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Young women's dis-identification with feminism: negotiating heteronormativity, neoliberalism and difference

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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This is for my nieces Mae, Ada, and Luisa in the hope that they won't need this thesis, but instead live in a post-patriarchal era.

Abstract

This thesis explores young women's relationship with feminism, contributing to an enhanced understanding of feminist dis-identification. Feminist research offers various explanations for young women's repudiation of feminism; this study adds a further dimension to current debates by adopting a performative approach which explores how difference, and particularly sexuality, mediates young women's responses to feminism. Employing and developing the broader theoretical frameworks of postfeminism, individualisation, neoliberalism, and difference, this thesis intervenes in current debates by highlighting the role of heteronormativity in negotiations of feminism. The study is based on forty, semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews with a diverse group of German and British women, aged 18-35. A discursive analysis of the interviews provides an insight into young women's talk, thoughts, and feelings about feminism.

Exemplifying a postfeminist logic, two broad patterns were discernable in the research participants' talk: feminism was either considered as valuable, but anachronistic and therefore irrelevant to the present, or fiercely repudiated as extreme and dogmatic. While most research participants reported they would not call themselves a feminist, their stance towards feminism shifted depending on the cultural resources they drew on to discuss feminist politics. Reflecting the broader cultural currents of neoliberalism and individualisation, the respondents frequently rejected the need for a collective movement by positioning themselves as individuals who were capable of negotiating structural constraints autonomously. The research participants were aware of persistent gender inequalities, but located them predominantly in the public sphere and/or 'other' parts of the world, claiming they had not personally experienced gender discrimination. Feminists were overwhelmingly portrayed and

constructed as unfeminine, man-hating, and lesbian. Although the respondents could not name any concrete examples of feminists who corresponded to this stereotype, the construction of 'the feminist' haunted their accounts. As the performative approach illustrates, discussions of feminism gave rise to complex negotiations and performative citations of normative femininity. Performances of femininity were racialized and classed, intersecting with feminist dis-identification in multiple ways. The perception of feminism as inclusive or exclusive figured as an important theme in the interviews. This thesis adds to our understanding of feminist dis-identification by employing various theoretical tools, drawing on empirical accounts, and by revealing the structuring role of heteronormativity in negotiations of feminism.

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Preface

I recently found myself in a situation that I have encountered numerous times since starting my PhD: somebody asks me what my research is about and, willingly or not, I find myself having a conversation about 'feminism'. Most frequently, I get comments like: "But you don't look like a feminist" or "Really, do you hate men?", or "I didn't know you could do a PhD in Gender Studies" (as if it was not a 'proper' discipline). This time, I had told a young woman about my research. She was in her late twenties and worked for the civil service. When I mentioned the word 'feminism', she said: "Oh, I wish the whole thing had never happened. Wouldn't it be nice if we could all stay at home with our babies, and meet our girlfriends for lunch, and our husbands would look after us – like in the good old times?". I was a quite baffled and the only thing I said in response was that some women might prefer to be financially independent (I did not have the emotional energy, and perhaps even courage, to point out that far from all women desire to have children, be married or in a (heterosexual) relationship, and that the 'good old times' she described were quite specific to the middle-classes). The young woman countered my objection by saying that perhaps the issue of financial independence did not matter too much; if every woman relied on the support of her husband, it would "kind of be okay" again.

I should mention here that there was another young woman talking to us who then took up a pro-feminist stance by drawing attention to the gender pay gap. I had become very quiet at this point: strangely reassured that I had good reasons to research feminist dis-identification amongst young women, but also deeply disturbed, mostly by the subtle hostility that was underlying her statements. The young woman seemed to be perfectly comfortable with 'bashing' feminism. She had been told that I did research on feminism which indicates that I am interested in it. Yet, she made overtly anti-feminist comments. It had been this hostility towards feminism and feminists and

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the more or less overt aggressiveness that emerges from casual discussions about gender issues or from statements that there still *are* inequalities and that I *am* a feminist which originally prompted me to embark on this study. I wanted to know why feminism is so unpopular and, more specifically, why the mention of the 'f-word' frequently gives rise to affect-laden, negative responses. Given my interest in the affective politics involved in negotiations of feminism, I decided to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews to hear the subjective accounts of 'young women'. Of course, 'young women' do not represent a homogenous entity and I tried, as much as possible, to hear the accounts of a diverse group of women in Germany and the UK. Similarly, 'feminism' is a contingent term, representing many different theories and there is no one women's movement with a unified set of goals (Bergman, 2004; Gerhard 2004a: 337; Riley 1988: 5). For these reasons, this thesis regards 'feminism' and the 'women's movement' as *discursive* categories to signify various understandings of the terms and to avoid exclusionary definitions (Butler, 1992).

This thesis begins with a review of the literature on feminist dis-identification. After demonstrating briefly why I will not draw on social movement theory as a theoretical framework for this study, the first chapter explores feminist perspectives on young women's repudiation of feminism. Feminist researchers provide various valuable analytical tools - such as the concepts of postfeminism, neoliberalism and individualisation - to investigate young women's relationships with feminism. I seek to add a further dimension to existing perspectives by developing a performative approach to feminist dis-identification which pays attention to the structuring force of sexuality and difference in young women's negotiations of feminism. Chapter two explores the methodological questions and dilemmas arising from my research on feminist dis-identification. Investigating shifting power-relationships in the interviews,

dilemmas of representation, and silences in the research process, I adopt a feminist and reflexive methodology. The third chapter presents the interpretative frame of this study by exploring the complementarities between discursive psychology, performativity theory, and theories of affect. The chapter argues for a poststructuralist discursive psychology that incorporates the insights of Butler's performativity theory and Ahmed's performative approach to emotions.

The remaining four chapters form the empirical part of the thesis by presenting my analysis of the research participants' accounts. Chapter four provides an overview of the interviews by discerning the emerging themes and patterns in the respondents' talk. By drawing on McRobbie's (2004a, b; 2009) and Gill's (2007) conceptualisation of postfeminism, I attempt to make sense of the existence of two seemingly competing interpretative repertoires on feminism in the interviews, where feminism was described in both positive and negative terms. Chapter five investigates the apparent paradox of the interviewees' awareness of persistent gender inequalities on the one hand, and the simultaneous rejection of feminist politics on the other hand. By drawing on the concepts of individualisation, and neoliberalism, I argue that feminism is rarely claimed because it potentially threatens the respondents' self-identification as empowered individuals who autonomously 'manage' structural inequalities. While the research participants self-identified as empowered and free, the trope of their cultural 'other', the 'oppressed Muslim woman', appeared in their talk and secured their positioning as bearers of social change.

The 'oppressed Muslim woman' was not the only trope occurring in the interviews; as chapter six will show, the figure of the unfeminine, man-hating, lesbian feminist haunted the accounts. The 'feminist' obtained abject status and, as I will argue, figured as the constitutive outside of heterosexual norms. Discussions of

feminism were embedded in the heterosexual matrix and, as chapter seven will show, frequently involved negotiations and performative citations of femininity. The performative approach illuminates how sexuality, but also class and 'race' mattered, and came to matter, in negotiations of feminism. The conclusion is somewhat unusual in that it delves into a new field of inquiry, namely the new German feminisms, to recap the main findings of this study. After I had conducted the interviews with the research participants in Germany, a lively media debate about feminism unfolded and several books were published by young women who advocated a 'new' feminism. As opposed to the majority of my respondents, the new feminists promote feminism. However, a closer analysis reveals similar repudiatory processes in the promotion of a new feminism which parallel the research participants' accounts. For example, the 'old' German feminism of the 1960s and 1970s is rejected because of its alleged man-hatred, which is a theme that I will discuss in detail in my thesis.

As this brief overview over the forthcoming chapters suggests, my thesis addresses a range of themes and discusses several bodies of literature: research on young women's relationship with feminism in Germany and the UK, some of which draws on the emerging field of girls' studies; texts on feminist methodology; discursive psychology; performativity theory; postfeminism; individualisation; Foucauldian approaches to neoliberalism; and queer theory. The thesis is interdisciplinary in focus, drawing on insights generated by gender studies, cultural studies, critical psychology, queer theory and sociology. It makes contributions to several fields, such as girls', gender and cultural studies by exploring the phenomenon of feminist dis-identification from various angles; it adds to queer theory by highlighting how the dimensions of sexuality and heteronormativity structure negotiations of feminism; it provides empirical data that illustrates the workings of

performatives, and makes several smaller contributions   to feminist methodology for example   by highlighting the insights that can be gained from a reflexive engagement with silences in the research practice. Having located the thesis in its interdisciplinary terms, I shall begin the first chapter by exploring various explanations for feminist dis-identification.

1   Chapter One

Literature review: understanding feminist dis-identification

Daisy Garnett (Vogue, August 2006: 86): *"As part of my research for this article I sent an email to 84 women of different ages with different occupations, including full-time motherhood. I asked: Do you consider yourself a feminist? What does the term 'feminism' mean to you? I was surprised by the number of my contemporaries who rejected the term completely"*.

Garnett's finding highlights a seemingly paradoxical phenomenon that is not only apparent in the United Kingdom (UK), but also in Germany and which applies to young women in particular. Currently, the younger generation encounters a situation where many feminist goals haven been achieved, yet gender inequalities continue to characterise the socio-economic order (Aapola et al., 2004: 195; Heintz, 2001: 9). Recent studies in the UK demonstrate that young women embody feminist ideals (Rich 2005); however, many do not identify with the women's movement (Jowett 2004; Rudolfsdottir and Jolliffe 2008). In relation to the German context[1], the journalists Weingarten and Wellershoff (1999: 12) equally argue that there is a social paradox in that the younger generation broadly identifies with feminist goals but would never describe their aspirations as 'feminist'.

Wetherell and Edley (2001: 447) point out that "people today present themselves as overwhelmingly in favour of gender (and racial) equality". In relation to young women's relationship with feminism, this raises the question of why it is that "so many women seem to endorse feminist goals and yet far fewer women are willing to call themselves feminist?" (Bulbeck, 1997: 126). Or, to cite McRobbie (2004b: 258), "[w]hy do young women recoil in horror at the very idea of the feminist?" In this

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[1] Unless otherwise stated, the German texts that I am drawing on are academic articles and books. The authors have different disciplinary backgrounds, ranging from philosophy (i.e. Landweer), education (i.e. Reiss), to sociology (i.e. Hark, Lenz, Gerhard) and social psychology (i.e. Knapp).

opening chapter, I seek to investigate the phenomenon of feminist dis-identification amongst young women (McRobbie 1994; 1999; 2003; 2004a; 2004b) by reviewing the existing literature. I will expand on current arguments by offering a performative approach (Butler 1999 [1990]; 1993) that foregrounds how difference, and particularly sexuality, might mediate negotiations of feminism.

Feminism has constituted one key area of social movement activity since the 1960s (Byrne, 1997: 12). Accordingly, the first section of this chapter will draw on social movement theory to explore whether it provides suitable theoretical tools for investigating young women's relationship with the women's movement. Critically assessing four approaches of mainstream social movement theory, I will argue that they do not offer adequate theoretical frameworks for analysing young women's attitudes towards the women's movement: apart from reinforcing the 'public/private distinction', mainstream social movement theory does not pay sufficient attention to subjective experiences and is primarily concerned with explaining the emergence of social movements and activism, rather than their decline.

The second section of this chapter collects and groups the reasons that feminists attribute to young women's reluctance to claim feminism. Researchers argue that young women regard gender equality as having been achieved, distancing themselves from feminism as anachronistic (Budgeon 2001; Griffin 1989; Jowett 2004; Moeller 2002; Read 2000; Rottmann 1998; Sharpe 2001; Titus 2000). Feminist academics and journalists highlight negative media representations and stereotypes of feminism to argue that hostile discourses render the movement unpopular amongst the young (Bail, 1996; Braun, 1995; Bulbeck, 1997; Kailer and Bierbaum, 2002; Kramer, 1998; Kinser, 2004; Karsch, 2004; Johnson, 2002; Rottmann, 1998; Summers, 1994; Webber, 2005). Developing and drawing on the concept of postfeminism, feminist

academics demonstrate that feminism is taken into account but also forcefully repudiated (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004a, b, 2009; Tasker and Negra, 2007). Equally drawing attention to current socio-cultural trends, researchers argue that neoliberal discourses and individualisation promote individual achievement and dissolve the appeal of joining collective political struggles (Hughes 2005; McRobbie, 2009; Misra 1997; Rich 2005; Trioli 1996; Weingarten and Wellershoff, 1999). Frequently, generational differences between younger and older feminists are said to account for the distancing of the younger generation (Gerhard, 1999a; Landweer, 1993; Levy, 2005; Pilcher, 1998). Lastly, but importantly, various researchers emphasize that young women regard feminism as exclusionary (Aronson, 2003; Denner, 2001, McIntyre, 2001; Skeggs, 1997) due to a perception that feminists are predominantly white, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied and heterosexual (Aapola et al., 2004; Kelly 2001).

These explanatory models offer multiple perspectives on feminist dis-identification but I seek to add a further dimension to current debates by presenting a performative approach. The third section of the chapter asks whether repudiations of feminism (McRobbie 2003; 2004a; 2004b) could be interpreted as performative citations of normative femininity (Butler 1999 [1990]; 1993). There are numerous empirical and historical accounts of the perception of feminists as 'unfeminine', lesbian, and/or man-hating which point to the role of sexuality in young women's negotiations of feminism. However, foregrounding sexuality in the analysis of feminist dis-identification potentially privileges sexuality over other axes of difference, such as class and 'race'. The fourth section of the chapter draws attention to the importance of acknowledging young women's diversity. It is crucial to analyse how various locations

intersect with feminist dis-identification and to explore the role of sexuality as well as 'race' and class in negotiations of feminism.

1.1 Young women's relationship with feminism: does social movement theory lend itself to exploring feminist dis-identification?

1.1.1 The socio-historical contexts: why study young women's negotiations of feminism?

Young women's relationship with feminism is situated within a context that is characterised by both intense social change with regard to employment, education and the private sphere but also by gender, and other forms of inequalities that are still deeply embedded in the socio-economic order (Aapola et al., 2004). In education, significant progress has been made and European women today have a higher level of education than men (European Commission, 2008; Hurrelmann and Albert, 2006). The percentage of German women doing their 'Abitur' (A-levels) increased from 46 % to 55 % between 1990 and 2006. Similarly, in the UK, girls are more likely than boys to reach the expected standard of educational attainment (Office for National Statistics, 2007). However, socio-economic background strongly affects educational performances, particularly in Germany where young people from privileged backgrounds are much more likely to undergo more promising forms of education with regard to future career prospects (i.e. attending the 'Gymnasium' (Grammar School) to do their 'Abitur'; Hurrelmann and Albert, 2006). In both countries, study fields continue to be greatly segmented with a high percentage of men in engineering or science and technology, and women in health, education or the humanities (European Commission, 2008).

The sphere of employment is also characterised by the competing trends of women's success, and continuing patterns of inequalities. "Women have been the driving force behind employment in recent years" (European Commission, 2008: 8)

and yet the gender pay gap in Europe is narrowing slowly and has remained steady at 15 % since 2003 (ibid.). Women are overrepresented in part-time work; the share of female part-time employees exceeded 40% in Germany and the UK (ibid). Ethnic background intersects with gender in ways that further disadvantage minority ethnic women. In the UK in 2006, there were 126 women MPs, two of whom were from minority ethnic backgrounds (Government Equalities Office, 2009). Furthermore, ethnic minority women are less likely to be employed. The employment rate for the population overall is 74, 9 % compared to 52, 8 % for female ethnic minorities (Government Equalities Office, 2009)[2]. Youth unemployment is high in both countries, and Germany is marked by further divisions between the former East and West. Representative interviews with young women aged 17 - 19, and 27   29 demonstrate that only 18% of East German women believe their job is secure (Allmendinger, 2008). Lastly, women with children face particular difficulties in combining caring responsibilities with employment, which is a dilemma that I will explore in more detail in chapter five when discussing processes of individualisation.

As social theorists have argued, family relationships are undergoing profound changes (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, Giddens, 1992). "In the west, at the start of the 21st century, more and more people are spending longer periods of their lives outside the conventional family unit" (Roseneil, 2005: 241; also see Aapola et al., 2004). Marriage rates are falling in both Germany and the UK. In England, marriage rates decreased to their lowest level since 1895 in 2007 (Office of National Statistics, 2009). Similar trends are discernable in Germany where numbers of traditional family units decrease and alternative family forms increase (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, 2008; Haensch, 2003). The divorce rate rose to over 40 % in 2005 as

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[2] Similar figures are not available in Germany. Statistics do not include data on ethnic minorities due to the history of National Socialism.

compared to 24% in 1993. Demographic changes in Germany are also characterised by a low birth rate, followed only by few other countries in the world (Allmendinger, 2008). However, recent empirical studies in Germany suggest that young people consider 'the family' important (Hurrelmann and Albert, 2006), but do not necessarily believe that marriage and family belong together (Allmendinger, 2008). In the UK, relationship practices are changing as well. "One of the most significant, yet largely unremarked upon, changes in personal life of recent years has been the rise in the number of people who do not live with a partner" (Roseneil, 2006b, online, no page numbers). Relationship practices are transforming in multiple ways (Roseneil, 2005). Friendships, for example, become more prioritised (Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004) and there is a move beyond heteronormative conjugality (Roseneil, 2005) to the emergence of "counter heteronormative practices" (Roseneil, 2007: 131).

Indeed, German and British legislation has begun to recognise the diverse ways in which people live their intimate lives, particularly in the UK (FEMCIT Report, 2008). The Civil Partnership Act 2004 ensures that same-sex couples have a legal status which is comparable to that of married couples. Germany passed the law on 'Eingetragene Lebenspartnerschaft' (registered partnership) in 2001. Same-sex couples can register their partnership to obtain a legal status that is similar to that of marriage. However, legal and fiscal differences persist. Marriage, for example, continues to be defined narrowly in terms of existing between differently sexed couples only, and certain fiscal advantages of marriage (such as 'Ehegattensplitting', see chapter five) are not granted to couples who register their partnerships. Curiously however, societal attitudes towards homosexuality seem to be more favourable in Germany. A 2007 survey by the European Commission (European Commission, 2007: 43) showed that 46% of British respondents say that homosexual marriage should be allowed, while 52

% of Germans agree with this statement. Importantly, younger people tend to have more positive attitudes towards homosexuality. On a European-wide level, 55% of those aged 15 -24 are in favour of homosexual marriage (ibid.).

This brief overview of the socio-historical, German and British contexts highlights social change and progress, but also the persistence of inequalities that are racialised, sexualised and classed in particular ways. Nevertheless, "young women are not especially interested in feminism as a label or a movement anymore" (Aapola et al., 2004: 195). A survey conducted in 2006 showed (www.womankind.org.uk) that 71% of women in the UK distance themselves from feminism and interviews demonstrate young women's "(dis-)investment" in feminism (Jowett 2004: 91; also see Rich 2005). Summarising their findings on how a group of nine women thinks about feminism, Rudolfsdottir and Jolliffe (2008: 273) claim that it "was disheartening to see how little engagement the young women had with feminism". According to McRobbie (2003: 133), feminism has been expelled to an "abject state", representing an untenable subject position for young women. Feminism is "almost hated" (2003: 130) and a "discredited political identity" (2007: 723).

Indeed, McRobbie argues that there has been a shift in young women's relationship with feminism (2004a: 6; 2004b: 257). While it was marked by a "'distance from feminism'" in the early nineties (1994: 158; also see 1999), McRobbie holds that we have entered the "cultural space of post-feminism" (2004b: 257) characterised by an "active, sustained, and repetitive repudiation or repression of feminism" (2004a: 6). Following Butler, McRobbie saw young women's critical engagement with feminism in the 1990s as signifying a productive and hopeful dis-identification. In reflecting upon the political promises of dis-identification, Butler (1993: 213) states that "it may be that the affirmation of that slippage, that failure of

identification is itself the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference". Over a decade later, McRobbie (2004b: 257) however stresses that young women's "utterance of forceful non-identity with feminism have consolidated into something closer to repudiation rather than ambivalence". McRobbie's reflections on dis-identification frame wider discussions on young women's relationship with feminism and it is in this sense that I employ the term throughout my thesis. Feminist dis-identification constitutes the contested and fraught territory of young women's attitudes towards feminism that is increasingly marked by repudiation[3].

Paralleling McRobbie's observations in the British context, young German women are also reluctant to claim feminism (Kramer 1998: 329). The women's movement is mostly regarded as outmoded (Rottmann 1998: 114). According to the journalists Kailer and Bierbaum (2002: 251) as well as Karsch (2004: 186), feminism is highly unpopular in Germany even though gender inequalities continue to exist. In her edited collection *Die neue F-Klasse* (The new F-class) the novelist Dorn (2006: 36) states that the reputation of feminism is very bad. Even though the book promotes women's emancipation[4], Dorn (2006: 310) distances herself from feminism by declaring it "dead". The term feminism is also said to be contested in academic contexts. Critically investigating the renaming of women's studies into gender studies

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[3] Brunsdon (2005) also discusses dis-identification in the context of feminism and I will refer to her work more explicitly in chapter 4. In the field of queer theory, Munoz (1999) employs the concept and highlights the subversive potential of dis-identification in relation to queer practices. While Munoz' research offers valuable insights into the re-signification of exclusionary norms, I draw on McRobbie's use of dis-identification because its emphasis on the contested nature of feminism provides a more useful framework to explore young women's relationship with feminism at present.

[4] Dorn's *The new F-class* was the first of a series of recent German books that advocate a new and/or different feminism (Koch-Mehrin, 2007; Stöcker, 2007; Eismann; 2007; Haaf et al.; 2008; Hensel and Raether, 2008; Roche; 2009). These 'new' German feminisms emerged from and entered the public debate *after* I had conducted the interviews in Germany. I therefore do not discuss the new German feminisms here, but will explore them in detail in chapter eight.

in Germany, Hark (2005: 258) observes that it has become unpopular to use the terms "feminism" or "feminist theory" in German-speaking academia[5].

This subsection traced progress and social change, but highlighted the persistence of inequalities at the same time. I also drew on a range of texts that suggest young British and German women dis-identify with feminism. As argued in the introduction to this chapter, there seems to be a paradox: gender equality is a broadly agreed upon value and yet, in the face of persistent inequalities, many young women do not claim feminism. Indeed, McRobbie's reflections on dis-identification reveal that negotiations of feminism are increasingly marked by forceful repudiations, rather than by a critical distance. This paradox raises the interesting and important question of why feminism is rejected and indeed, it seems, hated. How do young women think, talk and feel about feminism, and what attitudes towards feminism do their exhibit in their talk?

This thesis does not attempt to provide a historical argument on how young women's relationship with feminism has changed over recent years, but instead takes as its point of departure the reported phenomenon of young women's feminist dis-identification to explore how, and in which ways, young women position themselves in relation to feminism. The underlying concern lies not only in researching whether young women would identify as feminists or not, but in investigating young women's complex relationship with feminism, with a particular focus on the affective dimensions of negotiations of feminism.

In exploring various themes that come to the fore in young women's relationship with feminism, such as the role of heteronormativity, I hope to add to the broader fields of queer theory, gender and cultural studies. More specifically, I aim to

[5] For less recent US based qualitative and quantitative research on attitudes towards feminism see: Smith and Self, 1981; Jakobson, 1979; Goldberg et al. 1975; Jakobson and Koch, 1978; Ronald Johnson et al. 1983; Renzetti 1987; Kamarovsky 1985.

contribute to the emerging field of 'girls' studies' (Aapola et al., 2004: 9) that "seeks to understand the gendered specificities of the already popular field of youth studies, as well as the meanings of generation and the impact of feminism in times of rapid social, economic and cultural change". Girls' studies has a number of diverse reference points, such as the work of feminist youth researchers at the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, most notably McRobbie, as well as "the reflections of the members of the Second Wave Women's Movement at the point of generational change" (ibid.). The question of young women's relationship with feminism arises in the context of various debates within research on young femininities. Most recently, the concept of 'postfeminism' (see below, chapter four) added to these debates. By investigating negotiations of feminism in detail, it is my hope that this thesis adds to this field, but also to more specialised sub-themes, such as the roles of neoliberalism, individualisation, heteronormativity and difference in young women's lives. Lastly, the exploration of any of these themes within the context of young femininities contributes to the empirical analysis of neoliberalism, individualisation, heteronormativity and difference more broadly.

1.1.2 Social movement theory

There is general agreement that the women's movement[6] is one of four major new social movements in "advanced industrial societies over the last thirty years – centred

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[6] The re-emergence of a new wave of feminist activism in West Germany (after the suffragette movement at the beginning of the 20th century) is frequently traced back to the 1968 conference of the SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund/Socialist German Students' Union). Feminist delegates found their views were ignored and threw tomatoes at the panel chairing the session. The campaign for abortion, which took place in 1971, constituted a further mobilising event. Alice Schwarzer encouraged 374 women to announce publicly that they had had an abortion and the decriminalisation of abortion figured as a key concern in the new women's movement. The negotiation of lesbianism within feminist activism was marked by a shift. While lesbianism was pathologised in the early stages of the movement, it increasingly signified a political identity to the point where lesbianism obtained a privileged status amongst activists (Hark, 1996). Feminist researchers (Karsch, 2004; Lenz, 2001) divide West German feminist activism into three phases. The years 1968 to 1975 raised consciousness and led to the articulation of a political agenda. The second phase, which lasted from 1975-1980, saw the expansion of the movement, less through public campaigns, but more through consciousness raising groups. The third

on students, women, environmentalists and peace activists" (Byrne, 1997: 26).

Empirical observation of these movements produced social movement theory which analyses various aspects of collective movements. Mapping the field of social movement theory, Della Porta and Diani (1999: 3) identify "four currently dominant perspectives in the analysis of collective movements: collective behaviour; resource mobilisation; political process; and new social movements". As my critical investigation of these approaches will show, mainstream social movement theory primarily focuses on the public and institutional realm and is concerned with the emergence of movements. These features of social movement theory render it unsuitable for my research on young women's subjective accounts and dis-identification with feminism.

Particularly dominant in the 1960s, the collective behaviour approach conceptualised social movements as the manifestation of feelings of deprivation and aggression resulting from frustrated expectations (Della Porta and Diani, 1999: 3). Phenomena such as the rise of Nazism or the American Civil War were considered the results of feelings of dissatisfaction. The collective behaviour approach regarded social movements as the outcome of irrational actions, but was critiqued for overemphasising unexpected dynamics at the expense of theorising deliberate organisational strategies (Melucci, 1980: 200). In response to these criticisms, American sociologists in the

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phase, 1980 – 1989, encompassed the professionalization and institutionalisation of feminist politics. Crucially, the 1980s were also marked by the emergence of black feminist writings in Germany (Oguntoye et al, 1986, see chapter two) which was inspired by Audre Lorde, who came to West Berlin as a visiting professor (for further readings on the history of the new women's movement in West Germany see: Gerhard, 1999).

Less information is available on the East German women's movement. Since the beginning of the 1980s, there had been a women's movement which considered itself separate from state-sanctioned organisations (Miethe, 2002). Independent women's groups organised under the roof of the protestant church to obtain publicity, focusing on similar issues that the West German movement discussed. However, the themes of non-ideologised childrearing, as well as combining a family with a career, were more important in the East German women's movement (Miethe, 2002: 45). It is difficult to estimate the scale of this movement, but researchers believe there were up to 100 women's groups (ibid.).

1970s drew on rational choice theory and conceptualised social movement activity as rational action. They regarded movement participants as actors who extend conventional forms of political activity in order to meet their interests. The central questions of this research programme relate to mobilisation: "where are the resources available for the movement, how are they organised, how does the state facilitate or impede mobilisation and what about the outcomes?" (Mueller, 1992: 3-4). By focusing on mobilising structures, this approach sidesteps questions of subjective experiences (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Mueller, 1992; Lenz, 2001) and is therefore not suited for my research on young women's personal accounts of feminism and related issues. Moreover, as Ferree (1992: 47) points out, resource mobilisation treats people as abstract individuals due to its indebtedness to rational choice theory, "thus universalising the experience and perspective of white, Western, middle-class men" (also see Schwenken, 2000).

A further dominant approach in social movement theory, which continues to influence current debates, is political process theory (Bevington and Dixon, 2005: 185). Similar to resource mobilisation, the political process perspective is based on a rational view of collective action (Della Porta and Diani, 1999: 9). However, the central focus of political process theory is the political and institutional environment in which social movements operate. Representing the political process outlook, Tarrow (1998: 2) argues that "contentious politics is triggered when changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for social actors who lack resources of their own" (also see Klandermans and Jenkins, 1995). Political process theory concentrates on the institutional sphere which reinforces the public/private distinction that feminists have long argued against (Dackweiler, 1995; Lenz, 2000; Taylor, 1998). In addition, cultural and social opportunities remain undertheorized in political process

theory (Bergman, 2004; Goodwin and Jasper, 1999). The distinction between the public and private and focus on the institutional sphere forecloses an engagement with the interrelations between subjectivities and socio-cultural formations. As Blee (1998: 382) points out, political process theory neglects identity, culture and emotion and therefore does not lend itself to studying how young women think, talk and feel about feminism.

Importantly, less mainstream approaches to social movement research exist where the dimension of the personal and biographical is foregrounded. Feminist studies of social movements, and women's movements in particular, draw on biographical accounts. Miethe's (1999) research of the women's movement in the German Democratic Republic in the 1980s employs a biographical approach by conducting narrative interviews and providing in-depth studies of individual cases. Roth (2000; 2003) also adopts a biographical perspective on social movement participation in her study on the Coalition of Labour Union Women in the United States. In the British context, Roseneil's research on the women's peace movement in Greenham Common explores the interplay between the global, the local, and the personal (2003), and investigates the particularities of the feminist politics of Greenham by telling stories through the accounts of participants (2000)[7].

Paralleling feminist approaches to social movement research, social movement theorists have begun to respond to the criticisms that they neglect the subjective and cultural spheres. For example, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996) highlight the cultural dimension of social movement activism and introduce the analytical concept of 'framing processes' to theorise people's efforts to produce shared understandings of the world. Their theoretical framework addresses 'meaning' and subjective

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[7] Also see Passerini (1996) on the generation of '68 in Italy as well as Christensen et al. (2004) and the FEMCIT (www.femcit.org) project on European women's movements.

experiences in relation to mobilisation structures and political opportunities. Indeed, several scholars are developing methodological approaches to studying cultural processes. However, as Klandermans and Staggenborg (2002: 314) point out, "many scholars have called for cultural approaches to social movements, but these remain more at the level of rousing calls to action than empirical achievements".

In comparison to resource mobilisation and political process theory, the fourth variant of mainstream social movement theory, the new social movement approach, appears to have a longer tradition of addressing the cultural realm and subjective experiences. Often loosely grouped under the rubric of new social movement (Taylor and Whittier, 1992: 104), European analyses of social movements see contentious politics as the result of structural changes in advanced capitalist societies (Byrne, 1997: 48). New social movement theorists stress the importance of meaning construction by arguing that collective political actors do not exist a priori, but that they are created during the process of social movement activity (Taylor and Whittier, 1992: 109- 110). Also associated with the work of Melucci, this approach has the advantage that it attends to the personal and cultural discontent that propels movements (Taylor and Whittier, 1992: 123).

On a more abstract level however, the attempt of social movement theory to incorporate the 'cultural' realm configures the cultural sphere as a distinct entity and perpetuates narrow understandings of 'the cultural'. As Hardt and Negri (2000: 275) argue, social movement theorists "fail to recognise *the profound economic power of the cultural movements,* or really the increasing indistinguishability of economic and cultural phenomena" (emphasis in original). Hardt and Negri draw on Butler's (1998) reflections in *'Merely Cultural'* which question the sharp distinction between the material and cultural. Criticising the resurgence of an orthodox Leftism which

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dismisses queer politics as 'merely cultural', Butler (1998: 36) asks how the "very distinction between the material and the cultural becomes tactically invoked for the purposes of marginalising certain forms of political activism?" Relegating issues of sexuality to the cultural sphere, they risk becoming secondary to other, allegedly more salient and 'serious' concerns such as economic deprivation. Hardt and Negri's intervention in mainstream social movement theory points to the difficulties and politics involved in distinguishing between the 'cultural' and 'material', but also highlights the risk of cultural issues being considered less relevant.

A further important limitation of mainstream social movement theory in relation to my research constitutes its preoccupation with the *emergence* of movements. According to Bagguley (2002: 170), the "sociological analysis of social movements is largely preoccupied with explaining the emergence of social movements". He points out that their decline "has largely evaded consideration". Dackweiler (1995) observes a comparable tendency in Germany and contends that the central questions of social movement research are: "what are social movements, what is new about social movements, why do they emerge and what is their potential in regard to broader societal processes of transformation?" (my translation). Dackweiler's observation resonates with Goodwin's and Jasper's (2003: 315) claim that "scholars had much more to say about why social movements arise than why they decline, enter a period of 'abeyance' or disappear altogether" (also see Mueller, 1992: 3). I do not wish to make the straightforward argument that the British and German women's movements are in decline. More complex processes seem to be at play. Postfeminism, to mention just one, configures a terrain where feminism is simultaneously taken into account and repudiated (McRobbie, 2004a, b; 2009). Social movement theory does not offer the tools to investigate feminist dis-identification because it mostly studies the

emergence of movements. Its focus on moments of activism cannot account for rejections and repudiations of feminism as they are common amongst young women in Germany and the UK.

The few existing explanations of movement decline "focus on the surrounding political environment" and fall short of investigating individuals' accounts and experiences (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003). Summarising the most notorious hypotheses about decline, Goodwin and Jasper (2003: 315) refer to the institutionalisation of movements, the disappearance of opportunity structures, internal dispute as well as the contestation of a collective identity in identity-based movements. The focus on the institutional sphere is evident in Bagguley's (2002) discussion of the contemporary women's movement in the UK. He argues that British feminism is a movement in abeyance due to a change in British feminism's repertoire of contention. Rather than engaging in forms of public protest, activists are working within established political institutions and the British women's movement is now mainly preoccupied with reproducing itself (2002: 174; also see Epstein, (2003) for a similar argument in the US context). Bagguley focuses on the relationship between the women's movement and political institutions but does not look at subjective accounts in the context of feminist dis-identification that are at the centre of my research.

Rather than engaging in a discussion of the institutional and political factors that led to the emergence and/or 'decline' of the women's movement in Germany and the UK, I will investigate individuals' views of feminism and the women's movement. It is the aim of this project to obtain an enhanced understanding of young women's complex relationship with feminism, with a particular focus on the subjective dimensions. I will therefore not draw on mainstream social movement theory, but will turn to feminist perspectives on feminist dis-identification in the next section to

investigate whether they offer explanatory models that are more suited to explore young women's relationships with feminism.

1.2 Feminist perspectives on feminist dis-identification

Feminist researchers offer a variety of explanations to account for the widely documented phenomenon of young women's repudiation of feminism. This section provides an analysis of the different explanatory models for young women's dis-identification with feminism. Its analytical work consists of collecting, ordering and grouping different approaches according to emerging themes. While I will critically assess some of the explanations offered, the main task of this section is to map different perspectives on feminist dis-identification. This will enable me to subsequently introduce my performative approach as a novel perspective and intervention in current debates on young women's repudiation of feminism.

Pointing to the widespread acceptance of feminist ideas, Budgeon (2001: 24-25) and Read (2000: 249) argue that feminist perspectives have become such a central part of young women's lives that they do not have to acknowledge it explicitly. Similarly, Sharpe (2001: 178), Rottmann (1998: 116) and Griffin (1989: 184) hold that young women often regard gender equality as having been achieved, and thus distance themselves from feminism as anachronistic. The findings of Jowett's (2004) qualitative study on young women's stance towards feminism echo these claims. Jowett (2004: 96) holds that "[f]eminism was thus seen as something which had contributed to female progress in the past, but was no longer relevant". Similar observations are made in the North-American context where Moeller (2002) and Titus (2000) reflect on students' resistance to feminism, arguing that "numerous women students acknowledge that things used to be inequitable but they recognise women's oppression only as past history" (Titus 2000: 30).

This resonates with Volman and Ten Dam's (1998: 529) claim that gender equality, rather than inequality, is presented as the norm in contemporary societal discourses. Exploring students' resistance to feminism in a Canadian university, Webber (2005) also highlights the importance of cultural formations and draws on the notion of a "historically sedimented regime of rationality" which dismisses feminist knowledge as legitimate knowledge. Similar observations apply to the German context where researchers argue that the current societal climates are hostile to feminist ideas, particularly emphasising the prevalence of anti-feminist discourse in the media (Karsch 2004: 186; Braun 1995: 87). Kailer and Bierbaum (2002: 642) for example refer to negative media representations of feminism depicting women's activism as obsolete which resonates with Rhode's (1995: 686) more general claim that the media coverage can "demonise, trivialise and unduly personalise feminist struggles".

The younger generation's alleged belief in the existence of gender equality is frequently traced back to prevailing public discourses and media representations of feminism. Kinser (2004: 134) argues that young American women grow up in a 'postfeminist' climate that perpetuates the belief that gender equality has been achieved. In the UK, researchers also discern the prevalence of postfeminist discourses in the media (Gill, 2007), popular culture (Tasker and Negra, 2007) and across a range of socio-cultural phenomena (McRobbie, 2009). As chapter four will explore in more detail, Gill, Tasker, Negra and McRobbie foreground the complex relationship between feminism and postfeminism by demonstrating that feminism is simultaneously taken into account *and* repudiated. Adopting the critical lens of postfeminism, young women's repudiation of feminism can be regarded as reflecting broader cultural currents and the "double entanglement" (McRobbie, 2003: 130) where

feminism has achieved Gramscian common sense and, as a consequence, is fiercely rejected.

Similarly referring to commonly held beliefs and perceptions, researchers also identify negative stereotypes associated with feminism as a reason for feminist dis-identification amongst young women. Talking about the Australian context, Bulbeck (1997: 4) states that feminists are seen as "man-haters, radicals, lesbians and bra-burners" which resonates with Kramer's (1998: 323) claim that the alleged hostility of feminists towards men is perceived as too radical. In addition, feminism is often thought of as a prescriptive ideology. Summers (1994: 520-521) for example states that "[i]t is our continual pointing out of what remains wrong which I think causes many younger women to be wary of us, to consider us as too negative (read: anti-men), too pessimistic, [and] too depressing [...]". According to Bail (1996: 5), young women "regard feminism as a prescriptive way of thinking that discourages exploration on an individual level. The word 'feminism' suggests a rigidity of style and behaviour that is generally associated with a culture of complaint". In her introduction to the third wave feminist text *Jane sexes it up,* Johnson (2002: 4) makes a similar point and claims that feminism is often addressed by young women as a "strict teacher". Correspondingly, Rottmann (1998: 114) points out that the German women's movement is frequently regarded as prescriptive and moralising, discouraging young women from identifying with its politics.

A common explanatory model for understanding young women's repudiation of feminism highlights the prevalence of 'neoliberal' discourses which dissolve the appeal of joining collective political struggles. According to Walkerdine (2003: 329), the neoliberal subject is understood as being free from traditional ties of location, class and gender, and is regarded as entirely self-produced. Similarly, Gonick (2004: 190)

states that neoliberalism governs through subjects "who are free, rational agents of democracy" which echoes Volman and Ten Dam (1998: 540) claim that "[i]ndividuals must be more capable than ever before of deciding how they want to run their lives, regardless of the social constraints of family, social class, and sex".

Hughes' (2005) study demonstrates that neoliberal ideology is a factor preventing young women from embracing feminist politics. Asking young Australian women who had just started a women's studies programme about their attitudes towards feminism, Hughes (2005: 12) found that the use of the term feminism was resisted "because it is synonymous with analysing the systemic structural constraints which limit 'choice', 'individual freedom' and 'rights'". Indeed, Hughes conducted interviews at the beginning and at the end of the academic year. While the participants in her study were more willing to align themselves with feminism at the end of the year, they only did so with "the proviso that structural constraints remain ignored or obscured" (2005: 14) The reluctance to acknowledge structural constraints and orientation towards the values of choice and freedom highlight the potential impact of neoliberalism on feminist dis-identification.

Misra (1997: 279) foregrounds the role of individualist rhetoric by arguing that students reject feminist standpoints because they "have difficulty seeing beyond the individualistic explanations of 'success' and 'failure'" prevalent in the USA. According to Trioli (1996: 63), young women are encouraged to believe that "individual power is enough" which is a finding that also emerges from Germany where young women repudiate feminist politics because they regard structural inequalities as individual problems (Weingarten and Wellershoff, 1999: 54). Rich's (2005) empirical study in the UK produced a similar result: exploring feminist

consciousness in ten white middle-class white women, Rich (2005: 9) shows that individual achievement is believed to be sufficient to overcome social constraints.

These empirical observations resonate with broader sociological arguments about individualisation (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1991) and more critical perspectives on processes of individualisation in particular (Bauman, 2000, 2001; McRobbie, 2009). Regarding individualisation and modernity as intertwined, Bauman (2000: 62) claims that everything is undergoing processes of individualisation and is now down to the individual. Developing the concept of female individualisation, McRobbie (2009: 5) contends that feminism is replaced with an "aggressive individualism", playing a vital role in the undoing of feminism. The findings of Mirsa, Trioli and Rich, as well as the more theoretical arguments of Bauman and McRobbie suggest that individualisation facilitates repudiations of feminism.

Apart from regarding individualisation and the neoliberal climate as factors that negatively impact on feminist identification, numerous feminist academics emphasise generational differences in their attempt to grasp young women's repudiation of the women's movement. Stoehr (1993: 92) contends that there is a growing interest in theorising generational differences in contemporary German academic debates (also see Kilian and Komfort-Hein, 1999). Similarly, Long (2001: 3) argues that the "generation war" as a discourse to conceptualise the relationship between older and younger women is widely drawn on in western countries ever since it gained sustained media attention in the USA in 1993[8]. In her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and*

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[8] The debate on feminist generations seems to have been very lively in Australia. In her widely discussed book *DIY Feminism,* Bail (1996: 5) for example uses the term "generational quake" to refer to conflicts among older and younger feminists. Similarly, Lumby (1997: 156) claims that there is a generational conflict and that the increased institutionalisation of feminism "can look an awful lot like the patriarchy". Feminist ideas and arguments are represented in a variety of institutions and feminism can no longer claim to be outside the system.

the Rise of Raunch Culture, Levy (2005: 74) talks about a "generational rebellion" and argues that young American women embrace raunch culture to distance themselves from second-wave feminists because "[n]obody wants to turn into their mother".

In the British context, Pilcher (1998: 2) emphasises the role of generation in researching women's responses to feminism and gender issues, calling attention to "the importance of age as a source of diversity and difference amongst women". Referring to the German women's movement, Landweer (1993) argues that there is a real generational conflict amongst feminists where the younger generation identifies with poststructuralist approaches to theorising gender (notably Butler, 1999 [1990]), whereas older feminists regard "sexual difference" as the appropriate analytical tool. Theorising feminist repudiation amongst the young, Gerhard (1999a) also draws on a generational discourse. She claims that young German women feel the need to distance themselves from their 'mothers', asking for some 'time-out' to develop a feminist political agenda suited to their specific needs in contemporary German society.

However, as Griffin (2001: 182) points out, the generational approach to theorising young women's relationship to feminism is problematic because it tends to overlook diversity amongst young women and feminisms. Similarly, Long (2001: 7-11) argues that the generational metaphor obscures the diversity and historical fluidity of feminism. Furthermore, she claims that the generational framework leaves little scope to examine the experiences of those women whose feminist consciousness does not conform to pre-set generational patterns and argues that the approach posits a static model of feminist dis-identification which does not accommodate individuals' changing perspectives (ibid.). Long (2001: 10) emphasises the "extent to which normative generational divisions are connected to Western epistemological and chronological frameworks, which erase cultural and class differences, and which

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assume certain modes of transmission and generational knowledges as given". This point resonates with Bulbeck's (2001: 5) critique of the generational approach who argues that class and ethnicity are flattened away in debates which mostly focus on the experiences of younger and older middle-class women.

In her challenge of the generational approach, Long (2001: 11) takes particular issue with the mother-daughter dynamic that is often employed in theorising the relationship between younger and older women (as evident in Gerhard's, 1999 account, quoted above). Long holds that we can unproblematically relate to the mother-daughter relationship "only by erasing the experiences of many groups of women, by implying universal heterosexuality, and a universal model of homogenous (for which read white) motherhood". The critique of the mother-daughter relationship as an explanatory framework is extended by D'Arcens (1998: 105-111). She argues that the mother-daughter dynamic depicts a hierarchical relationship that restraints the agency of young women. Equally important, the generational approach is not only challenged in the English-speaking context, but is also problematised in Germany. Thon (2003: 111) for example states that explanatory models, such as the mother-daughter dynamic, fail to account for complexities and the specific historical context in which negotiations of feminism are embedded (also see Kilian and Komfort-Hein, 1999: 13). I fully agree with these critiques and would add that a merely generational approach to theorising young women's stance to feminism is problematic because it overemphasises one component - namely age - of women's identities at the expense of others.

The privileging of age, and the heteronormative assumptions underlying the generational approach to feminist dis-identification, lead us to the important issue of difference in negotiations of feminism. Seeking to account for young women's lack of

interest in feminist politics, Aapola et al. (2004: 197) and Kelly (2001: 153) point to the exclusionary tendencies of feminism and suggest that the image of feminists as predominantly white, middle-class, middle-aged, able-bodied and heterosexual prevents young women from a variety of backgrounds to identify with the women's movement (also see Stuart, 1990). Interviews with young women from a variety of racial and socio-economic backgrounds (Aronson, 2003: Denner, 2001; McIntyre, 2001; Skeggs, 1997) demonstrate that 'race' and class mediate negotiations of feminism.

However, as Aronson (2003: 906) argues, most of the existing research studies on young women's relationship with feminism focus on "groups that are too homogenous to provide conclusions about the full diversity of today's young women". Having interviewed white, middle-class women in her research in the UK, Rich (2005: 4) equally claims that "[t]here is of course a case to be made for further research which explores these issues with women of different ethnicities, socio-cultural background, sexualities etc". While the research design of Jowett's (2004) study on (in)equality, Girl Power, and feminism was attentive to differences amongst young women, Weingarten and Wellerhoff's (1999), Rich's (2005), as well as Rudolfsdottir's and Jolliffe's (2008) research is limited by their focus on a homogenous and privileged group of young women. The impact of individuals' location is insufficiently taken into account in empirical research on young women's relationship with feminism in Germany and the UK. In making this argument, I do not intend to privilege empirical research over more theoretically oriented analyses and explorations of broader socio-cultural phenomena and trends. By pointing to this gap in empirical research, I want to flag the contribution that I hope my research makes as a project which attempts to hear

and analyse the views of a diverse group of young women, through theoretically engaged empirical work.

1.3   A performative approach to feminist dis-identification

Acknowledging young women's diversity, and focusing on the dimension of sexuality in this section, I will present a performative approach to feminist dis-identification which analyses the extent to which negotiations of feminism are potentially linked to gender identity and heteronormativity. Chambers (2007: 667) defines heteronormativity as "the assemblage of regulatory practices, which produces intelligible genders within a heterosexual matrix that insists upon the coherence of sex/gender/desire". I hold that Butler's performativity theory and theorisation of the links between gender identity, sexuality, and the heterosexual matrix lends itself to exploring feminist dis-identification. There are numerous accounts of the construction of feminists as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian. This observation raises the question of whether feminism is rejected because unfemininity, man-hating, and lesbianism are perceived as threatening and troubling 'gender'.

In their analysis of British media representations of feminism Moseley and Read (2001), as well as Hinds and Stacey (2001) argue that feminism and femininity are frequently portrayed in binaristic terms and commonly regarded as mutually exclusive. Hinds and Stacey (2001: 156) claim that the "tension between feminism and femininity is perhaps most clearly articulated in what has now become the mythical, and most persistent, icon of second-wave feminism: the bra-burner". Equally, Read (2000: 9) refers to the popular belief that feminism occludes femininity and Brunsdon (2000: 211) argues that "[i]n the popular imagery, feminists are still women who don't wear make-up, don't shave their legs and disapprove of watching soap opera, getting married, and having doors held open for them".

In a similar vein, Adams et al. (2007: 291) contend that "in public discourse, and under the influence of 'post-feminism', it is often implied that 'real' feminists are women who reject heteronormative expectations in relation to their sexuality and physical appearance". An analogous popular belief in the incompatibility of feminism and (normative) femininity seems to prevail in Germany. The German media argues Karsch (2004: 191), often tries to establish a dichotomy between sexy girlies who want to have fun on the one hand, and embittered frigid feminists on the other hand. Her claim resonates with Mueller's (2004: 176) observation that feminists in Germany are often regarded as anti-men, childless, ugly, humourless, and – even though rarely directly voiced – lesbian.

On the level of cultural representation, femininity and feminism are positioned as diametrically opposed which raises the question of whether the repudiation of feminism can be read as a re-affirmation of normative femininity. In light of this, the widely-cited statement 'I am not a feminist, but...' (Griffin, 1989; Kramer, 1998; Pilcher, 1993) could be interpreted as an affirmation of a woman's femininity, implying that she is not an 'unfeminine' woman 'but' still holds feminist views. Drawing on Butler's (1993: 5) performative understanding of sex, gender and sexuality where sex and gender are "formed and sustained through and as a materialisation of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony" (1993: 15), the rejection of feminism as unfeminine could be interpreted as a performative act reiterating normative femininity and heterosexuality. Rejecting the sex/gender distinction, Butler argues that sex and gender are materialised through regulatory norms and are assumed through a process of citation and reiteration, which also constitutes subjects. "Identificatory processes are crucial to the forming of sexed materiality" (1993: 17) and sexed identity is the effect of practices, of repeated

performative acts that generate the illusion of it being a 'natural' and discursively independent category.

Following Butler, young women's repudiation of feminism could be regarded as performative citations of femininity which re-affirm heteronormativity through repeated performances of culturally sanctioned acts that emerge from and reinforce the heterosexual matrix. Although this performative approach brings to the fore the role of heteronormativity in negotiations of feminism, it does not presume that normative femininity always implies heterosexuality. My understanding of normative femininity is informed by Butler's (1999: 23) definition of "intelligible genders" where the "coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire" is maintained. Heterosexual conventions structure the coherence of sex, gender, and desire and Butler's framework suggests a strong link between normative femininity and heterosexuality. However, she also states that it is crucial to "trace the moments where the binary system of gender is disputed and challenged, where the coherence of the categories are put into question, and where the very social life of gender turns out to be malleable and transformable" (2004: 216). Bearing in mind that 'gender' is highly contingent, the relation between normative femininity and heterosexuality has to be critically explored and disentangled on the empirical level[9].

Given the culturally prevalent construction of feminists as 'unfeminine', Butler's framework lends itself to exploring young women's repudiation of feminism. Her emphasis on the close link between gender identity and heteronormativity provides a valuable theoretical tool to explore young women's reluctance to claim

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[9] Nayak and Kehily (1996) for example applied Butler's theoretical framework to researching young British men's performativity of heterosexual masculinity. Offering empirical examples, they demonstrate that the young men's heterosexuality is structured through the display of homophobia. However, Nayak and Kehily (1996: 226) simultaneously draw attention to the contingent character of normative masculinity and argue that "homophobic performances are, then, only one facet employed for the styling of masculinity and are by no means a gendered necessity"

feminism as something that they might fear disrupts their 'femininity'. By shedding light on the role of heteronormativity and sexuality in negotiations of feminism, the performative approach provides a new perspective on feminist dis-identification and potentially contributes to our understanding of young women's rejection of feminism.

The positioning of feminism and femininity as mutually exclusive is not only evident in the realm of cultural representations, but also emerges from empirical observations. Kramer (1998: 326) holds that young German women associate unfeminine women with feminism, which is supported by Sharpe's (2001: 177) finding that the younger generation rejects feminism as "the arena of loud, unfeminine women" (also see Pilcher, 1998: 115). Storr equally (2003: 48) argues that "the stereotype that all feminists are 'man-hating lesbians' is all too common" among the British heterosexual women in her study. Cameron and Kulick (2003: 6) claim that "[f]eminists of all sexual orientations come under suspicion of being lesbians" which is echoed by Rich's (2005: 13) finding that feminist subject positions tend to be hard to combine with conventional notions of (heterosexual) femininity. Most recently, Rudolfsdottir and Jolliffe (2008: 269) stressed that the "word 'feminist' clearly has a plethora of negative connotations and is often countered or seen as antithetical with femininity"

Holland's (2004: 79) study on British women whose appearance does not correspond to established normative notions of femininity further underpins my argument. Her research participants distanced themselves from the women's movement. Holland explains this by arguing that feminism is perceived as an inherently unfeminine subject position which potentially threatens the delicate balance between the respondents' alternative looks and allegiance to normative femininity. Holland suggests that the women fear their 'alternative' appearance erodes their

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femininity and shows that the participants try to negotiate this dilemma by 'recuperating' their femininity through the use of items they consider traditionally feminine, such as perfume. Based on this observation, Holland concludes that feminism is rejected as a political stance because it is perceived as too unfeminine. In her study on the gender-conscious use of language in Germany, Reiss (2004: 167) also shows that feminist politics are rejected by young women. Associating feminist politics with 'unfeminine' women, the respondents felt that a critical examination of gender inequities "calls their femininity into question".

Reflecting upon her experiences of teaching women's studies classes in the US, Frye (1992: 124) recounts that "[m]any believe that if they associate themselves with feminism they will be associated with lesbianism, and for some that is a frightening, even a disgusting thought". She argues that there is an intrinsic connection made between feminism and lesbianism in contemporary Anglo-American settings which is also evidenced in Davis' (1992) study on the teaching of feminist theory. She draws attention to the "real fear that young women have of being labelled as lesbians or anti-male if they identify themselves as feminists" (1992: 234). Bulbeck's (1997) empirical research on Australian women's relationship to the women's movement parallels these findings. She shows that many women reject feminism because it is associated with bra-burning and radical lesbians. Bulbeck (1997: 147) argues that the appellation "'lesbian' is used to police the boundaries of acceptable femininity" which further supports my argument that repudiations of feminism can be interpreted as an affirmation of normative femininity. Accordingly, Pollitt (2003: 313) argues that "when women (of whatever age) say 'I am not a feminist, but'....what they are signalling is that they like men and want men to like them, [...]".

Given these observations, I was surprised to find that the role of heteronormativity in negotiations of feminism has not been extensively theorised or researched. This is even more astonishing when taking into account the historical dimension of young women's rejection of the women's movement. In the German context, it is for example widely documented that young, politically active women distanced themselves from the suffragette movement during the Weimar Republic (1918–1933) (Gerhard, 2000: 165; Stoehr, 1993: 93; 2000: 43; Usborne 1995; Weingarten and Wellershoff, 1999: 55). Stoehr (2000: 43) recalls that the younger generation rejected the suffragette movement because of its alleged hostility towards men. Usborne (1995: 147) equally states that young German women "showed little respect for older members of the women's movement who appeared to them as old-fashioned spinsters pursuing legal and political reforms of little relevance to their own lives".

Young women's repudiation of feminism is also evidenced in the international context and in the UK in the period after the First World War. Rupp's (2001: 169) research on the international sphere in the first half of the twentieth century shows that "women in the international women's movement often lamented the absence of young women and longed for new recruits, yet never succeeded in attracting the younger generation". In 1936, the British feminist Strachey (1936: 10) states that "[y]oung women know amazingly little of what life was like before the war, and show a strong hostility to the word 'feminism' and all which they imagine it to connote". Moreover, the association of feminism with spinsterhood was not only common in Germany but also prevailed in the UK during the twenties. Pugh (2000: 73) argues that, according to public discourse, "the feminist was by implication a spinster". He also draws attention to the widely held belief in the incompatibility of feminism and femininity by arguing

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that "large numbers of women [...] saw feminism as a threat to their femininity" (ibid.). Pugh (2000: 79) even claims that some politicians were prepared to publicly voice their fears "over the presumed connection between the single woman, feminism and lesbianism".

Apart from drawing attention to young women's hostility towards feminism and its association with spinsterhood and lesbianism, researchers repeatedly employ the metaphor of a generational conflict between younger and old feminists. Pugh (2000: 260) for example argues that there was a "division between two generations" in the UK in the twenties and thirties. "Many feminists of the pre-war generation disapproved of the changes in women's lives: the increase in casual sex, the public display of fashionable clothes, cosmetics and dancing, the growing pursuit of marriage" (ibid.). German feminist researchers, such as Stoehr (1993: 93, 2000: 42) and Weingarten and Wellershoff (1999: 55), also argue that the current situation of young women's distancing from the women's movement is amazingly similar to the situation in Germany in the 1920s. Comparing young women of the 1920s to the younger generation today, Weingarten and Wellershoff (1999: 55) claim that:

> Both are young, unmarried, active, self-confident, attractive, and enjoy working; both follow a generation of politically active women and are benefiting from their success; both prefer the hedonistic enjoyment of their recently acquired freedoms in the private sphere to campaigning for more rights in the public sphere; [...] both take an individualistic rather than collective approach to organising life; both are friendly towards men rather than critical of patriarchy when at the same time sexually-aware and oriented towards satisfying their own needs (my translation).

As my discussion of the generational approach to feminist dis-identification has shown, it is problematic to employ the generational paradigm in theorising feminist consciousness. Rather than referring to the historical dimension of young women's repudiation of feminism to perpetuate the generational approach, I draw on these historical accounts (and the commonly held belief of the incompatibility of feminism and femininity in particular) to illustrate my performative approach to feminist dis-

identification. Indeed, the repudiation of feminism as unfeminine is not restricted to the beginning of the twentieth century, but seems to be a more constant feature of attitudes towards the women's movement. As Gerhard (2000: 165) recounts, the slogan "I am not a suffragette" was also used amongst young women in 1948. "The 'new' women took inspiration from the older women's movement while at the same time clearly distancing themselves from it" because, as Stoehr (2000: 48) argues, they were afraid of being regarded as unfeminine. Conducting research on the American women's rights movement in the 1940s and 1950s, Taylor and Rupp (1991:121) interviewed an active feminist of the period and were taken aback when she stated that "[w]e were not like the young bra-burners and lesbians of today".

Similarly, Pugh (2000: 285) claims that younger British women in the 1950s distanced themselves from the women's movement because the combination of welfare reform, economic opportunities and political rights seemed to render a feminist battle obsolete. Indeed, Caine (1995: 2) argues that the meaning of feminism has been fiercely contested every since the term was first introduced in the mid-1890s. She reminds her readers that ambivalences about the term feminism were also apparent in the 1970s: "[m]any of these women made a determined and concerted rejection of the term 'feminist' [...]" (1995: 11). Similarly, Brunsdon (2005: 112) holds that "disidentity" is at the heart of feminism. She claims that '[d]isidentity – not being like that, not being like those other women, not being like those images of women – is constitutive of feminism, and constitutive of feminism in all its generations' (ibid.).

In conjunction with women's ambivalences about the term feminism, media representations also have a long history of being anti-feminist, reinforcing the commonly held stereotype that feminists are unfeminine. In her book *A Century of Women*, Rowbotham (1997: 13) re-prints a British anti-suffrage propaganda postcard

from 1909. The postcard shows five miserable-looking elderly women and a slogan that reads: "Suffragettes who have never been kissed". Already in 1909, feminist activism and the fight for the suffrage seem to have been associated with unattractive and sexually unsatisfied women. Referring to the German context, Karsch (2004: 368) recalls that the suffragette movement had a negative reputation. These observations resonate with Pozner's claim (2003: 35): "[f]rom the suffragette movement to the third wave, corporate media doctors have labelled feminism unladylike, unnecessary and – above all – unwanted".

The historical dimension of young women's rejection of feminism as 'unfeminine' and of women's ambivalent relationship to the term points to the role of sexuality and normative femininity in negotiations of feminism. The historical precedents illustrate my argument about the connection between heteronormativity and the rejection of feminism. Drawing attention to the historical dimension of young women's rejection of feminism as 'unfeminine', I however do not seek to invalidate analyses of current social and cultural trends. An awareness of the historical dimension does not counter contemporary arguments which for example suggest that postfeminism, neoliberal discourses and processes of individualisation dissolve the appeal of identifying as a feminist.

In making my argument about the link between normative femininity, heteronormativity and the repudiation of feminism, I add a new and further dimension to current debates. I believe that the performative approach to feminist dis-identification improves our understanding of young women's negotiation of feminism. At the same time, I am aware that this perspective has its limitations. The foregrounding of the role of sexuality and normative femininity might explain why women feel reluctant to claim feminism, but it cannot illuminate the *heightened*

negative reactions to feminism as they have become apparent in recent years (McRobbie 2003, 2004a; 2004b; 2009). There is a need for an analysis of contemporary repudiations of feminism which uses various analytical tools and concepts to explore feminist dis-identification. While I argue that the performative approach offers important insights into the dynamics involved in repudiations of feminism, this approach should be adopted in addition to, and conjunction with existing analytical tools such as the concepts of postfeminism, neoliberalism and individualisation.

