and Brown, and also was apparent in the accounts of Hoff Sommers and Wolf in Part 1.
of feminism with one or the other figure is, I suggest, a problematic restriction which is imposed when one approaches Nietzsche's account diagnostically. As we will see, Nietzsche's account of the slave's attempt to conjure the possibility of self-creation within a political regime in which this possibility is outlawed for him offers feminists the same kind of political message as does his account of mastery's ultimate fragility—a message about how a form of weakness which can be made to host the possibility of strength and self-creation arises and can be thwarted in the presence of domination.

Nietzsche construes oppression as a circumstance in which one is separated from what one can do,116 in which one is "denied the true reaction, that of deeds" and, in this, prohibited from achieving self-definition and distanced from the possibility of self-affirmation.117 To be oppressed is to experience a world in which one's needs, especially as regards the possibility of self-making, have been outlawed within the particular political regime one inhabits. If one reads the *Genealogy* without a view to adopt Nietzsche's Pro and Con, one can see that this circumstance is to be associated with both the master and the slave. Insofar as these figures are incommensurable, the empowerment of one is set up as the disempowerment of the other, and neither figure can digest the needs of the other. Hence both figures represent orders of difference which will be unassimilable within the regime of their opponent, meaning that feminism, as a politics of difference, has much to learn from both figures.

116As in Chapter 2, this phrase is borrowed from Deleuze's account, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 123. Deleuze associates this separative move with *ressentiment's* triumph over master morality, but on my reading this move pertains equally to the master's prior triumph over the slave, hence its appropriateness for a description of oppression. This latter use of Deleuze's phrase draws on Elizabeth Grosz' treatment of it in Chapter 13 of her book *Space, Time and Perversion*, 207-227.

117GOM: I, 10.
Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* is freighted with a ready made prejudice against the slave, a prejudice which is ventriloquised when the concept is used diagnostically but which occupies unstable ground given that, by Nietzsche’s own account, the slave’s *ressentiment* can be interpreted as the co-produced effect of the master-slave relation. The political narrative attending Nietzsche’s articulation of master morality is one in which the noble will to power is shaped so as to craft and maintain a ruling structure that “lives”—the ruling structure Nietzsche has in mind is an aristocratic one, wherein the state is able effectively to enslave the populace and in so doing accept “with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, *for its sake*, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments.” As part of his defence of this configuration of power—for it enables the nobility, if undisturbed in their nobility, to extend human greatness—Nietzsche portrays the original nobles as beasts of prey, creatures of untrammelled instinct who ‘could not have behaved otherwise’.

But there are questions which remain unanswered in all this. How, we must ask, could the slave have behaved otherwise? Nietzsche registers the slave as a figure who “*was* only what he was *considered*”. Even as we may share ground with Nietzsche’s critique of liberalism, what reason do we have to enjoin Nietzsche’s blaming lament over the rebellion of the slave, his aversion to the slave’s formation of the concepts required to counter a social fate in which he “*was* only what he was *considered*”? What grounds are there to uphold an expectation that this is a worldly situation the slave must be resigned to perform obediently? We will address these questions in turning now to the perspective of the slave.

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118BGE: 258. Emphasis in original.
119BGE: 261. Emphasis in original.
5.2 The Power of the Weak

As the foregoing discussion has identified, the political situation Nietzsche describes in his account of the moralities of master and slave is one in which the slave is maximally repressed. The slave shares a level of repression with the master insofar as they jointly suffer the "homesickness" which attends the civilising process. Both have been deprived of a seamless relation with instinct's "more natural vent". But while the master is able to compensate himself for his suffering in commanding the slave and by 'going outside,' the possibility of such compensation is denied to the slave. As Ridley comments, the slave suffers a comparatively "high degree of internalisation" which fosters the development of an ever-sharper "contrast between 'inner' and 'outer'. The 'inner'—the theatre of his own private torment—is himself; the 'outer' is that hostile external world which has made him as he is.” The slave's circumstance is one in which rancorous frustration—ressentiment in its "brute state"—mounts and, as Nietzsche puts it, "festers", all the while lacking any immediate outlet. This is why, by the third essay of the Genealogy, Nietzsche will ascribe an "explosive" quality to ressentiment. The quantity and quality of the force its exerts 'inside' has the potential to explode so as to effect an unruly break with obedience and act as the potential source of the slave's power in the world.

Let us observe that we already are encountering the sense in which 'ressentiment' does not stand as a stable term in Nietzsche's account since it describes a dynamic process occurring within an inherently unstable power

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120 GOM: II, 16.
121 GOM: II, 22. Emphasis in original.
122 Ridley, Nietzsche's Conscience, 27.
123 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 126.
124 GOM: I, 10.
125 GOM: III, 15.
relationship. It appears that this process is at least threefold, meaning that in the *Genealogy* the term ‘ressentiment’ is made to refer to at least three stages in the development of *ressentiment*: brute or “noncreative”; creative; and explosive/contained.\(^{126}\) We know that *ressentiment*’s brute state attends the slave’s starting position of maximal repression. As this section’s account of the slave’s perspective unfolds, *ressentiment*’s creative stage will be elucidated, while full engagement with the third stage awaits us in the following chapter. There I will argue that this third stage, when *ressentiment* exhibits an explosive quality and, as such, begins to present a problem to which the powerful will require a solution, is of great significance for feminist political reflection, and has a crucial bearing on our understanding of the relationship between feminism and *ressentiment*.

When he first presents his thesis on the moralities of master and slave in *Beyond*, Nietzsche performs one of the signature moves of his account of morality, that of switching between two perspectives on one social order. After describing the “morality of the ruling group”, Nietzsche takes us into the perspective of the ruled, “the minds of those who suffer” from the master’s cruelty, those whom the nobles deem ‘bad’.\(^{127}\) The following passage is his first elucidation of this perspective:

Suppose the violated, oppressed, suffering, unfree, who are uncertain of themselves and weary, moralise: what will their moral valuations have in common? Probably, a pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man along with his condition. The slave’s eye is not favourable to the virtues of the powerful: he is sceptical and suspicious, subtly suspicious, of all the “good” that is honoured there—he would like to persuade himself that their happiness is not genuine. Conversely,

\(^{126}\)The term “noncreative” is drawn from Ridley (*Nietzsche’s Conscience*, 23) who, like Deleuze, discerns Nietzsche’s implicit distinction between *ressentiment* in its noncreative (“brute”) stage, and *ressentiment* in its creative stage when it invents values (slave morality). I add a third stage here—explosive/contained.

\(^{127}\)BGE: 260, GOM: I, 11.
those qualities are brought out and flooded with light which serve to ease the existence of those who suffer ... Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility.\textsuperscript{128}

By the \textit{Genealogy}, Nietzsche's characterisation of slave morality is more developed and more vehement in tone, and the concept of \textit{ressentiment} is introduced to his account.\textsuperscript{129} As we will see, within the terms set by the \textit{Genealogy}, the "unfree" begin to moralise when their \textit{ressentiment} reaches its creative stage: slave morality is produced when the \textit{ressentiment} of the slaves "becomes creative and gives birth to values".\textsuperscript{130} But even without the layer of detail that the concept of \textit{ressentiment} provides, the core feature of Nietzsche's definition of slave morality's evaluative creativity remains the same between \textit{Beyond} and the \textit{Genealogy}. Slave morality performs an inversion of master morality and a reversal of master morality's self—other order of valuation. As a reversal of the evaluating look, slave morality's point of purchase is derived from a negative experience of the world which knows itself to be negative owing to the contrast supplied through observation of the nobles in their happiness, health, wealth, power and splendour. Hence Nietzsche identifies the "need to direct one's view outward" with the "essence of \textit{ressentiment}": the nobility occupy the \textit{foreground} of the slave's mode of evaluation.

The powerful supply the slave with empirical evidence that not everyone suffers in the way he suffers, which in turn delivers the question: 'Why do I suffer while they do not?' An evaluative division between that which eases suffering and that which causes it may then be developed on the basis of this perception of politico-social difference or, we might say, 'inequality':

\textsuperscript{128}BGE: 260. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{129}See supra, Note 6.
\textsuperscript{130}GOM: I, 10.
Here is the place for the origin of that famous opposition of “good” and “evil”: into evil one’s feelings project power and dangerousness, a certain terribleness, subtlety, and strength that does not permit contempt to develop. According to slave morality, those who are “evil” thus inspire fear; according to master morality it is precisely those who are “good” that inspire, and wish to inspire, fear, while the “bad” are felt to be contemptible.131

Slave morality’s inversion of the value-positing eye furnishes the noble’s distinction of ‘good’ from ‘bad’ with competitive opposition from below. Slave morality produces an evaluative distinction in which the ‘good’ of master morality is recast as ‘evil,’ while the ‘bad’ of master morality is recast as ‘good’. The noble, having evaluated himself as good, is revalued by the slave as evil: the slave interprets the noble as the source of his fear, suffering and endangerment. As Nietzsche notes, according to slave morality, the “good human being has to be undangerous to the slave’s way of thinking.”132 Having directed his view outward in this way, the slave is then positioned to direct his view inward: he revalues himself and all that may ease his suffering—all that is “undangerous” to him—as good. Both slave morality’s revaluations provide self-preserving, utilitarian expediency. Maximally, aligning the noble with evil and the slave with good provides the beginnings of a delegitimation of the noble’s power over the slave and, moreover, a delegitimation of the particular shape the noble’s will to power assumes (domination, exploitation, appropriation, imposition). More immediately, these revaluations provide the slave with a path to self-affirmation. However, as we noted in the previous section, this is a path which offers a starkly reactive constitution of self.

