A Qualitative Study of Anti-Feminist Discursive Strategies in Online Comment Sections

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses multiple analytic categories drawn from the literature to identify discursive strategies used in online comment sections that function to undermine feminism. The work has two purposes: to provide a qualitative, critical discourse analysis of anti-feminist discourse in asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC), and to describe the ways in which the frameworks drawn from the literature complement one another in the analysis. This is done by analyzing comments from several North American websites, and describing occurrences of anti-feminist discursive strategies in terms of individual occurrences, and as they intersect with one another. Previous research has shown that the ability to identify anti-feminist discursive strategies allows feminists to resist silencing. Thus, in addition to adding to the literature on anti-feminist discursive strategies and asynchronous CMC, it is my hope that this work may be useful in denaturalizing and demystifying these strategies.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

       This thesis investigates discursive strategies used in online comment sections that function to undermine feminism. Nielsen (2014) makes the valuable point that "[t]he technology that has enabled online comments provides an interesting avenue for study because its purpose has not been clearly defined and depends upon whose values have been foregrounded" (471). Thus, while ideally comment sections might allow contributors from diverse backgrounds to discuss their views with one another in a civil manner, in practice, they are frequently home to obscenity. Academic research concerning online harassment is sparse, but what work has been done reveals some alarming statistics. For instance, Griffiths (2000) found that 41% of women who frequently use the Internet in the UK had been either sent unwanted pornographic material, harassed, or stalked online. A study by Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2003) found that of the adolescents surveyed, 62% had received "unwanted sex-related emails" at their personal email addresses, and the vast majority of these (92%) were from unknown senders. In addition, 73% of respondents reported having accidentally entered sex sites, either by following a link, viewing a pop-up window, or using a search engine. With respect to feminism specifically, in response to articles and videos about feminism, anti-feminists frequently leave blatantly hateful comments for readers to view. For instance, in 2013 Caroline Criado-Perez, a UK activist who campaigned to have the 19th century novelist Jane Austen put on the £10 note received death and rape threats on Twitter. (Hattenstone) That same year, Jaclyn Munson, founder of the blog *Onward and F-Word*, was stalked and sent incoherent messages, also on *Twitter*, after posting a picture of a handwritten note reading "Happy #FeministFriday!" (Munson) A 2013 Tweet by UK journalist Helen Lewis, and re-used by the UK edition of *Wired*, states "Lewis' Law," which sums up the issue: the comments on any article about feminism justify feminism. (Marwick) However, in

addition to these overt instances of harassment, equally disturbing are more covert forms of anti-feminist discourse that appear in these contexts: while an expletive-laden rant may be easy to dismiss, these more covert forms can sometimes be more persuasive than overt ones because of their insidious and naturalized qualities.

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, research has demonstrated that the ability to identify discriminatory discursive strategies can aid in the resistance of oppression. That is, according to proponents of critical discourse analysis, the critical analysis of discourse can expose and demystify ideological perspectives that may otherwise go unnoticed. By this logic, analyses of anti-feminist discursive strategies can help to disrupt the commonsensical and naturalized quality of covert attacks against feminism. One aim of this project, then, is to identify the ways that anti-feminist discursive strategies are used in the public spaces of comment sections, in the hopes that this work may be used to help everyday computer users develop the knowledge required to identify these strategies, and the ideological perspectives they encode, and thereby resist them.

This work is also intended to examine the ways in which previous discursive frameworks developed to analyze anti-feminist discourse articulate with respect to each other. The analytic categories used in the course of this project are taken from three previous works, as will be shown in Chapter 4. The assumption is that analyzing my data using analytic categories from these studies will increase the depth of my own analysis, while also demonstrating how these other frameworks may be used together in an analysis.

Chapter 2 describes some of the elements of online culture that create the context in which anti-feminist discourse occurs. I begin with a description of three dominant ways of viewing the complicated relationship between women and the Internet. I then describe some characteristics of the Internet that lend themselves to antisocial behaviour. This is followed by a

discussion of characterizations of feminism, men, and women according to a postfeminist sensibility, which is then tied into a discussion of individualism and libertarianism.

Chapter 3 presents a brief overview of early research into asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC), the mode of communication under which comment sections fall. I also provide a discussion of select studies that focus on the ways covert, oppressive language manifests itself online. As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, these kinds of accusations are present in much of my data, and are partially based on the elements of online culture discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 describes the methods and methodology of the project in more detail, beginning with a description of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. This is followed by a series of brief descriptions of the articles and videos the comment data were written in response to. The chapter closes with a detailing of the data collection and the method of analysis, with special attention paid to the frameworks from which my analytic categories are drawn.

Chapter 5 is the first analysis section, describing multiple examples of the discursive strategies found in the data. Chapter 6 is devoted to a more detailed discussion of a smaller selection of comments, with a focus on how these discursive strategies intersect with and complement one another. Finally, Chapter 7 briefly reviews the major findings of the project, discusses its limitations and makes suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Online Culture

Section 1: Introduction

In this chapter, I describe several aspects of online culture that contribute to the context in which the discourse under examination occurs. I begin in Section 2 with a discussion of three views of the relationship between women and the Internet. This discussion also references characteristics of the Internet that increase antisocial tendencies of users that potentially put women at risk for abuse online. Section 3 is devoted to a discussion of postfeminism, where we see how views of feminism, women, and masculinity from a postfeminist sensibility interact with perceptions of feminist ideas and feminism as a movement, and perceptions of power relations between men and women. It is my view that many of the strategies discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 are heavily influenced by a postfeminist sensibility. Finally, Section 4 focuses on libertarianism, a philosophical view that is very influential online. I will draw connections between postfeminism and libertarianism in this chapter, and will return to the subject of libertarianism as a driving force behind anti-minority and anti-feminist discourse in Chapter 3.

Section 2: Women and the Internet

Scott et al. (2001) discuss three views of the relationship between women and the Internet in their work "Women and the Internet: The Natural History of a Research Project." Understanding these views can help us understand some of the factors that influence women's relations with the Internet. Each view emphasizes different aspects of this relationship, and it is in taking these together that we can begin to untangle the complicated set of factors affecting women's relationship to online culture.

The first view discussed by Scott et al. is referred to as "locked into locality." This view highlights "the material constraints of time, space, money, educational background, cultural

expectations, and employment opportunities, which act to limit women's opportunities and aspirations in relation to the ICTs [information and communication technology]" (13). While my current work focuses on a North American context and the discourse of those *already* online, it is important to remember that the majority of the global population does not have access to the Internet, or can only access it sporadically. (Miniwatts Marketing Group) Even within the North American context, Internet access is not available to all members of society. Some rural areas do not yet have the infrastructure required for online access, and some groups cannot and do not access the Internet for various reasons, or do so only in specific ways. For instance, older segments of the population, especially those with lower income and less formal education, are less likely to go online relative to younger populations. (Smith)

Prevailing wisdom suggests that once online access is available to users, inequalities affecting access do not follow users into the online world. An example of this idea can be found in what Scott et al. describe as the "webbed Utopia" view, which holds that "[t]he use of . . . electronic networks has clearly enhanced both local and global networking, thus opening up new social and political possibilities" (10). However, as Herring (2000) observes, studies have demonstrated that social norms and oppression do exist online: "as more women began to venture online in the early 1990's, infiltrating what had previously been an almost exclusively male domain, studies of gender and CMC started appearing with greater frequency" ("Gender Differences"). A major finding of this research is that "gender is often visible on the Internet on the basis of features of a participant's discourse style, features which the individual may not be consciously aware of or able to change easily" ("Gender Differences"). This visibility will be further discussed in Chapter 3. For now, suffice it to say that this visibility results in women being identifiable as "women" online. Furthermore, Herring points out that the anonymity

available to Internet users may not be something that all users choose: "users are not necessarily interested in exploiting the potential for anonymous interactions -- the use of one's real name lends accountability and a seriousness of purpose to one's words that anonymous messages lack" ("Gender Differences"). That is, there may be benefits in communicating as one's "true" offline self.

Despite this, anonymity, at least on an individual level, remains a central aspect of online communication. Other factors involved in online communication include "invisibility, lack of eye contact, easy escape, and neutralizing of status" (Barak 82). All of these combine to create "the online disinhibition effect" (ODE), posited to cause "Internet users to behave less defensively and more naturally . . . and to reduce the use of existing social (or specific environmental) norms and behavioral standards in determining their behavior" (82). Barak elaborates on the idea that the Internet may encourage users to participate in illegal or antisocial activities by pointing to some of the "technical and practical features of the Internet that make antisocial behaviors more common" (82-83). Anonymity and the ODE are among these, and we may also consider the role of individualized online spaces and settings, to be discussed further below (in relation to libertarianism). In addition, Barak describes "[t]he (near) lack of clear legal boundaries, the absence of visible authorities and enforcement vehicles, and the absence of significant sanctions [that] encourage people with criminal intentions to do what they would have been restrained from doing in offline situations" (83). For example, a 2014 Pew Research Center study found that "[a]t a basic level, there is no clear legal definition of what constitutes 'online harassment.' Traditional notions of libel, slander, and threatening speech are sometimes hard to apply to the online environment" (Duggan). While the absence of legal boundaries and significant sanctions does not affect the type of discourse discussed in this work specifically,

since its sexist and harassing nature is covert and thus would probably never be subject to "significant sanctions," the absence of clear legal boundaries does have an impact on the online environment more generally.

