

Journal of Feminist Scholarship

Volume 4
Issue 4 Spring 2013


Article 5

Spring 2013

Third Wave Feminism's Unhappy Marriage of Poststructuralism and Intersectionality Theory

Susan Archer Mann
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jfs>

 Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Law and Gender Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Mann, Susan A.. 2018. "Third Wave Feminism's Unhappy Marriage of Poststructuralism and Intersectionality Theory." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 4 (Spring): 54-73.
<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jfs/vol4/iss4/5>

This Viewpoint is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

Third Wave Feminism's Unhappy Marriage of Poststructuralism and Intersectionality Theory

Cover Page Footnote

The author wishes to thank Oxford University Press for giving her permission to draw from Chapters 1, 5, 6, 7, and the Conclusion of *Doing Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity* (2012).

VIEWPOINT

Third Wave Feminism's Unhappy Marriage of Poststructuralism and Intersectionality Theory

Susan Archer Mann, University of New Orleans

Abstract: This article first traces the history of unhappy marriages of disparate theoretical perspectives in US feminism. In recent decades, US third-wave authors have arranged their own unhappy marriage in that their major publications reflect an attempt to wed poststructuralism with intersectionality theory. Although the standpoint epistemology of intersectionality theory shares some common ground with the epistemology of poststructuralism, their epistemological assumptions conflict on a number of important dimensions. This contested terrain has generated serious debates within the third wave and between second- and third-wave feminists. The form, content, and political implications of their “unhappy marriage” are the subject of this article.

Keywords: third-wave feminism, feminist theory, feminist epistemology

Copyright by Susan Archer Mann

Introduction

US feminism has a long history of living through unhappy marriages. In the nineteenth century the doctrine of coverture governed marriage laws across most of the United States. Under this doctrine, once a man and women married they were considered one before the law. This “one” was the husband who controlled the property and income of the household and had the right to chastise his wife and children. The famous “Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments,” established in 1848 at the first women’s rights conference in the United States, directly attacked this doctrine. It enumerated various ways in which men established “tyranny” over women, including “taking from her all right to property, even to the wages she earns” and “making her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead” (Stanton [1848] 2005, 72).

Mirroring the doctrine of coverture, in the late twentieth century the term “unhappy marriage” virtually became a cliché for feminist theorists’ attempts to wed contradictory or disparate perspectives where one approach came to dominate the other. In the early 1980s, Heidi Hartmann referred to the “unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism” to criticize how Marxism (like the husband) dominated feminism (the wife) because class trumped gender in Marxist feminists’ understanding of women’s oppression (Hartmann 1981). In the early 1990s, Cheshire Calhoun discussed the “unhappy marriage of feminist theory and lesbian theory” in her critique of how patriarchy was given greater salience than heterosexism in second-wave radical feminism ([1994] 2003). These feminist critiques were leveled against hierarchicalizing oppressions or treating one form of oppression as more important than another. Both Hartmann and Calhoun urged feminists to clearly distinguish between different forms of oppression and not to treat one form as simply derivative of the other.

Controversies over hierarchicalizing forms of oppression are rare today, given the powerful impact of feminisms that focus on differences between women and the multiplicity of oppressions they experience. Key voices in the rise of this feminist scholarship of difference were those of US women of color who highlighted the “simultaneous” and “multiple” nature of oppressions as the “most significant contribution” of their

approach (Smith 1983, xxxii). Rudimentary forms of intersectional analysis existed during the first wave.¹ However, it was not until the second wave that this approach came to be known by a number of specific names, such as the women-of-color perspective (Moraga and Anzaldúa [1981] 1983); intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1989); and US Third World feminism (Sandoval [1991] 2003). Despite its long history, intersectional analysis—whether viewed as a theory, a method, a metaphor, and/or a politics—only began to gain hegemony in US feminist thought in the 1980s, following the publication of such signal works as the Combahee River Collective’s “Black Feminist Statement” (1977) and *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa ([1981] 1983).² Interestingly, it was second-wave women of color who first used the term “third wave” to distinguish their intersectional approach—although this particular moniker was seldom used (Springer 2002, 1063).

Other theoretical perspectives that became more prominent within US feminism in the 1980s and 1990s—postmodernist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial feminisms—also focused attention on polyvocality or the multiple voices generated by diverse vantage points on social reality (Grant 1993; Fuss 1989; Mohanty 1984). Like intersectionality theorists, they too ushered in calls to deconstruct essentialist conceptions of “woman” and to decenter feminisms that spoke only to the interests of women of privileged classes, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and/or global locations. All of these polyvocal feminisms rested on epistemologies that fundamentally challenged and shook the foundations of modern scientific thought. As a result, the former trend toward seeking universal “truths” and theoretical convergence gave way to the recognition of multiple “truths” and theoretical pluralism (Cheal 1991, 153). This momentous change is stated quite simply in the title of Sandra Harding’s influential book on feminist epistemologies, *Is Science Multicultural?* (1998).

A number of observers have referred to this focus on difference, deconstruction, and decentering as a “paradigm shift” in feminist thought because of its radical break with earlier feminisms (Barrett and Phillips 1992; Hekman 2004; Mann 2012). In their aptly titled book, *Destabilizing Theory*, Michèle Barrett and Ann Phillips write:

The founding principles of contemporary western feminism have been dramatically challenged with previous shared assumptions and unquestioned orthodoxies relegated almost to history. These changes have been of the order of a “paradigm shift,” in which assumptions rather than conclusions are radically overturned. (1992, 2)

Grounding the Paradigm Shift Socially

Toward a history of the vanishing present.

— Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*

The social grounding of this paradigm shift has both global and national dimensions. The rise of the scholarship of difference has been linked to new social movements that fostered the collapse of the Euro-American West’s hold on its colonial empires in the post–World War II era and sharpened conflicts *within* European and American societies. In the United States these conflicts spawned the anti–Vietnam war movement, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the lesbian and gay rights movement, and the Black, Red, and Brown power movements of African-Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos/as (Lemert 2004). Such attempts to decenter both the West globally and dominant groups within Western nations were important triggers for this paradigm shift.

Yet, in a more profound sense, the shift to a focus on difference, deconstruction, and decentering reflects the seismic changes in social conditions wrought by postmodernity (Mann 2012). Globalization and

digitalization have been signal features of this new world order. Not only has globalization unsettled and blurred national boundaries, but it has decentered the First World's industrial working class. In the face of the offshoring and outsourcing that accompanied increased US corporate investments abroad, the United States deindustrialized. Between 1965 and 1985 alone, the manufacturing share of US total employment was cut in half and real male wages experienced their sharpest reduction ever in a two-decade period when US gross domestic product was advancing (Thurow 1996, 223–24). In turn, US women entered the labor force in record numbers to buttress their household incomes. The rise in low-paying service jobs provided employment not only for US women, but also for large numbers of immigrants from Latin America and Asia. In the 1990s, over a million immigrants were entering the United States each year, with women making up an increasing percentage of this foreign labor (Macionis 2011). That feminists have been focusing more attention on race, ethnicity, and global location reflects the changing demographics of the US labor force, the feminization of migration, and the increasingly global nature of the division of labor (Mann and Huffman 2005).³

Marked advances in globalization were made possible by the growth of the new digital, microchip, and satellite technologies that annihilated previous barriers of time and space. These new technologies dramatically quicken the distribution of ideas, which flash by with a speed that makes them difficult to unpack. Moreover, their ability to create simulations and virtual realities blurs the lines between artifice and reality (Baudrillard 1983). In such a swirling sea of signs and symbols, it is no wonder that in many contemporary theories discourse appears to have inordinate power or that a major theoretical device used to decode such messages—deconstruction—has become a buzzword in social thought (Agger 1998, 125).