The task of the slave is to conjure self-definition and self-affirmation from a starting position in which he “was only what he was considered: not at all used to positing values himself, he also attached no other value to himself

131BGE: 260.
than his masters attached to him". As we know, the value the master attaches to the slave renders the slave 'bad': hence the slave's starting position is one of *self-loathing* ('I am bad'). He is nothing other than what he is considered, and the possibility of accepting this fate is eclipsed by the suffering this fate brings him. His interpretation of this situation as unbearable grows increasingly stark the more 'internalised' he becomes, the more his *ressentiment* mounts and, therefore, the more his intelligence grows—Nietzsche notes that slaves are "bound to become eventually *cleverer* than any noble race." It is through cleverness that the slave is able to make his *ressentiment* over into a source of creativity: as Ridley puts it, "cleverness, born of enforced prudence, is the ace up the slave's sleeve."

Slave morality's creative revaluation of the noble's values will remedy the slave's situation to the extent that he will be positioned to break with his self-loathing. However, his starting circumstance itself is not able to host the possibility of *autarchic* self-definition and self-affirmation. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche is especially concerned to convey that negation must constitute the first evaluative step slave morality takes:

> While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside," what is "different," what is "not itself"; and *this* No is its creative deed ... in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction ... picture "the enemy" as the man of *ressentiment* conceives him—and here precisely is his deed, his creation: he has conceived "the evil enemy," "the Evil One," and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves, as an afterthought and pendant, a "good one"—himself! ... This "bad" of

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133 BGE: 261. Emphasis in original.
134 On this point I am guided by Ridley's account of the slave's self-loathing in *Nietzsche's Conscience*, 17.
135 GOM: I, 10. Emphasis in original.
noble origin and that "evil" out of the cauldron of unsatisfied hatred—the former an after-production, a side issue, a contrasting shade, the latter on the contrary the original thing, the beginning, the distinctive deed in the conception of a slave morality—how different these words "bad" and "evil" are, although they are both apparently the opposite of the same concept "good": one should ask rather precisely who is "evil" in the sense of the morality of ressentiment. The answer, in all strictness, is: precisely the "good man" of the other morality, precisely the noble, powerful man, the ruler, but dyed in another colour, interpreted in another fashion, seen in another way by the venomous eye of ressentiment.¹³⁷

Both master morality and slave morality begin by evaluating the master. In the case of master morality, this valuation is one of positive self-affirmation. In the case of slave morality, it is one of negative other-negation. Only on the basis of this initial negation of the master can the slave achieve self-affirmation: 'He is evil therefore I am good.' This places the slave's affirmation of self as an immanent perversion of—rather than transcendent alternative to—master morality, a reversal of its terms which, as a reversal, remains dependent on those terms. The slave achieves self-affirmation and breaks with his self-loathing, but only by changing the terms on which he is dependent on the master, not by eliminating this dependence. In short, the slave has achieved an immanent form of emancipation rather than emancipation as such.

Nietzsche argues, then, that slave morality, the product of ressentiment in its creative stage, transports the slave from being nothing other than what he is considered to revaluing what he is considered as good. The slave does not dispute the contents of the identity ascribed to him in the social order he inhabits, rather he reverses their value: the master's demarcation of the slave and all slavish traits as 'bad' is reversed so that they now denote 'good.' With slave morality, Nietzsche writes, "weakness" is "lied into something

¹³⁷GOM: I, 10, 11. Emphasis in original.
"meritorious" and "every blackness" is made over into "whiteness, milk, and innocence".\textsuperscript{138} The slaves—"cellar rodents" who anxiously emerge "from all the corners and nooks"—revalue as 'good' characteristically 'slavish' traits: weakness, powerlessness, impotence, lowliness and cowardice. As Nietzsche writes:

Weakness is being lied into something \textit{meritorious} ... and impotence which does not requite into 'goodness of heart'; anxious lowliness into 'humility'; subjection to those one hates into 'obedience' ... The inoffensiveness of the weak man, even the cowardice of which he has so much, his lingering at the door, his being ineluctably compelled to wait, here acquire flattering names, such as 'patience,' and are even called virtue itself; his inability for revenge is called unwillingness to revenge, perhaps even forgiveness ... They also speak of 'loving one's enemies'—and sweat as they do so.\textsuperscript{139}

This is the point at which Nietzsche's association of the slave with mendacity, vanity, counterfeit and self-deception find their meaning. One of the slave's primary accomplishments, Nietzsche argues, is to lie his circumstance into something good, meritorious, and \textit{chosen}. The concept of free will facilitates this feat of imagination, but let us note first that Nietzsche's gesture of naturalisation remerges in this aspect of his treatment of the slave.\textsuperscript{140}

"Weakness", Nietzsche writes, is the "sole ineluctable, irremovable reality" of the slave's starting situation.\textsuperscript{141} But Nietzsche presents the

\textsuperscript{138}GOM: I, 14. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{139}GOM: I, 14. Emphasis in original. In this quote Nietzsche is occupying the voice of his imaginary reader/interlocutor, in all likelihood the honest democrat summoned in an earlier aphorism (GOM: I, 9). The scenario is that his interlocutor is reporting to him from 'below,' within slave morality's "dark workshop," on the evaluative transformations taking place there. We may assume that Nietzsche's interlocutor, by the time of this aphorism, is being seduced to Nietzsche's dire view of the slave.
\textsuperscript{140}See also Nietzsche's comments on the concept of free will in TI: The Four Great Errors, 7.
\textsuperscript{141}GOM: I, 13.
weakness of the weak—their "essence"—in two lights.\textsuperscript{142} Firstly, using terms such as "deprived", "oppressed", "lowly" and "failures from the start", he refers to the slave's having been socio-politically inscribed as weak.\textsuperscript{143} However he also uses terms such as "ill-constituted', "dwarfed", "atrophied", "sick", "born failures" and "physiologically unfortunate" to suggest not just an inscription of oppression upon the body, but a prior physical inscription of inferiority, a natural predisposition to weakness and, therefore, servility.\textsuperscript{144} What is perhaps the key term Nietzsche uses to describe the slave's weakness—"impotence"—would seem to straddle this socio-political/natural divide: it captures at once a social position which is "denied the true reaction, that of deeds" and an imperfect physical state when compared with the master's apparently consummate masculinity.\textsuperscript{145}

Let us return to the role of the concept of free will. Slave morality, Nietzsche argues, takes the slave's existing weakness and, through a feat of "sublime self-deception", reinscribes it as "a voluntary achievement, willed, chosen, a deed, a meritorious act."\textsuperscript{146} In this way, the "impotence" of the slave—his inability to act his reaction, shape his circumstances, and make himself—assumes the fictional guise of action. Impotence is recast as the circumstance he actively, voluntarily chose for himself and, in turn, this choice is cast as testimony to his virtue:

When the oppressed, downtrodden, outraged exhort one another with the vengeful cunning of impotence: "let us be different from the evil, namely good! And he is good who does not outrage, who harms nobody, who does not attack, who does not requite, who leaves revenge to God, who keeps himself hidden as we do, who avoids evil

\textsuperscript{142}GOM: I, 13.
\textsuperscript{143}GOM: II, 13; III, 14.
\textsuperscript{144}GOM: I, 10, 7; III, 14.
\textsuperscript{145}GOM: I, 10.
\textsuperscript{146}GOM: I, 13. Emphasis in original.
and desires little from life, like us, the patient, humble, and just"—this, listened to calmly and without previous bias, really amounts to no more than: "we weak ones are, after all, weak; it would be good if we did nothing for which we are not strong enough" ... 147

The slave, Nietzsche argues, makes his situation bearable by deceiving himself that he chose this situation and, as such, may be regarded as virtuous. His impotence thereby is clothed in the "ostentatious garb of the virtue of quiet, calm resignation".148 Recoding the slave's circumstance as a product of an active, virtuous choice is one of two primary roles that slave morality's concept of free will plays.

The other primary role the concept of free will plays is as a means of potentially constraining the power of the powerful by making expressions of their power appear to be chosen or 'deliberate'. The concept of free will overlays the master's expression of his power with a moral drama in which the master is cast as a subject who chooses to behave in the way he does, a subject who is, therefore, free to behave otherwise. Nietzsche argues this in one of the more famous aphorisms from the Genealogy, that containing his parable of lambs and birds of prey:

That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange: only it gives no grounds for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: "these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good?" there is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that the birds of prey might view this a little ironically and say: "we don't dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb." ... To demand of strength that it should not express itself as strength, that it should not be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of

weakness that it should express itself as strength ... just as the popular mind separates the lightening from its flash and takes the latter for an action, for the operation of a subject called lightening, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so ... no wonder the submerged, darkly glowering emotions of vengefulness and hatred exploit this belief for their own ends and in fact maintain no belief more ardently than the belief that the strong man is free to be weak and the bird of prey to be a lamb—for thus they gain the right to make the bird of prey accountable for being a bird of prey.149

The concept of free will not only enables the slave to unburden himself of pain by reinterpreting his situation as virtuously chosen, it also lends him the means by which he may take the master's free-flowing strength and impose a moral-conceptual schema upon it, thereby divorcing the doer from his deeds in such a way that the doer may be construed as “accountable” for his deeds. Here, the concept of guilt, the formation of the bad conscience and a particular conception of agency as not just calculable but accountable, find their beginnings.150

Importantly for our purposes, let us note that this moral-conceptual schema gives the slave an opportunity to position himself as a ‘victim’ for the first time, if by ‘victim’ we mean one whose suffering—the separation of oneself from what one can do—is not to be interpreted as a meaningless and apparently inevitable element of the natural order of things (in which case ‘victimisation’ cedes to ‘nature’), but rather as a preventable effect of an accountable other's deeds. We can deduce from this that, according to Nietzsche's insights, the moral technology underpinning conceptions of