A further feature of the Internet that encourages illegal and antisocial behaviour, according to Barak, is the masculine values and norms that pervade online culture.

> Cyberspace is a culture that is characterized by dominant masculine values and aggressive communications, one that perhaps also delivers a message that antiminority behaviors are welcome and even praised. Specifically in regard to women, quite a few online environments -- practiced in chat rooms or in forums -- are characterized by an antiwomen spirit, the attitude communicated by verbal messages, by providing links to selective sites, and by displaying obscene pictures. (83)

These masculine values and norms are connected to the final view of women's relationship to the Internet identified by Scott et al., what they refer to as the 'flamed out' narrative. This view "highlights the fact that the use of male violence to victimize women and children, to control women's behaviour, or to exclude women from public spaces entirely, can be extended into the new public spaces of the Internet" (11). This particular idea has received a significant amount of media attention recently, as women come forward with stories of harassment occurring on social media. It is also a topic that has been pursued in scholarly and academic work.

Section 3: Postfeminism

For the purpose of this thesis, I will be discussing postfeminism as what Gill calls "a sensibility." This sensibility is a way of conceptualizing certain aspects of the world, and Gill argues that postfeminism, and the cultural productions affected by it, should be considered objects of study. Postfeminist gender representations in the media, she asserts, are characterized by several themes. Among those to be discussed in this section are:

> [A] focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; . . . the articulation or entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas; a resurgence in ideas of natural

sexual difference; [and] a marked sexualization of culture . . . . (*Gender and the Media* 255)

I return to several of these themes in the coming sections, not just as they relate to postfeminism, but also in relationship to libertarianism. For now, I turn to views of feminism, women, and masculinity according to a postfeminist sensibility.

Section 3.1: Feminism

Postfeminism "has an intertextual relationship to feminism" (Whelehan 161). This is possible in part because feminism has undergone numerous, visible changes over the past decades, which are actively commented on today, and because some feminist ideas have become "common sense," according to Gill. For instance, Gill states that

> [c]ontemporary women's magazines . . . take for granted women's right to work on equal terms and for equal pay to men, to combine career and motherhood, to have access to reliable, safe contraception, to be able to walk the streets safely, and a myriad of other second-wave [feminist] goals. These ideas -- once so contested -- have become part of the common sense of magazines aimed at young women. (*Gender and the Media* 199)

However, as Gill also notes, in a postfeminist society, these ideas may occur along with contradictory ones. For instance, in men's magazines, Gill notes "discourses of . . . sexism *together with* feminism and equality are *purposely reconciled* to rebut criticism" (emphasis in original) (215). Gill cites an example from *FHM* [*For Him Magazine*] in which an article states "over 99% of all commercial porn is sexist crap" while simultaneously indicating women can be pressured into watching and imitating it.[1] (215) Gill contends that this display of ostensibly feminist opinion -- that most commercial porn is sexist -- is used to pre-emptively rebut

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[1] See also: Attenborough, Frederick. "Categorical Feminism: New Media and the Rhetorical Work of Assessing a Sexist, Humorous, Misogynistic, Realistic Advertisement." *Gender and Language* 8.2 (2014): 147–168. Print.; Whelehan, Imelda. "Remaking Feminism: Or Why Is Postfeminism So Boring?" *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9.3 (2010): 155–172. Print.

objections to pressuring women into performing sexual acts: since the article openly agrees with feminist opinion, even going so far as to use the feminist term *sexist* it is more difficult to accuse the article itself of containing sexist opinions. This use of feminist ideas to support anti-feminist sentiments will be further discussed in Chapter 3, and plays an important role in my analysis. Part of the reason that feminism can be used in this way is because it is now part of the "cultural field" -- it is "common sense" (Gill, *Gender and the Media* 40). Indeed, these kinds of contradictions are a hallmark of postfeminist sensibility: "[i]t is precisely the knowingness of the 'transgression', alongside the deliberate articulation of feminist and anti-feminist ideas, that signifies a postfeminist sensibility" (Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture" 162). Lazar's (2014) view of postfeminism is similar: its mark is knowingness, as opposed to obliviousness ("Recuperating Feminism" 212). Where previously sexism could be said to be caused by "obliviousness" to feminist concepts and ideas, it now co-occurs with knowledge of these concepts and ideas. Here, then, we can see the theme of "articulation or entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas" noted by Gill: a postfeminist sensibility allows one to pre-emptively defend the expression of anti-feminist ideas with ostensibly feminist rhetoric.

Despite the integration of feminist *ideas* into the public consciousness, Gill notes that "feminism and feminists are constructed as harsh, punitive and inauthentic, [and] not articulating women's true desires" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 161-2). What is frustrating from a feminist perspective is that some of these constructions are partially valid, and worthy of discussion: they are based on an increased awareness of genuine problems within mainstream feminism. Discussion of problematic feminist behaviour and continued oppression of minorities within the community is necessary. However, this discourse is frequently used, not to empower oppressed groups in order to create positive changes to the feminist movement, but to argue against the

movement as a whole. Whelehan summarizes this line of thought: "'feminism gave women social equality, choices and freedoms, but those choices have emotional costs which individual women are constantly trying to resolve and balance.' It is feminism, then, that is positioned as creating the most significant challenges for postmodern women" (156). Feminists then are not given credit for the positive contributions that feminism has made to many women's lives; rather feminist ideas are taken to be commonsensical, and *feminists* are blamed for women's problems.

Section 3.2: Masculinity

As feminist ideas have become more commonsensical, popular depictions of men have, unsurprisingly, changed. The nature of this change has been towards a certain level of equal opportunity objectification and mockery. For instance, like depictions of women in advertising, images of men in advertisements have also become sexualised. Here, we see how the postfeminist theme of "sexualization of culture" comes into play, creating the same problems for men that women have faced for years. Men are also frequently portrayed as incompetent -- for instance, incapable of cooking or cleaning -- or as objects of violence: while representing women as strong and capable, "revenge ads" seek to appeal to women by degrading or threatening men. Gill cites a particularly grievous example, a Levi's ad showing "a naked man lying prone, his head just outside the shot, and a woman's boot pressed on his buttocks, its stiletto heel hovering menacingly close to the man's anus and testicles. The violence of the imagery is reinforced by slogan: 'put the boot in'" (107).

In a similar vein, Shifman and Lemish (2010) found that the main shift in online humour when moving from traditional to postfeminist humour was linked to masculine stereotypes ("Between Feminism" 886). That is, women continue to be mocked -- traditional humour that focuses on women as "sex objects, terrible wives, and stupid blondes" is still "highly popular on

the Internet" ("Mars and Venus" 266). Simultaneously, men are now more mocked and stereotyped than previously, typically as "childish Neanderthals, driven by the SBS (sex, booze, and sports) trinity" ("Between Feminism" 886). This ostensible gender "equality" with respect to mockery is a trait of postfeminist humour, which "tend[s] to obliterate the hierarchical component and focus only on differences," (875) relating to the postfeminist theme of "resurgence in ideas of a natural sexual difference" within a postfeminist sensibility. For instance, while women are mocked for talking too much and men for talking too little, Shifman and Lemish note that "the hierarchical tagging attached to [these descriptions] is unclear" (884). With this hierarchical component removed, men and women appear to be on equal terms: both are sexualized and threatened with violence, and both are equally mocked.

Another postfeminist theme identified by Shifman and Lemish is that of "Girl Power," which focuses on individualism and empowerment, following the postfeminist theme of "individualism, choice, and empowerment." This kind of humour focuses on women as superior to men, or on women as better off without men. This humour parallels the revenge ads previously discussed by Gill: while the teasing is sometimes light[2], women are often portrayed as tricking men, sometimes with false accusations of sexual harassment. (Shifman & Lemish, "Mars and Venus" 265) The authors theorize that "[s]uch texts may echo public anxiety that women might . . . take advantage of sexual harassment laws as a weapon against men" (265). Whelehan notes a similar theme in postfeminist film, where "[t]he constant return to the theme that full empowerment and heterosexual romance are incompatible has meant that under mature postfeminism men increasingly are being put under erasure" (169). Thus, in addition to the incorporation of feminist ideas into public consciousness coupled with a negative stereotyping of

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[2] Shifman and Lemish (2011) provide an example: "Man: I know how to please a women. Woman: Then please leave me alone." (265)

feminists themselves (discussed in the previous subsection), we now add to a postfeminist

sensibility a view of men and women as equally oppressed, or of men in danger of violence and

trickery at the hands of women.