Although such technological developments have been ingenious, science and technology in general have been subjected to intense critical scrutiny by social theorists in recent decades. Their rational means, which earlier theorists claimed would promote social progress, created major risks that plague our planet today, such as environmental pollution and nuclear arms. As the irrationality of rationality became more visible, increasing skepticism was directed toward the rules governing scientific inquiry and what is deemed as credible knowledge. Feminist Jane Flax called this the “end of innocence” in terms of viewing science as the key to truth and social well-being (Flax 1992). Indeed, the deconstruction of science by new feminist epistemologies revealed the hidden fingerprints of power underlying scientific inquiries and engendered a radical uncertainty in regard to what constitutes “truth” and whose “truth” is privileged.

The latter topic is the primary subject of this article. The unhappy marriage examined here took place *after* this paradigm shift in feminist thought and was arranged by US feminist authors who published under the banner of the third wave. I call it the “unhappy marriage of poststructuralism and intersectionality theory” because these two perspectives, which inspired their writings, have conflicting epistemologies that make the marriage untenable.

Who Is the “Third Wave”?

I am the third wave...

— Rebecca Walker, “Becoming the Third Wave” (my emphasis)

In the 1990s, the US women's movement witnessed a resurgence of feminist activism and scholarship among a new generation of feminists so large and unexpected that some referred to it as a “genderquake” (Wolf 1994, 25). Although debates have ensued as to whether this resurgence of feminism constitutes a “new” wave (Berger 2006) or whether this oceanography of feminist waves is even useful (Mann 2012, xvii–xviii), the third wave has become the banner under which many women identify their new brand of feminism.⁴

Clearly, demarcating exactly who constitutes the third wave is not without difficulty. Its constituents have been referred to in myriad ways that often focus more on their age or generation than on their contributions to feminist theory or activism. Many of the early writings of self-identified third wavers used specific dates of birth, for example between 1963 and 1974 (Heywood and Drake 1997), while other writers used collective designations such as “Generation X,” the “twenty-somethings,” or the “Jane Generation” (Kamen 1991; Johnson 2002). Mother-daughter tropes also were used to describe these feminists’ relationship to their second-wave predecessors, often resulting in themes of generational conflict and rebellion (Quinn 1997; Henry 2004). However, as these young women aged and new recruits joined the third wave, birth dates and generational criteria became less useful for distinguishing this new wave of feminism. Some observers even warn that generational accounts of feminism provide a tool for dividing the feminist movement (Berger 2006) and/or fostering an antifeminist backlash (Gillis and Munford 2004, 177–78).

Other writers have suggested using the notion of a “political generation” to designate the third wave. The key to political generations is that they reflect the life experiences and concerns of a particular historical moment—the moment when a person becomes politicized; thus, a political generation could include more than one chronological generation (Whittier 1995, 15). No doubt there is much to learn from historically grounding the discourse of third-wave feminism in the turbulent, uncertain social conditions of postmodernity, especially given the stark differences between the political and economic conditions faced by both the second and the third wave when they entered their respective adulthoods (Sidler 1997; Heywood and Drake 2004; Mann and Huffman 2005).

In contrast to the ways of designating the third wave I have outlined above, this article focuses on the theoretical assumptions employed by US feminist authors who identify as belonging to the third wave. While it is doubtful that all US feminists who mobilize under this banner share a uniform perspective, their major publications share a number of theoretical and epistemological assumptions that reflect an attempt to merge the two feminist frameworks by which they were heavily influenced: poststructuralist feminism and intersectionality theory. This view of US third-wave theory was first described by Deborah Siegel in “Legacy of the Personal: Generating Theory in Feminism’s Third Wave,” where she discussed how these earlier perspectives “shaped the form and content of third wave expressions” (1997a, 46). My analysis examines these theoretical links more closely to highlight their epistemological assumptions and to expose the contradictions entailed in merging the two feminist frameworks. It must be emphasized that calling the approach of third-wave authors a synthetic derivation does not mean it lacks originality. Rather, it is the complex ways in which they interweave these earlier feminisms that make their third-wave agenda novel.

It may seem ironic to focus on third-wave authors’ theoretical perspective when their writings have been described as without theory. One review of Rebecca Walker’s signal work, *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995), portrayed her anthology as “not a book of feminist theory,” but rather “a very personal book filled with anecdotes about individuals’ own struggles” (Haslanger quoted in Siegel 1997a, 67). A harsher critic referred to the contributors to *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (1995) as “amateur memoirists” who confuse “feeling bad” with oppression and who “believe their lives are intrinsically interesting to strangers” (Kaminer quoted in Siegel 1997a, 67). Katha Politt’s article, acerbically titled “The Solipsisters,” labeled third-wave publications as “self-absorbed writings” that naively assume “personal testimony, impressions and feelings are all you need to make a political argument” (quoted in Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 19–20). Even avid supporters of the third wave, such as the editors of *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 20th Century*, state that “it is time to move beyond personal accounts to political and collective action” and urge their peers to use personal experiences “as a bridge to larger political and theoretical explorations” (Dicker and Piepmeier 2003, 13).

No doubt, the preferred genre of third-wave authors—personal narratives—is a difficult form of writing from which to unravel theoretical assumptions, precisely because these narratives are so individual and subjective. Nevertheless, “claims that the third wave is a theory-free movement ... are epistemologically naïve, historically inaccurate, and, ultimately, misinformed” (Siegel 1997a, 49). There are common threads running through these narratives that weave together the underlying theoretical fabric of third-wave feminism. Siegel refers to these threads as “common tropes, images, motifs, narrative patterns and general issues of concern” (1997a, 51). By whatever name, they reveal the theoretical ground shared by the agents of this wave. Though “third-wave feminism” remains a contested concept, I concur with a recent analyst that

despite conflicts over definitional issues and inconsistencies in its usage, the phrase “third wave” is meaningful insofar as several dimensions are repeatedly associated with it and these cohere to the extent that it is feasible to regard them as a distinct form of feminism. (Budgeon 2011, 4)

Yet, because these repeated assumptions are less obvious, we have to read between the lines, so to speak, to discover this less explicit or “embodied theory” (Bordo 1993, 184–85).

This study, then, follows in the footprints of authors such as Deborah Siegel (1997a, 2007), Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier (2003), Astrid Henry (2004), and Shelley Budgeon (2011), who analyzed major publications of feminists who identify as belonging to the third wave.⁵ This textual analysis should not be read as a metonymic view of the US third wave in which only one part of its practices—major published works by its authors—is taken to represent all of its visions and voices. Rather, the narrow parameters of this study entail certain limitations. First, using major published works privileges those voices and silences other diverse sites of theorizing such as zines, blogs, art, or music by which third wavers have made their voices heard. Second, published works are often written by college-educated women, thereby introducing a class bias, given that only about thirty percent of adult US women 25 years and older have a four-year college degree (Macionis 2011). Third, although the implications of various theoretical assumptions for political praxis will be addressed, this is not a study of US third-wave activism—a massive task beyond the scope of this article. Fourth, focusing on the United States ignores new directions in third-wave thought undertaken by feminists in other countries. For example, less visible in US third-wave publications are the materialist approaches embraced by some European feminists (Van der Tuin 2011) or the transnational approaches used by various contributors to international anthologies such as *Defending Our Dreams: Global Feminist Voices for a New Generation* (Wilson, Sengupta and Evans 2005) and *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (Gillis, Howe and Munford [2004] 2007). Indeed, given time, it is likely that we will speak of different third-wave feminisms, just as we speak of different feminisms *within* both the first and second waves. However, this study is limited by focusing only on the theoretical assumptions most characteristic of US third-wave publications to date.