150David Owen's reading of this aspect of Nietzsche's Genealogy provides an especially clear account of how this moment signals a transfer from a consciousness of 'debt' to a consciousness of 'guilt' (Maturity and Modernity, 38-43). Given Nietzsche's association of the sovereign individual with responsibility, 'responsibility' may be read as a refinement of guilt and a telos of this transfer.
victimhood within modern emancipatory politics do indeed have their roots in slave morality. Indeed, we can glimpse here a very basic relation between feminism and creative ressentiment. Insofar as modern feminism, whether radical, liberal or otherwise, has sought to show that women's subordination is neither natural nor inevitable, it has worked from what Nietzsche identifies as creative ressentiment's conceptual schema, a schema which lends the slave the concepts required to reinterpret their circumstance as contingent rather than inevitable. Moreover, to recall our reflection on the issue of sexual violence in Part 1, feminist efforts to counter sexual violence have retraced the steps of Nietzsche's slave in seeking to separate men from their capacity to perform sexual violence, and to counter naturalisation of this capacity. That "rape" is listed among the repertoire of violent acts performed by Nietzsche's beast of prey should not be lost on a feminist reading of Nietzsche's account.\(^{151}\)

Of course, what interferes with this reading is that on Nietzsche's account the slave—\emph{unlike} feminism—apparently does not use the political foothold 'victimhood' lends him to bring the master into an \emph{actual} relation of reciprocal recognition so as to seek socio-political transformation. That is, the slave does not use 'victimhood' as a means to craft a circumstance in which he can become something other than a victim. Rather, he recasts his victimhood as his chosen virtue, and gives his enforced servitude to a master he hates a virtuous name: "obedience". This is why Nietzsche associates creative ressentiment with an "imaginary revenge": the slave exacts revenge not through direct struggle with the master, but "\emph{in effigie}", through an \emph{imagined} reckoning.\(^{152}\)

\(^{151}\)GOM: I, 11. Nietzsche lists "murder, arson, rape, and torture".

\(^{152}\)GOM: I, 10.
In what sense, then, does the slave actually “revolt”? What are we to make this aspect of Nietzsche’s account, and what does it mean for the diagnostic alignments of feminism with creative ressentiment that we examined in Part 2? Let us recall that Nietzsche’s association of ressentiment with the flatly resubordinative gesture of lying impotence into virtue is one of the primary aspects of Nietzsche’s account that is put to work in the diagnoses of feminism as a politics of ressentiment that we examined. One of the main themes in those accounts was that ressentiment resutures the victim to victim identity, giving rise to a essentially non-transformative politics—as conveyed in Yeatman’s image of the antagonistic outsider’s self-defeating loyalty to outsidership, and in Cocks’ portrait of a degenerative feminist radicalism which ‘sanctifies powerlessness’. However: each of the accounts we examined describe a politics which speaks and acts in the world. Cocks’ writer and orator of victim politics is writing policy and making public speeches, as is Tapper’s femocrat; Yeatman’s antagonistic outsider voices critique of the status quo while her statist protectionist makes claims on the state; Brown’s modernist feminist is conducting revolutionary-oriented consciousness-raising groups while her statist identitarian is drafting legislation. Nietzsche’s “man of ressentiment”, meanwhile, has sanctified his own worldly impotence and is conducting an imaginary reckoning with an effigy of his political opponent. This man, Nietzsche writes, “understands how to keep silent”.

Creative ressentiment, it seems, does not actually revolt. Rather, in creating the moral technology through which the slave will be able to rethink his circumstance, it precipitates actual revolt, thereby lending the slave’s ressentiment the potential for a third, explosive stage. This would explain why Nietzsche notes that the man of ressentiment is “provisionally self-

\[153\text{GOM: I, 10.}\]
deprecating and humble."\(^{154}\) Let us note that if *ressentiment* ceased with a silence behind which impotence has been lied into something virtuous—that is, if it did not advance to a stage wherein it returns the slave to the capacity for action prompted by the idea that his social fate is not inevitable—it simply would not be a problem to which the powerful will require a solution. It is clear from Nietzsche's account, however, that *ressentiment* does assume a third stage, and that the slave does break his silence and seek an actual reckoning with the powerful. Both the second and third essays of the *Genealogy* describe strategies which operate as means by which the powerful subdue the threat of *ressentiment*, which in its third stage becomes "the most dangerous of all explosives".\(^{155}\)

We will be examining these strategies—legalism and religious asceticism—in the following chapter. But to conclude this chapter's consideration of Nietzsche's account let us be clear as to precisely what the threat of *ressentiment* in its third stage is. Nietzsche notes that the threat of *ressentiment* is "anarchy": the dissolution of the socio-political order which brought it into being, the rescinding of "the privilege of the full-toned bell over the false and cracked", a radical breach in the *pathos* of distance, a calamity in which "the sick ... make the healthy sick".\(^{156}\) And Nietzsche provides a precise answer to the question as to how the threat of *ressentiment* proceeds. *Ressentiment* will achieve its "ultimate, subtlest, sublimest triumph" when the slaves succeed in "poisoning the consciences of the fortunate with their own misery", making the "happy, well-constituted [and] powerful in soul and body ... doubt their right to happiness".\(^{157}\) Put another way, *ressentiment* in its third stage fosters the possibility of an actual reckoning between master and

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\(^{154}\)GOM: I, 10. My emphasis.

\(^{155}\)GOM: III, 15.

\(^{156}\)GOM: III, 13, 12, 14.

slave in which the slave agitates for socio-political change and for the right to make himself over into something other than what he is considered—an agitation which draws its traction from the idea that the master’s “happiness” has produced, and depends upon, the slave’s “misery”.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to broaden our perspective on *ressentiment* by taking into consideration the elements of Nietzsche's account which tend to be obscured when the concept of *ressentiment* is employed diagnostically, most notably the dynamic struggle between master and slave through which Nietzsche articulates his concept of *ressentiment*. In countering the tendency to regard *ressentiment* in isolation from the remainder of Nietzsche's account, the chapter's analysis has sought to demonstrate that Nietzsche's condemnatory attitude toward *ressentiment* wears thin when the nature of this struggle is in view. In view of this struggle, *ressentiment* appears not as a necessarily self-subversive style of politics which is limited to and by an entrenchment of the distance between the slave and positive political capacity, but rather as a dynamic process of revolt which certainly includes the possibility of self-subversion, but which also has the capacity to exceed this limit in providing the slave with the moral technology through which an ability to challenge subjection can be crafted.

This reading challenges the assumption, apparent in the literature examined in Part 2, that *ressentiment* is unambiguously 'bad,' and challenges as well the notion that *ressentiment* is inherently non-transformative. On this reading, *ressentiment* is, rather, the very source of dynamism and instability within the master-slave relation. Moreover, this reading suggests that the slave's conversion of his circumstance into a source of power does not of necessity yield 'triumph of the slave as slave'. As I understand it, *ressentiment* is threatening precisely because through it the slave realises that he may
become something other than what he is considered—that he may, that is, open socio-political being to contingency.

Over the course of the chapter's discussion of *ressentiment* we also have collected two main points regarding the relationship between feminism and *ressentiment*. Firstly, in elucidating the relation between master and slave I identified the sense in which these figures are essentially incommensurable, and as such can be put to work in similar ways to reflect on feminism's status as a politics of difference. Where feminist claims to female autarchy and agency reckon with liberal universalism they capture something of the plight of Nietzsche's master in moving against the grain of liberal normativity. At the same time, where feminism fights to open definitions of femaleness to contingency—to enable women to become something other than what they have been considered—they capture something of the plight of Nietzsche's slave, whose necessary crisis of authenticity, we might add, would seem to have been played out within feminist debates about essentialism.

Secondly, in terms of feminism's political moves, I have argued that we can perceive a very basic relation between feminism and the moral technology *ressentiment* elaborates in its creative stage in the sense that this technology delivers the idea that the master's power is neither natural nor inevitable—he is free to behave otherwise. However I also argued that, in speaking and acting in the world, feminism clearly has exceeded the flipside of the concept of free will—the slave's flatly resubordinative acceptance of the idea that his subordination is virtuously chosen. Even those feminisms which redraw patriarchal essentialism and revalue as virtuous traditionally feminine traits such as nurturance and pacifism, do not convincingly align with Nietzsche's slave as he maintains his silence, contenting himself with an imaginary reckoning with his oppressor. It would seem that insofar as we
have something called ‘feminism,’ we are already talking about a *ressentiment* which has gained an explosive quality and earned the capacity to articulate and act on a desire for socio-political change. And it is not difficult to imagine that the ‘slave,’ in acting on this desire, will become even cleverer—clever enough, that is, to realise the pitfalls of resubordinative essentialism.
He struggled on with his copy, but when the clock struck five he had still fourteen pages to write. Blast it! He couldn't finish it in time. He longed to execrate aloud, to bring his fist down on something violently ... The barometer of his emotional nature was set for a spell of riot.
—James Joyce.¹

... he fights with cunning and severity and in secret against anarchy and ever-threatening disintegration within the herd, in which the most dangerous of all explosives, ressentiment, is constantly accumulating.
—Friedrich Nietzsche.²

Introduction

In the previous chapter I provided a positive interpretation of ressentiment as an effect of domination which has the potential to become an effective weapon against domination. In this chapter, as I continue my reading of ressentiment into its third stage, I examine the strategies Nietzsche describes as providing 'solutions' to the problem of ressentiment, using this material to make a specific set of connections back to the accounts of feminist ressentiment examined in Part 2 and, to a lesser extent, the popular feminist accounts of Part 1. In so doing I present my concluding arguments and articulate my view that feminist politics works both 'within' and 'against' ressentiment.