1.4   Acknowledging difference: femininity as a classed and racialized performance

Having discussed the role of sexuality and heteronormativity in the analysis of young women's stance towards feminism, it is important to bear in mind that gender identities "are constructed out of a complex network of identity factors, including 'race', ethnicity, social class and sexuality" (Frosh et al., 2002: 258). As Frosh's, Phoenix's and Pattman's (2002: 146) research on young British masculinities demonstrates, "[…] the construction of gendered identities involves a narrowing of choices which takes place in the context of other, overlapping layers of identity construction, most notably and obviously those of class, and especially, 'race'". In her study on black British womanhood, Mirza (1992: 164) argues that "the evidence presented here suggests that the cultural construction of femininity among African Caribbean women fundamentally differs from the forms of femininity found among their white peers" (for similar points on masculinity see Archer, 2001: 98). Conducting research on black girls, Weekes (2002) likewise found that young black women's sexuality is framed within discourses of 'race'. This resonates with Alexander's (2000: 231) challenge to unidimensional notions of identity where "'race' is seen not as the primary marker of identity but formulated through, and sometimes against, other structures, such as

ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality – increasingly religion – and so on". These observations suggest that differences between young women have to be taken into account when researching their relationship with feminism.

Feminist debates have shown that female identity is not determined by sex alone but is constituted through the complex interplay of a variety of factors such as 'race', socio-economic status, cultural background, ability and sexuality (Butler, 1999 [1990]: 6). For example, the German feminist movement has been critiqued for its Eurocentric and white bias (Grimm, 1994: 161; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 1999) and for neglecting the experiences of migrant women (Apostolidou, 1995: 175; Bednarz-Braun and Hess-Meining, 2004: 245). In relation to the British context, Whelehan (1995: 129) argues that feminists are increasingly aware of the non-homogeneity of the term 'women' and that differences amongst women are a social fact that should be recognised to avoid replicating unequal power-relations. Similarly, Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1996: 5) claim that "[r]epresentations of 'women' which imply a homogenous category of Otherness render invisible the different experiences of women of varied ethnic, sexual and class locations".

Acknowledging these challenges to the conceptualisation of 'women' as a coherent entity highlights the importance of regarding gendered identities as constructed through multiple axes of social differentiation such as 'race' and class. Referring to the repudiation of feminism amongst young women, Read (2000: 253) emphasises this point crudely and states that "there may be a different set of contradictions and exclusions in play than simply the opposition between feminism and lipstick". Accordingly, I argue that it is crucial to regard gender and   in the context of feminist dis-identification amongst young women – femininity as classed and racialized performances. This approach implies that gender identity, sexuality,

ethnic and socio-economic background intersect with feminist identification in complex ways. This is not to argue that pre-existing essential differences, such as 'race' and class, automatically produce a certain stance towards feminism. On the contrary, "ethnicity and 'race' are plural, dynamic and socially constructed concepts" (Frosh et al., 2002: 146) and arguably intersect with feminist consciousness in unpredictable ways. Similar to Butler's (2004: 216) claim about the fragile character of the binary system of gender, 'race' and class are taken up in variegated ways, and will produce different sexualised, classed and racialized identities which will unpredictably impact on feminist dis-identification.

Indeed, several studies show that individuals' positionings in relation to various axes of differentiation impact on feminist dis-identification in multiple ways. Skeggs' (1997: 152) research on white working class women in the UK demonstrates that her respondents reject feminism because they perceive it as too middle-class. Skeggs (1997: 157) argues convincingly that the research participants view their femininity as potentially facilitating upward social mobility and as a means of being seen to be respectable. Feminism, by contrast, could not offer the means of attaining similar cultural and economic approval. Usually associated with unfeminine, lesbian women (1997: 122), "feminism was seen to offer few incentives, especially in comparison to the use that could be made of femininity" (1997: 157).

Skeggs' findings highlight the common belief that feminism and femininity are mutually exclusive and point to the role of sexuality in negotiations of feminism. They also draw attention to the importance of socio-economic background in feminist dis-identification. Similarly, McIntyre (2001) discussed feminist topics with a group of six urban girls of colour in the US. She (2001: 158) shows that the research participants understood feminism to mean 'feminine' and argues that they were not aware of any

other potential meanings of the term. Young women who inhabit socially disadvantaged positions both in relation to class and 'race' might not know about the term feminism or they might dis-identify with it because they advocate equality for all, including oppressed men (ibid.). Springer (2002: 11) makes a similar point when discussing black women's relationship with feminism by pointing out that "the recurring point of contention that Black women have with feminism is its impact on Black male/female relationships".

An analogous observation is made by Denner (2001) who researched a group of teenage women from a variety of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds in California. Whereas most of the young women in her study used terms such as "equality", "strength", and "pride" to describe the meaning of feminism, young Latina women from disadvantaged social backgrounds espoused more ambivalent views (165). Although they were struggling with their gender roles, they distanced themselves from feminism because they were demanding equality for all who were marginalised, including brothers and uncles. Hunter's and Seller's (1998) quantitative survey study in the US also shows that ethnic background, such as identifying as African-American, impacts upon feminist dis-identification. They (1998: 95) argue that African-American women's "perceptions of the racist intent of whites and experiences with racial discrimination drove their rejection of interracial gender-based organising". Equally important, they emphasise the role of socio-economic background in relation to feminist consciousness, claiming that "[a]mong women, higher levels of household income and education heightened awareness of gender inequality, perhaps via women's own experiences in the labour force" (ibid).

These findings point urgently to the need to theorise diversity in relation to feminist dis-identification. Aronson's (2003) study of young women's views of

feminism in the US seeks to take difference into account and investigates the role of multiple axes of difference – class, 'race' and life-experience – in relation to feminist dis-identification. In accordance with the research findings referred to above, Aronson (2003: 917) demonstrates that socio-economic and racial background mediate feminist dis-identification. She shows that the space to think about feminist issues might be a luxury that not all women can afford and states that most women of colour in her study "distanced themselves from the identity of feminist, suggesting that the intuitional support for feminism may be more appealing or available to white women" (ibid.).

Aronson's research on the interplay of diverse locations and feminist dis-identification represents an important contribution to current debates. Although her sample does not enable her to "examine whether young lesbian and bisexual women would report different perceptions of feminism than heterosexual young women" (2003: 209), I value her research on difference in relation to feminist dis-identification. I think that the exclusion of sexuality from the analysis of feminist dis-identification in Aronson's study reveals the practical limitations of conducting qualitative research that reflects *everybody's* views. My research project will also have limitations. As opposed to Aronson, I will explore the role of sexuality in feminist dis-identification, but I will not be able to theorise, research and analyse all possible dimensions of difference. Aronson's investigation highlights the importance of a multidimensional perspective when researching young women's relationship with feminism. Her research supports my performative approach which holds that the role of 'race', class and sexuality has to be explored when investigating the complex intersections between racialized, classed and gendered performances on the one hand and young women's relationship to feminism on the other hand.

Issues of diversity are not only apparent in relation to differences among young women but also apply to the different cultural contexts that this research is embedded in. As I will explore in the next chapter, issues of language difference and cultural translation arise at various stages and levels in my research. I will translate German interviews into English, but will also use Anglo-American concepts and apply them to a different cultural sphere. The dynamic nature of 'race', ethnicity and class for example implies that the concepts are constructed and used differently in various cultural contexts, such as Germany and the UK (Knapp, 2005, Ha, 2004, Steyerl, 2003). Here, I would like to draw attention to a further dimension of difference in relation to my research, namely the existence of two German states between 1949 and 1990. 'East' and 'West' Germans had different experiences living under a socialist and capitalist regime respectively and unequal power-dynamics have emerged (before and) since the reunification (Miethe, 2002; 2008; Miethe and Roth, 2003)

As Miethe (2002: 52) emphasises, "the German unification threw together two systems that could hardly h ave been more different from another". In relation to feminist and/or women's issues in particular, there were numerous differences between the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany and the socialist German Democratic Republic, ranging from abortion rights, and employment to the public-private distinction (for a detailed exploration see Miethe, 2008). With respect to women's employment, the traditional image of the housewife and mother predominated in West Germany, whereas over 90 percent of women were working outside the home in East Germany (Miethe, 2002: 52). As a consequence, women's attitudes developed quite differently in the two parts of Germany and the East and West German feminist movements had dissimilar concerns (ibid.). The issue of abortion illustrates this point: while abortion was legal in most socialist countries, the right to abortion formed one of

the central issues that gave rise to the women's movement in West Germany (Miethe, 2008: 123). After the reunification, heated debates emerged amongst East and West German feminists (Miethe, 2004) which were framed by broader unequal power structures between the West and the East. Universities, the media and public administration tend to be dominated by West Germans (Miethe, 2002). "'The West' increasingly became the unquestioned norm" and speaking of Germany still implies addressing West Germany (Miethe, 2008: 125).

Miethe's work highlights crucial differences between the two German states, which variously impacted on the experiences of people living in East and West Germany and the formation of women's movements. She argues that the category 'East German' intersects with gender identity, in addition to other axes of differentiation (2004: 338; also see Simon et al., 2000). Importantly, she perceives of 'East' and 'West' as socially constructed categories which are contingent and cautions against their reification (Miethe and Roth, 2003: 13). Miethe's research draws attention to a further dimension of difference that is relevant in the German context and that potentially intersects with feminist dis-identification. In relation to the younger generation, Miethe (2008: 130) however points out that:

> the dichotomy of 'East' and 'West' is gradually dissolving, not least due to the coming of age of a generation who have undergone most of their socialisation in a united Germany, who remember East or West Germany only as part of their childhood, and who sometimes have difficulty identifying themselves with one or the other.

The history of the existence of two German states thus calls for an approach that is sensitive to how the research participants in Germany position themselves in relation to the categories of 'East' and 'West' and that is open to exploring whether, and if so how, the experiences of growing up in the two parts of Germany shape feminist dis-identification. Such a perspective would attend to instances where the identities 'East'

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or 'West' German are taken up and made relevant in the context of negotiations of feminism.

'Difference' also pertains to the highly contested terms 'feminism' and the 'women's movement'. According to Griffin (1989: 181) it "is inappropriate to treat feminism as a unitary category reflecting a consistent set of beliefs, or even as a coherent social identity". Similarly, the German academic Gerhard (2004a: 337) underlines the importance of speaking of women's movements and feminisms in a plural form and argues that "there are no universally valid criteria nor any one definition which is suited to label women's movements". Taking a historical stance, Riley's (1988) reflections on the categories 'women' and 'feminism' raise a similar point. She argues that "'women' is an unstable category, that this instability has a historical foundation, and that feminism is the site of the systematic fighting-out of that instability" (1988: 5). Being aware that 'feminism' is a highly contested term (Grimm, 1994: 161) and that there is no one feminist movement with a unified set of goals (Whelehan: 1995: 1), this project will leave it to the participants to provide their own understanding of 'feminism' and the 'women's movement'[10].

Following Butler's (1992) reflections in '*Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of Postmodernism*', 'feminism' and the 'women's movement' will be regarded as discursively constituted categories, avoiding a pre-defined and potentially exclusionary definition of the movement. Demonstrating that subject constitution is always achieved through exclusionary processes, Butler claims that 'feminism' should rest on "contingent foundations" and calls for a constant redefinition of what

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[10] As I will explore in chapter three, my decision to leave the terms 'feminism' and 'women's movement' undefined is also coherent with the interpretative frame of this study, namely discursive psychology. The discursive psychologists Potter and Wetherell (1987: 50) critique traditional attitude research by arguing that attitudes shift, depending on the respondents' understanding of the attitudinal object. This insight of Potter and Wetherell cautions against pre-defining feminism which is the attitudinal object of this study.

constitutes feminism and its subjects. Although the repeated reference to 'feminism' and 'the women's movement' as apparently coherent entities in this thesis seems initially problematic, conceptualising the categories as discursively constituted might actually represent a strength: regarding 'feminism' and the 'women's movement' as contingent will not only avoid potential exclusions, but also offer considerable insight into young women's varying understandings of the concepts and how they might impact on feminist dis-identification. As Butler (1992: 16) rightly points out, a conceptualisation of feminism and its subjects as contingent does not imply the term should cease to be employed:

> To deconstruct the subject of feminism is not, then, to censure its usage, but, on the contrary, to release the term into a future of multiple significations, to emancipate it from the maternal or racialist ontologies to which it has been restricted, and to give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear.

In her qualitative empirical study on young women's views of feminism, Aronson (2003) also refrained from imposing a pre-defined notion of 'feminism' or the 'women's movement' as analytical categories. She argues:

> my study did not impose a uniform definition of feminism when probing or interpreting interviewees' attitudes but instead left this term for the women themselves to define. In so doing, I didn't assume that feminism's meaning is commonly understood or agreed upon (2003: 906).

Avoiding a potentially exclusionary definition of the movement in empirical research, the conception of feminism and the women's movement as discursive categories will also accommodate different national conceptualisations. This is particularly relevant in relation to the comparative dimension of my project. Bergman (2004) elaborates on this point by discussing the methodological difficulties involved in conducting cross-national research on social phenomena as elusive as 'feminism' and 'the women's movement'. She reiterates that different interpretations of the concept exist, not merely amongst members of the movements, but also in society at large. "Thus", Bergman (2004: 27) concludes, "in cross-national research in particular, 'feminism' has to be

approached flexibly, in terms set by the national, political and cultural contexts".

Bergman as well as Gerhard (2004b: 294; 1999b: 88) demonstrate that understandings

of feminism and the women's movement are contested and differ according to context.

They suggest that the term feminism is more widely used in the United States, but

more readily associated with radicalism in Europe. These observations point to the

importance of acknowledging cultural specificities which resonates with my broader

quest for acknowledging the role of 'diversity' in negotiations of feminism. In light of

these arguments, the main <u>research questions</u> of my study are:

1. *What do contemporary young women understand by 'feminism'?*
2. *How do young women position themselves in relation to 'feminism' and why do they or don't they identify as feminist? What are the similarities and differences between young women's relationship with feminism in Germany and the UK?*
3. *Do the dimensions of sexuality and heteronormativity play a crucial role in negotiations of feminism? And is the performance of (normative) femininity a component of these negotiations?*
4. *Does young women's stance towards feminism differ according to their positioning in relation to multiple axes of differentiation?*

1.5 Conclusion

According to Bulbeck's (2001: 10) crude but witty comparison, "[m]ore people in the

USA believe that the earth has been contacted by aliens than believe that the term

feminist is a compliment". Drawing on an extensive body of literature, this chapter

mapped different approaches to feminist dis-identification. While the first section

demonstrated that mainstream social movement theory does not offer suitable

theoretical frameworks to grasp individuals' reasons for dis-identifying with the

women's movement, the review of feminist reflections on young women's repudiation

of feminism offered multiple explanatory tools. Feminist researchers draw attention to

public discourses which emphasise that gender equality has been achieved. They

discuss anti-feminist media representations and the postfeminist cultural climate where

feminism is simultaneously taken into account and repudiated. Feminist activists and

academics also highlight the negative connotations of feminism as radical, moralising

and prescriptive and stress the predominance of neoliberal discourses and processes of individualisation which dissolve the appeal of political activism. Lastly, feminist researchers emphasize generational differences and foreground exclusionary tendencies of feminism in their attempt to understand young women's rejection of feminism.

These approaches offer a range of reasons to explain young women's repudiation of feminism which suggests that there are multiple factors which mediate feminist dis-identification. However, I added a further dimension to current debates by theorising the role of sexuality and heteronormativity in negotiations of feminism. I referred to historical and empirical accounts which point to the association of feminism with man-hating, unfemininity and lesbianism. By presenting a performative approach, I asked whether repudiations of feminism could be read as performative citations of (normative) femininity, indicating that heterosexual conventions structure young women's relationship with feminism.

While the impact of normative femininity with its arguably complex links to heteronormativity and heterosexuality on individuals' relationship to feminism should be explored, the subsequent and final section of this chapter demonstrated that an analysis of feminist dis-identification has to take into account young women's different socio-economic, racial, national and cultural backgrounds, as well as sexual orientations. Consequently, the next chapter shall be concerned with reflecting upon the methodological issues involved in researching feminist dis-identification, particularly across difference. I hope that my performative approach, which attends to various and interlocking axes of difference, offers a useful theoretical framework to analyse young women's arguably complex relationship with the women's movement. I will employ the performative approach in addition to and conjunction with already

existing explanatory tools in order to increase our understanding of the extent to which difference but also broader socio-cultural trends and currents mediate young women's attitudes towards feminism.

2   Chapter Two

Methodology: doing qualitative research from a feminist perspective

"The investments, dilemmas, and implications of researchers' ethical decisions and moral choices are usually secreted away, buried, concealed, and hidden from public scrutiny [...]" (Halse and Honey, 2005: 2142).

Rather than concealing difficulties and insecurities, this chapter focuses on the methodological issues and ethical dilemmas arising from my research project and invites the reader to critically engage with the methodological choices made. In accordance with the feminist concepts that I drew on to explore feminist dis-identification, I am using a feminist methodological framework to select, describe and analyse the data collection methods of my project. However, as the first section of this chapter will demonstrate, feminist research is a "perspective" (Reinharz, 1992: 241) rather than a specific set of research methods. And as there are multiple feminist methods ranging from qualitative to quantitative approaches I will explain why I chose the semi-structured in-depth interview as the research tool for my study.

The second section of this chapter will focus on the ethical dimensions of qualitative interviewing, reflecting feminist researchers' quest to conduct ethical research. Exploring researcher-researched dynamics both theoretically and empirically in relation to my study, I will illustrate the shifting nature of power-relationships in the research process. My location as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, German feminist does not mean that I always found myself in a privileged position. Taking into account the complexity of power-dynamics in the interview, I will argue that there is no universally valid approach to balancing power in the research process.

As the third section will illustrate, the multifaceted nature of social research renders it difficult to find generally applicable solutions to ethical concerns raised in research. To be sure, professional bodies, such as the British Sociological Association

or the British Psychological Society[11], provide important ethical guidelines that seek to maintain ethical standards. However, this section will focus on more specific ethical questions that emerged from my research, particularly in regard to *dilemmas* of representation and the complex ethical issues involved in speaking for and across difference. For instance, I will highlight difficulties involved in using Anglo-American concepts in relation to the German context. I will argue that we should seek to decrease the dangers of representation, rather than attempting to 'solve' the problem of speaking for and about others.

In this vein, the fourth and final section of this chapter argues that we might improve ethical practice by also investigating the unspoken dimensions of research. We should not only critically examine the problematic issues arising from the spoken aspects of research, but we should also analyse the silences in the research process. Providing examples from my study, I will demonstrate that silencing practices (in terms of silencing oneself and/or others) constitute one means through which differences are negotiated and raise specific ethical dilemmas that have to be explored. In addition, I will argue that the analysis of silences can improve our understanding of interpersonal dynamics in the research process and thereby enhance reflexive practice. Drawing on the feminist notion of 'reflexivity', I will end the chapter by advocating reflexive analysis. I will discuss some of the shortcomings of 'reflexivity', but I will emphasise its analytical potential, especially if it involves the investigation of 'silences' within research.

2.1   Feminist methodology and the use of the qualitative in-depth interview

Seeking to explore feminist dis-identification from a feminist perspective, and amongst a diverse group of young women, it seemed to be most appropriate to use a feminist

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[11] For the BSA see: Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2002). For the BPS see: Guidelines for Minimum Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research (BPS, 2004).

methodological framework and feminist data collection methods. As the following section will demonstrate, feminist methodology emerged out of a critique of dominant positivist epistemological principles. However, there is no clear-cut definition of what constitutes feminist methods and multiple approaches to feminist research exist. Being aware that different methods are appropriate for different levels of analysis, I attempt to show why I specifically chose the qualitative semi-structured in-depth interview to obtain the empirical data for my study.

"If Women's Studies is to be made into an instrument of women's liberation, we cannot uncritically use the positivist, quantitative research methodology" (Mies, 1993: 66). Feminist scientists have critiqued dominant positivist empiricist principles from a variety of perspectives: they challenged the ideals of "pure objectivity" and "value neutrality", arguing that these standards erase the possibility of exploring the interplay between emotion and reason, and obscure the connection between knowledge and power (Code, 1993: 16). According to DuBois (1983: 105), "[s]cience is not 'value-free". Along with other feminist researchers, she rejects dichotomies predominant in traditional western science, such as the dualism between observation and experience or science and the maker of science. Similarly, Hekman (1990: 73) draws attention to the feminist critique of the subject/object dualism characterising western thought, which depicts men as the subjects and producers of knowledge and thereby excludes women from the realm of rationality, truth and scientific activities.

Challenging dominant epistemological tenets of scientific discourses in modernity, feminist theorists have developed multiple and interdisciplinary methodological[12] approaches. Harding (1991: 48) for example distinguishes between feminist empiricism, standpoint theory and postmodern tendencies, a categorisation

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[12] Using the terms 'method' and 'methodology', I am drawing on Harding's (1987: 2-3) definitions. She states that a "research method is a technique for (a way of proceeding into) gathering evidence", while "a methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" (ibid.).

that is echoed by Letherby (2003). However, Letherby (2003: 96) argues that "there is no such thing as *the* feminist method" (emphasis added). This claim is also made by Fonow and Cook (2005: 2213) who hold that "[t]here has never been one correct feminist epistemology generating one correct feminist methodology for the interdisciplinary field of women's studies". Similarly, Reinharz (1992: 241) argues that there are "multiple feminist perspectives on social research methods" and highlights that "feminism is a perspective" rather than a specific set of methodologies (1992: 240; also see Taylor and Rupp, 1991). Lastly, 'feminism' is a discursively constituted category (see chapter one) which implies that definitions of 'feminist' methods are equally contingent and variable (see Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 147).

Although there is no one particular model of what constitutes feminist research, feminist theorists identify recurrent themes in the literature on methodology. Maynard (1995: 21), for example, argues that feminist methodologies focus on women's experiences and are concerned with the ethical questions that guide research practices. Similarly, Letherby (2003: 73) holds that feminist research seeks to "develop non-exploitative relationships within research" and highlights the importance of reflexivity and emotion as a source of insight. Feminist approaches are further characterised by paying attention to the significance of gender as an aspect of social life and research. However, they simultaneously attend to women's diversity and the interrelations of gender with racialized power, heterosexism, and the effects of capitalism or disability (Letherby, 2003: 73; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 147). Feminist research methods value the personal as worthy of study and, concurrent with the feminist critique of traditional western science, challenge the norm of 'objectivity' (Letherby, 2003: 73). Feminist research is not value-free but depends "on a normative

framework that interrelates 'injustice', a politics for 'women' (however these categories are understood), [and] ethical practices that 'eschew' the 'unjust' exercise of power [...]" (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 147).

Seeking to explore feminist dis-identification in a diverse group of young women, semi-structured, qualitative interviews seemed to be the most appropriate method to obtain the empirical data for my project. According to Kelly, Burton and Regan (1995: 34), it is "still the case that not just qualitative methods, but the in-depth face-to-face interview has become the paradigmatic 'feminist method'". Similarly, Maynard (1995: 11) holds that semi-structured (or unstructured) interviewing has been the research tool most often associated with a feminist stance. Kelly et al. (1995: 29) go as far as to say that an orthodoxy has developed in social science which implied that "'feminist method' involved face-to-face interviewing" (1995: 29). However, I did not select the qualitative in-depth interview in order to adhere to an alleged feminist orthodoxy, but to hear subjective accounts.

Indeed, there has been a multifaceted feminist debate on the uses and abuses of quantitative and qualitative methods in recent years, which promotes the value of both quantitative and qualitative devices. This discussion has pointed to the overlaps between qualitative and quantitative methods (Oakley, 2000), emphasising that there is no quantification without qualification and no statistical analysis without interpretation (Bauer et al., 2000). Feminist critiques have further argued that the conceptualisation of qualitative and quantitative methods as diametrically opposed is not only at odds with the feminist critique of dualistic categorisation (Maynard, 1995: 21), but is also "unhelpful practically, academically, and politically" (Letherby, 2004: 183).

Qualitative methods, such as face-to-face interviews, lend themselves to feminist principles of reciprocity, the valuing of women's personal experiences and the

analysis of nuances of meaning and social relationships (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 155). Nevertheless, feminist researchers have also demonstrated the shortcomings of qualitative research tools and challenged the idea that they always accord with feminist principles. The use of qualitative methods and small-scale studies can provide the illusion that baseline knowledge has been achieved which gives rise to the methodological problems of poor representation and over-generalisation (Kelly et al., 1992: 153; Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991: 102). Additionally, the more anonymous character of quantitative methods, such as large-scale questionnaires, might encourage research participants to disclose information that they otherwise would have kept to themselves (ibid.). According to Cannon et al. (1991: 107), the small-scale character of qualitative research has often excluded women of colour and working-class women. Additionally, members from oppressed groups may encounter difficulties in communicating specific experiences and meanings in research that takes place in a culturally dominant white middle-class context. By contrast, large-scale quantitative surveys have the potential to be more representative and inclusive. In conjunction with the "appeal of numbers" (Pugh, 1990: 110), they "have the power to alter public opinion in ways that a smaller number of in-depth interviews do not" (Fonow and Cook, 2005: 2227).

Reflecting upon the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative methods, "there is a general concurrence in recent writings on feminist methodology that there can be no single, prescribed method or set of research methods consistent with feminist values" (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991: 100). Qualitative and quantitative methods can also be combined to develop a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon under study (see, for example, Tolman and Szalacha, 1999 and their research on girls' experiences of sexual desire). As Letherby (2003: 81) rightly

stresses, "it is not the use of a particular method or methods which characterise a research or project as feminist, but the way in which the methods are used". Different methods are more suitable for different levels of analysis (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 155) and researchers have to choose the research tools most appropriate for their research questions.

For my study on feminist dis-identification amongst young women, the use of qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews was most suitable. As I have demonstrated, the aim of this project is to explore young women's *subjective* views of feminism and the ways in which they position themselves in relation to the women's movement. Rather than focusing on broader social trends by using quantitative methods, I seek to explore young women's *personal* understandings of feminist politics. The desired outcome of my project is not to obtain a representative sample that lends itself to generalisation, but to inquire into individual accounts. Hence the use of the qualitative in-depth interview as a method which is well suited to provide insight into subjective experiences and meanings (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 1; Parr, 1998: 89). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995: 1), "[q]ualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds". Interviewing allows researchers to listen to people's arguably contingent and context-specific thoughts and enables the research participants to tell their story in their own words (Anderson and Jack, 1991: 11). The spontaneous exchange within an interview allows for flexibility and freedom (ibid.) where repeated questioning and personal contact enable the researcher to gain an enhanced understanding of what the interviewees think at a specific moment in time (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 19).

"Within the general rubric of in-depth interviewing there are many different approaches" (Letherby, 2003: 89) and researchers sometimes have a completely

unstructured agenda (ibid.). However, I chose to have semi-structured "conversations"[13]. After conducting a pilot interview, a revised interview protocol (see Annex) provided the basis for semi-structured conversations. Asking different interviewees the same questions offered an important point for comparison: in relation to their varying understandings of 'feminism' and with regard to the interviewees' different locations as well as the cross-cultural component of this study. Topics that were addressed ranged from the research participants' views on gender roles and (in)equality, their understandings of and associations with feminism, to the question of whether they would call themselves feminist.

I interviewed 40 women aged 18 to 35 in Berlin, London as well as Birmingham and I conducted half the interviews in Germany. Research participants had to be at least 18 years old in order to be able to give me their consent; if they had been younger, I would have had to elicit their parents' consent and I was worried that this would make it harder to access research participants. The large age-range is also due to practical reasons. My attempt to interview a diverse group of women meant that I had to increase the age-range in order to be able to obtain access to respondents from a variety of backgrounds.

The research was carried out in Germany and the UK, as I had encountered the phenomenon of feminist dis-identification in both countries. I am German, but went to the UK for my higher education. My positioning as a German at a British university offered the opportunity to conduct research in both countries, taking advantage of the fact that I speak both languages, and am familiar with the two cultural contexts. As I will discuss at the beginning of my data analysis, there were more similarities, than differences, between negotiations of feminism in Germany and the UK. In the course

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[13] "Qualitative interviewing is similar to ordinary conversations but also differs from them" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 1) because they are research tools, held between strangers and guided by the researcher.

of the research, it turned out that differences between Germany and the UK did not present themselves clearly in young women's talk, which is why the comparative aspect of the data will remain little explored in the data analytic chapters.

Given the importance of acknowledging difference in young women's negotiation of feminism, I sought to obtain a diverse group of research participants in both countries. The identity characteristics of the women I interviewed varied across multiple axes of differentiation   such as sexual orientation, ethnic and socio-economic background – and intersected with each other in numerous ways. For example, one research participant identified as East German, white, lesbian and middle-class whereas another described herself as black and upper class. Several interviewees refused to use any 'labels' and one participant referred to her identity as "constantly growing". The interviewees further differed in relation to their religious identification and their status regarding health and motherhood, as well as education. As my discussion of the performative approach illustrated, I will mostly focus on the dimensions of gender identity, sexuality, 'race', class and - to a much lesser extent national differences with a sensitivity to the history of the East/West divide in Germany.

The diversity of my sample highlights that identities are complex and intersect with forms of social differentiation in variegated ways. It is therefore problematic to adopt a 'tick-box approach' by categorising my research participants as being members of a specific group such as 'working-class' or 'ethnic minority'. However, 'race', class, gender, sexuality do matter and impact on individuals' life – even if they do so in complex ways. Consequently, I have to negotiate an acknowledgment of the complexities of identities on the one hand, and an awareness of how they mediate feminist dis-identification on the other hand. As I will demonstrate in chapter seven,

my performative approach will assist me in negotiating this dilemma by tracing the shifting nature of identities, whilst also demonstrating how 'race', class, gender and sexuality matter, and come to matter, in feminist dis-identification. In order to strike this difficult balance within the context of the presentation of my data, I will now offer a brief overview of my respondents, focusing on their different positionings, particularly in relation to 'race', class, and sexuality. I hope that this will enable the reader to appreciate the diversity of the sample. On the other hand, I will refrain from using biographical information about each research participant when I discuss individual statements. This is because I attempt to avoid representing the respondents' identities as fixed, rather than changing and under constant production. Instead, I will provide short pen portraits of all the participants in the Annex in order to offer a 'fuller' and potentially less essentialising description of them. I hope that this approach manages to highlight diversity and complexity without reifying socially-constructed categories.

In Germany, I interviewed thirteen middle-class women and seven women from lower socio-economic backgrounds; four women who identified as gay, 13 as heterosexual and two bisexual women[14]; as well as two black, two mixed race, one East Asian, and 12 white research participants. Three respondents identified as both German and Turkish and one participant had been raised in West Africa and had worked in Germany for several years. All respondents lived in Berlin at the time of research. 11 had been raised in former West Germany and eight research participants had been born in the GDR (mostly in East-Berlin). In the UK, I conducted 15 interviews in London and five in Birmingham. In these interviews I met five working-class women and 15 middle-class women. Three respondents described themselves as

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[14] Faith declined to discuss her sexuality.

lesbian, 14 as heterosexual and three as bisexual. Two research participants identified as black, three as mixed-race, three as Asian and 12 as white. Most research participants had been raised in the UK with four research participants having multi-national backgrounds including continental Europe and Southern Africa.

	Sexuality	Class Background	Racial and Ethnic Background
Germany 11 raised in former West Germany 8 in GDR	4 lesbian 13 heterosexual 2 bisexual 1 unknown	7 working-class 13 middle-class	12 white 2 mixed-race 1 East Asian 2 black 3 German/Turkish
UK	3 lesbian 14 heterosexual 3 bisexual	5 working-class 15 middle-class	12 white 3 mixed-race 3 Asian 2 black

In order to obtain a diverse sample, I spent a lot of time and energy identifying and accessing suitable participants. One way of gaining access to the interviewees was by using my social network (friends/family/colleagues who asked their acquaintances whether they wanted to participate) and subsequent snowballing. In Germany, I also contacted two Turkish/German cultural organisations and one did indeed get back to me to put me in touch with one participant. However, it proved incredibly difficult to access a diverse group of women, specifically in relation to finding interviewees from a lower socio-economic background in the UK. In London, I contacted numerous social workers and one teacher over the course of ten months but, after initial

enthusiasm, my quests for assistance were often met with reluctance. This reluctance was expressed in many different ways, ranging from just not getting back to me to saying that there was a lack of interest in the topic. In the end, a very proactive friend of a colleague offered her assistance and organised five interviews for me in Birmingham.

Once a participant had agreed to take part in the research, we met for interviews which lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours although the average duration amounted to one hour. While I informally told the participants about my project when first establishing contact, I provided detailed information about the study at the beginning of each interview in order to obtain written or oral consent (see consent form, Annex). However, one has to bear in mind that it is impossible for interviewees to give their fully informed consent at the outset of a qualitative interview whose direction cannot be anticipated (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002: 111). The line between informed and uninformed consent remains blurry (Thorne, 1980) and the notion of consent is further rendered problematic because it posits an autonomous liberal humanist subject able to make rational judgments (Halse and Honey, 2005: 2149). This notion of the stable and independent actor discounts the multiple power relations as well as forms of interaction that constitute the subject. Moreover, the concept of the autonomous subject is at odds with a feminist ontology that emphasises interrelatedness and power-relationships (ibid.).

Despite these difficulties with the concept of informed consent, I nonetheless experienced it as an important tool with which to establish some of the basic principles of my research – such as confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and the opportunity to withdraw – and to encourage participants to view the interview as a "guided conversation" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) by asking me questions back, also

during the interview. All interviews were recorded with permission and then transcribed, using pseudonyms to protect the interviewees' anonymity. I transcribed 28 interviews myself and then received funding for the professional transcription of the remaining twelve. There were several interesting slips in the professional transcriptions, where interviewees' statements were incorrectly transcribed in ways that reaffirmed culturally prevalent stereotypes, such as the association of feminism with lesbianism (see chapter six). My decision to use a professional transcription service thus provided unexpected and additional insights. On the whole, the interviews offered empirical data on young women's relationship with feminism, but also provided insight into the multifaceted nature of researcher-researched relationships which I will explore in the following section.

2.2   The researcher/researched relationship

As the previous section sought to demonstrate, feminists have often advocated the use of qualitative methods to explore the specificity of individual women's understandings, emotions and actions. However, the first section also showed that feminist critics have theorised the shortcomings of qualitative methods, such as their limited means of generalisation. In addition, feminist researchers have specifically drawn attention to ethical issues arising from face-to-face interviews. Reflecting the quest to conduct non-exploitative research, feminists have investigated the ethical dilemmas arising from unequal power-relationships within research. Exploring the nature of the researcher-researched relationships in my study, the following section will shed light on the changing nature of 'power' within the research process.

According to Patai (1991: 145), ethics is a matter of relations between people and "the personal interview is, therefore, a particularly precise locus for ethical issues to surface". The basis of all research is a relationship (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 59)

involving an interaction between the researcher and the research participants. The interview constitutes a two-way exchange which is shaped by the feelings and ideas of both participants (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 19). According to Song (1998: 113), researchers, as well as interviewees, have sympathies and allegiances and, in some cases, friendships may emerge out of the research process (Oakley, 1997). However, the research process does not represent an equal encounter, but is characterised by power-imbalances that feminist researchers have theorised extensively (Wolf, 1996; Cotterill, 1992; Finch, 1995; Grenz, 2005; Luff, 1999, Opie, 1992; Phoenix, 1995). Trying hard to avoid the exploitation of women, ethical questions are heightened in feminist interview research (Reinharz, 1992: 27) and "fieldwork has been one important site in which feminists have tried to minimise or eliminate power differences between the researcher and the researched" (Harding and Norberg, 2005: 2012).

Describing power-relations during the research process, Wolf (1996: 2) argues that power is discernible in three interrelated dimension: "1) power differences stemming from different positionalities of the researcher and the researched [...]; 2) power exerted during the research process, such as defining the research relationship, unequal exchange, and exploitation; and 3) power exerted during the post fieldwork period – writing and representing". Similarly, Alldred (1998: 162) points to different levels at which power can operate and Letherby (2003: 78) emphasises the authority of the researcher in selecting and rejecting data at the different stages of the research. In the pre-fieldwork stage, the researcher determines the questions and further selects data during analysis and writing-up. "The full, individual identities of respondents cannot be known during the process of research" (ibid.) which implies that the researcher's ability to select data constitutes an important aspect of her or his power. Moreover, after leaving the field, the researcher has ultimate control over the material.

She has the power to organise and present the data (Letherby, 2003: 85; Parr, 1998: 100) as well as turning people's lives into an authoritative text (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 113).

Being aware of the power of researchers vis-à-vis respondents, feminists have argued that interviews should be characterised by friendliness, rapport and engagement to establish a more equal research relationship. This stance was most famously expressed in Oakley's (1997) article 'Interviewing Women: A contradiction in terms', but has been challenged on multiple accounts. Reid (1983), for example, claims that Oakley's call for a high level of rapport between her and the women she interviewed seems to be fairly middle-class. Similarly, Phoenix (1995: 55) holds that "the women-interviewer women-interviewee situation does not always produce rapport through gender identification". Instead, Phoenix (ibid.) highlights the unpredictable impact that 'race' and gender can have on the research process. Equally important, feminists have become increasingly aware that the feminist in-depth interview can be "used clumsily and even exploitatively" (ibid.) and carries the risk of doing rapport "too effectively" (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002: 111). Finch (1995) for example holds that trust is easily established between women and has exploitative potential. Participants may disclose information that they potentially regret having shared and which carries the risk of later being used against them. The high degree of interaction between the researcher and the participant may reveal "deeply personal, emotionally charged information" (Kirsch, 2005: 2163), placing research subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal (Stacey, 1991).

As Kirsch (2005: 2165) points out, respondents rarely exercise their rights to refuse to answer particular questions and the researcher might touch on sensitive issues unknowingly. This is what happened during one interview where a participant spoke

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very openly about her relationship with her family. I had the impression that the interviewee wanted to talk about these issues and therefore did not stop her. A few hours later however, she sent me an email which read: "Thanks for the interview, I enjoyed it, even though it left me emotionally drained, as those are not the kind of things one talks about everyday". This event made me acutely aware that the feminist quest to establish rapport can easily go too far and that intimacy between the researcher and the researched is potentially harmful (Stacey, 1991). As Cotterill (1992: 598) rightly points out, "the distinction between a research relationship and friendship may become blurred. And when a woman then talks about very painful aspects of her life to an other who will eventually walk away, there may be real potential for harm". The above mentioned instance illustrates the potential of face-to-face interviews to turn into one-sided encounters and highlights the responsibility of the researcher to protect the respondents (Brannen, 1988: 552).

Indeed, I experienced respondents disclosing private and intimate issues on various accounts, even though my research does not touch on sensitive topics per se. This experience not only highlights the exploitative potential of interviews, but also touches on a further ethical issue: "the crises and tragedies occurring to our respondents or study population [...] may enhance our own research" (Wolf, 1996: 20). I was distressed to hear that some research participants had experienced violent or sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancies and/or unemployment. Feminist concerns continue to be pertinent and I could not help thinking that this finding was simultaneously useful for my research. This mixture of feeling satisfied with the findings but also guilty was reinforced by the fact that the interviews will enable me to gain a PhD, but not alter the material realties of those researched (Standing, 1998: 199).

By highlighting the powerful position of the researcher in the research relationship, I do not mean to imply that the researched is always in a powerless position. According to Letherby (2003: 116), "it is important not to over-pacify respondents within the research situation". Research participants have the power to deny or gratify access (Olsen and Shopes, 1991: 196; Phoenix, 1995). This is a power which I have experienced quite vividly through my difficulties of finding suitable participants in the UK. It became obvious to me that my status as a foreign student in London meant that I did not have an extended social network to access a diverse group of interviewees. It took me much longer to establish contact with interviewees in London, as opposed to Berlin, and I relied on the help of my supervisor and colleagues in some instances. In addition, research participants can exercise power *during* the research process: they can refuse to answer, decide what to talk about and not tell the truth (Standing, 1998: 189; Letherby, 2003: 116). The circumstances that the interview takes place in can further empower the participant (Phoenix, 1995: 59). This was the case in one of my interviews with a very wealthy respondent who invited me to her place, which I found quite intimidating. I also conducted half of the interviews in English which is not my mother tongue and at times made me feel insecure. Equally important, a significant number of the respondents were older than me and both of these factors potentially empowered the participants.

Sometimes my being a feminist put me in a vulnerable position as well. Recounting her experiences of conducting research as a feminist, Millen (1997: 9) for example states that "it was difficult sometimes to listen to the repeated characterisation of 'feminists' as 'bra-burners', 'lesbians', 'hippies' and 'trouble-makers' in disapproving terms". I have had similar experiences on multiple accounts, culminating in one respondent who asked me whether I was a man-hater (chapter six). It has not

always been easy to openly talk about my feminist identity after having listened to numerous derogative comments about feminists, such as 'all feminists are ugly'. It left me wondering what the participants thought about my appearance and I frequently emerged from interviews feeling in need of a good 'make-over'. Whereas I have always been open about my feminism, Ramsay (1996: 137) chose not to identify herself as a feminist in her research. I empathise with her decision because I have experienced repetitive and depreciative comments about 'feminists' as quite stressful. Dismissive remarks about feminism challenged a central part of my identity in very overt and hostile ways which often made me feel vulnerable.

Interviewees can exert power in multiple ways and potentially experience the research as empowering. Opie (1992) stresses that the researched may benefit from participation in at least two ways: they contribute to making a social issue visible and may experience the interviews as therapeutic. Similarly, Phoenix (1995: 60) stresses that the women she researched enjoyed having someone with whom to talk. This observation resonates with Olsen's and Shopes's (1991: 197) claim that interviewees benefit from the opportunity of "being heard, to air grievances, to work over and perhaps seek reassurances for certain decisions, and, yes, to complain". Equally important, Skeggs (1995: 81) notes that the self-worth of her research participants was enhanced by "being given an opportunity to be valued, knowledgeable and interesting". McRobbie (1982: 56) also talks about the sense of flattery on the part of the women she interviewed. This parallels my experience of over-hearing a few participants proudly telling their friends/relatives that they had been selected to take part in an important "scientific study".

Reflecting upon the powers of the researcher and the researched, it has become clear that power relationships in the research process are not fixed, but changing. "The

balance of power between interviewers and interviewee shifts over the course of a study" (Phoenix, 1995: 55) and "it becomes evident that there is not an either/or power relation between the researcher and the researched" (Grenz, 2005: 211). Differences between the locations of the researcher and the researched (such as 'race', gender and socio-economic background) enter the interview but they "do not do so in any unitary or essential way" (Phoenix, 1995: 49). As Brah (1996: 125) points out, it is a contextually contingent question whether difference pans out as inequity, exploitation and oppression or as egalitarianism, diversity and democratic forms of political agency.

I conducted one interview which illustrates the complex and shifting nature of power-relationships within the research process. Faith is German, with strong links to her East-African heritage. She had just embarked on her doctoral degree and was three years older than me. Faith was forty-five minutes late for her interview and only answered my questions reluctantly. There were short silences before many of her answers and she did not give me any cues as to how I should address her. For example, when I asked her how she would describe her identity, she replied by saying "constantly growing". The non-verbal communication during the interview was equally telling because she kept pushing the tape-recorder away from her, and switching it on and off when she felt like it. I experienced her interference with the tape-recorder as a challenge to my authority (be it consciously or not), but am now acutely aware that I have the privilege to write about our encounter from my perspective. Cultural, ethnic and religious differences impacted on our conversation and privileged both of us at different stages of the research. I was not always and automatically in a more dominant position even though my structural location as white

and non-religious as opposed to hers as a black Muslim woman might have suggested that in this particular time and context.

Reflecting not only on individual interviews, but on the overall experience of conducting research, illustrates the complex and shifting nature of power-relationships even further. According to Fonow and Cook (1991: 9), "feminist researchers often attend specifically to the role of affect in the production of knowledge". Having kept a research journal which documented my spontaneous thoughts and feelings about each interview, I became aware of the plethora of emotions I experienced during interviewing: Insecurity – when the participants addressed issues that I did not know much about; pity and "middle-class guilt" in relation to my privileged socio-economic position; exhaustion; incomprehension and frustration about the persistence of negative stereotypes associated with feminism; feeling uncomfortable in the role of the 'authority'; boredom of listening to certain ideas over and over again; tension because I had to get through with my questions in a certain amount of time; pressure to lead the conversation and to conduct 'ethical' interviews by not asking any potentially offensive questions; vulnerability in relation to hostile views of feminism; but also thrilling bonding experiences; attraction; stimulating intellectual/personal exchange; curiosity and empowerment. Emotions can serve as a source of insight and paying attention to affect in the production of knowledge can enhance critical reflexivity (Fonow and Cook, 1991: 10). In my opinion, the multiple emotions I experienced during interviewing illustrate the shifting nature of researcher-researched dynamics quite vividly. However, they also highlight that the interviews constitute human relationships, bringing us back to the beginning of this section and the ethical dilemmas in research.

How are researchers to ensure that research is conducted ethically if the power-relationships between the researcher and the researched are complex and changing? Acknowledging the shifting dynamics of power within the research process seems to imply that there can be no universally valid approach to solving the ethical dilemmas in research. Indeed, as the critical reflection on doing rapport (see beginning of this section) has shown, a close relationship between researcher and researched might not always be desirable (also see Reinharz's, 1992: 297 critical reflection about "achieving" rapport). For example, racial matching as a strategy to minimise differences between the researcher and the researched denies the existence of other axes of differentiation such as gender, sexuality, as well as class and presupposes that the researched has acquired a particular subjectivity (Twine, 2000: 16). As has been demonstrated above, 'race' and gender of the researcher certainly matter, but do so in unpredictable ways (Archer, 2001), demonstrating that racial matching is not always a desirable strategy.

Feminists have further called for researchers to hand their interpretation of the data back to the participants in order to create a more equal relationship. However, giving research participants the opportunity to comment on emerging interpretation of research data (Kirsch, 2005: 2168) does not always prove beneficial because this strategy "depends on a high degree of trust in the research relationship, and does not offer any consistent method for dealing with conflicting understandings among the researched, conflicting political interest or the ethics of informed consent" (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 116; also see Mauthner and Doucet, 1998: 139). As Coyle (1996: 74) points out, the researched are likely to disagree with the researcher's interpretation of the data, especially if it is conducted from a feminist standpoint: "[w]omen participating in feminist research may not invoke the role of patriarchal

social structures when making sense of their experiences". Taking these challenges seriously, I decided not to engage in this strategy. Instead, I continuously reflect on the dilemmas arising from my research by exploring them both theoretically and empirically. Accordingly, the next section deals with a further feminist ethical issue – the dilemma of representation – and will equally demonstrate that there are no straight-forward, universally valid answers to ethical questions arising from empirical research.

2.3   The dilemma of representation

According to Alldred (1998: 150   151), research is frequently regarded as providing a space in which hitherto silenced people can 'be heard', hoping that the "dissemination of 'findings' in the public sphere can provide a platform for, or can amplify, these voices". However, as the feminist debate in recent years has demonstrated, there are dangers involved in speaking for others[15], particularly if these are members of a group that we do not belong to and that is oppressed in ways we are not (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996: 1). Already in 1979, Lorde called for feminists to examine women's difference and to attend to the experiences of "poor women, black and third-world women, and lesbians" (2001:106). Feminist theory and research should seek to include the diversity of women's experiences; "yet the dangers of speaking across difference of race, culture, sexuality, and power are becoming increasingly clear" (Alcoff, 1995: 98). Accordingly, Patai (1991: 137) asks whether it is possible "to write about the oppressed without becoming one of the oppressors?". The location of the researcher is epistemologically salient and more privileged positions can be discursively dangerous by for example reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for (Alcoff, 1995: 99).

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[15] According to Carabine (1996: 167), a focus on the other is problematic because it seems to rely on a self/other binary, suggesting essential, fixed and homogenous categories which obscure differences amongst members of a specific group. Furthermore, Carabine (ibid.) points out that a focus on the other can lead to a neglect of the commonalities that one shares with members of different groups. While I agree with Carabine's challenge to the concept of the other, I am using it here to refer to the feminist debate about 'representing others' and the specific theoretical and methodological questions this discussion has raised.

"For in both the practice of speaking for and the practice of speaking about others, I am engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situation, and in fact, who they are, based on my own situated interpretation" (Alcoff, 1995: 100-101). Objectification (the use of other people's experiences for one's own purposes) as well as the potential for exploitation are intrinsic aspects of research projects (Patai, 1991: 137), revealing further ethical dilemmas in research.

In her famous article '*Can the subaltern speak?*', Spivak (1988) highlights the risks at stake when members of a privileged group, for example intellectuals, make political claims on behalf of oppressed groups, such as "third world women"[16]. Elaborating on the concept of the 'subaltern', Spivak demonstrates that subaltern subjects are "no more than an effect of the subaltern subject effect" (1988: 204). The subaltern is no sovereign political subject and the benevolent attempt to represent subaltern groups only appropriates their voices and thereby silences them. Spivak's discussion of the sati (widow sacrifice) in Hindu culture further illustrates that the "subaltern cannot speak" (1988: 308). Subaltern women do not have their own voice because they are deeply embedded in historically determinate systems of political and economic representation (Hindu patriarchal codes of conduct and British colonial representations of women). Spivak's critical reflections on representing the voices of the subaltern and the harmful effects of speaking for disempowered groups are echoed by numerous feminists. Burman (1996: 139) for example shares similar concerns and holds that the act of 'speaking for' not only risks patronising and colonising 'other' voices, but is also in danger of essentialising those accounts by failing to treat them as discursively constructed.

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[16]In a similar vein, Mohanty (1991) criticises how the white feminist perspective has ignored third world women or repositioned them. Being the object of the white female gaze, third world women are marked by their difference or otherness, but are never the agents of knowledge and producers of political discourse.

Issues of representation emerge at different stages of the research. Standing (1998: 190), for example, reflects on her experiences of transforming the interview transcripts into standard English. "By doing this", she asks, "am I further negating the worthiness of the women's language, and indeed my own?" (ibid.). How, on a linguistic level, are we to represent our research participants' experiences? This is a pertinent question, also in relation to my research, because I had to translate all the German interview extracts that I quoted into English. In addition, some of the women spoke in their local, Berlin dialect and the untranslatable nuances of their specific ways of speaking might get lost in translation. Does this imply that some 'voices' will disappear on their journey from Berlin to London and during their transformation from oral narratives into written accounts? Regarding language as an element that "allows us to make sense of things, of ourselves", Spivak (1993: 179) establishes a close link between language and agency. She argues that "[t]he task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency" (ibid.). Taking into account the difficulties of retaining the specificity of language in translation, and thereby diminishing the agency of the subjects that are being represented, her reflections highlight the political dimensions of processes of translation.

With regard to my research, I do not only have to translate German statements (and specific local dialects) into English, but the cross-cultural dimension of my research also implies that I have to be wary of issues of translation arising from my use of predominantly Anglo-American theoretical concepts. For instance, there is a debate amongst critical social theorists in German speaking academia that reveals the complexities involved in the application of analytical categories that have emerged from, and are more common in, the Anglo-American sphere. Various researchers have observed that German academic debates have only recently began to consider racism

as a structuring power (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 1999: 31), and that postcolonial and cultural studies perspectives have only been drawn on more widely since the end of the 1990s (Ha, 2005: 85). This observation applies to more mainstream academic and feminist discourses; differences amongst women had already been discussed in the 1980s (Oguntoye et al., 1986, for overview see Hark: 2005: 41). It is important to acknowledge these early interventions in feminist debates as to avoid a genealogy which overlooks the contributions of black women and women of colour to feminist debates in Germany (also see Hemmings, 2005).

In her article on the travelling of "race, class, and gender", Knapp (2005: 257-258) shows that the incorporation of Anglo-American analytical categories in German theoretical debates and empirical research proves difficult, particularly in relation to the concept of 'race'. "*Rasse* is a category that cannot be used in an affirmative way in Germany: it is neither possible to ascribe a *Rasse* to others nor is it acceptable to use *Rasse* as a basis for identity claims, which by comparison is a common practice in the US". According to Knapp, the reluctance to employ the term Rasse relates back to the history of National Socialism in Germany. There is a fear that it (re)-manifests notions of 'race' (Tissberger, 2006: 85). In addition, the subtle continuity of the belief in an 'ethnically homogenous German nation' also accounts for the fact that racial differences are rarely the subject of public debates. German citizenship right is for example based on the *ius sanguinis* (right of 'blood') which suggests that being born and socialised in Germany is not sufficient to 'count' as a German:

> [C]hildren born in Germany to settled migrant workers are like their parents foreigners or 'Ausländer'. Within the ideology of the 'volkish' nation based on blood ties, Black and migrant people are seen as invaders, their 'difference' a threat to ethnic purity and national unity. Germany, an ethnic nation state, is 'ideologically programmed for assimilation' despite being a multi-cultural society. Yet neither the foreign workers nor the Black Germans are regarded as belonging to German society (Solanke, 2000: 183; also see Wollrad, 2005: 11).

The historically informed and contextually specific reluctance to use the term *Rasse* leads to a paradoxical situation: 'race' is not discussed out of fear to perpetuate racism which for example means that whiteness, as a location of structural advantage (Frankenberg, 1993:1) is not discussed. This de-thematisation of whiteness, argues Tissberger (2006: 85), prevents the work against racism.

Accordingly, there has been a call for a critical engagement with 'race' and whiteness in Germany which draws on Anglo-American whiteness studies (Frankenberg, 1993; Dyer, 1997; Ware and Back, 2002) and argued for the transfer of Anglo-American debates to the German context (Walgenbach, 2000; Wollrad, 2005). Motivated by a critical engagement with whiteness as a position of structural advantage, Germany's frequently neglected history of colonialism (Arndt, 2006), and challenges to German-speaking feminism as privileging gender over 'race' (Lory, 2006), various critical theorists began using the insights of Anglo-American critical whiteness theory. However, the transfer of analytical categories that have emerged form a different context has also been subject to criticism. Already in the mid-1990s, Gümen (1996) highlighted some dangers involved in the travelling of concepts. She argued that broader societal discourses in Germany, particularly in relation to cultural identity, rely on an essentialist concept of difference as expressed in German citizenship policy. By importing Anglo-American categories into German academic debates, concepts such as 'diversity' might be re-essentialised rather than deconstructed. 'Difference', and particularly ethnic difference, might be defined in essentialist terms, thereby reinforcing existing structures of oppression and marginalising the experiences and voices of 'others'.

Reflecting more specifically on the critical whiteness debate in Europe, Griffin and Braidotti (2002: 231) argue that one of its central shortcomings consists in the

understanding of diversity as primarily connoting skin colour. "Skin colour in and of itself is not a necessary or sufficient explanation for some of the kinds of racism that have wreaked such havoc in Europe" (ibid.). Equally, Dietze (2006: 231) argues that early uses of critical whiteness studies in Germany restricted the application of its critical tools to 'racial' differences, leaving undertheorized patterns of power and dominance in the mobilisation of cultural differences. In the critical collection *Does the Subaltern Speak German?* Steyerl (2003) equally cautions against a simple transfer of Anglo-American postcolonial theory to other contexts and calls for a critical examination of the applicability of key concepts and terms. The debate on the uses and abuses of critical whiteness studies and postcolonial theory in different contexts raises important issues. It is crucial to take into account that academic concepts, such as 'race', class and gender cannot be applied to the German context thoughtlessly, but have to be contextualised. I hope that my performative approach which investigates how different identities are negotiated, taken up and done in the context of the interviews provides such a contextualisation. In this regard, it is also important to trace the specificity of meanings as they travel from Germany to the UK. This can for example be achieved by not directly translating specific German terms into English, but by retaining them and describing their meaning so that cultural nuances will be found in translation.

A further dilemma of representation arises when seeking to interpret the research data, especially as a feminist researcher analysing the accounts of non-feminist women. According to Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 115), "[a] critical point in the politics of representing 'others' across difference is, then, the process of interpreting data". As Letherby (2003: 135) argues, the feminist/ (non-)feminist identification is one aspect of "otherhood" that has to be considered in research. This

raises the question of how to interpret non-feminist accounts from a feminist perspective. How can researchers combine a critical analysis of the interview material and simultaneously avoid the trap of interpreting certain accounts as instances of 'false consciousness'? The concept of 'false consciousness' has been challenged from multiple perspectives (see Stanely and Wise, 1993: 123). Gorelick (1991: 468) argues that "[t]he difficulty with the concept of false consciousness lies in the implication that a) there is a true consciousness that is known and complete, and b) the researcher-activist knows it, and the participant does not". In relation to my research, the dilemmas arising from the interpretation of the research data are particularly pertinent. This is not only the case because I have interviewed many non-feminist women whose interpretative frames were different from mine. Further difficulties may arise because I have conducted research across difference and interviewed women whose specific locations on social axes of differentiation *could* imply that they are oppressed in ways that I am not.

All research involves representation (Griffin, 1996: 99) and gives rise to multiple dilemmas which suggests that no generic solution can be found (Patai, 1991: 145; Wolf, 1996: 24; Ribbens, 1989: 590). Acknowledging differences and seeking to avoid exploitation in the process of knowledge production seems to suggest that we should limit research to relationships between those who share as much as possible. However, sameness within research can be a problem because it can 'blur the vision' of researchers, preventing them from conducting a critical analysis (Hurd and McIntyre, 1996: 79). Moreover, as Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 115) emphasise, "the shifting complexity of identities, and the complex intersections of social divisions, make confining emancipatory research to insider knowledge difficult to achieve [...]". Multiple, intersecting discourses of otherness imply that the question of 'speaking for

others' is problematic in itself because "it presupposes that complex realities can be reduced to simple binary equations" (Ang-Lygate, 1996: 54).

The recognition of multiple intersecting axes of differentiation implies that various 'solutions' to the dilemma of representation, such as silence, retreat or engagement all pose ethical questions (Fine, 1994: 81). Even if we were able to clearly demarcate what constitutes the 'other', the "declaration that I 'speak only for myself' has the sole effect of allowing me to avoid responsibility and accountability for my effects on others; it cannot literally erase those effects" (Alcoff, 1995: 108). Speaking only for myself might reinforce the silencing of oppressed voices by erasing their experiences and re-inscribing power-relations (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996: 12). It is for these reasons that I decided to include the voices of a diverse group of women in my research. However, the attempt to hear the voices of a diverse group of women can also serve to underwrite and reinscribe social forms of differentiation, providing the illusion that those are "essentially real" categories, rather than socially constituted entities (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996: 23). For example, as an international student, I did not know any British women who did not go to university and who were from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. I had to make a conscious effort to access suitable participants and found myself in the awkward situation of reinforcing differences (by for example asking friends whether they knew any 'working-class women') which I normally seek to deconstruct.

While being aware that there is no definitive solution to the problem of speaking for others (Alcoff, 1995: 111), feminist researchers have nevertheless pointed to strategies that can decrease its dangerous effects. There seems to be widespread agreement that emphasising commonalities and connectedness in the encounter with the other can be beneficial. Although an awareness of difference remains crucial in

order to conduct ethical research (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996), "finding the common ground through our subjective experience is the basis from which to build understanding and knowledge" (Blackwood, 1995: 27). We all have multiple selves and identities (ibid.), but we can work to recognise ourselves in others (Burman, 1996: 79). Focusing on connectedness potentially means that seemingly irreconcilable differences lose their rigidity (Bell, 1996) and we can "work the hyphen", the "relations between" selves and others, to reveal our partialities and pluralities (Fine, 1994).

In order to offer further ways of dealing with the dilemmas of representation, Alcoff (1995: 111) develops four interrogatory practices that researchers should get involved in when speaking across difference: she underlines accountability and responsibility in speaking for others; argues that we should critically analyse the bearing of our location on what we are saying; and interrogate the effects that our representations may have. Moreover, she claims that the "*impetus to speak* must be carefully analysed and, in some cases (certainly for academics) fought against" (ibid.). It is this last interrogatory practice that I would like to focus on in the beginning of the next section of this chapter. In my opinion, the impetus *not* to speak should also be critically investigated. The theoretical explorations of the dilemma of representation seem to centre on the spoken dimensions of 'speaking for' and silences are predominantly theorised as 'lack' of representation and therefore not always focus of the debate. Silences are mentioned in relation to the continuing silencing of the voices of the subaltern (Spivak, 1988), signalling oppression (Lugones and Spelman, 1983: 573) and are said to be a consequence of the refusal to speak for others (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996: 12). However, my research made me aware that silences can

constitute a crucial feature of research across difference and should be explored to potentially enhance ethical and reflexive practice.

2.4   Silences and reflexivity

According to Letherby (2003: 109), "[s]ilences are as important as noise in research and the interpretation of silence is as important as the interpretation of what is being said". Silence is not 'neutral' but "allows the continued dominance of current discourses and acts by omission to reinforce their dominance" (Alcoff, 1995: 108). When reflecting upon the dilemmas of representing difference, I became aware that my experience of researching others involved numerous unspoken dimensions. I would like to illustrate this in relation to my research with six socio-economically disadvantaged research participants in Berlin. The interviews with Janina, Susanne, Jessica, Nicky, Helena and Ulla were characterised by a number of silences which centred around our different class backgrounds[17]. These differences in terms of socio-economic status seemed to be salient in the interviews and yet remained 'unvoiceable'. Consequently, I started to wonder whether silencing practices were one means of negotiating our differing locations and whether my research shows that there can be a lot of 'non-speaking' in the process of 'speaking for and to others'. I think that this is not only an interesting paradox but also points to the need to interrogate the ethical dimensions of the silences that occurred.