In defense of this limited textual analysis, it is important to acknowledge that much feminist critical analysis in the past (whether of authors in the first, second or third waves) has addressed major published works as signaling (if not representing) important insights into the theoretical and epistemological foundations of different feminist frameworks. In turn, many authors of the works examined below have become major spokespersons for the US third wave at international, national, and local conferences and workshops, as well as in the mass media, which—rightly or wrongly—gives their voices privilege and currency.

Tracing a Lineage to Intersectionality Theory

I stand on the shoulders of women like Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde and Luisah Teish....

— Veronica Chambers, “Betrayal Feminism”

In recent years, closer scrutiny of “intersectionality” has revealed both its complexity and its misuse (McCall 2005; Hancock 2007; Choo and Ferree 2010; Nash 2010; Alexander-Floyd 2012). Without entering into this dense debate, suffice it to say that I use intersectionality both as an “idea” and as an “ideograph” (Alexander-Floyd 2012, 3). In this article, I primarily refer to intersectionality as a specific theory or idea that focuses on and explicates the simultaneous and intersecting or co-determinative forces of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism in the lives of women. In turn, I discuss the political implications of this specific theory and, therefore, address intersectionality in the ideographic sense of a broader project focused on social justice theorizing and action (Alexander-Floyd 2012, 4–5). As will become more apparent below, I share Nikol Alexander-Floyd’s view that women of color often “disappear” when the epistemological assumptions underlying intersectionality are ignored, thus reversing the original intent of those who pioneered intersectional analysis (Alexander-Floyd 2012, 17–18).

Many third-wave authors, regardless of their own racial or ethnic backgrounds, trace their lineage to the US second-wave women of color who forged intersectionality theory. For example, in *Third Wave Agenda* (1997), editors Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake state, “It was US Third World Feminism that modeled a language and a politics of hybridity that can account for our lives at the century’s turn” (1997, 13). Daisy Hernández, Bushra Rehman, and Cherríe Moraga, the editors of *Colonize This! Young Women of Color in Today’s Feminism* (2002), describe their anthology as “continuing the conversations” first initiated by second-wave intersectionality theorists (2002, xxi). In *Feminist Fatale* (1991), Paula Kamen acknowledges that the “authors with the most undeniable influence on my generation ... are women of color” (Kamen 1991, 17). One of the more poignant testimonies to this influence appears in Veronica Chambers’s “Betrayal Feminism” (1995), which critiques other forms of second-wave feminism while lauding the work of intersectionality theorists:

When I bought Barbara Smith’s *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, I carried it like a prayer book. It was in this book that I first read Audre Lorde, Michelle Cliff, June Jordan and Luisah Teish. When I read Michelle Cliff’s “If I Could Write This Fire, I Would Write This Fire,” the title alone reverberated in my head like a drumbeat. (Chambers 1995, 24)

Chronicler of the third wave Astrid Henry argues that intersectionality theorists’ central insight into the simultaneous, interlocking nature of multiple oppressions has been “the second wave’s most influential and vital lesson” for the third wave (2004, 32).

Common Epistemological Ground

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century a paradigm shift has been under way in epistemology, a movement away from an absolutist, subject-centered conception of truth to a conception of truth as situated, perspectival and discursive.

— Susan Hekman, “Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited”

Because there is not one feminism but many feminisms, feminists do not always agree on epistemological positioning. To date, the major feminist epistemologies have been divided into three camps that hold distinct positions on who can be knowledge producers and how knowledge is produced. These three epistemological

camps—empiricist, standpoint, and postmodern—have been discussed at length by various scholars (Harding 1993 and 2005; Hekman 2004; Hesse-Biber, Leavy and Yaiser 2004). I argue that many US third-wave authors wed approaches with analytically distinct epistemologies, given that poststructuralism embraces a postmodern epistemology while intersectionality theory employs a standpoint epistemology. Below I focus on the common ground shared by these epistemologies to better understand third-wave authors' attempts to merge them.

First, the epistemologies of intersectionality theory and poststructuralism both embrace a strong social-constructionist view of knowledge. This means they highlight the relationship between knowledge and power, as well as how people construct knowledge from different social locations, such as their race, gender, class, and global location. Because all vantage points are socially situated and perspectival, both of these epistemologies embrace polyvocality or the inclusion of many voices or vantage points in their construction of social reality.

Second, common ground is visible in the joint call of these epistemologies for the excavation and retrieval of subjugated knowledges as critical acts that undermine dominant discourses. These are the knowledges of subordinate groups that have been buried, ignored, silenced, or deemed less credible by dominant groups. Poststructuralist Michel Foucault referred to them as “naïve knowledges,” not because they are naïve in themselves but rather because they are treated as such by dominant groups (Foucault 1984, 81–82).

Evidence of third-wave authors' commitment to polyvocality and the retrieval of subjugated knowledges can be found in most major third-wave publications. For example, the editors of third-wave anthologies are careful to include authors of subjugated and diverse races, ethnicities, genders, and sexualities (although their diversity by social class is less apparent). Anthologies such as *To Be Real* (1995), *Listen Up* (1995), and *Colonize This!* (2002) exemplify this approach to voicing difference. More recently, contributors to “Polyphonic Feminisms: Acting in Concert” (2010) went even further to examine the difficulties or “sticking points” of polyvocal, intersectional analyses and political praxis (Nash 2010). They point, for example, to how organizations committed to these politics sometimes “implode” because of the difficulties of working across differences within the group (Van Devin and Kubala 2010). They also suggest ways of addressing these difficulties that enable both diversity and dissent.

A third feature shared by standpoint and postmodern epistemologies is the recognition that there is no such thing as value neutrality in social research and analysis. This is well stated in third-wave feminist Julie Bettie's award-winning book *Women without Class: Girls, Race and Identity* (2003). Bettie discusses how her generation grew up amid the “crises of ethnographic authority” that posed a challenge to the ideal of an impartial science (Bettie 2003, 17). Her ethnography recognizes that researchers do not offer a “view from nowhere” or what other critical analysts call the “God trick”—pretending to be a detached, neutral observer who sees from everywhere and nowhere (Bettie 2003, 22).

A fourth terrain of common ground is that these epistemologies recognize the reflexive nature of knowledge. People both construct knowledge/discourses and are constructed by them—what Sandra Harding referred to as a “co-constructionist view of knowledge” (Harding 1998, 4). Hence, authors must acknowledge how their social locations influence their knowledge claims and be accountable for how their knowledge claims may influence other people. On the one hand, third-wave writers' preference for personal narratives reflects their commitment to such authorial accountability and transparency. Personal narratives are one of the more transparent ways of acknowledging authorial presence and one's role in the construction of knowledge. On the other hand, rather than speaking for other women, third wavers resist using the foundational claims of the second-wave feminist “we” (Siegel 1997b, 57). This critical stance

stems from the deconstructionist techniques of postmodernism and poststructuralism, as well as from the critiques by intersectionality theorists of the second-wave “sisterhood” that too often spoke for “all women” and ignored difference. Consider the words of third-wave feminist Jee Yeun Lee:

These days, whenever someone says the word “women” to me, my mind goes blank. What “women”? What is this “women” thing you’re talking about? Does that mean me? Does that mean my mother, my roommates, the white woman next door ... half of the world’s population? (quoted in Siegel 1997a, 57–58)

A fifth epistemological feature shared by poststructuralism and intersectionality theory and embraced by third-wave authors is the call for a broader description of the activity that customarily qualifies as theoretical, pointing to multiple sites of theory production both inside and outside of the academy. For example, second-wave intersectionality theorists elevated the value of socially lived knowledge or the knowledge garnered from everyday life. In *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), Patricia Hill Collins refers to this knowledge as “wisdom” as contrasted to formal education (Collins 1990, 208). In *Tapestries of Life: Women’s Work, Women’s Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Life* (1989), Bettina Aptheker points to the importance of socially lived knowledge and what she calls the “dailiness” of women’s lives. In “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” Audre Lorde makes the case that poetry is a “distillation of experience” that can serve as an emancipatory project for women (Lorde 1984, 37). Similarly, in “The Race for Theory,” Barbara Christian argues that “people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic”:

Our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. (Christian 1988, 52)

This defense of multiple sites, forms and foundations of theorizing also can be found in third-wave writings. In “Producing Sex, Theory, and Culture: Gay/Straight Remappings in Contemporary Feminism” (1990), Katie King speaks of how the academy often privileges certain types of theory production and leaves others unacknowledged or deemed lesser.