As registered in the previous chapter, that ressentiment reaches a stage where it poses a problem for the powerful is evident from Nietzsche's elucidation of two strategies—legalism and religious asceticism—which work

² GOM: III, 15.
to diffuse the threat *ressentiment* presents to the social order which conditions its production. These strategies acquire their potential for success from a particular property of *ressentiment*—its capacity to be *redirected* and, thereby, contained. The strategies Nietzsche describes have particular significance for our purposes because we already have encountered their workings in the analyses of previous chapters. In reviewing these strategies across the first two sections of the chapter we will be positioned to forge key connections with earlier insights pertaining to feminism and the question of reformism versus radicalism and, as we turn to religious asceticism, the issue of self-blame.

The first section of the chapter addresses Nietzsche’s account of how the strategy of legalism works to redirect *ressentiment*. I argue that a distinction between two modalities in the politicisation of *ressentiment* can be discerned within this account: one modality has a broadly transformative reach while the other assumes a reformist posture. In the light of this distinction, I recall the two main feminist political strategies at issue in the accounts examined in Part 2—liberal feminism’s reformist or ‘insider’ posture and radical feminism’s more revolutionary or ‘outsider’ orientation—and argue that these do not represent strategies which either draw on or overcome *ressentiment*, but rather may be regarded as two modalities in the direction of *ressentimental* desire, the respective effectivities of which I seek to illuminate.

In the chapter’s second section I turn to Nietzsche’s account of how religious asceticism works to solve the problem of *ressentiment* by inducing it, under the aegis of the concept of ‘sin,’ to self-blame. In discerning the role that self-blame plays in diffusing the threat of *ressentiment*, I return to reconsider earlier moments in the dissertation in which we encountered the issue of self-blame and the injunction to those engaged in emancipatory politics to ‘take responsibility.’ I argue that the popular feminist accounts examined in Part 1,
with their efforts to redistribute responsibility and their tendency to permit victim-blame, may be interpreted as a form of asceticism. With the intention of making a further contribution to the role that Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment might play in feminist political theory, I also point out that Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment can itself be made to operate ascetically, where this provides further reason to rethink approaching this concept diagnostically. Finally, the third section of the chapter imposes a qualification upon the positive interpretation of the concept of ressentiment offered in this part of the dissertation, and seeks to illuminate a further labour the concept of ressentiment might in future perform for feminist theory.

6.1 Ressentiment and legalism

In this section we are concerned with the first strategy Nietzsche describes as a means by which the powerful may subdue the threat of ressentiment—legalism, the "institution of law".\(^3\) This strategy, as Aaron Ridley puts it, works to contain ressentiment by furnishing it with "a target and a limit."\(^4\) Given that the anarchic hopes of ressentiment directly threaten the socio-political order within which it appears, legalism works to make these indigestible hopes over into digestible complaint by governing the arbitration of injustice, imposing parameters of right and recognition upon phenomena of victimisation, and articulating a set of ostensibly repairable wrongs through which a ressentimental populace can re-script and re-direct its desires, which may be domesticated thereby. Law, on this reading, works for the powerful as does the muleta for the matador, enticing and diverting the treacherous ire of the bull.

\(^3\) GOM: II, 11.
\(^4\) Ridley, Nietzsche's Conscience, 132.
In articulating the strategy of legalism Nietzsche spars with the philosopher from whose work he drew the term 'ressentiment,' Eugen Dühring. In his book *Der Werth des Lebens: eine philosophische betrachtung* (1865), Dühring argued that “all concepts of justice” are to be attributed to “the feeling of *Ressentiment*.” For Dühring, justice—the means by which we express our distinction between right and wrong—“exists for and springs from the ancient sense of vengeance” which is indigenous to humanity. Hence a central feature of Dühring’s argument is that *ressentiment* (“a reaction, a sensation that belongs alongside revenge and fits with it in the same category of emotion”) is a configuration of affect to which no human is immune—insofar as one is human, one feels *ressentiment*. On this basis Dühring reads criminal justice systems as organic extensions of an essentially natural doctrine of revenge, a naturally occurring human capacity to distinguish the just from the unjust and to contrive a system through which the unjust may be avenged and deterred. In forwarding his alternative account of the role of the institution of law, Nietzsche appropriates Dühring’s use of the term *ressentiment* but rebuffs his thesis on *ressentiment* with a “blunt antithesis”.

Noting that Dühring presents justice as “at bottom merely a further development of the feeling of being aggrieved”, Nietzsche counters Dühring’s naturalisation of justice systems in arguing that “legal conditions can never be anything other than *exceptional conditions*:

> “Just” and “unjust” exist, accordingly, only after the institution of the law (and *not*, as Dühring would have it, after the perpetration of the injury). To speak of just or unjust *in itself* is quite senseless; in itself, of course, no injury, assault, exploitation, destruction can be “unjust,”

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5 Eugen Dühring, *Der Werth des Lebens: eine philosophische betrachtung* [The Value of Life: a course in philosophy] (Breslau, 1865), viii, 220.

6 Ibid., 220.

7 Ibid., 217.

8 GOM: II, 11.
since life operates essentially, that is in its basic functions, through
injury, assault, exploitation, destruction and simply cannot be thought
of at all without this character.9

In a sense, then, Nietzsche counters Dühring's order of naturalisation with a
different order of naturalisation. The 'injustices' to which justice systems are
addressed come as part of the essential operation of life, and as such can only
be construed as 'injustices' via a kind of anti-nature, a "partial restriction of
the will to life, which is bent on power".10 This basic disagreement between
Nietzsche and Dühring as to the relation of nature to law provides the ground
on which Nietzsche will pose his alternative account of the institution of law.
As opposed to Dühring's "communistic cliché" in which law is understood as
"a means of preventing all struggle in general"—a means of deterring the
unjust—Nietzsche proposes that law be understood as "a means in the
struggle between power complexes".11 Where Dühring apprehends the
institution of law as an extension of humanity’s reactive feelings, Nietzsche
argues, rather, that the institution of law is the means by which the powerful
"struggle against the reactive feelings" emanating from lower social strata.12
For our purposes, this indicates that the powerful, on Nietzsche's view,
contrive "exceptional conditions" through which the explosive ressentiment of
the lower orders can be diverted and thereby contained. Hence the powerful's
"need for law":

... in which sphere has the entire administration of law hitherto been
at home—also the need for law? In the sphere of reactive men,
perhaps? By no means: rather in that of the active, strong,
spontaneous, aggressive. From a historical point of view, law
represents on earth ... the struggle against the reactive feelings, the
war conducted against them on the part of the active and aggressive

9 GOM: II, 11.
10 GOM: II, 11.
11 GOM: II, 11.
powers who employed some of their strength to impose measure and bounds upon the excesses of the reactive pathos and to compel it to come to terms. Wherever justice is practiced one sees a stronger power seeking a means of putting an end to the senseless raging of ressentiment among the weaker powers that stand under it (whether they be groups or individuals)—partly by taking the object of ressentiment out of the hands of revenge, partly by substituting for revenge the struggle against the enemies of peace and order, partly by devising and in some cases imposing settlements, partly by elevating certain equivalences for injuries into norms to which from then on ressentiment is once and for all directed.\footnote{GOM: II, 11.}

For Nietzsche, legal systems do not spring from ressentiment. Rather they work to redirect and so quell ressentiment, enabling the powerful to preserve their power by compelling a ressentimental populace to “come to terms”. In this way, legalism works to diffuse the threat of the weak.

With this strategy Nietzsche appears to be observing a shift in the character of rule that sees the powerful concede to a reform so as to preserve their power, which now assumes a slightly different guise. The powerful divert “some of their strength” toward innovating and administering a legal system. There is a clue in this regarding the manner in which the slave revolt Nietzsche delineates in the \textit{Genealogy} proceeds. Even as the \textit{Genealogy} delineates slave morality's 'victory,' at no point in the \textit{Genealogy} does Nietzsche describe a moment in which the slaves simply defeat their masters and become masters themselves (although this possibility is not exactly excluded). It seems, rather, that the slave revolt proceeds through the threat of direct overthrow, which carves out new sites of "need" on the part of the powerful (as in their "need for law"). The ressentiment of the slaves, in other words, places the rulers in circumstances wherein they either recast their power into a new form—in this case, extending it to the institution of law—or be directly subject to the wiles of a livid majority. This trajectory of slave
revolt—one of protracted ‘decay’ rather than swift explosion, in which the powerful are bound gradually to lose their capacity for “spontaneity”—sees the slaves’ incentive and potential for overthrow work to extract concessions from the rulers which incrementally will transform the manner in which rule is conducted and, therefore, the forms of mastery available to the rulers.\textsuperscript{14} It is in this sense that Nietzsche locates slavish \textit{ressentiment} as an ‘instrument of culture’ which set the West on a track toward universalist political culture, epitomised by liberal democracy’s ethos of equality. In tune with his representation of the original nobles as consummately masculine, Nietzsche conceives of this process as one of \textit{emasculating}. We will consider the gendered component of Nietzsche’s account in the final section of the chapter.

The workings of the strategy of legalism furnish us with a distinction with which to address the question as to how \textit{ressentiment} plays out politically. We may surmise that the furthest political reach of \textit{ressentiment} is a form of radicalism which hosts a capacity for overthrow and which is led by a desire for a substantially different socio-political order. This is the reach of \textit{ressentiment} Mark Katz associates with “maximum-goal revolution”.\textsuperscript{15} From the rulers’ perspective, it is this element of \textit{ressentiment} which is most threatening and most in need of containment. Where the strategy of legalism performs its labour effectively, a second modality in the politicisation of \textit{ressentiment} appears, a reformist modality which succeeds in forcing reform upon the character of rule, but at the cost of redirection, containment, and maintenance of the general relation of power informing the \textit{status quo}. In other words, we may regard \textit{ressentiment} as something of a revolutionary spirit which, when contained, assumes the guise of reformism. And it would seem that the latter guise depends upon the former. In the absence of

\textsuperscript{14}See Ridley’s lucid delineation of this, \textit{Nietzsche’s Conscience}, 132.