For instance, I asked myself whether it was ethical not to voice the fact that these six respondents were being interviewed because of their lower socio-economic status. In this case, I had contacted an acquaintance of mine who is a social worker in Berlin. She helped me make contact with young working-class women and thereby

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[17] As I will demonstrate in detail in chapter seven, I draw on the work of several feminist theorists and sociologists and regard 'class' as culturally produced and an ongoing process and negotiation that 'nevertheless' has very 'real', material consequences (Skeggs, 2005).

enabled me to talk to a group of women I would not have been able to approach otherwise. Importantly, neither I nor the social worker had told them explicitly why they, and not others, had been selected. I went with my intuition and felt that it would have been inappropriate to disclose that I wanted to interview these research participants because of their working-class backgrounds. However, this raises the question of whether they gave me fully informed consent. I told them about my study, the kinds of questions I would pose, that everything would be treated confidentially and then asked them for their oral or written consent. However, would Jessica, Janina, Susanne, Nicky, Helena and Ulla have consented had they known that I wanted to interview them primarily because of their socio-economic positioning? But how could I have communicated my desire to interview them in a way that was not offensive, did not reinforce my more privileged socio-economic status and did not essentialise the differences between us?

The second instance of practicing silence in the research process emerged from the fact that all six interviewees stated they were not familiar with the term 'feminism'. As I will discuss in chapter seven, Nicky claimed she had not heard of the term because she hardly had any time for such things. I tended to briefly explain what 'feminism' potentially refers to and alluded to the history of the women's movement. However, I felt very uncomfortable 'lecturing' research participants, specifically if I had the impression that the interviewee was not showing much interest in the subject. Hence, I mainly remained quiet about feminism and did not always tell the respondents about common understandings of the term. However, does this indicate that I did not take Janina, Susanne, Nicky, Helena, Ulla and Jessica seriously by not having a proper dialogue with them?

A third example that equally illustrates silences within the research process emerges from the interview with Ulla who made a very xenophobic statement and subsequently advocated the death penalty. Since she had had difficulties finding a job, I had asked her about her views on unemployment. She said: "Well, I think that they should create more jobs – yeah, that's my opinion about it. And all the foreigners should leave Germany and – go where they belong and they should also stay there, I mean...". I was shocked to hear such an outright xenophobic remark and felt very uncomfortable and unsure about how to react. In the end, I did not challenge her xenophobia which left me feeling guilty and ashamed. After a short pause, I shifted the focus of the conversation by asking about the well-known German feminist activist Alice Schwarzer. I felt that I could not criticise Ulla's political views because it could have negatively impacted on our rapport. More importantly, I did not want to present myself as someone who knows better, occupying moral high-ground. I continue to feel guilty about not challenging her xenophobia and explaining to her that foreign workers are not the reason for the high unemployment rate in Germany (Arndt, 2000). I now ask myself whether I should have argued against her xenophobic remark in order to speak for groups oppressed in ways that this white/German woman was not? This raises the question of where to draw the line between respecting 'others'', i.e. Ulla's views on the one hand, and 'speaking for other others', i.e. 'foreign workers' on the other hand, who are oppressed in ways that the researcher and the researched are not.

According to Luff (1999: 698), "[l]istening to, nodding or saying simple 'uhms', or 'I see', to views that you strongly disagree with, or ordinarily, would strive to challenge, may be true to a methodology that aims to listen seriously to the views and experiences of others but can feel personally very difficult [...]". Letherby (2003: 112) points to a similar dilemma, but argues that listening to views that we, as

researchers, disagree with, might help us to better understand and more effectively challenge them in the future. She holds that there is no clear course of action in these situations and claims that "most researchers probably end up going with their (politically and intellectually) informed 'instinct'" (ibid.). Arguing from a very pragmatic perspective, Phoenix (1995: 56) claims that voiced prejudices in the interview produce interesting data, emphasising that the whole point of conducting interviews is to evoke respondents' accounts. Similarly, Islam (2000: 51) defends his strategy of not challenging anti-black comments during his field research because he feared it would create a distance between him and the research participants. Overtly critiquing racists remarks could have generated hostility and easily led to his being expelled from his research community (ibid.).

Even though there may be good reasons for not criticising interviewees' prejudices directly (indeed, research participants do not consent to having their political views challenged upon signing the consent form), the question remains of whether it is ethical to write about such instances. Focusing less on the conduct of research, I would like to draw attention to the presentation of the findings. What are the effects of representing racist accounts made by members of a comparatively powerless group in relation to education and socio-economic privilege? Does it contribute to fostering a negative or bad image of disadvantaged communities (Bourgois, 2000: 207)? Sharing my dilemma of not having challenged a xenophobic remark with friends and colleagues, I had the impression that most were not surprised that 'these women' would exhibit racist tendencies. However, Ulla was the only one to make an overt xenophobic statement and I felt uneasy about validating common prejudices which hold that socially disadvantaged communities are racist. I sensed that there was an expectation in middle-class and/or educated circles that respondents

from a working-class background are xenophobic. Armstead (1995:635) faced a similar dilemma in her research and states: "In writing about working-class women's use of racial categories and outright racism, I feared that I would be contributing to academia's dismissive portrayals of working-class people as ignorant and bigoted". Reporting the incident therefore raises issues about reproducing stereotypes of lower class participants in the representation of data.

According to Becker, there is no right solution to dealing with prejudices in the research situation (2000: 248). The dilemma around Ulla's remark sheds light on the ethical dimensions of silences in research and demonstrates that these should be explored. The three silencing practices that I referred to above raise ethical questions about 'full consent', 'having a proper dialogue', or 'taking seriously the voices of others'. Moreover, they are all instances in which I, as the researcher, was silenced[18] by choosing not to voice specific issues. Consequently, I would like to ask what these silences can tell us about the nature of the dialogue that is taking place in the interview, the research relationship and the positioning of the individuals that are involved?

Attending to the silences in research might offer us an enhanced understanding of the interview situation and can potentially make us more aware of the power-relations in the research process. What do repeated silences on my part expose, for example in relation to the second instance of the silence around potential meanings of 'feminism'? My decision not to 'lecture' the interviewees on common understandings of feminism mainly arose from the consideration that I did not want to perpetuate the inequalities between the researched and me, specifically with regard to the vast differences in our educational backgrounds. Seeking to ensure rapport, this silencing

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[18] Thanks to Ros Gill for pointing this out to me.

practice also constituted a strategic means to maintain a good relationship with the participants. In this sense, my silence around feminism was productive in that it potentially contributed to the maintenance of rapport, highlighting that silencing practices are not intrinsically constraining or negative. However, I also held back from telling these interviewees about the women's movement because I mostly sensed that there was no interest. Body language, such as looking away when being asked questions around feminism, as well as expressions of boredom by giving very brief answers indicated to me that this topic was not appealing. In this particular instance, the participants silenced me by not responding to my attempts to engage them in a conversation about 'feminism'. Similar to the instance of the xenophobic remark that remained unchallenged, the research participants had the power to set the agenda several times. I am not sure whether these aspects about the strategic maintenance of rapport and the occasional power of the researched would have come to light if I had not reflected upon these silences.

As I have demonstrated above, feminists have emphasised commonalities and connectedness in research across difference and have invited us to 'work the hyphen' and explore the space between the researcher and the researched. According to Finlay (2002: 533), "[h]aving come to understand that the researcher, the world, and the researcher's experience of the world are intertwined, the challenge is to identify that lived experience that resides in the space between subject and object". Similarly, Probyn (1993: 145) calls for researchers to investigate the space between my self and another self. In my opinion, silences can be regarded as residing between the researcher and the researched. The critical investigation of silencing practices potentially helps us to occupy this space and become more aware of commonalities and potentially shifting power-relationships.

Paying attention to silences can also increase our understanding of the extent to which 'difference' impacts on the research process. What does it mean when certain issues remain unvoiced such as the selection criteria for participants? Or that none of the socio-economically disadvantaged women in my study mentioned the differences that existed between us? I believe that our different class backgrounds were dramatically obvious because the research participants for example knew that I was living abroad to pursue a degree at university. Consequently, I would argue that the silences around our different life experiences and opportunities potentially expose the impact of our differences on the research. This is not to claim that there are no other reasons which explain why we refrained from openly talking about our different locations: 'differences' are not usually openly addressed, specifically in a neoliberal climate which detracts from the persistence of structural inequalities (see chapter five). While thinking about the interviews with this group of young women, however, I was struck by the number of silencing practices I could detect. In these interviews, differences between the researcher and the researched surfaced and the simultaneous occurrence of silences raises the question of their function in relation to 'difference'. In this instance, the silences seemed to have constituted a central means to negotiate the different locations of the researcher and the researched; silencing practices facilitated negotiation. Consequently, the analysis of the silences in the interview potentially highlights the pertinent role of difference in the research process, shedding light on issues that might have otherwise remained unexplored.

Both Finlay's (2002) and Probyn's (1993) claims on exploring the space between the self and the other have emerged from their discussions of 'reflexivity', raising the question of whether attending to silences in research can improve reflexive practices. According to Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002: 117), "[g]iven the impact of

explicit and hidden power relations on social research, and the problems of making knowledge claims across difference, feminists have favoured processes of critical reflection, or reflexivity, to make these difficulties more manageable". Fonow and Cook (2005: 2219) claim that reflexivity has come to mean "the way researchers consciously write themselves into the text, the audiences' reactions to and reflections on the meaning of the research, the social location of the researcher, and the analysis of disciplines as sites of knowledge production".

Critical reflection takes place at different stages in the research and also involves being accountable for the knowledge that is produced (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 119). This involves reflecting upon how knowledge is authorised, the community that the researcher produces knowledge within, and why certain stories are told rather than others (ibid.). Reflexivity attends to the "hidden" or unexamined stages of the research process (Fonow and Cook, 1991: 2) which is why an exploration of the silences within research lends itself to reflexive practice. According to Finlay (2002: 532), reflexivity encompasses "continual evaluation of subjective responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself". I would argue that we should also regard the attention to silences as a crucial part of reflexive analysis. Being clear about the nature of the research process (Maynard, 1995: 25) should involve a critical investigation of the unspoken dimensions of the research and a reflection on the possible functions that these silences fulfil as well as the ethical issues arising from them.

Despite strongly advocating reflexive analysis involving the investigation of silences within research, I am aware of the problems associated with 'reflexivity'. Critical reflection is limited because "systematic self-knowledge is not easily available" (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1995: 133). We cannot free ourselves from the

social constraints on our knowing and a high level of self-awareness might only be possible through intense psychoanalysis (Finlay, 2002: 542). Moreover, the focus on self-reflexivity risks placing the researcher at the centre (Lal, 1996: 206) and muting the voices of the participants (Edwards and Ribbens, 1998: 204). According to Kobayashi (2003: 348), reflexivity gives rise to a dilemma: "[w]hile reflexivity is an important, and some may say essential, aspect of recognising the difference between the studier and the studied and even in some cases of taking moral responsibility for that difference, indulgence in reflexivity is ironically the very act that sets us apart".[19] Although I broadly agree with Kobayashi's claim, I would argue that reflexive analysis does not always have to be 'indulging' and that the alienating potential of reflexivity might depend on the degree to which it is practiced.

Drawing attention to another way in which reflexivity may contribute to reinforcing differences, Skeggs (2004: 129) points out that the ability to be reflexive is a privilege, representing a position of mobility and power. Reflexivity is made possible through access to resources, and the technique of telling for the middle-class depends on accruing the stories of others, of those less privileged. "Yet, if research is judged to be legitimate on the basis of self-telling, we can see how research methods themselves constitute class difference" (2004: 134). By advocating reflexivity, researchers engage in a classed practice and potentially reinforce unequal power relationships. However, Skeggs (ibid.) does not offer a deterministic account, but claims that some reflexive practices could maintain inequalities while others might be more subversive.

As Finlay (2002: 532) argues, reflexivity can be viewed as only one way of analysing the complexities of intersubjective dynamics, and is certainly not the only

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[19] Moreover, as Adkins (2003) has demonstrated, reflexivity is not necessarily transformative, but forms part of the very norms that govern gender and specifically femininity in late modernity. Reflexivity, as habit of gender, can lead to re-traditionalisation (ibid.). In light of this argument, I think it is interesting that feminists in particular are advocating reflexivity, potentially reinforcing normative femininity.

way. However, reflexive analysis can provide a good first step to obtaining more insight into how the location of the researcher and the researched impact on the research relationship and facilitate specific personal dynamics (Finlay, 2002: 532). Moreover, reflexivity enables public scrutiny because it provides detailed information about the research decisions and the various dynamics that took place during the research process (ibid.). If we include the analysis of silences in the process of reflexivity, reflexive thinking does not only offer insight into the spoken dimensions of research and the dilemmas arising from them. Attending to the silences in research also sheds light on the unspoken aspects, providing an enhanced understanding of the complex interpersonal dynamics and the opportunity to deepen our understanding of the multiple ways in which 'difference' is played out in the research situation.

2.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to lay bare the methodological and epistemological issues arising from my data collection methods, specifically focusing on the ethical dimensions of qualitative research. Providing an overview of the multiplicity of feminist methods in the first section (and the debate about the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods in particular), I explained why I chose the semi-structured qualitative in-depth interview as my data-collection method. As the second section attempted to demonstrate, the face-to-face contact in the interview raises specific ethical issues that are complicated by the dilemmas of representation. Issues around 'speaking for others' constituted the focus of the third section which further showed that the complexity of social life means that there are no generic solutions to dealing with the multifaceted nature of power-relationships in the research process.

However, the fourth and final section has argued that we should attempt to decrease the dangers in research by engaging in reflexive practices. Claiming that the analysis of silences in research should constitute an important aspect of reflexivity, I am hoping that an increased awareness of the complex interpersonal dynamics within the research process helps us conduct more ethical research. Even though I continue to believe that there is no standard solution to the dilemmas in research, my claim is that reflexive analysis can raise our awareness of the complex ways in which 'difference' impacts on the research. Reflexivity should take place at all the different stages in research, and should also constitute an important aspect of data analysis. Exploring further methodological questions in the next chapter, I will construct the interpretative frame of my study by using the insights of performativity theory, poststructuralist discursive psychology and theories of affect. My focus will be on the emotional tone that characterised numerous interviews, detailing the methodological issues arising from the analysis of affect-laden data.

3   Chapter Three

The interpretative frame: performativity theory, discursive psychology and theories of affect

Notable today is above all the affect with which feminism is represented, yes even caricatured (my translation, Mueller, 2004: 270).

I have this picture in my head, of a short, butch – woman, shouting at a man, that's what I – used to think what a feminist would be like... (Miranda).

How can a researcher make sense of affect-laden negotiations of feminism and what are the interpretative tools one can draw on to analyse talk in interviews? Illustrating the interpretative frame of my study, this chapter will demonstrate *how* I seek to analyse my empirical data. More specifically, I will bring together different bodies of literature – namely performativity theory, discursive psychology and theories of affect – to ask whether they can be productively combined for my data analysis. I will suggest that a discursive psychology which incorporates performativity and affect provides a suitable interpretative frame for my study.

Although I have already offered a brief overview of Butler's performativity theory in my literature review, the first section of this chapter will provide a thorough review of the main tenets of her performative approach. A detailed exploration of Butler's performativity theory will allow me to delineate aspects of her approach that could be fruitfully combined with the more empirically oriented field of discursive research. As the second section of this chapter will demonstrate, Butler's highly abstract theory resonates with discursive psychology, itself a tradition that offers practical tools to study talk and language in action. Outlining central themes in discursive psychology by contrasting the approach with conversation analysis and cultural psychoanalysis, the second and third sections of this chapter advocate post-structuralist discursive psychology (most notably represented in Wetherell's, Edley's

and Billig's work and also referred to as critical discursive psychology) as the interpretative frame of this study.

While this mode of discursive research complements Butler's performativity theory, the explanatory power of discursive psychology could be enhanced by drawing on Ahmed's theory of affect. Discursive psychology fails to offer a satisfactory account of why individuals occupy certain subject positions over time and does not provide a plausible explanation for how certain stances become imbued with affect. Critically assessing various theories of affect, the forth and final section will demonstrate the usefulness of Ahmed's performative approach to emotions because it illustrates how affects 'stick' to certain bodies. By theoretically exploring these different strands of literature, I will suggest that discursive psychology combined with performativity theory constitutes a useful interpretative frame. However, in order to account for the emotional tone of much of the empirical data I have gained, I will propose that Ahmed's theory of affects be incorporated in the interpretation of findings.

3.1   Butler's performativity theory

Drawing on Butler's performativity theory as one of the main theoretical frames for this study raises the question of how to apply her work to the analysis of empirical data. According to Speer and Potter (2002: 164), "Butler offers a theoretically sophisticated route into an analysis of gendered and prejudiced talk. What her approach lacks, however, is an examination of the local accomplishment of gendered and prejudiced actions in real-life situations". Butler's theoretical "abstractions remain disconnected from the vibrancies of life" (Hey, 2006: 451) and her account of gender performativity "leaves little room from which to proceed" (McIlvenny, 2002b: 5). Butler's work has had a major influence on many disciplines (McIlvenny, 2002a: 114)

and has provided the theoretical frame for several studies of gendered talk (Rodino, 1997; Cameron 1997; Bunzl, 2000). However, her writings have not yet had a great impact on the field of discursive research, which itself offers a detailed analysis of actual language use (McIlvenny, 2002a: 114). In contrast to Butler's abstract theoretical framework which does not seek to make any empirical claims (Butler, 1997b: 138), the field of discourse analysis provides the practical tools for a detailed study of discourse in action (Speer and Potter, 2002). Reviewing Butler's performativity theory, and subsequently exploring the field of discourse analysis, I will propose that both theoretical traditions complement each other and that discursive psychology can offer a sophisticated interpretative frame for the analysis of my interview data.

The foundational text of performativity theory is Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* (1962) which consists of a series of lectures he gave in 1955. According to Austin, "the performative utterance [is] not, or not merely, saying something but doing something" (1962: 25). Performatives are modes of speech that accomplish something in their enunciation. Typical examples of the Austinian performative are 'I bet' or 'I promise' as well as the 'I now pronounce you husband and wife' in the (Christian) wedding ceremony. Importantly, Austin draws a distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, arguing that a performative only works and becomes a felicitous performative if the speaker means what he or she says (Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 126). In his essay *'Signature Event Context'*, Derrida (1982) challenges Austin's emphasis on intentionality and the view that the force of a performative is under the control of the speaker. Derrida illustrates this argument through an investigation of how a signature becomes binding. He claims that "[i]n order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must

be able to detach itself from the present and the singular intention of its production" (1982: 328). Highlighting the temporal dimension of iterability, Derrida extends this argument to speech-acts and argues that they are performative because they "work through the power of citation" (Livia and Hall, 1997: 11); performatives do what they say because speakers reiterate conventional forms of language that are already in place at the moment of the utterance.

The Derridean critique of Austin, with its emphasis on iterability, is central to Butler's concept of performativity which she defines as "the vehicle through which ontological effects are established. Performativity is the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed" (1997c: 236; also see 1999: xiv). Performatives are not just linguistic, but also bodily because the body works as the "activating condition of language" (2004: 199). Importantly, performative acts must be repeated to produce that which they name: "[i]f a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that "success" is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition of citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*" (1993: 226; emphasis in original). Butler's emphasis on iterability[20] as opposed to a speaker's intentionality also means that there is no autonomous agent, no 'I' that stands behind discourse and executes its volition. Drawing on the Althusserian notion of interpellation, Butler claims that the 'I' only comes into being through being called. Hence, Butler's distinction between the

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[20] According to Sedgwick (2003: 9), Butler's highlighting of temporality involves a "loss of spatiality" Demonstrating that the neighbourhood of a performative – periperformatives can be "the site of powerful energies that often warp, transform, and displace", Sedgwick (2003: 75) argues that it is crucial to attend to the dimension of space when theorising the performative. "Although temporal and spatial thinking are never really alternative to each other", Sedgwick amends Butler's conception of the performative to also include a spatial dimension. However, her reflections raise questions about how to demarcate the sphere of the "periperformative" and how to distinguish between the spatial and temporal more generally.

performance and the performative: "the former presumes a subject, but the latter contests the very notion of the subject" (1997c: 235).

Butler's notion of iterability is illustrated by her reflections on hate speech in *Excitable Speech* (1997a). Challenging deconstructive positions on speech (such as Derrida's) which hold that speech acts break with every context in which they are embedded, Butler argues that certain speech acts (such as hate speech) are inseparable from the situation in which they occur. However, contrasting the deconstructive standpoint with Bourdieu's (1991) reflections on censorship in *Language and Symbolic Power*, Butler states that one should not overemphasise the determinative influence of the context in authorising certain speech acts. Arguing that Bourdieu's "conservative account of the speech act presumes that the conventions that will authorise the performative are already in place" Butler states that Bourdieu "forecloses the possibility of agency that emerges from the margins of power" (1997a: 156). By claiming that performative acts are effective only if the person who speaks has authority and power, Bourdieu fails to recognise that performatives can break with existing contexts and challenge dominant forms of legitimacy.

Butler's reading of Bourdieu's speech theory as overemphasising the structural constraints of performatives and neglecting the subversive potential of unauthorised utterances is plausible when recalling the following passage in *Language and Symbolic Power*:

> Symbolic productions therefore owe their most specific properties to the social conditions of their production and, more precisely, to the position of the producer in the field of production which governs, through various forms of mediation, not only the expressive interest, and the form and the force of the censorship which is imposed on it, but also the competence which allows the interest to be satisfied within the limits of these constraints (Bourdieu, 1991: 139).

Emphasising the importance of context in authorising symbolic productions, Bourdieu fails to take into account the potential of speech acts for misappropriation. "This excess is what Bourdieu's account appears to miss or, perhaps, to suppress: the abiding

incongruity of the speaking body, the way in which it exceeds its interpellation, and remains uncontained by any of its acts of speech" (Butler, 1997a: 155).

Although Butler acknowledges that the analysis of the context of a specific utterance is crucial (and therefore critiques Derrida), she stresses that racist speech "works through the invocation of a convention", and not merely because it is uttered by a specific person in a certain situation. In order for a performative to work, it has to repeat already established rules and conventions. However, this repetition means that subsequent performatives diverge slightly from previous ones which is what makes transformations possible. Injurious speech acts that are uttered in a slightly different manner or situation can take on various meanings, giving rise to the political possibility of reworking the force of hate speech. "[...] I would insist that the speech act, as a rite of institution, as one whose contexts are never fully determined in advance, and that the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative" (1997a: 161). According to this theory of the efficaciousness of speech, terms such as 'queer' can be appropriated and reclaimed in order to become affirmative, rather than injurious.

Butler's discussion of hate speech demonstrates the emphasis on constraint and repetition in her performativity theory. Temporality is crucial to Butler's account because performatives only work through the reiteration and repetition of norms and conventions (1993: 94). As Ahmed (2004b: 92) points out in relation to Butler's work, the power and authority of performatives depends upon the sedimentation of the past. This emphasis on temporality also relates to Butler's broader conception of agency. A performative is a "ritual reiterated under and through constraint" (1993: 95), but since it has to be repeated in order to succeed, it also bears the potential for agentic

reiteration. "The force of repetition in language may be the paradoxical condition by which a certain agency – not linked to the fiction of the ego as master of circumstance – is derived from the impossibility of *choice*" (1993: 124; emphasis in original). The efficacy of performatives emerges from and can only be maintained through repetition; the necessity of iteration however also implies that repetition can fail to repeat "loyally" (1993: 220). Constraint and regulatory norms form a central component of Butler's performativity theory. However, regulations and rules do not work in determinate ways because they are called into question "at the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice" (Butler, 2004: 218).

As has been demonstrated in chapter one, Butler presents her performativity theory through reformulating the links between sex, gender and sexuality. She intervenes in feminist debates by questioning the sex/gender distinction, and foregrounds the workings of heterosexual norms in the formation of sexed materiality. "The regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe and contour the 'materiality' of sex, and that 'materiality' is formed and sustained through and as a materialisation of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony" (1993: 15). Identificatory processes are crucial to the materialisation of norms and constitute the site of the production and prohibition of desires. For example, gender norms "are almost always related to the idealised idealisation of the heterosexual bond" (1993: 232) and sexed positions "are themselves secured through the repudiation and abjection of homosexuality and the assumption of a normative heterosexuality" (1993: 111). Heterosexual conventions figure as a starting point in Butler's work (1993: 19). Consequently, her performative approach lends itself to my study's exploration of sexuality and heteronormativity as mediating young women's negotiations of feminism. Bringing to the fore the exclusionary processes in the formation of

heterosexual identities, Butler however argues that the logic of repudiation not only governs normative heterosexuality, but "other 'sexed positions' as well" (1993: 112). In this vein, Butler calls for a "non-causal and non-reductive" reformulation of the links between gender and sexuality (1993: 240).

Importantly, Butler also holds that analyses of power have to take into account multiple forms of oppression such as race. "[T]he inquiry into both homosexuality and gender will need to cede the priority of *both* terms in the service of a more complex mapping of power that interrogates the formation of each in specified racial regimes and geopolitical spatialisations" (1993: 240; emphasis in original). Rejecting conceptions of race and gender as two separate axes, Butler advocates an approach that can explain how one becomes the condition of the other. Being less interested in theories of intersectionality that try to keep processes of gendering and racing distinct, critical analyses ought to show "how the unmarked character of the one often becomes the condition of the articulation of the other" (1999b: 178). Consequently, Butler's performativity theory does not only provide a reformulation of the relationship between iterability, constraint, agency, identificatory processes and heteronormativity, but also offers a theoretical framework for conceptualising the reproduction of social formations such as gender, sexuality, 'race' and class. However, as has been argued above, Butler's writings do not provide the practical tools for a detailed study of empirical data and linguistic practices. In the following, I shall outline the main theoretical assumptions of discourse analysis (and specifically discursive psychology) in order to detail some ways in which more practically oriented traditions of discursive research might be brought into a fruitful dialogue with Butler's performativity theory.

3.2   Discursive psychology and conversation analysis

According to Speer, (2005: 13), "[d]iscourse analysis is a collective term for a diverse body of work spanning a range of disciplines". Discourse research emerged most strongly from the 1980s onwards and social scientists use different modes of discourse analysis today (Wetherell, 2001: 381). These range from conversation analysis (CA), to Foucauldian research and critical discourse analysis to discursive psychology (Wetherell, 2001: 382). Rather than exploring the different variants of discourse analysis, I shall focus on the tradition of discursive psychology in this chapter to demonstrate that it provides useful practical tools for applying Butler's performativity theory to empirical data. Based on ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and Wittgenstein's later philosophy (Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 119), "discursive psychology is a broad church" (Wetherell, 2003b: 11). According to McIlvenny (2002b: 18), "a divide has emerged between the poststructuralist inspired work of Wetherell, Edley and others, and the recent work of more CA-aligned discursive psychologists, such as Potter, Edwards, Hepburn and Speer". Currently, there is also a debate between discursive psychology and psychoanalysis (Wetherell, 2003a: 100). I will revisit the different variants of discursive psychology at a later stage and focus on their commonalities for now.

According to Harré and Gillett (1994: 32), discursive psychology is concerned with "language in use as the accomplishments of acts or as attempts at their accomplishments". Discursive psychology seeks to demonstrate how social order is produced through discursive interaction. Consequently, social and particularly psychological phenomena are interpreted as features of discourse. Rather than positing an internal psychic reality, discursive psychologists argue that psychology should study "outward activity" (Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 119). Treating the relationship between mind and world as constituted through discourse (Edwards, 2003: 31),

discursive psychology holds that discourse constructs both social *and* psychological processes. According to Speer and Potter (2000: 545), "[t]he discursive psychological move, then, is from considering underlying, stable, cognitively represented attitudes, to evaluative practices that are flexibly produced for particular occasions".

In common with Butler's performative approach, discursive psychology regards utterances as doing things (Speer and Potter, 2002: 157). In his book *Representing Reality* (1996), the discursive psychologist Potter for example explores the way descriptions are made factual and investigates the function they fulfil. Discourse analysts do not regard language as a neutral means of communication which simply mirrors the social world, but as actively constructing reality (Gill, 1996: 141; Burman and Parker, 1993: 3). This approach to signification resonates with Butler's claim that language is "productive, constitutive, one might even argue performative" (1993: 30). Equally important, Butler's work and discursive psychology dispense with the notion of an "'intentional' sovereign subject" (Potter and Speer, 2002: 157). While Butler's concept of iterability implies that there is no 'I' behind discourse, discursive psychology's anti-cognitivism regards subjectivity and individuality as constructed through discourse (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 59). Highlighting further common features between discursive psychology and Butler's work, Speer and Potter (2002: 157) argue that both "view discourse as central to the construction of (gendered) identities". Similar to Butler, Wetherell and Potter (1992: 78) conceive of identity as the sedimentation of past discursive practices. Lastly, Speer and Potter (2002) argue that the two accounts are anti-foundationalist. Butler, like discursive psychologists, abstains from making truth-claims. Indeed, discursive psychology is explicitly relativist in the sense that it treats truth claims as discursive accomplishments[21].

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[21] To be sure, both discursive psychology and Butler's performative approach make truth claims about 'discourse' as constituting reality. Arguably, this is a tension in post-structuralist approaches more

While Speer and Potter offer a quite comprehensive overview of the complementarities between discursive psychology and Butler's performativity theory, I would add that both approaches attend to 'power' (Wetherell, 2001: 25)[22] and the persistence of oppressive structures. At the same time however, Butler and discursive psychologists regard norms as relatively open, rather than determinate. In an interview, Butler (1999b: 178) argues that "[w]hat is poststructuralist in my work is the fact that I want those subjectivating norms to be temporalised and open rather than fixed and determinate". Similarly, discursive psychologists stress the dilemmatic nature of ideology (and thinking) and do not posit unified systems of beliefs (Billig et al., 1988: 2). Rather than problematising contradictions and inconsistencies in talk, discursive psychologists regard variability as a clue for analysis (Edwards, 2003: 33; Antaki, 2003). Individuals' accounts can differ, depending on the function they seek to fulfil. For discursive psychologists, "variation in response is as important as consistency" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 165). One of the key concepts of discursive psychology, the "interpretative repertoire" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 202) provides an analytic tool to study and theorize the flexible deployment of language (Edley, 2001: 197). "An interpretative repertoire is a recognisable routine of arguments, descriptions, and evaluations distinguished by familiar clichés, common places, tropes and characterisations of actors and situations" (Edley and Wetherell, 2001: 443). In contrast to the broader Foucauldian notion of discourse, interpretative repertoires can be viewed as more fragmented, less monolithic entities that offer speakers a whole range of opportunities (Edley, 2001: 197). In addition, the notions of "subject

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broadly. I would however argue that the nature of the truth claims that are being made is qualitatively different. This is particularly pertinent in relation to qualitative research and the interpretation of findings. Here, post-structuralist frameworks regards language as constitutive but abstain from making truth claims about 'what is really going on' in the conduct, talk or minds of the research participants.

[22] It is important to note here that not all strands of discursive psychology provide a critical analysis of power. I will refer to this issue when exploring conversation analytic critiques of discursive psychology.

positions" (Edley, 2001: 197) and "ideological dilemmas" (Billig et al., 1988) allow discursive psychologists to account for variability and complexity which resonates with Butler's attempt to theorise norms as fluid rather than fixed.

Outlining the parallels between Butler's performativity theory and discursive psychology, Speer and Potter (2002: 174) simultaneously critique Butler's theory for remaining too abstract in focus and advocate discursive psychology as offering the methodological and practical tools for studying discursive practices. Further developing the critique of Butler in her subsequent book *Gender talk: feminism, discourse, and conversation analysis*, Speer (2005: 78) claims that Butler "reifies discourse by turning what is an essentially agentless, disembodied, social practice, into an agentive, embodied, thing-like subject, that has the power to do things to us, and that's on a par with macro-social structures and institutions". According to Speer (2005: 79), Butler conceptualises discourse as a "causal agent" that produces (gendered) subjects. Although Speer (2005: 80) refers to Butler's theory of psychic excess (1997b) as preventing a "thoroughgoing form of determinism" she holds that the incorporation of the psyche in Butler's work presents "a cognitivist theory of discourse, in which resistance and resistive acts are ultimately reduced to, and explained exclusively in terms of the world 'under the skull'". Such allegedly cognitivist accounts of the self posit a unitary, private self and are believed to be antithetical to Butler's anti-essentialist theory.

In presenting her critique of Butler, Speer (2005: 79) acknowledges that post-structuralist approaches to discursive psychology, such as Wetherell's and Edley's work, can be subject to similar criticisms. Post-structuralist researchers focus on "broad, constraining, macro-level discourses" (ibid.) which means their theories are

determinist since they fail to leave space for agency and creativity[23]. In order to avoid the alleged determinism and cognitivism of Butler's work which also applies to post-structuralist discursive psychology, Speer and Potter (2002; Speer, 2005) advocate an approach that combines discursive psychology with conversation analysis. Emerging from ethnomethodology and Sacks' work on the organisation of everyday language, conversation analysis is a method for the study of naturally occurring talk (Wooffitt, 2001: 49). Key to conversation analysis is the investigation of members' perspectives and orientations. Rather than inquiring into normative constraints that cause a certain conversational pattern to occur, conversation analysts ask "how do members build, orient to, and reproduce these recognisable patterns, structures and norms within their talk"? (Speer, 2005: 149). As opposed to poststructuralist approaches like Wetherell's and Edley's, conversation-analytic variants of discursive psychology "do not bring politics into their research" (Kitzinger, 2002: 56). Members are regarded as orienting to the social and political in their talk; broader social categories such as 'gender' only become relevant to critical analysis if they are explicit features of conversation. Researchers who advocate conversation analysis as a useful tool to explore how gender and sexuality are accomplished in everyday interaction (Speer and Potter, 2002; Speer, 2005; Kitzinger, 2002; McIlvenny, 2002a; D'hondt, 2002) value the emphasis on members' orientation as crucial to exposing ideological features in talk without positing abstract, constraining discourses. According to Speer (2005: 149), "[i]t is precisely because social structures are analytically tractable, that an approach which does not go beyond participants' orientations is so important and radical for feminism".

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[23]Madill and Doherty (1994: 268) equally challenge post-structuralist variants of discursive psychology, such as the work of Wetherell, for being deterministic. They argue that post-structuralist research is vulnerable to the charge of determinism if it tries to account for consistency and continuity of identity. McNay (1999: 176) makes a similar criticism in relation to Butler's work, claiming that her concept of agency is "abstract and lacking in social specificity".

The conversation-analytic approach to discursive psychology is discussed in detail because it reflects broader theoretical debates in discursive psychology. According to McIlvenny (2002b: 18) and Taylor (2001: 15; also see Van Den Berg et al., 2003: 2), the question of the limits of analysis is a central one. Should discourse analysis use "etic" (imposing a frame of reference) or "emic" (drawing on the conceptual framework of those studied) approaches (Taylor, 2001: 15)? As I have alluded to in the introduction to this section, discursive psychology is a dynamic field and recently a divide has emerged between critical, post-structuralist informed approaches and CA-aligned discursive psychology (McIlvenny, 2002b: 18). While Wetherell and Potter have co-authored numerous books and articles since the late 1980s, their perspectives have begun to differ in recent years. As illustrated by Potter's and Speer's (2002) critique of Butler's work and the emphasis on 'emic' approaches, Potter's work has become more aligned with the conversation-analytic tradition. By contrast, Wetherell's recent work advocates etic forms of analysis and an explicitly critical stance. It has been named "critical discourse analysis" (Speer, 2005: 15) and is also exhibited in the writings of Edley and arguably Billig's recent work. In the following, I will assess conversation analysis' critique of Butler's theory and post-structuralist approaches more broadly; by challenging some of the basic claims of conversation analysis and taking a post-structuralist stance, I am hoping to further illuminate the usefulness of critical discursive psychology (notably Wetherell's, Edley's and Billig's work) and the way it can be brought into a productive dialogue with Butler's performativity theory.

While conversation analysis has certainly offered important contributions to studying the specificities of talk in action by, for example, exploring turn-taking in

detail (Billig, 1999b: 544)[24], conversation analysts' claims of impartiality and calls for emic forms of analysis (Schegloff, 1997) can be contested on various grounds. As Billig (1999b: 545) demonstrates, conversation analysts use their own terms to interpret data and far from being neutral, the "'foundational rhetoric'" of conversation analysis contains ideological and sociological assumptions. Referring to feminist epistemology and challenges to 'objectivity', Weatherall (2000: 287) raises the crucial point of the "impossibility of impartiality in any analytic approach. Resonating with the epistemological assumptions underpinning this study, Weatherall reminds us that values enter into all empirical approaches by, for instance, determining the types of questions that are asked. Moreover, social categories such as gender are pervasive and impact on conversations in complex ways. So even if the gender of a person is not explicitly oriented to, it is an "omnipresent feature of all interactions" (ibid.). On a theoretical level, one could further question whether the notion of 'orienting to' facilitates more 'neutral' modes of analysis. Arguably, the possibility that there is *something* that may be oriented *to* presupposes a certain 'something' that always-already takes on a specific form and/or meaning.

Equally important, the absence of broader contextual considerations in conversation analytic research implies that it cannot offer a critical analysis of why specific forms of conduct may be problematic. As Stokoe and Smithson (2002: 83) point out, conversation analysis might provide useful tools to identify controversial issues in a conversation, but fails to equip the analysts with the means to explain *why* certain topics might be contentious. Dominant cultural formations, such as heteronormativity, processes of racialization and issues around class do not tend to be

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[24] Assessing the usefulness of conversation analysis, it is important to bear in mind that the method only lends itself to the study of short extracts of talk (Speer, 2005: 19) and demands very fine-grained methods of transcription (Wetherell, 2003b: 28) . With regard to my study, a fine-grained transcription of 40 interviews would not have been feasible.

explicitly voiced in talk (see chapter two on silences in the research process). A conversation analytic sequential analysis of talk is therefore inadequate to address all critical concerns, "especially when dealing with interactions in which gender and sexuality (and particularly sexist and heterosexist assumptions) are 'unnoticed' by participants" (Stokoe and Smithson, 2002: 104). In light of drawing on Butler's performativity theory when analysing empirical data, this last point is crucial because Butler herself invites analysts to attend to the unsaid in conversations. "And the omissions in discourse also 'say' something about what is and is not sayable within any given discourse" (Butler, 2006: 533). A Butlerian stance involves paying attention to the unsaid because it is regarded as being constitutive of what is being said. Analysing what is omitted in discourse involves a lot of analytical work. The focus is not on all things that might have been said, but on the issues that remain unvoiced but nevertheless constitute the intelligibility of specific utterances. This analytical work that seeks to grasp not only what has been said, but also how utterances are constituted through what is omitted, does not form part of a conversation analytic approach.

Butler's "view of performativity implies that discourse has a history that not only precedes but conditions its contemporary usages" (Butler, 1993: 227) which means that identity characteristics such as 'race', class, gender or sexuality potentially impact on a conversation even if they are not explicitly voiced. As has been demonstrated above, temporality is a crucial aspect of Butler's performativity theory. The temporal dimension of performatives accounts both for their success but also for their potential failure. In response to Speer's and Potter's (2002) criticism of Butler's account as deterministic, I would argue that the emphasis on temporality in Butler leaves room for agency. Moreover, Butler's account of the psyche (1997b) does not reflect a cognitivist stance which posits the simultaneous existence of an inner/psychic

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and outer/social sphere. By contrast, her account of "how psychic and social domains are produced in relation to one another" (1997b: 167) resonates with the anti-cognitivism in discursive psychology (and is entirely consistent with the anti-essentialism underpinning Butler's theory).

Similarly, discursive psychologists such as Wetherell do not regard discourse as an "active agent" (1998: 401). Contrary to Speer's and Potter's (2002: 79) claim that post-structuralist approaches view discourse as a 'causal agent', Wetherell (1998: 401) emphasises that participants orient to their setting and that issues of accountability underpin conversational activities. Individuals position themselves in relation to a certain discourse, but their positioning is not fully determined by this discourse. The local setting in which the positioning occurs plays an important role. According to Wetherell, a subject position is "only partly the consequence of which discourse it can be assigned to" (ibid.). The concepts of variability, interpretative repertoires, subject positions and ideological dilemma imply that discursive psychology can accommodate agency and fluidity. Similarly, Butler's performativity theory regards norms as contingent. In Butler, subjectivating norms always run the risk of not being repeated loyally and of breaking with the context in which they can exert their regulatory force.

Indeed, I would argue that the use of discursive psychology as the interpretative frame for this study decreases the risk of giving an overly deterministic account. Analysing actual interview data, theoretical concepts will be automatically contextualised and embedded in practices. This is an important aspect, specifically in relation to criticisms of discursive research as failing to offer generalisable findings due to their historic specificity (Tonkiss 1998: 259). While discourse analysis does no set out to identify "universal processes" (Gill, 1996: 155) in the first place, the

historically specific findings of discursive psychology also involve less deterministic interpretations because data analysis is always-already highly contextualised. This argument parallels the findings of Cameron's and Kulick's (2003) research on the relationship between gendered speech and the enactment of heterosexual identity. Claiming that the relationship between the two components is "more complicated than it might initially seem" (2003: 27), Cameron and Kulick demonstrate the value of a detailed analysis of linguistic performances because it accommodates contingency and specificity. Rather than regarding discursive psychology's focus on local practices as a weakness, one could argue that the resistance to making broad empirical generalisations constitutes a strength by foreclosing the charge of determinism.

3.3   Discursive psychology and cultural psychoanalysis

Apart from the conversation analytic critique, the standpoint of cultural psychoanalysis has provided a further challenge to discursive psychology, focusing in particular on Wetherell's and Billig's approaches. Wetherell (1999, conference paper) coined the term 'cultural psychoanalysis', which describes "the work of psychologists and cultural theorists such as Stephen Frosh, [...], Wendy Hollway [...] and others who have tried to theorise the interface between psychoanalysis and socio-cultural identities". There has been a debate between discursive psychology and researchers whose work falls into the tradition of cultural psychoanalysis (Frosh et al., 2003). These researchers, whose approach is informed by psychoanalysis, argue that psychoanalytic theory can "enrich the (discursive) analysis of texts" (Gough, 2004: 245). Psychoanalytic concepts lend themselves to material that is rich in emotional tone and potentially "provide insight into these instances in the transcripts" (ibid.). In this vein, Rattansi (1995: 271) challenges Wetherell's and Potter's (1992) discursive

psychology by claiming that "they fail to engage with the psychoanalytic possibilities that might prove fruitful".

Psychoanalytic critics of discursive psychology do not argue that the latter approach is entirely useless; rather, they seek to explore "the way contemporary discourse theory can be harnessed to psychoanalysis" (Frosh, 2002a: 17). Challenging discursive psychology's shift from an exploration of individuals' inner spheres (such as the psyche) to exploring the public arena, Frosh claims that there is an intrinsically psychological realm "'beyond' discourse" that ought to be investigated (ibid.). This is because there is a danger in reducing meaning to that which is said (2002a: 134). Positing that psychic life is characterised by "excess, this astonishing psychic energy that leaves rationality staggering behind" (2002b: 192-93), Frosh claims that discourse analysis has to draw on psychoanalytic concepts to grasp that which is outside language. According to Frosh, there is an "outside to the world of discourse" (1999: 382) which can never be approximated to in language. Therefore, "something is always missing" (1999: 382) from discourse and psychoanalytic concepts provide the necessary tools to move 'beyond' discourse, facilitating deeper analysis.

Apart from leaving psychic excess under-theorised, discursive psychology has been criticised for failing to account for "the adoption of particular identity positions by specific actors" (Frosh et al., 2000: 226). Arguing that individuals have a personal investment in the discursive positions that they occupy, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2003: 52) claim that discursive psychology has to move "'beyond' or 'beneath' discourse to explore the needs which are being met, the 'enjoyment' created, by the position which is taken up" (ibid.). Equally emphasising individuals' investments in the subject positions they occupy, Hollway and Jefferson (2000; 2005) offer an account that has a social, discursive and psychic dimension. Arguing that "the

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exploration of investments has rarely been addressed in subsequent discourse analyses" (2005: 149), Hollway and Jefferson claim that the analysis of empirical data and interview transcripts has to involve a biographical, and irreducibly psychic dimension. This approach to analysing talk resonates with Hollway's earlier account of why individuals occupy certain subject positions over time: she holds that "the availability of a position in discourse which is positively valued and which confers power must be accompanied by a mechanism at the level of the psyche which provides the investment to take up this position" (1984: 256; also see Hollway, 1989: 66). Apart from avoiding discursive psychology's failure to "offer plausible reasons why specific individuals end up where they do" (Frosh et al., 2003: 39), an account which involves an inner psychic sphere is also held to accommodate agency and explain inconsistencies in individuals' position-taking (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005: 178).

Hollways' and Jefferson's (2000: 14) emphasis on individuals' investment in certain positions emerges from their broader psychosocial work which sees subjects as "simultaneously psychic and social". Exploring men's and women's fears of crime, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that it is crucial to attend to individuals' investments in certain positions in order to understand why they take up particular discourses, and not others. Drawing on post-Freudian developments, especially Klein's work and her stress on intersubjectivity, Hollway and Jefferson (2000: 22) use the idea of a defended subject to "show how subjects invest in discourses when these offer positions which provide protections against anxiety and therefore supports to identity". This notion of the defended subject is central to understanding that Hollway and Jefferson seek to provide a *psychosocial* analysis. They argue:

> The concept of an anxious, defend subject is simultaneously psychic and social. It is psychic because it is product of a unique biography of anxiety-provoking life-events and the manner in which they have been unconsciously defended against. It is social in three ways: first, because such defensive activities affect and are affected by discourses (systems of meanings which are a product of the social world); secondly, because the

unconscious defences that we describe are intersubjective processes (that is, they affect and are affected by others); and, thirdly, because of the real events in the external, social world which are discursively and defensively appropriated (2000: 24).

Hollway's and Jefferson's psychoanalytically informed psychosocial work forms part of the tradition that Wetherell describes as cultural psychoanalysis, and raises important criticisms of discursive psychology by highlighting the importance of exploring individuals' investements in certain positions when analysing interview transcripts.

In order to assess the usefulness of discursive psychology as an interpretative frame for my study, these criticisms have to be addressed and investigated. The psychoanalytic challenge pertains to my research because of the emotional nature of many of the interviews I conducted. As I have illustrated in chapter two, I experienced a surfeit of emotions during my empirical research. Many of the interviews I conducted were rich in emotional tone and heightened imagery – most notably centring on the figure of the man-hating feminist. As an illustration, Elspeth talked about common stereotypes of feminists in the following way: "I used to work in a bar, and feminists were supposed to be fat, ugly, can't get men, lesbians, wear sensible shoes, you know, rugby shirts, it is still out there". Describing feminists as too emotional, Carrie said: "So. I think, personally, I think they [feminists] should plan better ways of dealing with the world, and how they think instead of *shouting* and *screaming* about how men should change because they are not going to". Similarly, Heather used a lot of emotional language when explaining why she would not call herself a feminist:

> I wouldn't, no. Never no. I suppose that's partly, oh this is *embarrassing* but I remember when I was doing my Geography 'A' Level and my teacher talked about feminists and he was going, this is *horrible* but he went 'they are all vegan lesbians right'? (Hmm) which is *really nasty* of him but I suddenly thought 'gosh is that how feminists are seen?' I would be *embarrassed* if I was seen as a feminist then to have that title erm or that stereotype (yes) erm so I wouldn't want to be seen as a feminist because of the *negative stereotype* of feminist. They are not sort of looked upon as people, not that its *negative* to be called what my Geography teacher called them but that is, its not taken, its not looked upon as serious.

I will explore the accounts of the research participants in more detail in my analysis chapters. In drawing on these interview extracts here, I seek to demonstrate that emotions surfaced in the interviews. This observation raises the question of whether discursive psychology's exclusive focus on the social, rather than the interior and personal falls short of providing the necessary tools to analyse talk that is infused with affect (Gough, 2004: 247).

A recent exchange between Wetherell (2005), as well as Hollway and Jefferson (2005, 2005b), sheds light on the debate between discursive psychology on the one hand, and cultural psychoanalysis on the other. This exchange is based on Hollway's and Jefferson's (2005) article *Panic and Perjury: A psychosocial exploration of agency* and illustrates theoretical and methodological differences between the two modes of analysis. I will therefore discuss this exchange in the following, in order to engage with cultural psychoanalysis' criticisms of discursive psychology, and to clarify my stance on these theoretical and analytical issues.

Hollway's and Jefferson's (2005) article *Panic and Perjury* explores why a particular man (Vince) has committed perjury and explains his behaviour in terms of unresolved unconscious conflicts. Wetherell (2005) critically discusses this article and provides a variety of challenges to psychoanalytically informed research methods. In critically engaging with cultural psychoanalysis, Wetherell's article also constitutes a response to cultural psychoanalytic criticisms of discursive psychology. She argues that Vince's words become "acontextual and psychologised" because the discursive context in which they take place, such as the interview, is ignored (2005: 171). Moreover, she is not convinced that Vince's narrative is symptomatic of an unconscious conflict and asks whether other people may draw on similar explanations for their behaviour. Hollway's and Jefferson's explanation for Vince's conduct in

terms of unconscious psychological processes means that he acquires an identity which he might not identify with and may want to repudiate (2005: 169). Wetherell also questions whether Vince's account really represents a "mystery" that has to be resolved through psychoanalytic explanations. In her opinion, Vince's narrative seems clear and cogent. "So in what sense is Vince suffering from an unconscious conflict?" (2005: 171-72).

Lastly, Wetherell takes issue with the authors' intention of going 'beyond' discourse in order to grasp Vince's 'real self', arguing that such a move individualises Vince and posits a psychological sphere that is separate from the social. For discursive psychologists such as Wetherell, how individuals "*make* themselves is diagnostic of culture and peoples' uses of what is culturally available" (2003a: 106). Wetherell regards the psychic and the social as inseparable and therefore scrutinises the attempt to go beyond discourse. As I will demonstrate below, this last point constitutes the central "nub of disagreement" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005b: 177) between Wetherell, Hollway and Jefferson. Wetherell believes that the positing of an irreducible psychic dimension maintains a distinction between 'the psychic' and 'the social', thereby not really constituting a psychosocial form of analysis. Hollway and Jefferson, by contrast, stress that they regard 'the psychic' and 'the social' as separate, but intertwined, and argue that this makes their analysis psychosocial. In the following, I will demonstrate why I adopt Wetherell's stance on this question.

As opposed to psychoanalysts who regard individuals' psychological processes as the manifestations of psychic reality, discursive psychologists regard emotions, the unconscious and processes such as repression as social activities (Billig, 1999a; 2002). According to Billig (1999a: 1), repression for example "depends on the skills of language. To become proficient speakers, we need to repress". Similarly, both

conscious and unconscious emotions are considered as socially constituted. "Thus, hatred needs not be seen as an individual condition, located within the body of the individual. There can be ideologies of hatred that produce 'hate-talk'" (Billig, 2002: 179). Interestingly, Billig's account of hate talk parallels Butler's critique of an illocutionary model of injurious speech; it also illustrates that discursive psychology does not abandon psychological concepts, but sees them as entirely social. In this sense, discursive psychology can offer the tools to attend to emotional talk in interviews, but importantly it does so without positing an irreducible psychic dimension.

This is crucial because Hollway's and Jefferson's (2005) psychoanalytic analysis of interview data raises ethical, epistemological and methodological issues that discursive psychology arguably pre-empts because it abstains from positing a psychic sphere beyond language. Scrutinising Hollway's and Jefferson's account from the perspective of research ethics, the psychopathologising of Vince's behaviour seems problematic. Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 159) draw attention to Vince's supposed reluctance to acknowledge his boss's dishonesty and argue that it "suggests an idealisation of the boss by Vince that has the flavour of an ideal father figure [...]". Vince might not recognise himself in such an analysis and reject it because it suggests that his behaviour is pathological and in need of 'fixing'. As Roseneil (2006: 865) points out in the context of psychoanalytically informed psychosocial approaches to the interpretation of interviews, "sociologists probably often produce analyses which are not congruent with their subjects' own self-identifications". I fully agree with Roseneil's point, but feel that there is a difference between offering a critical (sociological) analysis, and a psycho-pathologising account. Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 177) indicate that Vince's behaviour poses a "particular, unique puzzle" that

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has to be solved. Vince's account is regarded as insufficient and Hollway's and Jefferson's analysis implies that he needs the help of social scientists, or a psychoanalyst, in order to make sense of his 'irrational' conduct. Moreover, the psychoanalytic interpretation of the interview portrays Vince as being subject to unconscious desires that are beyond his control. Rather than depicting Vince as an agentic actor who offers his own valid account, Hollway and Jefferson pathologise Vince, potentially disempowering him. An important ethical question that emerges at this point is whether Vince has consented to being 'psychoanalysed'? Should social scientists have the privilege to offer psychoanalytic accounts which are based on only a small number of interviews, especially if they have not undergone the necessary training?

Apart from raising ethical issues, psychoanalytic modes of interpretation bring to the fore epistemological questions. Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 151) "assume a life beyond the account" which constitutes the "main focus" of their analysis because it can offer "further information about [Vince's] conflicts". What is the epistemological basis for assuming that there are unconscious dynamics that an individual, like Vince, is unable to account for but that Hollway and Jefferson can make assumptions about? How do they know what exactly is 'beyond' discourse and how do they access this void without filling it with their own presuppositions and assumptions? Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 177) argue that "the real events that Vince is recounting shine through his account" and become accessible to the researchers because they are mediated by available discursive resources. On what epistemological grounds do they distinguish between available discursive resources and Vince's personal reality shining through?

In a discourse analytic vein, I would further investigate the desire to posit an irreducible psychic dimension. As I illustrated above, Hollway and Jefferson seek to

deconstruct the binary of 'the psychic' and 'the social', and yet they (2005b: 176) "insist on the importance of an irreducible psychic dimension". What does this theoretical move do? And more importantly, what does it exclude? Does an account that posits multiple, separate spheres, such as the psychic, social and discursive run the risk of privileging one at the expense of the others? And can the psychic really be conceptualised as distinct from the social? With regard to psychic excess, Butler (1997b: 17) makes the insightful point that "[t]o claim that the subject exceeds either/or is not to claim that it lives in some free zone of its own making. Exceeding is not escaping, and the subject exceeds precisely that to which it is bound". This implies that excess is socially constituted and cannot be grasped in 'merely psychological' terms.

Hollway's and Jefferson's psychoanalytic interpretation also raises methodological issues. After having conducted two interviews only, they explain Vince's relationship to his boss in terms of unresolved conflicts with his father. This interpretative move is questionable with regard to the issue of variability in talk: Vince might provide a slightly different account in a third interview which could change the interpretation altogether. Indeed, Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 161) acknowledge that they do not know what happened to Vince after the interview which, as they argue, constitutes a "highly relevant source of warrant". Hollway's and Jefferson's claims are also problematic because they regard certain aspects of Vince's account as 'true' (that he was a happy family father) while they re-interpret others (the relationship he has had with his boss). How exactly does their methodology account for regarding certain bits of a conversation as more reliable than others? In contrast to discursive psychology, Hollway's and Jefferson's psychoanalytic account makes truth claims without offering the criteria on which they are based. They (2005: 152) hold that "[t]he

fact that Vince's train of thought moves from his attempts to explain feeling ill directly to the court case is, in our view, a clear indication of the emotional connection between the two". Here, one could ask again why these two themes are regarded as emotionally connected, but not others.

A further important methodological question represents the applicability of psychoanalytic approaches to interactions that take place outside the clinical setting. This is an important point because it illustrates that my stance is *not* against the use of psychoanalytic insights and theory per se, but that it is critical of the application of psychoanalytic tools gained from clinical practice outside the consulting room. For example, Hollway and Jefferson (2005: 151) discuss processes of countertransference in their account. However, such reflections might only be available to researchers who have had the necessary psychoanalytic training. Moreover, and as Frosh (2008: 418) points out, transference and countertransference might only be discernable in the carefully crafted therapeutic setting. Indeed, while Frosh proposed psychoanalytic approaches to data analysis initially, he has recently repudiated some of his positions and raised concerns about the employment of psychoanalytic techniques in other situations. In a recent article, Frosh and Baraitser (2008: 363) caution against the employment of countertransference in the research setting by arguing that "there is a strong and present danger that it will be used as an ungrounded expert system of knowledge in precisely the way objected to by its critics". As a response to these criticisms, Hollway (2008: 419) now hesitates to use the concept of countertransference in a data-analytic context. The debate between Frosh and Baraitser, and Hollway, Jefferson (and others) demonstrates that there is an ongoing discussion about the methodological implications of a psychoanalytically informed

approach to data analysis which grapples with the dilemmas and difficulties generated by the application of psychoanalytic techniques outside the consulting room.

Finally, and as I have alluded to earlier, cultural psychoanalysis might be challenged for lacking the theoretical tools to explore variability in talk. How would Hollway and Jefferson react if they interviewed Vince for a third time and he suddenly said he had had a great relationship with his father? Rather than inquiring into inner, psychological motives for social conduct, discursive psychology asks questions about the resources that people draw on when positioning themselves in relation to various issues. This focus on patterns in talk (such as interpretative repertoires) allows researchers to obtain insight into the cultural materials available to negotiate social phenomena. For researchers interested in making sense of similarities that have emerged across a variety of interviews, discursive psychology, rather than cultural psychoanalysis might provide more useful interpretative tools.

More generally, the debate between discursive psychology and cultural psychoanalysis brings to the fore a further parallel between Butler's performative approach and post-structuralist discursive psychology: both argue that the psyche *cannot be separated* from the social. While Hollway and Jefferson also see the psychic and social as mutually intertwined, they (2005b: 175) "posit an internal world" and "insist on the importance of an irreducible psychic dimension – an inner world" (2005b: 176). This is the 'nub of disagreement' between Wetherell's (discursive psychology) and Hollway's and Jefferson's work. While both advocate psychosocial forms of analysis (Wetherell, 2005: 172; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), they differ in that Hollway's and Jefferson's approach posits an internal world, while discursive psychology – and Butler's performativity theory – claim that the psyche and the social cannot be regarded as distinct (if intertwined) entities.

This argument is made explicit in discursive psychology through the emphasis on anti-cognitivism and the conceptualisation of psychic processes as social practices. Similarly, Butler offers a refined account of the relation between the psychic and the social in *The psychic life of power* (1997b). In this book, Butler seeks to explain the social form that power takes. More specifically, she calls for a psychoanalytic rethinking of the concept of gender performativity through the notion of melancholia (1997b: 162). Arguing that heteronormative masculinity and femininity are formed through the repudiation of homosexual attachments whose psychic manifestations are ungrievable losses, Butler not only provides a theory of gender as constituted through disavowed attachments, but also offers an account "of how psychic and social domains are produced in relation to one another" (1997b: 167). Butler claims that psychic space, which is sometimes figured as 'internal' emerges through the melancholic turn whereby the ego is turned back on itself, thereby acquiring the status of a "psychic object" (1997b: 168). The forming of heterosexual identities involves the disavowal of homosexual attachments that acquire a psychic presence through the melancholic turn; homosexual attachments become ungrievable losses that are constitutive of, but not prior to, the formation of the ego. In this sense, the melancholic turn initiates the distinction between internal and external worlds, the psychic and the social. Consequently, Butler (1997b: 170) argues that "[t]he psychological discourses that presume topographical stability of an 'internal world' and its various 'parts' miss the crucial point that melancholy is precisely what interiorises the psyche". Crucially then, the psychic and the social are seen as implicated in each other so that Butler's account resonates with, and potentially deepens, discursive psychology's anti-cognitivism.

While I have sought to outline the analytic strengths of poststructuralist discursive psychology through a critical discussion of cultural psychoanalysis, I find

Butler's psychoanalytic account of psychic life compelling. Her approach conceptualises the psyche in social terms but simultaneously offers an explanation for why the psychic sphere appears to be interior and separate from the social. Furthermore, I agree with the psychoanalytic critique (Frosh et al., 2000; 2003) that discursive psychology cannot provide a satisfactory explanation for individuals' investment in certain subject positions. *Why* do certain individuals occupy specific stances (such as an (anti-)feminist standpoint) over time? As Wetherell (2003a: 117) recalls, "[p]eople may be socialised in the same broad discursive styles and yet they are not interchangeable in their positioning work". This observation implies that discursive psychology has to develop practical tools that allow for an analysis which goes beyond the immediate contexts of a conversation and can account for continuity in individuals' position-taking. According to Wetherell, (ibid.), "[o]ne key task is to develop concepts for understanding and describing those individual repetitions in meaning making in emotional and relational contexts that become defined as 'character' or 'personality' or as 'symptoms' in conventional psychological terms".

Moreover, the emotional tone of many of the interviews I conducted raises the question of how and why specific emotions become attached to individuals' stances and believes. I feel that it is not only important to ask *why* individuals occupy specific subject positions, but to inquire into *how* certain stances are imbued with affect. How are we to account for rhetorical patterns that do not only dismiss 'feminism' but whose argumentative moves involve heightened imagery and 'emotional talk'? Is this because the interpretative repertoires available to account for feminism are themselves infused with affect? But why is this the case and what are the processes through which 'affect' becomes associated with certain positions, but not others? There is certainly a point to be made about feminism being aligned with extremism and irrationality in order to

distinguish it from more 'rational' and therefore more 'legitimate' positions (Ahmed, 2004b: 170). Such an explanation does not, however, illuminate the processes through which feminism becomes attached with emotionality, and why individuals' positioning-work in relation to feminist issues seems to be affect-laden. In the following and final section, I will therefore examine theories of 'affect'. It will be my aim to assess whether they can provide insights that can complement the interpretative framework of this study by offering an account of the affective nature of negotiations of feminism.