Some analysts of third-wave texts argue that “the majority of third-wave feminists have been quick to define themselves as primarily non-academic” (Gillis and Munford 2004, 168). In particular, third-wave authors critique the abstract, abstruse language of academia as failing to meet the needs of women “outside the ivied gates” and as draining ideas of their relevance to the real world of politics and action (Wolf 1994, 125). For example, third-wave authors Veronica Chambers and Joan Morgan highlight distinctions between the socially lived knowledge they drew from their everyday lives and the academic knowledge they acquired in women’s studies classes (Chambers 1995; Morgan 1999). In her third-wave hip-hop classic *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost* (1999), Morgan, like Chambers, expresses her gratitude to the university curriculum that exposed her to the works of women of color. However, she wants a feminism that speaks to young Black women, the way that hip hop does: “If feminism is to have any relevance in the lives of the majority of black women ... it has to rescue itself from the ivory towers of academia” (Morgan 1999, 76). Because her critique is leveled at both white feminist theorists and feminist theorists of color, one observer writes:

Morgan seems to suggest that academia is like a bleaching agent, inevitably whitening those who choose it as a career path. Whiteness and intellectualism both have the same effect, a feminism that is out of touch with young black women. (Henry 2004, 155)

A similar critique of academic feminism can be found in the third-wave anthology edited by Jessica Yee, *Feminism for Real: Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism* (2011). A number of contributors to this book (including Yee) are indigenous women who experienced racism and classism within the university system and felt that abstract theory, even the “hot language of intersectionality,” did not “change their walk”—it neither reduced the racism they experienced nor translated well into social-justice activism (Yee 2011, 12).⁶ They found that their academic experiences entailed various colonialist features, which enhanced their feelings of being other and lesser and fractured their own understandings of the world in ways that silenced their native cultures (Yee 2011, 16–17; Williams and Konsmo in Yee 2011, 28–29; Cruz in Yee 2011, 54–55). Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak labeled this latter form of violence “epistemic violence” in her various efforts to decolonize feminist thought produced, in Chandra Mohanty’s words, “under Western eyes” (Spivak 1987; Mohanty 1984).⁷ Spivak and other postcolonial theorists have done much to explain the very processes that Yee and her contributors simply describe. And, while describing difference certainly allows feminists to bear witness to the operations of power, “it does not analyze the mechanisms by which these systems of exclusion are replicated and re-created” (Nash 2010, 2). The latter is the role of theory.

It is ironic that Yee found intersectionality to be too academic to be politically useful when intersectionality theorists have been among the most vocal US feminists in criticizing how academic theories and scientific discourses have been used against women of color. A number of these theorists chafed at how the elitist and exclusionary language of various feminist theories performed powerful gatekeeping functions that excluded women of color (Collins 1998; Di Stefano 1990). However, unlike Morgan and Yee, they did not call for feminism to rescue itself from the ivory tower. Rather, they called for a broadening of what is meant by theory and the recognition of how both socially lived knowledge and academic theory feed and revitalize each other. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins discusses both the importance of theory and how “Black women intellectuals are central to Black feminist thought” (Collins 1990, 33). Similarly, in “Theory as a Liberatory Practice” (1994), bell hooks criticizes those who “trash” theory and who praise “speaking from the gut” rather than in the abstract as promoting a “false dichotomy between theory and political practice” (hooks 1994, 65). She highlights how theories entail important ideas, thoughts and visions. In her words, “Making theory is the challenge before us. For in its production lies the hope of our liberation....” (1994, 75). Ironically, it is not intersectionality theorists but rather scholars who use the most abstract and abstruse prose—postmodernists and poststructuralists—who are most wary of theory, as I will discuss next.

Tracing a Lineage to Poststructuralism and Its Stepchild Queer Theory

Do not commit a master narrative....

— Brian McHale, “Postmodernism, or the Anxiety of Master Narratives”

Postmodernists and poststructuralists are wary of metanarratives and generalizing theories, because they view these discourses as moves for power or dominance rather than as attempts at greater clarity. Foucault, for example, discussed how different ways of specifying knowledge and truth can restrict or enable writing, speaking, thinking, and acting. He offered a politically laden view of theory, science, and truth where “truth” becomes multiple and suspect.

Under the assumptions of a postmodern epistemology there is no single truth but many different truths situated in different discourses, none of which have any greater claim to epistemic privilege or “truth” (Hekman 2004, 229). Foucault’s work further points to how theories—even emancipatory theories—are often blind to their dominating tendencies (Ramazanoglu 1993).

It appears that some third-wave writers found these ideas particularly fertile grounds for analyzing feminism itself. Claims that feminism (especially second-wave feminism) is a disciplinary and regulatory discourse that restricts individual freedom and sits authoritatively in judgment over women's ideas and practices can be found in a number of third-wave publications (Henry 2004, 39). Barbara Findlen, editor of *Listen Up*, describes how her peers think that "if something is appealing, fun or popular, it can't be feminist" (1995, xiv). Some third wavers embrace Girlies who reclaimed the word "girl" to address what they saw as the antifeminine, anti-joy features of the second wave. For them wearing pink, using nail polish, and celebrating pretty power makes feminism playful and fun. "A lot of what Girlie radiates is the luxury of self-expression that *most second wavers didn't feel they could or should indulge in...*" (Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 161; my emphasis). The refrain that second-wave feminists are their "serious sisters" is echoed by other third-wave writers (Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 161).

A far more damning description of second-wave feminism is voiced by Rebecca Walker in *To Be Real*:

A year before I started this book, my life was like a feminist ghetto. Every decision I made, person I spent time with, word I uttered had to measure up to an image I had in my mind of what was morally and politically right according to my vision of female empowerment. Everything had a gendered explanation, and what didn't fit into my concept of feminist was "bad, patriarchal, and problematic." (Walker 1995, xxix)

In the "Afterword" to *To Be Real*, second-wave theorist Angela Davis describes with amazement (and some skepticism) how most contributors to this anthology felt feminism had "incarcerated their individuality—their desires, aims, and sexual practices" and characterizes this disciplinary feminism as an "imaginary feminist status quo" (Davis in Walker 1995, 281).

The imagery of incarceration evokes Foucault's discussion of the panopticon prison. In this model prison, a few guards (located out of view of the prisoners in a high circular tower) could gaze down upon the inmates and their activities. Whether or not guards were present, the effect was to "induce in the prisoners a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assured the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 1979, 201). The result of this internalized, prescriptive panoptical gaze was to make the prisoners their own jailers (Foucault 1979, 155). For Foucault, this technique of power was prevalent in modern societies where people internalized powerful, prescriptive discourses about what is "normal" or "abnormal," "sane" or "insane," "healthy" or "pathological"; thus, self-policing becomes a major means of control.