\textsuperscript{15}Mark N. Katz, \textit{Reflections on Revolutions} (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 64-68.
ressentiment’s threat of overthrow, the “power complexes” with which Nietzsche is concerned would not be engaged in “struggle”, and the powerful would have no need to cede “some of their strength” so as to change some of their colours. With this distinction between two interrelated modalities in the direction of ressentimental desire in place, let us register how Nietzsche’s account of legalism affects our understanding of the relationship between feminism and ressentiment.

We have seen throughout the dissertation that one of the main points of tension within the literatures we have examined is whether feminism’s potential to precipitate radical social change is facilitated or compromised when feminism co-opts the agency of the state and the law so as to legislate for a non-discriminatory socio-political climate capable of hosting women’s empowerment. The literature examined in Part 2 was divided on this issue. On one side, Brown and Cocks share a perception that feminism has taken a litigious turn which curtails its potential to pose a more radical challenge to the existing socio-political order. In Brown’s terms, feminism’s “uncritical statism” expresses a will to “inscribe in the law and in other political registers its historical and past pain rather than conjure an imagined future of power to make itself”.16 As Brown also puts it, involvement in the mode of political expression known as identity politics has produced a feminism which does not “fight for a world” but rather “conduct[s] process on the existing one.”17 Let us recall that both Brown and Cocks conceive of feminism’s litigious turn as the point at which feminism becomes a politics of ressentiment. However, if we put to work the distinction noted earlier between two modalities in the politicisation of ressentiment, we can see that this turn should be read, rather, as a diversion and containment of feminist ressentiment.

16Brown, States of Injury, 66.
17Ibid., 28.
This suggests that returning feminism to a more radical posture, a return Brown and Cocks jointly but non-prescriptively beckon, would not be a matter of moving feminism beyond ressentiment, but rather of retaining or regaining feminist ressentiment's explosive—that is, fierce, intelligently impertinent, uncompromising and plastically creative—dimension. Second wave feminism's explosion onto the political scene in the late 1960s may be read as a prime exemplar of this dimension of ressentiment, hence the title of Ruth Rosen's recent account of the second wave: The World Split Open.¹⁸ We will return to this point, for in my view Brown discerns the makings of a feminist return to a more radical posture in her analysis of how the political agenda of identity politics occludes critique of capitalism.

On the other side of the issue of feminist legalism and statism, while Yeatman and Tapper partly enjoin the arguments of Brown and Cocks in impugning various aspects of 'femocracy,' they nonetheless jointly insist that existing institutions and categories furnish feminism with its final political horizon, and that feminism's political agency be reigned to an essentially reformist posture. This prescription was shored up by their shared diagnosis of feminist radicalism—that which moves beyond wanting equal power within current conditions, that which antagonistically resists containment by liberalism's political protocols—as motivated by ressentiment. However, on the basis of the distinction we discerned earlier between two modalities in the politicisation of ressentiment, let us register that accepting this political horizon would not, as these theorists contend, spell a break with the politics of ressentiment, but rather an acceptance of the kinds of incremental benefits that diversion and containment of ressentiment may bring.

Beyond this formal point regarding how the concept of re LLsentiment should apply to the question of reformism lies a more substantive point pertaining to feminism’s ability to constructively ameliorate re LLsentiment when it does impose reform upon the existing order. The political work of feminism, like that of other emancipatory movements, has always at least two kinds of task. There is the task of cultivating, through collective engagement and debate, a reflexive political imagination willing to ask how the world has become what is it and capable of envisioning the world otherwise. And there is the task of designing particular politics projects which can serve more immediately to improve the present conditions of women’s lives. On my view, ‘feminist politics’ is the vital effect of the dialogue, disjunctures and confluences between the two. The main problem with the will to reign feminism’s political agency to a reformist or ‘insider’ posture is that the dialogue between these two levels is either muted or becomes one-sided. With this posture, the question as to what kind of challenge feminism poses, or needs to pose, to the existing order is closed down to the extent that basic (although at times unmarked) allegiance to this order is pledged. While keeping this point in mind, the main strength of reformism in relation to re LLsentiment should not escape our notice.

Let us recall that Brown’s account of re LLsentiment cut new ground where it discerned that re LLsentiment may be regarded as an effect of particular configurations of power. In Chapter 4 I referred to this moment in Brown’s analysis as a ‘sociology’ of re LLsentiment, a term I drew from Max Scheler’s work on the concept of re LLsentiment. I wish to draw attention now to Scheler’s having placed “woman” at the top of his list of “typically recurrent situations” in social life which are “charged with the danger of re LLsentiment”.\(^\text{19}\) Scheler’s

\(^{19}\text{Scheler, Ressentiment, 38. Emphasis in original. In attending to women’s relationships with re LLsentiment in this way, Scheler echoes several insights drawn from Nietzsche: his association of women with the circumstance of the slave (see, for example, BGE: 261,}
account of women's rencentiment is by no means pro- or proto-feminist, but in this account he offers an important point which speaks to our interest in rencentiment and feminist reformism:

The danger of feminine rencentiment is extraordinarily intensified because both nature and custom impose upon woman a reactive and passive role in love, the domain of her most vital interest. Feelings of revenge born of rejection in the erotic sphere are always particularly subject to repression, for communication and recriminations are barred by pride and modesty. Besides, there is no tribunal which repairs such injuries, provided they violate no civil rights. It must be added that women are forced to great reserve by stronger barriers of convention and modesty.20

Scheler's naturalisation of women's "passive role in love" is clearly problematic, as are other elements of his portrait of "feminine rencentiment". But the point of greatest interest to us in this passage is the connection Scheler draws between the role of social convention in forcing women to "great reserve"—codes of modesty which 'deny the true reaction, that of deeds'—and the potentially ameliorative part a "tribunal" might play in countering such reserve and enabling reparation of injury.

It seems reasonable to suggest that the kinds of legislative reforms feminists have argued for, often successfully, over the last thirty years or so—for example, in the areas of sexual harassment, sexual violence, sexual discrimination, reproductive rights, equal opportunity, affirmative action,

GOM: III, 14); his observation that bourgeois sexual morality curtails female eroticism for the benefit of men (see, for example, GS: 71); and his association of rencentiment with circumstances of maximum repression. For a valuable elaboration of 'feminine rencentiment' which builds on Scheler's account see Kathleen Streip, 'Psychoanalysis, Humor and Ressentiment,' Paragraph 14 (1991): 171-183 and "Just a Cérébrale"; Jean Rhys, women's humor, and rencentiment,' Representations 45 (Winter 1994): 117-144.


20Scheler, Ressentiment, 43. My emphasis.
employment entitlements such as paid parental leave, and a variety welfare benefits—may be conceptualised as counter-forces to *ressentiment* insofar as they seek to open up courses of action (‘deeds’), devise means of reparation, and articulate entitlements that women can pursue individually. This returns us to the point made in Chapter 2 regarding sexual harassment codes and victim identity. The notion that such codes invite women to indulge passivity is least plausible when we consider that these codes are designed to open formal avenues of agentic action where previously such avenues were lacking. We may note too that this point highlights the idea that feminism’s relationship with *ressentiment* is at least twofold. Feminist reformism, as it is interpreted here, represents one of two modalities in the politicisation of *ressentiment*, and at the same time works amelioratively ‘against’ *ressentiment*. Feminist reformism is a diversion and containment of *ressentiment* in the sense that it agrees to make feminism’s potentially indigestible hopes over into digestible, codifiable complaint. But in so doing it carves out ways in which those circumstances which can incite *ressentiment* within the lives of individual women—employer harassment and discrimination, experiences of sexual violence and spousal violence, unwanted pregnancy, limited access to education and so forth—may be actively addressed and potentially redressed.

Still working from Nietzsche’s characterisation of legalism, we may surmise that the strength of reformism nonetheless is attended by certain significant weaknesses. Reformism, read through Nietzsche’s formulation, presents a ‘solution’ for the powerful—it bends but does not break the presiding hegemonic powers. It makes radical instability over into constitutive instability. It also involves a loss of control over how women’s ‘needs’ are codified, re-presented and administered by law and state policy and, as Brown and Cocks warn, proceeds at the cost of legitimating and abetting judicial and state power. So quite apart from the idea that reformism
draws its traction from the prospect that a more radical threat could be posed, and even as we recognise its potentially ameliorative responsiveness to ressentiment, we have good reason not to construe reformism as a political end in itself, as feminism’s final political horizon. But Brown provides further reason still with her argument that, in liberal democratic settings, reformist postures forfeit a good measure of “political freedom” when they direct their ire exclusively toward state social policy and the law, eluding direct engagement with the social and economic arrangements of capitalism.21 In bringing this argument of Brown’s back into focus now, I will suggest that in discerning the extent to which identity politics—which she locates as an essentially reformist posture—eludes engagement with capitalism, Brown ‘updates’ Nietzsche’s account of how presiding powers can work to diffuse the threat of ressentiment by diverting it from direct challenge to its most potent sources.