3.4   Theories of affect

Theories of affect have emerged out of three concerns with current cultural studies (Hemmings, 2005: 549). Critical cultural theory is challenged for leaving out the "residue of excess", for failing to provide forms of analysis that "deepen our vision" and lacking a model of subject formation that goes beyond binaristic constructions of power and resistance (ibid.). Interestingly, these concerns with cultural theory resonate with debates in discursive psychology. As has been demonstrated, critical evaluations of discursive psychology raise questions about psychic excess (Frosh, 1999), ask for 'deeper' accounts that go 'beyond the discursive' (Frosh et al., 2003) and call for less deterministic conceptualisations of constraint and power (Speer, 2005). In light of the similarities between current debates in discursive psychology and cultural theory, as well as the emotional nature of my research, I shall explore theories of affect in this section. In the following, I will provide a very brief overview of affect theories[25] and subsequently draw on Ahmed's (2004a; 2004b) account as offering a useful contribution to current debates.

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[25] Also see Thrift (2004) for a description of different positions on affect.

As a solution to the perceived dilemmas in cultural studies, theorists of affect draw on the work of psychologist Tomkins (Sedgwick and Frank, 2003) or philosopher Deleuze (Massumi, 1996; 2002) and posit 'affect' as the theoretical tool that allows researchers to conceptualise complexity in ways that cultural theory does not. Referring to Tomkins' distinction between affects and drives, the theorists Sedgwick and Frank (2003: 108) champion affect theory as "enabling a political vision of difference that might resist both binary homogenisation and infinitizing trivialisation". According to Tomkins (1995: 46), affects can be distinguished from drives because of their higher degree of freedom. While drives have very restricted freedom (one can hardly suppress the need to breathe) affects can be "turned on an off for varying periods of time" and can attach to a variety of objects. Sedgwick and Frank (2003: 101) read Tomkins as offering an account that layers "digital (on/off) with analog (graduated and/or multiply differentiated) representational models", arguing that the combination of both modes provides a deeper understanding of "difference, contingency, performative force, or the possibility of change". In Tomkins' work, the analog model seems to be associated with the waxing and waning of affects; however, affects surface in conjunction with drives that are aligned with the digital mode. Consciously drawing on biologistic and essentialist theoretical models, Sedgwick and Frank (2003: 114) invoke affect theories as an answer to "paranoid" forms of analysis predominant in current US critical theory that find evidence of oppression everywhere (2003: 125). The freedom of affect to "combine with a variety of other components" (Tomkins, 1995:45) is thought to provide an alternative theoretical model that accounts for power and subversion in non-binaristic terms.

Sedgwick's and Frank's (2003) argument about the freedom of affect resonates with Bruns' (2000:5) call to depict laughter in analogic terms which allows theorists to

go beyond the binaristic formulas of respectful and disrespectful forms of amusement. In a similar vein, queer theorists (Probyn, 2000; Munt, 2000) have revisited 'shame' in light of theories of affect and argued that this move allows "us to reach beyond the underlying normative categorisations of politics that continue to dog cultural studies" (Probyn, 2000: 25). Similarly critiquing the alleged "dualism in cultural studies", the Deleuzian theorist Massumi (2002) advocates affect as that which is "outside expectation and adaptation" (1996: 219), as the "unassimilable" (1996: 221) whose "autonomy" (1996: 229) can account for movement and qualitative transformation. Cultural theory, by contrast, cannot theorise change because notions of subject-positions catch "the body in a cultural freeze-frame" (2002: 3), leading to conceptualisations of the body as nothing "more than a local embodiment *of* ideology" (ibid., emphasis in original). In congruence with Sedgwick's and Frank's (2003) assessment of current critical theory as paranoid, Massumi (2002: 13) warns us that "[t]oo much critique is wrong" and draws on the Deleuzian notions of the autonomy of affect, movement, and the virtual (see Colebrook, 2006) to offer a more open and less deterministic theory of cultural change.

Critically discussing Sedgwick's and Massumi's theories of affect and particularly drawing attention to their depiction of cultural studies, Hemmings (2005) argues that they strip cultural theory from its theoretical and political complexity. For example, Sedgwick and Massumi fail to acknowledge the tradition of feminist standpoint epistemology that "attends to emotional investments, political connectivity and the possibility to change" (2005: 557). Moreover, Sedgwick's and Massumi's' claims about the freedom and autonomy of affect and the subsequent turn against critical forms of analysis do not take into account that there "are affective responses that strengthen rather than challenge a dominant social order" (Hemmings, 2005: 551).

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I agree with this critique of Sedgwick and Massumi and will now investigate a further approach to affect, namely the work by Clough and Halley (2007) which moves away from cultural theory to examining social theory more broadly.

Clough contends that there has been an "affective turn" (2007). Editing a collection of articles that engage with theories of affect, Clough states that "the essays suggest that attending to the affective turn is necessary to theorising the social" (2007: 2). Moreover, theories of affect can be seen as presenting a challenge to performativity theory (Bell, 2007: 97). This became apparent in Sedgwick's reading of Tomkins' theory of affect as offering a 'deeper' understanding of performative force (see above). The affective turn brings to the fore various criticisms of performativity theory which I will explore in turn. The challenges seem to centre on performativity's Hegelian negativity and the theory's disregard for the self - activity of matter (Bell, 2007).

Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guatarri, criticisms of performativity focus on the allegedly 'negative' Hegelian model of 'difference' that Butler's theory is based on and instead propose a more vital, and creative theory of 'difference'. According to Gutting (2001: 335), Hegel sees a being as different "only because it is negated by everything eternal to it". In an early article on Bergson, Deleuze states: "In Hegel, the thing differs with itself because it differs with everything that it is not" (Deleuze, cited in Gutting, 2001. 335). Seeking to depart from a Hegelian conceptualisation of difference, Deleuze sees difference as that which grounds being. Difference exists within the organism (see Gambs, 2007: 112); it must be understood as "*what being is in itself,* not (only) how it is related to other tings" (Bell, 2007: 104). Differentiation is not seen as a negative process where identity is postulated in dialectical opposition to a necessarily devalourised other as the Hegelian framework seems to suggest (Braidotti, 2002: 27). Instead, Deleuze regards difference as vital.

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Difference is the fundamental principle of being which is not based on unity, but on difference – "at root to be is not to be one but to be diverse" (Gutting, 2001: 335). Comparing the Deleuzian view of difference with the Hegelian/Butlerian perspective, Bell (2007: 109) states: "In the one there is difference because life will result in difference; life is differentiation, a creative positive force. In the other, difference emerges as a struggle of the thing against all that it is not; [...]".

A further point of critique that theories of affect raise in relation to performativity theory focuses on the dynamism of matter, highlighting the self-organisation or self-activity of the material world. According to Bell (2007: 99) "[p]erformativity is challenged on many counts, then, but they circle around what emerged as a central issue: how to understand the self-activity and creativity of the material world". Braidotti (2002: 56) for instances charges Butler's conceptualisation of matter as lacking "dynamic force of its own" which echoes the criticism that the dynamism of the body in Butler is only the product of cultural forms (Clough, 2007: 8). As Wissinger (2007: 253) points out, theorists of affect regard the body as an affective system and therefore believe that the body is more than a "mere product of meaning systems or of how it is represented".

The assertion of the self-activity of matter, which also became apparent in Sedgwick's and Massumi's accounts, points to the possibility of creativity beyond the operations of the cultural. The emphasis on the activity of material entities calls for an understanding of creativity as independent of cultural forces. Theorists of affect attend to 'interior' bodily processes beyond the social and cultural, thereby challenging performative models of subject inscription. Importantly, the attention to interior processes does not foreclose considerations of the cultural sphere. The point of the debate is not to set up a dichotomy between the bodily and the environment. Instead,

performativity theory is asked to expand its considerations to theorising and researching "how performatives necessarily take place within other sorts of ethno-ecological assemblages" (Bell, 2007: 114). Pointing to the shortcomings of a 'merely' performative approach, Grosz states (2004: 2) that "[w]e need to understand not only how culture inscribes bodies [...] but, more urgently, what these bodies are such that inscription is possible [...]".

As a consequence of understanding matter as dynamic, theorists of affect trouble the notion of the body as organism (Clough, 2007: 8). Clough claims that theorists like Freud and Butler perceive of the body as an organism, which means that it is regarded as a closed system, seeking equilibrium. Such a view of the body manifests itself in Freud's belief that evolutionary change comes from the environment outside the human organism as opposed to residing in the organism itself (Clough, 2007: 11). Advocating a move away from such a conceptualisation, Clough (2007: 12) wants to acknowledge the dynamism of matter by thinking the body as an open system, thereby superseding the opposition between the body and the environment. Matter has the capacity for self-organisation – it is said to be "in-formation" which means that form is not merely inscribed on the body, but that form can also arise out of the body (Clough, 2007: 18).

This revised theory of the body leads to a shift in broader theorisations of the social. Consequently, Clough draws on a range of social theory, as well as on recent findings in the natural sciences and points out that there has been a shift from disciplinary societies to control societies. Here, the target is no longer to produce behaviours that express internalised norms, but to control "never-ending modulations of moods, capacities, affects, and potentialities" (2007: 19). Amongst other things, theorists of affect explore this shift from the ideological interpellation of the subject to

the circulation and modulation of affect. This entails a move away from the preoccupation with representation, discipline and subject identity to exploring the dynamism of materiality in the context of the reconfiguration of bodies, technology and matter.

Importantly, Bell (2007: 114) underlines that "creativity, self-organisation and vitalism should not be understood simply to supersede performativity theory". As I sought to demonstrate, she seems to suggest that performativity should expand its considerations to individuals' participation within a wider "ecology" (2007: 123). Similarly, Clough (2007: 28) argues that "representation, discipline, ideology, subject identity [...] all still matter". This suggests that even though theories of affect can, and have been understood as challenges to performativity theory, it might be more fruitful to explore how the two approaches can be brought together to theorise and research social phenomena. In relation to my aim of obtaining a better understanding of the processes through which feminism becomes attached with emotionality, theories of affect might offer useful insights. To be sure, theories of affect represent a broad field of inquiry and the focus on the dynamism of matter suggests that the work on affect might be less suited for an analysis of discourse and language. Theorists have used affect predominantly in relation to rethinking new configurations of the body, technology and matter (Clough, 2007: 1) which might be less compatible with my study's focus on conversation and discourse. However, there is work on affect that focuses on language, fruitfully combining an attention to affect with performativity theory. This is achieved in Ahmed's (2004a; 2004b) theory on emotions, which I will explore in more detail in the following.

Ahmed's approach to affect provides a fascinating account of how emotions are aligned with bodies, objects and signs. Offering a performative approach (2004b:

12), Ahmed regards emotions as simultaneously social, material and psychic (2004b: 120) and explicitly challenges "any assumption that emotions are private". Outlining an economic model of emotions, Ahmed (2004a: 117) argues that emotions "create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds". Crucially, emotions or affects are not seen as residing within a specific body or object, rather their ability to circulate and re-attach to signs is constitutive of their performative power: "the nonresidence of emotions is what makes them "binding" (2004a: 119). Ahmed explains her hypothesis by drawing on the example of how a bear becomes fearsome to a child; I will quote it at length because it provides a beautiful illustration of her theory:

> It is not that the bear is fearsome, 'on its own', as it were. It is fearsome to someone or somebody. So fear is not in the child, let alone in the bear, but is a matter of how child and bear come into contact. This contact is shaped by past histories of contact, unavailable in the present, which allow the bear to be apprehended as fearsome. The child becomes fearful, and the bear becomes fearsome: the attribution of feeling to an object (I feel afraid because you are fearsome) is an effect of the encounter, which moves the subject away from the object. Emotions involve such affective forms of reorientation (Ahmed, 2004b: 7-8).

Ahmed conceptualises emotions as performative in that they create the very boundaries they seem to presuppose. Furthermore, she offers an account of how affects align with objects through the 'sticking' of specific signs to bodies. Affects do not equally stick to all bodies; crucial to Ahmed's (2004b: 13) performative theory of emotions is their temporal dimension: "signs become sticky through repetition" and "some objects become stickier than others given past histories of contact" (2004b: 92). Ahmed's economy of affect shows how emotions align with bodies (the man-hating feminist), how these emotions come to stick to certain bodies (the man-hating feminist is a pervasive cultural stereotype) and how these associations move individuals in specific ways (some individuals turning away from feminism). Importantly, Ahmed (2004b: 93) argues that signs can cease to have a binding effect; her performative theory of affect implies that the historicity of signification which renders a certain

object sticky can also break with context. Surely, feminists are not always regarded as man-haters. On the other hand however, signs are always-already associated with others signs (feminist, man-hater, butch-lesbian, 'unattractive' women...) so that stickiness is comparatively resistant to processes of re-signification.

Ahmed's argument about the performative power of emotions is illustrated by Lawler's (2005) work on how disgust towards the 'working-class' is mobilised to create middle-class identities (also see Skeggs, 2005). Making a similar argument, Tyler (2008) claims that class disgust is not simply felt but actively generated through repetition. Ahmed's performative account provides a useful framework for understanding the affective nature of various cultural phenomena; her theory of affect resonates with performativity theory in productive ways. In relation to the shortcomings of discursive psychology that I laid out in section three, Ahmed's economic model of emotions provides a more satisfying explanation for continuity in position-taking and for how affects become aligned with stances and beliefs. Demonstrating that individuals have different affective relations to dominant norms, Ahmed's affective economies set out to explain why "transformations are so difficult (we remain invested in what we critique), but also how they are possible (our investments move as we move)" (2004b: 172). Ahmed's performative emphasis on repetition elucidates continuity in position-taking by regarding it as an outcome of past histories of contact. It thereby describes how individuals become invested in certain subject-positions, shedding light on processes that discursive psychology has yet to explain.

To underline the complementarities between Ahmed's work (as only one manifestation of a theory of affect) and discursive psychology is not to claim that the two approaches can be integrated seamlessly. Indeed, Wetherell (2007) critiques

Ahmed's work for decontextualising psychological phenomena, such as emotions, by disentangling them from the practices in which they occur. Although Ahmed does provide various empirical examples (like the bear becoming fearsome to the child) which are also of current political relevance (her reflections on global economies of fear and terrorism since 9/11), she does not present a fine-grained analysis of interaction and the construction of surfaces through emotions. Wetherell sees this lack of engagement with small-scale everyday interactions as indicating a privileging of emotion over practice. Wetherell (2007: 7) however contends that it is not "emotions that shape the surfaces of individual and collective bodies. What shapes is the activities and practices in which emotional colourings are embedded and which organise their effects and their nature". Wetherell emphasises the need to focus on the empirical, and to study interactions in order to avoid a conceptualisation of emotions as outside the interactional realm because this runs the risk of treating emotions as interior and distinct from the social. Wetherell's challenges to Ahmed's theory highlight conceptual disagreements between Ahmed's more abstract perspective and the more empirical and interaction oriented approach of discursive psychology.

Rather than seeking to solve these theoretical discrepancies here, I suggest that the two approaches can nevertheless be brought together on an empirical level. Ahmed's performative approach to emotions enhances discursive psychology by illuminating continuity in position-taking, while discursive psychology's focus on the empirical and interactional avoids a conceptualisation of an irreducible psychic dimension. In congruence with my argument about the complementarities between discursive psychology and Butler's performativity, I claim that Ahmed's theory can refine discursive psychology because its conceptualisation of certain signs as sticky illuminates why individuals take up stances over time and how these positions become

affect-laden. With regard to the broader argument of this section and chapter about the complementarity between Butler's performativity theory, discursive psychology and theories of affect, Ahmed's theory of emotions seems to be particularly suitable because of its roots in performativity theory. I hold that discursive psychology, performativity theory and the stickiness of affects can be brought together in fruitful ways to analyse multiple facets of the research participants' talk, including emotional tone and heightened imaginary. It is my hope that such an account can offer a useful interpretative frame for the empirical analysis of my data.

3.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed various bodies of literature to suggest that critical discursive psychology, combined with performativity theory and Ahmed's approach to affects constitutes a theoretical framework to interpret the interviews. I began by summarizing the main tenets of performativity theory and discursive psychology, suggesting that discursive research complements Butler's abstract theory in useful ways. Although there have been efforts to combine performativity theory with various strands of discursive analysis, such as conversation analytic research or cultural psychoanalysis, I have argued that Wetherell's, Edley's and Billig's post-structuralist work can be brought into a productive dialogue with Butler's theory. Both approaches offer accounts of power and constraint that leave room for agency. Conversation analysis seeks to escape the charge of determinism by emphasising members' orientation and cultural psychoanalysis posits an irreducible psychic dimension to avoid determinism. And while this irreducible psychic dimension is understood through, and in relation to, social discourses, discursive psychology and Butler's theory can account for change in entirely social terms. Discursive psychology's concepts of variability, interpretative repertoires and subject positions, as well as Butler's emphasis on iterability and

temporality allow us to theorise how norms exercise regulatory power but do not do so in determinate ways. In contradistinction to conversation analysis, discursive psychology and performativity theory enable a critical and political analysis and, as opposed to cultural psychoanalysis, the two approaches accommodate psychological concepts without going 'beyond' discourse.

While discursive psychology provides many useful tools for the actual study of performatives, the final section of this chapter has evaluated theories of affect in order to make sense of the emotional tone and heightened imagery manifest in the empirical data. Providing a brief overview of theories of affect and the way they potentially challenge performativity theory, Ahmed's performative economy of emotions seemed to fruitfully combine performativity theory with an attention to affect. I contend that Butler's performativity theory offers us the means to theorise the constant re-making of identities while Ahmed's cultural politics of emotions allows us to conceptualise continuity and 'affect' in position-taking. Finally, discursive analysis provides us with the practical tools to investigate these processes on an empirical level. Having developed my interpretative frame in this chapter, I will begin to present my analysis of the interviews in the following chapter. This first empirical chapter will outline the interpretative repertoires available to discuss feminism, and draw on the concept of postfeminism to make sense of several features of the respondents' talk.

4   Chapter Four

Feminist dis-identification in the postfeminist era

We are not free. I would like to say that. It's not, we haven't reached a state where we can lean back and say: 'no matter what, I still want that my bum doesn't have any wrinkles'. I mean, it's like, there is often this kind of 'it's all good and now we can look after ourselves again and be beautiful and take care of our bodies' and so on. That's bullshit. I don't think it has stopped. Somehow, something else has happened, I think, something else took place, I really can't describe it any better, it has somehow fizzled out (Julia).

Julia's statement foreshadows a central theme of this chapter, namely postfeminism. But before discussing the concept of postfeminism, this chapter outlines broader patterns that were discernable in the research participants' talk in order to introduce the empirical part of this thesis. Feminist issues were discussed in various ways in the interviews, exhibiting a broad range of views and stances on feminism. However, the talk on feminism was also patterned and two "interpretative repertoires" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 202) emerged: one set of arguments depicted feminism as a valuable social movement that has brought about gender equality and therefore was not needed anymore. A competing perspective portrayed feminism as an extreme stance that goes too far. The first section of this chapter introduces and analyses the two interpretative repertoires on feminism with a view to the discursive function they fulfil. Even though feminism was not portrayed in an entirely negative light, both interpretative repertoires enabled the rejection of feminism. The woman's movement was either valuable, but somehow outmoded, or simply extreme and therefore unappealing.

Paying special attention to the allocation of feminism to the past and its status as both commendable and fiercely repudiated, the second section of this chapter adopts a postfeminist lens to theorize the co-existence of the two interpretative repertoires on feminism. Drawing on recent conceptualisations of postfeminism (Gill, 2007; McRobbie 2004a, b; Tasker and Negra, 2007) as signifying both the incorporation of

feminism and its simultaneous (and indeed consequent) rejection, I argue that the concept allows us to make sense of various modes of argumentation prevalent in the interviews. Feminism was relevant to the interviewees' accounts in many ways, but frequently remained unvoiced, indicating that it was taken for granted. Indeed, feminism was not only implicitly invoked, but also rejected without any mention of the term. Its spectral and shadowy existence (McRobbie, 2003) involved heavy policing around uses of the label and a "postfeminist sensibility" (Gill, 2007: 254) transpired through numerous accounts.

Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate in the third and final section of this chapter, research participants' stances on feminism were shifting and thereby enabling feminist identification for a moment or in individual cases. In a discourse analytic vein, an attention to variability in talk reveals the complexities of feminist dis-identification, providing insights into moments of rupture and support for feminism. Dichotomous constructions of feminism which posited a good and bad variant, and subsequent identification with its more positive expression, allowed several research participants to claim the term. Although the prevalence of postfeminist discourses facilitated rejections of feminism, the movement was also supported and constituted a highly contested and fraught territory.

4.1   Interpretative repertoires on feminism

My first research question is 'what do contemporary young women understand by feminism?' Initially, I had envisioned a neat overview of the various understandings of feminism that were offered by the research participants. However, I quickly became aware that I would have had to list at least twenty definitions, still feeling that I had somewhat misrepresented the accounts of the respondents. As I will demonstrate in section three, the research participants' positionings to feminism changed during the

interviews. Previous research has demonstrated that individuals take differing stances on feminism, depending on the interpretative repertoires they draw on to discuss feminist politics (Edley and Wetherell, 2001). Consequently, I will focus on patterns that have emerged in talk about feminism and recognisable routines of arguments, associations and evaluations. Two overarching themes were discernable, and I will discuss each of them in turn: feminism was depicted as a positive movement that brought important changes which rendered it anachronistic in the UK and Germany, or as an extreme movement that goes too far.

Interestingly, the cultural resources to discuss feminism were similar in Germany and the UK. Comparable patterns emerged from interviews conducted in Berlin, London, and Birmingham and with women who were born and raised in 'West' and 'East' Germany. There were only few differences in the research participants' accounts that seemed to be *culturally* specific. These variants related to the individuals associated with feminism, as well as the sartorial choices feminists were imagined to make. Several women that I met in Berlin associated Alice Schwarzer[26] with feminism, while British respondents thought of Germaine Greer, suffragettes such as Emily (Emmeline) Pankhurst, and Margaret Thatcher. Feminists were described as unfeminine in both contexts (chapter six). In Germany however, feminists were thought to wear purple and not shave their armpits while the image of the bra-burner was much more frequently evoked in the UK. This observation suggests that the cultural resources available to discuss feminism were comparable in both contexts, highlighting similarities, rather than differences between the ways feminism is negotiated amongst young women living in Germany and the UK[27].

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[26] Alilce Scharzer is a well-known German feminist activist and public figure. She is founder of *Emma*, a German feminist magazine which celebrated its thirtieth birthday in 2007.

[27] Interestingly, Erel (2009: 32) also found that the life-stories of the migrant women she interviewed in Germany and the UK were similar. "While my initial expectation was that the experiences of the

4.1.1 Feminism as commendable but anachronistic

Seven research respondents described feminism as a movement of great socio-political importance that brought about crucial changes which today's women should be thankful for. Barbara claimed she was grateful for Alice Schwarzer's political activism and Leila stated: "when you feel disadvantaged, then you should do something about it as a woman, and then I think it's okay, for example, this women's movement, at that time, I find that, I think that it was a good thing". Similarly, Carolina argued that she "would not sit here if it had not been for the feminist movement. I mean, you have to also, honestly – it was really important at that time". However, she continued by saying: "I am just not sure whether, to what extent it is still important nowadays". Carolina's statement illustrates a crucial feature of the interpretative repertoire on feminism as valuable: it portrays the movement as having achieved its goals and implies that feminist politics have become redundant.

Doris told me she and her boyfriend did not have any arguments about gender equality because of her feeling that "nowadays, you don't have to talk about it much, because it is also normal, it is already, it does not need much clarification, or debate, it is simply clear that the woman is also allowed to work, that she has certain rights, that the man cooks, or, I mean, I feel it's simply normal". According to Doris, gender equality has acquired normative status – "it does not need much clarification", is "simply clear" and "normal" – which indicates that there is no need for feminism anymore. Importantly, the employment of the interpretative repertoire of feminism as a commendable, if anachronistic movement does *not* imply that research participants were unaware of the persistence of gender inequalities. As I will demonstrate in chapter five, the gender pay gap was frequently acknowledged but rendered irrelevant

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migrant women in Britain and Germany would be significantly different, in the course of the study it turned out that this view was mistaken. The differences between Germany and the UK do not present themselves clearly within the life-stories".

through the use of individualist discourses. Here, I want to emphasise that there is no space to acknowledge the persistence of gender inequalities in this interpretative repertoire on feminism. The underlying assertion is that women's status has improved steadily over the years and that western democracies have witnessed a transformation of gender relations which renders feminism unnecessary.

The portrayal of feminism as both positive and out-of-date resonates with Whelehan's (2000: 3) claim that "in today's cultural climate feminism is at one and the same time credited with furthering women's independence and dismissed as irrelevant to a new generation of women who no longer need to be liberated from the shackles of patriarchy because they have already 'arrived'". One crucial feature of the interpretative repertoire is that feminism is located in the past. Julia told me she would not call herself a feminist because, amongst other reasons, it "seems to be somewhat, erm, somewhat outmoded". Barbara, Undine, and Christine associated feminism with the period of the sixties and seventies, adding to an account that leaves no space for feminism in contemporary society. Feminist issues are temporalised and generationalised: they belong to the past and were relevant to an older generation.

Generational differences are thus negotiated, but remain unvoiced. Interestingly, none of the young women drew on the trope of the 'mother-daughter dynamic' to distance themselves from feminism. As I will demonstrate in chapter seven, mothers' involvement in feminist activism played a role in negotiations of feminism in terms of facilitating a felt distance or closeness to the women's movement. The research participants, however, did *not* distance themselves from feminism out of a rebellion against their mothers. This is an interesting finding given the popularity of the generational approach to feminist dis-identification that foregrounds age differences in an attempt to grasp young women's rejection of

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feminism (see chapter one). Rather than casting young women's feminist dis-identification in terms of a mother-daughter dynamic, I suggest that it is more useful to think about the interplay of feminism and generation in terms of the generationalisation of feminism and its allocation to the past. In chapter one, I challenged the generational approach to feminist dis-identification for its heteronormative assumptions and privileging of one axis of differentiation namely age at the expense of additional, and intersecting, forms of differentiation amongst women. Here, I am extending my criticism of the generational approach by attempting to uncouple processes of generationalisation from the (heteronormative) mother-daughter dynamic. Feminist dis-identification intersects with generational difference not through an alleged rebellion of a younger generation against an older generation but through the allocation of feminism to the past. This 'pastness' of feminism is an essential element of the postfeminist cultural climate (McRobbie 2004b) which I will discuss in more detail below.

The interpretative repertoire of feminism as a valuable movement that significantly changed gender relations in Germany and the UK rendered the women's movement redundant by allocating it to the past. It also gave rise to a sub-variant which emphasised the need for feminism in other parts of the world, namely Muslim countries. After having claimed the high level of acceptance and normative status of feminist ideas in Germany, Doris stated that feminism is not "that necessary anymore nowadays because we've somehow progressed quite far, here in Europe". Gender equality, progress, and the achievement of feminist aims are linked to the west which meant that various research participants stressed feminist activism was needed in other, particularly Muslim countries. Carrie took a clear stance on the issue by arguing:

> the Muslims who, who, need...you know, I think the women over there are restricted in what they are doing and do need help. And feminists over here should just shut their mouths and go and help them, instead of the whining about equal rights and a couple of grants here and there

> that they don't really work for. And, they should be concentrating on the people that are getting castrated, the girls, you know.

The trope of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' as the 'other' of liberated western women occurred in numerous interviews. I will investigate the discursive function (and political consequences) of juxtaposing allegedly emancipated European women with supposedly oppressed and powerless women in other parts of the world in more detail in chapter five. The reference to seemingly backwards and oppressive regimes outside the west figured as a sub-variant of the interpretative repertoire of feminism as valuable, but redundant in contemporary European societies. Parallel to the allocation of feminism to the past, the trope of the '(Muslim) oppressed other' renders feminism superfluous in today's German and British societies. Interestingly then, the interpretative repertoire of feminism as valuable, if a little unnecessary, depicts feminism in an entirely positive light, whilst reinforcing the perception of feminist activism as anachronistic, at least in western countries.

4.1.2   Feminism as an extreme movement

An alternative interpretative repertoire on feminism characterises the woman's movement not as commendable (if unnecessary), but as extreme and going too far. Nine research participants described feminism by employing these exact terms. Louisa portrayed feminists as "these really hardcore, workaholic women, who don't listen to any advice. That's really extreme, like 'we are so equal'...who are totally offended when you offer them a seat". In this statement, the feminist is constructed as somebody who makes a fuss about everything, who is intolerant, and would not even take a seat if it were offered to her. Louisa's rather trivial example is noteworthy. It is representative of a trivialisation frequently employed in depictions of feminist activism where feminism contests doors being held open, bags being carried, and seats offered (Skeggs, 1997: 143). Trivialising statements add to the portrayal of feminism as

extreme: feminists are pedantic and narrow-minded by struggling against seemingly unimportant and minor issues.

Some statements likened feminism to racism (Doris) or established an association with far-right political parties such as the BNP and thereby also depicted feminism as extreme. Whelehan (2000: 19) states that feminist discourse is frequently compared with fascism or Stalinist communism which emerges from Elspeth's statement:

> Well, you know...I think, women that make, making noise, just for the sake of it, and making people, it is like, BNP, people liberal are going to shy away from it, because it is too much, it is too strong, I think there is a point where, there is a line where you can be political, make people aware, but it is the way that you do it.

By arguing that liberal people shy away from feminism, Elspeth establishes a dichotomy of feminism as extreme through its association with the BNP on the one hand, and a liberal, moderate stance on the other hand. The view of feminism as extreme and irrational also surfaced in Sara's statement. She claimed that feminism is "too extreme. I feel when you're talking to them that they don't – they're not coming out with proper reasons". According to Sara then, feminists are irrational since they are not "coming out with proper reasons". Sara's portrayal echoed the description of feminists across the interviews: they were said to be angry, aggressive, defensive, making noise, and women who want to 'fight'. Feminism, in parallel, was portrayed as provocative, revolutionary, radical, rigid and bold. In contrast to the first interpretative repertoire where feminism is regarded as a progressive and valuable movement, feminism becomes associated with extremism, irrationality and intolerance in this alternative set of arguments.

Indeed, the second interpretative repertoire implied that feminism was against, rather than for, gender equality. Statements put forward within this set of arguments held that feminism meant women could do more than men. Nine research participants

referred to feminists as women who think they are better than men, and several respondents claimed that there is going to be no gender equality as long as feminist politics persisted. Carolina felt that "as long as there is feminism, there is no [gender] equality". Feminist politics brought more of a divide because of "illegal" practices such as positive discrimination. That feminism is divisive and transgressive was also expressed in associations of feminism with man-hating (and lesbianism) which I will explore in chapter six. Analogous to the portrayal of feminism as valuable if anachronistic, this alternative interpretative repertoire of feminism as extreme, divisive, and transgressive facilitates a rejection of feminism. Given that the majority of research participants went back and forth between the two interpretative repertoires on feminism, it is unsurprising that only two research participants answered the question of whether they would call themselves a feminist with a "yes". Eight women answered this question with a 'yes, but', whereas the remaining thirty respondents did not identify as feminists.

While I will explore research participants' various reasons for rejecting but also claiming feminism throughout my analysis chapters, I would like to contextualise the interpretative repertoires on feminism in the following. How can we make sense of the co-existence of two sets of arguments related to feminism that depict it as either important but anachronistic, or extreme and transgressive? The detection of two seemingly contradictory, but simultaneously occurring responses to feminism – commendable *and* hostile – is not a new finding (Pilcher, 1998; Edley and Wetherell, 2001; Mueller, 2004). But what is the social climate that allows for feminism to be valued but fiercely repudiated at the same time? I argue that the concept of postfeminism as it has been developed in recent years (Gill, 2007: McRobbie, 2004a, b; Tasker and Negra, 2007) provides a useful explanatory tool to theorize the

simultaneous existence of two apparently contradictory interpretative repertoires on feminism. Rather than merely demonstrating the co-existence of two sets of arguments on feminism and exploring their discursive function, I propose to view and analyse the existing interpretative repertoires under a postfeminist lens.

4.2   Postfeminism: what did the 'post' do to feminism?

According to Tasker and Negra (2007: 8), the term postfeminism became "concretised, both as a discursive phenomenon and as a buzzword of US and UK journalism" during the 1990s. In 1998, Gamble (2001: 43) however claimed that there was little agreement on what the term postfeminism meant. In 2007, Gill (2007: 248) equally argued that postfeminism was being used variously. She identified *three* broad ways[28]: as denoting an epistemological break within feminism, a historical shift involving a move into a time after feminism, and a normative position antithetical to feminism. Brooks' (1997: 1) understanding of postfeminism as "encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism" exemplifies the first understanding of postfeminism that Gill identifies. Klose (1996: 85) uses the term postfeminism in the German context to highlight social changes which imply that the women's movement has to adopt its strategies to contemporary challenges (also see Budgeon, 2001: 25). This use of postfeminism maps onto the second formulation that Gill discerns. The third way in which postfeminism is employed is most famously expressed in Faludi's thesis which identifies a cultural backlash against the goals and achievements of feminism (Faludi, 1991; also see Kim, 2001).

Gill (2007: 254) however argues that neither approach convincingly grasps the specificity of the current postfeminist climate, and instead suggests conceiving of

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[28] For a less recent summary of different understandings and conceptualisations of postfeminism see Lotz, 2001.

postfeminism as a *"sensibility"* (emphasis in original). Taking the media as her critical object of study, Gill detects a number of recurring features that characterise contemporary representations of gender. They range from the notion of femininity as a bodily practice, and a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment to the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas (255). Indeed, Gill (2007: 269) argues that constructions of feminism are an integral feature of the postfeminist sensibility where "feminism is not ignored or even attacked but is simultaneously taken for granted and repudiated". Gill's emphasis on the simultaneous incorporation and rejection of feminism resonates with McRobbie's (20004a: 4) argument that postfeminism "actively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account in order to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, a spent force". McRobbie (2004b: 255) underlines that feminism has to be understood as having passed away for it to be "'taken into account". The construction of feminism's 'pastness' within a postfeminist climate is crucial and, as I demonstrated above, frequently occurred in the interviews. In their edited collection on postfeminism and popular culture, Tasker and Negra (2007: 4) also conceptualise postfeminism as connoting the simultaneous acceptance and repudiation of feminism[29]. They claim that postfeminism involves an "'othering of feminism' (even as women are more centralised), its construction as extreme, difficult, and unpleasurable". Similar to the allocation of feminism to the past, the portrayal of feminism as extreme represented one interpretative repertoire on feminism and was prevalent in the interviews.

Importantly, cultural theorists point to further characterising features of postfeminism by highlighting its exclusionary tendencies – "postfeminism is white and

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[29] Projansky (2001: 20) equally holds that postfeminist "discourses paradoxically both incorporate feminism into and purge feminism from popular culture [...]".

middle-class by default" (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 2; also see Projansky, 2001: 68) –
that also pertain to inequalities of "age, sexuality and disability – as well as gender"
(Gill, 2007: 255). While I will discuss the interplay between negotiations of feminism
and difference in more detail in chapter seven, I draw on the theorisation of
postfeminism here as a valuable analytical framework to make sense of the
simultaneous incorporation and repudiation of feminism. Gill's, McRobbie's, Tasker's
and Negra's conceptualisations of postfeminism do not only allow us to comprehend
the co-existence of two seemingly contradictory interpretative repertoires that emerged
in discussions of feminism, but also shed light on the process of *how* feminism is
simultaneously accepted, and fiercely rejected. Indeed, McRobbie's (2003: 130) notion
of the "double entanglement" offers a further useful analytical tool to comprehend the
status of feminism in the postfeminist climate. It signifies a logic where feminism has
achieved the status of a Gramscian common sense, but is refuted and "'almost hated'"
at the same time (ibid.). The taken-into-accountness of feminism is exactly what
permits it to be repeatedly discredited, rejected, and portrayed as redundant,
anachronistic, or extreme – as was so often the case in the interviews.

The concept of postfeminism and the notion of the double entanglement
nevertheless also allow us to make sense of additional features of the data. In
conducting the interviews, I was waiting to hear the statement 'I am not a feminist,
but...' which is frequently cited in the literature on feminist dis-identification (Griffin,
1989; Kramer, 1998; Pilcher, 1993). Having suggested that this claim can be rethought
as a performative act of (normative) femininity (see chapter one), I was keen to
encounter it in the interviews to bolster my argument. However, I was 'disappointed'
by my data because not a single research participant used the phrase. How should I
interpret the absence of this disclaimer? The reflections on the cultural logic of

postfeminism and the double entanglement are helpful in this context. Arguably, 'I am not a feminist, but...' did not occur in the interviews because feminism does not have to be named explicitly in the postfeminist era where it is always-already taken into account. As I will show, feminism was relevant to the interviews in many ways, but frequently remained unvoiced, indicating its taken for granted status.

Carla told me that feminism "is just there, I know it is there, and I know I could come back to it, if I needed to". At the end of the interview, she argued that feminism "surrounds me, it's always there. So you can't really remember a pin-point in time when it started". This perception of feminism came to the fore in numerous accounts where feminism was oriented to without making it explicit. Talking about gender differences in the professional sphere, Nanda claimed that "a woman can do that equally well as a man, because she can have those skills and she can be trained as much as her male counterpart". I had asked Nanda about her views on gender roles; in answering my question she indirectly refers to a feminist discourse by emphasising women's equal status vis-à-vis men. Her statement does not contain a reference to a feminist struggle for equality, but simply reiterates a feminist standpoint which signifies the taken-into-accountness of feminism. Similarly, feminism was invoked, but not voiced, in depictions of men and women as different but equal. Christine argued that men and women "are very different. I don't think it means that one is more inferior to the other". In discussing gender differences, Christine implicitly makes a feminist argument because she is quick to emphasise that women are not inferior to men. She asserts differences between men and women whilst subscribing to notions of gender equality. The terms feminism or feminist, however, remain unvoiced and (continuing) struggles for gender equality are purged from the account.

Feminist perspectives were lurking in the background of numerous statements but were hardly ever made explicit. In talking about her experiences of working in a shop, Sabrina told me that "no one undermines each other which it doesn't matter, you know, regardless of be – of gender, you know, we'll have jokes with each other we'll er, as a – no one doesn't get on with each other. It's really er, everyone is equal as- as a team". In talking about her workplace, Sabrina alludes to the possibility that gender might be an issue by – paradoxically - stating that this is *not* the case. Discrimination on the basis of gender is thus invoked, but concurrently portrayed as not happening. Sabrina's statement demonstrates feminist awareness by implying that gender discrimination is a potential issue at the workplace. However, a feminist perspective is immediately disavowed. Sabrina abandons the thought of gender inequality by drawing on postfeminist common sense that "everyone is equal". Her statement asserts the normative status of equality. Yet, her account simultaneously disallows a critical engagement with (gender) inequality because its persistence is always-already foreclosed. Sabrina's use of the statement "everybody is equal" indicates that there is no space for people not to be equal. The way the phrase is used in this sentence suggests that "everybody is equal", and therefore everybody *has* to be equal.

Postfeminist statements frequently occurred in relation to the question of childrearing where numerous research participants expressed their desire for a "traditional" home. Asena voiced her vision for an ideal future in the following way: "When it comes to that I am still very traditional: I would like to have a family, with a house and a garden, in a nice suburb, erm, yes, working, yes, partly working, I mean, this would be my ideal". Asena indicates her awareness of being traditional which functions as a qualifier for her subsequent remark. She knows that things have changed – and again feminist struggles and politics remain unvoiced – but nevertheless longs

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for a traditional home[30]. Asena demonstrates feminist awareness by using the disclaimer "I am still very traditional" which does the postfeminist trick of taking feminist ideas into account while rejecting them at the same time.

One notable instance of an invocation and concurrent disavowal of feminism occurred in Miranda's talk about a job she had been offered in a high-profile industry. Miranda told me that she got the job because she was a "girl" and because she was "pretty": "But that's what they want, they want to be able to take a pretty girl with, to a client lunch, and keep the client interested. I know that, it doesn't bother me, but, I know it is not right maybe, but I don't really care, I could use it to my advantage too, so –". Miranda demonstrates feminist awareness by stating that the reasons for her employment are "not right". However, she subsequently rejects a feminist perspective by claiming that she did not care and that the job also held advantages for her. Feminist standpoints are taken and rendered irrelevant; and again, they are not made explicit. Reflecting the postfeminist emphasis on individualism, empowerment and choice (Gill, 2007: 255), Miranda draws on an individualist statement to justify why she does not care about possible feminist objections to the reasons for her employment. This individualist focus neglects the consequences of sexist employment practices for women who do not have the necessary looks – be it based on their age or body size. Miranda also does not acknowledge the precarious nature and constraints of an employment based on her youth, appearance, and successful performance as a pleasant escort who is obliged to use her femininity and sexuality to keep – supposedly male – clients interested.

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[30] Indeed, a large survey (Hurrelmann and Albert, 2006) on the attitudes of young Germans found that young women were much more family oriented than their male peers, expressing a wish for children and a committed relationship at a younger age. However, the same survey also found that young women want to combine having a family with a career, see chapter five.

In asserting a shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification as a further marker of postfeminist contemporary culture, Gill (2007: 90) claims that "sexual objectification can be presented not as something done to women by some men, but as a freely chosen wish of active (confident, assertive) female subjects". Miranda's statement – indeed confident and assertive – illustrates this shift disturbingly well. No man coerced her into taking the job and Miranda's use of individualist rhetoric allows her to represent herself as being in control. She consciously 'chooses' to use her femininity and sexuality in a sexist and precarious work environment. Crucially, Gill points out that the shift from sexual objectification to subjectification makes it much harder to critique such practices because they seem to be freely chosen. The self-conscious and non-coercive nature of Miranda's behaviour makes criticism much more challenging because her reasoning always-already incorporates a disavowal of feminist forms of critique.

McRobbie's (2007: 723) concept of the "post-feminist masquerade" provides yet another illuminating explanation for, and critique of, self-conscious enactments of seductive femininity as they occurred in Miranda's statement (and interview as a whole). McRobbie understands the post-feminist masquerade as "one of the self-conscious means by which young women are encouraged to collude with the re-stabilisation of gender norms so as to undo the gains of feminism and dissociate themselves from this now discredited political identity" (ibid.). Again, underlying notions of choice are crucial here as well as the disavowal of feminism. McRobbie (2007: 725) argues that young women adopt this masquerade for fear of retribution now that they actually are in the institutionalised world of work. Miranda agreed to take a job in a highly prestigious and still male-dominated industry and arguably disperses the threat of her female presence by embracing excessive femininity. As

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McRobbie (2007: 725 - 726) points out, however, the feminine masquerade underlines female vulnerability, re-assures male structures of power, and re-stabilises gender relations in the heterosexual matrix. Seen under this lens, the self-conscious and seemingly pro-active 'choice' that Miranda makes appears much less empowering and advantageous. It relies on unequal gender relations that remain unchallenged due to Miranda's disavowal of feminism.

While feminist perspectives lurked in the background of various accounts, if never explicitly voiced and frequently disavowed, research participants claimed they did not discuss feminism. Arguably, feminist issues are taken into account to such an extent that feminisms, in all their complexity and contingency, cease to become the object of discussions. When I asked research participants whether they talked about feminist issues with their friends and whether the term 'feminism' ever came up in conversations, most gave a negative answer. Indeed, some respondents argued that their perceived lack of knowledge about feminism kept them from claiming feminism. Charlotte told me she would not call herself a feminist:

> 'Cause of my very, very small understanding of it. It is not something I really think about or even associate myself with. I mean it is probably something, you know, once I read about it, and understood it, I would be like, er yes, I would see myself [as a feminist].

An unfriendly interpretation of Charlotte's statement could read it as offering an 'excuse' for why she has not shown any interest in feminist politics or activism so far. I however hold that Charlotte's felt lack of knowledge is representative of the majority of interviews. When talking about feminism, respondents mainly took recourse to stereotypes about the women's movement which I will discuss in chapter six. Here, I do not want to establish criteria for what constitutes 'proper' knowledge in relation to the women's movement but think that the stereotypical knowledges about feminism illustrate its 'pastness' in the postfeminist era.

In her review essay of Butler's (2000) *Antigone's claim: Kinship between Life and Death*, McRobbie (2003) explores Butler's reflections on Antigone. Antigone is seen to "represent the unrepresentable" (McRobbie, 2003: 132) due to her incestuous parentage. McRobbie moves on from Butler's account to suggest that Antigone's status as unimaginable and unintelligible allows us to reflect on the "shadow existence" of feminism in the current social climate. She points to the "abject state" of feminism, emphasising that it is "reviled" or "almost hated" (130) in contemporary postfeminist culture. This "spectral existence" (McRobbie, 2003: 133) of feminism most notably emerged from statements of research participants who reiterated the stereotype of the 'man-hating, unfeminine, lesbian feminist' (see chapter six). It also surfaced when interviewees were telling me that the claiming of a feminist stance was heavily policed. In talking about a female friend who was outspoken about her feminist views, Stella told me that other people frequently thought:

> 'Oh, here she is again with her theories'. But I find it's good in a way, that she does that and I also actually use that, I mean, when there are things that I notice, to bring them into the discussion. And then you are often, in a way belittled, it doesn't lead to a proper topical discussion, I would say.

According to Stella, taking a feminist stance bears the risk of having one's views fiercely challenged and belittled. Feminism is not discussed at an intellectual level, but is relegated to the arena of stereotypes and unfounded accusations.

Stella's experiences paralleled the accounts of several research participants. In talking about feminists and emancipated women, Barbara pointed out that the term feminist was a "swearword". Imitating reactions to instances where feminism was claimed, Barbara said: "Yeah, 'you feminist, you Emanze'[31], yeah, it really is a

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[31] Emanze is a derogatory German term for an emancipated women, or a woman striving for emancipation. Maybe it compares to the English term 'femi-nazi'. Reflecting the construction of feminists as unfeminine, man-hating, and lesbian, the term Emanze connotes similar meanings. An interesting anecdote in this context is that the German pronunciation of Emanze contains the sound of the German word for 'man'. When I was younger, and did not yet know the term emancipation, I thought the term Emanze referred to a woman who was, or wanted to be like a man.

swearword, 'are you an Emanze or what'"? Equally, Yvonne stated: "when I'm amongst my good friends and like there's a little bit of playing when things have been said and it's 'Oh, are you a feminist?'". To be a feminist is worthy of accusation and a feminist stance is profoundly policed. Indeed, Morgan (1995: 131) observes that young women who identify as feminists are often rejected by their peers. The feminist occupies a spectral position, residing at the boundaries of what is imaginable and sayable, and what is not. The policing of feminist statements illustrates the violent processes through which certain subjects – such as the feminist are relegated to a marginalised position and excluded from the realm of normative, acceptable identities. The question and accusation 'are you a feminist?' delimits what a woman can legitimately voice; it works as a threat which circumscribes acceptable womanhood (see chapter six). Following the accounts of the research respondents (and indeed my own experiences), a young woman puts herself in a vulnerable position when making explicitly feminist statements and runs the risk of having her views dismissed or being insulted.

Taking a feminist position and making it explicit by using the term feminism or politicised language conjures up adverse reactions. Callie told me that men "just tell me to shut up" when raising feminist concerns. Lara remarked: "I was at a barbeque the other night and I can't remember why feminism came up at all, erm, I said, I said something about feminism, and like, we were just being silly, but these two guys like moved away from me". She continued by telling me she got "mocked quite a lot" for her feminist convictions:

> I am not seriously offended, but it's them teasing me, but I guess it just goes to show that it [feminism] is not considered, you know, you might as well, it is not considered more important, but actually, they are blind to feminism to a certain extent, but there is just this war on feminism that is considered something different, or separate, or not related to how people live their lives.

It is interesting that Lara uses the term "blind" to describe people's reactions to the term feminism. Arguably, this metaphor signifies that feminism is something that cannot be seen, which is not there and hardly intelligible. Lara's experiences with mentioning the 'f-word' mirror the accounts of 'the feminist' being a swearword, offering few incentives for publicly supporting feminist demands or perspectives. The accusation of being a feminist carries the threat of being relegated to the boundaries of the normatively acceptable and imaginable. Young women in the postfeminist climate abstain from calling themselves feminist because the use of the label is profoundly policed as signifying a somewhat transgressive and abjected political identity. Consequently, it is less the use of a label as such that prevents young women from claiming feminism than the policing of the label 'feminist' more specifically.

4.3   Feminist identification: contested but not impossible

The postfeminist cultural era and the policing of an affirmation of feminism discourage young women from claiming feminism. However, these cultural convergences do not mean that feminist identification is impossible. In order to avoid painting a deterministic picture of negotiations of feminism, I will focus on moments of rupture and modes of feminist identification in the following. First and foremost, my discourse analytic perspective and the use of concepts such as interpretative repertoires involve an attention to variability in talk: if a research participant said she would not call herself a feminist, she did not necessarily have only negative views on feminism. This has become apparent in my discussion of the two interpretative repertoires on feminism which did not depict the movement in an entirely negative light. Consequently, the quantification of my qualitative data (thirty out of forty respondents would not call themselves feminist) does not grasp the complexities of young women's stances on feminism. Paralleling their changing perspectives on feminist politics, the

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interviewees dis-identification with feminism was shifting. Rather than regarding young women's stances on feminism as a stable matter, I am approaching the issue in a discourse analytic vein by viewing them as fluid.

Consider Ella's statements as a case in point. Ella talked about her relationship with a female friend of hers:

> Ella: [...] So we are quite encouraging of each other, we are feminists.
> *Christina: But have you ever thought about that – I mean was it, I mean, because it sounded like you had to think whether you were a feminist -*
> Ella: Yeah, I don't know whether I would say I am a feminist, or just that I am a good friend. Would you call being a feminist – you would. Yeah, then I am a feminist.
> *Christina: Is there anything that kind of holds you back from calling yourself a feminist? Any reservations, or –*
> Ella: Yeah, the reservations are, I don't want it to be all about women. 'Cause I want to encourage guys too. You know. And with, when you say feminist to me, I kind of, I kind of look at it as if it is somebody who is only interested in women and not men, and then that's when I, when you start thinking, hold on, and then you get the guys feeling angry or whatever. That's the only reservation, otherwise, I don't have a problem with being called a feminist, you know, but I still, you know, want to be encouraging of men as well as women.

Ella goes back and forth between calling herself a feminist and voicing her concerns about it. She seems to be insecure as to what a feminist 'really' is and is wary of the implications of claiming the label. Interestingly, her concerns relate to the fact that she does not want it to be "all about women" with the "guys feeling angry or whatever". As I will discuss in chapter six, such statements are firmly located within the heterosexual matrix and should be analysed in view of my argument about the crucial role of heteronormativity in negotiations of feminism. Here, I want to demonstrate that feminist dis-identification is not a straightforward matter, but is changing throughout subsequent statements.

Miranda told me that she had learned about feminism at university, reading an essay by Laura Mulvey. At first, she expressed a positive attitude towards feminist theory by arguing that reading the Mulvey article made her think that "it is actually all very fair and very good". Five more minutes into the interview, I asked her whether she had started to think about feminist issues after having learned about it at university. Miranda replied: "No, because I really hated that all" and subsequently portrayed

feminism as biased against men. Her shifting attitudes toward feminism depend on her understanding of it. This, in turn, is based on her respective use of the interpretative repertoires on feminism that I identified above. Miranda occupied a positive stance towards feminism when associating it with fairness and equality - "it's actually all very fair and very good". Five minutes later, she however rejected feminism because she framed it within the second interpretative repertoire on feminism as extreme and man-hating. Importantly, Miranda's changing opinions on feminism do not only illustrate variability in talk, but also demonstrate that attitude statements construct the "attitudinal object" (Wetherell and Potter, 1987: 52). Critiquing traditional attitude theory, Wetherell and Potter argue that the "object of thought", in this case feminism, is formulated and constructed in discourse: "sameness of wording does not necessarily mean that respondents will understand the terms or formulate the object of thought in an identical way". Miranda did not only express an opinion about feminism but simultaneously constructed it as either a good thing or an extreme stance that involves man-hating.

The seemingly contradictory nature of the two dominant interpretative repertoires on feminism gave rise to shifting attitudes towards the term and its politics and also involved a form of feminist dis-identification that followed a 'yes, but…' formula. As aforementioned, eight research participants claimed that they would call themselves a feminist under certain provisos. As I will show, such formulations frequently entailed a dichotomous construction of feminist politics into active/passive (Asena, Nanda); noisy/quiet (Callie) and explicit/implicit (Sam). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the respondents allocated themselves on the more 'feminine' side of the binary: passive, quiet, implicit. This dichotomous construction allows them to negotiate competing constructions of feminism as being extreme, but also valuable. By

describing their feminist identification as passive, quiet and implicit, respondents dissociate themselves from extremism, transgressiveness and divisiveness. The dichotomous construction of feminist activism and subsequent identification with its more positive variant also solves the ideological dilemma that emerges in negotiations of feminism as simultaneously valuable and extreme. Billig et al. (1988) stress the dilemmatic nature of thinking as an inherently social process and as reflecting the existence of contrary themes in common sense. Ideological dilemmas emerge when competing sets of arguments have to be negotiated. The dilemmas arising from two seemingly contradictory interpretative repertoires on feminism surfaced in numerous interviews where respondents attempted to solve them through a dichotomous construction of feminism and subsequent support for its more positive variant.

Nanda argued that "there are more passive feminists and there are more active feminists. I wouldn't describe myself as an active feminist, because I haven't done anything yet [...] but I do think about things, I verbally object to things, so I do think that at the passive level I am a feminist". While the description of active and passive seems to map onto different degrees of involvement in feminist activism in this statement, Nanda's subsequent explorations indicate that she is negotiating competing understandings of feminism:

> I mean, I don't like the excessive, sort of male-hating, male-bashing feminism – erm, but I mean, sort of, I consider, I do lots of voluntary work, and I have worked for places that give really good advice to people, and I have considered erm, sort of, doing voluntary work sort of at organisations that help women.

Nanda seems to know exactly the type of feminism she does not want to be associated with. Again, her distancing from "male-bashing" should be analysed under a critical heteronormative lens (see chapter six). Having rejected "excessive" feminism, she begins to grapple with the kind of feminist work she envisions herself being involved in. Paralleling her distinction between active and passive feminism, she only feels able

to claim feminism after having distanced herself from its allegedly excessive and male-bashing variant.

The dichotomous construction of feminism as representing different forms of activism enables feminist identification. Callie claimed: "I wouldn't – I don't think I'd ever put myself in a situation where you know, I – I was marching or you know but I – but I would sort – I'd be a quiet feminist if you like and sort of you know, I – I do- I do very much er, like the idea of more equality". In arguing that she would not go marching but be supportive of equality, Callie dissociates herself from extremism and related depictions that occur in the interpretative repertoire of feminism as going too far. By describing herself as a quiet feminist, Callie further distances herself from the allegedly transgressive aspects of feminism. In her research on negotiations of feminism, Pilcher (1998: 114) found that young women frequently made distinctions between "different types and degrees of feminism, including 'militant feminists', 'hard feminists', 'very radical feminists', 'strong feminists', 'left-wing feminists' and 'ultra ultra feminists'". These distinctions enable research participants to claim feminism but they rely on the rejection of one strand of feminism. Indeed, Brunsdon (2005: 112) observes that it is very common for young women in the postfeminist climate to reject the figure of the censorious second-wave feminist as their key other. Brunsdon argues that disidentity – not being like those other women or feminists – is at the heart of feminism. The splitting of feminism into active/passive or good/bad reveals the fraught and highly contested place that feminism occupies within the cultural space of postfeminism.

Distinctions between more and less favourable variants of feminism may enable feminist identification, but come at a cost. In critically discussing accounts that differentiate between a more commendable form of feminism and negative perceptions

of the movement more broadly, Gill (1997: 27) acknowledges that such forms of argumentation might be done for strategic purposes. However, she highlights that the distancing of "'them' (extreme, mistaken, excessive, etc.) from 'us' (moderate, responsible, realistic, etc.)" colludes with, if not reproduces, ideological accounts of feminism. To say that one is not like 'those feminists' is to draw upon and reproduce the discourse of those that are hostile to feminism (Gill, 1997: 28). Feminism is reified, and the diversity of different strands of feminism is not taken into account. The form of feminist dis-identification that relies on a 'yes, but…' formula is hence problematic not only because it invokes the figure of the censorious (second-wave) feminist (Brunsdon, 2005), but also because it fails to challenge hostile accounts of feminism (Gill, 1997). Rather than positively embracing different strands of feminism and differences amongst women, negative discourses on feminism are reiterated, thereby giving credibility to anti-feminist accounts.

Feminist identification was also enabled by contesting its meaning which highlights the contingent nature of the term. Sara's statement illustrates the struggle over what feminism actually connotes:

> I think if we found a new word for it (laughs) like empowerment erm …. I wouldn't knock it. I think it's really, really ….good. You – you've changed my thoughts on it really because [*laughs*] I was thinking feminism as in extremist but no, it's the same thing as an empowerment so anyone can do it. No, it's brilliant and you waste your life being down trodden and thinking that you can't do things because you're female. Got one life and you've just got to go for it haven't you?

Claiming that she has changed her understanding of feminism as signifying "empowerment" rather than extremism, Sara feels able to occupy a positive stance on feminism. Empowerment sounds much more positive: "anyone can do it" and she "wouldn't knock it". Similar to the dichotomous construction of feminism into more and less commendable forms of activism, the re-signification of its meaning enables Sara to claim feminism as something "brilliant". As my laughter however indicates –

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and the adjective 'nervous' should be added here - I felt slightly uneasy about Sara's resignification of feminism as empowerment. My feelings of unease stem from a sense that empowerment discourses detach feminism from the social and political. Budgeon (2001: 144) argues that re-figurations of feminism as being about autonomy (and empowerment) "give feminism a popular front which provides selective appeal and reaches across class and race divides by speaking to the desire to be autonomous, powerful, confident, glamorous, and so on". She is however quick to point out that discourses about empowerment individualise feminism and render differences amongst women and any sense of collective responsibility invisible. So while the re-signification of feminism away from extremism to empowerment enables feminist identification, it does so at the cost of individualisation and depoliticization.

My nervous laughter was also a reaction to Sara's claim that I had changed her thoughts on feminism. Since I felt uneasy about the direction her new thoughts had taken, I was concerned that the interview legitimised individualist rhetoric. Importantly, I was not alarmed because Sara defined feminism differently to how I would conceptualise it. Rather, I was anxious that our conversation would encourage her to embrace individualist rhetoric. My nervous laughter also indicates my unease about changing research participants' views on feminism through the interviews more generally. Given my continuous reflections on researcher-researched dynamics in the interviews, and specifically my awareness of being in a position of power due to my status as a researcher (not always, but frequently – see chapter two), I felt apprehensive about the interview having an impact on the research participants. As I argued in chapter two in relation to Ulla's xenophobic remark, research participants had agreed to take part in a study on feminist dis-identification, but had not given their consent to having their views challenged. Research participants' claims that the interview had

changed their views raises ethical concerns with regard to the status of their consent. Such claims also challenge the distinction between feminist research, and feminist activism. Perhaps, my sense of unease about changing the research participants' views emerges from an uncoupled investment in more detached research practices. While I strongly support feminist research methods (see chapter two), the knowledge that the interview actually had an impact on research participants' views unsettled me perhaps because I am invested in allegedly 'neutral' and less 'biased' forms of research on some level.

Interestingly, my unease about having influenced research participants' views on feminism also stems from an investment in not wanting to be a 'dogmatic' feminist who imposes her views on others. Having listened to numerous accounts of feminists as ideological, and disidentifying with this imaginary figure, statements such as Sara's provoked anxiety because they threatened my desire not to be 'one of them' (Brunsdon, 2005). While I regard 'the dogmatic feminist' as a fantasy and would actually draw attention to the stereotypical and mythical nature of this construction, my fear of being or becoming just that offers interesting insights. It demonstrates that my investments and anxieties are not dissimilar to the concerns of the research participants. It shows, unsurprisingly but tellingly, that I am negotiating similar discourses and dealing with comparable fears about being hailed and interpellated as an extreme feminist who pushes her views upon others. Indeed, the interviews increased, rather than decreased my fear of being a 'dogmatic' feminist. Listening to numerous accounts which evoked the figure of 'the strict feminist' made me want to prove that I was not one of 'them'.

Several respondents claimed that our conversation made them reconsider their views of feminism. When I asked Heather what her thoughts on the women's movement were, she replied:

> I've probably changed my mind from when I first started because [laughter] I would have been like 'no men are fine, they are at the top. We'll have it' but having thought about the fact that wars and everything and I have previously thought if women were in charge we wouldn't be in such a position with war I feel we are all right where we are, women in society it's all right...I feel it's all right if I was to fight for anything in terms of women's movement it would be perhaps that childcare shouldn't, should be free [...].

Heather claims that the interview changed her mind by making her more critical of men being "at the top". Equally, Elspeth described the interview as something that helped her find out where she stood in relation to feminism:

> Erm, I just think I have crystallised my own thoughts about it [feminism] and I am more aware of what, of how I feel about it now, and yes, if probably, if somebody asked me if I was a feminist now, I would probably say, yeah rather than just saying I don't know. It was something that helped to find out where I stand and how I feel about things.