In "Unpacking the Mother/Daughter Baggage, Reassessing Second- and Third-Wave Tensions" (2002), Cathryn Bailey uses Foucaultian imagery to discuss how feminism can be experienced as a repressive form of power and authority:

Many younger women see themselves as struggling against becoming the kind of feminist subjects they thought that they were supposed to become. As such, they may be offering a kind of resistance that is not immediately directed at actual feminists, but rather to an internalized version of a feminist governor—a "panoptical feminist connoisseur." (Bailey 2002, 150)

Another of Foucault's modern techniques of power—the confessional—is employed by Gina Dent in her article "Missionary Position" (1995). Here, she likens feminism's ostensible political correctness to how missionaries told people of other cultures that the "missionary position" was the only proper way to have sex. Although she never mentions Foucault, his imprint is clear in her discussion of feminism as both austere and disciplinary. Dent argues that, once we demand a particular form of feminist practice, confession becomes "not only a dynamic within feminism, but a means of policing its borders" (Dent 1995, 71).

Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake offer a different analysis of why second-wave feminism's "master narrative" of patriarchal oppression has become "useful only in some contexts" (2004, 18). They discuss how globalization and deindustrialization resulted in not only downward mobility for most Americans but also income parity for most men and women of their generation. For this reason, they maintain that women of Generation X "have more in common with men of their own age group than they do with women of previous generations" (2004, 16). Because their generation also was "raised on a multicultural diet" (2004, 16), they argue that third wavers are more likely to branch out into other movements for social justice that reflect their commitment to intersectional differences, a claim echoed by other third-wave authors (Labaton and Martin 2004, xxxi; McCanty in Reger 2005, 201; Dicker 2008, 126–27). Feminism as a political movement thus becomes "less visible" but "more widely dispersed" (Heywood and Drake 2004: 20).⁸ This localized and scattered view of feminist activism, coupled with such dismissals of systemic patriarchal oppression, raises important issues about how political praxis and power are conceived.

Different Conceptions of Power and Political Praxis

Power is everywhere, and so ultimately nowhere.

— Nancy Hartsock, "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?"

If we delve deeper into third-wave epistemological assumptions, we detect other conflicts and contradictions between the standpoint epistemology of intersectionality theory and the postmodern epistemology of poststructuralism. While these issues have been hotly debated by second-wave feminists, they seem to have fallen on deaf ears in the third wave. Take, for example, the debates published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* in 1997 and later reprinted in Harding (2004). Here Patricia Hill Collins highlights how an intersectional standpoint epistemology focuses on vantage points as group phenomena:

First, the notion of a standpoint refers to historically shared, *group*-based experiences. Groups have a degree of permanence over time such that group realities transcend individual experiences.... I stress this difference between the individual and the group as units of analysis because using these two constructs as if they were interchangeable clouds understanding of a host of topics.... (Collins 2004, 247–49; original emphasis)

In contrast, a postmodern epistemology deconstructs all group categories as essentialist. For example, Judith Grant argues that "groups are not cut out of whole cloth"; they have "no single voice or vision of reality" but rather are made up of people with heterogeneous experiences (Grant 1993, 94). This argument has critical implications for many feminist frameworks, including intersectionality theory. Even though intersectionality theorists called into question the essentialist category of "women" as ignoring differences between women by race, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation, a similar critique could be leveled against their own group concepts, such as Collins's "Black feminist thought" or Gloria Anzaldúa's "new mestiza consciousness" (Collins 1990; Anzaldúa 1987).

Poststructuralist-inspired queer theorist Steven Seidman speaks directly to these issues when he discusses how even "the assertion of a black, middle-class, American, lesbian identity silences differences in this social category that relate to religion, regional location ... to feminism, age or education" (Seidman 2000, 441). Here differences are infinite and each individual is potentially unique. In contrast, for Collins, the notion of standpoint refers to groups who have shared histories because of their shared location in relations of unequal power and privilege. They are neither groups based simply on identities chosen by individuals nor groups analytically created by demographers, bureaucrats or scholars. For her, to call for

the deconstruction of *all* group categories in the name of critiquing essentialism is simply to move to a “language game of politics” (Collins 2004, 248 and 252–53).

Intersectionality theorists also make clearer distinctions between oppression and difference. For them, not all differences are axes of structural social oppression. For example, both intersectionality theorists and poststructuralists speak of “marginalized” peoples. Yet the former anchor this concept in hierarchically structured, group-based inequalities, while poststructuralists often are referring to people whose behaviors lie outside of or transgress social norms. This latter conception of “margins” includes a much broader swath of people where the normative structure rather than structural relations of oppression is determinate. Indeed, not all countercultural lifestyles and politics reflect the historical, institutionalized oppressions highlighted by intersectionality theorists; even groups such as the Michigan militia or the Ku Klux Klan are marginalized groups in terms of transgressing norms. This is why Collins argues that, when scholars took the postmodern turn, “conceptions of power shifted—talk of tops and bottoms, long associated with hierarchy, were recast as flattened geographies of centers and margins” that “rob the term of oppression of its critical and oppositional importance” (Collins 1998, 129 and 136). Similarly, Kimberlé Crenshaw suggests that such “flattening” of intersectionality results from the absence of a structural and political critique (quoted in Berger and Guidroz 2009, 70).

Following in the footsteps of their theoretical father Foucault, poststructuralists and queer theorists also deconstruct identity categories, arguing that they are restrictive fictions that should be jettisoned as a basis for politics or, at the very least, opened up for critical interrogation (Butler 1990; Seidman 2000).⁹ A number of third-wave authors adopt their view of identities as restrictive (Senna in Walker 1995, 20; Heywood and Drake 1997; McCanty in Reger 2005):

We fear that identity will dictate and regulate our lives, instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad.... (Walker 1995, xxxiii)

In contrast, intersectionality theorists such as the Combahee River Collective view multi-axis identity politics as the “most profound and potentially most radical politics” and they choose sides against their oppressors without hesitation ([1977] 2005, 313). For them, coalitions are the major means for building a social movement based on difference. Crenshaw’s article on identity politics makes clear her rejection of single-axis identity politics. However, she describes the “postmodern idea” of viewing identity categories as socially constructed fictions as a “vulgarized social constructionism” that reveals how power is exercised through the process of categorization but fails to understand the social and material consequences of this categorization ([1995] 2005, 539). Thus, she finds it dangerous for guiding political praxis. Rather, she argues: “At this point in history, a strong case can be made that the most critical resistance strategy for disempowered groups is to occupy and defend a politics of social location rather than to vacate and destroy it” ([1995] 2005, 539). Similarly, Nikol Alexander-Floyd highlights how “Women of color feminists generally support identity politics centered on complex, negotiated understandings of *group* interests” (2012, 11; my emphasis). Indeed, a theory and politics that views freedom as “living in the happy limbo of nonidentity” (Foucault quoted in Grant 1993, 131) would make women of color invisible.