Section 3.3: Women

Lazar describes the "postfeminist feminine subject [as] ultraconfident and comfortable in

her fragmented, contradictory and ambivalent identity," and notes that

> [t]he appeal of this kind of postfeminist discourse is that, in its sum total, it is
> ostensibly pro-women, for the represented hybrid postfeminist subject is
> independent and empowered, optimistic and upbeat, relaxed and fun, and allows
> women to just be 'themselves'. In a nutshell, the postfeminist discourse is
> productive of a 'feel good' femininity. ("Recuperating Feminism" 222)

While this description sounds promising, she continues: "[f]rom a critical feminist perspective,

the de-politicisation in consumer feminism transforms a collective social movement for social

change merely into a marketing strategy and an individual lifestyle choice based upon endless

consumption" (222).

With this focus on individual choice, women are constructed as completely autonomous,

freely-acting agents -- "no longer constrained by any inequalities or tyrannies" (Gill, *Gender and

the Media* 93). When women choose, then, they are choosing *for themselves*. Thus, while this

"focus on individualism, choice, and empowerment" may be drawn from feminist discourse, it

displays the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas: feminism, now part of the cultural

landscape, has given women options, and since basic feminist ideas are so commonsensical,

women are no longer seen as oppressed. Any choices they make are entirely their own. Any

choices they regret, they have either themselves or feminists to blame, not male oppression.

Simultaneous with this focus on the empowerment of women is, as we saw, a focus on the

disempowerment of men.

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Section 4: Libertarianism

A final element of online culture I would like to address is libertarianism. As Jordan (2001) notes, for anyone involved in cyberpolitics, "libertarianism is the ideology they have to engage with" (12). Libertarianism is a political ideology that "most emphasise[s] individual liberty and the right to self-government [in addition to] the ability of people to come together in free associations and create just communities" (8). Immediately, we can notice the connection between libertarianism and the postfeminist theme of "individualism, choice and empowerment." A related libertarian concept, from a philosophical perspective, "is *full control self-ownership*, the right to control the use of one's person. Something like control self-ownership is arguably needed to recognize the fact there are some things (e.g., various forms of physical contact) that may not be done to a person without her consent, but which may be done with that consent" (emphasis in original) (Vallentyne & Vossen). This principle, Vallentyne and Vossen assert, "is a strong endorsement of the moral importance and the sovereignty of the individual" (Vallentyne & Vossen).

Aoki (1998) characterizes "the 'libertarian' vision" as "driven by paranoia at the prospect of the public realm 'usurping' and smothering the private sphere" (450). That is, there is concern that private, personal realms will be increasingly under the control of authorities from the public realm (such as government officials), such that individuals will be able to make fewer and fewer personal choices about their own private spaces. Online libertarianism posits the Internet as part of the private sphere and "'pre-political' in a libertarian sense"[3] (451). Thus, there is concern

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[3] This, Aoki notes, is an odd assumption, given the history of the Internet as an ARPAnet (Advanced Research Projects Agency network) created by the US government, initially a government, and subsequently an academic, tool.

about the encroachment of authority from the public realm into online space, that will increasingly minimize individuals' personal freedoms online. I would like to suggest that this connects to a sense given by postfeminist media that men are approaching (or have surpassed) a level of oppression equal to that of women.

Given these descriptions, we can see the existence of a relationship between libertarianism and postfeminism on several levels. Most especially, both seem intimately connected to individualism. Jordan notes that "[t]he first moment in cyberspace is spent by nearly everyone in their own individualised space" (8). That is, individuals must enter personal information (typically, a username and password) in order to access cyberspace, and their access is typically through a personal space of some sort (a homepage) or else is personalized in some way (via their personal settings). "Second, moving from this home to other virtual spaces usually involves some moment of self-definition; choosing an online name, choosing a self-description or outlining a biography" (8). It does not matter whether these details are fact, the point is simply that "[t]hese two recurring moments of individualisation provide a forceful perception to people that they are *individuals* in cyberspace" (emphasis added) (8). As stated earlier, these individuating processes are part of the "technical and practical features of the Internet that make antisocial behaviors more common" in online environments. (Barak 82-83) This parallels postfeminism's "commitment to seem to address the needs of women as *individuals*" (emphasis in original) (Whelehan 159) and its "all-purpose postfeminist answer that [women] have a right to 'choose' whenever confronted with a 'feminist' question" (161).

Section 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe several characteristics of online culture that contribute to the context in which the discourse to be analyzed occurs. I began by outlining

three views of women in relation to the Internet noted by Scott et al.. "Locked into locality," emphasizes the barriers to online access created by the physical and social realities of some women's lives, for instance their location, socio-economic status, and cultural expectations. "Webbed Utopia" focuses on the tremendous possibilities and benefits that the Internet presents, although this view is somewhat idealistic given the evidence in the literature that gender is visible online, and thus social norms are in full force. Finally, the "flamed out" view emphasizes that anti-woman social norms exist online (in the way that they do offline), and that there is an ease with which sexist and misogynist oppressive activities may be carried out online as well. Barak cites three features of the Internet which may play a role in encouraging these kinds of oppressive activities: (1) technical and practical features of the online world that can increase antisocial behaviour, (2) lack of clear legal boundaries, and (3) online (masculine) social norms and values. Related especially to the first and third of these feature is the idea of individualism. As Jordan describes it, users experience the online world in a very individual way, being able to personalize the settings of their computers and private online spaces, and frequently creating personal profiles. Additionally, a widespread libertarian philosophy that pervades online culture emphasizes the importance of individual sovereignty, and any user, whether they agree with libertarian views or not, is likely to find themselves influenced by this ideology.

A major portion of this chapter was devoted to the effects of postfeminism on modern cultural productions, and to an explication of a postfeminist sensibility. Within a postfeminist sensibility, feminist ideas are considered commonsensical, that is, the general population has a kind of "knowingness" about them, allowing for the use of feminist rhetoric in the rebutting of criticisms of sexism. Feminists themselves, however widespread some of their ideas have become, remain negatively stereotyped. Women, in general, are viewed as increasingly

empowered to make their own decisions and feel good about themselves, while men are increasingly disempowered, as images of them are sexualized, mocked, and threatened with violence, often at the hands of women. A powerful result of a postfeminist sensibility is that women are no longer considered oppressed, and every decision they make is entirely unconstrained by gendered social norms and structures. This is closely related to the libertarian concept of full control self-ownership, the right to control the use of one's person.

While women are represented as empowered, men are increasingly subject to mockery and violence from women in media representations. Images of men in advertising are limited to a small range of representations, and these representations typically show men sexualized, threatened, and portrayed as incompetent. In postfeminist online humour, men and women are portrayed as equally defective, with the major shift being that men are described in more unfavorable terms than previously (as opposed to women being described *more* favorably). Men are also depicted as suffering at the hands of women, who abuse the justice system in order to exact revenge. This reversal of gender oppression, where women are characterized as holding power over men, is closely related to Barak's description of online culture as communicating that "antiminority behaviors are welcome and even praised" (83).

What I would like to argue, then, is that postfeminism, extremely relevant in popular culture both online and off, and libertarianism, a widespread philosophical view influencing online culture, create a context in which anti-women and anti-feminist discourse are not only more likely to occur online, but more likely to occur in a certain way, when compared to offline discourse. As we will see in Chapter 3, libertarian views are often used as an excuse to attack oppressed persons trying to call attention to their oppression. This creates a context in which feminists may be attacked for calling attention to the importance of women's rights and the

elimination of women's oppression. At the same time, the incorporation of feminist ideas into

public consciousness, part of a postfeminist sensibility, may allow users online to better tailor

their attacks to avoid rebuttals by feminists, as will also be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Asynchronous CMC

Section 1: Introduction

This chapter will focus on previous research that has investigated asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC), of which comment sections are a subtype. Herring (2007) distinguishes between synchronous CMC, in "which sender and addressee(s) must be logged on simultaneously" and asynchronous CMC, which involves "systems [that] do not require that users be logged on at the same time in order to send and receive messages; rather, messages are stored at the addressee's site until they can be read. Email is an example of this type." ("A Faceted Classification Scheme") Synchronous CMC most obviously covers video and voice chat, such as might be used on Skype, because these programs generally do not allow the sender to leave a video or voicemail -- the call only goes through if the receiver is also logged in. IRC is a text-based chat client that works the same way: messages cannot be sent unless the receiver is signed in. However, other methods of CMC might also be considered synchronous if we broaden our definition slightly. For instance, the typed back-and-forth one might experience in Skype, Google Hangouts or AIM could be considered synchronous, although all of these tools do save messages sent to the receiver when the receiver is offline[4], because users typically are logged in simultaneously, and are interested in engaging in real-time discussion. Asynchronous CMC, meanwhile, covers e-mail, comment sections and website posts (such as blog posts). As Herring (2000) notes, asynchronous CMC, when compared to synchronous CMC, "show[s] greater inequity in terms of amount of participation [between men and women]," typically engages an older, more professional audience, and is the mode of more serious discussion. ("Gender Differences") For instance, news websites, a type of asynchronous CMC, are generally home to conversations of a certain gravity, and these conversations are housed in comment

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[4] Very few text-based modes of CMC remain that do not allow messages to be sent to users who are offline.

sections, also a kind of asynchronous CMC. Much of the research described here is devoted not to comment sections, but to various other kinds of asynchronous CMC, such as discussion lists, forum posts, and blog posts. This is because comments sections are considerably more recent than e-mail discussion lists and forums, on which the majority of asynchronous CMC research is based. This chapter begins with a brief description of *YouTube* and news sites generally. I then turn to a description of some of the earliest asynchronous CMC research. The majority of the chapter is devoted to discussing four studies of asynchronous CMC that are particularly relevant to my study.