One of the most important matters Brown raises with regard to identity politics is that it may be read as a mode of political expression through which “markers of social difference” are made to “bear all the weight of the sufferings produced by capitalism” (Brown includes those of economic stratification, alienation, commodification, exploitation and displacement).22 As Rosemary Hennessey elaborates Brown’s point, “identity politics suppresses the potential to name and know capitalism’s deprivations.”23 We saw in Chapter 4 that Brown’s portrait of the late-modern liberal subject as seething with ressentiment is informed by the idea that capitalism, working in concert with neoliberal discourses of individual self-making and responsibility, acts as a potent source of ressentiment.24 Hence an important element of

21 Brown, States of Injury, xi.
22 Ibid., 60.
23 Hennessey, Profit and Pleasure, 227.
24 Brown, States of Injury, 69.
Brown’s argument is that identity politics is animated in part by *ressentiments* incited by capitalism, but works to divert this component of its animus away from its ‘source,’ directing it instead toward claims on the state to recognise orders of injury pertaining to socio-political exclusion and cultural invisibility. Such claims are likely to have economically redistributive effects, but stand nonetheless as claims in which “sufferings produced by capitalism” assume an unmarked and unarticulated presence. Hence Brown, and Hennessey after her, suggest that we regard identity politics as a kind of political fetishism wherein inclusive, recognitive validation within the liberal polis is the ersatz, traded for an undoubtedly more arduous reckoning with capitalism.25

This insight revises Nietzsche’s formulation, in which a singular formation, “the powerful,” recast the character of rule so as contain the *ressentiment* of an asymmetrically opposing formation, “the weaker powers”.26 Brown’s version of this dynamic sees identity politics marshalling a broad and complex array of sufferings into a single category of suffering, excluded difference, asking that liberalism answer wrongs of disenfranchisement and, in shaping the claim in this way, enabling the blows of liberalism’s companion power, capitalism, to be obscured as social and economic policy are symbolically, and conveniently, divorced. When this element of Brown’s account is read in the light of Nietzsche’s formulation of legalism, it is clear that Brown observes and presents a more complex

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26GOM: II, 11.
arrangement than does Nietzsche. Yet the principle remains the same: *ressentiment* is diverted, made digestible, its threat contained.

In elucidating capitalism’s deprivations, and taking care to avoid positing an authentic subject of need, both Brown and Hennessey express concerns centred on how these deprivations determine and diminish contemporary prospects for self-sustenance, self-making and self-legislation, creating what Brown refers to as an “unparalleled individual powerlessness over the fate and direction of one’s own life”. Brown notes that advanced capitalism’s processes of commodification work increasingly to dictate and to discipline, rather than simply meet, individual and sub-individual needs, wants, desires, preferences and tastes. ‘Lifestyles’ and forms of selfhood increasingly are articulated by and through processes of commodification. Hennessey treads a broader ground, encompassing generic deprivations which attend the commodification of labour power and referring also to those introduced through minimum wage setting, longer working hours, high levels of unemployment and cuts to health and welfare provision, through to the proliferation of regulations for personnel conduct which demand particular forms of emotional labour.

Building on Brown’s account, and providing a window onto capitalism’s generation of *ressentiment*, Hennessey explains that the companion to capitalism’s production of surplus value is “the production of outlawed

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need”. Capitalist arrangements forge distinctions between “allowed and illegitimate needs”, accumulating a ground of “unmet needs” which form capitalism’s “monstrous”, “unassimilable” yet “necessary” outside. Outlawed needs assume a radical character since “they cannot be brought back into capitalism without abolishing the very terms of the extraction of surplus value.” Working heuristically from Marx’s identification of orders of human need and potential which are forfeited when labour power is exchanged for wages, Hennessey argues that “human capacities for sensation and affect”—no less than needs for “food, clothing, housing, health care, education, and time for intellectual and creative development”—be regarded as a primary domain subject to the outlawing of need. Given Hennessey’s overall task to provide a political economy of sexuality which delineates the relation between commodity capitalism, heteronormativity, and the historical production of sexual identities, she includes “sex-affective potentials” within this order of human capacities for sensation and affect. In other words, Hennessey seeks to articulate capital’s unarticulated place within identity politics centred on issues of gender and sexuality.

In pointing to these orders of deprivation, both theorists succeed in making strange the fact that identity politics—focused as it is on social injury and exclusion and on the prospect of inclusive recognition, directed as it is toward law and social policy rather than economic policy—is, as Brown puts

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29Hennessey, Profit and Pleasure, 216. In making this argument Hennessey draws on an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Deborah Kelsh, Desire and Class: the knowledge industry in the wake of poststructuralism (The University at Albany, SUNY, 2000).
30Hennessey, Profit and Pleasure, 228.
31Ibid., 228.
33Ibid., 217.
it, "the dominant political expression of the age".\textsuperscript{34} Identity politics addresses, in an unmarked fashion, the sufferings which attend the outlawing of need, but does so in a way that obscures the mechanisms through which need is outlawed—the extraction of surplus value being primary among these mechanisms. Neither Brown nor Hennessey trivialise identity politics' construction of exclusion as social injury, nor do they underestimate the gains identity politics has achieved, the radical significance of which are clear when we consider the wars over 'political correctness' this political form brought on and the far right animus it has stirred. Rather, their concerns centre on the implications of maintaining political quietism in relation to capitalism, of perpetuating the "inarticulateness of class".\textsuperscript{35}

The suggestion which remains implicit in Brown’s account but is made explicit in Hennessey's is that the most urgent and certainly the most arduous task facing contemporary feminist politics, and emancipatory politics more generally, is that of (re) politicising capitalism. Hennessey argues that the politicisation of identities be reoriented "to begin with human needs" so that the articulation of identities through processes of commodification is lent centrality, and the question as to "how affect accompanies and is organised" by these processes is addressed.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34}Brown, States of Injury, 74.
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{36}Hennessey, Profit and Pleasure, 224, 214. It should be noted that the kind of project Hennessey sketches here has found a strong beginning in the global justice or anti-capitalist movement. The connection is especially clear when we consider that one of the main slogans of this movement is 'human need not corporate greed.' The vast numbers of women involved in this movement (women made up well over half the total of 20,000 delegates at the European Social Forum in Florence, December 2002) has effected a revitalisation of feminist activism, and has ensured the movement's attentiveness to the ways in which global capital's shifts in labour relations impact women's lives. In this regard, women's overrepresentation in the informal sector and as workers in free trade zones are of central concern, as is the global sex trade. For an account of this see Chapter 4 of David McNally's book Another World is Possible: globilisation and anti-capitalism (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2002), 96-146, and Carolyn Egan and Michelle Robidoux, 'Women,' in Anti-Capitalism: a guide to the movement, eds. Susan George, George Monbiot, Lindsey German, Teresa Hayter, Alex Callinicos and Kim Moody (London: Bookmarks, 2001), 81-92. Another relevant text here is Angela McRobbie's 'Bridging the Gap: feminism, fashion and consumption,' Feminist Review 55
Importantly for our purposes, Hennessey conceives of this reorientation as one in which "desire, fear, anger, and resistance" might be "marshalled for social movement."37 But in sketching the process of "disidentification" which will enable the reorientation she beckons, Hennessey is guided by Brown's characterisation of ressentiment as a purely resubordinative configuration of affect:

Disidentification is a practice of working on existing ways of identifying that we embrace and live by. This "work" is a process of unlearning that opens up the identities we take for granted to the historical conditions that make them possible. It involves uprooting these identities not just from ways of thinking that invite us to construe them as natural but also from a history of suffering—the fertile ground for resentment to grow—and resituating how we know them in a different historical frame, a frame that allows us to see how this suffering is the product of a mode of production that outlaws a whole array of human needs. The disidentifying subject ... replaces the narrow resentment of identity politics with the potentially much more powerful and monstrous collective opposition of all capitalism's disenfranchised subjects.38

On the basis of the interpretation of ressentiment offered in this part of the dissertation, the process of disidentification Hennessey describes would in fact be one of resisting the diversion and containment of ressentiment so as to kindle its furthest, most creative, and most threatening political reach, rather than one of "replacing" ressentiment with an alternative order of affect. Having registered this point, let me note that on my view the political direction Hennessey pursues from Brown's account, most notably its

(1997): 73-89. McRobbie argues that feminist accounts which emphasise the forms of pleasure and power made available to women through the practice of conspicuous consumption (see, for example, Mica Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal: women, the city, and the department store,' in Modern Times: reflections on a century of English modernity, ed. Mica Nava [London: Routledge, 1996]) do so in a manner which serves to maintain the invisibility of the off-shore women workers whose increasingly under-paid labour produces the fashion goods which inspire such pleasure and power.

37Hennessey, Profit and Pleasure, 214.
38Ibid., 229.
willingness to interrogate the nexus of affect, identity, commodification and politicisation, is highly suggestive and worthy of endorsement.

6.2 Ressentiment and asceticism

This section addresses the second strategy identified in Nietzsche's *Genealogy* as providing a solution to the threat of *ressentiment* from below. This strategy, religious asceticism, connects directly to the matter of self-blame which has been raised at various points throughout the dissertation, most notably Chapters 2 and 4. The strategy involves a preeminent but curious figure in the *Genealogy*: the ascetic priest. The ascetic priest is curious for his liminal position between master and slave. He hosts "a *ressentiment* without equal", which positions him as the ultimate slave, yet his "will to power [is] in tact", he exhibits "mastery", and he "despises more readily than [he] hates", all of which suggests that the ascetic priest is a kind of noble. And where Nietzsche insists that master and slave are bound to misunderstand one another given that their relation situates their respective realities as fundamentally incommensurable, he associates the ascetic priest with an ability to prevail equally within, and mediate between, slavish and noble spheres: he is at once "profoundly related to the sick" and able to "walk among the other beasts of prey with bearlike seriousness and feigned superiority."³⁹

For our purposes, the key aspect of this liminal figure is the labour he performs when he achieves "*dominion over the suffering*".⁴⁰ The ascetic priest "defends his herd ... [a]gainst the healthy", but he also discourages the herd from "envy of the healthy", and this latter element of his labour is the key to the priest's ability to stabilise and maintain the power relationship and

³⁹GOM: III, 15.
“segregation” between ‘sick’ and ‘healthy.’ The “essential art” and “supreme utility” of the priest, Nietzsche writes, is that in his dominion over the suffering he effectively “alters the direction of ressentiment.” In so doing, the priest provides a solution for the powerful to the threat of ressentiment from below:

“I suffer: someone must be to blame for it”—thus thinks every sickly sheep. But his shepherd, the ascetic priest, tells him: “Quite so, my sheep! someone must be to blame for it: but you yourself are this someone, you alone are to blame for it—you alone are to blame for yourself!”—This is brazen and false enough: but one thing at least is achieved by it, the direction of ressentiment is altered … You will guess what, according to my idea, the curative instinct of life has at least attempted through the ascetic priest, and why it required for a time the tyranny of such paradoxical concepts as “guilt,” “sin,” “sinfulness,” “depravity,” “damnation”: to render the sick to a certain degree harmless, to work the self-destruction of the incurable, to direct the ressentiment of the less severely afflicted sternly back upon themselves (“one thing is needful”—and in this way to exploit the bad instincts of all sufferers for the purposes of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming.