Many third-wave writers also follow poststructuralists and queer theorists such as Judith Butler (1990) to focus on transgressive acts as outlaw performances that challenge and subvert (Heely 1996; Delombard in Walker 1995; Stoller 1999, 84). This is most visible in third-wave writings on sexuality and sexual practices. Nan Bauer-Maglin and Donna Perry, editors of “*Bad Girls*”/“*Good Girls*,” describe “sexuality

in all its guises” as the “lightning rod of their generation’s hopes and discontents,” likening it to how civil rights and the Vietnam war galvanized the generation of the 1960s (1996, xvi). In her most recent book, *Sisterhood Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild* (2007), Siegel describes how third-wave writers celebrate their “sexual bravado” and revel in a “feminist badass” image (2007, 124 and 155–57). Queer theoretical assumptions are prevalent in the works of third-wave authors who embrace a profusion of gendered subjects as well as a lusty, “no sex toy unturned” approach to sexual practices (Stoller 1999, 84). As one analyst put it, “the term ‘queer’ has been used to mark a new formulation of politics for this new generation of feminists” (Henry 2004, 115).

Yet, the crux of queer theory is “resistance to regimes of the normal” (Warner 1993, xxvi; Duggan 1992; Halberstam 2005). Precisely because the coercive effects of the normative structure can be felt even in the most innocuous social interactions, poststructuralists and queer theorists point out how “power is everywhere” and “can even come from below” (Foucault 1980, 93). For example, in *GenderQueer: Voices from beyond the Gender Binary*, Riki Wilchins describes how she felt the normative surveillance of gender transgression when she was purchasing a newspaper or sitting on a bus (Wilchins in Nestle, Howell and Wilchins 2002, 51). In short, queer scholars focus heavily on a micropolitics of resistance (such as performance politics) rather than on hierarchical, structural power relations and macrostructural change.

Along with third-wave authors who embrace queer theory’s focus on micropolitics and dismissal of identity politics, other third-wave authors explain their commitment to local action and rejection of identity politics as stemming from different reasons. In regard to cultural activism—another major site of third-wave activism—Heywood and Drake claim that creating their own media sites and networks as forms of “localized,” “radical dispersal” better resists “co-optation by global technoculture” than does identity politics (2004, 20). In contrast, for intersectionality theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins, an “overemphasis” on local politics “flies in the face of actual historical successes” and “undercuts” political activism (1998, 135). She views the postmodern focus on the local as the most effective terrain of struggle as seductively deceptive. By erasing macrostructural power from their purview, activists can appear to challenge oppression, while “secretly believing such efforts are doomed” (Collins 1998, 135).

Moreover, rather than the group concepts embraced by intersectionality theorists, a strong strain of individualism characterizes many third-wave publications. As Heywood and Drake write, “Despite our knowing better, despite our knowing its emptiness, the ideology of individualism is still a major motivating force in many third wave lives” (1997, 11). Over a decade later, Shelley Budgeon describes third-wave authors as still “privileging individual experience” and even names one of her chapters in *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity* “A Politics of Self” (2011, 103 and 191). This individualistic approach is visible not only in the third wave’s “penchant for personal narratives” (Springer 2002, 1060), but also in many third wavers’ “do-it-yourself” (DIY) approach to feminism. No doubt, the DIY approach can be empowering when it motivates feminists to take action to accomplish their goals.¹⁰ However, the notion that feminism as a *political* movement can be an individual’s DIY project has disturbing implications for collective action. Consider the words of Marcelle Karp, co-editor of *The Bust Guide to the New Girl Order* (1999):

We’ve entered an era of DIY feminism—sistah, do-it-yourself—and we have all kinds of names for ourselves, lipstick lesbians, do-me feminists... No matter what the flava is, we’re still feminists. Your feminism is what you want it to be and what you make of it. (quoted in Karp and Stoller 1999, 310–11)

This view of the third wave is echoed in Astrid Henry's article "Solitary Sisterhood" when she describes third-wave texts as "replete with individual definitions of feminism" (2005, 82).

In contrast, intersectionality theorists embrace neither an individualistic nor a relativistic feminism. Over two decades ago, bell hooks criticized feminist relativism in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984):

Currently feminism seems to be a term without any clear significance. The "anything goes" approach to the definition has rendered it practically meaningless. (...) such definitions usually focus on the individual's own right to freedom and self-determination. (hooks 1984, 23)

hooks is especially critical of feminism being viewed as a "lifestyle choice" rather than as a "political commitment" (hooks 1984, 27). She argues for a feminism defined in "political terms" that stresses collective rather than individual well-being and that calls for social revolution rather than simply personal lifestyle reform (hooks 1984, 23). Additional critiques of the political inefficacy of postmodern relativism can be found in Collins's *Fighting Words* (1998).

In contrast, relativism is embraced in Rebecca Walker's anthology *To Be Real* (1995). In this anthology, not only can one find authors who want "to be free" to engage in vigilante violence and to eroticize the violent rape of a child with a baseball bat, but Walker views as "liberating" these authors' "courageous reckoning" with such "anti-revolution acts" (meaning acts that most second-wave feminists would criticize) (Walker 1995, xxxviii). She writes:

If feminism is to continue to be radical and alive, it must avoid reordering the world in terms of any polarity, be it female/male, good/evil. (1995, xxxv)

The contributors to "Polyphonic Feminisms" (2010) also suggest that multiple truths can "work together to create a coherent whole" according to their concept of "polyphony," derived from a musical term that describes the way multiple melodies can "co-exist without dominance" (Van Deven and Kubala 2010, 3). It is not clear what these authors mean by "dominance" here. While they explicitly welcome diversity and dissent, their fear of "dominance" suggests a reticence to judge other feminists' ideas as less valid or credible and a preference for a sanguine, even if noisy, political pluralism.

Yet standpoint theorists have long argued that feminists must be able to adjudicate or judge between competing knowledge claims in order for theory to guide political practice. Dorothy Smith, for example, argues that if knowledge is to have an impact on politics, "there must exist the possibility that one account can invalidate another" (Smith 1987, 121–22). In "High Noon in Textland" (1993) and "Telling the Truth after Postmodernism" (1996), she mocks the political impotency of a postmodern relativist epistemology. Similarly, Sandra Harding claims that epistemological relativism opens up a Pandora's box for any and every viewpoint to claim legitimacy, even those harmful to the interests of women or other oppressed groups; for her, relativism is an "anathema" to feminism (Harding 1993, 61). Indeed, the idea that feminism should avoid making any judgments as to good or evil, right or wrong, belies its role as a politics. What are politics but the methods by which people make decisions about what is right and wrong, fair and unfair, equal and unequal, and what should be done to resolve, reform, or transform these situations?

In *Catching a Wave* (2003), third-wave analysts Dicker and Piepmeier suggest a more nuanced approach. They consider it fine for third wavers to challenge a restrictive notion of feminism not of their own making. They also agree with opening up and broadening the notion of feminism to make it appealing to a more diverse array of women. However, in their view, the absence of any boundaries on what feminism means "empties feminism of any core set of values and politics" and results in a "feminist free-for-all":

If everything and everyone can fit within the third wave—it doesn't matter what they actually think, do or believe.... This is the worst interpretation of bell hooks' edict that "feminism is for everybody," it implies that anybody can be a feminist, regardless of her or his actions. (Dicker and Piepmeier 2003, 17)

The Lived Messiness of Third-Wave Authors' Epistemological Stance

The lived messiness characteristic of the third wave is what defines it....

— Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, *Third Wave Agenda*

Unlike earlier studies that often focused on generational criteria to define the third wave, this study has highlighted the theoretical and epistemological assumptions of major US third-wave publications as an alternative way of understanding third-wave discourse and its implications for political praxis. I have argued that US third-wave authors created an unhappy and untenable marriage by wedding two approaches—poststructuralism and intersectionality theory—that have distinct and contradictory epistemologies. I've discussed their common ground as well as their contested terrain in terms of the importance of theory; the value placed on individualism versus collectivism; their different conceptions of power and political praxis; and whether embracing relativism results in a localized, radically dispersed, and anything-goes politics. As documented in this study, other analysts of third-wave texts have identified many of these same issues before. However, none have traced them in such a detailed way to their deeper epistemological roots.