Section 2: *YouTube* and News Sites

YouTube is a popular, Google-owned, online video streaming service, based in the U.S. It came online in 2005, and rapidly became a well-known entertainment website: by April of 2008, it hosted over 85 million videos and "accounted for 37 percent of all Internet videos watched inside the United States, with the next largest service, Fox Interactive Media, accounting for only 4.2 percent" (Burgess & Green 2). This popularity derives in part from the wide diversity of content available on the site, created both by common users and, more recently, corporate users, its easy-to-use nature, and its sense of community. *YouTube* is a Web 2.0 site, characterized "by social interaction and user-generated content" (Herring, "Discourse in Web 2.0" 1). As a user-based website, *YouTube* has a complicated relationship with the corporations that seek to benefit from the site. On one hand, everyday users can benefit financially by agreeing to run advertisements at the beginning of their videos and receive revenue from the advertiser. On the other hand, the presence of corporate channels is in opposition to the dominant community on *YouTube*, "the community of amateur videographers" (Strangelove 113), and is viewed as

exploiting *YouTube's* popularity for money. In other words, *YouTube* is a site where the usurping

of the private sphere by the public sphere, discussed in Chapter 2, is a concern.

Dislike of corporations aside, *YouTube* has, as with the rest of the Internet, historically

been considered very democratic, because participation on *YouTube* is cheap and requires limited

technical skill. As we saw in Chapter 2, however, not everyone has equal access to the Internet,

and oppressive social norms remain relevant online. Additionally, for *YouTube*, localized

versions of the website created to conform to different national laws mean that not everyone has

access to all videos, since some videos are blocked in some countries. Strangelove suggests that

YouTube exists in a world where the prevailing powers are "patriarchal capitalism and

misogynistic media culture" (Strangelove 84) and, as Gandy (2002) notes, new media is shaped

in such a way as to support "the interests of already powerful social groups" (458). I would add

that, as a popular website, *YouTube* is more dramatically affected by elements of online culture

addressed in Chapter 2, when compared to news websites, because news websites do not exist

solely in the online world. These online cultural effects have made *YouTube* home to "hundreds

of thousands (if not millions) of videos and written comments . . . that are . . . pornographic,

violent, and racist" (Strangelove 106). While the amount of vitriol present on the site is

problematic, it is important to remember that all of the freedoms allowed by the site apply in

theory to women as well as to men (even if not always to the same degree). While new

technologies like *YouTube* may trigger what Drotner (1999) terms "media panics" surrounding

piracy and "cyberbullying," Burgess and Green counsel against treating technologies "as if they

directly cause the cultural transformations being celebrated or deplored" (Burgess & Green 20).

That is, we should understand the vitriol appearing on *YouTube* not as a result of *YouTube's*

specific technology, but as a result of the broader cultural landscape in which it is situated, both

online and offline. Thus, while the effects of the distance created by anonymity and text-based communication may be of interest to us, it is a gross oversimplification to say that they are the sole cause of oppressive behaviour online.

While *YouTube* has grown up with comment sections, newspapers have had to adjust to changing technology over time. It was not so long ago that many newspapers did not have online editions, and the advent of comment sections is even more recent: "[b]y 2009, most daily newspapers -- even small ones -- had websites (Singer and Ashman, 2009)" (Nielsen 472). Many U.S. newspapers opened their comment sections in 2004, but Hughey and Daniels (2013) report that by 2013, many were finding the sections problematic, and some papers were shutting them down (e.g. Reuters). (332) For instance, News & Observer, a local paper in Raleigh, North Carolina, initially opened their comment sections in 2004 to anonymous posters, but found that these attracted "spam, profanity, harassment and unpaid advertising. . . ." (Gsell 16). They decided to implement mandatory registration for commenters in response. The problem does not affect only local papers: journalists across the US cite "[b]igotry, sexism, and racism in online comments [as] common concern ..." (Nielsen 482). Some secondary issues are "inaccuracy of comments, the unrepresentative nature of comments and the lack of two-way interaction between readers and journalists on the comment threads" (Canter 612). Even when comments are not inappropriate or inaccurate, some journalists found that too many comments contained "'me, too' remarks [and] bad jokes" (Nielsen 483). When referring to comments more generally, journalists saw them as having "nothing to offer," not being "thoughtful" or "on-topic" (Nielsen 481). Santana (2011) found similar results in a study of 435 US journalists, with 64.8 per cent of the reporters surveyed disagreeing or strongly disagreeing "that the online comments promoted civil, thoughtful discussion" (75).

Simultaneously, news site comment sections are viewed as a force for good in the online world. Nielsen (2014) found that 53.5 per cent of the 583 US journalists surveyed said they had been presented with a "new perspective" via a comment section. (481) Comments also inspired one journalist from Singer and Ashman's (2009) study to report "a need to 'consciously signal' efforts to look at a topic 'from different perspectives'" in anticipation of the diversity of comments that would be received in response. (16) Overall, then, the diversity of readers' voices aids in detailed, balanced coverage. Readers provide expertise, and inspire journalists to do more fact-checking before publishing. Readers also cause journalists to consider news items from a different perspective. This points to a more general benefit of comment sections: they "[make] it possible to present, within the same edition, the reactions of readers who also respond to and question one another" (Mabweazara 46). Unsurprisingly then, journalists at the UK's *Guardian* newspaper "also linked UGC[5] [User-Generated Content] to values of universal free speech" alongside "strengthened relationships" (Singer & Ashman 12). This was true not just at the *Guardian*, but also at local British papers, where three quarters of respondents "saw enabling comments as a way to support free expression and agreed that UGC diversified the news product" (Singer 134).

Section 3: Early CMC Research

As discussed in Chapter 2, early views of the Internet imagined it to be a utopian world, removed from offline oppression. In part, this is likely due to the relatively homogeneous nature of early online participants, who were mostly white men. Beginning in the early 90s, however, women began to access online forms of communication more frequently, leading to more available evidence for academic research on online gender relations. This research has found that

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[5] Comments are sometimes labelled as User-Generated Content (UGC), which is content created by users which may or may not be considered news. UGC generally refers not only to comment sections, but UGC as a whole, without clearly demarcating comment sections.

men and women do indeed communicate differently online, so that gender is distinguishable online and oppressive norms remain in play. For instance, Selfe and Meyer (1991) find that men and higher status participants dominate asynchronous CMC discussions regardless of degree of anonymity, and multiple studies find that men generally behave in a more aggressive manner than women in online discussions. (see, for example: Herring, 1993; Herring, Johnson & DiBenedetto, 1992; McCormick & McCormick, 1992)

Herring (1994) proposes an explanation for this behaviour: based on survey responses, men indicate an appreciation of "speed (valued not only in computer systems but in human interlocutors, for whom it presupposes a certain level of technical skill and access to sophisticated equipment) and rational debate, according to which the ideal communication interaction involves intelligent, reasoned debate about well-documented facts," ("Politeness" 290) in addition to evoking "an ideal of freedom from external authority" (289). These values "supercede politeness and result in violations (including flaming) of conventional politeness norms" (279) when they are threatened by other net users. In other words, interlocutors who appear to be responding slowly, to not be engaging in rational debate, or to be attempting to impose external authority are likely to find themselves on the receiving end of some degree of rudeness. Here we must recognize the possible reasons for responding slowly, which may be due to being away from one's computer or thinking deeply about the topic of discussion, in addition to a slow Internet connection. We should also consider the fact that women are stereotyped as overly emotional, and thus irrational, which may put them at greater risk for being considered subpar debate partners. Finally, a woman calling for stricter rules regarding harassment in an online community, or speaking up more broadly about mistreatment of women online may be seen as trying to impose external authority in a private, online space. The last of these is

especially relevant to this study because feminists arguing for behavioural changes online may be seen as seeking to impose authority in spaces that do not belong to them.