Resonating with my point about variability in talk, Elspeth's statement demonstrates the shifting nature of feminist dis-identification. Having voiced reservations about the label 'feminist' as an adequate description for her political views at the beginning of the interview, Elspeth claims she would probably call herself a feminist now. I was sometimes uncertain whether research participants were actually rethinking their views or whether they had only stated they saw feminism in a different light in order to please me, the feminist researcher. I however think that the interviewees' statements were genuine and that an extended, long conversation on gender roles, gender (in)equality, feminism, and the women's movement encouraged them to rethink their stance on feminist issues. Whether, and in which ways the interviews had a lasting impact on subsequent negotiations of feminism remains unclear.

Heather's and Elspeth's statements on the interviews having changed their perceptions of feminism point to a dimension that seems to be crucial to feminist identification: relating personal experiences to broader social and political structures.

As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the prevalence of individualist discourses however meant that a link between the personal and the political would *not* be established. Towards the end of the interview, Christine talked about the absence of an explicitly feminist discourse in women's magazines and claimed that the term 'feminism' was hardly ever mentioned. She then moved on to say that "maybe it needs to be clear that it [feminism] is not some separate strange thing that we don't know what to do with, actually it is something that we come across every day". Relating her personal experiences to the broader claims of feminism was also crucial to Karuna's developing a feminist sensibility. She said that her interest in feminism

> [...] probably did stem from my own experience of countering you know, discrimination, whether it is internally from your own family, about them trying to define what you should be doing or not be doing, or you know, and I think there comes a sort of anger and a resentment, that spurs you to do things and spurs you to want to change things, and I think that – from my, using my own experiences, was the best, was the best spur for that really, and I just, I decided to just write about what I knew.

Karuna's statement demonstrates that she has developed feminist awareness by politicizing her personal experiences. She talks about her family - as something that is conventionally regarded as private, intimate, and removed from the political realm – but uses politicised language by drawing on the term "discrimination". Karuna's statement also contains numerous references to emotional states. She felt "anger and resentment" and argues that these feelings spurred her interest in feminism. Emotional involvement and investment were crucial to Karuna's politicisation and emerging interest in feminist perspectives.

Karuna argued that learning about feminist theory and different strands of feminism at university also played a central role in spurring her interest in the subject:

> I did a course in feminism and, I was totally hooked and 'All that, right, I really like this' and erm, yeah, just, it did, I mean I think in my last year I had one module, my thesis was on feminism and then I had anther module which was feminism and then another module so that I spent most of my last year studying it. Erm, and it was, yeah, it was just really really interesting.

Karuna talks about her experiences of learning about feminism at university in entirely positive terms: she "got hooked" and it was "really, really interesting". Similarly, Yvonne told me that learning about feminism at college changed her perspective. She used to think that it was "a lesbian thing" but "after doing a bit of reading you get to realise and know what – what I got from it like from some black feminist or learn more about empowerment and you know, more empowerment for me". As I argued in relation to Sara's statement about feminism meaning empowerment, Yvonne's individualist focus on "empowerment for me" seems to strip the political and social from feminism. Nevertheless, Yvonne's statement shows that her experiences in higher education made her reconsider her views on feminism. Given that numerous interviewees claimed they had not learned about feminism in school, and did not really know what it was, teaching various strands and theories of feminism in higher education seems to play a crucial role in providing a space to encounter and discuss feminism in all its contested and contingent forms. Indeed, Aronson (2003: 913) found that the self-identified feminists in her sample "largely came to see themselves as feminists as a result of taking women's studies courses". Similarly, Griffin (2004: 14) contends that "Women's Studies has a powerfully transformative effect on its students". As I will demonstrate in chapter seven, enrolment in modules on feminism gave rise to feminist identification in some cases, but also led to more complicated forms of engagement in other instances.

4.4   **Conclusion**

By focusing on the emergent patters in the research participants' talk, this first analytical chapter provided a structured account of shifting and multi-layered negotiations of feminism. I identified two dominant interpretative repertoires, regarded them as firmly embedded within, and reproductive of a postfeminist logic, and thereby

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contextualised the accounts of the young women. Feminism was both valuable, and deeply hated; it was taken into account, but firmly located in the past. A feminist perspective was frequently adopted in the interviews but it remained unvoiced and was simultaneously rejected. There was a felt lack of knowledge about the women's movement and the claiming of feminism was heavily policed, giving rise to fierce repudiations of the label.

However, the third section of this chapter demonstrated that a deterministic picture of feminist dis-identification should not be drawn. The discursive perspective on the data allows us to account for and make sense of variability in talk. Dichotomizing accounts of feminism as, for example, extreme versus moderate enabled feminist identification; feminism was contested, renamed, and had its meaning re-signified. Such processes frequently took place over the course of a few minutes, or of the interview as a whole and several research participants claimed that the conversation about feminist issues had altered their views and understandings of it. Feminist identification was momentous and fragile, but not impossible. Some research participants had linked their personal experiences to feminist politics, frequently as a consequence of taking modules on feminism at university. As the next chapter will however demonstrate, the prevalence of neoliberal and individualist discourses in the interviews meant that personal experiences were predominantly kept at a safe distance from feminist political claims. A distancing move was further accomplished through the recurring trope of the 'oppressed woman' in other parts of the world. Feminism and its claims were pushed away from the self, either to the public realm, or - literally - to other parts of the world.

5   Chapter Five

Individualisation, neoliberalism and the trope of the 'oppressed other woman'

"The distinctive feature of the stories told in our times is that they articulate individual lives in a way that excludes or suppresses (prevents from articulation) the possibility of tracking down the links connecting individual fate to the ways and means by which society as a whole operates [...]" (Bauman, 2001: 9).

"[Neoliberalism] figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care' -- the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions" (Brown, 2003: paragraph 15).

"In the imagination of the nation that I call home, Canada, stereotypical images of third-world women suggest fixed, static identities of passive oppressed victims who are subservient to men. In the case of Muslim women the list also suggests that she is veiled, exotic and oppressed by Islam" (Khan, 2005: 2023-2024).

The title of this chapter potentially causes unease in the reader due to its implied juxtaposition of individualisation and neoliberalism on the one side, which are commonly associated with contemporary western democracies, and the trope of the subordinated non-western woman on the other side (Mohanty, 1991). As Gill (2007b: 70) points out, there is a risk that the figure of the 'oppressed other woman' "becomes subject to the racializing, imperializing gaze of western feminism with its alternate dynamics of condemnation/salvation, waiting to 'save' her from the supposed tyranny and barbarism of her 'culture'". By referring to the 'oppressed other woman' as a trope, I however aim to provide a critical perspective on the discursive construction of this figure by exploring the function it fulfils in the research participants' talk. Rather than reproducing a binaristic logic of western, liberated women versus non-western oppressed women, this chapter seeks to explode such a binary and concludes by demonstrating that the construction of the 'oppressed other woman' is intertwined with the production of individualist[32] narratives and self-responsible neoliberal subjects.

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[32] I use the term 'individualist' to describe statements that centre on the individual, and that do not place individuals within their broader social context, such as their positioning with regard to various cultural divisions along the lines of gender, 'race', class and sexuality.

I begin by exploring the respondents' reluctance to engage in a critical analysis of gender relations. As I will show, the research participants frequently 'undid' a perspective which revealed various forms of discrimination against women. Seeking to move beyond the concept of postfeminism in this chapter, I propose that 'individualisation' and 'neoliberalism' provide further explanatory tools to analyse young women's rejection of feminism. Both 'individualisation' and 'neoliberalism' have been theorised by a range of authors[33], and I will argue that Bauman's (2000; 2001) and McRobbie's (2009) account of individualisation, as well as the Foucauldian approach to 'neoliberalism' (most notably Rose and Miller, 1992) provide useful frameworks to explore the research participants' repudiation of feminism. While sections one and two of this chapter will focus on the undoing and disarticulation of feminism through individualist rhetoric, section three will explore the workings of the 'neoliberal' imperative to be self-responsible and self-reliant in the rejection of feminism. Paying particular attention to the subject positions that individualist and neoliberal rhetoric carve out for young women, I will show that their self-identification as empowered subjects of social change (McRobbie, 2009), who self-responsibly deal with various forms of oppression, meant that feminism was rarely claimed.

While the research participants frequently portrayed themselves as free and empowered, the final section of this chapter will demonstrate that the respondents characterised other women, particularly those who lived in Muslim communities or countries, as passive victims of patriarchal oppression. Problematising various aspects of the figure of 'the subordinate Muslim woman', such as the production of neo-colonial forms of knowledge about the other, I will conclude by arguing that the construction of the other woman as powerless was not a tangential phenomenon, but

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[33] For individualisation see: Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000; 2001; McRobbie, 2009. For neoliberalism, see: Brown, 2003; Bourdieu, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Giroux, 2004; Rose; 1992; 1999; Rose and Miller, 1992; Ong, 2006).

was central to maintaining the intelligibility of the research participants' positioning as western, empowered individuals. It is through my critical investigation of the discursive workings of the trope of the 'oppressed other woman' and its role in young women's self-representation as emancipated that I will seek to deconstruct the binaries so frequently produced in the juxtaposition of western liberated versus non-western subordinated women.

5.1 **"I don't think it's about being a woman; it's an individual thing![34]"**

The research participants talked at length about differences and similarities between men and women. However, they rarely offered a critical account of gender relations, especially if it involved a perspective that highlighted how social norms, conventions or practices disadvantage women. Louisa talked about her experiences of working in a high-powered job as a young woman. She reported difficulties in standing her ground and in gaining respect which "really annoyed her". Louisa continued by arguing that the "man/woman thing" irritated her less than her lack of work experience as a young employee: "I would find it really interesting to see, if I had work experience, whether I would have the same difficulties". I subsequently inquired whether she ever discussed these issues with her female colleagues to which she replied: "We talk about it, that one is not really being understood, but not directly about, that it's because we are women, more like, because we don't have any work experience, or because we are younger". In this account, age and lack of experience figure as explanations for feelings of powerlessness at the workplace. Being female is mentioned as a possible variable, but simultaneously removed from the narrative.

An analogous argumentative pattern occurred several times. Louisa discussed gender inequalities by acknowledging the gender pay gap and the small number of

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[34] Vivianne

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female managers in her company. This awareness did however not lead to a critique of gender discrimination at the workplace. Instead, Louisa argued that her company was progressive: "[...] in comparison to other jobs, where I was, it [my company] is much more liberal, I mean, just the fact that we are more women in my office, is a sign that there are ways to advance in your career". Again, a feminist perspective is rejected in favour of an account that elides persistent gender inequalities. Paradoxically, a critical analysis of gender relations is repudiated by drawing on notions of progress. This means that a feminist perspective is being made redundant with the use of seemingly progressive and 'liberal' vocabulary.

Arguably, Louisa's account only works because it elides the very issues at stake in Louisa's initial complaint: Louisa started by lamenting the lack of respect for young, female employees. Towards the end of the narrative however, the sheer number of junior female members of staff is taken as a sign for progress and there is no mention of feelings of powerlessness. Louisa's account adheres to a postfeminist logic in that a feminist perspective is taken into account in order to be rejected. Evidently, Louisa is 'gender aware' (Budgeon, 2001) and yet she does not adopt a feminist stance. However, I would like to move beyond the concept of postfeminism at this stage. What is at stake in Louisa's account is not merely an undoing of feminism, but also a resistance to engage in a critical and politicised analysis of gender relations. Louisa is seemingly happy to regard age and lack of work experience as possible explanations for her difficulties at the workplace. In contrast, she uses various rhetorical tools to render an explanation that foregrounds gender in her feelings of powerlessness less valid.

A comparable reluctance to discuss gender inequalities that disadvantage women was apparent in Viola's interview. She described the state of gender equality in Germany in the following way:

> No, it starts with the wages. No, I mean it obviously has not been reached. I mean, there is no doubt about that, erm, but maybe. And, I mean, I just wanted to say, but up to a certain age, I guess, until one enters the job market. But that is not right either, if you look at schools for example, or teachers, how they treat their students, boys and girls are disadvantaged because of their gender.

Viola acknowledges the persistence of gender inequalities at the beginning of her account. She uses unambiguous language by stating that it "obviously has not been reached". However, the passage contains a discursive move away form acknowledging gender inequalities that discriminate against women to a statement which points to disadvantages that both girls *and* boys experience. Over the course of four lines, the emphasis shifts from apparent inequalities that women experience to discriminatory practices that affect both sexes. Similar to Louisa's statement, a gender sensitive rhetoric is employed that allows for a simultaneous acknowledgment and undoing of feminist concerns.

In providing a critical analysis of Louisa's and Viola's accounts, it is not my attention to dispute that boys can be disadvantaged or that other factors, such as age, play a role in shaping individual experiences. I quote these passages because they are representative of numerous statements which deflect a feminist perspective, thereby illustrating the widespread reluctance to engage in a critical analysis of gender relations amongst many research participants. 'Being' a woman was hardly ever seen through a critical lens. Gender, as a political category, was repeatedly taken out of the equation. As Volman and Ten Tam (1998: 537) have shown in their research, there is reluctance amongst young women and men "to see inequality as hierarchical difference [...] when gender inequality (as opposed to gender difference) was discussed". A further interesting twist in this context is that one of my questions in an interview was

falsely transcribed by the transcription service. While the interview was clearly about gender and related issues, my inquiry about "gender inequalities" was transcribed as "general inequalities". I will discuss the 'politics' of transcription at more length in the next chapter. Here, I argue that this instance potentially illustrates the reluctance to engage with gender inequalities.

As Louisa's and Viola's statements have shown, the absence of a persistently critical analysis of gender relations *cannot* be explained by young women's supposed belief in the existence of gender equality. My research participants' accounts contradict the argument made by numerous authors (see chapter one) that young women reject feminism because they believe equality has been achieved. Sharpe for example (2001: 179) claims that "the prevalent rhetoric around 'equality' lulls young women into a false sense that more has been achieved than is the case, and creates a discrepancy between feminism and young women who believe that improvements in women's lives have rendered feminism redundant". However, both Louisa and Viola showed awareness of gender inequalities. Indeed, gender discrimination at the workplace was referred to in nearly all interviews (38 out of 40). Vicky's statement was emblematic: "When I think of gender equality I think of it in terms of the workplace". Equally, Nicky thought it was "crap" that "women are being looked at funny if they work as car mechanics" This finding parallels Aronson's (2003: 912) account that "discrimination was often defined in a narrow way, to include only blatant instances of workplace inequality". By mentioning the workplace, gender inequalities were overwhelmingly located in the public sphere. This means that private concerns were not regarded as political, and that more intimate issues were not discussed in relation with 'feminism' (also see Pilcher, 1998: 52). In the context of the argument in this chapter, the respondents' knowledge about persistent inequalities (at the

workplace) complicates existing arguments on young women's feminist dis-identification and calls for a more complex analysis.

While almost all interviewees were aware of gender inequalities, twelve respondents claimed they had never personally experienced any form of discrimination. The frequency of this argumentative pattern resonates with Davis' (1992: 235) observations in the gender studies classroom where students commonly remark: "'Well, I am a woman and I have never been discriminated against'". Jessica claimed she had never felt disadvantaged on the basis of her gender and stated that "nobody ever came up to me and said: 'Yes, because you are a woman and stuff'. I think sometimes that you have advantages because you are a woman". Jessica's account indicates that oppression works in obvious and easily discernable ways, leaving no room for an engagement with more subtle modalities of power. In a similar manner to Viola and Louisa, oppression is removed from Jessica's account. Instead, the narrative alludes to the potential benefits of being a woman. Similarly, Clarissa claimed that "I've always been taught to – to do whatever I want re- you know, be – not necessarily because I'm a women but because I'm an individual, you know and – and no-one's ever sort of said to me you can't do that because you're a woman. So I haven't really had any negative experiences because of my gender". The image of somebody verbally discriminating against women does not only come up in Jessica's, but also in Clarissa's account. It seems to be prevalent in both Germany and the UK and suggests that discrimination only works in readily discernible ways.

Clarissa's account is suffused with individualist statements. She is "an individual" and does whatever she wants to do; her gender has never imposed any limitations on her ability to act freely because she has never had any "negative experiences" as a woman. Indeed, individualist language was weaved through the

narratives of the research participants. Christine was also conscious of persisting gender inequalities, but stated: "I feel that I can do anything I want to as a woman, so I feel I have the choices open to me". Similar to Clarissa, Christine claims she can do anything; the vocabulary of having all choices open indicates unlimited individuality and freedom. The observation that young women's talk is characterised by individualist language is not new. Rich (2005) for example demonstrates that the research participants in her study constructed "a sense of self that was 'free' of gender constraint" (also see discussion of Trioli, 1996; Misra, 1997 in chapter one). Indeed, processes of individualisation have been discussed at length by sociologists (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000, 2001; McRobbie, 2009). In the following, I want to discuss these theories and draw on the more critical variants, such as the work by Bauman (2000; 2001) and McRobbie (2009). It will be my argument that these authors offer useful frameworks to analyse young women's reluctance to engage in a critical analysis of gender relations and to acknowledge constraints on their individuality, freedom and choice.

Our late modern age is characterised by intensified tendencies towards "individualisation" (Beck and Beck Gernsheim (1995) and " reflexivity" (Giddens, 1991). Most readily associated with the work of Beck (1992), Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Giddens (1991), this reflexive modernisation thesis argues that capacities towards both structural and self-reflexivity have intensified. Giddens (1991: 3) claims that "[i]n the settings of what I call 'high' or 'late' modernity – our present-day world, the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made". As reflexivity increases, the relationship between social structure and agents changes so that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 7) posit "individuals freed of traditional constraints". The research participants' individualist accounts resonate with the main

tenets of this grand social theory; however, the reflexive modernisation thesis does not represent a useful theoretical frame for my purposes because Beck, Beck-Gernsheim and Giddens fail to sufficiently critique the trend towards individualisation.

Various theorists have raised criticisms of individualist and reflexive accounts of late modernity (see Adkins, 2002b: 346; Roseneil, 2007: 123-124 for more detailed overviews). Feminist research in particular has challenged the assumption of freedom from constraint in Beck's, Beck-Gernsheim's, and Giddens' individualisation thesis. Their criticism has been particularly pronounced in relation to young women's lives and the intersections of class, sexuality, 'race' and gender. Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) highlight the crucial role of class in determining the life chances of girls and young women and Gill (2007) challenges accounts of sexually liberated young femininities by pointing to a shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification (see chapter four). Researching young lesbians' lives in the German context, Haensch's (2003) criticises Beck and Beck-Gernsheim for regarding heterosexuality as the norm and Giddens for basing his exploration of homosexuality on the assumption of a level playing-field. Adkins (2000a) argues that the reflexive production of selves appears to involve a re-traditionalisation of gendered norms. Finally, McRobbie stresses that "[t]here is an evasion in this writing of social and sexual divides, and of the continuing prejudice and discrimination experienced by black and Asian women. Beck and Giddens are quite inattentive to the regulative dimension of the popular discourses of personal choice and self-improvement".

One theme that frequently emerges from feminist discussions about theories of individualisation, particularly in Germany, relates to the question of mothers' ability to combine a family with a career. Keddi (2003) critiques Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's argument and claims that the intimate sphere is not freed of traditional constraints. She

shows that "relationships and families figure as 'bastions' of gender relations, where women's oppression is cumulated and concentrated" (my translation). Keddi argues that processes of individualisation provided women with more opportunities in terms of having a career, a family or both, but highlights that traditional, gendered divisions of labour, particularly in the realm of childrearing, have not been dissolved as a consequence of processes of individualisation. Beck's and Beck-Gernsheim's argument that individuals are freed of traditional constraints applies in that young women now feel they do not have to fulfil the traditional role of housewife and mother. Indeed, recent empirical studies in Germany demonstrate that young women overwhelmingly aspire to staying in employment if they have children (Hurrelmann and Albert, 2006; Allmendinger, 2008). Similarly, most of my research participants who wanted or who had children sought to combine a family with a career.

However, structural constraints persist that make it difficult to realise this goal. Hurrelmann's and Albert's study (2006) demonstrates that young men are less prepared to give up traditional, gendered childrearing roles and Allmendinger (2008) shows that women's difficulties in combining a family with a career are their biggest concern. Work/family reconciliation measures have been reformed in Germany in recent years and there has been a shift away "from positive support for a traditional gendered division of labour, toward greater de-familialization and incentives for women's employment" (Lewis et al., 2008: 269). One example for this is the introduction of a revised benefit scheme that incentivises both parents to take part in childrearing by extending parental leave and increasing financial support. On the other hand, however, the German taxation system continues to provide fiscal benefits to married heterosexual couples which encourage a sole earner/breadwinner model. This so-called 'Ehegattensplitting' (wife and husband splitting) provides tax advantages to

sole earner families which discourages dual earner households. In addition, argue Lewis et al., (2008), cultural attitudes towards mothers' employment are not very favourable in (West) Germany where a gendered division of labour had been encouraged for years.

In comparison to Germany, work/family reconciliation measures are a new area for state intervention in the UK (Lewis et al., 2008). Work/family policies have been adopted relatively recently, after the election of the Labour Government in 1997 (ibid.). Since then, the government has doubled the number of registered childcare places in England (Government Equalities Office, 2009b). Recently, a lot of changes have been introduced, such as the right to request flexible working hours, and (limited) parental, paternity, and adoption leaves (Lewis et al., 2008: for detailed overview see FEMCIT report, 2008). However, financial support for families in the UK is still weaker than in Germany. While the British and German government have sought to increase support for work/family reconciliation in recent years, parents, and particularly mothers, have to navigate a structural environment that continues to be characterised by constraints – fiscally, financially, and culturally. Processes of individualisation mean that young women favour a less traditional gendered division of labour; however, structural constraints limit the choices that are available.

In comparison to the reflexive modernisation thesis, Bauman's (2000; 2001) writing on modernity exhibits a much more critical account of individualisation that highlights constraint and that, as I will show, lends itself to exploring how processes of individualisation mediate young women's relationship with feminism. Baumann (2000: 32) claims that "to speak of individualisation and of modernity is to speak of one and the same social condition". He argues that "[i]ndividualisation is a fate, not a choice" where refusal to participate in the "individualising game is emphatically not on

the agenda" (2000: 34). "Everything", he states, "is now down to the individual" (2000: 62); the conditions in which individuals live, their experiences and narratives undergo a relentless process of individualisation. By applying Bauman's understanding of. individualisation to various features of the interviews, and later also using McRobbie's concept of female individualisation that builds upon Bauman's work, I will demonstrate that this perspective offers useful insights for understanding how processes of individualisation influence the research participants' relationship with feminism.

The individualisation of narratives was a recurrent feature in the interviews and became apparent in Stella's discussion of an argument she had had with a male friend of hers. Deliberating over the reasons for the conflict, Stella said:

> Yes, it was for me, in the beginning, a real struggle and then I was thinking: is it somehow a man/woman combat or, is it really more, that in a way, I have to deal with the person Benjamin. Erm. And I think, for me, it was really the experience that it is about individual persons.

Similar to Louisa, Stella raises, and subsequently disavows the possibility that her experience had a gendered dimension. Instead, she adopts an individualist perspective and claims that it was "really" about "individual persons". A potentially feminist account is rejected and replaced with an individualist narrative.

Gender, as a category that describes broader social structures also disappeared from Doris' account to be substituted by individualism. Talking about Angela Merkel being the first female German chancellor, she argued that she was happy for Merkel to have been elected, but not because she was a woman: "I can't say that I was happy just because a woman became chancellor. I somehow was happy for her as a person and I am positively surprised by her, and I rather, I found it was in a way normal, that it can simply be a woman, you know". Similar to Stella, Doris acknowledges that gender might play a role in her feelings about Merkel's election, but subsequently discards

this interpretation. Writing this chapter shortly after the inauguration of US president Barack Obama, there is an interesting contrast between the different ways in which 'race' and gender are treated, or not treated, as structuring principles. As Bauman argues, Stella's and Doris' narratives undergo a process of individualisation so that personal experiences become uncoupled from broader social dimensions, such as gender.

5.2   Disarticulation and female individualisation

Bauman might overemphasise individualising tendencies at the expense of discerning competing trends and at the risk of offering only one explanatory tool to theorize a range of social processes. Bauman has been critiqued for being overly pessimistic, particularly in relation to his arguments about a crisis in personal relationships and community (Budgeon and Roseneil, 2004: 128; Roseneil, 2004: 415) While I agree that Bauman's analysis is rather gloomy, I nevertheless contend that his account provides vital insights for understanding my research participants' reluctance to claim feminism. To recall the statement that I cited above, Bauman (2001: 9) holds that the individualisation of narratives "suppresses (prevents from articulation) the possibility of tracking down the links connecting individual fate to the ways and means by which society as a whole operates". As the research participants' acknowledgement of the gender pay gap demonstrates, the respondents are gender aware and yet this awareness is relentlessly undone by the use of individualist discourses. This individualist outlook renders a feminist perspective meaningless: if gender ceases to be a category that significantly shapes one's experiences, a critical stance which would involve some recognition of gender   and its intersections with class, 'race', and sexuality – as a structuring principle becomes nearly impossible to think and articulate. In discussing the *Aftermath of Feminism*, McRobbie (2009: 26) uses the concept of disarticulation as

designating a "force which devalues, or negates and makes unthinkable the very basis of coming together (even if to take part in disputatious encounters) on the assumption widely promoted that there is no longer any need for such actions". McRobbie states that disarticulation occurs in a range of cultural and social spaces; I argue that the individualist accounts in the interviews figure as occasions that facilitate and allow for the disarticulation of feminism.

McRobbie discusses processes of disarticulation after introducing the notion of female individualisation. Critically engaging with Beck, Beck-Gernsheim's, and Giddens' work (see above), McRobbie draws on Bauman's work and develops the concept of female individualisation to make the broader argument that feminism has been replaced with "aggressive individualism" (2009: 5) (amongst other things) and that this plays a vital role in the undoing of feminism. In making this argument, McRobbie draws a distinction between the processes of individualisation, and individualism. She seems to regard individualism as the outcome of processes of individualisation. It is in this sense that I will use the concepts 'individualisation' and 'individualism' in the following: individualisation describes the process, such as the individualisation of narratives that I discussed above, while individualism denotes a consequence of processes of individualisation, such as individualist rhetoric and statements.

The replacement of feminism through individualist rhetoric can be observed in Christine's statement. She argued that she would not call herself a feminist because:

> And I don't always like to see things as – I have opinions on what is male and what is female, but I really think that actually, people are individuals, there are traits amongst gender groups, but as much – we are also individuals, so, I don't want to, I don't mind exploring that, but I don't want to be fixed with a group of erm thinking of, constantly thinking about women, or what are these, or –.

While Christine alludes to differences amongst men and women, she undoes the need for feminism by using individualist rhetoric; indeed, an engagement with feminism is disputed because "we are also individuals". Similar statements were made across a range of interviews. Barbara for example told me that she did not solve conflicts as "a feminist", but as "simply me, Barbara, me as a human being and not as a woman". Equally, Carolina argued against positive discrimination because "it should not matter whether one is a woman – it should be about individuals". These individualist statements are drawn on to reject, but also to replace feminism, thereby undoing "the possibility of feminism remaining in circulation as an accessible political imaginary" (McRobbie, 2009: 42).

The significance of individualism in the undoing of feminism and in young women's reluctance to claim feminism, becomes even more apparent when bringing to mind young women's positioning as "privileged subjects of social change" (McRobbie, 2009: 15) and the connections between the category 'young women' as well as the notions of 'freedom' and 'choice'. According to McRobbie, this hopeful positioning of young women as able and independent beings comes at the cost of giving up feminist politics. Individualist discourses of 'empowerment' and 'choice' are deployed "as a kind of substitute for feminism" (2009: 1), rendering feminism aged and redundant.

Charlotte told me she would not call herself a feminist because: "I think I can do, I think I can get ahead and do what I need to do because...I can do it". Charlotte's statement follows a circular logic where she, as a young woman, can do whatever she desires, because she can. By rejecting feminism in claiming that she "can do it", feminist politics becomes replaced with a language of individual empowerment. Given the association between young femininity and empowerment, I hold that it is

significant that Charlotte's claim occurs in the context of disidentifying from feminism. Charlotte's account seems less individualist, and more normative in the sense that it (re)produces the subject-position carved out for her as a young woman: as a self-determined, free being who rejects feminism as unnecessary.

Walkerdine (2003: 242) also establishes a close link between (middle-class) individuality and femininity, by arguing that the qualities of an independent self build "upon a long established incitement to women to become producers of themselves as objects of the gaze". The connection between youth, femininity, a rhetoric of individualism and choice, provides a critical perspective on the research participants' self-representation as empowered and free beings who are no longer in need of feminism. Resonating with Bauman's critical analysis of individualisation, it appears that young women are obliged to be free and able, and to discard feminism on the very basis of personal empowerment. It is in light of these arguments that I offer a rather gloomy interpretation of a statement that Leila made at the end of the interview: "If I personally felt oppressed, then I would definitely do something. Definitely! I am not going to be oppressed!". While Leila's statement is refreshing in that she so clearly speaks out against oppression, my preceding analysis of the prevailing individualism calls the emancipatory potential of Leila's claim into question. One may ask whether Leila will ever feel oppressed in a social climate that relentlessly disarticulates (gender) oppression and instead substitutes critical politics with individualism. Leila's use of unambiguous language – "oppression" and "definitely" – further points to a certain distance Leila establishes between her now-empowered self and a possible future in which she might be oppressed. Similar to my discussion of the image used by Jessica and Clarissa, which depicted somebody actively and overtly oppressing them, Leila's unequivocal rhetoric indicates that she perceives of discrimination as working

in very obvious ways, thereby further decreasing the likelihood of her speaking out against it.

Demonstrating that feminism is undone through the privatisation and individualisation of experiences, McRobbie (2009: 49) adds a further dimension by arguing that (young) women "are currently being disempowered through the very discourses of empowerment they are being offered as substitutes for feminism". McRobbie draws attention to reinstituted forms of sexual hierarchy, and the dividing of women along broader lines of oppression which foreclose the possibility of collective political struggle. My discursive analysis of the research participants' interviews illustrates a further way in which young women are disempowered by individualisation. Focusing on the ways in which norms are reinstated through the use of individualist narratives, I will demonstrate that individualism does not only elide the regulatory force of norms, but can actively contribute to their reinforcement.

Sabrina stated that she imagined "really sort of butch lesbians when I think of feminism" (see chapter six). When I inquired into her feelings about butch looking women, she said:

> I kind of think if that's how they want to look then fair enough er, but I personally wouldn't choose to look like that and you know, it's up – it's up to everyone how they want to dress and how they want to look but if I was that person I would not look like that [...].

Sabrina goes back and forth between conveying her acceptance of different looks, and asserting that she would not choose to look this way. She vacillates between passing judgment on non-normative looks by claiming that she does not find them desirable on the one hand, and portraying herself as an open-minded person who does not care about other people's style of clothing on the other hand. Sabrina is confronted with the dilemma of passing judgement and not wanting to do so. She seeks to resolve this conflict by using individualist rhetoric. The individualism in her statement functions as

a disclaimer in that it enables her to convey normative and discriminatory views – butch lesbians dress badly – while simultaneously facilitating an allegiance to open-mindedness and tolerance. Sabrina got her message across, without being overtly offensive. Key to her success in doing so is the use of individualist rhetoric, illustrating how individualism operates at the level of talk to reinforce norms and dominant perceptions.

Individualist talk evades political discussions because everything is cloaked in the seeming neutrality of it only being an individual's opinion. However, one could argue that this supposed neutrality emerges exactly from the normativity of such statements – as that which does not have to be named or made explicit – thereby adding to the regulatory force of seemingly apolitical, individual views. Arguably, Sabrina's statement can only be perceived as individualist because it is made from a normative, apparently neutral position, further contributing to the elision and reinforcement of regulatory power in such accounts. Reading and analysing the interviews, I got the impression that anything could be said under the proviso that 'it is just me who thinks this way'. Carla claimed: "As long as people are happy they can do whatever they want, basically that's how I feel". Similarly, Ulla held that "everybody should do what he wants to do". There seems to be an imperative to let everybody (or only men?) do what they want to do. However, as Sabrina's statement demonstrates, this imperative becomes intermeshed with a normative individualism – normative both in the Bauman sense of not having a choice but to be individualist, but also in the sense of reinstating normative views through the use of individualist rhetoric.

Brown's (2006) insightful analysis of tolerance talk illustrates the normative workings of such statements. Suggesting that there has been a renaissance in tolerance talk since the mid-1980s, Brown studies its social and political effects. She observers

that "[a]lmost all objects of tolerance are marked as deviant, marginal, or undesirable by virtue of being tolerated" (2006: 14) which leads her to an understanding of tolerance as "a mode of late modern governmentality that iterates the normalcy of the powerful and the deviance of the marginal" (2006: 8). Tolerance constitutes a practice of power and regulation by drawing a line between the tolerable and the intolerable. This process is at play in Sabrina's statement where butch looks are marked as deviant by virtue of being tolerated. Importantly, Brown argues that tolerance is a discourse of depoliticization (2006: 15) and places it in the context of broader depoliticising social currents, such as certain tendencies in liberalism; individualism; market rationality and neoliberalism as well as the culturalisation of politics (2006: 17). In Sabrina's case, inequalities and marginalisation are construed not as political problems, but as matters of personal and *individual* sartorial choices.

The link between tolerance talk and individualism became apparent not only in Sabrina's statement, but also in the interview with Miranda. This was one of the interviews that made me feel like 'having a good make-over' (see chapter two). I had asked Miranda what she thought feminists' views about femininity and wearing make-up were. She said she did not know and asked me, the feminist, for my opinion on that. Miranda had depicted feminists as dogmatic and bitter (amongst other things) throughout her interview. I felt I had to negotiate being indirectly described as just that: dogmatic and bitter. Hence, I wanted to present myself as open-minded and easy-going by saying: "I think, I think nowadays feminists would say it is more complex, you know, it is not wrong to wear lipstick, or to be, to dress like a woman, and that everybody should do what they want to do, you know".

This statement is problematic because I speak for feminists as if they were a homogenous group that shares one view on normatively feminine appearance.

Furthermore, my response to Miranda illustrates the role of tolerance talk and individualist rhetoric in affirming and reproducing dominant norms. By making the individualist and tolerant claim that "everybody should do what they want to do", I reinstate dominant norms. Rather than dismantling the associations between femininity and wearing dresses as well as lipstick, I reproduce normative perceptions of femininity and render them unproblematic. My statement and association between femininity and wearing dresses gestures at, but simultaneously elides, the fact that everybody is not free to do what they want, but that modes of feminine appearance are actually quite narrowly prescribed (see chapter six). Analogous to Sabrina's account, my claim to tolerance fulfils a disclaiming function that serves to depoliticise and reinstate normative femininity through the use of seemingly apolitical and individualist language.

5.3 Neoliberalism and the production of self-responsible subjects

The preceding analysis raises the question of why individualism is so prevalent in the research participants' accounts (and my response to them). Theorizing the rise of individualism, the reflexive modernisation thesis seems to rely on the assumption of a 'natural' progression from early to late modernity with the gradual move towards individualisation. As McRobbie however points out, this perception ignores other factors that might have contributed to the rise of individualism such as social movements and political struggle. Indeed, McRobbie (2009: 46) argues that Beck's and Giddens' writing is actively "contributing to the eclipsing of feminism as a valid force for social and political change". Rather than regarding individualisation as the necessary and inevitable outcome of modernity, I argue that using the concept of 'neoliberalism' might provide further insights into the prevalence of individualism in young women's talk, and their reluctance to claim feminism.

The term neoliberalism is being variously used, not only across time (Thorsen and Lie, 2006) and space (Ong, 2006) but also within different political and disciplinary contexts. One strand of writing on neoliberalism that has emerged strongly in recent years is highly critical of processes of neoliberalisation, regarding them as the defining trend of our times (Bourdieu, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Giroux, 2004; Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism, in these writings, is primarily understood in economic terms, as denoting a "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005: 1). Neoliberal monetary policies thus include attempts to lower inflation, maintain fiscal balance, flexible labour markets, trade and financial liberalisation, and privatisation (Li, 2004)[35]. Furthermore, neoliberalism is said not only to operate as an economic system, but also a "political philosophy and ideology that affects every dimension of social life" (Giroux, 2004: 70). Bourdieu (1998) holds that neoliberalism figures as a "strong discourse" that is "hard to combat only because it has on its side all of the forces of a world of relations to forces, a world that it contributes to making what it is".

While I am entirely sympathetic to the politics underpinning these critical engagements with neoliberalism, I find that these accounts do not clearly spell out how neoliberalism functions not only as an economic system, but as a cultural and political force as well. Perhaps a bit similar to Bauman's argument about individualisation, these critical writings draw on neoliberalism to account for a variety of social phenomena, ranging from the emergence of "proto-fascism" in the United States

[35] As I am writing this chapter, the 'credit crunch' and the 'global economic crisis' have called these neoliberal economic policies into question. While the collapse of the financial markets raises the question of how to theorize neoliberalism now that it has seemingly entered into crisis, I conducted the interviews long before the beginning of the financial crisis and will therefore draw on accounts of neoliberalism written before the offset of the 'credit crunch'.

(Giroux, 2004) to "cynicism as the norm of action and behaviour" (Bourdieu, 1998). A much more detailed account of the workings of neoliberalism as not only an economic, but also a cultural politics can be found in Duggan's (2003) analysis. She demonstrates that neoliberalism "was constructed in and through cultural and identity politics" and that neoliberal thinking shaped public discussion and cultural policy making in a wide range of cases, such as public spending for culture and education, affirmative action, and 'moral' foundations for welfare reform (2003: 11). Providing several case studies on neoliberalism as an economic, cultural and political force, Duggan (2003: 70) calls for an engagement with neoliberalism that analyses "how the many local alliances, cultural projects, nationalist agendas, and economic polities work together". While Duggan's work offers a convincing argument on neoliberalism as cultural politics, her analysis does not investigate the workings of neoliberalism on a subjective level. This is not intended as criticism of her work, but it means that Duggan's research does not easily lend itself to my analysis of individual accounts. I therefore propose that an alternative school of thought on neoliberalism, namely the Foucauldian work by Rose and Miller (1992; Rose, 1999)[36] provides a useful theoretical framework to contextualise the research participants' individualist accounts.

Rose's and Miller's approach differs from the aforementioned accounts in that they understand neoliberalism as "a mentality of government" (Rose, 1992: 145) which also entails a "reorganisation of programmes of personal lives" (Rose and Miller, 1992: 198). Working in a Foucauldian tradition, 'government' denotes various ways in which the self has become linked to power where power is understood as working through, and not against, subjectivity. Importantly, Rose regards neoliberalism as closely linked to the tradition and rationalities of liberal government

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36 also see Brown, 2003; Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996; Foucault, 2008; Gonick, 2004; Ong, 2006; Thrift, 2000.

in western democracies which "have always been concerned with internalising their authority in citizens through inspiring, encouraging and inaugurating programmes and techniques that will simultaneously 'autonomise' and 'responsibilize' subjects" (1992: 162). In making this argument, Rose links processes of individualisation to shifting relations between citizens and the states. He provides an account of neoliberalism as an art of government that exerts power through autonomous, active citizens who engage in the pursuit of personal fulfilment and who make their life meaningful through acts of choice. As Barry, Osborne and Rose (1996: 41) point out, neoliberal government "does not seek to govern through 'society', but through the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as subjects of choices and aspirations to self-actualisation and self-fulfilment". In re-conceptualising the relationship between individuals and the state, the Foucauldian approach to neoliberalism offers a compelling explanation for the rise of individualism as being closely related to liberal forms of government. The approach to power as working through individuals who are not merely its subjects, but who participate in its operations provides me with a useful theoretical framework to analyse the workings of individualism, 'choice' and responsibility on the subjective level and in the context of feminist disarticulation.

As my preceding analysis has shown, individualism was prominent in the undoing of feminism. Discourses of 'choice' also emerged from various accounts, such as Christine's statement of having "all the choices" open to her (see above). The neoliberal form of government through regulated choices became apparent in Miranda's statement about being "all for cosmetic surgery":

> I will definitely have a boob job once I have had kids, and I will definitively have Botox once I start getting wrinkles because I don't want to look old, and, I will I don't know, I don't think I will have liposuction, because that's just lazy, because you can go on a diet and go to the gym.

Miranda's decision to undergo cosmetic surgery in the future is self-aware and self-determined: she is the one who wants to have a 'boob job' and 'Botox'; nobody tells her to do so. Her choices however are highly regulated in that they enable Miranda to adhere to prevalent ideals of female beauty – such as firm breasts and endless youth. Miranda does not need anybody to tell her what to do; she makes the 'right' (i.e. normative) choices independently. Indeed, she aspires to and desires normative looks, which illustrates the workings of power through, and not against, the subject. Moreover, the last sentence of Miranda's statement points to a further dimension of neoliberal government, namely responsibilisation. Miranda is not going to have liposuction, because "that's just lazy". Given that the moral autonomy of neoliberal subjects is "measured by the capacity for 'self-care' -- the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions" (Brown, 2003: paragraph 15), Miranda's support for dieting and exercise fully conforms to a neoliberal form of government through responsibilisation. She is not going to have liposuction because she proclaims the more 'responsible' choice of a strict dieting and exercising regime.

In the context of feminist dis-identification, the neoliberal notions of choice and personal responsibility work to undo feminist claims because of their emphasis on individualism and autonomy which do not sit well with the perceived collectivism of feminist activism and focus on structural constraints. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, feminism was associated with the sixties and seventies, signifying its alleged pastness but also the association of feminism with collective protest. Indeed, Christine said that she connected feminism with protest, amongst other things: "Weirdly I think of protests, perhaps from you know, I am thinking of images from the seventies ...". The mention of "protest" and "the seventies" evokes particular images of collective struggle that differ from the pronounced individualism in the research participants'

talk. The depiction of feminism as radical, rigid and bold, which I also explored in the previous chapter, further portrays feminist politics as focusing on constraint, rather than providing a more flexible account. Several research participants rejected feminism on the basis of over-generalising. Undine for example claimed that feminism did not appeal to her because she did not have "the tendency to approve of some general, sweeping statements". Equally, Elspeth associated feminism with excessively focusing on constraint and distanced herself from it as being somebody who is "not looking for, the things that I haven't got, or the way that life is giving me a hard time, that's not my policy, I am oh, I am biologically optimistic, down to my genes". Elspeth's investment in being an optimist and in attending to the bright sides of live are pitched against feminism which allegedly highlights lack and the hardships suffered by individuals. Constructing feminism as unduly emphasising constraints, and producing Elspeth as an optimist, this statement demonstrates the perceived incompatibility of feminism and the neoliberal emphasis on individuals as capable managers of their own lives.

Instead of drawing on feminist rhetoric with its supposed determination to focus on hardship and difficulties, Elspeth instead used the neoliberal language of 'choice'. Talking about (female) straight friends of hers who are experiencing difficulties in heterosexual relationships, Elspeth subsequently claimed:

> I mean lots of straight friends of mine moan, he never does this or does that....and I am like you have the choice now, you know, you either stay and find your freedom, or you lump it, or you know, you walk, it is a very brutal simple term and it is never that easy but everybody has choices.

According to Elspeth, everybody has choices and is therefore responsible to achieve happiness and "freedom". While she acknowledges that "it's not always that easy", there is no mention of structural constraints in Elspeth's statement, thereby undoing the call for some sort of critical or feminist analysis. The possibility of constraint is alluded to and subsequently repudiated to allow for the intelligibility of neoliberal

discourse of "choice" and "freedom". "Reality and destiny", in Elspeth's statement, have thus become "matters of individual responsibility" (Rose, 1992: 87). There is no need for example to ask who controls the choices that are available to women if they want to leave their male partners, or to reflect on "the political and social ramifications of the act of choosing" (Probyn, 1997: 130).

Elspeth's statement implies that the individual has only "himself or herself to thank or blame" (Bauman, 2001: 9; also see Weingarten and Wellershoff, 1999; Kailer and Bierbaum, 2002). Collective struggle becomes almost meaningless in this context where structural constraints are undone through individualisation and responsibilisation. More importantly, I argue that collective forms of organising loose their appeal because they seem to restrain individuals to act as responsible subjects: if to be a good person involves taking good care of the self through individualist acts, critical analysis of structural constraints and forms of collective organising do not allow for the individual to prove herself as an autonomous, and therefore moral being. To attribute one's happiness and misery to broader social and political forces is decisively not on the agenda because it robs the individual from the opportunity to fashion herself as a morally good person. Perhaps it is in this sense that we can also understand the research participants' reluctance to engage in critical and political analysis of unequal gender relations as something that threatens their positioning as self-determined, empowered and free subjects.

I interpret Carrie's statement on why she would rather "hold tight and stand strong" than "going off and rioting" as indicating a preference for being a self-responsible individual over an 'angry, rioting woman'. Talking about her experience of being the only woman who worked with a group of six boys at a club, Carrie stated:

> They [the boys] just make me feel bad as a girl because they don't see what they are doing or maybe they do and they want to pick on me because I am a woman. *But I am just going to hold tight and stand strong* because I know that eventually they have got a lot of

respect for the other things that I do [...] and you know, they resent me being a woman. And you know, *I just have to hold tight and stand strong.* There is not much point in going off and rioting about it, *you just have to be strong about it and do it.*

Similar to her peers, Carrie demonstrates feminist awareness because she knows that the boys resent her as a woman. She is not suffering from 'false consciousness' or lulled into a false sense of equality (Sharpe, 2001). To the contrary, she comes across as self-determined, in control and well aware. But rather than claiming feminism as one possible mode of understanding and dealing with the resentment she experiences at the workplace, Carrie advocates a self-responsible form of individualism where she is going to "hold tight and stand strong". She argues that "there is not much point in going off and rioting about it" but that you have to "just do it". Carrie regards individual, hard work as a key to success. Political activism is an option that is vigorously repudiated in favour of the fashioning of a neoliberal responsible self.

Carrie uses the phrase of "being strong and holding tight" several times in this statement; its repetitive reiteration reveals the performative character of her account which figures not only as a rejection of feminism, but simultaneously as the production of a neoliberal self. Cronin (2000) illustrates the mutually constitutive link between the idea of a voluntaristic self and neoliberal discourses. Critically discussing consumerism and the neoliberal imperative of choice, Cronin argues that the "ideal of the voluntaristic will of the individual is paradoxically framed through 'compulsory individuality'" (2000: 277). Drawing on Butler's performativity theory, Cronin conceptualizes 'choice' as a performative enactment of self, a self which is constituted through reiterative series of self-realising acts. While Carrie does not use the vocabulary of choice, her stress on individual strength is equally neoliberal through its association with autonomy and personal responsibility. Carrie's statement and repetitive use of individual strength can be recast as a performative act which produces

a neoliberal 'self' that rejects feminism as undesirable. Carrie's allusion to political protest and collective organising through the term "rioting" suggests that feminism is repudiated as something that potentially threatens her positioning as an autonomous and strong young woman. Feminism is thus 'pushed away' from the self as incompatible with the neoliberal imperative to be self-reliant.

On the whole, processes of individualisation render feminism redundant through the relentless undoing of structural constraints. These processes are part of the larger trend towards neoliberal government which depends on responsible, autonomous and active citizens. Both individualisation and neoliberal responsibilisation carve out subject positions for young women that are conducive to the repudiation of feminism. As empowered bearers of social change, young women reject feminism as anachronistic. As autonomous, responsible and choosing subjects, they distance themselves from forms of collective organizing and the acknowledgement of structural constraints associated with feminist politics.

5.4   Constructions of the 'oppressed Muslim woman'
While individualisation and neoliberalisation contributed to the perception of feminism as a spent force and an undesirable political stance in contemporary western democracies, other 'cultures' and parts of the world were frequently portrayed as being in need of feminist politics. In particular, these discourses constructed and reiterated the trope of "Muslim women as incomparably bound by the unbreakable chains of religious and patriarchal oppression" (Mahmood, 2005: 7). This construction reflects the tendency to regard Muslim women as passive victims who are "veiled, exotic and oppressed by Islam" (Khan, 2005: 2023-2024). Talking specifically about the UK, Alexander (2000: 6) has characterised the "reification of Islam as one of the key markers of difference in contemporary British discourse". Similarly, several German

authors have highlighted and critiqued the construction of 'Turkish people in Germany' as the cultural other par excellence (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 1999; Heidenreich, 2006). In the German cultural imaginary, the Turkish/Muslim other is always depicted as 'traditional', and stigmatised as belonging to a community oppressed by patriarchal and Islamic structures (Ha, 2004: 55).

In the construction of the Muslim woman as inherently oppressed and powerless, the veil figures as a particular marker of cultural difference (Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002). Jessica talked about the oppression of women in other countries and when I asked her what she meant by that, she replied: "Erm, wearing the veil. Turkey and so on. I mean, even if it is part of the religion, I mean, but still...". In this statement, women's oppression becomes linked to the symbol of the veil, to a particular locality (Turkey), and to a religion. This cultural imaginary positions women who wear the veil as always-already oppressed; the veil figures as a visible sign of their subordination. In sharing how she was perceived by people on the streets of Berlin, Gertrud provided the following account:

> I mean, it would be nice if they saw me here also as a woman. But they don't do that, [they see me] only as oppressed. Not even as an oppressed woman, but as an oppressed – erm, 'Muslima'. I mean, that does not exclude, obviously, 'Muslima' is feminine, but, I mean, people always see my sign first, which is also nice, but it's not what I only am, I mean, I am much more than that. And people simply reduce everything to this piece, to the 'headscarf', yes, as they call it.

Gertrud's account illustrates the painful effects of being positioned as an oppressed cultural other whose identity is reduced to being a subject of patriarchal violence. As Hirschkind and Mahmood (2002: 352 - 253) argue, a "Muslim women can only be one of two things, either uncovered, and therefore liberated, or veiled, and thus still, to some degree, subordinate". The construction of the veil as the "symbol for women's oppression" (ibid.) with its seemingly progressive concern for the oppression of women has the adverse effect of contributing to the subordination of those individuals

who wear it. As Gertrud's statement demonstrates, the perception of her as inherently oppressed does not have any emancipatory or empowering consequences for Gertrud, but instead functions as a discriminatory practice which positions her as powerless. The veil has many meanings (Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002) and "the significance of veiling is ultimately drawn from the local historical and cultural contexts in which it is practiced" (Brenner, 1996: 669). The complexities of veiling are however not acknowledged in the construction of the 'oppressed Muslim woman', whose veil can only ever be symbolic of her victimhood and lack of agency.

In the context of feminist dis-identification, the trope of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' figures as yet another site for the disarticulation of feminism. The construction of Muslim women as powerless victims of patriarchy facilitates the repudiation of feminism as unnecessary in western countries. When I asked Vicky whether she could imagine campaigning for women's issues, she replied: "Well, the thing – it's difficult living in England or well, western Europe where it's – we've reached such a high level of kind of democratic connotation and values already. Like if – if I was in the Middle East, er, then obviously I would". Vicky rejects the need for feminist campaigning in the UK by portraying its gender regime as egalitarian and progressive. As Edley and Wetherell (2001: 450) have pointed out, "[t]his progressive view of history is a common frame of reference in which society is seen as moving from a state of relative ignorance, barbarism and injustice towards increased enlightenment and civilisation". This account of historical change as automatically moving towards more egalitarian structures implies the inevitability of society's progress, thereby undoing the need for social movements to facilitate change. Vicky's claim that she would "obviously" campaign for women's right in the Middle East establishes a dichotomy between the west as egalitarian, and non-western countries as

in definite need for feminist activism. This account does not allow for the existence of more complex power relations in both parts of the world. Reflective of a neo-colonial discourse (see below), knowledge about social processes in other countries is easily obtainable and the workings of patriarchal power are depicted as obvious.

As Khan (2005: 2027) pointed out, constructions of and comparisons between the west as progressive and liberated and the rest as oppressive and traditional, "make it easier for women in the west to believe that they are not oppressed and make critiques of the violence and other forms of structural inequalities they face more difficult to get across". The juxtaposition between the west and the rest is frequently coded in terms of gender and the granting of sexual freedoms (McRobbie, 2009: 1). It disarticulates the need for feminism in places like Germany and the UK because its dichotomous construction relies on the characterisation of western countries as liberated and free. Discussing the findings of her study on young Australian women's relationship with feminism, Hughes (2005: 8) argues that "a continuum was constructed by all students (Islamic and non-Islamic alike) which positioned strict Islamic women (a religious rather than ethnic reference) at one extreme and Anglo-American women at the other". A comparable finding emerges from the data I collected. In sharing her experiences of spending the summer holidays in Turkey, Leila claimed that "women have many more advantages here in Germany than they do in Turkey, because here you don't make such strong distinctions, like in Turkey for example". Germany and Turkey are placed at the extreme ends of the continuum of gender (in)equality, thereby establishing a binary of 'patriarchal Turkey' and 'liberated Germany'.

An analogous binary opposition of a western liberated country and "other countries" also occurred in Christine's statement: "I think that there is still a long way

to go actually, I think we are luckier here than in other countries". Interestingly, I had asked Christine about her views on gender equality in the UK. While she states that equality has not been achieved, she subsequently shifts the attention away from the UK. Paralleling the workings of individualist discourse in feminist dis-identification that I described above, Christine acknowledges that "there is still a long way to go" but undoes the need for feminism in the UK by alluding to the lack of equality in "other countries". The discourse of the liberated west and the oppressed (Muslim) rest works in very similar ways to processes of individualisation in that they create a distance between oneself and feminism. Both individualising and othering discourses uncouple feminism from one's experiences – either through the individualisation of narratives or the literal displacement of feminism away from the self and to "other countries".

One statement that combined individualist rhetoric and the attribution of gender inequalities to the Muslim world was made by Miranda: "I have never come across anything that made me upset about anything the way that a woman is treated, obviously I hear these things about, on TV, and about how, some Muslim women for instance are treated, and I think that's very wrong". Miranda disarticulates the need for feminism both by using an individualist discourse – she has never experienced discrimination – and by attributing the experience of gender oppression to "Muslim women". Similar to Vicky, Miranda "obviously" hears about the treatment of "some Muslim women" which she finds "very wrong". As opposed to her emphasis on never having encountered discrimination herself, her language becomes unambiguous and political by using the terms "very wrong". The juxtaposition between her experiences and those of "some Muslim women" is thus reinforced on the level of language itself. Through the portrayal of the treatment of other women as being "very wrong", Miranda also expresses an allegiance to broader notions of equality. The trope of the

'oppressed Muslim woman' allows Miranda to reject feminism as irrelevant to her life. Simultaneously, it functions as a face-saving device which enables Miranda to portray herself as a supporter of gender equality. On a discursive level, 'the oppressed Muslim woman' steps in to carry the burden of oppression in order to allow for Miranda to disarticulate feminist perspectives as superfluous in the UK.

McRobbie (2009: 26) argues that this disarticulation process has become more sustained since the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre (also see Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002), pre-empting the formation of critical solidarities amongst women from a range of backgrounds and displacing possible post-colonial criticisms of the construction of the west as progressive. Indeed, the discourse on patriarchal and oppressive Islam can be cast as neo-colonial because it reinstates colonial modes of talking about and knowing the other. Mahmood (2005: 189   190) argues that "colonialism rationalised itself on the basis of the 'inferiority' of non-Western cultures, most manifest in their patriarchal customs and practices, from which indigenous women had to be rescued through the agency of colonial rule". The call for the rescuing of indigenous women appeared in Carrie's statement that I cited in chapter four when discussing the construction of the 'Muslim oppressed other' as representing a sub-variant of the interpretative repertoire on feminism as being a valuable and good thing. Carrie argued that Muslim women needed the help of western feminists who should be concentrated on "the people that are getting castrated". The theme of genital cutting also came up in Louisa's statement lamenting the position of "women in Africa" who "somehow get married, or these tribes, I don't know, there are always these horror stories, that they are getting stitched up during the first night". The narrative of other women being in need of rescuing, and the talk about "Africa" as a seemingly undiversified continent whose tribal practices give rise to "horror stories"

strikes me as neo-colonial in its construction of Africa as an uncivilised, dangerous place in need of western intervention.

The neo-colonial interpretative repertoire of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' is particularly powerful because it constructs the very object it speaks about, thereby (re)producing a regime of truth about the other (Spivak, 1988). As Vicky's (and also Miranda's) statements have shown, the "Middle East" is knowable to the western subject: women's oppression is so obvious in these parts of the world that she would of course campaign for women's rights. Similarly, Viola talked about Moroccan women's oppression as being "totally obvious": "They are women who come from a completely different culture where the image of women is once more so completely different, where their discrimination is so totally obvious". Again, the language used to talk about the other woman is definite, strong and political. As Abu-Lughod (2001: 105) contends in the context of Orientalism, the force of a statement such as Viola's comes from "its power to construct the very object it speaks about and from its power to produce a regime of truth about the other and thereby establish the identity and the power of the subject that speaks about it". Statements that claim and thereby produce knowledge about the other – in this context the 'Muslim oppressed woman' – are implicated in the (re)production of western authority because they construct knowledge exclusively from a western point of view. In critically analysing statements about Islamic cultures and countries as patriarchal, it is not my intention to argue that there are no gender inequalities in the Muslim world. Instead, I aim to demonstrate how the 'oppressed Muslim woman' is constructed in talk; that this construction is problematic because it produces the western subject as the knower and the non-western woman as oppressed; and that these processes are part of the disarticulation of

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feminism and the undoing of potential international feminist solidarities (Khan, 2005: 2027).

Following Said (1985), Frankenberg (1993: 16) suggests that the "Western self is itself produced as an effect of the Western discursive production of its Others". In the context of feminist dis-identification, the construction of the 'oppressed Muslim other' by women who live in the west produces a liberated self that is not in need of feminism. Through knowing and naming its other, the western self gets constructed as that which is not its other: if the Muslim woman is oppressed and a victim of patriarchal power, the western woman is liberated and freed from gender constraints. Indeed, as the following statement will show, the young western woman is the one who goes out to help her oppressed other. In discussing a consultancy job on women's career advancement in a developing country, Christine argued that "it will be nice to, in an active way, to support the professional development of other women in a country where it is not, you know...it's not common". This construction of the western emancipated self who can go out to "support" other women in their career development maps onto the positioning of young western women as self-empowered and free bearers of social change. Analogous to neoliberal discourses that position young women as responsible, active and choosing individuals who reject feminism as a collective politics which foregrounds structural constrains, the trope of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' constructs subject positions for young western women as not being in need of feminism. The construction of liberated versus oppressed women is central to the production of an empowered western self through its non-western other. The repudiation of feminism as redundant in the west produces and draws on a cultural other, reinforcing the binary of the liberated west and the patriarchal rest.

The interpretative repertoire on women's oppression in other parts of the world

establishes a static model of two homogenous entities, thereby failing to allow for

differences and hierarchies both within the west and those countries designated as

other. Gender relations in Islamic countries and communities are coded as 'obviously'

discriminatory and oppressive, disregarding hierarchies amongst indigenous women

(Khan, 2005: 2026) and ignoring intra-group differences (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002:

230). Crucially, the dichotomous construction of the free west versus repressive parts

of the world whose boundaries are absolute (Narayan, 2000) essentialises and reifies

culture as an all determining structuring force. This approach to culture, argues

Alexander (1996: 14), "leads ultimately to the reification of absolutist notions of

cultural authenticity, which in turn re-inscribe new racist ideologies of essential

cultural difference". In several accounts of the research participants, culture – when

discussed in relation with difference – figured as a determining force. Discussing

gender relations and cultural difference, Callie said:

> Sometimes, yeah. Er, because people from different cultures still erm, if you were to walk
> down a road you'd find families where the woman was still you know, had to - to stand in the
> kitchen all day and do the, and the men went off. Erm, yeah. I think – I think culture has a lot to
> do with it, the different cultures. Obviously I've been brought up in erm...you know, a British
> culture er, and – but not- even people that you know, live locally er, their - their values and
> their outlook on life's totally different still.

Callie describes seemingly backwards gender relations where the women "still" has

"to stand in the kitchen all day", arguing that "culture has a lot to do with it". Culture

and cultural difference figure as the central explanation for 'traditional' forms of

behaviour (Dannenbeck, 2002: 40) and are set apart from social progress through the

repetitive use of the word "still". It seems that these cultures are "still" backwards

when compared to British culture which Callie has "obviously" been raised in. Again,

the word "obviously" appears, reinforcing the juxtaposition between cultures that are

depicted as traditional and British culture that is portrayed as "obviously" different in

this respect. Callie's statement draws on and reproduces the notion of cultural difference and of culture as determining people's values and habits.

The reification of culture as a structuring force occurred on various occasions and in interviews with a variety of participants. Nanda, when explaining the dismissive reaction of members of her family and community to feminist issues, claimed that "the only experience they have is their traditional background". Notions of tradition and culture as irrevocably influencing one's perceptions also emerged from Carla's account of why her mother had difficulties accepting her homosexuality. "I guess it is an [East Asian] thing with my Mum, which makes it to be harder. Because, she is into tradition, and her culture is very strong with her, the way she grew up, and I completely understand, I don't expect her to accept everything right now". Carla argues that her mother's cultural background is "very strong with her", and alludes to her mother's adherence to "tradition". [East Asian] culture is linked to tradition and is viewed as determining her mother's stance on homosexuality. While I do not want to contest that culture affects individuals' perceptions, beliefs and behaviour, Callie's, Nanda's and Carla's accounts reify culture and portray it as the central structuring principle. Culture is conceptualised as fixed and essential, failing to account for its constant creation (Alexander, 1996: 17). Cultural differences are portrayed as the sole factor mediating one's experiences and views, leaving no room to account for the various ways in which culture intersects with gender, 'race', class, nation, and sexuality.