It is said that third wavers "live comfortably with paradox" (Siegel 2007, 143) and value contradictions or their "lived messiness" as a means to a more open and inclusive feminism (Heywood and Drake 1997, 8; Dicker 2008, 103).¹¹ This would be fine if the messy conflicts and contradictions embodied in the epistemologies of their major publications did not lead to serious political (rather than generational) disconnects with other feminists that "have widened, rather than narrowed" over time (Siegel 2007, 161).¹² Some third-wave authors, such as the contributors to "Polyphonic Feminisms" (2010), are more astute at recognizing the difficulties of working through these contradictions to build a movement based on difference. Yet, they still "preserve a hope for collective engagement" (Sameh 2011). However, if the individualism and relativism of this unhappy marriage's postmodern epistemological legacy prevail, cacophony rather than polyphony will result, and we will be left with scattered forms of resistance marching to different drums.

This is a particularly serious issue today when, within the United States, the most politically organized response to the radical insecurities engendered by postmodernity have come from the right rather than from the left, in the form of the various groups that united under the rubric of the Tea Party. Their calls for small government and privatization have already dismantled many government jobs and social services that affect the lives of women and children, not to mention their warmongering, imperialist stance, and their hostility to reproductive freedom, LGBTQ issues, and immigrant rights. While the Mad Hatters in this Tea Party were able to mobilize in a collective, mass-based movement, feminists seem unable to follow suit, even though this right-wing populism is an immense threat to those in social locations marginalized by gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and global location.

Choosing between a postmodern path that embraces an anything-goes feminism or developing a body of politics that enables us to act collectively appears to be one of the most important issues confronting feminists today. Whether voiced in Joan Morgan's hip-hop language that "sistahood is critical to our mutual survival" (1999, 232) or in the playful words of the Girlie admirers, the message is the same: "Without a body of politics, the nail polish is really going to waste" (Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 166). Otherwise, instead of "making tidal waves together" we will end up simply "splashing in different pools" (Siegel 2007, 161).

Notes

The author wishes to thank Oxford University Press for giving her permission to draw from Chapters 1, 5, 6, 7, and the Conclusion of *Doing Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity* (2012).

1. Examples of nineteenth-century precursors of intersectionality include Harriet Jacobs ([1861] 2001) and Anna Julia Cooper ([1892] 1988).

2. See McCall (2005), Nash (2010), Hancock (2007), Choo and Ferree (2010), and Alexander-Floyd (2012) for a discussion of various ways in which “intersectionality” has been used and misused.

3. Castles and Miller (1993) coined the term “feminization of migration” to refer to the phenomenon of women making up an increasing proportion of immigrants.

4. See, for example, the poem by Alix Olson and the article by Lisa Jarvis in Berger (2006).

5. Though Budgeon is British, she addresses many writings by US feminists in *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity* (2011).

6. Many contributors to this anthology are indigenous women from Canada. They are included here because First Nation women do not always recognize the same juridical nation-state boundaries that my US-focused perspective observes.

7. Ironically in the context of this discussion, Spivak is known for using and defending an abstruse style and theoretical language (Morton 2003, 5–6).

8. One wonders how third-wave activists will avoid the problem of feminist issues being treated as less important in other movements for social justice, an experience shared by their predecessors in the abolitionist movement and in the anti-Vietnam war and civil rights movements.

9. Only a few queer theorists have questioned the political efficacy of this deconstructive dismissal of identities. Notably, Judith/Jack Halberstam rejects “happily casting off” identities as a “neoliberal” notion of “uniqueness as radical style” (2005, 19).

10. For a discussion of the empowering potential of a DIY approach see Klein in Heywood and Drake (1997) and Duncan in Reger (2005).

11. Rory Dicker even titles her chapter on the third wave “Third Wave Feminism: Embracing Contradiction” (2008, 103).

12. Deborah Siegel views these disconnects as resulting from a “generational divide” (2007, 161). In contrast, I argue they reflect a political divide stemming from different theoretical and epistemological assumptions.

References

- Agger, Ben. 1998. *Critical Social Theories: An Introduction*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Alexander-Floyd, Nikol G. 2012. “Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality in the Social Sciences in a Post-Black Feminist Era.” *Feminist Formations* 24 (1): 1–25.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.
- Aptheker, Bettina. 1989. *Tapestries of Life: Women’s Work, Women’s Consciousness and the Meaning of Daily Experience*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

- Bailey, Cathryn. 2002. "Unpacking the Mother/Daughter Baggage: Reassessing Second- and Third-Wave Tensions." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30 (3): 138–54.
- Barrett, Michèle, and Anne Phillips, eds. 1992. *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1983. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Bauer-Maglin, Nan, and Donna Perry, eds. 1996. *"Bad Girls"/"Good Girls": Women, Sex, and Power in the Nineties*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. 2000. *ManifestA: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Bettie, Julie. 2003. *Women without Class: Girls, Race and Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Berger, Melody, ed. 2006. *We Don't Need Another Wave: Dispatches from the Next Generation of Feminists*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.
- Berger, Michelle Tracy, and Kathleen Guidroz, eds. 2009. *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy through Race, Class, and Gender*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Bordo, Susan, 1993. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Budgeon, Shelley. 2011. *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Calhoun, Cheshire. 2003. "Separating Lesbian Theory from Feminist Theory." In *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, edited by Carole McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, 334–52. New York: Routledge.
- Castles, Stephen, and Mark J. Miller. 1993. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.
- Chambers, Veronica. 1995. "Betrayal Feminism." In *Listen Up: Voices of the Next Feminist Generation*, edited by Barbara Findlen, 21–28. Seattle: Seal Press.
- Cheal, David. 1991. *Family and the State of Theory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Choo, Hae Yeon, and Myra Marx Ferree. 2010. "Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities." *Sociological Theory* 28 (2): 129–49.
- Christian, Barbara. 1988. "The Race for Theory." *Feminist Studies* 14 (1): 51–63.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- . 1998. *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2004. "Comment on Hekman's 'Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited': Where's The Power?" In *The Feminist Standpoint Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, edited by Sandra Harding, 247–53. New York: Routledge.
- Cooper, Anna Julia. (1892) 1988. *A Voice from the South*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989: 139–67.
- . (1995) 2005. "Intersectionality and Identity Politics: Learning from Violence against Women of Color." In *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, edited by Wendy Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, 533–42. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Dent, Gina. 1995. "Missionary Position." In *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, edited by Rebecca Walker, 61–76. New York: Doubleday.
- Dicker, Rory. 2008. *A History of U.S. Feminisms*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.
- Dicker, Rory, and Alison Piepmeier. 2003. *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Di Stefano, Christine. 1990. "Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism." In *Feminism/Post-*