To induce the slave to self-blame, the priest redirects the slave’s ressentiment back onto himself—a substantially greater solution than that provided by law. This redirection reintroduces a spiritualised species of self-loathing which renders the slave “harmless”.

The priest directs the sufferer to seek the cause of his suffering “in himself, in some guilt, in a piece of the past” such that he will understand his suffering “as punishment.” The “invalid”, Nietzsche writes, is thereby “transformed into ‘the sinner.’” Nietzsche goes on to enumerate a range of

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41 GOM: III, 15.
42 GOM: III, 15.
43 GOM: III, 15, 16.
labours the priest performs under the aegis of this interweaving of suffering, guilt and sin, each of which are attuned to dispelling the slave’s potentially unruly “discontent with his lot” by encouraging him toward the kind of obedience which promises safe passage to a higher afterlife. The slave thereby is separated from the capacity for unruly activity ressentiment lends in its explosive stage, and his newfound capacity to imagine that the world could be otherwise is spiritualised in anticipation of a righteous afterlife. When the priest is not administering guilt, he displays “ingenuity in name-changing and rebaptising” to make the slaves “see benefits and a relative happiness in things they formerly hated”—most notably, the compulsory undertaking of work. In short, the role of the priest—and, indeed, of religion in general—is to contain the explosive property of ressentiment by returning the slave to a form of obedience underpinned by a reinterpretation of his suffering as punishment, a source of guilt, a testimony to his sinfulness, and as a circumstance to be endured in the name of a higher, transcendental and ultimately redemptive purpose. Hence Nietzsche presents the priest as an essentially contradictory character who represents “life against life”: he works on behalf of ‘life’ in maintaining a social order which segregates the ‘sick’ from the ‘healthy,’ but he does so by intensifying the sickness of the sick.

The general point we can draw from the priest, then, is that the way to effectively disarm ressentiment is to make it blame itself, turn it back on itself, compel it into a self-lacerative and resubordinative cast of introspection. Indeed, it seems that priestly asceticism may be regarded as

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46GOM: III, 18.
47GOM: III, 18.
48Nietzsche observes that the ascetic priest is not specific to Christianity: “consider how regularly and universally the ascetic priest appears in almost every age; he belongs to no one race; he prospers everywhere; he emerges from every class of society.” GOM: III, 11.
the ultimate incarnation of the concept of victim precipitation. For our purposes, two related points regarding the relationship between feminism and ressentiment emerge in view of this strategy. The first point has to do with how we might reconsider the intra-feminist debate about feminism and the category 'victim,' particularly the popular incarnation of this debate examined in Part 1, in view of the role of asceticism in redirecting ressentiment. As against the idea that this debate represents a timely reckoning with outmoded and ineffectual dimensions of feminist politics, what I want to suggest is that this debate may instead be interpreted as a moment in feminist history when feminist ressentiment was turned back on itself, a moment in which those engaged in feminist politics were encouraged to entertain a self-lacerative cast of introspection. A moment, that is, in which the threat of feminist-led social change—intensified as feminist politics reckoned with its own exclusionary practices and sought not only to address issues of gender but of race, ethnicity, nationalism, sexuality, and ability—had been deeply felt.

Let us recall from Part 1 the main line of argument aired in the more publicly visible domain of this debate: that feminist radicalism must be countered owing to its having manufactured a false impression of the world as a place in which women continue to be systematically disadvantaged and, in disseminating this impression, its having produced the victims it would represent. The "false and brazen" words of the priest—'you yourself are to blame'—resound through this argument, and resound as well in the secular asceticisms called up in support of it: traditional rape law's regime of victim-blame, which promises to stem feminism's tide of 'unworthy' victims, and neoliberal individualism, through which women's aggregate lower socio-economic status can be explained as a failure to 'take responsibility' and, according to Naomi Wolf's formulation, a failure to develop an appropriate 'psychology' of wealth. The priest is present too in this argument's rebaptising
of the presiding hegemonic powers—liberalism and capitalism—as the true seats of freedom. This suggests that the accounts examined in Part 1 may be read not as attempts to break with what Hoff Sommers referred to as the “unwholesome passion” of resentment, but rather as an attempt to disarm it, to separate it from what it can do.\(^{50}\)

The second point which emerges in view of the operation of asceticism centres on the idea that Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* itself can be made to operate in a priestly fashion. In making this point I wish to illuminate a risk which attends the diagnostic use of the concept of *ressentiment*, as in the accounts examined in Part 2. I want to suggest that where Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* is employed diagnostically, and where such diagnosis upholds Nietzsche’s condemnatory attitude toward *ressentiment*, a risk is introduced whereby the concept of *ressentiment* may be lent the capacity to induce in the object of diagnosis precisely the form of disarming, self-surveillant, self-lacerative introspection Nietzsche associates with priestly asceticism. Emancipatory political movements are vulnerable to this inducement given that self-loathing and self-blame are typically constitutive elements of unfreedom. Such movements require clearly drawn distinctions between productive reflexivity and resubordinative self-blame, distinctions which remain unarticulated in the accounts of feminist *ressentiment* we examined.

To flesh out this idea of the concept of *ressentiment* operating in a priestly fashion, I want to offer a rather extreme but especially clear example, drawn from Max Scheler’s work on *ressentiment*. Scheler’s work is useful in illuminating a sociological approach to *ressentiment*, but troubling for its intense conservatism. Scheler notes that *ressentiment* is “chiefly confined to

\(^{50}\)Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?*, 21.
those who serve and are dominated", those who "fruitlessly resent the sting of
authority."\textsuperscript{51} Their resentment is "fruitless" because, according to Scheler:

... it is false to interpret legal inequality as the imperfect expression of
an underlying ideal of equal rights, which is perverted by factual
power relations. Quite on the contrary, every factual legal equality
conceals a basis of inequality of rightful claims which is founded on
the unchangeable natural difference between "slaves" and "free
men".\textsuperscript{52}

For Scheler, those who serve and are dominated become vulnerable to the
"inner venom of ressentiment" when they harbour thoughts of resistance.\textsuperscript{53} To
prevent being engulfed by ressentiment, Scheler advises, the dominated must
vent their spleen, but this venting must assume a particular form. In the
case of the "ill-treated servant", for example, rather than assume the form of
publicly dissonant speech which openly reckons with the master, the servant
must "vent his spleen in the antechamber" (as distinct from the parlour).\textsuperscript{54}
This way, ressentiment can be bypassed and the natural order of things
maintained. Like the priest, Scheler aims to 'redirect' the unruly affective
forces emanating from the dominated. But where the priest induces obedience
by introducing the prospect of guilt before god and by presenting disobedience
as a path to damnation, Scheler aims to induce obedience by introducing the
prospect of guilt before nature and by presenting disobedience as a path to
ressentiment—which, he insists, is "incurable".\textsuperscript{55} Hence the concept of
ressentiment itself is made to assume the role that the concept of 'sin' plays in
priestly asceticism, thus producing a second order asceticism which proceeds
diagnostically.

\textsuperscript{51}Max Scheler, Ressentiment, 31.
\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 31. Richard Ira Sugarman also draws attention to this moment in Scheler's
account, Rancor Against Time, 40.
\textsuperscript{55}Max Scheler, Ressentiment, 6.
In the context of Scheler's study, radical bids for emancipation are conceived of as roads to ressentiment, meaning that he uses the concept of ressentiment to delegitimate in advance the publicly voiced complaints of those whose lives are in large part and in non-trivial ways determined by the wills of others. Although published in 1915, Scheler's account echoes contemporary claims which cast radical political postures as outside the purview of public reason in being governed by negative emotions which ought to be vented privately. Examples include the claim that protestations of economic inequality are animated by the 'politics of envy,' that feminism is ultimately an exercise in 'man-hating,' that anti-racism asks for the inversely racist 'special treatment' of non-white persons, and that 'political correctness' is an exercise in unjustified sanctimony. Current trends in international political discourse serve to provide further examples of this. In a recent BBC interview, Britain's State Secretary for Trade and Industry claimed that refugee camps host "swarms" of "discontented, resentful people" and, as such, are "hotbeds for terrorism". With this comment, the sources of resentment—poverty, displacement, dispossession, grief—are effectively obscured while fear of the resentful is encouraged and actions which may be regarded as motivated by resentment are lent advance delegitimation—in this case as part of an argument for state terrorism, for the Secretary was defending the United States congress decision to permit its president to engage an act of war in the absence of a United Nations mandate.

\[56\]This formed an important theme in Australian Prime Minister John Howard's electoral campaign in 1998, from which this phrase 'politics of envy' is drawn. In one of the more memorable media moments of this campaign, Howard mistook the price tag on a Land Rover as the total cost of the vehicle rather than the minimum deposit required to buy it. The apparently cheap price provided Howard with occasion to impugn the 'politics of envy' animating the claim that his government's neoliberal economic policy drive had precipitated a rise in the cost of living and increased economic inequality. With the cameras of every major Australian mass media outlet rolling, Howard argued that, as the price of the Land Rover evinced, the good life was available to all hard-working Australians. He stood by his point when later informed of the actual price of the vehicle.