Section 4: Previous Research of Anti-Feminist Discourse & Use of 'f-'categories in CMC

In the following section, I will turn my attention to more detailed discussion of four studies, which will inform my discussion in Chapters 5 and 6. The first three of these focus primarily on the relationship between libertarianism and free speech issues, and oppression. The final study discussed instead focuses on the pre-empting of arguments in discourse about feminist subject matter. This relates to the postfeminist "knowingness" discussed in Chapter 2, and will also inform the discussion of Co-optation in Chapters 5 and 6.

Herring et al.'s (1995) "'This Discussion Is Going Too Far!' Male Resistance to Female Participation on the Internet" offers an in-depth analysis of two conversations occurring on academic discussion lists. The first of these is a discussion on Megabyte University (MBU), where an English professor requests suggestions for readings in a men's literature course. In response to this request, women raise the point that, in fact, most literature courses are "men's," and that the offering of such a course might take valuable resources away from a less traditional course offering. The second discussion takes place on the LINGUIST discussion list, and revolves around an advertisement comparing unattractive dates to dogs. The discussion begins with a post by a woman, who considers whether *dog* in the context of the advertisement applies only to women, or to both women and men, and thus whether or not the ad is sexist. This study is interesting because both discussion groups were, in general, "considered to be models of appropriate discourse by their members" (67). However, when women in both groups raised concerns about women's issues,

> [m]ale members reacted . . . by employing a variety of silencing strategies: first
> they avoided addressing the women's concerns by dismissing them as trivial or by

intellectualizing the discussion away from its original focus; then they erupted into anger and accusations when the women persisted in posting messages on the topic; and finally they co-opted and redefined the terms of the discourse as a means of regaining control. (68)

Of particular relevance to my study is the kind of discourse the men used in their accusations. Herring et al. describe it in the following way: "[s]everal [of the men involved in the discussion] . . . declared themselves to have been silenced by the women on the list and by the 'hegemony' of feminism in the field of English" (73). They continue: "men [in the MBU discussion] commented that they 'weigh nearly every word [they] say [...] with this kind of topic'; that they are 'staying silent' because the likelihood of misinterpretation makes it 'not worth talking'; or that they feel there is 'a PC build-up of bias' against them" (84). Herring et al. argue that the effect of this discourse is to tell women: "Your behavior is inappropriate and violates standards of what is socially tolerable; if you persist, you may be responsible for driving decent peace-loving people away and (by implication) ultimately destroying the harmony of the group" (85). We can see, then, the expressions of anger and victimization on the part of the men when women seem to impose external authority by "silencing" the men via their own discussing of women's issues concerning sexism in a male-dominated discussion: men create discord in the group but blame it on the women for speaking up, thereby reversing the oppressive relations the women have been trying to discuss. That is, when the women bring forward their concerns about women's oppression, they are told that they, in fact, are the ones engaging in oppression. In both discussion groups, then, the strategies adopted by the men are consistent with libertarian views that support the notion that oppressed groups are in fact party to oppression.

According to Herring et. al., the ultimate effect of the men's discursive strategies in both discussion groups was that "the discussion died and the discourse returned to the status quo, with men once again controlling the floor and introducing most of the topics discussed by the group"

(68). However, Herring et al. note with some optimism: "women on MBU were aware of silencing mechanisms used by men against them, and identified them when they occurred constructing a metadiscursive commentary that proved to be a powerful form of resistance against silencing" (91). The women's use of this metadiscursive commentary in order to resist the men's silencing tactics highlights for Herring et al. "the role played by feminism in empowering the women to speak up and continue speaking in the face of active discouragement" (68). Indeed, "the only silencing behavior the women did not name was co-optation, which was disguised in the form of agreement with feminist views, and their failure to do so ultimately led to their discursive gains being co-opted" (91). We can see then why research into discursive methods that undermine feminism is relevant for online discussions of this variety: being able to identify silencing discursive strategies may empower those the strategies are being used against, while their lack of identification may lead to the downfall of those being undermined. Wherever women are exposed to both overt and covert forms of discriminatory discourse, knowledge of the forms and patterns used to undermine and silence women may be of use.

Herring identifies similar discursive strategies in her 1999 paper, "The Rhetorical Dynamics of Gender Harassment On-Line," where she examines two separate cases of harassment of female CMC participants by male participants, one on the IRC channel #india, a synchronous mode of communication, and the other on Paglia-L, an academic discussion list, an asynchronous mode of communication. I focus here primarily on the findings connected to the asynchronous discussion, which revolves around the forced retirement of Professor Matin Yaqzan, who wrote an article for the University of New Brunswick's student paper in which he blames women for date rape. As Herring explains, due to the asynchronous nature of the discussion list, "harassers must rely exclusively on language to intimidate and silence in the

asynchronous mode" (151). This is in contrast with the synchronous mode, where members "can be kicked off a channel -- that is, their connection can be electronically broken."

Of course, context of discussion is important as well: while discussion on IRC is "crude, direct, and sexually explicit," conversation "in discussion lists [is] oriented toward debate among older, academic users, [and] gender harassment is typically rationalized by -- and masked beneath -- an intellectual veneer" (152). Contextually, asynchronous discussion on news websites may be similar to the kinds of discussion lists Herring refers to, given the typically serious and formal tone of conversation. Similarly, while *YouTube* contains a wide variety of video content, some humorous, some less so, the videos chosen for this project both tend towards the formal. "WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*" is framed partially as a debate, with YouTuber Laci Green presenting reasons (and factual information) for being a feminist, and ends with her asking her viewers to discuss why they do or do not identify as feminists in the comment section. "More Feminist Fails For 2015" is presented as a news segment with a presenter, video clips, and information on recent events. These videos will be described in more detail in Chapter 4, and transcripts from each video can be found in Appendix J and Appendix I, respectively.

Interestingly, in Herring's study, it is in the more academically-oriented discussion, as opposed to the everyday interactions on IRC, that accusations of censorship from the men involved arise when women participating in the discussion raise concerns about the topic under discussion from a feminist point of view: "For suggesting that Yaqzan's views on 'date rape' are problematic, [a user called] Mary is labeled as 'censor' by Geoff [another user], and lumped together with 'PC fascists' who promote 'feminist dogma'" (157). Men involved in the discussion "invoke libertarian principles of freedom of expression, constructing women's resistance as 'censorship'," a strategy that Herring argues succeeds "because of the ideological

dominance of (male-gendered) libertarian norms of interaction on the Internet" (152). Herring notes that "[t]hese messages distort Mary's position, conflating her criticism of Yaqzan's views with a call for the suppression of the rights of individuals to express such views" (157). In sum, "[i]n the asynchronous discussion group, harassment is accomplished rhetorically, by associating women in the discussion with alleged extremist political forces" (157). The result of these discursive strategies is that "communication evolves over time to more closely approximate a style of interaction preferred by, and advantageous to, male participants. . . . The women . . . are coerced into accommodation by being systematically presented with limited, undesirable choices: . . . cease to express pro-female viewpoints or be vilified. . ." (160). Once again, we see the interplay of male online values of libertarianism and the characterization of men as oppressed and women as oppressive.

A more recent work, in this case a discourse analysis of news website comment sections, comes from Hughey and Daniels (2013) "Racist Comments at Online News Sites: A Methodological Dilemma for Discourse Analysis." In this paper, Hughey and Daniels discuss the difficulties of engaging in discourse analysis of comment sections on news websites, where comments frequently are moderated, not archived, or simply not allowed. The authors, examining racist discourse in comment sections, argue that these features of comment sections result in "whitewashed" data for the researcher, either because they do not allow users to post certain comments, or erase the comments after a given period of time -- resulting in researchers being unable to access them -- and that analysts "need guidelines on how to recognize and study increasingly disguised forms of racist discourse in public and virtual contexts" (334). As a step towards elucidating such guidelines, they examine data from news websites that require user registration, including real life payment information, which should result in more covert forms of

racism, due to users' concerns about being barred from the site. Their aim is to identify some covert strategies for propagating racist discourse, even when comments are moderated, and the user's identity is known to the site operators (even if not necessarily to other users). The news websites used in the course of this study, the *New York Times* and the *Globe and Mail*, require this kind of registration.