Crucially, this essentialist view of culture as a determining principle stands in stark contrast to the individualism prevalent in the interviews. Culture is essentialised and reified only in discussions of cultural difference, producing an image of western culture as fluid and flexible, and other cultures as deterministic and traditional.

Observing that culture has become an object of tolerance and intolerance in recent years, Brown (2006: 151) provides a fascinating analysis of the contrasting views on culture in the context of liberal democracies on the one hand, and 'other', supposedly repressive, regimes on the other hand: "'we' *have* culture while they *are* a culture" (emphasis in original). Brown sees the liberal emphasis on moral autonomy as crucial to the attribution of culture-as-dominance to others. While autonomous liberal subjects are able to step in and out of culture, to 'have' culture, their others are governed by culture.

> For the organicist creature, considered to lack rationality and will, culture and religion (culture as religion, and religion as culture – equations that work only for this creature) are saturating and authoritative; for the liberal one, in contrast, culture and religion become 'background', can be 'entered' and 'exited', and are thus rendered extrinsic to rather than constitutive of the subject (Brown, 2006: 153).

Culture as power and rule is attributed to others, helping to stabilise the fiction of the autonomous individual on the one hand, and its oppressed opposite on the other.

In highlighting the constitutive link between autonomy and culture-as-mere-way-of-life, or oppression and culture-as-power-and-rule, Brown's analysis sheds light on the function that the trope of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' fulfils in the talk of the interviewees. While the research participants present themselves overwhelmingly as empowered subjects who are freed from structural constraints, their other is regarded as an oppressed victim of cultural domination. Gender inequality and discrimination are relentlessly individualised and purged from the research participants' accounts about their own experiences. By contrast, patriarchal oppression becomes the defining principle in talk about other cultures whose traditions determine their members' views and behaviours. The research participants position themselves as empowered and free bearers of social change, taking up a subject position whose intelligibility depends on their cultural other that is said to suffer from a lack of

agency. The interpretative repertoire of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' stabilises the research participants' positioning as free and emancipated, playing a vital role in the repudiation of feminism as unnecessary to their lives in contemporary western democracies.

Individualism and neoliberalism pre-empt a critical gender analysis and politics through the individualisation of narratives and the emphasis on responsible, free citizens of choice. The trope of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' secures this positioning of the research participants as autonomous and independent beings by delegating structural forces to other communities and cultures. Consequently, the figure of the female victim of the patriarchal gender regime is interlinked with and constitutive of individualist and neoliberal discourses. In being the other of the autonomous, empowered young western women, the 'oppressed Muslim woman' stabilises the hopeful positioning of the research participants as subjects of social change. The powerless and dominated woman represents a marginal and marginalized figure in young women's talk about feminism. However, she plays a central role in the disarticulation of feminism and its re-direction away from the self to other parts of society and the world.

5.5 Conclusion

Building on the preceding chapter, my analysis went beyond the notion of postfeminism to explore the workings of individualisation and neoliberalisation in the research participants' talk. Arguing against the attribution of 'false consciousness' to young women, I demonstrated the respondents' gender awareness and instead suggested that their reluctance to claim feminism was related to the uncoupling of their experiences from broader structures. Feminism was undone and disarticulated through the individualisation of narratives and social trends. The research participants

frequently occupied the position of empowered individuals whose emancipation renders feminism a spent force. The prevalence of individualism was conceptualised as a central feature of the broader trend towards neoliberal government as it has been theorised by Foucauldian researchers. Similar to processes of individualisation, the neoliberal emphasis on autonomy, responsibility and choice created subject positions for young women that were seemingly irreconcilable with the acknowledgement of structural constraints and forms of collective organising frequently associated with feminist politics.

The last section of this chapter investigated the construction of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' in the interviews. Arguing that the figure of the subordinated other woman falls in the tradition of colonial forms of knowledge production and reifies culture, I ended this section by delineating the links between the research participants' construction of themselves as empowered and free, and their 'others' as powerless and subjugated. Rather than evoking the figure of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' to establish a dichotomy between the liberated west and oppressive rest, my analysis sought to provide a critical challenge to this binary so frequently established in the research participants' talk and society at large. Similar to processes of individualisation and neoliberalisation, the trope of the other subordinated woman played a central role in the undoing of feminism. Continuing to explore the research participants' rejection of feminism by offering various modes of explanation, the next chapter will focus on the construction of yet another figure which is central to the repudiation of feminism: the 'unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian feminist' as unintelligible and abjected in the heterosexual matrix.

6   **Chapter Six**

Constructions of 'the feminist' in the heterosexual matrix

[A]n understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition; and it will assume that the appropriate place for that critical analysis to being is from the relatively decentred perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory (Sedgwick, 1990: 1).

Sedgwick's frequently cited call for an incorporation of the homo/hetero definition into analyses of modern and current social phenomena provides a powerful entry point to this chapter which investigates the research participants' constructions of 'the feminist'. Resonating with my argument in chapter one about the central role of sexuality and heteronormativity in negotiations of feminism, many of my respondents depicted feminists as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian. By providing a detailed account of how and why the feminist was overwhelmingly connected to unfemininity, hostility towards men and lesbianism, I seek to further our understanding of repudiations of feminism. Conducting my analysis from a critical perspective on heteronormativity, I intend to provide an investigation of how the figure of the feminist is produced, thereby revealing the homophobic workings of this construction. Paradoxically perhaps, my analysis of the research participants' accounts means that I will reiterate the links between feminism, unfemininity, man-hating and lesbianism in this chapter. I hope to address these concerns by deconstructing these connections and by exposing its exclusionary effects.

The first section of this chapter demonstrates that conventional femininity was narrowly constructed as primarily pertaining to physical appearance. The interviews reflect existing accounts of the juxtaposition of femininity and feminism (chapter one) and feminists were overwhelmingly depicted as unfeminine. Furthermore, feminists

were regarded as man-like and, as the second section of this chapter illustrates, as man-hating. In briefly reviewing the critical literature on heteronormativity, I adopt a queer theory perspective to analyse the research participants' associations of feminism with unfemininity and man-hating. Section three continues the detailed investigation of how the figure of the feminist is produced in talk by focusing on the portrayal of feminists as lesbians. This section develops my argument about the structuring role of heteronormativity in young women's negotiation and repudiation of feminism. Lastly, section four reconceptualises the trope of the feminist as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian, as a constitutive outside of the heteronormative order which nevertheless haunts the research participants' accounts. Drawing on psychoanalytic insights, and also on Ahmed's (2004b) notion of sticky stereotypes, I aim to provide an explanation for the spectre of 'the feminist' that haunted numerous interviews, but for which no specific examples could be given by the research participants. In advancing the more general argument that constructions of the feminist should be located in the heterosexual matrix, this chapter makes a broader epistemological point by demonstrating how the young women's knowledges of feminism were mediated by heterosexual conventions. This mode of knowledge formation about feminism takes us back to Sedgwick's work and her claim (1990: 3) "that the language of sexuality not only intersects with but transforms the other languages and relations by which we know".

6.1   Constructions of femininity: feminists as unfeminine

Exploring cultural representations, empirical and historical accounts in chapter one, I demonstrated that femininity and feminism are frequently constructed as mutually exclusive. Having analysed a range of explanations for young women's repudiation of feminism, I argued that normative femininity and sexuality might play a crucial role in

negotiations of feminist politics. Consequently, I was not surprised to encounter numerous references to, and negotiations of femininity in the talk of the research participants. This was partly prompted by my interview schedule which contained a question on the relationship between feminism and femininity. Frequently though, the research participants brought up the theme of femininity themselves. Descriptions of what women were or what they should be like occasionally related to conduct. Helena portrayed women as "softer" and Asena referred to them as "sensitive beings that are reserved, that don't come across as offensive and that do not raise their voice, just slightly more calm".

Most frequently however, femininity was described in terms of physical appearance. When I asked Christine to explain what she meant by "typically feminine", she replied: "I suppose the main way is visually, you know, in appearance, so, er, in the make-up maybe, er, hair, you know". Christine only refers to physical characteristics in her description of femininity; her statement does not contain any references to behaviour and conduct. This observation resonates with Gill's (2007: 89) broader argument that

> [c]ontemporary femininity is constructed as a bodily characteristic. No longer associated with psychological characteristics and behaviours like demureness or passivity, or with homemaking and mothering skills, it is now defined in advertising and elsewhere in the media as the possession of a young, able-bodied, heterosexual, 'sexy' body.

The research participants' statements paralleled the current trend of depicting femininity as a physical characteristic. Ines stated that "there are feminine and unfeminine women. Everything comes into it, I mean, hair, the physical appearance, gestures, facial expression, erm, and so on, yes". While Ines claims that "everything" pertains to femininity, she only lists bodily characteristics.

What counted as typically feminine (bodily) characteristics was, however, narrowly defined. This became particularly apparent in the German research

participants' discussion of Angela Merkel as the first female chancellor. Merkel was depicted as an untypical woman several times, mostly because she was portrayed as not looking conventionally feminine. Gertrud argued that Angela Merkel was a "Mannsweib", a derogative term which translates to 'man-woman'. Vivianne stated she liked her, "even though she was a bit chubby". Viola claimed that Angela Merkel was not "amazingly beautiful", particularly in comparison to female politicians in Asian or South American countries. According to Viola, Merkel was not a woman who came to meetings, making men think: "wow, great". Paraphrasing these statements, a conventionally feminine woman must be skinny, beautiful and, importantly, must impress men. Apart from the fact that most women's appearance would not correspond to this narrow definition of femininity, it is absolutely striking that the topic deemed noteworthy in discussions of Merkel's political leadership is her appearance. According to Gill (2007: 116), "men are rarely described in terms of their physical attractiveness". Equally important, Viola's statement about men's reaction to a good looking female politician lays bare heterosexist assumptions by implying that sexual attractiveness and desire primarily exist between men and women. As Richardson (1996: 5) points out, "[t]ypically, desire is conceptualised in terms of attraction to difference, where gender is the key marker of difference".

I will analyse presumptions of heterosexual, opposite-sex desire in more detail below, but would like to focus here on rigid constructions of femininity. Hair length figured as another marker of femininity as Sabrina's statement demonstrates. In talking about the American talk-show host Ellen DeGeneres, Sabrina claimed that "she kind of looks very masculine and her hair is quite short but still...she wears make-up and she is feminine". Ellen DeGeneres' short hair seems to make her look more masculine, indicating that long hair and wearing make-up constitute feminine looks. Indeed, short

hair was not only related to unfemininity, but frequently linked to lesbianism, as Sabrina's allusion to Ellen DeGeneres, who is openly gay, potentially illustrates. Ines claimed that most lesbians have short hair, which she did not find beautiful "unless other aspects of their appearance are feminine". By arguing that "other aspects of their appearance" have to be feminine, Ines describes short hair as something unfeminine. In claiming that short hair is not beautiful, Ines reinforces her normative statement by not only associating femininity with long hair, but by labelling short hair as unattractive.

The association of short hair, unfemininity and lesbianism seems to emerge from heterosexist assumptions that a lack of femininity, as expressed through appearance, signifies a lack of desire for men (see below). Hair length delimited what counted as feminine and heterosexual. Janina told me that she was often thought to be a "Kampflesbe"[37], a "fighting-lesbian" because of her short hair. The term Kampflesbe, when placed in the heterosexual matrix, expresses a certain transgressiveness as referring to women who fight and fail to look, act, and desire like a 'woman'. Importantly, regulatory norms about femininity and sexuality were also critically discussed as Rhiannon's statement demonstrates. Seeking to contest the stereotype of lesbians having short hair, Rhiannon claimed that "when I first became a so-called lesbian I had really long hair and you know and then when I had a boyfriend I had really short hair". While appearance – and hair length in particular – figured as markers of femininity and sexuality in numerous accounts, narrow definitions of what constitutes a feminine appearance and how it relates to sexual orientation were also disrupted and questioned.

There are various possible interpretations of rigid understandings of femininity as they occurred in many interviews. One could adopt a Butlerian stance and argue that

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[37] Kampflesbe is a derogative German term.

such narrow views, which would exclude large numbers of individuals who identify as 'women', illuminate the phantasmatic nature of gender as an unachievable ideal whose status is so precarious that it has to be repeatedly affirmed and reinstated. Based on this reading, narrow views of femininity would be indicative of its status as a cultural construction and a performative which has to be constantly produced through reiteration. Alternatively, one might draw on Adkins' (2000) critical engagement with the reflexive modernisation thesis and her argument that we are currently witnessing a re-traditionalisation of gender. She claims that reflexive modernity does not involve a simple freeing of individuals from social constraints, but also a process where "new, yet traditional or re-traditionalised – rules, norms and expectations are at issue". While Adkins (2000: 200) refers to the economic domain, the scope of her argument could be extended by understanding rigid notions of femininity as signifying a re-traditionalisation of gender norms. A further explanation for exclusionary definitions of conventional femininity would take Adkins' arguments further by regarding narrow, cultural perceptions not only as a form of re-traditionalisation, but "as a determined overturning of feminist gains, a resurgent patriarchal attempt to undo the achievements of the women's movement" (McRobbie, 2009: 47). Attributing young women's narrow conceptions of femininity to the postfeminist era which sees itself confronted with various threats to the gender order (the spectral existence of the women's movement, women's increasing economic independence, critical feminist and queer theory), one might go with McRobbie (2009: 61 - 62) and regard the narrow definition of femininity as an attempt of the (Lacanian) Symbolic to re-secure gender hierarchies and heterosexual desire. Following McRobbie, the limited and limiting accounts of femininity that emerged from many interviews would be seen as pre-empting disruptions to the gender order.

In demonstrating how femininity was conceptualised in the interviews, I sought to lay the groundwork for my subsequent analysis of the research participants' constructions of the relationship between femininity and feminism. Resonating with widespread notions of femininity and feminism as mutually exclusive, the research participants frequently depicted feminists as unfeminine[38]. Charlotte argued that feminists are "not fussed about their looks" and Caroline had the feeling that "feminists tend to hide their femininity, or so – especially to put on make-up and to somehow dress nicely". Again, femininity is discussed in terms of physical appearance; feminists are said to "hide their femininity" because they do not invest in conventionally feminine attire such as make-up. Equally, Asena claimed that feminists had lost their femininity: they did not wear bras and did not shave their arm-pits. The feminist is constructed as unfeminine and it is primarily her appearance which expresses her lack of femininity.

In one account, looks also figured as a central marker of characteristics that are conventionally regarded as more interior, such as feminist convictions. Roxana claimed that "probably people have the views of a feminist but don't portray it as much as a feminist because they don't think they – what they are – because they don't look like that". According to Roxana, individuals do not perceive of themselves as feminist because they do not look like feminists. Appearance establishes what somebody believes; it is not only that bodily characteristics tell us something about a person's attitudes, but also that individuals' opinions are mediated by their physical appearance. Paralleling the depiction of femininity as primarily expressed through

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[38] In analysing the respondents' views on the relationship between feminism and femininity, I am interested in exploring how the construction of feminism and femininity as opposing principles figures in feminist dis-identification. Proceeding in a discourse analytic vein, I seek to investigate the ways in which the positioning of feminism and femininity in these particular instances cites heterosexual norms. I therefore do not aim to make claims about the relationship between feminism and femininity.

physical appearance, looks are absolutely central in Roxana's statement by indicating whether somebody identifies as feminist or not.

Research participants did not only portray feminists as unfeminine, but as actively opposing femininity. Eight research participants explicitly stated that feminists were unfeminine or against femininity. Carla claimed that "feminists see it [femininity] as a negative thing, I don't really understand why, but that's the way they see it, because they don't want to be that". Equally, Carrie asserted that "the burning of the bras ... was all against femininity really, wasn't it-that was the thing. 'We are strong women we are not feminine!' was the kind of message they were putting across". Carla and Carrie draw on, and reaffirm broader cultural understandings of feminism and femininity as mutually exclusive. By arguing that feminists are "strong women" and "not feminine", Carrie inadvertently constructs femininity as not involving personal strength. Her statement expresses her belief that feminists oppose femininity, but also constructs feminism and femininity in particular ways by attributing the notion of strength to feminists. I wonder whether the belief that feminists are unfeminine also transpired through a slip in the transcription of Sam's interview. Sam was talking about "a person who kind of shared her feminist views". This statement appeared in the transcript as "a person who pushed her feminist views". Is it a mere coincidence that the mode through which a feminist allegedly disseminates her views is transcribed as pushy, rather than sharing? I would argue that being pushy is not commonly regarded as a feminine trait. This leads me to ask whether the slip in the transcription could be interpreted in light of a broader cultural context where feminists are regarded as unfeminine, and therefore more likely to be pushy?

Feminists were depicted as "really tough women" (Louisa) and often portrayed as man-like. Six research participants thought feminists were manly. An expression

frequently used in the German context was "Mannsweib"[39]. Charlotte for instance described feminists as "women who are just trying to be men and take over everything". Charlotte's statement implies a close link between masculinity and power; feminists who seek to gain control are like men who "take over everything". The link between feminism and masculinity appears to arise from strict gender polarities where there is no space for women to be unfeminine, but not manly. It seems that women who engage in masculine pursuits of seeking power and control transgress gender boundaries, thereby becoming masculinised. Feminists are not merely regarded as unfeminine due to their alleged looks and oppositional stance to femininity, but are indeed cast as man-like. This means that gender binarisms are re-stabilised. Gender is not troubled in the depiction of feminists as unfeminine and manly, but the portrayal of feminists as mannish reproduces conventional gender polarities. Untypically feminine behaviour is connected to feminism, unfemininity and masculinity, leaving femininity untainted and intact.

Crucially, not all research participants believed that feminism and femininity were incompatible. Karuna, a self-identified feminist, did not think there was a tension between feminism and femininity because "I see one as a cultural stereotype [femininity] and one as being a fact [feminism]". Equally, Vicky talked about a friend of hers who identified as feminist and said: "I would say she is a feminist but she's really pretty and girlie [...] anyone can be a feminist I think. It doesn't, you can't stereotype them and say they tend to be feminine or they tend to be more butch[40]". By

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[39] The German term 'Mannsweib' translates to 'man-woman', and has derogative connotations.

[40] According to Walker (1993: 867), "[t]he definitions (theoretical and colloquial) of *butch* and *femme* are under question within the lesbian community and resist simple explanation. Joan Nestle describes both sexual styles as 'a rich mixture of class, history, and personal integrity' in her essay 'Butch-Femme Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s' from her A Restricted Country (1987, 108).A brief explanation of the terms might best refer to clothing, one of the most commonly read indicators of sexual style. Dress codes identify butch women by their adaptations of typically 'masculine' attire and femmes by their traditionally 'feminine' attire. The point often made about femmes (one that will be

drawing on her own experience of having a "really pretty and girlie" feminist friend, Vicky contests stereotypical perceptions of feminists. In making this claim, she uses the term "but" which juxtaposes being feminist on the one hand, and pretty on the other hand. This juxtaposition indicates Vicky's awareness of commonly held opinions that regard feminists as ugly and non-girlie. Vicky orients to, but simultaneously distances herself from common perceptions of feminists as unfeminine.

Viola also negotiated commonly held beliefs that feminists are unfeminine. Similar to Karuna, she argued that femininity does not exclude feminism. Then she continued to state that

> of course, it is surely no coincidence that many feminists are very robust, also in terms of their manners, but, as I said, you should not draw a, such a distinction between masculine and feminine. Of course there are masculine traits, feminine traits – but, there is at least no general difference, but I would not say that it is mutually exclusive. At least, it doesn't have to be that way.

When I asked her to explore this further, Viola said that she believed many feminists were simply lesbians (see section three) because they had a "sexuality that was not a 100 percent supported by society and that then, one has, maybe one develops a certain form of aversion against the opposite gender, that one should maybe turn towards in order to be supported by society". In light of these remarks, Viola's critical engagement with stereotypical views of feminism seems more ambivalent. She goes back and forth between contesting conventional views of feminists, femininity and masculinity on the one hand, and resorting to common perceptions of feminists as robust and lesbian on the other hand. While Karuna's and Vicky's claims called into question the belief that feminism and femininity are mutually exclusive, or that feminists are not pretty and girlie, Viola's engagement with the issue contained both critical and more conventional views.

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taken up in this essay) is that they, unlike butches, are indistinguishable from straight women in their sexual style."

While some research participants sought to undo the association of feminists with unfeminine women, several respondents portrayed feminists as both unfeminine and hyper feminine at different stages in the interview. Doris described her mental picture of feminists as "a bit boyish, manly, a bit rabid and always strongly defending their opinions". Later on I asked her about her thoughts on feminists' relationship with their femininity. She replied that "they [feminists] emphasise it [their femininity] extremely and they act it out and are not in the world as a human being, but are in the world as women". How to make sense of feminists' supposed lack of femininity and simultaneous hyper-awareness of it? Doris was not the only one to argue that feminists are very feminine. Gertrud also described feminists as "really aware" of their femininity. Similarly, Barbara claimed that she found feminists "incredibly feminine". "Strong women – that's great. Intelligent women, that's sexy, and women who say something, I think it's great that they have something to say". Lastly, Stella explained that taking a feminist stance did not make her feel less feminine. "For me, in a way, it's more like, that I somehow feel more feminine".

These passages can be read as instances where the prevalent cultural understanding of feminists as unfeminine is resisted or even subverted, particularly in Barbara's statement which does not only associate feminists with femininity, but also portrays self-confidence and "women who say something" as positive and "sexy". Doris' claim that feminists emphasise their femininity because they are not in the world as human beings but as women, signifies a shifting stance on feminists' supposed relationship with their femininity. While she had earlier described feminists as a "bit boyish", her subsequent statement about feminists' enhanced femininity indicates a different perspective. Resonating with the theoretical assumptions underlying discursive psychology, one could regard Doris' changing attitudes as an

instance of variability in talk. One could also interpret Doris' shifting attitudes towards feminists' femininity and the hyper femininity that Doris attributes to feminists in her latter statement as arising from feminists' supposed awareness of inhabiting a gendered social world as 'women'. Read against the prevalence of individualism in the research participants' statements (chapter five), feminists might appear more feminine because they are thought not simply to see themselves as individuals, but as women who are confronted with particular structural constraints. Doris' perception of the hyper femininity of feminists would then emerge from the belief that politicised and critical awareness means feminists are not simply in the world as human beings, but as women.

6.2   Feminists as man-haters

Feminists were not merely depicted as unfeminine or, for that matter, hyper feminine. Eighteen respondents mentioned man-hating in conjunction with feminism. Charlotte stated that "when you think feminist you tend to think of the man-hating women". Similarly, Leila believed that feminists "have a negative view of men, I think; otherwise, they wouldn't be feminists". While Charlotte associates feminism with man-hating, Leila regards a negative stance towards men as following from feminism. Man-hating and feminism seem to be mutually intertwined in Leila's statement because "otherwise, they wouldn't be feminists". The frequently established link between feminism with man-hating meant that feminists and men were regarded as two mutually exclusive groups; feminists were positioned as being against men which left no room for men to be considered feminists. Feminists were predominantly thought to be female in the interviews. This became particularly clear in the German context where the feminine grammatical form was used in talk about feminists. Indeed, only one research participant referred to the involvement of men in feminism and

feminist activism. Lara claimed that her acquaintances did not consider feminism as relating to men in any way and subsequently reflected on involving men in feminist activism. More generally, however, men and feminists were regarded and constructed as two separate groups who mainly oppose each other due to the supposed man-hatred of feminists.

The link between feminism and man-hating was also established in more ambiguous ways. Miranda talked about the author of a critical article she had read at university, stating: "now, I don't know whether she was a feminist but she definitely hated men". Miranda leaves open the link between feminist politics and man-hating, but at the same time alludes to it by raising the issue. While she seeks to avoid making premature assumptions by stating "I don't know whether she was a feminist", her statement simultaneously figures as a disclaimer because it is followed by the word "but". Miranda's claim both questions but also affirms commonly held beliefs that feminists are man-haters. Equally, Undine distanced herself from feminists "as making gross generalisations, like: 'men are annoying' or 'men are stupid', or 'men are simply unfair towards women'". This is the extract of a longer statement in which Undine made the same discursive move twice: she accused feminists of making gross generalisations that were subsequently described as being directed against men. Undine expresses concern about feminists' supposed tendency to generalise; however her repeated mentioning of unfair generalisations about men suggests that she also feels uneasy about feminism's alleged hostility towards men. Feminists were not only seen as being anti-men, but also as discarding men as Gertrud's claim indicated. She described feminists as thinking "we have the power and don't need any men", expressing a fear that feminists want to do away with men.

The frequency and extent to which feminist politics were linked to a negative stance towards men raises the question of why feminism is repeatedly related to man-hating in the interviews. I suggest that sexuality, and more specifically heteronormativity figure prominently in the association of feminists with man-haters. Several research participants argued that feminists did not like men because they liked women. Heather believed that "if you are a feminist you....that you only like women...you know what I mean? That you are so anti-men and that you won't listen to them so I think there is an element of cutting men off from the equation because you are so angry with them". Heather portrays feminists as only liking women and as being against men. Her statement collapses feminism with a preference for women and a dislike for men; it seems that Heather regards the former and the latter as almost interchangeable. Relatedly, Carrie claimed that "a lot of" feminists "do hate men and that's why they don't become feminine". Consequently, feminism was not only related to man-hating, but man-hating was connected to liking women and to being unfeminine. Lastly, feminists' supposed unfemininity and man-hating were associated with lesbianism as Ines' and Vicky's statements demonstrate. Ines claimed that feminists are regarded to "be like men and then it probably somehow came about that they are associated with lesbians" and Vicky argued that "you must be a lesbian because you think women, you know, are better than men". Consequently, there is a chain of associations linking feminism, man-hating, unfemininity and lesbianism.

By briefly referring to the literature on heteronormativity, I will argue that these associations with feminism are embedded in, and reproductive of conventional heterosexist binaries. The connection between feminism and man-hating, unfemininity and lesbianism parallels heteronormative assumptions and the heterosexist "chain of equivalence that is sex/gender/desire" (Chambers, 2007: 669). To recall, Chambers

(2007: 667) understands heteronormativity as "the assemblage of regulatory practices, which produces intelligible genders within a heterosexual matrix that insists upon the coherence of sex/gender/desire". As the term "heterosexual matrix" indicates, Chambers draws on Butler's (1999 [1990]; 1993) work and her argument that the internal coherence of gender requires an oppositional heterosexuality. Butler (1999 [1990]: 30) claims that

> gender can denote a *unity* of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender – where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self – and desire – where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires.

To paraphrase Butler, and quote Dennis (2004: 282), "[t]he term *man* is meaningless unless it includes "desiring women", and *women* is meaningless unless it includes "desiring men". Crucially, Butler does not use the term heteronormativity, but instead writes about 'conventional heterosexual polarities', the 'regime of heterosexuality', 'heterosexual matrix' or 'heterosexual norms'. Warner coined the term heteronormativity in his 1993 book *Fear of a Queer Planet* and offered a detailed definition in collaboration with Berlant. They (2000) conceptualise heteronormativity as "the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged". Regarding heteronormativity as "a fundamental motor of social organisation", Berlant and Warner (2000: 328) call for the analysis of the axis of sexuality as a basic organising principle.

Going even farther, the materialist feminist and sociologist Ingraham (2006: 309) argues that heteronormativity "constitutes the dominant paradigm in Western society. It is the basis for the division of labour and hierarchies of wealth and power stratified by gender, racial categories, class and sexualities". While I concur with Berlant's and Warner's perspective on heteronormativity as a fundamental organising

principle, I will not take up Ingraham's stance. By regarding heteronormativity as "*the* dominant paradigm", rather than "*a* fundamental motor or social organisation" (emphases added), Ingraham indicates that sexuality is more important than other axes of differences which does not correspond with my theoretical approach and attempt to attend to various and interlocking forms of oppression in my thesis more broadly.

The concept of heteronormativity sheds light on the processes through which feminism is linked to unfemininity, man-hating and lesbianism. The heteronormative imperative that one must desire a different gender from that which one identifies as, provides a foil for analysing the chain of associations between being feminist, anti-men, unfeminine and lesbian. As Heather's statement about feminists' preference for women demonstrates, feminists are depicted as man-haters because they like women. There is no space for liking both women and men. Following a binaristic, heterosexist logic, feminists must hate men because they like women. Carrie's claim that feminists do hate men "and that that's why they don't become feminine" illustrates the role of heterosexuality in regulating gender as a binary relation: women who do not like men are unfeminine. Ines' statement that feminists are man-like and her subsequent conclusion that this is why they are associated with lesbians further reveal the role of sexuality and desire as a structuring principle. Women who are like men must desire like men and, following a heterosexual logic, therefore be attracted to women. Feminists are lesbians because "you must be a lesbian because you think women, you know, are better than men" (Vicky). The construction of the feminist as an unfeminine man-hater and lesbian cites a heteronormative logic and resonates with Chamber's view of heteronormativity as insisting on a coherence between sex/gender/desire.

While I draw on more recent perspectives on heteronormativity here, Ingraham (2008: 18) states that a critical investigation of dominant notions of heterosexuality can

be traced back at least to the 1970s. More famously, Rich's 1980 article *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* suggests that heterosexuality "needs to be recognised and studied as a political institution". Rich calls for feminists to address "the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male right of physical, economic and emotional access" (647). Referring to Rich's analysis, Wittig (1992: xiii) takes her argument further and describes heterosexuality "not as an institution, but as a political regime which rests on the submission and the appropriation of women". Arguing that the category of sex "is the product of a heterosexual society" (1992: 7), Wittig wants to dispense with the signifier 'woman', "for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems" (31). She advocates materialist lesbianism and claims we should replace 'woman' with the category of 'lesbian' as the only concept which is beyond the categories of sex, men and women. There have been numerous engagements with and critiques of Rich's argument about compulsory heterosexuality and Wittig's radical critique of heterosexism (see for example Hesford, 2005 on Rich and Braidotti, 2002: 34 on Wittig) which I am not able to explore here. In referring to less recent critical engagements with heterosexuality, I seek to demonstrate that the body of literature which I mostly draw on - namely queer theory – does not represent the only theoretical framework which critically explores heterosexuality and heteronormativity.

Indeed, Ingraham's work on heteronormativity, and most notably her analysis of *White Weddings* (2008), constitutes a materialist, feminist approach to the study of heterosexuality as an institution whose underlying belief system is heteronormativity. Ingraham (1997: 277) argues that "materialist feminism breaks away from the growing trend toward discursive politics – postmodern and poststructuralist feminism – and takes as its object the 'social transformation of dominant institutions that, as a totality,

distribute economic resources and cultural power asymmetrically according to gender (Ebert, 1993: 5)'". Ingraham distances herself from poststructuralist approaches to rethinking sexuality and instead advocates a materialist perspective. However, her materialist approach would conflict with my discursive and performative stance. I briefly discussed Butler's (1998) critique of a distinction between the material and the cultural in chapter one[41]. I am not using Ingraham's materialist approach because it does not address the interesting and important question of how 'the material' becomes distinguished from 'the cultural', and how the two are produced and become known as separate spheres.

Instead of drawing on materialist feminist writings, my approach is informed by queer theory that seeks to "make sexuality a primary category for social analysis" (Warner, 1993: xiv). Constituting a "rather amorphous body of work", queer theory's foundational claim is "that an understanding of sexuality, and in particular, of the homo/heterosexual binary, must be central to any analysis of modern western culture" (Roseneil, 2000: paragraphs 2.1 – 2.2). Importantly, queer theory challenges the opposition between heterosexual and homosexual identities so that "homosexuality is no longer to be seen simply as marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined either by opposition or by homology" (De Lauretis, 1991: iii). Queer theory critically interrogates the assumption of "a priori relationships among sex, gender and sexuality" (Hemmings, 2002: 110) which usefully applies to my analysis of the research participants' talk and their constructions of equivalences between unfemininity, man-hating and lesbianism.

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[41] Butler (1998) questions this distinction by arguing that the differentiation between the cultural and the material frequently leads to a marginalisation of cultural struggles which become depicted as less relevant. Surely, Ingraham's distinction between the material and the cultural does not consider issues of sexuality as less important; as I argued above, she regards heteronormativity as the dominant paradigm. But Ingraham's approach raises the question of how the material and the cultural can be distinguished from each other.

A queer theory framework with its emphasis on sexuality as a structuring principle enables me to understand the processes through which feminists are constructed as conventionally unattractive, hostile towards men and gay. Sedgwick's (1990: 30) argument that "the question of gender and the question of sexuality, inextricable from one another though they are in that each other can be expressed only in the terms of the other, are nonetheless not the same question" will guide my analysis of constructions of 'the feminist'.

Given the structuring role of sexuality and heteronormativity in the portrayal of feminists as man-haters, it is perhaps not surprising that research participants tried to distance themselves from man-hating when negotiating feminism. The heteronormative requirement that women like and desire men renders feminist identification problematic as a stance that is commonly regarded as involving hostility towards men. Nanda claimed that she would not mind being called a feminist "as long as people don't see me as a man-hater". Nanda's response to feminism and its alleged hostility towards men is structured by heterosexual conventions. Identifying as a female and being positioned within a heterosexual matrix potentially explains why she does not want to be regarded as being against men. Similarly, Lara made it clear that she would describe herself as feminist but always seek to qualify her feminist identification:

> I guess I would [call myself a feminist], but I would probably want to qualify. Because I think the perception of feminism is quite negative generally, from both women and men, now, and it is seen as a bit radical, and a bit unnecessary, meaning, man-hating, kind of, and so I would always want to qualify a statement.

Referring to negative stereotypes of feminism, Lara mentions radicalism, but also "man-hating". She explains that she qualifies feminist statements, presumably to avoid being perceived as radical and anti-men.

Numerous research participants claimed their allegiance to men, both in discussions of feminism more specifically and the interviews more broadly. Talking about feminism's relationship with men, Rhiannon claimed:

> I don't think that, you know, you can't throw men out because men are part of the situation and we're all part male and we're all part female and we have sons and brothers and fathers and we, you know it's not the solution to get rid of men because they really aren't the problem [...].

Orienting to feminists' supposed man-hatred, Rhiannon warns of getting "rid of men". I interpret her unease about feminists' perceived intentions to discard men as emerging from her conviction that men are not "the problem", but also as reflecting broader heterosexual norms. The assertion of solidarity with men recuperates heterosexual conventions that are thought to be destabilised by feminists' hostility towards the 'opposite' gender. Feminism, as something that is related to man-hating, is discussed from within a heterosexual logic and experienced as threatening because it challenges the heteronormative imperative that women like men. As I will demonstrate in detail in the next chapter, the culturally established link between feminism and man-hating gave rise to a range of performative enactments of femininity and repudiations of feminism. Here, I focus on the threat that 'man-hating' poses, and the research respondents' felt need to assert they are not against men. Lesbian respondents seemed to feel this need in particular[42], possibly because their positioning in the heterosexual matrix as lesbians and women who do not sexually desire men always-already involves the likelihood that they are hostile towards men. Both Barbara and Julia used the exact same phrasing when emphasising that they liked men 'but didn't want to go to bed with them'. Equally, Carla seemed to feel the need to stress that she was not against men. She argued: "I am gay, I never had a boyfriend, I never kissed a boy, never got even close to one, but, erm, I am, I love boys, I got a lot of friends, male friends [...]". Barbara's,

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[42] Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1993: 12) argue that "criticism of heterosexuality is (it seems) less acceptable when it comes from lesbians", but point out that "'heterosexual women generally make no bones whatever about criticizing heterosexual relationships, in depth, in detail, and with considerable passion and bitterness (Onlywomen Press, 1981: 56)'".

Julia's and Carla's statements could be interpreted as simple claims about their feelings towards men. I however argue that these affirmations also arise from, and negotiate, heteronormative conventions that require 'women' to like 'men', as well as positionings of feminists as anti-man.

Feminists' supposed man-hatred gave rise to feelings of unease. Talking about feminists' alleged disdain towards men, Sabrina claimed that "things like that scare me a little bit". Indeed, several researchers have observed that women are frequently worried that feminist perspectives do not take men into consideration. Titus (2000: 31) reports female research participants' "concerns with excluding men when discussions focus on women". Similarly, Webber (2005: 188) argues that "[r]esearchers also note that students (often women students) get concerned about men's exclusion when class discussions focus on women". I want to suggest that the reported unease about feminism's alleged man-hatred is partly related to the heteronormative requirement that women like men. As I demonstrated above, feminists were frequently portrayed as anti-man because they concentrate on women. Feminists' alleged preference for women unsettles heteronormative conventions that women like (and desire) men.

Consequently, feminist statements were sometimes made in conjunction with an emphasis that they are not directed against men. Ella embraced feminism but was careful to signal she was not against men: "I guess I am a feminist because I am very encouraging of women to do well, I will quicker [support] a woman, no actually I do encourage my male friends as well, but I do like to see a woman doing well". Ella is quick to emphasise that she also wants to see men do well. Her identification as feminist is followed by a statement that underlines her positive attitude towards men. I propose that this statement can be interpreted as emerging from heterosexual norms.

The culturally established link between feminism and man-hating on the one hand, and the heterosexist requirement that women desire men on the other hand, did not only give rise to affirmations of one's positive stance towards men on the part of the respondents, but also on my part. Towards the end of her interview, Carrie wanted to know whether I was a feminist and I said "yes". Subsequently, Carrie asked: "So, do you hate men?" to which I replied "No. No. I am heterosexual. I have a boyfriend. No, I get on well with my dad and my brother". Taking up the firmly established link between feminism and man-hating, Carrie then inquired: "So, in what ways are you a feminist?" This dialogue is interesting and politically problematic on various levels.

First, it demonstrates my identification and positioning as female in the heterosexual matrix and – in congruence with the research participants – my felt need to assert that I have positive relationships with men. I use the word "no" three times in this short statement to reject the appellation "man-hater". Second, I not only reproduce heterosexist conventions by affirming that I like and desire men, but also inversely confirm the links between man-hatred and female homosexuality. Instead of answering Carrie's question by simply saying I am not a man-hater, I stress that I am heterosexual. In referring to my relationship and my good rapport with my father and brother, I further establish normative heterosexuality and kinship relations. Numerous authors have emphasised the multiplicities of heterosexualities by stressing its variants and by cautioning against regarding heterosexuality as a monolithic entity (Butler, 1998b; Jackson, 2006; Seidman, 2005; Renold, 2006). Seidman (2005: 40) argues that "normative heterosexuality not only establishes a heterosexuality/homosexuality hierarchy but also creates hierarchies among heterosexualities". In telling Carrie that I am in a relationship, I produce myself as a good sexual citizen (Seidman, 2005) whose

respectability is enhanced by good kinship relations to the male members of her family.

My reflections on my response to Carrie reveal the firm grip of regulatory heteronorms in this specific instance. Carrie was quite hostile towards feminism and feminists throughout the interview; she overtly addressed me as a man-hater which made me feel vulnerable. I did not want to occupy the space of a man-hater and consequently claimed normative heterosexuality by talking about my positive relationships with men. In doing so, I reproduced and reinforced heterosexist norms that I would otherwise seek to contest. In discussing her research with young women at school, Morris-Roberts (2004: 225) refers to a similar problematic: "rather than questioning and challenging 'compulsory heterosexuality' in school, I actually perpetuated it". My dialogue with Carrie exemplifies how heteronorms are drawn on and reproduced in talk, but also illustrates the violent workings of such norms in determining what is said and how. The 'feminist' who would like to think of herself as being critical of regulatory norms reproduces exactly that (heteronorms) in her talk. This is not to argue that critical thinkers have the ability to move beyond the regulatory force of norms. To the contrary, the passage highlights that heterosexual conventions are not easily escaped from. In this instance, the appellation of man-hater, which followed from my identification as feminist, quite literally *does* something by moving me away from feminist politics to a reaffirmation of heteronorms.

The dialogue with Carrie also demonstrates shifting power-relationships in the research process. There were several instances where I felt powerless and vulnerable due to my positioning as a feminist (chapter two). Sharing her feelings about agreeing to take part in the interview, Yvonne told me she was afraid of being seen as a feminist: "Even a –er, trying to- you coming here with erm, ask if we'd take part and

like (laughs) somebody said, 'oh, bloody skinhead (laughs) oh, hate men and de-de-de' and I'm one of them". Similar to Yvonne, I felt uneasy about being "one of them", but also felt hurt and ashamed about indirectly being described as a "bloody skinhead". The term "skinhead" conjures up associations with racism, extremism and refers to somebody who does not have any hair at all. I am not sure whether the figure of the "skinhead" represents the epitome of an unfeminine woman by referring to somebody who does not only have short hair, but no hair at all. On the whole, I was scared of being positioned as radical, extreme and transgressive and sought to undo this positioning by reinstalling exclusionary heteronorms.

Finally, another interesting aspect of my dialogue with Carrie relates to my feelings of unease in sharing my reaction to being interpellated as a man-hater. In transcribing the interview extract and in writing it up here, I cringe and feel embarrassed that I did not challenge the construction of feminists as man-haters and homosexuals. Moreover, I am imagining a room full of feminists - at a conference for example – who are outraged by my affirmation of heteronorms. This fantasy involves a fear of not being 'a good feminist', but also reveals my embeddedness in culturally widespread notions of feminists as dogmatic and harsh. Indeed, my fantasy about a group of feminists scolding me is not dissimilar from the interpretative repertoire on feminists as dogmatic (chapter four). While I reject such a portrayal of feminism on a more 'rational' level, my fears around discussing this interview extract indicate that I have 'taken on' cultural constructions of feminists as strict. My identification as a feminist, and the concurrent threat of being positioned as a man-hater and somebody who transgresses heteronorms, gave rise to a reaffirmation of heterosexual norms, but also laid bare my embeddedness in wider discourses which portray feminists as rigid.

6.3   Feminists as lesbians

Recalling the construction of feminists as unfeminine as well as man-hating, and situating the respondents' accounts in the heterosexual matrix, it is perhaps not surprising that twenty research participants connected feminism to lesbianism. The high number of respondents who link lesbianism with feminism further supports my broader argument that sexuality and heteronormativity structure negotiations and repudiations of feminism. However, writing about the construction of 'the feminist' also makes me feel uneasy. In describing how feminism becomes linked with unfemininity, man-hating and lesbianism, I cite stereotypical and exclusionary constructions of 'the feminist'. Even though I do so in an attempt to deconstruct these links, part of me feels uncomfortable about reiterating these associations. My discomfort emerges from the fact that I encouraged the research participants to openly talk about their associations with feminism, thereby creating a space where homophobic views could be voiced. The interviewees frequently cast the alleged lesbianism of feminists in a negative light, which I mostly left unchallenged. Similar to my reaction to the overt xenophobic remark that I discussed in chapter two, and my reaffirmation of heterosexist norms in the interview with Carrie, I did not openly critique the homophobic undertones of statements which subtly portrayed the supposed lesbianism of feminists as problematic. However, in providing a detailed account of cultural constructions of the feminist, and in reflecting upon my involvement in the upholding of heteronormative conventions, I hope that my analysis sheds light on the workings of regulatory norms in the context of young women's negotiations of feminism. A detailed account might add to our understanding of repudiations of feminism, providing an insight into how heterosexuality is reinstalled as the norm and homophobia reproduced.

Asking Louisa what she knew about the women's movement, she stated: "Not much. No, it always makes me think of les, of lesbians". Resonating with the empirical and historical accounts of the notion that feminists are lesbians, which I discussed at length in chapter one, Christine said that "lesbians are often associated with feminism". As discussed in chapter three, Elspeth explicitly talked about this stereotype by discussing her experiences: "feminists were supposed to be fat, ugly, can't get men, lesbians, wear sensible shoes, you know, rugby shirts, it is still out there". She continued by arguing that there are "a lot of stereotypes out there, and I think feminism and lesbianism are very very intertwined and I think there is still that image if you stand up for yourself you have to be gay". The culturally pervasive stereotype 'feminist = lesbian' also came to the fore in a false transcription of a statement Vicky made. The transcript reads: "Er, no. I would say lesbians are just lesbians, they have to be feminists". However, I listened to the tape again because the statement did not make any sense in the context of Vicky's preceding remarks. Rather than saying lesbians have to be feminists, Vicky actually challenged widespread beliefs and claimed that "they <u>don't</u> have to be feminists". While Vicky mumbled occasionally during her interview, this statement was quite clearly pronounced. The attribution of lesbianism to feminists did not occur once, but several times in transcripts that were produced by the professional transcription service I employed for twelve interviews. I, the feminist researcher, was for example turned into a lesbian by supposedly stating: "to me as a gay woman [...]". However, I did not introduce myself as gay. I think that these slips in the transcriptions are significant because they resonate with widely held beliefs that feminists are lesbian, even when these have been called into questions in specific instances.

Several research participants used rhetorical constructions that allowed them to distance themselves from the stereotypical perception of feminists as lesbians while referring to them at the same time. Heather discussed a teacher's remark about feminists, stating "this is horrible but he went 'They are all vegan lesbians'". Heather distances herself from her teacher by describing his statement as "horrible". She signals that it is not her who thinks this way by speaking through her teacher. Heather's portrayal of her teacher's views as "horrible" could either be interpreted as a critical negotiation of the stereotype that feminists are vegan lesbians, or as a disclaimer that enables her to ward off the possible criticism that she is homophobic while making the statement at the same time.

Miranda's claim about common perceptions of feminists also lends itself to various readings: "I know it is so wrong, but just because, I didn't know much about feminism and anything that I ever heard about that was in connection with – being lesbian. And I know that it's way wrong, but yeah". Miranda's repeated insistence "that it's way wrong" and her use of past tense signal that she seeks to reject stereotypical depictions of feminism and is aware of the homophobic implications that the portrayal of feminism as lesbianism potentially has. Paralleling my reading of Heather's statement, Miranda's claim can be interpreted as both critiquing common views of feminism, but also as a disclaimer which perpetuates the culturally entrenched notion that feminists are gay, and that this is somewhat problematic.

Rhiannon explicitly critiqued widespread perceptions that feminists are lesbians. Having challenged this prejudice, Rhiannon however made a slip in a subsequent statement where she used the term 'feminist' instead of 'lesbian':

> I don't think, well I personally don't particularly go for that whole butch idea which some people do and some people think that makes you more of a lesbian. I just think actually between you, me and the tape I sometimes think well that is odd because some, like some butch feminists I know, ones that are into butch women or women that are butch I kind of think, well wait a minute, who's the real lesbian here because I like sleeping with women.

Rhiannon's use of the word "butch feminist" instead of "butch lesbian" bespeaks the pervasiveness of the 'feminist-as-lesbian' cultural figure. Paralleling my point in section one that portrayals of feminists as unfeminine involve constructions of conventional femininity, Rhiannon's implicit allegation that butch lesbians are not "real lesbians" equally delimits proper objects of 'lesbian' desire (for critical perspectives see Munt, 1998). By quoting Rhiannon's statement here, I sought to illustrate the pervasiveness of the collapsing of feminism with lesbianism, even amongst research participants who openly challenged this stereotype.

While the link between feminism and lesbianism was established, but also 'undone' at different stages in the interviewees, Carla overtly argued against the pervasive assumption that feminists are lesbians:

> I know that there are stereotypes that dykes or gay women will be more feminist than anyone [...] it's not true you know, it's not because you are a lesbian that you, you are very prone to feminism and you are fighting for all the rights, and demonstrating and carrying banners, no, it's not true.

In referring to the stereotype that gay women are more feminist than anyone, and subsequently distancing herself from it by arguing that "it's not true", Carla critiques the assumption that lesbians are feminists and vice-versa. As opposed to Heather and Miranda, Carla's negotiation of the stereotype 'lesbian = feminist' is less ambiguous. Her statement does not contain any disclaimers, but seeks to disrupt the association of lesbianism with feminism by explicitly calling it a "stereotype" and by stating twice that it is "not true".

Reflecting the heterosexist logic that I identified in the construction of feminists as unfeminine and manly, lesbians were depicted in parallel ways. Resonating with Esterberg's (1996: 276) research on a group of lesbians in the United States, "the coding of lesbians as not feminine and therefore in some way masculine predominated". Louisa talked about a lesbian friend of hers who went dating.

According to Louisa, the lesbians she met were "these hardcore women who either look like men, or, yeah, they all looked like men, I think, or these man-women, I don't know how I should describe that". Louisa's use of the construction "either/or" implies that she intended to list several traits of lesbians. However, Louisa refers to lesbians' supposed masculinity three times in her statement: lesbians "either look like men", or "looked like men", or are "man-women". Louisa's reiterative portrayal of lesbians as manly evokes the myth of the "mannish lesbian" (Newton, 1984) which represents "the most enduring characteristic" ascribed to homosexual women (Blackman and Perry, 1990: 74; Richardson, 1996: 4). Concurrent with historical and cultural views of lesbians' alleged masculinity as pathological (ibid.), Louisa constructs her friend as "totally normal, you'd never know that she's a lesbian". I suppose that Louisa regards her friend as "normal" because she does not look (and perhaps act) manly. Louisa's statement that you would never know her friend was gay reflects the cultural logic that any deviance from conventional femininity signals lesbianism (Frye, 1992: 125). Harking back to my argument about the depiction of femininity as a bodily characteristic, the belief that somebody is lesbian might primarily emerge from *visual* markers.

The heterosexist construction of feminists as lesbians, and of both as unfeminine and manly, also transpired through Julia's claim that she would not call herself "*a* feminist", but describe herself "*as* feminist". Julia sought to distance herself from feminism by using the adjective rather than the noun. Towards the end of the interview, she explained why she was reluctant to identify as *a* feminist: "And, I am, I think I am actually eager to make an effort to still appear feminine, to be lesbian and still feminine, than to be lesbian and feminist". Julia constructs femininity and feminism as mutually exclusive by juxtaposing being "feminine" with "being

feminist". Lesbianism and feminism are collapsed in Julia's statement because she does not explore the possibility of being lesbian, feminist and feminine. Indeed, several passages of Julia's talk illustrate that she connected lesbianism to manliness. Julia expressed unease about being regarded a manly woman because of her lesbianism. As Newton already argued 25 years ago, "[m]any lesbians' connection to the mannish lesbian was and is painful" (also see Blackman and Perry, 1990). 'Catching' herself engaging in "macho-like" behaviour, Julia told me about her concerns: "Oh God, am I doing this because I am lesbian, or something?" She continued by arguing: "I don't want to be a woman about whom one thinks: 'She's is quite manly – she's like a guy – this woman – this woman – but she is like a guy!'" When I asked her what exactly she thought was bad about being viewed as a manly woman, she replied: "Yeah, like a guy – it's the worst for a woman, to be like a guy".

Julia's identification as lesbian troubles the heteronormative chain of equivalence between sex/gender/desire to an extent that Julia is concerned about being or acting manly. Julia regards instances of "macho-like" behaviour as a sign of her supposed manliness which, I propose, arises from her sexual attraction to women. Julia's negotiation of feminism and lesbianism as involving mannishness, and her discomfort about being "like a guy", reveal that heterosexual conventions underlie her statement. The link between feminism and lesbianism, and the collapsing of the two as signifying manly behaviour demonstrate the ways in which Julia's negotiation of feminism is embedded in the heterosexual matrix.

Several lesbian research participants distanced themselves from 'unfeminine' lesbians. Barbara told me that she really liked the TV series *The L-word* because it depicts "really great beautiful women, so like nothing to do with cliché lesbians, and there are these really attractive, beautiful women, who just love women, which is

great, which you can actually identify with". *The L-word* offers her a representation of lesbians that she embraces. As Esterberg (1996: 275) argued – long before the launch of *The L-word* – "glamorous representations of lesbians reflect progress toward lesbian's acceptance in a heterosexist society; yet, by focusing on lesbian chic – lesbians who don't 'look like' lesbians – these images both distort and depoliticize lesbianism". Undine also mentioned that she enjoyed watching *The L-word*. She made this statement after having distanced herself from "lesbianlesbians" by claiming that she found it hard to "deal with them". Barbara and Undine used the German words for "cliché lesbians" and "lesbianlesbians" to describe mannish lesbians who in an English-speaking context would probably be called 'butch'. Interestingly, there is no German translation for the terms 'butch' and 'femme'. The German research participants came up with alternative designations in their attempts to describe the figure of the 'mannish lesbian'. In Undine's case, the manly lesbian is a 'lesbianlesbian', arguably twice removed from the heteronorm: not only a lesbian, but a mannish lesbian, a 'lesbianlesbian'.

Importantly, not all lesbian respondents dis-identified with butch lesbians; Carla for example described herself as "basically a butch" (see chapter seven). In analysing the constructions of 'the feminist' as lesbian, and laying bare heteronormativity as an underlying principle, I do not mean to imply that heterosexual conventions were never troubled. As I demonstrated above, there were several instances where research participants challenged stereotypical views and/or heterosexual conventions. Interpreting broader cultural trends in the UK, Roseneil (2000: paragraph 3.8) actually argues that "we are currently witnessing a significant destabilisation of the hetero/homosexual binary" (paragraph 3.8). Referring to the "cultural valorising of the queer" (2000: paragraph 3: 15), Roseneil identifies a range

of queer tendencies which pose a threat to the normativity of heterosexuality. While she does not argue that we live in a post gay era, her argument cautions against theorising heteronormativity as a structuring force that leaves no room for agency and social change. As my performative approach will demonstrate more explicitly in the next chapter, heteronormative conventions structured the research participants' negotiations of feminism, but simultaneously gave rise to a range of performative acts which emerged from, but also troubled, heterosexist conventions.

Returning to the normalisation of heterosexuality at this stage however, heteronormativity was not only reproduced in negotiations of feminism, but was also depicted as normal in the interviews. In talking about her gay mother, Jessica claimed that she herself was "normal", meaning that she was dating men. Heterosexuality was naturalised and normalised in various ways. Susanne described herself as bisexual and talked about "normal sexuals" in referring to heterosexuals. Similarly, Carla explained that "we take the view of the gay person but then we also are a normal person". Using the term "normal" in relation to heterosexuality as distinct from homosexuality, inversely labels homosexuality as non-normal. Likening heterosexuality to 'normal sexuality' also occurred in Barbara's statement about 'straight' bars as "normal bars". Heterosexuality figures as normal in these accounts, whereas homosexuality is cast as deviating from the norm. These statements illustrate the mundane ways in which heterosexuality is produced as normal and ordinary in talk (also see Kitzinger, 2005). In discussing her lesbianism, Janina stated three times that she was not attracted to "men but to women". Rather than saying she was attracted to women, Janina reiterates a heterosexual logic in talking about her sexuality. By claiming that she is not attracted to "men but to women", she orients to and accounts for her positioning as female within the heterosexual matrix to subsequently carve out a space for her lesbianism.

Resonating with the normalisation of heterosexuality, the figure and fantasy of the lesbian frequently acquired abject-status in the talk of the research participants. According to Butler (1993: 3), subjects are formed through processes of abjection and the abject acts as the constitutive outside of the self. For example, heterosexuality configures itself through the abjection of homosexuality (1993: 111); the homosexual as abject figures as the other, "unsymbolisable, unspeakable, illegible" (1993: 190). Talking about her geography teacher who said that feminists were "all vegan lesbians" (also see chapter three), Heather continued by claiming that they "are not looked upon as people. Not that it is negative to call them what my geography teacher called them but that is, it's not taken, it's not looked upon as serious". Heather alludes to a perception of lesbians as somewhat non-human by arguing that "they are not looked upon as people". The abjection of homosexuality also finds expression in her statement through the avoidance of the term 'lesbian'. Heather uses pronouns ("they" and "them") when talking about lesbians, but does not mention the term. I suggest that the abject position of the 'lesbian' transpires through the absence of the signifier.

The notion of the 'abject' within feminist work is frequently traced back to Kristeva's (1982: 4) psychoanalytic view of the abject as that which "disturbs identity, system order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite". While I draw on Butler's conceptualisation of the abject, I briefly refer to Kristeva's work here because it sheds light on the affective dimensions of abjection. Kristeva's abject unsettles the Freudian 'ego', and is primarily understood in terms of bodily affect (Tyler, 2009: 80). For Kristeva (1982: 2), "[f]ood loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection". Kristeva's conceptualisation of abjection lends itself to analyses that seek to foreground affective dimensions. In critically exploring Kristeva's theorisation of the abject, and more

specifically subsequent feminist uses of the abject paradigm, Tyler (2009) however cautions against an uncritical adaptation of Kristeva's approach. She argues that analyses which draw on the concept of the abject frequently offer detailed insights into processes of abjection. This form of abject criticism however reinforces cultural processes of abjection. Rather than reiterating the violent fantasies that produce abjection, Tyler (2009: 87) advocates a different form of abject criticism that explores "the violent exclusionary forces operating within modern states: forces that strip people of their human dignity and reproduce them as dehumanised waste, the dregs and refuse of social life [...]". Tyler (2009: 95) also draws on Butler's understanding of abjection by arguing that her engagement with Kristeva's abject theory is its "most thorough feminist challenge". I concur with Tyler and believe that Butler offers a useful tool to understand contemporary exclusionary forces. Butler regards the subject as constituted through abjection and exclusion; the process of abjection is central to her notion of subject formation. Consequently, Butler's abject does not reproduce exclusionary processes. By regarding the abject as the constitutive outside of the subject, the abject is always-already a part of the subject. It is in this sense that I understand the respondents' constructions of lesbians, who are portrayed as less than human, as processes of abjection.

The abjection of female homosexuality was hinted at in Undine's description of "Kampflesben"[43] as saying: "I am here, the Kampflesbe and er, I don't know and you can all kiss my a – and I am so absolutely cool and I am not a human being, but I am somehow, I represent a position". Is it a coincidence that Undine portrays the Kampflesbe as not being a human being? Or is it indicative of the abject status of the Kampflesbe within heteronormative constellations? Seidman (2005) outlines the triple

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[43] To recap, Kampflesbe is a derogative German term and literally translates to 'fighting lesbian'.

threat that lesbians pose to the heteronormative patriarchal order: "[a]s a perceived threat to men's dominance, to a conventional dichotomous gender order, and to a norm of the heterosexual family that has relied on the domestic labour of women, the lesbian is a truly menacing figure". Crucially, female homosexuality did not *always* seem to signify abjection. Resonating with Roseneil's (2000) identification of queer tendencies, Elspeth claimed that "it's a great time to be a gay woman". In a slightly different context, Rhiannon stated that her friends regarded her bisexuality as "really normal". Frequently however, the figure of the lesbian, and particularly the lesbian feminist was configured as abject. Paralleling Heather's attempt to avoid mentioning 'the l-word', Roxana spoke about a feminist teacher of hers who "wasn't in a relationship with a male". Roxana indicated that her teacher was lesbian, but did not use the term. In parallel with Janina's description of her homosexuality, Roxana inversely portrays lesbianism as not being "in a relationship with a male". Roxana's avoidance of the terms lesbian, homosexual or gay could represent an attempt to stay away from more explicit language that could be used against her as signifying homophobia. Roxana's avoidance of the term lesbian could also indicate that a woman's desire for another woman is something that is haunted by a certain unreality and unthinkability. This was expressed in Lara's claim about her realisation that she liked women. She thought that a sexual desire for women "cannot be part of me at all". Lara experienced homosexuality as something that had to be split from her self. It is other and unrepresentable as Julia's account of having difficulties in "finding a language" for her lesbianism demonstrates.

6.4   The figure of 'the feminist': of haunting and sticky stereotypes

The abject-status of lesbianism, and the research participants' association of feminism with lesbianism support McRobbie's (2003: 133) claim that feminism is abjected in the

contemporary postfeminist climate (chapter four). The abject-status of the figure of the

feminist found further expression in respondents' inability to provide examples for the

'feminist as unfeminine, man-hating, and lesbian' stereotype. Christine did not know

where her views of feminists came from: "people talking about, people's stories you

hear maybe, I think it is a very subconscious, kind of unconscious process, I don't

know where they come from really, a bit worrying". Christine's use of the words

"subconscious" and "unconscious" point to the phantasmatic nature of the figure of the

feminist. Gertrud told me that she had the feeling that feminists thought they were

better than men. She continued by stating "but it's only a feeling, I mean, I have never

experienced that myself anywhere". Gertrud's statement also refers to a dimension

which is beyond the grasp of reasoning by talking about her perceptions of feminists as

being "a feeling" and as something she herself has never experienced. Equally, Ella

stated that "strong feminists tend to look down on men" but told me: "I can't think of

any to be honest". The figure of the feminist as a man-hater figures in Ella's perception

of feminists, but escapes her mind when she is asked to apply her statement to her

experiences. Equally, Undine distanced herself from feminists who say "I don't want

anything to do with men", but claimed that "I mean I can't, I am bad at giving

examples I have to say, erm, I don't know". In parallel with Gertrud and Ella, Undine

portrays feminists as hostile towards men, but cannot name any instances of such

behaviour. The trope of the feminist, connected to unfemininity, man-hating, and

lesbianism, figures prominently in the research participants' accounts but continually

disappears from sight when related to actual experiences.