\[57\]BBC Interview, February 5, 2003.
It is clear that a very different set of political sensibilities to those of Scheler attend the accounts of feminist *ressentiment* examined in Part 2. I do not claim that those accounts rehearse the moves Scheler makes. Rather, in illuminating these moves, I offer the more narrow point that one risks trading on this second-order asceticism in setting *ressentiment* up as an essentially 'undemocratic' mode of political expression, rendering it a kind of political damnation—a “dead end” as Cocks put it. According to the interpretation offered here, *ressentiment* is ‘undemocratic,’ but it is so only in the sense that it arises from and rails against democracy's failures. One of contemporary feminism's greatest strengths is its intelligence for auto-critique, and feminism does indeed require a political imagination reflexive enough to discern the ways in which emancipatory political projects entertain reactive, regressive and mimetic postures. But, as Nietzsche's account of asceticism indicates, self-blame can be just such a posture. For this reason I suggest that we assume critical distance from the notion that overcoming *ressentiment* involves ‘taking responsibility,’ and be equipped to discern the point at which resubordinative self-blame is ‘rebaptised’ in discourses of responsibility, including feminist ones. Perhaps what is required is a certain restlessness in blaming. Nietzsche identifies the concept of blame as one of the innovations of slave morality, and laments the grammar it imposes on human action. But for emancipatory purposes the key offering of the concept of blame is that it enables one to imagine self and world otherwise. We would do well to retain this imaginary while holding its resubordinative tendencies in check.

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6.3 Emasculation and the direction of ressentiment

In this final section of the chapter, I wish to impose a qualification upon the positive reading of ressentiment offered in this part of the dissertation, and in so doing point out a further labour the concept of ressentiment might in future perform for feminist theory, a labour which pertains to theorising violence against women. So far I have not drawn attention to the role gendered metaphorics play in Nietzsche's account of ressentiment, but these metaphorics form the backdrop for the point I wish to make here. By 'gendered metaphorics' I refer in this case to Nietzsche's conception of ressentiment as a form of emasculation, a conception made explicit when he describes ressentiment as a “shameful emasculation of feeling”. Deleuze reasserts this characterisation when he ascribes to ressentiment a “dreadful feminine power”. It appears that part of Nietzsche's objection to ressentiment is that it feminises 'man' and, as such, threatens to close the distance between the sexes—an objection which of course relies on a reified representation of women as the 'weaker sex'. It also appears that Nietzsche's account of the struggle between master and slave contains a particular and perhaps peculiarly modern narrative of masculinity, and may in part be read as a story about the dynamics of gender relations among men, no less than as a highly useful account of the dynamics of power which illuminates key aspects of the exercise of rule and the circumstance of being ruled.

When introducing Nietzsche's Genealogy at the beginning of Chapter 5, I noted that part of the drama of this text is that it places moderns as the heirs of slave morality, cut off from the masterful ancients and left to consider

59 GOM: III, 14.
60 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 119.
61 I draw this notion of 'gender relations among men' from R. W. Connell's arguments regarding the operations of hegemonic masculinity in his book Masculinities (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), see especially Chapter 3, 67-96.
whether and how this chasm may be breached. Let us now briefly consider the extent to which this circumstance may be regarded as sexually specific. In the *Genealogy*’s drama modernity is cast as a time in which the “good man” holds the “man in man” to ransom, making the generation of a “man who will justify man” ever less likely. Through the workings of *ressentiment* as an instrument of culture, the consummate masculinity of the original nobles has been eroded, its signature capacities for evaluative autarchy and spontaneity of action thwarted by slavish logics. This form of masculinity was never available to all men. On the contrary, through its exercise as a mode of form-imposing rule, a majority of men are enslaved, made “impotent”, separated from what they can do, made to occupy a starting position of emasculate weakness. According to the terms set out in the *Genealogy*, slave revolt serves to *generalise* this condition of emasculation, and as such has served to generate a democratic political culture which exhibits “unmanly tenderness”.

In other words, a strand of Nietzsche’s telling sees the dynamics which unfold between master and slave encompass a process of emasculation and counter-emasculcation, a process in which the *ressentiment* of the slaves appears as an expression and an effect of emasculation which threatens to emasculate in turn. These gendered metaphorics inform the *Genealogy*’s task to observe and present a dilemma regarding how a “man who justifies man” will find conditions of possibility given the emasculated state of modern man, a state in which “maggot man” prevails. Let us register the discernible rapport between this dilemma and the circumstance into which Dostoevsky

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62It is worth noting that, in BGE, Nietzsche casts the fight for women’s rights as an effect of this condition of masculine decadence: “That woman ventures forth when the aspect of man that inspires fear—let us say more precisely, when the man in man is no longer desired or cultivated—that is fair enough, also comprehensible enough.” BGE: 339.

63BGE: 202.

64GOM: I, 11.
casts the anti-hero of *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov “wanted to be a Napoleo...n or not, it must be because I felt clearly that I was not a Napoleo...n.” Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Jessie Coulson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 [originally published 1866]), 401. The deed Raskolnikov refers to is his murder of the money lender. Raskolnikov also murders her sister on account of the latter's accidental witnessing of the crime.

66The dossier on Nietzsche's encounter with Dostoevsky's work, which he began to read while still working on the *Genealogy*, includes his Letter to Overbeck, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Penguin, 1982), 454-455 and his reference to Dostoevsky as “the only psychologist...from whom I had anything to learn” in TI: 45.


68Penelope Deutscher also suggests that misogyny be read as a form of *ressentiment*, “Is it not remarkable that Nietzsche...should have hated Rousseau?”, 178. In making this point Deutscher draws attention to Nietzsche’s own impugnation of misogyny in D: IV, 346.
between 'men' and 'women'. In other words, a further modality in the direction of ressentiment can be discerned here, a modality which sees the ressentiments which attend emasculation directed at women rather than toward constructive transformation of their source: relations of power among men.

In questioning Nietzsche's condemnatory attitude toward ressentiment I have sought to press against the idea that ressentiment should be regarded as 'bad.' I do accept, however, that ressentiment is 'bad' when it accepts an ersatz object upon which to spend its anger and redistribute its pain—that is, when it is diverted from the task of constructively transforming the conditions under which it has been produced. This qualification delivers in turn a suggestion regarding a further labour the concept of ressentiment might perform for feminist theory. The suggestion is that this notion of a ressentiment redirected toward an ersatz object has explanatory power for feminist theorisations of male violence.69 This is why an epigraph from Joyce's Dubliners appears at the beginning of this chapter. Mr Farrington, the character whose emotional barometer is "set for a spell of riot", experiences severe humiliation at the hands of his rank-pulling boss. Lacking alternatives, and lacking the imagination for alternatives, Farrington spends his rage in the private sphere, where his wife and sons act, to recall Nietzsche's phrase, as "drainage ditches" for his affects.70 Farrington, in short, suffered an intensely emasculating experience, and sought to restore his sense of masculinity by perpetrating violence upon those whom he was free to dominate, upon those marked as even more powerless than he.

If this suggestion is right, then we can discern a second sense in which feminism works 'against' ressentiment. Firstly, as I have argued, in a general

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69 Lynne Segal's discussion of male violence suggests that this kind of redistributive manoeuvre is a key dynamic, Slow Motion: changing masculinities, changing men (London: Virago Press, 1990), 207-271.
70 BGE: 260.
sense feminism works against ressentiment to the extent that ressentiment is a political force which always works against itself when it seeks at best to force change upon the configurations of power which condition its production. The ‘aim’ of ressentiment is to transform the conditions under which it is produced. Secondly, in view of the connection drawn here between masculinity, violence and the redirection of ressentiment, we can discern that a more particular line of feminist movement proceeds against ressentiment as it is produced within gender relations among men, and as it is vented ‘outside’ of these relations.

Conclusion
The critical re-reading of the concept of ressentiment I have offered has sought to demonstrate that this concept does indeed aid our understanding of feminist politics, but that this understanding need not proceed along the lines of negative intra-feminist diagnosis, nor shore up a jettisoning of ressentiment as its goal. In the Genealogy, Nietzsche spends his praise on the noble and, in a more conflicted manner, the ascetic priest, reserving his spleen for the slave. But once we look behind this ostensibly stable Pro and Con and take in the full view of Nietzsche’s account of the dynamic struggle between master and slave, we can see that, if it manages to remain shameless, ressentiment is an affective venue which can enable the relatively powerless to craft the very kind of positive political capacity that Brown’s account of feminist ressentiment beckons: the capacity to “conjure an imagined future of power to make itself.” On my reading, this process does indeed centrally involve the category ‘victim,’ but does so in a manner which situates this category not as an end in itself, but as a vehicle through which socio-political being may be

71Brown, States of Injury, 66.
opened to contingency. In this sense, the category 'victim' may be regarded not as inimical to agency, but as a source of agency.

By Nietzsche's own account, ressentiment represents the slave's potential passage out of the social fate assigned to him, and in this sense may be interpreted as an effect of domination which can become an effective weapon against domination. In view of this, overcoming ressentiment most certainly should be feminism's goal, but such overcoming should not be construed as a matter of switching political strategies so as to locate a feminism that is 'without ressentiment'. Overcoming ressentiment requires the perhaps less enticing and certainly more arduous task of redressing those configurations of power which incite noncreative ressentiment most powerfully. This in turn entails discerning how best to direct ressentiment, how best to keep it creative, enervated, courageous, imaginative and productively reflexive, how best to resist those who would contain it and, given that political struggle is not the chosen life work of all, how to judge when to broker compromises that will not eclipse the ability to envisage a time when neither feminism nor its particular repertoire of ressentiments will be needed.
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