Hughey and Daniels first identify coded language, such as *POS* (Piece of Shit), used to bypass filters designed to remove foul language. This kind of coded language is also found in work by Erjavec and Kovačič (2012), where a slight transformation of the Slovenian *peder* (*faggot*) to the diminutive form *pederček* is enough to bypass filters. (908) Next, and most relevant to this study, Hughey and Daniels identify "common sense" racism, used by commenters to "cover their racialized speech in 'common sense' appeals to supposedly race-neutral principles and/or by appealing to historically dominant and well-entrenched racial stereotypes that are collectively shared and rarely challenged" (338). This is done in three ways: by making "abstract arguments that invoke the individual's right to engage in 'free speech'" by making "accusations of victimhood that appeal to 'political correctness'," and by making "seemingly matter-of-fact statements that are based on implicit racial stereotypes and myths" (338). As an example of abstract arguments based on free speech, they cite a comment where the author supported "birtherism[6]" on First Amendment grounds. A second example, demonstrating the use of accusations of victimhood, begins with a reference to Obama's "illeged [sic] US Citizenship [sic]" before moving on to discuss the author's lack of employment, and ends: "Caucasians have passed laws, and rules that try to be fair to every other race in the country which is more then ok with me but we excluded ourselves, why is this?" (339) The author here

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[6] The movement denying that president Barack Obama was born in the United States.

ties Obama's administration to their own difficulties, and subsequently to the victimization of "Caucasians," who are excluded from the fair laws and rules protecting other "races" in the U.S..

In their analysis of these discursive strategies, Hughey and Daniels assert that discourse analysts must employ "[n]uanced discourse methodologies" which "could . . . detail the ways that white supremacist logic employs political rhetoric as a Trojan horse amidst the internet landscape" (342). They also argue these strategies are evidence that moderation is not an adequate response to racism online because it is costly, "may provide a false sense of a 'post-racial' or 'color-blind nation'," and "is a reactionary tactic predicated on dominant understandings of racism" (343). Comment section moderation generally requires payment to the moderators (except in cases where volunteer moderators can be located), and moderation itself gives the impression that racism is no longer an issue because it erases the more overt forms of racism. Relatedly, moderation is based on an understanding of racism that locates racist discourse in overt attacks -- racism in its more covert forms would not appear in comment sections otherwise -- and is reactionary -- it is a band-aid solution that does nothing to educate or reduce occurrences of racist discourse. As a result, moderation cannot be said to be an adequate response to racism. Arguably, the same may be said of any other covert, oppressive discourse. A much better solution, in my view, is making these covert forms of discourse more widely identifiable, so that they may be noticed and deconstructed in the conversations during which they are used.

The previous three studies focused in part on the way libertarian-related values are used in accusations of censorship directed at oppressed groups. We also saw how knowledge of these kinds of discursive strategies may aid in denaturalizing them and diminishing their power. The

final study I wish to discuss relates in part to the idea that discourse analysis can help to deconstruct discriminatory discursive strategies.

Attenborough's (2014) article, "Categorial Feminism: New Media and the Rhetorical Work of Assessing a Sexist, Humorous, Misogynistic, Realistic Advertisement" is a more recent discourse analysis of asynchronous CMC relating to what Attenborough calls 'f-'categories, such as *feminism* and *feminist*. The author examines the use of 'f-'categories in 146 posts from various websites about a Christmas advertisement in the UK that could potentially be perceived as sexist. Attenborough's study focuses on the way "users claimed or denied their own (or some others') allegiance to 'f-'categories as a method for strengthening their own (or undermining others') assessments" (147). That is, the author investigates "how being or not being a feminist is given meaning in a particular discursive content and as a member's, rather than an analyst's category" (149). Attenborough finds

> two interlocking rhetorical strategies: where users deployed 'f-'categories to suggest that anyone making assessment [x] was doing so on the basis of some pre-existing bias, prejudice or disposition, other users would deploy 'f-'categories to recipient-design an assessment [x] that could deflect or pre-empt precisely those kinds of subject-side allegations. (153)

For instance, "a prevalent method for prospectively or retrospectively attacking the subject-side of users who proffered negative assessments was to suggest that their assessments were caused by a pre-existing allegiance to a dogmatic feminism" (153). That is, authors who positively evaluate the ad (as non-sexist) pre-emptively dismiss concerns of those with negative evaluations of the ad by claiming those concerns were connected to "a dogmatic feminism." This means that posters who want to post negative evaluations of the ad have to pre-emptively counter the idea that their negative evaluation is due to feminist bias. Attenborough provides the following example: "I'm a divorced mum with no man about so unfortunately the ad does reflect my role. I

am far from a bra-burning feminist but do find it offensive to suggest that it's all down to the women to sort" (156). Here, the author of the post describes herself as a "divorced mum with no man about," highlighting her experience with the subject matter presented in the ad, which "[invites] recipients to infer a particular set of skills and competencies . . . along with the entitlement to comment on this advert that flows from those competencies" (156). She further distances herself from accusations of bias by asserting that she is "far from a bra-burning feminist," in order that "divorced mum" is less likely to be read as "someone with a grudge against men" (156).

In contrast, when a commenter posts "positive assessments" of the ad (claims it is not sexist), they must pre-emptively engage with the idea that "only stupid, ignorant or 'non-' feminists would be positively predisposed towards the advert" (159). In order to do so, "[t]hey would often seek to deflect . . . attacks not by repudiating feminism, but, on the contrary, by portraying themselves as 'total', 'absolute' and/or 'fully committed' feminists" (161). For example, Attenborough cites the following comment: "Personally looking after your home, children and the old man does not strike me as being a betrayal of feminist values; it's what I would call being mature and responsible and something to admire rather than condemn" (161). Use of the phrase "does not strike me as being a betrayal of feminist values" signals to the reader that the author possesses "the cultural capital to 'get' the possible relevance of feminism to any subsequent assessment of the advert" and "it is precisely this user's familiarity with feminism that allows her to reframe actions like 'looking after' the 'home, children' and 'the old man' . . . as quintessentially *feminist* actions" (emphasis in original) (162). Attenborough explains that because "authors knew -- just as recipients, as competent social actors knew -- that their assessments would be read not just for what they said about the advert but for what they revealed

about the author doing the assessing, they were designed to pre-empt any subsequent attacks on that author's credibility, objectivity, and so on" (164).

As Attenborough demonstrates, knowledge of how discourse operates, including the discursive strategies used to undermine particular positions, allows authors to pre-emptively defend themselves against attacks by their interlocutors. Further, as demonstrated by Herring et al., this same kind of knowledge allows for metadiscursive commentary to occur following an accusation as well. This recalls the knowingness of a postfeminist sensibility encountered in Chapter 2, in which feminist discourse is combined with sexism to pre-emptively rebut criticism about one's sexist beliefs. As we will see in the analysis section (chapters 5 and 6), this pre-emptiveness is also present in the anti-feminist discourse I analyze in *YouTube* and news website comment sections.

Section 5: Conclusion

I began this chapter with a brief discussion of *YouTube* and news websites, and their comment sections. The majority of the chapter, however, focused on previous research relating to asynchronous CMC. We saw how, while it was previously thought that gender is invisible online, research beginning in the early 90s revealed that gender is in fact distinguishable in CMC. Men in particular communicate more aggressively than women, in part due to a differing value system: men will violate politeness norms if they perceive their interlocutor to be too slow in their response, uninterested in rational debate dealing with hard facts, or as attempting to impose external authority, in the case of the studies reviewed by raising the issue of sexism in male-dominated discussions. Despite this professed interest in fact-related debate, however, the majority of men and women are more likely to simply express their personal views in online discussions.

Related to men's values of speed, rational debate, and freedom from imposition of external authority, Herring et al. (1995) and Herring (1999) demonstrate that when women raised concerns about women's issues in discussion lists, men accused them of oppression, and sowing disharmony in the group. This is similar to the "common sense" racism identified by Hughey and Daniels, where racist discourse occurs alongside calls for more freedom of speech and accusations that oppressors are being victimized. These studies demonstrate the way in which the rights of the individual and concerns with external authority being imposed on the individual, like the libertarian ideas discussed in Chapter 2, are invoked in order to excuse anti-minority sentiments. Finally, we saw how 'f-'categories analyzed in Attenborough's work were used to pre-emptively dismiss possible attacks against an individual. This strategy is made available because feminist ideas have become part of the cultural landscape, as discussed in Chapter 2, and so authors are able to anticipate feminists' (or non-feminists') reactions to their words, and react accordingly. We will see in Chapters 5 and 6 how this pre-emptiveness comes into play in order to dismiss possible attacks based on the kinds of anti-minority arguments and accusations of victimization identified by Herring et al. (1995), Herring (1999), and Hughey and Daniels (2013).

Chapter 4: Methods and Methodology

Section 1: Introduction

I open this chapter with a brief overview of feminist critical discourse analysis, the primary methodology of the project. This is followed by a description of the analytic frameworks used in the analysis, Ehrlich and King (1994), Skinner (2005), and Lazar (2014), to which the majority of the chapter is devoted. I then describe the origins of the data under analysis. The final two sections are focused on my data collection and my methods of analysis.