Talking about her mental picture of feminists, Caroline stated: "I don't know

how these images come about, I am thinking [pause]. I don't know, and actually, I

really can't think of a concrete, relatively well-known feminist who corresponds to

that. But I would still always say it". Carolina does not know where her image of feminists comes from, but nevertheless holds on to its mythical construction. The figure seems to haunt the interviews – it is frequently evoked but yet it repeatedly escapes the grasp of reality: it is strongly felt to be there, but does not materialise when the respondents are asked to provide specific examples. As I have argued above, the construction of the feminist as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian gives rise to feelings of discomfort because it destabilises the heteronormative order. As a figure that is perceived to be transgressive, the feminist has to be repudiated and kept at a safe distance. Recalling Butler's psychoanalytic considerations on abjection and on processes of subject-formation more broadly, the figure of the feminist acts as a constitutive outside of the heteronormative order. It haunts the interviews because it is always-already there; as a constitutive outside it is also inside and therefore cannot be discarded. As Fuss (1991: 3) argues, [h]eterosexuality can never fully ignore the close psychical proximity of its terrifying (homo)sexual other, any more than homosexuality can escape the equally insistent social pressures of heterosexual conformity. Each is *haunted* by the other [...]" (emphasis added). Butler (1993: 125) equally argues that "heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome, that its effort to become its own idealisations can never be finally or fully achieved, and that it is consistently *haunted* by that domain of sexual possibility that must be excluded for heterosexualised gender to produce itself" (emphasis added). Paralleling Fuss' and Butler's psychoanalytic accounts of homosexuality as the constitutive outside of heterosexuality, which haunts the heteronormative order, I view the spectral existence of the feminist as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian as that which has to be forcefully repudiated in the accounts of the research participants, but which nevertheless haunts them.

Even when respondents realised that there was a discrepancy between their feelings about feminism on the one hand and their knowledges of it on the other hand, they were reluctant to reconsider their views. To the contrary, the myth of the unfeminine, man-hating, lesbian feminist was instead reinstalled. Stella portrayed feminism as a movement that leaves out men, but then stated "okay, I mean I actually can't give you a concrete example now, because, again, it is only that which I believe to know, erm, that, erm [laughter] it's getting complicated, yes, that there are areas that men aren't granted access to". Stella is aware that she only believes to know something; however, she subsequently reconfigured her belief as a truth claim by describing feminists as having "hobbies or like simply men-free zones or something like that, which I just find a bit ridiculous". Without being able to mention any specific instances of feminists advocating men-free zones, Stella refers to feminists' supposed exclusionary practices towards men as "ridiculous". While Stella acknowledges her lack of "concrete examples", the feminist-as-man-hating is evoked in her account.

A similar dynamic of preserving the mythical construction of the feminist took place in Christine's interview. Christine portrayed feminists as unfeminine and then stated: "I have one or two friends who you know, challenge that, my stereotype of that, but I think as a whole my stereotype would be that perhaps, not that they are less feminine, or they maybe somewhat less feminine, typically feminine". Christine has two feminist friends who challenge the stereotype and yet she adopts a conventional perspective by explaining that she would still tend to regard feminists as "somewhat less feminine, typically feminine". Christine acknowledges the stereotypical nature of her perceptions, but nevertheless portrays feminists in such ways. Her perception of feminists is not altered by her realisation that her feminist friends contradict her views, but is instead evoked. Stella's and Christine's affirmations of mythical constructions of

the feminist could be interpreted as an attempt to preserve the spectre of the unfeminine man-hater as the constitutive outside of normative femininity.

Interestingly, and in support of my argument about the constitutive role of the figure of 'the feminist' which haunts heteronormative constellations, the construction and preservation of the "feminist-as-lesbian" is also a feature of how second-wave feminism is remembered in academic feminism[44] (Hesford, 2005: 228). Hesford argues that the sign of the 'feminist-as-lesbian' first appeared at the turn of the last century and then re-appeared in the 1970s (also see chapter one). The sign, argues Hesford is also prevalent today:

> As a metacultural sign, a sign that transgresses ostensibly discrete discursive realms (such as popular culture, mass media, subcultural feminist zines, academic cultural memory manifested in concepts and terms like 'essentialism', for example), the figure of the feminist-as-lesbian is evidence, I argue, of a kind of remembering – a collective cultural remembering of the second wave movement (ibid.).

Crucially in relation to my argument, Hesford claims that the 'feminist-as-lesbian' haunts academic feminism today. Drawing on Derrida, she argues that haunting is "intrinsic to every dominant social and political order because it is a sign of that which has been forcibly expunged or evacuated from that order" (229). In understanding the figure of the 'feminist-as-lesbian' as haunting academic feminism, Hesford (2005: 238) refers to the challenges that second wave feminism made to the "socio-cultural institution of heterosexuality – challenges that are not yet over". Extrapolating from Hesford's insightful analysis, I argue that the configuration of the 'lesbian-as-feminist' as haunting and threatening works in similar ways in the young women's accounts. The myth of feminists as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian haunts us precisely because it still challenges conventional constructions of femininity and heterosexuality.

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[44] The relationship between 'second-wave feminism' – as a multifaceted movement – and lesbianism is complex. See Hark's (1996) critical discursive history on the changing relationship between 1960s and 1970s feminism and lesbianism in Germany.

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We can further understand the pervasiveness of the myth of the 'feminist-as-lesbian' if we recall Ahmed's (2004b) work on the economy of affects more broadly and the attribution of certain feelings to objects more specifically (see chapter three). Arguing that feelings are produced as effects of circulation and do not reside in objects, Ahmed draws on performativity theory to demonstrate how affects align themselves with objects by sticking to bodies. Through repetition, 'unfemininity', 'man-hating', and 'lesbianism' are attached to feminism; feminism becomes a sticky sign that therefore evokes a chain of associations which have become intrinsic to the sign through reiteration. The stereotype of the ugly, man-bashing, homosexual feminist comes into existence through repeated reiterations and produces that which it seeks to designate every time it is named. Disturbingly then, my interviews represent sites where the sign of the feminist is evoked as sticky and where the stickiness of the sign is augmented. However, my analysis and deconstruction of the links between feminism, unfemininity, man-hating and lesbianism also seeks to render these associations less sticky by – quite literally - disentangling them.

Ahmed's performative approach to the binding effects of values as they become associated with specific signs, explains why the stereotype of the 'feminist' is not "just a stereotype" (Roxana). Recalling Ahmed's account of the bear becoming fearsome to the child (chapter three), the negative affect which sticks to 'feminism' is that which turns numerous research participants away from it. Feminist journalists and researchers claim that negative media representations and stereotypes of feminism render the movement unpopular amongst young women (Kailer and Bierbaum; Rhode 1995; Bulbeck 1997). Eight research participants rejected feminism for its negative connotations. Ahmed's conceptualisation of emotions as performative and as creating the very boundaries they presuppose sheds light on this process. Yvonne argued that

she would be "scared to be around [feminism]" which reveals the role of affect in relationships with feminism. The emotion of fear becomes attached to the sign of feminism and subsequently makes Yvonne turn away from it. Sara claimed that the term 'feminist' has "a bit of a stigma on it". "If you – if you- if- the rare time you do speak about it, that's what – that's what they conjure up in their mind". Sara stated that "it is just that word". It was however that word and the negative connotations attached to it- that made several research participants turn their back on feminism.

The figure of the unfeminine, man-hating, lesbian feminist provokes discomfort and gives rise to repudiations because of the negative affects sticking to it and its transgressiveness within a heteronormative order. Heather told me that "the view of feminists, the stereotype of them would stop me from calling myself one". Similarly, Christine said she would not label herself a feminist because "there are still some negative associations attached to feminism". In line with Ahmed's argument, stereotypes are not simply stereotypes. Emotions stick to stereotypes and align themselves with the figure of the unfeminine, man-hating, lesbian feminist through reiteration. This figure is performatively brought into existence. As signifying that which challenges heterosexual conventions – unfemininity, hostility towards men and women's desire for women the 'feminist' constitutes a threat to heterosexual norms and therefore has to be kept at a distance. By representing something that has to be repudiated under a regime of heterosexuality, the 'feminist' acts as a constitutive outside of the heterosexual matrix. Due to its status as outside, but also inside (Fuss, 1991), the 'feminist-as-lesbian' haunts the young women's accounts because it cannot be entirely expunged. A re-conceptualisation of the figure of the 'feminist' as a haunting, constitutive outside, but also as a 'sticky' stereotype which transports

emotions allows us to shed light on the affective dimensions of rejections of feminism which take place under a regime of heterosexuality.

6.5   Conclusion

Resonating with the literature that I reviewed in chapter one and which pointed to the widespread perception of feminists as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian, this chapter demonstrated that the research participants constructed 'the feminist' in parallel ways. Seeking to investigate this portrayal of feminists by regarding their negative reputation as emerging from heterosexual norms, this chapter sought to enhance our understanding of young women's repudiations of feminism as being structured by a heterosexist logic. By not only critically analysing the research participants' accounts, but also reflecting on *my* response to the appellation 'man-hater', I hope that this analysis contributes to our understanding of how sexuality structures knowledges more generally, and negotiations of feminism in particular. In this vein, I will continue to discuss the theme of sexuality and heteronormativity at the beginning of the next chapter, but will do so by employing my performative approach more explicitly. It is my hope that the performative lens will enable me to discern the ways in which sexuality, but also 'race' and class, mediate how young women relate to feminism.

7   Chapter Seven

Performing femininity: the intersections of sexuality, 'race' and class with feminist dis-identification

"[O]ur examples suggest that many performances of gender will involve the affirmation of heterosexual identity and/or the rejection of homosexuality, because of the heteronormative assumption that heterosexuality is an indispensable element of 'proper' femininity or masculinity" (Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 73).

"The 'incitement to discourse' and the materialisation of bodies in the world are both processes: they hence involve the negotiation, and renegotiation of categories and norms that are never fully fixed in place, though at times it may feel as if they are [...]" (Ahmed, 2002: 55).

Is performing (normative) femininity a crucial component of negotiations of feminism? This is one of the central questions that this chapter seeks to address. While I outlined various reasons for young women's dis-identification with feminism such as the role of the postfeminist cultural climate, individualism and neoliberalism, this chapter argues that performative citations of femininity are indeed a central element of the research participants' discussions of feminism. Given the culturally pervasive construction of feminists as lesbians, man-haters and unfeminine women (see chapter one and six), the first part of this chapter will show that femininity and sexuality were variously discussed, taken up, and troubled in talk about feminism. As we saw in the previous chapter, numerous research participants distanced themselves from feminism as connoting homosexuality and/or unfemininity. Here, I will make the argument that such repudiations constitute performances of gender and sexuality. Importantly, the view of feminism as connoting man-hating and/or lesbianism did not always give rise to performances of normative femininity and also did not lead to a rejection of feminism in all cases. I will stress that the links between a portrayal of feminists as unfeminine; a performative citation of normative femininity; and a repudiation of feminism have to be left open.

As I argued in chapter one, performances of femininity are racialized as well as classed and intersect with feminist dis-identification in multiple ways. By demonstrating how gender and sexuality, but also 'race' and class were taken up, not taken up, or negotiated, the latter part of this chapter will argue that young women's locations mediate their relationships with feminism, albeit in complex ways. Drawing on Ahmed's (2002; 2004) performative conceptualisation of 'race', and a cultural approach to class more broadly[45], I will regard 'race' and class not as referencing essential, or pre-given characteristics, but as categories with a history that are constantly negotiated. This perspective allows me to illustrate the shifting nature of identities. However, my performative approach also has its limitations. For example, it only provides a partial account of identity constituting processes and this chapter will point to some of the challenges that are involved in applying the performative approach. Nevertheless, I hope that this approach will enable me to illustrate the various ways in which sexuality, 'race' and class matter, and come to matter, in negotiations of feminism.

7.1 Repudiations of feminism: performing heterosexual femininity

If feminism and femininity were overwhelmingly constructed as mutually exclusive, to what extent can we understand repudiations of feminism as performative acts of (normative) femininity? In chapter four, I discussed Miranda's attitudes towards feminism, demonstrating that they shifted and depended on what she constructed feminism to be. Miranda first voiced a positive opinion about feminism when talking about her experiences of reading feminist texts at university. She subsequently occupied a more negative stance, arguing that she associated feminism with "being

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[45] Walkerdine et al, 2001; Skeggs, 1997, b; 2004, 2005; Lawler 1999, 2005; Reay, 1997a; Devine & Savage, 2005; Savage et al., 2001.

lesbian" and "a short, butch woman, shouting at a man". When I asked her whether she would call herself a feminist, she stated:

> No, in some ways I think I am - I used to think that I am anti-feminist, but then, the more I find out about it, the more I think how good it is, so – kind of in-between. When I used to think that feminists are people who hate men and that women are better I just used to think that's a lot of rubbish because I am quite old fashioned, I like being, I like having a man as the boss of the house, being the strong one, being the leader, and the breadwinner of the house, the father figure, and I am like the tidy one, that cooks and cleans, I like that.

Mirroring her changing attitudes towards feminism, Miranda occupies an "in-between" space and subsequently uses past tense to describe how she felt about feminism before thinking about it more. Interpreting this passage in light of the interview as a whole, and the fact that Miranda by then knew that I identified as a feminist, I understand her use of past tense also as a rhetorical device. By safely locating her critical thoughts about feminism in the past, Miranda manages to voice negative stereotypes of feminism while simultaneously warding off potential criticism. This means that disclaimers can take various forms, and do not always cohere to the "I am not xy, but..." formula (van den Berg, 2003: 125). Miranda's claim of being "quite old fashioned" can be interpreted in a similar light: as a postfeminist moment that acknowledges changes in gender relations (thereby protecting herself against criticism) while simultaneously reinstating the "man as the boss in the house". As I demonstrated in chapter four, Miranda's use of postfeminist rhetoric allows her to take feminism into account – she knows she is old-fashioned – in order to reject a feminist perspective.

In relation to my research question of whether performing (normative) femininity is a component of negotiations of feminism, I am however more interested in demonstrating that Miranda takes a stance on feminism while doing femininity at the same time. After distancing herself from feminists as "man-haters" and calling feminism a "load of rubbish", Miranda cites traditionally feminine attributes: she wants a man who is the strong one, leader, and breadwinner while she is happy

cooking and cleaning. Miranda's negotiation of feminism goes hand in hand with an iteration of conventionally feminine markers. According to Cameron and Kulick (2003: 122), an analysis of the interplay between language, gender and sexuality should not ask "'who says it'" but inquire "'what does saying it – or not saying it produce'". Miranda's statement positions her in relation to feminism, but also serves as an accomplishment of femininity. Her response should not simply be viewed as reaffirming traditionally feminine attributes – although it also does that – but as an instance of doing femininity.

In making this argument, I am drawing on Butler's performativity theory (1999 [1990], 1993, 1997, a, b) to suggest a reading of Miranda's statement as not being expressive of a "true or abiding feminine essence or disposition" (1997b: 144), but as a performative that "produces retroactively the illusion that there is an inner gender core" (ibid.). Indeed, rejections of feminism frequently evoked a performative citation of femininity. Carrie distanced herself from feminism by describing feminists as constantly rioting women. She felt she did not need feminism and said: "Just stand strong and here I am, and what I am and stay being a woman and just, and not getting into this riot of … 'Well, I am as much a man as you [are]'. Because I am not, I am a woman and I do different things and I am comfortable with that". Reinforcing gender binarism (you are either a man or a woman) and doing femininity by claiming "I am a woman", Carrie distances herself from feminism by taking up femininity.

In arguing that Carrie 'takes up' femininity, I am not implying a voluntaristic subject, or an "I" that stands behind discourse (see chapter three). As Butler (1993: 225) reminds us, "the "I" only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated, to use the Althusserian term, and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the "I"". Equally important, iterability, "a regularized and constrained

repetition of norms" (1993: 94) is key to the workings of performatives and it is this repetition that enables a subject, that brings the subject into being. Performatives are therefore not to be understood as singular acts, but as "ritualized productions" (ibid.). In casting Miranda's and Carrie's statements as performances of femininity, I am therefore regarding them as elements in a long chain of repetitions whose power and authority depends upon the sedimentation of the past (Ahmed, 2004b: 92). Butler's (1993: 232) remarks on "girling" illustrate this point: she argues that naming a 'girl' "girl" initiates a process whereby the symbolic power of the term 'girl' "governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm. This is a "girl", however, who is compelled to "cite" the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject". In my reading, Miranda's and Carrie's negotiations of feminism figure as citations of gendered and gendering norms and form part of the ongoing process of "girling".

My analysis of performances of femininity in negotiations of feminism can therefore only provide a partial insight, or a snapshot, of how femininity constitutes itself: my reading is limited to singular moments and the focus on talk and text also means that the institution of gender through the stylization of the body escapes my analysis. Butler reminds us that "performativity is not just about speech acts. It is also about bodily acts" (Butler, 2004: 198). The body sometimes says more than what is uttered and self-display can augment, or undercut that which is explicitly stated. Butler (2006: 533-534) therefore claims that "[w]e can only understand the discursive scene of subject constitution in light of these problems of embodiment, social norms and visual signification, and within the temporal modalities of anticipation, desire, fear and the spatial modalities of constraint, support and incitement". In offering a reading of

Miranda's and Carrie's statements as performative, I am conscious that my analysis only provides a limited understanding of identity constituting processes.

Normative femininity was frequently performed in negotiations of feminism not only through a citation of conventionally feminine markers, but also through a rejection of homosexuality. To recall, Butler (1993: 225) argues that "heterosexualised genders form themselves through the renunciation of the possibility of homosexuality". Following Butler, I want to suggest that the repudiation of feminism as connoting lesbianism can be read as a performance of femininity. Heather told me she would not want to call herself a feminist because of the stereotypes attached to it:

> I think there is an element of feminists where people do consider them homosexual. Not always at all but I think there is that and I suppose, yeah I suppose I wouldn't want to be thought of as not heterosexual although if people did it wouldn't bother me too much because I know that I am erm so but no I wouldn't, I wouldn't want to be thought of as a feminist possibly, well, yes partly because I wouldn't want to be thought of as homosexual. I wouldn't want to be thought of as not caring, as not nurturing because that is part of my nature is nurturing yeah.

Alluding to the culturally established link between feminism and lesbianism, Heather says that she would not want to be thought of as a feminist out of fear of being regarded as homosexual. In making this statement, Heather goes back and forth between stereotyping feminists as lesbians on the one hand, and seeking to distance herself from this stereotype on the other. "People" view feminists as homosexual; "not always", but frequently enough for her to reject feminism "possibly" and "partly" because of its association with lesbianism. Heather corrects herself several times, probably out of fear of being regarded homophobic. The tortured nature of her statement indicates she is aware of the homophobic undertones of her claim which she seeks to weaken by trying to distance herself from lesophobia at the same time. Being regarded as lesbian "wouldn't bother her", and yet she fears the appellation homosexual.

Heather identifies as heterosexual and refrains from claiming feminism as a label that calls her sexual identification into question (vis-à-vis others). Heather's statement does not merely figure as a performance of heterosexuality but also of femininity. Cameron and Kulick (2003: 72) argue that "a performance of heterosexuality must always be in some sense a performance of gender, because heterosexuality requires gender differentiation". This link between heterosexuality and gender transpires in the last sentence of Heather's statement. Here she cites conventionally feminine qualities by expressing her wish of being regarded caring and nurturing. She fears that if people see her as homosexual, "part of her nature" will not be acknowledged. Heather links homosexuality to an absence of conventionally feminine qualities, mirroring and reproducing the construction of lesbians as man-like, and unfeminine (see chapter six). The possibility of homosexuality is experienced as a potential threat to her feminine "nature". Femininity is accomplished through an achievement of heterosexuality and a repudiation of homosexuality (see Butler, 1997b: 135).

I read Sara's explanation for why she would not call herself a feminist in a similar light:

> Because you have got this, this is going to sound really really bad now. You do...you do picture them [feminists] er, really short hair and are they lesbians? That is really, really bad er, pigeon hole but when you think of feminism you think that and the burning the bras and anti-men and which you don't – this is why you detach yourself from feminism.

Sara reiterates the stereotype of the short haired, lesbian, anti-men feminist arguing that "this is why you detach yourself from feminism". Her use of disclaimers such as "this sounds really really bad now"; her demonstrated awareness of stereotyping ("pigeon hole"); as well the impersonal "you" towards the end of the statement, imply that she is aware of making stigmatizing generalizations. This signalled awareness nevertheless enables her to reject feminism as lesbian and anti-men, allowing her to

uphold and reinforce stereotypes. What the statement however also does – through the repudiation of feminism as lesbianism – is to reinstate her as heterosexual and, following Butler, as feminine. If "masculinity and femininity in the heterosexual matrix are strengthened through the repudiations that they perform" (Butler, 1997b: 140), Sara's statement simultaneously figures as a repudiation of feminism, but also as an affirmation of her heterosexuality and femininity. In his conceptualization "[m]asculinity as homophobia", Kimmel (2004) also illustrates the link between gender identity and homophobia. He (2004: 188) argues that "homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood". In a similar vein, Sara's rejection of feminism as connoting lesbianism should be viewed not only as rejecting female homosexuality, but also as reconstituting her femininity.

Roxana's statement about feminism also figures as a performance of heterosexual femininity, albeit in more subtle ways. In telling me how she felt about feminism, Roxana said:

> I think the word feminist is a bit dated. I think something like women's movement, or something needs to be in place because you think er, you think of feminist, you think, of a particular...er, person, a particular lady the way she dresses and the way she looks, just the type of person she is. And really she's not, she's just...she's you think she's anti-men you know where really I'm not anti-men.

Roxana describes the feminist as a "particular lady" who dresses a certain way and who is "anti-men". Reading this statement in conjunction with the frequently made associations with feminism (see chapter 6), I argue that Roxana indirectly associates a lesbian woman with feminism. A woman who is anti-men might not like men, and, following a binaristic logic, therefore desire women (see chapter six). It is in this sense that I interpret Roxana's statement "I am not anti-men" as meaning that she is not lesbian. She affirms her heterosexuality through a repudiation of feminism as connoting man-hating and lesbianism. Paralleling my interpretation of Sara's statement, I also read Roxana's rejection of feminism as a performance of femininity.

Her emphasis on not being "anti-men" further implies that she is not transgressive, loud, noisy, radical, and demanding; in short, she is feminine by rejecting all those manly traits that are frequently associated with feminism (see chapter four and chapter six).

Butler's concept of melancholia (1997b) illuminates the process through which heterosexualised genders form themselves through the repudiation of homosexuality. In chapter three, I briefly reviewed the notion of melancholia, and the melancholic turn, as an account of how psychic space emerges as internal. Here, I recall the notion of melancholia as a psychoanalytic concept that allegorizes how gender is assumed through the repudiation of homosexual attachments. Heterosexual melancholy refers to the process whereby "feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed) through the incorporative fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love" (1997b: 146). This love is never grieved, but preserved through "heightened feminine identification" (ibid.), so that the heterosexual woman becomes the woman she never loved (147). If the woman is a woman because she never desired a woman, homosexual desire panics gender: "[i]f one is a girl to the extent that one does not want a girl, then wanting a girl will bring a girl into question" (Butler, 1997b: 136). It is in this sense that I read Heather's, Sara's, and Roxana's claims as accomplishments of heterosexuality, but also of femininity.

7.2   Discussing feminism: troubling heteronormative conventions

While this analysis illustrates that negotiations of feminism went hand in hand with performances of heterosexual femininity in some cases, the portrayal of feminism as connoting lesbianism was not always about accomplishing normative femininity. When I asked Julia about her interest in feminism, she claimed: "To be honest with you, I am pretty well-off because of my being lesbian". She explained that her being

lesbian was a stance she had to endure - vis-à-vis men and women – which involved feminist modes of behaviour, thereby establishing a link between feminism and lesbianism. She was however quick to distance herself from the slogan 'feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice' (for a critical discursive history on how this slogan travelled to and in Germany see Hark, 1996) by arguing that feminist thinking was also important to heterosexual spaces. Subsequently, she stated: "And, I then strangely belong to those women, but that then really has something to do with this being lesbian, who say 'I don't have a problem with men'. Erm, but- because it's somehow important to me, that it's not about man-hating, I mean, that loving women does not imply man-hating". Julia argued that she probably felt similar to a lot of women who think that "men are great", claiming "I also think men are great, I just don't want to go to bed with them. But, apart from that I find them also – sometimes I think they are obnoxious...". Julia explained she had become much more aware of sexism over the last few years. Towards the end of this part of the interview, she recounted that she felt irritated by men who sit across from her on the underground with their legs apart, taking up too much space.

In talking about her feminist consciousness, Julia first re-states she is lesbian, negotiating feminism from that position. Before actually discussing her feminist awareness, Julia however distances herself from the slogan 'feminism is the theory and lesbianism is the practice' and asserts that she is not a man-hater. Only then does she seem to be able to claim feminism as shaping her perception of men taking up too much space on the underground. Julia has to make various disclaimers (feminism does not always imply lesbianism and vice-versa; she is a lesbian 'but' not a man-hater) before occupying a pro-feminist stance. Her relationship with feminism is mediated by her sexuality and located within the heterosexual matrix.

Through her claim that she likes men, but does not want to go to bed with them, Julia accounts for her location as female within the heterosexual matrix (as a woman she is supposed to desire men). Indeed, Julia claims femininity in this statement because she does not only take up her positioning as female, but also embraces it – "men are great". She simultaneously carves out a space for her lesbianism by arguing that she likes men but does not want to go to bed with them. In negotiating feminism, Julia engages in a lot of discursive work to acquire a position from which she can discuss her feminist views as a lesbian. The use of various disclaimers allows Julia to portray herself as reasonable and counter culturally pervasive constructions of feminist lesbians as extreme and transgressive (see chapter six). However, Julia's discursive work mainly consists in making sure she is not perceived as a man-hater, 'even though' she is a lesbian who has feminist convictions. Julia's identifying as lesbian troubles heteronormative assumptions: she is a woman who likes men, and 'yet' she does not desire them sexually. She is a lesbian who has feminist views 'but' distances herself from the cultural logic that feminism – to be pro-women – implies lesbianism (see chapter six). This means that the link between a characterization of feminism as lesbian and anti-men on the one hand, and a citation of normative femininity on the other hand, has to be left open. In adopting a feminist stance as a lesbian, Julia's statement is doing subversive work since it distances her even further from heteronorms. However, by claiming that she likes men, Julia also accounts for, and takes up her positioning as feminine in the heterosexual matrix, thereby both subverting and reaffirming normative femininity.

Equally important, the culturally pervasive construction of feminism as anti-men did not always give rise to a rejection of feminism. This did not only become apparent in Julia's interview but also emerged from Rhiannon's account. Rhiannon

described herself as bisexual and identified with feminism. When I asked her whether she would call herself a feminist, she sought to occupy a position that allowed her to maintain an investment in feminism while distancing herself from man-hating. Rhiannon argued: "I try to be what I consider to be a good feminist which is not to kind of assume all men are bastards and shit at things you know bound to erm lie and cheat you know or just be erm unable to do things and I try and I, you know I'm very conscious of not assuming that about men". In discussing her feminist awareness, Rhiannon claims feminism whilst constructing herself as not against men. Again, Rhiannon's emphasis on liking men should be regarded as emerging from the heterosexual matrix, even though her identification as bisexual does not loyally reproduce it. Arguably, her support for feminism (and potentially also her bisexuality) calls her allegiance to men into question which Rhiannon attempts to recuperate through this statement. Asena also identified as a feminist but emphasized that "feminism to me does not mean fighting for women's rights and then losing one's femininity". Asena alludes to the construction of feminism and femininity as mutually exclusive 'but' claims feminism by simultaneously signalling an investment in femininity. Julia's, Rhiannon's and Asena's statements demonstrate that the association of feminism with lesbianism, man-hating or unfemininity give rise to complex negotiations of sexuality, femininity and feminism. Culturally pervasive constructions of feminism do not always evoke a performance of normative femininity or a rejection of the movement, but are embedded in the heterosexual matrix.

Indeed, the construction of feminists as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian meant that negotiations of sexuality and femininity were prevalent in the interviews, but that they were discussed, taken up, and troubled in different ways. In talking about

feminism, Carla[46] distanced herself from the assumption that lesbians tend to be feminist (see chapter six), and variously spoke from the positions of "girl" and "boy". When I asked her about her thoughts on feminism, she replied:"[...] er, what I think about – I am having a kind of maybe, a boyish point of view, even though I am a girl, a boyish point of view". In explaining why she would not describe herself as a "hundred percent feminist", Carla stated:

> And also because I see women as fragile things and sometimes they, going through hard stuff is not easy and I want to protect them. And, that's a reason why, like doing, like physical work or things like that. I would basically, if there is something difficult to do, I would do it, because I think I am physically stronger to do it, even though I am still a girl.

In telling me she wants to protect women by using the pronoun "them", Carla seemingly indicates that she does not see herself as a woman, "even though" she is "still a girl". Indeed, Carla told me that she did not "feel very feminine in general" and that she saw herself as what people saw her, "as a boy". Carla negotiated feminism, and in doing so took up differently gendered positions.

The interview with Carla cautions against assuming that identifications are stable and demonstrates the usefulness of a performative approach to gender and sexuality. In regarding identities as a constant doing, the performative approach allows us to theorize, and account for Carla's changing gender identification. While my analysis can only provide a partial insight into the complex citational processes through which identities construct themselves reiteratively, the performative lens enables an interpretation that can account for the various ways in which genders and sexualities were taken up and troubled in the interviews. A lot of discursive work went into discussions of feminism, evoking a range of performances of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, the various performances that occurred in the interviews were located in a specific cultural context. Heterosexual conventions structured the accounts

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[46] I use a feminine pseudonym and pronouns because Carla introduced herself with a woman's name.

of the research participants by delimiting what counted as normal, and what had to be negotiated.

7.3 Racialized and classed performances of femininity

The previous section demonstrated how sexuality and gender were variously performed in discussions of feminism with the aim of underpinning my argument about the central role of negotiations of normative femininity in feminist dis-identification. Here, I would like to deepen this analysis by delineating the different ways in which identities were not only gendered and sexualized but also racialized and classed. Having argued that femininities should be seen as classed and racialized performances (chapter one), I will now investigate how attitudes toward feminism were mediated by racial and class background. Paralleling my finding that sexuality (and gender) intersect with feminist dis-identification, I will show that 'race' and class played a role in negotiations of feminism, but did so in complex ways.

In writing this chapter, and indeed analyzing and theorizing the data, I am aware that my decision to take heteronormativity as my point of departure is vulnerable to the criticism of privileging one vector of power over others. My focus on heterosexual hegemony, both in chapter six but also in the preceding analysis of negotiations of feminism as performative citations of (normative) femininity, emerges from my data and research topic that gave rise to numerous negotiations of gender and sexuality. This however means that processes of racialization and formations of class are somewhat subsumed under, or portrayed as parallel to, the domain of power of heteronormativity. It also implies that a broader range of identities and differences, including for example health status, do not constitute the focus of this analysis. There is a tension between the foregrounding of sexuality and the acknowledgement of multiple forms of oppression - which comes to the fore in this chapter.

Butler (1993: 18-19) stresses the impossibility of thinking through "contemporary power in its complexity", and points out that any analysis which claims to grasp every aspect of power risks "epistemological imperialism" by presuming that a certain writer is able to understand and explain the messiness of the social. In her anti-foundationalist vein, Butler recalls the benefits of the necessary incompleteness of analyses by pointing out that they will give rise to a set of criticisms that call fundamental presuppositions into question. "Taking the heterosexual matrix or heterosexual hegemony as a point of departure will run the risk of narrowness, but it will run it in order, finally, to cede its apparent priority and autonomy as a form of power" (Butler, 1993: 19). The tension between my focus on heteronormativity on the one hand, and the acknowledgement of various vectors of power on the other hand, will remain; hopefully, the existence of this tension will call its own fundamental premises into question, forming part of an ongoing epistemic project. As an illustration, one can re-read some of the statements I have analysed as not only pointing to femininity and sexuality, but also to class. Class is made relevant in Roxana's description of the feminist as a "particular lady" who dresses a certain way. The term "lady" does not only point to a woman, but to a woman of a certain, supposedly higher class background. Equally, Miranda's claim that she wants to have a husband who is the "breadwinner of the house" also calls for a reading that attends to the classed dimension of her statement as expressed through the term "breadwinner" and the ability to live on one income.

Exploring the complex intersections between gender, 'race', and class in feminist dis-identification further, I would like to discuss Sam's statement. Sam was one of the few women who would call herself a feminist without using any qualifiers, but stated it took her a while because: "And I think I probably had to work at moving

from the —where you- where you're more as an individual erm, especially because I am a white middle-class woman and er, erm, and always been quite confident myself". Sam points out that her privileged status in relation to class and 'race' might have kept her from claiming feminism at first because she was less aware of structural constraints. Following Ahmed's (2002; 2004c) argument about the performativity of 'race', I do not read Sam's statement as referencing essential characteristics or a 'pregiven' 'race', but as constituting a moment in an ongoing process of racialization. Ahmed (2004c: 46) reminds us that "race is brought into existence by being repeated over time"; the performativity of 'race' depends on the reiteration and the repetition of norms and conventions. 'Race' is an effect of racialization and the history of racism; it is not the origin or cause of racialization, but its outcome. In processes of racialization, skin colour is for example invested with meaning so that 'black' and 'white' figure as racial identities that mark bodies "as the site of racialization itself" (Ahmed, 2002: 46). This perspective on 'race' as processual rather than pregiven has the strength of avoiding essentialist conceptualisations, but also points to the limitations of this analysis. In congruence with my argument about the reiterative and embodied nature of performatives, my reading can only provide a partial understanding of how "bodies materialise 'through' assuming racial categories" (Ahmed, 2002: 54). Sam's statement can be read as one, amongst many negotiations and renegotiations of racialized norms that mark her as "white".

In her critical study on whiteness, Frankenberg (1993: 168-169) observes that the feminist women she interviewed frequently described themselves in terms of political identities, such as 'race' and class. While (racial) identity is potentially politicised through such statements, Frankenberg warns us that this form of introspection risks becoming an end in itself. If introspection is valued as much as

social change, race cognizance – such as "I am white" – is individualised and turns into a private journey, rather than a collective or social one. Frankenberg acknowledges that statements such as Sam's are not power-evasive because they witness an awareness of white privilege. However, she argues that the simple acknowledgement of being white is not power-strategic. The statement 'I am white' does not open up ways to reach towards a society that might move beyond racism. While I drew on Sam's statement to demonstrate how whiteness is performatively produced in negotiating feminism, Frankenberg's argument adds a valuable caveat to my discussion.

Explaining why she would be reluctant to call herself a feminist, Yvonne also assumed a racialized and classed position: "And I think – and label, you know, we live in a society where a label is attached to a lot of things anyway and you know, worry about a label as being a black single mother so I don't want to be a black single feminist mother". Yvonne's statement equally illustrates how certain locations – in her case the "black single mother" mediate claims for feminism. She negotiates her racial identity by assuming the category "black". Socio-economic background is also at issue in Yvonne's statement through the reference to being a "single mother". Several authors have pointed to the classed constructions of lone parenting where single working-class mothers have to confront hurtful stereotypes of "welfare scrounging single mothers" (Walkerdine et al., 2001: 189, also Skeggs, 1997). Most recently, Tyler (2008: 26) made this point when discussing media discourses on the figure of the 'chav': "[w]hilst young unwed working-class mothers have always been a target of social stigma, hatred, and anxiety, the fetishisation of the chav mum within popular culture has a contemporary specificity and marks a new outpouring of sexist class disgust". Yvonne's statement indicates that her ability to claim feminism is

compromised by her status in relation to 'race', class and parenting; the label "black single mother" already carries with it a stigma that Yvonne fears would be added to through the label 'feminist'.

Yvonne's negotiation of and orientation to her working-class background was representative for how working-classness was done in the interviews more generally: it was not named explicitly. Indeed, there were few instances of talk that expressed a class identity (such as 'I am upper/working/middle-class') across the data. This is partly related to the fact that it was not always appropriate to ask research participants direct questions about their class background. The respondents had agreed to take part in a study on gender-related issues and were not readily prepared to talk about their socio–economic status. Class was perceived as a very personal subject whose discussion provoked unease, particularly in relation to the participants' own sense of identity (Savage et al., 2001: 880). The few instances where class identity was made explicit occurred in interviews with women who described themselves as middle or upper class, such as Sam. This finding resonates with the well-known phenomenon that working-class women have an investment in not being recognised as such (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine et al., 2001). According to Walkerdine et al. (2001: 40) working-class women's talk is 'infused with a desire to distance themselves from the painful position of being "one of them". "They" were the "scruffs", the rough working class, the "underclass", the poor, the homeless or the hopeless". In relation to Yvonne's statement, I argue that her utterance can be viewed as an instance of doing class even if she does not explicitly express her class identity: class is made relevant by talking about negative labels attached to "single mothers" and by assuming and negotiating this positioning. In making this argument, I am drawing on Walkerdine et al's (2001: 14) understanding of class as a 'discursively produced category and

therefore a site of struggle and contestation' and a cultural approach to class more broadly.

Difficulties in conceptualising social class categories have motivated feminist theorists and sociologists to regard class as culturally produced (Walkerdine et al., 2001; Skeggs, 1997, b, 2004, 2005; Lawler 1999, 2005; Reay, 1997a; Devine & Savage, 2005; Savage et al., 2001). In summarising various criticisms of the concept of class, Reay (1997a: 225) claims that the "categories 'working' and 'middle class' are viewed as increasingly simplistic and irrelevant to sociological thinking both within and without feminisms". Social class categories ignore the multiplicity of women's positioning and theories of social class still operate with a "dichotomy between 'working' and 'middle' class" (ibid.). Reay also points to the problems of regarding class as a location, rather than as a process (ibid.). Equally, Skeggs (1997b: 126) critiques "mere" descriptions of class by arguing that they constitute processes of re-categorisation that can be read as the 'truth' and do not account for the constant production of class and the way classifications might be challenged.

Reay and Skeggs have therefore turned to the work of Bourdieu by arguing that his social theory offers a useful theoretical framework to conceptualize class (also see Lawler 1999; Devine and Savage, 2005; Savage et al., 2001). Understanding class as dynamic rather than static, Bourdieu's work is said to account for the ways in which class is lived, formed and challenged, encompassing processes of inclusion and exclusion. His 'sociology of practice' (1977) and the concepts of field and habitus regard inequalities as the outcome of the interplay between embodied practices and institutional processes (Devine & Savage, 2005: 13). In tandem with a "recent revival in the cultural dimensions of class" (Devine & Savage, 2005: 4)[47], I regard class as an

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[47] Devine's and Savage's text also contains an historical overview of sociological debates on class in the UK.

ongoing process and negotiation that 'nevertheless' has very 'real', material consequences since culture is understood to have 'material force' (Skeggs, 2005: 63). As Butler (1993: 17) reminds us in relation to her arguments about the central role of norms and conventions in processes of materialisation, a cultural approach does not dispute materiality, but brings to the fore the conditions under which it is formed. It is in that sense that a cultural approach to class should not be understood as doing away with material differences, but as attending to the processes in which class is produced and comes to matter (also see Butler, 1998). Paralleling my arguments about the performativity of sexuality, gender and 'race', I however stress that my analysis can only offer momentary and partial perspectives on the formation of class. My focus on text and language limits my reading to instances where class is done in talk, but does not allow me to illuminate further aspects, such as 'practice' more generally or processes of embodiment. Furthermore, the application of my performative approach to my intersectional analysis brings to the fore further challenges that I will return to below.

Yvonne's negotiation of the categories "black" and "single mother" impacted on her feminist dis-identification in various ways. She did not only distance herself from feminism for the stigmatizing stereotypes attached to it, but also drew attention to oppression along the lines of 'race', and class which complicated her relationship with feminism. At the beginning of the interview, Yvonne pointed to the persistence of gender inequalities in "sexual relationships" and "employment" but stated that "sometimes I really don't think that, maybe not all men may, maybe that, you know, there is a difference in- when it comes to race, you know, being with a black man, then my position would be higher than his in society. I'd be able to play maybe quicker than him". Yvonne also expressed awareness of the stereotype of feminism as "a lesbian

thing and okay, or anti-men and- and they all hate men and join us and hate man and do that". Yvonne's consciousness of the social stigma attached to "black single mothers"; structural forms of oppression that work to the disadvantage of black men; and her awareness of the alleged man-hatred of feminists imply that feminism is not an identity easily claimed.

Arguably, the construction of feminism as anti-men complicated feminist identification for a number of research participants because it was regarded as excluding oppressed men from struggles for equality. As I have demonstrated in chapter one, several authors have shown that women who are aware of intersectional forms of oppression might refrain from claiming feminism on the basis of advocating equality for all, including men that are oppressed on the basis of their 'race' (Aronson, 2003; McIntyre 2001; Denner 2001; Hunter and Seller, 1998; Springer 2002). Faith for example stated that "yes sure, as a black woman you have an interest in women's issues". She assumed the category "black woman" and simultaneously rejected feminism for its exclusionary tendencies by describing herself as a humanist. Humanism to her signified a "holistic term" that referred to the "struggle of all women" and "that, especially in the African context also involves men in activism". Faith distanced herself from "western feminism" as not adequately representing the views and needs of black women, but also expressed her wish for solidarity with African men by advocating humanism. The support for feminism as a political identity that is perceived as anti-men and western is fraught with particular contradictions for Faith who is advocating equality for all: not only 'western', but also 'non-western' women and men.

In addition, the stereotype of feminism as man-hating can be argued to negatively impact on feminist identification not only because it is seen to exclude

disadvantaged men from claims for justice, but also because it threatens femininity as a means to accrue cultural and economic resources (Skeggs, 1997). Carrie rejected feminism on various counts by for example arguing that it was a "daft place" to be in which could not make the slightest difference and always involved "whinging" and "fighting against something". Arguing that feminism was "associated with fighting femininity", Carrie held that "femininity should be celebrated" instead and used to one's advantage:

> A little smile can work a treat on a barman - you know just things like that. It's completely, I am a woman and I appreciate it because I know how to use it sometimes. And I don't always want to. You know, I don't go around and use my sexuality to get everything from what I want, but in a situation where I think: "Well. I really need to do that" and I think: "Well I possibly can use my sexuality to get this", I do. And quite often it works. Erm, I appreciate that. I think: What would I do if I were a bloke? I would probably have to go into a conversation but instead I just smile and put up my eyelid.

Skeggs (1997: 121) demonstrates that working-class women invest in femininity as a way to increase various forms of capital. Following Skeggs' argument, Carrie's rejection of feminism as "fighting femininity", and her claim that femininity should be used and celebrated, shows that there are various factors involved in repudiations of feminism. Carrie's celebration of femininity however purges unequal power-relations from the account. Conventional femininity might constitute a form of capital enabling social mobility; but its enabling power is severely limited by various factors such as age and body size. The form of femininity Carrie experiences as empowering is not evenly distributed amongst all women and, due to its links to youth, represents a precarious form of capital.

In discussing working-class femininity, Skeggs highlights a further aspect by drawing attention to the historical dimension of racialized and classed constructions of femininity. She (1997: 99) argues that "[w]orking-class women – both Black and White – were coded as the sexual deviant other against which femininity was defined". In making this argument, Skeggs draws on the work of Gilman (2005 [1992]) whose

iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine and literature demonstrates how the lesbian, the prostitute and the 'black woman' became linked through perceptions of sexual anomaly because they all figured as icons for deviant sexuality. According to Skeggs, working-class women are always-already positioned at a distance to respectable, coded (white) and middle-class, femininity. Arguably, the construction of feminism as anti-men, lesbian, and unfeminine might pose a particular challenge to working-class women who, historically, occupy the position of the 'other' in regard to culturally dominant constructions of femininity. Importantly, this is not to argue that women's locations mediate feminist consciousness in predictable ways and that working-class women will be predisposed to reject feminism as anti-men and/or unfeminine because they already feel at a distance to femininity. Susanne, who was from a working-class background, claimed that gender equality had not been achieved even though women's rights had been fought for. She told me that she had experienced gender inequalities in her life and argued for a continued struggle for equal rights. In drawing attention to racialized and classed constructions of femininity, it is my intention to add another layer to my discussion by highlighting that the portrayal of feminism and femininity as in tension may present itself differently to women from various locations.

7.4   Further intersections with feminist dis-identification and reflections on the performative approach

While negative stereotypes of feminism, particularly the alleged hostility towards men, have the potential to variously mediate relationships with feminism, there were further ways in which sexuality, 'race' and class intersected with feminist dis-identification. One theme that evolved, particularly in relation to socio-economic background, was a perceived distance or closeness to feminists and the women's movement. There were several working-class women who experienced feminist thinking and/or activism as

distant by portraying it as a luxury, as something elitist that does not adequately deal with social realities. Nicky for example stated that she had never heard the term feminism before because she did not have the time to deal with such things (chapter two). Carrie described feminists as "messed up intellectuals" claiming that feminism did not help her understand "what's really going on". Carrie's portrayal of feminists as intellectuals who are out of touch with social reality relies on a distinction between theory and practice, where theorizing seems to happen in a social vacuum, away from 'real life'. The construction of feminism as remote also emerged from Roxana's statement that feminists are "up there and they know about all these rights and they know about, you know, erm, prejudices a – against women and all that sort of thing". Feminists are "up there"; "they" have a certain kind of knowledge but are not necessarily in touch with the lives of 'ordinary women'.

Sara claimed she sometimes felt misrepresented by feminism because feminists "are speaking as though they're speaking for all women. But that – it's not necessarily the view of all women so and they usually come from [...]. They seem to be very well educated from that kind of well – well educated background". Sara expresses her sentiment that feminists are 'speaking for others' (Alcoff, 1995), indicating that feminists are different from "all women". Carrie's, Sara's and Roxana's statements portray feminism as elitist and point to the dangers in representation. Interestingly, as Brunsdon (1993) points out, the portrayal of feminism as distanced and removed also constitutes a feature of academic feminist discussions. In her article on identity in feminist television criticism, Brunsdon (1993: 312) calls attention to constructions of an "otherness between feminism and women" which involves a series of subject positions where 'feminists' are somehow opposed to 'ordinary women'. In such accounts, the relationship between feminism and 'ordinary women' is not simply

portrayed or analysed, but also constructs and produces a series of positions for 'women'. It seems that 'women' can be either 'feminist' or 'ordinary', thereby reinforcing, rather than dismantling the alleged elitism of feminism.

Carrie's, Roxana's and Sara's construction of feminism as distant and removed contrasts with Carolina's sentiment of automatically being implicated in feminism. She was from a middle-class background and argued: "I don't always sometimes know what they really want from me, somehow, I mean [...] you know, but since they say, 'I am a feminist', they somehow include me [...] I mean, I think that's it: I feel drawn into something that I don't really want to be drawn into, which then partly bothers me". Carolina feels addressed by, even drawn into, feminism. She does not experience feminism as distant or somewhere "up there", but indicates that feminism is somewhat too close, involving her in something that she does not fully agree with. Carolina's statement reflects a sense of being interpellated which is expressed by her feeling that she is somewhat automatically included in and part of feminism. Carolina's sense of automatic involvement in feminism differs from Carrie's, Roxana's and Sara's depiction of feminists as somewhat distanced elite women.

Recalling Skeggs' (1997) argument about the perception of feminism as middle-class, I argue that class plays a role in the research participants' relationship with feminism, specifically in relation to a perceived distance or proximity to feminists. Several middle-class respondents talked about their mother's involvement in feminist activism, which affected their relationship with the women's movement. Lara for example argued that her mum's feminism sparked her interest in feminist issues. Kelly by contrast did not identify as a feminist because "it's something old-fashioned, it's got this old-fashioned ring to it....I have got a memory of my mum wearing dungarees and going on marches and having badges and records and talking about

things with her female friends [...]". Kelly's memories of her mother who was an active feminist contrast with the portrayal of feminism as an elitist movement. In these instances, life experiences and socio-economic background mediated a perception of the women's movement as distant or close.

Julia thought it was "strange" that she had never talked about feminism with her mother. She claimed that it [feminism] had passed by women in the GDR but then emphasised that she was "of course" raised with the understanding that her mother would go out to work. "In my imagination, it did not exist that my mother could not work. That she could somehow stay at home with us kids". Julia remembered that she experienced it as "really strange that things were somehow, apparently different in the other part of Germany. That it's somehow always a question". In explaining why she had never discussed feminism with her mother, Julia talks about her upbringing in the GDR and describes what she perceived to be a great difference between the two German states. In discussing the issue of women's work and differing perceptions of motherhood, Julia orients to her socialisation in the GDR when talking about her mother's relationship with feminism and social expectations towards motherhood. Resonating with Miethe's (2008, see chapter one) observation that socialisation in the two parts of Germany differently shaped constructions of motherhood, Julia's statement illustrates how her upbringing in the GDR is made relevant in talk about feminist issues. More broadly however, few research participants oriented to both their upbringing in 'West' and 'East' Germany, particularly in the context of 'feminism'. Following Miethe (2002; 2004; 2008), this finding illustrates as least two trends: first, that the 'West' figures as the unquestioned norm – none of the research participants raised in West Germany made this explicit in terms of acknowledging that there was also another part of Germany. And second, that the categories of 'East' and 'West' are

gradually dissolving, not least because the younger generation has been mostly raised in a unified Germany.

At risk of repeating myself, I do not attend to the different ways in which certain locations were made relevant in discussions about feminist issues to argue that there is a causal relationship between one's location and stance on feminism. Paralleling my arguments that one's mother's involvement in feminism can variously impact on feminist dis-identification, middle-classness did not imply a straight-forward relationship with feminism. This becomes transparent when recalling Sam's claim that her privileged background meant it took her longer to identify as feminist and is further illustrated by Kelly's and Charlotte's statements. When I asked Charlotte whether she had ever been politically involved, she indicated that her socio-economic background meant she had never felt the need for political activism: "I don't come from a poor family in [South African country] and that's maybe why I have never really thought like, women's movement, get involved in women's things, cause I went to a mixed school, so I always had that background where everybody is the same [...]". Charlotte positions herself not only in relation to feminist activism, but also socio-economically so that her statement simultaneously represents a moment in an on-going process of class formation. Charlotte's, but also Sam's statement, caution against presupposing a straight-forward relationship between socio-economic positioning and feminist dis-identification.

Socio-economic background does not mediate feminist dis-identification in entirely predicable ways, also because it intersects with other axes of differentiation. When debating whether men were regarded as more superior in [South African country], Ella said:

> It is annoying, but it is more to do, I find, I notice it more with colour. In [South African country], I mean you notice my sister is mixed race, and if I walk, that time we were both in [South African country], and they were speaking to me in a derogatory way and referring to

them with a bit more respect and yet I am older than them. So it should really be the other way around but it is because I am black. And they are a little bit lighter. So I find, I notice more it is a colour thing and a status thing, rather than a gender thing.

Illuminating how racial identity, status, age and gender intersect in a specific location, Ella does not reject or claim feminism in her statement, but points to various factors that influence whether she feels being treated equally and with respect. By stressing that her status depends on colour, age, and gender, Ella assumes a gendered, racialized and classed position. She described herself as "upper-class" at the beginning of her interview: "You know, for England I would be upper-class, I guess I am, for you know, upper-class, but I mix with everybody". Her explicit talk on her class location, along with Sam's statement witness a degree of self-certainty and entitlement in relation to one's socio-economic positioning (see Reay, 1997a). Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2001: 885) argue that people with higher educational capital had the confidence to "play around reflexively with ideas of class". The finding that middle-classness, and upper-classness were named explicitly resonates with the phenomenon of working-class women's dis-identification with their class background that I discussed above. Consequently, Ella's, but also Sam's and Yvonne's statements do not only demonstrate the multiple ways in which class and 'race' intersect with feminist dis-identification, but also shed light on the complex citational processes through which identities are done in talk, amongst other things.

As I discussed in chapter one, Aapola et al. (2004: 197) and Kelly (2001: 152) argue that young women from a variety of backgrounds might reject feminism due to a perception of it being predominantly white, middle-class, able-bodied and heterosexual. Indeed, the question of feminism's exclusionary tendencies figured strongly in the interviews. Resonating with the criticisms of feminism as ethnocentric and as having a middle-class bias, Kelly made it clear that she did not only reject

feminism because it reminded her of something old-fashioned, but offered a further reason for her discomfort with it by arguing:

> When I see white middle-aged, middle-class European feminists denouncing erm the veil or something like that I feel very uncomfortable with that because I feel like they don't understand. I feel like it's just another…way of talking on behalf of other people and not really listening and erm I don't feel comfortable with that stance.

Providing a critical perspective on views of the veil as inherently oppressive (see chapter five), Kelly addresses central feminist concerns such as the dangers of speaking for others (see chapter two). Feminism, in her view, consists of middle-class, middle-aged European women who are prone to talk on behalf of other people. Kelly addresses differences amongst women, most noticeably in her explicit iteration of the characteristics "middle-aged, middle-class, European". She rejects feminism as a stance that makes her feel uncomfortable because of the dilemmas involved in speaking for others.

Similarly, Lara's view of feminism as middle-class complicated her identification as a feminist. She told me that she had moved away from feminism at the end of her university degree because she had increasingly noticed a middle-class bias:

> But then I think there is, just going off the point here, but there are lots of issues with feminism that make it quite problematic in terms of the relationships between women within feminist movements and working-class women and women at universities […] Maybe middle-class women relate to each other and support each other, but how much do we support working-class women, how much do we try to make those relationships equal in any way, do we work with working-class women, I don't see that….and I think that's uhm, I guess it is easy to support, supposedly support feminism, or what feminism is trying to do, but I think it needs quite a lot of interrogating really, in terms of, the values one holds.

Lara's university education made her interrogate her identification with feminism and meant that she would qualify her support to include women from various backgrounds. She positions herself as middle-class by asking "how much do we support working-class women ?". By using the pronoun "we", Lara makes a distinction between the two categories which Lawler (2005: 429) argues is crucial to establishing and maintaining middle-class identity.

The explicit acknowledgement of differences amongst women did not give rise to an interrogation of feminist identification in all cases. Karuna, who was just about to start a Master's degree, embraced feminism:

> Yes, I would call myself a feminist. I suppose, if I was to define myself I would be an Asian feminist woman, I mean I, you know, but yes, I suppose, you know, I do, those are the two things that, I am not religious, so that doesn't, I am not offended by, but I do get offended if people were just to make, if I were discriminated against because of my race, or my erm, my gender, so yes, I suppose I would be an Asian feminist if I was to come down to it, or a British-Asian feminist – I suppose yeah.

Karuna explicitly takes up a racialized and gendered position in describing herself as a British-Asian feminist. As opposed to several research participants who distanced themselves from feminism by pointing to its exclusionary tendencies, Karuna was drawn to feminism for its attention to women's differences. She held that "the feminist movement has definitely become more inclusive and it is recognising that there are different factors that are involved in how a woman defines herself as a feminist". Karuna had engaged with feminist theory during her university education and identified with feminism because of its attention to differences amongst women.

The theme of feminism's inclusiveness or exclusiveness provided a powerful force in feminist dis-identification. Feminism was constructed as exclusionary, but also embraced for its attention to differences amongst women. Differences amongst women played a crucial role in negotiations of feminism, and were discussed in relation to the question of whether feminism dealt with diversity adequately or not. Research participants from a variety of backgrounds addressed the question of feminism's attention to difference so that women's intersecting identities figured as a recurring theme in the interviews. Feminism was variously regarded as (un)successful in addressing differences amongst women which in turn mediated feminist dis-identification.

My performative approach has enabled me to trace the moments where sexuality, 'race' and class mattered, and came to matter, in discussions about feminism. As I highlighted in relation to Carla's negotiation of feminism, the performative lens also provided a useful tool to analyse and account for shifting identities in the context of feminist dis-identification. However, I have also pointed to the limitations of my performative approach by, for example, arguing that I can only offer a partial insight into identity constituting processes. Before concluding this chapter, I would like to reflect on an additional tension that I have struggled with in applying the performative approach. At the level of analysis, I was tempted to regard certain statements as more 'literal', and less performative, than others. To illustrate this point, I will critically revisit my interpretations of Heather's and Yvonne's statements. I thereby only focus on two statements, but believe that my respective readings reflect broader tendencies in my analysis.

To recall, Heather repudiated feminism because she did not want to be thought of as homosexual. I suggested a reading of her statement as a performative citation of femininity, which was achieved through Heather's claim to heterosexuality and repudiation of homosexuality. Yvonne's rejection of feminism also involved a negotiation of identity categories. She stated that she would not want to be seen as a black single feminist mother. I argued that Yvonne negotiated her racial and class identities by assuming the category 'black single mother'. In both instances, my analysis is conducted from a performative lens, but Heather's and Yvonne's *reasons* for rejecting feminism are interpreted as more 'performative' in Heather's case, and more 'literal' in relation to Yvonne's statement. Following my analysis, Heather's statement about why she would not call herself a feminist is doing more than Yvonne's claim. By proposing that Heather produces herself as feminine and heterosexual

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through her rejection of feminism, I regard her statement as performative because I show that Heather is doing something with her words. By contrast, I interpret Yvonne's disidentification from feminism more literally by claiming that Yvonne rejects feminism out of fear of taking on yet another stigmatising label.

I believe that my different readings of individual statements, and my interpretation of them as more or less performative, stem from my political commitment to discerning how broader, unequal power structures are reaffirmed in individual statements. Heather's claim illustrates how heterosexual norms are taken up, whereas Yvonne's account illuminates some of the harmful consequences of exclusionary norms that she tries not to be a target of. Therefore, I am perhaps more likely to adopt the performative lens, and the associated question of what is done with certain words, in analysing Heather's, rather than Yvonne's, reasons for rejecting feminism. However, my analysis of certain statements as more or less performative points to issues of analytical rigour and of determining the extent to which utterances count as performative. My respective readings also raise questions about the validity that my analysis attributes to various reasons for rejecting feminism. To stay with the example of Heather and Yvonne, my analysis may suggest that Yvonne's concerns are more legitimate because I interpret her reasons for rejecting feminism in more literal than performative ways.

Finally, my interpretations of certain statements as more performative or literal could be read as implying that certain forms of difference are more 'real' than others. I am concerned that my different interpretations of Heather's and Yvonne's claims may be taken to indicate that I regard processes of sexualisation as more performative than class formation and racialization. By highlighting the performative nature of Heather's motives for repudiating feminism, I analyse and theorise sexuality and gender as

performatives. In relation to Yvonne's statement, I demonstrate that she negotiates and assumes a classed and racialized positioning and thereby also adopt my performative lens. However, in writing about Yvonne's *reasons* for distancing herself from feminism, I interpret her statement more literally. Therefore, my analysis may be read as suggesting that 'race' and class are more 'real' categories than sexuality and gender, at least when compared to my engagement with Heather's statement.

My political investments transpire through my interpretation of the research participants' accounts and pose unforeseen challenges with regard to the application of my performative approach. Echoing the methodological perspectives I laid out in chapter two, I am not reflecting on the political bias of my readings with the aim of offering a neutral and objective account. Nonetheless, in the context of reflecting on the uses and limitations of the performative approach, and in the wider context of my commitment to a reflexive analysis, I feel it is important to acknowledge the tensions of my interpretative framework. I do not discuss the strengths and weaknesses of my performative approach in order to find generally applicable solutions and offer a flawless reading, but instead seek to account for some of the analytic decisions I have made.

7.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to demonstrate the various ways in which femininities, conceptualised as racialized and classed performances, intersect with feminist dis-identification. Taking heterosexual hegemony as a point of departure, I demonstrated that repudiations of feminism as connoting lesbianism constituted performative citations of heterosexual femininity in several cases. However, I emphasised that the links between a portrayal of feminism as anti-men on the one hand, and a performative citation of normative femininity as well as a rejection of feminism on the other hand,

have to be left open. While gender and sexuality were variously performed, and indeed troubled in some instances, negotiations of feminism were firmly embedded in the heterosexual matrix.

The latter part of this chapter focused more explicitly on the various ways in which the interviewees' different locations, not only in terms of gender and sexuality, but also 'race' and class, mediated negotiations of feminism. I conceptualised femininity as a classed and racialized performance and traced how sexuality, 'race' and class intersected with feminist dis-identification. I pointed to the strengths of the performative approach, but have also discussed its limitations. I underlined that my data analysis can only provide a partial insight into identity constituting processes. The performative approach only focuses on language and text at one specific moment in time. In addition, I reflected upon the implications of taking heteronormativity and sexuality as my point of departure which was in part determined by my research topic and empirical data. In highlighting the impossibility of explaining the complexities of contemporary power in their entirety, I drew attention to the tension in my analysis of focusing on one vector of power, namely heteronormativity, at risk of subsuming others, such as processes of racialization and formations of class. And finally, I discussed my dilemma of reading certain accounts as more performative than others, thereby reflecting on the methodological and analytical issues that such different readings raise. I openly discussed the challenges and limitations of my performative approach not with the aim of offering a flawless analysis, but with the intention of rendering myself accountable to the interpretations I offered. I hope that my reflexive analysis and discussion of the multiple ways in which sexuality, 'race' and class intersect with feminist dis-identification provided insights into the complexities of young women's relationship with feminism.