- modernism*, edited by Linda J. Nicholson, 63–82. New York: Routledge.
- Duggan, Lisa. 1992. "Making it Perfectly Queer." *Socialist Review* 22 (1): 11–31.
- Findlen, Barbara, ed. 1995. *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*. Seattle: Seal Press.
- Flax, Jane. 1992. "The End of Innocence." In *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, 445–63. New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Books.
- . 1984. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1, *An Introduction*. London: Penguin.
- Fuss, Diana. 1989. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. New York: Routledge.
- Gillis, Stacy, and Rebecca Munford. 2004. "Genealogies and Generations: The Politics and Praxis of Third Wave Feminism." *Women's History Review* 13 (2): 165–82.
- Gillis, Stacy, Gillian Howe, and Rebecca Munford, eds. (2004) 2007. *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grant, Judith. 1993. *Fundamental Feminism: Contesting the Core Concepts of Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Halberstam, Judith. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: NYU Press.
- Hancock, Ange-Marie. 2007. "Intersectionality as a Normative and Empirical Paradigm." *Politics and Gender* 3 (2): 249–69.
- Harding, Sandra. 1993. "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is Strong Objectivity?" In *Feminist Epistemologies*, edited by Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, 49–82. New York: Routledge.
- . 1998. *Is Science Multicultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms and Epistemologies*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- , ed. 2004. *The Feminist Standpoint Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2005. "From the Woman Question in Science to the Science Question in Feminism." In *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, edited by Wendy Kolmar and Francis Bartkowski, 2nd ed., 404–13. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hartmann, Heidi. 1981. "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union." In *Women and Revolution*, edited by Lydia Sargent, 1–42. Boston: South End Press.
- Hartsock, Nancy. 1990. "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?" In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited by Linda J. Nicholson, 157–75. New York: Routledge.
- Hekman, Susan. 2004. "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited." In *The Feminist Standpoint Reader*, edited by Sandra Harding, 225–41. New York: Routledge.
- Henry, Astrid. 2003. "Feminism's Family Problem, Feminist Generations and the Mother-Daughter Trope." In *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, edited by Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier, 209–31. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- . 2004. *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- . 2005. "Solitary Sisterhood: Individualism Meets Collectivity in Feminism's Third Wave." In *Different Wave-lengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement*, edited by Jo Reger, 81–96. New York: Routledge.
- Hernández, Daisy, Bushra Rehman, and Cherríe Moraga. 2002. *Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*. New York: Seal Press.
- Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy, Patricia Leavy, and Michelle Yaiser. 2004. "Feminist Approaches to Research as a Process: Reconceptualizing Epistemology, Methodology and Method." In *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research*, edited by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Michelle Yaiser, 3–26. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Heywood, Leslie, and Jennifer Drake, eds. 1997. *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2004. "It's All about the Benjamins': Economic Determinants of Third Wave Feminism in the United States." In *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, edited by Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howe, and Rebecca Munford, 13–23. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- hooks, bell. 1984. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press.
- . 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Jacobs, Harriet. (1861) 2001. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Johnson, Merri Lisa, ed. 2002. *Jane Sexes It Up: True Confessions of Feminist Desire*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.
- Kamen, Paula. 1991. *Feminist Fatale: Voices from the "Twentysomething" Generation Explore the Future of the "Women's Movement."* New York: Dutton Books.
- Karp, Marcelle, and Debbie Stoller, eds. 1999. *The Bust Guide to the New Girl Order*. New York: Penguin.
- King, Katie. 1990. "Producing Sex, Theory, and Culture: Gay/Straight Remappings in Contemporary Feminism." In *Conflicts in Feminism*, edited by Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, 82–101. New York: Routledge.
- Labaton, Vivien, and Dawn Lundy Martin, eds. 2004. *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Lemert, Charles. 2004. *Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classical Readings*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister/Outsider*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing.
- Macionis, John. 2011. *Society: The Basics*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Mann, Susan Archer. 2012. *Doing Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mann, Susan A., and Douglas J. Huffman. 2005. "Decentering Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave." *Science & Society* 69 (1): 56–91.
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs* 30 (3): 1771–1800.
- McHale, Brian. 1992. "Postmodernism, or the Anxiety of Master Narratives." *Diacritics* 22 (1): 17–33.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1984. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *boundary 2* 12 (3): 333–58.
- Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. (1981) 1983. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press.
- Morgan, Joan. 1999. *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: My Life as a Hip Hop Feminist*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Morton, Stephen. 2003. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge.
- Nash, Jennifer C. 2010. "On Difficulty: Intersectionality as Feminist Labor." In "Polyphonic Feminisms: Acting in Concert," edited by Mandy Van Deven and Julie Kubala. Special issue, *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 8 (3). http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/nash_01.htm.
- Quinn, Rebecca. 1997. "An Open Letter to Institutional Mothers." In *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*, edited by Devoney Looser and Ann Kaplan, 174–82. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ramazanoglu, Caroline, ed. 1993. *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism*. New York: Routledge.
- Reger, Jo, ed. 2005. *Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement*. New York: Routledge.
- Sameh, Catherine. 2010. "About this Issue." In "Polyphonic Feminisms: Acting in Concert," edited by Mandy Van Deven and Julie Kubala. Special issue, *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 8 (3). <http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/issue.htm>.
- Sandoval, Chela. (1991) 2003. "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World." In *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Reina Lewis and Sara Mill, 75–99. New York: Routledge.
- Seidman, Steven. 2000. "Queer-ing Sociology, Sociologizing Queer Theory." In *Social Theory: Roots and Branches*, edited by Peter Kivisto, 434–55. Los Angeles: Roxbury.
- Sidler, Michelle. 1997. "Living in McJobdom: Third Wave Feminism and Class Inequality." In *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, edited by Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, 25–39. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Siegel, Deborah L. 1997a. "The Legacy of the Personal: Generating Theory in Feminism's Third Wave." *Hypatia* 12 (3): 46–75.
- . 1997b. "Reading between the Waves: Feminist Historiography in a 'Postfeminist' Moment." In *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, edited by Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, 55–82. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2007. *Sisterhood Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Smith, Barbara. 1983. *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. Lantham, NY: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press.
- Smith, Dorothy. 1987. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- . 1993. "High Noon in Textland: A Critique of Clough." *Sociological Quarterly* 34 (1): 183–92.
- . 1996. "Telling the Truth after Postmodernism." *Symbolic Interaction* 19 (3): 171–202.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1987. In *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. London: Methuen.
- . (1999) 2006. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Springer, Kimberly. 2002. "Third Wave Black Feminism?" *Signs* 27 (4): 1059–82.
- Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. (1848) 2005. "Declaration of Sentiments." In *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, edited by Wendy Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, 71–73. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Stoller, Debbie. 1999. "Sex and the Thinking Girl." In *The Bust Guide to the New Girl Order*, edited by Marcelle Karp and Debbie Stoller, 74–84. New York: Penguin.
- Thurow, Lester. 1996. *The Future of Capitalism: How Today's Economic Forces Shape Tomorrow's World*. New York: William Morrow.
- Van der Tuin, Iris. 2011. "New Feminist Materialisms." *Women's Studies International Forum* 34 (4): 271–77.
- Van Deven, Mandy, and Julie Kubala. 2010. "Introduction." In "Polyphonic Feminisms: Acting in Concert," edited by Mandy Van Deven and Julie Kubala. Special issue, *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 8 (3). http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/intro_01.htm.
- Walker, Rebecca. 1992. "Becoming the Third Wave." *Ms. Magazine* (January/February): 42–46.
- . ed. 1995. *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Warner, Michael. 1993. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Whittier, Nancy. 1995. *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Wilchins, Riki. 2002. "A Certain Kind of Freedom: Power and the Truth of Bodies—Four Essays on Gender." In *GenderQueer: Voices from beyond the Sexual Binary*, edited by Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins, 21–63. New York: Alyson Books.
- Wilson, Shamillah, Anasuya Sengupta, and Kristy Evans, eds. 2005. *Defending Our Dreams: Global Feminist Voices for a New Generation*. London: Zed.
- Wolf, Naomi. 1994. *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*. New York: Random House.
- Yee, Jessica, ed. 2011. *Feminism for Real: Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.