Section 2: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

This thesis draws on concepts from both feminism and critical discourse analysis. I take the view that gender is an ideological structure, meaning that it "is enacted and renewed in a society's institutions and social practices, which mediate between the individual and the social order" (Lazar, "Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis" 147). This, in turn, means that "asymmetrical gender relations cannot merely be explained by individuals' intentions" because it is not that every individual devises their own gender ideologies; rather, these ideologies are systemic (147). This embedding of power relations within social practices, including discursive practices, is the subject of critical discourse analysis in the sense that through analysis, power relations, as they are embedded in discourse, can be demystified and denaturalized. My interest in gender inequalities specifically, as well as my own political commitment to feminism, has led me to examine power relations through a feminist lens. My focus is on the discursive undermining of feminists and their supporters, under the assumption that this kind of discursive subversion is detrimental to the promotion of women's rights. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the ability to identify and deconstruct discriminatory

discursive strategies denaturalizes such strategies and allows one to mount a better resistance to them. It is my hope that, in demonstrating the use of these strategies, both in individual instances and when combined, I will contribute to others' ability to resist their power and their force.

I would also like to take a moment to briefly discuss what I have taken *feminist* to mean in the context of this project. Though feminism is dedicated to gender equality, one must not identify as a feminist in order to believe in gender equality. That is, gender equality is no longer exclusively a feminist concept -- even if the concept of gender equality finds its origins in feminism. Simultaneously, feminists have varying views on gender equality issues, and indeed on what constitutes an *issue* in the first place. When I refer to *feminist* words or concepts in this work, I mean words or concepts related to the oppression of women, such as *sexism* or *rape*, or to gender equality. Similarly, when I talk about *feminism*, I mean the movement for women to have rights equal to those of men, and take a *feminist* to be a person involved in or supportive of that movement.

Section 3: Framework Descriptions & Examples

As mentioned previously, I draw my analytic categories from three frameworks: Ehrlich and King (1994), Skinner (2005), and Lazar (2014). Below, I outline each of the frameworks in turn, providing examples.

Section 3.1: Ehrlich & King (1994)

In their 1994 paper, "Feminist Meanings and the (De)politicization of the Lexicon," Ehrlich and King examine the way feminist linguistic innovations are redefined and depoliticized by the print media. While they allow that these linguistic innovations certainly do "pervade our culture" they maintain that "it is not clear that their use is consistent with their intended,

feminist-influenced, meanings" (65). In addition to borrowing and building on one form of

redefinition identified in Seidel (1988), Ehrlich and King present three other kinds of

Redefinition found in their data. I will first introduce Ehrlich and King's original work, then turn

to Seidel's work, before returning to Ehrlich and King.

The three forms of redefinition described by Ehrlich and King are Redefinition as

Omission or Obscuring, as Expansion, and as Obliteration. The first of these involves "the

elimination or obscuring of crucial aspects of a term's definition" (65). For example, they cite an

article from the *National Review* in which the writer hypothesized that women "did not report

their 'harassment' because they themselves did not regard a sexual advance as harassment" (66).

This implies that sexual harassment that goes unreported is not sexual harassment at all, merely a

sexual advance: "[r]eporting, then, becomes crucial to Morgenson's definition of *sexual assault*"

(emphasis in original) (66).

Next, Redefinition as Expansion involves "expanding the definition [of a term] beyond

reason . . . and then imputing this expanded (unreasonable) definition to feminists" which

"ridicul[es] and trivializ[es] … the phenomenon in question" (68). This type of Redefinition

takes advantage of the push by feminists to broaden the definitions of some terms, by broadening

a term's meaning to an absurd extent. (68) For instance, feminists have pushed for a broader

definition of rape, to encompass acts of coercion or violence that are not always viewed as

assault in our current culture. However, in a statement in *Reason* magazine, one author states that

"the word rape is being stretched to encompass any type of sexual interaction" (68). As Ehrlich

and King note, this description renders "women's concerns with [these] issues . . . ludicrous,"

(68) because they imply *rape* is being used to categorize any number of inoffensive sexual

activities.

The final form of Redefinition discussed by Ehrlich and King is Redefinition as

Obliteration. This is "the complete obliteration of a term's referent" and "probably the most

violent form of redefinition," which in their examples creates the impression "that phenomena

such as date rape and sexual harassment are creations of the feminist imagination" (68). One

example is taken from Minogue 1991:

> By campaigning against *the thing called* "date rape," the feminist creates immense
> hatred and suspicion between men and women, so that the feminist advice to any
> woman going out on a date is to establish a virtual contract governing what will
> happen in the course of an evening. (emphasis by Ehrlich and King) (Minogue 48
> qtd. in Ehrlich and King 69)

Here, the use of forms like *the thing called* and the quotation marks around *date rape* "express

the degree to which the writer believes in the truth of the propositions uttered" (69). What is

implied by the author is not disagreement with a particular broad or narrow definition of the

term, but disbelief in the existence of the thing being referred to.

The final discursive strategy identified by Ehrlich and King draws from Seidel's (1988)

"The British New Right's 'Enemy Within': The Antiracists." Examining writings taken from a

conservative British journal, the *Salisbury Review*, Seidel discusses the ways in which the New

Right discursively constructs antiracists. The strategy is referred to as Semantic, Mythical

Reversal (SMR) by Seidel, and as Semantic Reversal by Ehrlich and King. According to Seidel,

SMRs have three main functions: they construct the dominated group as the oppressor, create a

false symmetry (in Seidel's case, between black and white "prejudice"), and may reduce racism

and antiracism to "words, mere verbal fallacies," as opposed to "part of a dominant social

relation" (137). Seidel's most "striking" example is

> "the redefinition of 'black' . . . provided by Scruton in his *Times* column of 17
> January 1984, 'Now they tell me: I'm actually black.' . . . Scruton arrives at the
> remarkable conclusion that he is black in that he belongs to a minority (of

educated people) and he is excluded from particular power structures by the prejudice and hostility of the majority." (136)

In discussing Seidel's work, Ehrlich and King outline how Semantic Reversal can be combined with Redefinition to form a two-step discursive strategy. Using the example of political correctness debates on university campuses, the authors explain: "First, attempts to fight racism and sexism on university campuses are characterized or relabeled as the political correctness movement. Second, the political correctness movement is held responsible for creating disharmony and social divisions" (71). They cite the following quote, taken from a May 8, 1991 speech by George Bush Sr. as an example of the second step (where anti-racism, anti-sexism campaigns have already been relabeled as political correctness):

> The notion of "political correctness" has ignited controversy across the land.... What began as a cause for civility has soured into a *cause of conflict* or even censorship.... Political extremists roam the land, abusing the privilege of free speech, *setting citizens against one another on the basis of their class or race.* (emphasis by Ehrlich and King) (71)

Here, the Semantic Reversal takes place in that those fighting racism and sexism are reconstructed as the oppressors -- creating the conflict they say they intend to destroy.

Section 3.2: Skinner (2005)

Skinner's (2005) "Researching People in Power: Practice, Analysis and Action" is based on the author's earlier (2000) work, "Feminist Strategy and Tactics: Influencing State Provision of Counselling for Survivors." In the latter paper, Skinner discusses feminist strategy and tactics used in securing feminist-influenced services in the UK. In the former, she describes her experience working with elite interviewees. In both cases, her work is based on the interactions of police, health officials, and feminists involved in the RSACS [Rape and Sexual Assault Counseling and Support Service] project. This project was aimed at "the development of a local

state service for survivors of rape and sexual assault" ("Researching" 45). She highlights

instances where feminists involved in the project felt they and their work were co-opted by non-

feminist groups, and where some feminist meanings were translated into non-feminist ones.[7] It is

important to note here that what Skinner was examining was the perceptions of feminists

involved in the RSACS project. While these perceptions may or may not have been accurate,

Skinner's interviews indicate that her interviewees were concerned that the strategies used by the

police did not serve their interests.

Skinner defines Co-optation as "the intake of a 'feminist' word, concept,

recommendation, service, group and/or individual by a competing and often dominant

group/institution, so the latter can appear to fulfill feminist demands" (57). She provides an

example in which a feminist organization, "XWAV," was asked to consult with police about

centres that provide support for victims/survivors of sexual assault and rape in a given area

(referred to only as "X"). While this gesture on the part of the police may have been genuine,

there was a sense among some XWAV members, who were later required to compromise on

some of their stances, that in fact their place as consultants was used only as a way to placate

feminists "while attempting to silence their dissent" ("Feminist" 35).

The second discursive strategy described by Skinner is Translation: "the reworking of

that word, concept, recommendation or service in such a way that the initial author's intended

meaning is changed or distorted" ("Researching" 57). For instance, feminists interviewed by

Skinner felt that some of the changes they had suggested to police did not "take the form

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[7] While Skinner discusses these instances in both works, I primarily cite her 2005 chapter because that is where she overtly lays out the three terms used in my work: Co-optation, Incorporation, and Translation.

envisaged by the feminist campaigners," (57) indicating to them that a modification of their intended meaning had occurred.