Sexuality, 'race', and class mediated how young women thought, talked and felt about feminism. Heteronormativity played a crucial role in feminist dis-identification, but young women's class locations also facilitated a felt distance or closeness to the women's movement. The construction of feminism as anti-men gave rise to complex negotiations. Feminism was perceived not only as threatening an investment in heteronormative conventions, but also in the idea of equality for all, including oppressed men. Similarly, performances of normative femininity cut across sexuality and class by providing a form of cultural capital that facilitated social mobility. Lastly, respondents from a variety of backgrounds discussed differences amongst women in relation to feminism's alleged exclusive or inclusive tendencies. Several research participants charged feminism with being elitist and insufficiently taking diversity into account, while feminist perspectives were also embraced for their attention to various forms of oppression. The theme of feminism's inclusiveness or exclusiveness, along with the force of heterosexual conventions, played a powerful role in feminist dis-identification.

8   Chapter Eight

Conclusion: The new German Feminisms

„We believe that feminism makes life more beautiful for all women — no matter where they come from and under which conditions they live   and also for all men. And we want to show why that is. Feminism is not old and out of date. It is young and cool and can help answer a lot of questions (Haaf, Klingner, Streidl, 2008: 9) "[48].

Perhaps this is a somewhat unusual conclusion in that I will open up a new field of inquiry to recap my main arguments. In the time I have been writing my thesis, the contexts in which I conducted the interviews have undergone various transformations. There have been cultural shifts, particularly in relation to public debates on feminism in Germany. While feminism had not been the object of media debates for a long time (Hark and Kerner, 2007b), new feminisms have been proclaimed in Germany since 2006, triggered by a public debate on demographic changes. Mostly written by female, young, successful, well-educated, white journalists and authors, several books have been published that advocate various forms of feminist politics. Almost all texts appeared in 2007 and 2008 — long after I conducted my interviews in Berlin. This is why I have chosen to focus on this phenomenon in my conclusion, rather than in my literature review. The new German feminisms serve as a field of inquiry that can enter into dialogue with the main findings of my thesis. I am *not* drawing on the new German feminisms to contextualise the interviews I conducted in Germany. Instead, I take as my object of study the call for a new feminism.

The themes that emerge from the new feminisms relate to the main findings of my thesis in interesting ways. I will therefore revisit the central arguments of my data analysis through a critical examination of the new feminisms. My inquiry begins by offering a brief overview of the debates that led to a call for a renewed feminism. I will

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[48] Again, all translations from German into English are mine except for extracts from Roche's book *Wetlands* (discussed below) where the English translation is used.

subsequently map the field of the new feminisms, calling attention to the existence of different strands. Using the label new feminisms repeatedly, I probably will not be able to avoid reification. My use of the plural is an attempt to counter-balance this tendency and to demonstrate that there are different variants.

My discussion of the new feminisms will focus on the themes of difference, individualism and neoliberalism, as well as heteronormativity. The new feminists differ from the research participants because they explicitly claim feminism but also because they largely represent the voices of a small and privileged group. Nevertheless, the themes that emerge from my empirical data and the new feminisms are similar in many ways. Reflecting the neoliberal cultural climate, both exhibit a strong reluctance to engage in a *collective* politics. And while the new feminisms represent themselves as pro-feminist, they engage in a fierce repudiation of second-wave feminism, paralleling the respondents' attitudes towards feminism more broadly. Exhibiting a postfeminist logic, feminism is taken into account, indeed claimed, but also strongly rejected. Lastly, the trope of the feminist as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian also haunts the new feminisms, further revealing the structuring role of heteronormativity in feminist dis-identification.

8.1   Mapping the field

While my literature review drew on a wide range of authors to demonstrate that feminism was unpopular – specifically amongst young women – there have since been shifts in German public discourses on feminism which will form the focus of my investigation here. German journalists (Ritter, 2008) as well as academics discern a change in public negotiations of feminism: while feminism figured as a swearword in the past, it has recently become more popular (Klaus, 2008: 176). "Without any

doubt", argue Hark and Kerner (2007b[49]), "the embarrassment is over and also in this country feminism has come back onto the discursive stage". One important trigger for the revival of public debates on feminism was the so called *'Demographiedebatte'* (Klaus, 2008), a debate on demographic change in Germany. The forecasted shrinking and ageing of 'the German population' gave rise to a conservative backlash against feminism: several journalists and public commentators blamed the integration of women into the (paid) labour force for the predicted demographic changes, arguing that it had led to a decrease in stay-at-home mothers and a low birth rate.

The debate culminated in a newspaper article (2006), and later a book, published by the (former) news anchor Eva Herman. She claimed that feminism was responsible for the decline of the German population; "women now only want to prove themselves, repressing their longings for a husband and children. Today, they are frequently left alone, without a family and exhausted from their struggle against men". The debate on demographic changes is disconcerting because of its anti-feminism, its concern with the decline of the 'German people'[50], and the fact that conservative stances had been taken up by numerous journalists and public commentators. The 'Demographiedebatte' figured as a catalyst for another curious discussion on gender mainstreaming whose main critical object was gender studies (Thorn, 2007; Roßhart, 2007). Critics of gender mainstreaming (notably Zastrow, 2006; Pfister, 2006) argued against the conceptualisation of gender as a social construct and queer theory approaches. They also stated a direct correlation between feminism and lesbianism (Thorn, 2007) which was cast in a negative light. Such overt anti-feminism and

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[49] I am drawing on numerous newspaper articles and interviews in this conclusion. The absence of page numbers in in-text citations indicates that the quote was published in the print media, and accessed online. This is important to bear in mind when assessing the claims of some feminist academics cited here. Several of the texts I refer to when discussing Hark's perspectives constitute newspaper articles.

[50] Unsurprisingly perhaps, Eva Herman was asked to step down from her role as news anchor on public television after she had made a positive comment in 2008 on the Nazi's family policies.

conservatism gave rise to a range of critical responses and the emergence of a complex discursive field with various feminist strands (Klaus, 2008: 176). The voices of journalists, politicians, and public commentators were loudest and perspectives emanating from gender studies were rarely provided (Klaus, 2008: 183). Contrary to the past, where smaller movements highlighted feminist concerns, the current debate on feminism has been initiated in the public sphere (Casale et al., 2008).

The field is mapped differently by various researchers (compare Hark, 2008a; Klaus, 2008; Dölling, 2007), but all concur that the new feminisms represent the views of a homogenous and privileged group of women, are neoliberal in outlook and characterised by a fierce repudiation of second-wave feminism which is dubbed the 'old' women's movement. This is why the feminisms are most commonly referred to as 'new'. In Germany, the wave metaphor is less frequently used: what is called second-wave in an Anglo-American context tends to be labelled 'old' women's movement or 1970s feminism. Newspapers started to feature series on feminism (see DIE ZEIT, 2006) in 2006. In the realm of popular culture, the rapper and doctoral student Reyan Sahin explicitly took up feminist discourses in public, calling herself a "bitch" and doing things that are otherwise taboo for women (2008). In the arena of politics, Ursula von der Leyen, the minister for family affairs, stated that "conservative feminism" was an interesting concept (2007; for critical discussion see Klaus, 2008). Most relevant for my purposes here are a range of books that have been published since 2006 and which proclaim feminism in various ways. The authors of these books are comparatively young (born between 1970 and 1983), white, well-educated, and predominantly heterosexual. In her book *Die neue F-Klasse: Wie die Zukunft von Frauen gemacht wird'* (The new F-class: how the future is made by women), the novelist Dorn (2006) interviews eleven successful women. Distancing herself from the

old feminism in the introduction, Dorn advocates a new F-class instead. As I will demonstrate below, Dorn's F-class is elitist and strongly neoliberal. It is very similar in outlook to the book *Schwestern: Streitschrift für einen neuen Feminismus* (Sisters: Pamphlet for a new feminism) written by one of Dorn's interviewees, the politician and free democrat[51] Koch-Mehrin (2007). Focusing primarily on the difficulties in combining a family and career, Koch-Mehrin advocates for better child care provisions and argues against the 'Muttermythos': the German idealisation of the 'biological' mother as primary care giver.

The year 2008 saw the publication of three books that put feminist issues back on the agenda and that all received considerable media attention. In their text *Wir Alphamädchen: Warum Feminismus das Leben schöner macht* (We alpha-girls: why feminism makes life more beautiful), the journalists Haaf, Klingner, and Streidl endorse a new feminism that resonates with the experiences of young German women. Distancing themselves from 1970s feminism, and most notably Alice Schwarzer, the alpha-girls address issues of identity, sex, media, and power. While the authors (2008: 7) claim that every woman who thinks critically and has goals in her life can be an alpha-girl, the book addresses difference (e.g. class, 'race' and sexuality) only in the foreword and conclusion. Pursuing a similar agenda, the novelist Hensel and journalist Raether published *Neue Deutsche Mädchen* (New German Girls) at around the same time[52]. Also distancing themselves from 1970s feminism which they view as being personified by Alice Schwarzer, Hensel's and Raether's book describes what it is like to be a woman today. Similar to the alpha-girls, Hensel and Raether focus on

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[51] Koch-Mehrin is member of the German *Free Democratic Party* (FDP) which advocates neoliberal policies.
[52] I will use the expressions 'alpha-girls' and 'new German girls' when referring to the authors of the so-called books. I therefore only use 'girl' when writing about young women who call themselves girls. When discussing the 'alpha-girls' and 'new German girls', I do not seek to convey a lack of status that is potentially signified by the term 'girl' (Aapola et al., 2004: 6). For stylistic reasons, I sometimes write about the 'F-class' when talking about the new feminists, paralleling how Hark refers to the authors.

themselves, thereby failing to acknowledge differences amongst women. Both books carry strangely elitist and exclusionary titles, revealing that the experiences addressed are those of a privileged, comparatively small group of women.

But the review of German books dealing with feminist issues in 2008 would not be complete without reference to Roche's hotly debated *Feuchtgebiete* (Wetlands). Roche became well known as a presenter on the German music channel VIVA. *Feuchtgebiete* has sold almost 700.000 copies (Kean, 2009) and topped the international Amazon bestseller list in March 2008. It was the first German book to be an international bestseller since the creation of the list in 2004. *Feuchtgebiete* has now been translated into English (2009). The novel tells the story of Helen Memel who lies in hospital, exploring every part of her body and rebelling against bodily hygiene. Certain passages of the book aim to provoke disgust since they deal with Kristeva's (1982) abject matters. The press reports that audience members have fainted at public readings. The Guardian journalist Aitkenhaed (2009) claims that the book "makes the Vagina Monologues sound like Listen With Mother". The book is hugely popular amongst young women, and men over the age of 55 (Schaefer, 2008). Roche openly admits that her novel can serve as a masturbation pamphlet and adds that she wishes women would use it in such a way too (Mueller and Ritter, 2008). While the term feminism does not appear in the book, Roche (quoted by Caesar (2009), also see Kulish, 2008) describes her book as a "feminism of the body":

> The feminist angle to the book is this: I think women, now, have to have this clean, sexy, presentation side to their body. At any time, you must be available for sex, and you can just strip naked and look super. That's a high pressure, and the joke in this book is saying, 'Women shit, too, you know'. I know there are men who will find that hard to accept, because they are thinking, 'I want to f*** a clean woman.

Roche's book differs from the other texts because it is a novel. Nevertheless, her book raises a range of feminist issues that I will not be able to address here. Instead, I will

limit my analysis of Roche's novel to examining the ways *Wetlands* negotiates femininity, difference, and heterosexuality.

In the German-speaking context, there have been two more recent publications by young women which promote feminism. These texts differ from the books that I have discussed so far in that they also incorporate academic, feminist work and do not forcefully reject 1970s feminism. Stöcker's (2007) *Das F-Wort: Feminismus ist sexy* (The F-word: feminism is sexy) as well as Eismann's (2007) *Hot Topic: Popfeminismus heute* (Hot Topic: Pop feminism today) are both edited collections that explore a range of feminist issues. Stöcker's collection seeks to challenge negative stereotypes of the women's movement. Eismann, a journalist who works on feminism and popular culture, provides a platform for German-speaking critical, radical feminism that is informed by popular culture. Referring to ladyfests, feminist workshops, and drag-king shows, she wants to move the (media's) focus away from Alice Schwarzer's and Roche's feminisms to explore German-speaking pop feminism in its various forms and manifestations. Her edited collection draws on a range of feminist, academic literature and also seeks to represent the views of a diverse group of women. Stöcker's and Eismann's collections have received considerably less media attention, but are included here because their more critical and radical perspectives (particularly Eismann's collection) represent important exceptions to the exclusionary, neoliberal, and anti-1970s outlook of mainstream new feminisms.

Ambivalently, and in various forms, the new feminisms proclaim a feminist politics. In this regard, the recent public support for a new feminism differs from my findings and the research participants' reluctance to claim feminism. Chapter four identified two interpretative repertoires on feminism portraying it as either valuable, but somehow outmoded, or simply extreme and therefore unappealing. I argued that

these two seemingly contradictory sets of arguments reflect a postfeminist logic by acknowledging the importance of feminism, but repudiating it at the same time. On one level, the call for a new German feminism breaks with the postfeminist logic in that the need for a continued feminist politics – in whatever form – is asserted. On a different level however, the majority of new feminisms contain fierce repudiations of 1970s feminism not dissimilar to the research participants' postfeminist accounts.

Arguably, the fierce repudiation of feminism that McRobbie (2004a, b; 2009) claims is part of the postfeminist double entanglement is projected on to an older feminism from which the new feminists desperately seek to distance themselves. The second interpretative repertoire on feminism – feminism as extreme and going too far – appears in the new feminisms as a rejection of 1970s feminism. In that sense, the new feminisms still follow a postfeminist logic: they acknowledge feminism – indeed they call for a renewed feminism. Through their call for a new feminism, the new feminisms nevertheless allocate a certain type of feminism (read 'old') to the past, engaging in a forceful repudiation. They renew and refresh the feminist common sense; however, the rebranding of feminism as new and different constructs and constitutes the old feminism as "almost hated" (McRobbie, 2003: 130). Indeed, my interpretation of the new feminisms as postfeminist is not dissimilar to Hark's (2008a: 5) analysis of the attempts to re-define and re-invent feminism as new. Citing the work of McRobbie, Hark understands the proclamation of a new feminism as signifying the desire to discard a certain form of old feminism on the one hand, and evidencing changes that feminist perspectives brought to patriarchal structures on the other hand. While the accounts of the new German feminists differ from those of the research participants in that feminism is embraced on a certain level, a postfeminist logic is nevertheless discernable in the ambivalent engagements with 1970s feminism.

Feminism was valued and taken into account in the interviews, but also fiercely repudiated and hated. The postfeminist negotiation of feminism as both valuable and hated, which featured strongly in the respondents' talk, re-emerges in the new German feminisms as the call for a renewed feminism that relies on discarding its 'older' variants.

8.2   Difference

As I discussed in my literature review (chapter one) as well as methodology chapter (chapter two) and demonstrated through my performative approach, sexuality, 'race' and class mediated the research participants' relationships with feminism. While sexuality and heteronormativity provided my point of departure, I also sought to delineate the ways in which 'race', class and to a lesser extent upbringing in 'West' or 'East' Germany and the UK cut across negotiations of feminisms. The portrayal of feminism as anti-men, for example, gave rise to complex negotiations. Feminism was perceived as troubling investments in heteronormative conventions but also as threatening identifications with oppressed men who are disadvantaged on the basis of their racial and/or class background. The perceived inclusiveness or exclusiveness of feminism figured strongly in feminist dis-identification, indicating that difference should be discussed in regard to young women's relationships with feminism. Several researchers (Dölling, 2007; Hark, 2008a, b, c; Hark und Kerner, 2007b; 2007d; Klaus, 2008) have argued that the new feminisms are elitist and only reflect the views of a privileged group of women. As my analysis of exclusionary tendencies in the new feminisms will demonstrate, I largely agree with these claims. However, I think it is important to acknowledge the existence of different strands in the new feminisms: Eismann's edited collection for example addresses issues of class and racial inequalities, as well as queer politics. Numerous contributors provide an intersectional

analysis which also comes to the fore in Stöcker's edited collection (notably Haas' analysis of Germany's Next Topmodel). While Hark, Kerner, Dölling and Klaus are certainly right in challenging the alpha-girls and F-class proponents for providing an elitist perspective, I want to highlight the complexities of the field before developing my argument about the new feminisms' exclusionary tendencies.

Critically discussing the debate on the new feminisms, the journalist Kiyak stresses that issues of migration and class inequalities are not addressed. With the exception of Eismann's edited collection, and to a lesser extent Stöcker's book, the new feminists' focus on privileged, white, heterosexual, and German women is striking. Dorn's and Koch-Mehrin's acknowledgment of difference is limited to a few references to the oppression of Muslim women (Dorn, 2006: 24; Koch-Mehrin, 2007: 67). Recalling my argument that the trope of the 'oppressed Muslim women' stabilises a self-identification as free and independent beings (chapter five), Dorn's and Koch-Mehrin's reference to Muslim women as passive victims of gender subordination can be interpreted analogously. As I will demonstrate below, Dorn's and Koch-Mehrin's books are characterised by a strong individualist and neoliberal focus and an investment in personal empowerment and responsibilisation. The evocation of difference - only in relation to the 'oppressed Muslim woman' - is thus constitutive of Dorn's and Koch-Mehrin's positioning and intelligibility as free and empowered bearers of social change.

Similarly, the new German girls distance themselves from Alice Schwarzer's focus on "Islam, prostitution and pornography" as having nothing to do with their own life (2008: 14). Admittedly, Schwarzer's (2007: 14) stance on Islam is highly problematic. She draws parallels between Islamicists and Nazis. However, the new German girls do not seem to distance themselves from Schwarzer's views on Islam

because they disagree with her sweeping and stigmatising generalisations; similar to Dorn, Koch-Mehrin, and several of my research participants, the theme of women in Islam is relegated to the margins, securing a self-identification as free and empowered. In an interview with the women's magazine *Brigitte*, Raether (2008b) claims: "When Alice Schwarzer is talking about honour killings and [female] circumcision, then this does not have anything to do with our daily life". Advocating a feminism that focuses on their experiences only, the new German girls draw on their cultural other to produce themselves as more empowered. As Hark (2008b) points out, the focus on a certain group of women that is similar to oneself, constitutes a solipsist feminism that can only inadequately deal with a range of challenges. Moreover, the new feminisms' focus on the privileged few reactivates and potentially reinforces existing hierarchies and inequalities, rendering it more difficult to regard anti-racist struggles and critical engagements with global inequalities as feminist concerns (Hark and Kerner, 2007b).

The trope of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' also appears in *We Alpha-Girls* where Haaf, Klingner and Streidl (2008: 202) talk about grandmothers' circumcising their grand-daughters in certain parts of the world. More generally, the alpha-girls make a weak attempt at discussing diversity in their book. Differences amongst 'women' are referred to at the book's beginning and end. This indicates to me that the theme has been added on to an already-existing analysis whose prime focus is on younger, able-bodied, white, straight, and well-educated women. On the second page of their book, the alpha-girls (2008: 9) briefly acknowledge that some readers might miss the perspectives of lesbian women or female migrants[53] and then state that the book does not aim at unifying all perspectives. The allusion to the possibility that

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[53] The German term they use is „Migrantinnen", a highly problematic and exclusionary term commonly used in Germany to refer to people with a range of ethnic and national backgrounds. Reflecting the culturally prevalent belief in an 'ethnically homogenous' nation (chapter two), migrants can have the German citizenship, but are not regarded as German.

different perspectives can be unified raises interesting epistemological issues that I will leave aside here. More interesting for my critical engagement with the issue of difference is that the alpha-girls acknowledge diversity, only to then make generalising claims that speak for all women. Only four pages later, they argue that "all women want the same today: namely: earning as much as men, benefitting from the same prospects for promotion, an equally large share of power in our country and not having to decide between having children or a career". This list of what "all" women want is mainly work-related, limited to Germany, and only applies to women who might want to have children in the first place. While the alpha-girls claim they do not wish to speak for all women, they make generalising claims which might not apply to everybody.

A similar discursive move, which consists of an acknowledgment of difference and a subsequent, generalising claim that negates complexities, occurs in the last pages of the book. Having discussed the lives of German women for almost 230 pages, the alpha-girls (2008: 237) now decide to take a look around the world: "Feminist thinking does not only involve a struggle against inequalities and for one's own freedom, but also pertains to advocating for women, who live outside one's own orbit and cultural circle". In the space of four pages, they talk about global issues referring to Mexico, Guatemala, Pakistan, Iran, India, the Sahel zone, and the Congo. Their knowing gaze on other parts of the world is neo-colonial and resonates with the ways some research participants made knowledge claims about other parts of the world (chapter five). In this light, it is only ironic that the alpha-girls (ibid.) argue "migrant women are underrepresented in the German feminist establishment as well as young women. One talks about them, but they themselves do not participate". While the alpha-girls seek to take women's differences into account, their superficial and half-hearted engagement

with issues of diversity only seems to reinforce the exclusionary tendencies of their book. For example, their discussion of other parts of the world does not include the voices or perspectives of women other than the authors. This observation suggests to me that the alpha-girls reproduce an exclusionary tendency by not representing different views and failing to reflect on the dilemmas of speaking for others (chapter two). The book *We Alpha-Girls* demonstrates that feminism can improve the lives of a privileged few, but the claims for inclusiveness paradoxically reproduce exclusions.

An equally uncritical engagement with difference, namely racial difference, occurs in Roche's (2009) *Wetlands*. The narrator Helen visits brothels to look at other women's genitals – in her words: "[s]tudying pussy" (116). She only goes to "black hookers", after "having learned that black women have the reddest pussies" (125). I am citing the following passage at length to convey Helen's exoticising description:

> That's something. Because they have dark skin, the interior colours of the pussy really pop when it's spread open. Much more than with white women, where the contrast isn't as extreme. Something to do with complementary colours, I think. Pussy-pink next to light-pink skin tone looks a lot more boring than pussy-pink next to dark-brown skin tone. Against dark brown the pussy-pink looks dark-lavender-bluish-red. Swollen and throbbing (2009: 124-25).

To my surprise, none of the media articles that I read on *Wetlands* picked up on Roche's exoticising portrayal of black women's vaginas. The detailed description of black women's sexual organs, and how they differ from those of white women, reminds me of the colonial fascination with Sarah Bartmann's sexual parts that Gilman (2005 [1992]: 180) discerns in discussions of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine, and literature. In contrast to Gilman's portrayal of 19th century investigations of black female sexuality, Helen's fascination is not necessarily pathologising. However, her description is exoticising, treating black women's genitalia as special, worthy of investigation and therefore somewhat abnormal. Roche's 'feminism of the body' others blackness. This is enhanced by Helen's (2009: 126) claim that "there are no black women in my world" which overlooks diversity in

Germany and resonates with exclusionary discourses of ethnic and national homogeneity (chapter two).

Roche's, or for that matter Helen's, account of seeing prostitutes is not only disconcerting because of its exoticising fascination with black female sexuality, but is also of interest because of the way in which homosexuality is somewhat evoked in the book, but repeatedly foreclosed. Helen has sex with the female sex workers she visits. In talking about her only experience with a white woman, Helen provides one of numerous pornographic descriptions "I lick her and grind my pussy on her bent knee. I come fast. I'm the queen of coming". However, Helen repudiates the possibility of lesbianism by arguing she goes to brothels only to 'study pussy' (see above). Nowhere in the book does she express a sexual *desire* for women, other than her 'scientific' interest in their genitals and bodies. Throughout the book, Helen mainly talks about her sexual adventures with men. Indeed, the novel has a conventionally romantic twist. It also tells the story of Helen falling in love with one of the male nurses in hospital, who 'saves' her from her loneliness. Helen is eighteen years old and feels abandoned by her divorced parents who she seeks to reunite through her stay in hospital. The book ends with her deciding to leave her family, exiting the hospital together with the male nurse to live happily ever after.

Helen's experience of orgasms with women does not mean she identifies as lesbian or bisexual. What I find noteworthy is that Helen's story is so safely embedded in a heteronormative account, resonating with the heteronormativity of the research participants' talk, but also of the new German feminism more generally. While Eismann's and Stöcker's edited collections contain queer perspectives, the majority of the new feminist texts are written for and by heterosexual women. As I will explore below, the new feminisms are characterised by a repudiation of lesbianism through the

constant emphasis on not being against men and the related repudiation of 1970s feminism as man-hating and lesbian. The alpha-girls (2008: 23) state that "the new feminism has a more relaxed attitude towards sex [in comparison to the old feminism]. Feminists are for a lot of sex and good sex". Previous to this statement, the alpha-girls talk about penile-vaginal sex, focusing on heterosexual encounters only. Their attitude towards sex is "relaxed" on the condition that lesbianism and bisexuality are excluded: they are for "a lot of sex" and "good sex" between men and women. Non-heterosexual encounters are foreclosed and heterosexual sex is understood in narrow terms as primarily referring to penile-vaginal intercourse. On the whole, the findings of my study demonstrated that young women's different locations impact on their understandings of and expectations towards feminism. Most strands of the new feminisms do not reflect, address and represent the experiences of a range of women. With the exception of the two edited collections, the new feminisms normalise the views of a small group of privileged women by proclaiming feminism for the many, which turns out to be feminism for the few (also see Hark, 2008a, b, c). Finally, it is curious that none of the authors explicitly asks whether the history of a divided Germany continues to differently affect (young) women's lives. The New German girls refer to the fact that they were raised in Eastern and Western Germany respectively, but this theme remains underdeveloped on the whole. This is not to argue that the East/West divide necessarily mediates feminist dis-identification. Only one of my research participants made their upbringing in East Germany relevant to her negotiation of feminism. But this omission points to the neglect of differences amongst women that characterises the new German feminisms more broadly.

8.3   Individualism and neoliberalism

In line with my analysis of neoliberalism and individualisation in chapter five, the new feminisms are also characterised by individualism, an emphasis on personal responsibility and a reluctance to engage in collective political struggle. Dorn's *The F-class* and Koch-Mehrin's *Sisters* represent the most individualist and neoliberal strands of the new feminisms. As Dölling (2007) demonstrates in her critical discussion of Dorn's and Koch-Mehrin's feminism, both authors emphasise women's individual responsibility to bring about social changes. Dorn and Koch-Mehrin are critical of the welfare state and its orientation towards collective interests and draw a line between those individuals who self-responsibly manage their lives on the one hand, and those who 'fail' to live autonomously and 'independently' on the other hand. Dorn (2006: 37) openly lays out her individualist perspective by arguing: "Why not admit that this book is not about solidarity amongst women at any cost, but about a certain class of women, who are not defined by their privileged background, but solely by their individual achievements and experiences". Dorn seeks to pre-empt the criticism of elitism by refuting that the F-class comes from a privileged background. Nevertheless, her account reflects the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility: the individual has to conduct herself in a self-responsible manner in order to be successful. Dorn's account elides structural constraints and reflects the individualising tendencies that Bauman and McRobbie regard as crucial markers of the contemporary era (chapter five).

Koch-Mehrin's (2007: 13) stance is equally individualist. She stresses that social structures will change if individuals alter their behaviour. Koch-Mehrin argues in a typically neoliberal vein by asking individual women to take responsibility for their own lives: "Anyways, the time has come for self-criticism. Women stand in their own light, if they define themselves as passive victims of masculine oppression"

(2007: 113). Dorn and Koch-Mehrin exhibit a strong investment in a self-identification and positioning as free and self-responsible beings. This observation supports my argument about Dorn's and Koch-Mehrin's engagement with difference as limited to 'oppressed Muslim women'. Similar to the respondents in my study, the F-class proponents secure and stabilise their positioning as bearers of social change through the construction of a cultural other that is oppressed and powerless. While Dorn and Koch-Mehrin's stance differs from that of the majority of research participants – both claim feminism –, their engagement with difference is limited to their 'oppressed other' and parallels the accounts of the interviewees.

Resonating with Dölling's and my argument, Hark (2008a, b, c; Hark and Kerner, 2007c) critiques the F-class for disregarding the fact that structural constraints mediate personal success and failure. In talking about the F-class, Hark (2008c) does not only refer to Dorn and Koch-Mehrin, but also the alpha- and new German girls. She argues that "the F-class does not want to think about structural inequalities. They regard their success solely as an outcome of personal accomplishments and their individual superiority in the daily struggle for survival, not as an effect of societal constraints". Again, I largely agree with Hark's analysis but think that the new feminisms' engagement with structural inequalities is more complex. Hark does not include Eismann's edited collection in her account. Eismann (2007: 11) argues that the collection of essays investigates personal experiences in order to relate them to broader structural constraints and offer a critical theoretical perspective. Equally important, Eismann does not seem to be opposed to a collective politics. Moving away from Eismann's book to the more mainstream versions of the new feminisms, the alpha-girls and new German girls also engage with structural constraints in more complex ways than suggested by Hark. Indeed, the manner in which these new German feminists

respond to individualist and neoliberal social currents bears interesting parallels to the accounts of the research participants.

Similar to the interviewees, the alpha- and new German girls are aware of structural constraints and acknowledge them explicitly in their texts. Indeed, they critically engage with individualist and neoliberal perspectives. Hensel and Raether (2008: 72) argue that we now sense that success is determined by more than hard work and that those who have failed might not be solely responsible for that. "Perhaps this is why we can again speak about the social constraints that women encounter: because we can again speak about social constraints existing at all, not being less powerful only because some are capable of superseding them" (2008: 72-73; also see 2008: 140). Equally, the alpha-girls critically refer to the current "individualist-neoliberal climate" (2008: 19) and the fact that the young generation regards inequalities as individual problems (2008: 196). They even advocate collective activism by concluding their book with the following call for action: "Half of the world belongs to all of us – and together we can eventually acquire it". As the preceding discussion on difference has shown, it is unclear who the alpha-girls really refer to by "all of us". Nevertheless, the new feminists engage with individualism and neoliberalism in more complex ways than is suggested by their critics.

If my critical investigation ended here, I would however paint too rosy a picture of the alpha-feminism. In parallel to the talk of the respondents, there is an awareness of structural constraints that is nevertheless undone or rendered irrelevant: either through a renewed uptake of individualist rhetoric or a self-positioning as autonomous and responsible. In chapter five, I demonstrated the ways in which individualist rhetoric undoes feminist claims. Moreover, I argued that the positioning of young women as autonomous, responsible and choosing subjects complicates and

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renders unappealing an investment in collective forms of protest. An analogous dynamic is discernable in the *Alpha-Girls* and *New German Girls*. The alpha-girls critically discuss ever increasing beauty standards. Nevertheless, they (2008: 22) undo their critical analysis by making the individualist claim that every woman should be allowed to look the way she pleases. While the majority of the research participants rejected feminist perspectives by adopting an individualist perspective, the new German feminists do not reject feminism outright, but often render their analyses and claims less forceful through the uptake of individualist statements. Indeed, on a more general level, the two books do not offer much in terms of a new feminist politics. While they distance themselves from 'the old feminism' by arguing that it is time to modulate feminism to meet the requirements of contemporary young women, they do not provide a political agenda. On the contrary, it seems that they are reluctant to do so. Repeating the argument in chapter five, I believe that the neoliberal imperative to be autonomous and self-responsible plays a central role in their reluctance to promote collective political struggle.

The alpha-girls (2008: 16) state that they do not want to complain to friends, parents and colleagues – this is what they have done in the past. Whinging is unappealing arguably because it goes against the neoliberal grain to fashion oneself as active. This also explains why the position of being a 'victim' is so unpopular amongst the new feminists. The old feminism is frequently repudiated on the basis that it supposedly regarded all women as victims. Being a victim is associated with passivity, which robs the individual of the opportunity to take their lives into their own hands and, through that, become morally good persons. The alpha-girls (2008: 45) strongly reject a positioning as victims which they feel results from a claim to feminism. Feminism, and the acknowledgment of structural constraints as unequally enabling

some to master their lives more successfully than others, seems to be associated with passivity, victimhood and a denial of responsibility in a neoliberal climate. The alpha-feminists seek to pre-empt the accusation of victimhood by employing individualist rhetoric instead: "Feminists have often been reproached for playing victim. In this case, we would also do that if we only complained about how much we are being constrained. After all, everybody makes her own decisions in the end" (ibid.). In parallel to the research participants, the neoliberal imperative to be active and self-responsible seems to prevent the alpha-girls from occupying a stance that fully acknowledges structural constraints and the complex ways in which they intersect with (individual) agency. In a neoliberal vein, it is the self-responsible individual who is cherished.

According to this analysis, it is perhaps unsurprising that the alpha-girls, and particularly the new German girls, reject more traditional forms of political protest and engagement. In an interview, Hensel (2008c) states that she and her co-author do not want to instigate a political movement. In a more recent interview (2009) with the broadsheet DIE ZEIT and Angela Merkel, Hensel agrees with the chancellor who describes the younger generation as not placing all their demands on politics: "Exactly, that's what everybody does. That's boring". Hensel instead stresses that she limits herself to describing in as much detail as possible the gap between personal and public realities in her role as an author. Indeed, Hensel does not even like the term feminism. This seems rather curious, but perhaps makes sense when placing her statement in the context of a neoliberal climate more broadly. "It sounds like movement, struggle, bad conscience and a patronizing know-it-all attitude. I avoid it whenever I can" (Hensel, 2008d, also see 2009). Hensel defends her stance by arguing that she is an author, and not a politician. I however interpret her reluctance to call for, and engage in collective

political struggle as reflecting an investment in being a good, neoliberal subject that self-responsibly deals with the challenges life poses, rather than occupying the status of a victim who relies on broader social change for improvement. More generally then, the alpha- and new German girls critically engage with individualism and neoliberalism to a certain extent. However, the same social trends that they critique render a call for feminism highly ambivalent and fraught. Similar to the talk of the research participants, an investment in individualist and neoliberal perspectives transpires through the texts. While the new German feminists do not reject feminism, their engagement with it encompasses a range of repudiations, primarily that of the old feminism.

8.4   Repudiating feminism as 'man-hating and all that'
Hark and Kerner (2007c, d) already asserted the link between a rejection of the old feminism as involving victimhood and the neoliberal cultural climate. Indeed, they (2007c) regard the current emphasis on individualism, entrepreneurism, and "the survival of the fittest" as one of the main reasons for the rejection of the 'old' feminism. Offering a slightly different angle, Dölling (2007) foregrounds the preservation of a heterosexual order and the disarticulation of radical critiques of hegemony in her reflections on the rejection of 1970s feminism. Theorising the new feminisms' repudiations of earlier waves against the background of the findings of my thesis, I want to deepen Dölling's analysis by arguing that heterosexual norms structure the engagement with, and repudiation of, the 'old' women's movement. As I demonstrated in chapter six, numerous research participants distanced themselves from feminism because it was associated with unfemininity, man-hating and lesbianism. I for example explained the theme of feminists' alleged man-hatred as citing a binaristic heteronormative logic: feminists were thought to dislike men because they concentrate

on women. As my analysis showed, feminism was sometimes claimed by emphasising that it was not directed against men. A comparable investment in not wanting to be regarded as anti-man can be discerned in the new German feminisms. The alpha-girls (2008: 25) stress that men should not be turned into enemies. When asked what exactly is new about their feminism – given that their book addresses issues traditionally perceived as feminist – they (2008c: 50) first and foremost emphasise that their feminism includes men: "The old feminism has to be modernised, because it does not only have a problem with its image, but also because many of its approaches are anachronistic. Many think feminists are humourless, man-hating, and anti-pleasure".

The new German girls (2008c) also stress that feminism should not limit itself to women, but can also involve a discussion about role models that men equally take part in. Concurrent with my analysis, feminism is claimed under the proviso that it is not directed against men. The new German feminists, the research respondents, and - as my reflexive analysis has shown – myself feel the need to assert their allegiance with men (chapter six). The heteronormative requirement that women like (and desire) men renders feminist identification problematic as a stance that is commonly regarded as involving hostility towards men. The new feminists orient to, and seek to pre-empt, the accusation of being against men in their texts by stressing their positive attitude towards the 'opposite' sex. Similar to the feminism of the alpha-girls, the alleged novelty of Koch-Mehrin's (2007: 16) approach consists in being pro-men: "No feminism of women against men – that was yesterday – but a feminism with men, which immensely enriches the lives of all of us, women, men and children". Koch-Mehrin's portrayal of the 'old' feminism fails to account for the involvement of men in feminist activism. Indeed, if the novelty of the new feminism is based around the

inclusion of men, the old feminism has to be portrayed as excluding men for the 'new' feminism to be 'new'.

The repeated orientation to having a positive attitude towards men brings to the fore the performative character of such statements. As my performative approach demonstrated, such utterances frequently function as doings of femininity. They do not always involve the production of heterosexual femininity and do not lead to a rejection of feminism in all cases. As the new feminisms indicate, the portrayal of feminism as man-hating does not necessarily go hand in hand with its rejection. Instead, the threatening aspects of a critical feminist politics are projected on to an older variant in order to obtain a new feminism, all shiny and untainted by man-hating. Referring back to my argument about a postfeminist logic also being discernable in the calls for a new German feminism, the fierce repudiation that McRobbie regards as central to current engagements with feminist politics comes to the fore in these highly ambivalent negotiations of 1970s feminism and illustrates the affective politics of negotiations of feminism.

Arguably, femininity is also being performed in the new feminisms through the association and simultaneous repudiation of 1970s feminism as connoting lesbianism. Also a member of the F-class, Roche states in her interview with Dorn (2006: 141) that "feminists really made a mistake when declaring heterosexuality as evil in general". Dorn (2006: 36) herself argues that one difference between her F-class and 1970s feminism consists in not seeing the root of all evil in compulsory heterosexuality. Drawing on the insights of queer theory and Butler's (1993: 225) argument that "heterosexualised genders form themselves through the renunciation of the possibility of homosexuality", I read Roche's and Dorn's rejections of the second wave as performative statements which form part of the endless process of 'girling'. However,

Roche's 'girling' is conventional and unconventional at the same time. Through her book *Wetlands*, Roche rebels against rigid understandings of femininity, primarily referring to bodily hygiene. Similar to the research participants, Roche seems to understand femininity as primarily a bodily characteristic. However, Helen's take on femininity is rather less conventional than the research participants' accounts – if interview extracts can be compared with a novel at all.

The first line of the book (2009: 1) reads "[a]s far as I can remember, I've had haemorrhoids". The narrator Helen quickly makes clear that this is perceived to be "very unladylike". However, Helen repeatedly subverts conventional expectations of femininity, particularly in relation to embodiment. "Hygiene", Helen (12) states, "is not a major concern of mine". Helen complains girls are encouraged to wash much more frequently than boys. It is in the relation to personal hygiene that the book contains one of several disgust-provoking passages – feel free to skip:

> I've turned myself into a walking laboratory of pussy hygiene. I enjoy plopping myself down on any dirty toilet seat anywhere. That's not all. I rub the entire seat with my pussy before I sit down, going once around with a graceful gyration of my hips. When I press my pussy onto the seat it makes a smacking noise and then it sucks up all the public hairs, droplets, splotches, and puddles of various shades and consistencies. I've been doing this on every sort of toilet for four years now. My favourites are the ones at highway rest stops where there's just one toilet shared by men and women (2009: 14).

Helen rebels against the expectation that girls should be cleaner than boys, not masturbate, or be sexually promiscuous. She is very proud of climaxing frequently and quickly, and takes particular pleasure in instigating sexual encounters. Given that these are the topics Helen explores, the book contains many pornographic passages which raise important questions about female sexual agency that I cannot explore here (but see for example: Gill, 2007).

Contrasting Roche's 'feminism of the body' with the research participants' rigid attitudes towards femininity indicates that Roche subverts certain gendered conventions. However, Roche might break with cultural expectations that women be

clean, but she reinforces other norms in her novel. I have demonstrated that the book is heteronormative and others blackness. In addition, Helen (2009: 102) states that she sleeps with men to avoid feeling lonely: "I'll go to bed with any idiot just so I don't have to be in bed alone or spend a whole night sleeping alone. Anybody is better than nobody". She also engages in self-destructive behaviour to prolong her stay in hospital (2009: 173). Aitkenhead (2009) describes this passage "as a feat of self-harm almost unreadable for its violence, and ultimate futility". As she rightly points out, Helen's sexual liberation comes at the price of instability. Helen's self-harm also calls for a critical analysis of illegible rage and postfeminist disorders (McRobbie, 2009), adding further important dimensions to an assessment of the normative or subversive potential of Helen's femininity.

The new feminisms do femininity variously. Taking a more conventional approach to femininity than Roche, the alpha-girls (2008: 65) engage in a process of 'girling' through their title but also by arguing that "a feminist does not per definition mistrust heterosexuality. That some representatives of the women's movement had narrow-minded, restrictive views on sexuality does not mean that all of us have to be like this." The alpha-girls dis-identify with a certain branch of feminism (Brunsdon, 2005); indeed, they do so at various stages in the book. Talking about common prejudices against feminists, the alpha-girls (2008: 13) claim that "many view feminists as ugly, being against fun, men as well as irony, and unsexy". Repeatedly evoking the stereotypical view of feminists, and distancing themselves from them, colludes with, if not reproduces ideological accounts of feminism (Gill, 1997: 28). Instead of challenging hostility towards feminism and highlighting the homophobic, sexist undertones of such portrayals, the strategy of the alpha-girls reifies feminism and overlooks its diversity. While the alpha-girls (2008b) claim they have frequently

heard of young women embracing feminism after having read their book, Gill's (1997) arguments highlight that such a strategy tends to be short-lived. Indeed, this response to common perceptions of feminism only strengthens, rather than challenges the violent heterosexual norms that they emanate from. Through repetition, the signs 'man-hating', 'anti-fun', 'lesbian' and their related affects stick to feminism; feminism becomes a sticky sign evoking a chain of 'negative' associations and affects that effect a turning away from feminism (Ahmed, 2004b).

The reification and homogenisation of feminism can be attributed to all mainstream strands of the new feminisms. Except for Stöcker (particularly the chapters by Jäger and Haas) and Eismann, the new German feminists offer simplistic, generalising, and historically inaccurate portrayals of 1970s feminism that is, of course, always referred to in the singular. What struck me in particular (also see Hark und Kerner, 2007c; Klaus, 2008) is the absence of a thorough engagement not only with the history of the women's movement in Germany, but also with academic feminism. The F-class feminists write books about 'feminism' that, in some cases, draw on a range of 'scientific' studies. But none of these texts makes a serious attempt at engaging with academic feminist approaches. This lack of engagement speaks volumes about the "epistemic status" (Pereira, 2008) of gender and women's studies (in Germany). Decades of feminist academic research are overlooked and simultaneously caricatured. Actually, I believe that feminist research has to be ignored for the negative portrayal of the 'old' feminism to remain intact. Similar to the research respondents who could not name any examples for the mythic, mannish, lesbian feminist, the new feminisms contain endless references to it but fail to provide detailed examples. Recalling my analysis of the trope of the feminist as unfeminine, lesbian and man-hating which haunts the interviews, I feel that a similar logic is at play

in the new feminisms. In order to preserve its heteronormative assumptions as coherent, the F-class relies on a constitutive outside that is nevertheless always-already inside and therefore has to be repudiated again and again.

The rejection of the 'old', second wave, 1970s feminism is not unique to the new feminisms, but also features in the Anglo-American third wave (Gillis et al., 2007; McRobbie, 2009: 156-159). Since the mid-nineties, there have been numerous academic texts claiming the existence of a 'third wave' (for a good overview: see ibid.). Similar to their German 'counterparts', "[t]hird wave feminists have been extremely eager to define their feminism as something 'different' from previous feminisms" (Gillis et al., xxii). Waters (2007: 258) claims that the third wave's foregrounding of pleasure involves the "attempt to make feminism more agreeable to a generation of young women who have been fed the myth that feminists are the fat, man-hating, no-fun lesbians". My analysis has shown that such a strategy is politically ineffective because it does not address the homophobia, sexism, and exclusionary norms underlying the stereotypical portrayal of feminism. The repudiation of feminists' alleged man-hatred, lesbianism and unfemininity only feeds into the dynamics that centrally structure feminist dis-identification. Hesford (2005) describes the 'feminist-as-lesbian' as a cultural sign, transgressing discrete discursive realms. This cultural sign features not only in the accounts of the research participants, but also in various attempts to re-brand feminism, academic discourses, and the media (chapter one, chapter six). It is my argument that an understanding of the pervasiveness of the trope of 'the feminist' as it occurs across different sites requires a critical engagement with heteronormativity and difference more broadly. The mainstream of the new feminisms with their disregard for feminist and queer theory approaches is ill-equipped to transform the heteronormative attitudes which, amongst other dynamics, facilitate

feminist dis-identification. The new feminisms' emancipatory potential is severely limited through the absence of intersectional analyses and lack of understanding of the social forces that give rise to continuous calls for feminist/queer politics in the first place.

8.5   Not a happy ending

My critical analysis of the new feminisms allowed me to highlight central arguments of my thesis. The themes of postfeminism, individualism, neoliberalism, heteronormativity, and difference all figure in the new feminisms and the affective nature of engagements with the 'old' feminism resonate with the respondents' accounts. By delving into a new field of inquiry and discerning similar issues, I have gestured towards the broader implications of the findings of my research. Various dynamics are at play in feminist dis-identification which all seem to occur across a range of sites. I began my thesis by making the argument that difference, and particularly sexuality and heteronormativity, might play a central role in feminist dis-identifications. I drew on historical and empirical accounts, which have now been complemented by the analysis of my data and the new feminisms. In addition to postfeminist, individualist and neoliberal cultural currents, my performative approach and discursive analysis of interview extracts allowed me to discern the multiple ways 'race', class, and particularly sexuality intersect with feminist dis-identification. My reflexive analysis and inquiry into the affective dimensions of negotiations of feminism paid attention to the emotional dynamics at play in negotiations of feminism. Given that the majority of research participants were reluctant to call themselves feminist, my thesis mainly focused on the processes that facilitate its repudiation. However, my performative and discursive approach enabled me to account for shifting attitudes and opinions, hopefully avoiding a deterministic and overly negative analysis.

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A reader who identifies with feminism might be disheartened by the majority of the findings presented. I will not attempt to end this thesis on a proactive and potentially more positive note by offering a political agenda that addresses some of the challenges faced by feminist politics. I am not sure what such a list would look like, and more generally, I would be highly critical of such an endeavour. Instead, I hope that my analysis of the ways in which feminist perspectives are taken up, negotiated, and repudiated widens the ways 'we' think about feminist dis-identification as part of a broader attempt to explore the discursively intelligible and to contest its boundaries. As opposed to the new feminisms, I would advocate a Butlerian politics which seeks to avoid the re-establishment of normativities, and instead engages in an ongoing effort to scrutinise its contingent foundations.

In this vein, I would like to conclude by briefly revisiting some of the challenges I have encountered in conducting this research. I began this thesis by discussing one of many instances where my identification as a feminist came under scrutiny. My personal involvement in my research topic – through more than just being the researcher and interviewer – became relevant at different stages in the research. It inflected my research questions, methodological choices and interpretative tools, but also emerged during the interviews. I often struggled to find the right balance between offering generous interpretations of the research participants' talk on the one hand, and appropriately critical readings on the other hand. While I have discussed moments of rupture, my analysis focused on numerous instances where unequal power structures were reaffirmed. I hope that it has become clear that I am interested in the ways exclusionary norms are taken up, not to distance or elevate myself from such a process, but to understand how this happens at the level of talk and how this is connected to

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broader socio-cultural formations such as postfeminism, individualisation, neoliberalism and heteronormativity.

Another challenge that has emerged relates to my political, and indeed also epistemological, commitment to hearing and analysing the views of a diverse group of women. This commitment has raised methodological issues around gaining access to a diverse group of women, ethical concerns pertaining to the dilemmas of representation, and analytical questions with regard to the interpretation of individual statements. My attempt to reflect on the research process brought to the fore various tensions in my analytical framework that I did not seek to solve, but that I wanted to address in order to increase accountability and transparency.

My research on feminist dis-identification provides insights into young women's negotiations and repudiations of feminism, but also gives rise to further questions. One question that arises relates to the unhappy ending of my thesis and the issues that emerge from the persistence of gender inequalities on the one hand, and the fierce repudiation of feminism on the other hand. How do young women, who are cast as bearers of social change, cope with such complex demands? I feel that there is a need for further research that explores these issues from a psychosocial perspective and that traces how these competing demands are dealt with on an individual level. A further research topic that emerges from this study – to name just a few – calls for an investigation of the cultural currency of the figure of the feminist. Where does it come from and what are its sites of production? By asking this question I do not mean to imply that the 'feminist' has *a* specific origin, but I want to suggest further research that deepens my findings, by for example exploring media representations of feminism. It is my hope that such a project would further contextualise the subjective

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accounts presented in this study and thereby contribute to an ongoing attempt to understand feminist dis-identification.

Annex

I conducted the interviews between May – September 2006 in Berlin, and April 2006-February 2007 in London and Birmingham. All names used here are pseudonyms. Where appropriate, I changed personal details to preserve confidentiality. I also leave certain localities unspecified for the same reason. Interviews took place in the women's homes, my office at university, or in cafés. The information presented here focuses mainly on the life situation of the research participant at the time of interview; their ethnic and class background, as well as sexuality. The composition of these pen-portraits demanded that I portray certain identities as stable, when in fact I regard them as more fluid and complex than I am able to convey here.

The women I interviewed in Germany

Asena grew up in a small town in Western Germany. She just moved to Berlin to complete her Doctorate in Neurosciences. She is in her late twenties and plans to move to Turkey after completing her degree. Asena identifies as German and Turkish. Her parents are Turkish and her boyfriend lives there.

Barbara, a white, free-lance photographer, is in her early thirties. She was raised in a middle-class family in Southern Germany and moved to Berlin several years ago to pursue a degree at university. Barbara has been in a long-term relationship for four years and identifies as lesbian.

Carolina is in the final year of her Economics degree at a private higher education institute in Berlin. She is white and grew up in an affluent neighbourhood in Munich. She is in a long-term heterosexual relationship and wants to move to Paris where her partner lives.

I interviewed **Doris** just after she had finished her Master's in Political Science. Doris has lived in Berlin for a long time; she was actually born in East Berlin and is in her early twenties. She is white and was raised in a lower middle-class family. Doris is in a long-term heterosexual relationship and about to move in with her boyfriend.

Faith has just begun her Doctoral degree in Comparative Literature. She described her identity as "constantly growing" and declined to discuss her sexuality. Faith is black and her parents had come to Germany from East Africa. She was raised in a middle-class family in Northern Germany and moved to Berlin for her PhD.

I met **Gertrud** when she was about to complete a certificate course in Social Care. She is in her early twenties and has been raised in Southern Germany. She lives with her father and step-mother, who have moved to Germany from Turkey. Gertrud's father worked at a manual job but retired and subsequently moved to Berlin. Gertrud identifies as German and Turkish, and describes her sexuality as heterosexual.

Helena is eighteen and started vocational training as an assistant in a nursery. She is in a relationship and identifies as heterosexual. She currently lives with her siblings and parents, but would like to move out soon and share a flat with her boyfriend. She is white and was raised in a working-class family in East Germany.

Ines is a mixed-race (white and black African) Graphic Design student who just turned twenty. She describes herself as heterosexual and grew up in a middle-class family in Southern Germany. She moved to Berlin to pursue her degree at university and has lived there for one year. She is about to go abroad to study at a university in a Northern European country.

Janina was raised in Eastern Germany and just broke up with her girlfriend. She identifies as lesbian and is currently looking for employment. She has had several jobs since she left school at the age of sixteen. Janina is in her early twenties, white and grew up in a working-class family.

Jessica is a white eighteen-year old who is working in a so-called '1-Euro-job'. She left school at the age of fifteen and is currently living with her mother in a working-class area in Berlin. Jessica is in a heterosexual relationship and describes her sexuality as "normal".

Julia just met her current girlfriend and is about to begin her Master's degree in International Relations. She identifies as lesbian and moved to Berlin to study for her first degree. She is in her early twenties, white and grew up in East Germany. Julia's parents both worked as doctors and she describes her upbringing as middle-class.

Leila is engaged to her boyfriend and currently planning her wedding. She is in her early twenties and just finished college. She is currently looking for a place to do vocational training and lives with her parents who are also looking for employment. Her parents grew up in Turkey and moved to Western Germany before Leila was born. Leila identifies as German and Turkish.

Louisa grew up in a lower-middle class family in Southern Germany. After having obtained her Master's degree, she began working in a well-paying job. She lives on her own, is currently looking for a man to have children with and describes herself as half German, half East Asian.

Nicky is in her mid-twenties and was raised in East Germany. She is white and lives with her three children in a working-class area in Berlin. She was raised by foster parents and is currently a full-time mother.

Stella is a white, free-lance web-designer in her early thirties. She moved to Berlin five years ago, and lived abroad for several years since she obtained her A-levels. Stella describes her background as "solidly middle-class". She was raised in a wealthy area in South-West Germany.

Susanne is white and grew up in East Berlin. She lives with her two-year old daughter, is in her mid-twenties and left school after having obtained her 'Mittlere Reife' (GCSEs). She was raised in a working-class family, describes herself as bisexual and plans to work in her father's pub when her daughter is older.

Ulla was born in East Germany and is nineteen years old. She broke up with her boyfriend and describes herself as heterosexual. She is white, recently started

vocational training in the catering industry and currently lives with her mother who is looking for employment.

Undine is in her early thirties and grew up in Northern Germany. She is in a long-term relationship and identifies as lesbian. Undine obtained a Master's degree in Art History several years ago and is now working as a free-lance artist. She is white and was born to a middle-class family.

I talked to **Viola** during the final year of her Doctorate. Viola grew up in a large city in Southern Germany and is mixed-race (white and black African). She is currently in a relationship with a man and describes herself as bisexual. Viola was raised by her father and grew up in a middle-class environment.

Vivianne works as a beautician and moved to Germany several years ago. She is black and grew up in a West African country. Vivianne has a teenage son and is in her early thirties. She is married to a man who is about to finish his Doctorate in Chemistry and lives in a lower middle-class area in Berlin.

The women I interviewed in the UK

Callie is in her late twenties and training to become a hairdresser. She is white and lives with her husband and two children in Birmingham. Callie's partner is working as a plumber, and her parents both re-trained in their forties and are now working as probation officers.

Carla grew up in a middle-class family in continental Europe. She identifies as mixed-race (white and East Asian) and describes herself as gay. She is in her mid-twenties and doing a degree in Graphic Design.

Carrie is a white student at the end of her first year at university who describes herself as "pretty straight". She is in her mid-twenties and has worked in various jobs since she left school as a teenager. Carrie did not explicitly discuss her class background but I gathered that she grew up in a working class family from stray remarks she made during the interview.

Charlotte was born in a South African country and moved to the UK as a teenager. She is from a wealthy family and went to public school to do her A-levels. She is mixed race (white and black African), "has always felt heterosexual", and is in her early twenties. Charlotte works in customer services in London and plans to open her own business in her country of origin.

Christine is in her mid-twenties and lives in a flatshare in London. She is white and works for a big consultancy firm. Her job means that she has to travel frequently. She tells me that she has always been in heterosexual relationships and describes her socio-economic background as middle-class.

Ella currently lives in London with her husband and son, but plans to move back to the South African country where she was raised before she moved to the UK as a teenager. Ella identifies as black, has a background in Finance and is currently doing an MBA part-time in London. She describes her socio-economic background in the South African country as upper class.

Elspeth began to work in an administrative job at a London university after she finished her BA in French. She identifies as lesbian and lives with her long-term partner. Elspeth is white and in her mid-thirties. She describes her upbringing as working-class and says she would call herself middle-class now.

Heather works as a social worker full-time and has recently started to train as a counsellor. She is white, and moved in with her sister after she broke up with her boyfriend six months ago. Heather grew up in a middle-class family in Cornwall and would like to move back there upon completion of her counselling degree.

Karuna was raised in Birmingham, did her first degree in Sociology at Warwick and has recently moved to London to do a Master's in Social Policy and share a flat with her boyfriend. She is in her mid-twenties and identifies as British-Asian.

Kelly works as a journalist in London and has recently finished her PhD in International Relations. She is white, in her mid-thirties and describes her upbringing as middle class, Kelly feels sexually attracted to women and men. She describes her sexuality by stating: "I would never say I was heterosexual".

Lara grew up in a middle-class family that she describes as very progressive. She currently lives in a flatshare in South London and is training to become a sixth-form teacher. Lara is white and in her mid-twenties. She recently broke up with her long-term partner and identifies as bisexual.

Miranda moved to London several years ago and grew up in a South African country. Miranda is from a wealthy family and lives in an upper-middle class area in London. She is white, in her mid-twenties and in a heterosexual relationship. Miranda worked in several jobs when she first moved to London and is now doing a degree in Fashion.

Nanda grew up in London and lives with her family in the East End. She has a Bachelor's and Master's degree and is currently working in policy-making. Nanda describes her family as "very much first generation migrant". Her parents moved to the UK from South Asia shortly after Nanda was born. Nanda says she would like to be in a relationship and identifies as heterosexual.

Rhiannon moved to London after she did her BA in English. She now works in publishing and is in her early thirties. She is white, identifies as bisexual and describes her upbringing as middle-class.

Roxana is in her mid-twenties and lives with her husband and two primary-school aged children in Birmingham. Roxana's partner is currently looking for work and she has recently completed a qualification in Community Studies. Roxana is white, now works for the local Council and grew up in a working-class family in the area.

Sabrina grew up in a wealthy family in Surrey. She identifies as mixed race (white and black African) and has just finished the second year of her undergraduate degree in Fashion at a London university. Sabrina is eighteen years old and about to move in with her boyfriend.

Sam lives in London and works for the civil service. She is in her mid-thirties and in a long-term lesbian relationship. Sam describes herself as "white middle-class" and grew up in Northern England.

Sara is in her mid-thirties and has been a full-time mum for fifteen years. She has recently started her current job as a support worker and is in a heterosexual relationship. Sara is white and lives in Birmingham with her two teenage children.

Vicky is in her mid-twenties and has recently graduated from Oxford. She lives with her boyfriend in London and works as a researcher. Vicky describes her background as very middle class. Her parents moved to the UK from East Asia and she identifies as British born East Asian.

Yvonne is in her mid-thirties and lives with her two teenage children in Birmingham. She separated from her husband, who used to work as a carpenter, several years ago. Yvette identifies as black and has recently finished her degree in Community Studies. She currently works for her local Council.

Consent Form (English version)

Young women and feminism: A comparative study of young women's relationship to the women's movement in Germany and the UK [working title]

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this project about young women's relationship to feminism. The study is conducted in the context of my PhD research and is supported by the London School of Economics and Political Science, London. The project aims at exploring the views on feminism of young German and British women and the results will offer insight into the relationship between the women's movement and the younger generation.

The interview you are about to take part in is concerned to explore a variety of aspects of your experience, organised around the following themes:

- family background
- education, career aspirations
- views and understanding of gender, gender roles, differences or similarities between the sexes
- views on gender equality
- personal experiences with gender relations, femininity
- thoughts/knowledge about feminism
- attitude to, feelings about, image of feminism
- identification with feminism
- experiences with feminism

Participation

The participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any time during the course of the research. There will be no adverse consequences if you decide not to participate. If you have any queries or problems after the interview, you can contact me via email (address: see below).

Confidentiality

Everything you say in the interview will be treated with strictest confidence. I will be the only person who has direct access to the transcript of the interview and all research materials will be stored in a secure environment. My academic supervisor is the sole person I would allow to look at the interview transcript. In any written reports arising from the research, steps will be taken to protect your anonymity, including using pseudonyms, and altering information that might potentially identify you to others (expect where you make it explicit that you have no objection to this being known).

Consent

Thank you again for your time and valuable input to the research. Please sign below to give your consent to being interviewed for this study.

Name:
Signature: Date:
[my contact details]

The interview schedule

[Brief introduction to the project, presentation of consent form to obtain oral or written consent]

How would you describe your life at the moment? Followed by questions about their family background, education and career aspirations.

How do you think about women and men – do you think they are basically the same? How do you think caring and working roles should be divided up?

[In Germany: What do you think about Angela Merkel as the first female German 'Chancellor'?]

Do you think that gender equality has been achieved? Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you felt you were being treated unequally?

Have you ever heard of feminism and the women's movement? [if not yet mentioned]. If yes, what do you understand by feminism? How would you define it?

What do you associate with the term feminism? (It could be an image or a slogan or a particular individual).

Do you have any feelings when you talk or hear about 'feminism'? If yes, could you try to describe them?

How inclusive do you think feminism is? In terms of addressing a wide range of individuals from different backgrounds – be it cultural, economic, ethnic – and groups?

What do you think about the relationship between feminism and femininity?

What do you think about the relationship between feminism and men?

Do you identify as a feminist? Why or why not?

Have you gotten in touch with feminism before (for example during your education or in the media)?

Do you know any feminists personally?

Where do you think your views of feminism come from?

Do you often think about feminism or feminist issues?

Do you sometimes talk about feminism or feminist issues with your friends/family (or partner)?

Has either one of your parents described herself/himself as a feminist?

Would you describe yourself as political? Do you frequently think or talk about political issues? Have you ever been involved in political activism?

Would you like to add anything?

Notes on Transcription

[...]	Parts of sentence omitted
...	Short pause
-	Very short pause
[italics]	Interviewer's questions or comments
[text]	Additional information for reader. Sometimes altered to guarantee anonymity of research participant.

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