Finally, Skinner describes Incorporation as "when the word, concept, recommendation, service, group, or individual is subsumed within a competing group/institution, such that the competing group/institution claims ownership, denying the original authorship and/or meaning" (57). After XWAV was co-opted by the police, they were ultimately not involved in the "implementation and running of RSACS" (57). That is, the group was subsumed into the dominant, police force, and the meaning of their work and organization was erased when they were denied significant involvement beyond the consultation process.

Section 3.3: Lazar (2014)

Lazar (2014), "Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Relevance for Current Gender and Language Research," outlines four disavowals used by many in "industrialized societies" to deny the presence of patriarchy "in one's community or as personally relevant" (181). Two of Lazar's Disavowals draw on other work. The Alternate Men Disavowal she describes is based on Forsberg's (2010) *"Masculinity Studies as Fetish and the Need of a Feminist Imagination."* Forsberg notes that while hegemonic masculinity has been recognized in masculinity studies, it has been more 'recognized' in some men than in others: "For [white, middle-class men], the hegemonic masculinity figure has become 'the Other,' a character distant from their own experiences. *Other* men are violent, oppressive, rowdy and macho, while they are 'jämställda' (*gender equal*) partners, and caring, involved fathers" (emphasis in original) (3).

The second Disavowal, what I will call the Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal, draws on Mills' (2008) *Language and Sexism.* Mills' book covers a range of expressions of sexism and

Mills views them through the lens of both second and third wave feminism, both of which she spends some time distinguishing. Mills notes that the focus of third wave feminists on women as a heterogeneous group is important; however, "Third Wave feminism finds it difficult to discuss sexism, since sexism is a concept based on the idea that discrimination against women is systematic and sexism is imposed on women by those in positions of power, it is ingrained in social structures and works to the benefit of all men (patriarchy)" (30). That is, third wave feminism's focus on women as *individuals* can make difficult discussions of broad power structures oppressing and benefiting *groups*. Lazar continues, "there is now a cautiousness about 'gender oversensitivity,' that is reading 'gender' into every situation, even where other identities might be more relevant in given contexts" ("Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Relevance for Current Language and Gender Research" 181). While Lazar does not expressly name this as a Disavowal, she does note with some concern that "feminists might inadvertently contribute toward the emergence of a new gender undersensitivity" (181). While other Disavowals discussed disavow the existence of sexism or patriarchy within a specific group, the Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal disavows the systemic nature of these issues.

The remaining two Disavowals are labeled by Lazar herself, as the Alternate Context Disavowal and the Generational Disavowal. The first of these is a "cultural othering" wherein other ("third-world") countries or immigrant communities are viewed as the home of sexism. The latter contends that while sexism certainly used to be a problem, it no longer is, and thus feminism is obsolete.

Section 4: Introduction to Data

The data under analysis in this thesis are covert instances of anti-feminist discourse found in comment sections on news websites and *YouTube*. Online discourse is of interest because anti-woman and anti-feminist sentiment are frequently visible online, in both overt and covert forms. Comment sections specifically are of interest because they are ubiquitous online, and discussion of covert discourse in comment sections has received limited attention in the literature, especially when compared with other forms of asynchronous CMC. Additionally, comment sections are potentially beneficial as a form of democratic communication, but in order for these benefits to be fully realized, we must obtain more information about the discourse occurring in them. In this section, I would like to briefly introduce the specific videos and articles being responded to in the comments that I am analyzing. Transcripts of videos, along with copies of each article, can be found in the appendices. The descriptions in this section are grouped by source, and arranged alphabetically within those groups.

Section 4.1: *Globe and Mail* Articles

"Advice to Younger Women: Practice Manning Up" (Appendix A)

This article discusses recent examples of sexist behaviour, such as "manspreading," and calls for the expulsion of male dentistry students at Dalhousie University who posted rape-jokes to a Facebook group. The author describes these issues as having been blown out of proportion, and calls for women to stand up for themselves and address these issues head-on by discussing them with men, instead of shaming them online or petitioning to have them expelled from their programs.

"Body Politic: Why Do Vintage Playboys Appeal to Female Customers?" (Appendix B)

This article opens with a description of the author's surprise at being given a vintage Playboy magazine by a "liberated," platonic female friend. The author explains that early copies of the magazine have become popular across the country, and goes on to explore the views several women have of the magazine -- the owner of a store specializing in vintage products, and two pornography experts. The author does not come to a firm conclusion about the magazine; instead, he simply describes the varying views held by these women.

"Eighteen Minutes, Zero Men Speaking: How Scotland's Parliament Made History" (Appendix C)

This article opens with a description of the eighteen minutes in the Scottish Parliament after Nicola Sturgeon was sworn in as the first female First Minister of Scotland and was asked questions by the leaders of the Labour Party and the Conservatives, both women. The article goes on to describe the history of women in Scottish politics, focusing largely on perceptions of the current First Minister. Despite being rather celebratory about this step towards equality, the article also notes that women hold only 35% of the seats in the Scottish Parliament, and notes that the next leader of the Labour party is likely to be a man.

"Nov. 15: This Week's Talking Point -- the Price of Going Green -- and Other Letters to the Editor" (Appendix D)

This piece is a series of letters to the editor published by the Globe and Mail. The relevant letter (to which data in this thesis responded), written by Katie Almond, is a response to an earlier piece entitled "Abusers diminish legitimate male issues" (Appendix E) in which the author, Gary Mason, describes how advocates for men's rights have difficulty gaining

legitimacy. Specifically, he refers to Barbara Kay, a writer at the National Post, who has attempted to write about these issues and received abusive mail from feminists in response. Almond takes issue with Mason's characterization of the authors of Kay's hate mail as "feminists," arguing instead that the authors were simply "purporting" to be feminists, and that Mason is perpetuating "gender polarization" and "negative stereotyping" by describing the authors of the hate mail as feminists.

"When Will Harassment Change? It Already Has" (Appendix F)

The author of this article opens with references to recent sexual assault charges levelled at Bill Cosby and Jian Ghomeshi, and to some recent campus rape incidents. The author moves on to discuss her own experiences with sexism as she was growing up, and compares these experiences to recent events. She describes changes both in harassment behaviour and perceptions of these behaviours over time, and draws the conclusion that, while sexism continues to rear its head in the news, things have ultimately changed for the better over the years.

Section 4.2: *New York Times* Articles

"Childless, With Regret and Advice: Don't Wait for the Perfect Picture" (Appendix G)

This article recounts a series of decisions by the author that have led to her not having children. She discusses various ways other women in her life have gone about having and raising children, and gives readers the advice not to wait for "the perfect picture" before having children. She closes with the note that although she feels pleased with her life overall, she sometimes wishes she had followed in her mother's footsteps, and made time for both children and a career

"Excluded from the Silicon Valley Dream" (Appendix H)

This article addresses the notion of "culture fit" in the tech industry. The article discusses the primarily white, male workforce in Silicon Valley, and how the culture fit concept is used to avoid hiring people other than white men, or used to force those who do get into the business, despite their skin color and/or gender, to make personal sacrifices. The article focuses primarily on the experiences of Erica Joy, a black woman working in Silicon Valley, who voices concerns about racism in the industry, and the many personal sacrifices she made in order to fit in with her colleagues.

"The Complicated Origins of 'Having It All'" (Appendix I)

This article describes how the phrase *having it all* has shifted from encouraging women to achieve their desires both in and out of the household, to a reproachful key phrase in debates about whether women can or should be able to balance work and family goals. The author discusses how the negative perception of the phrase is due to a broken promise by feminists that women would be able to have a career without forgoing time with their families. The article finishes with an examination of the history of the phrase *having it all* and describes it as having a corporate, rather than feminist, origin.

Section 4.3: *YouTube* Videos

"More Feminist Fails For 2015" (Appendix J)

This video, posted on the popular *YouTube* channel "The Alex Jones Channel," follows a format similar to a news segment, with host Lee Ann MacAdoo speaking over several news clips. The video describes several "stupid feminist causes" from 2014, and compares Western

feminist campaigns with the severe treatment of women in Iraq and Pakistan. The segment closes with the prediction that more "stupid" feminist campaigns would appear in 2015.

"WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*" (Appendix K)

This video by popular YouTuber Laci Green opens with Laci's "confession" that she is a feminist. This is followed by a humorous list of stereotypes about feminists, after which Laci lists a wide variety of reasons she identifies as a feminist. At the end of the video, she invites viewers to leave a comment, providing their own reasons for identifying as a feminist or not.

Section 5: Data Collection Methods

I decided to collect data from the website, *YouTube*, and the websites of two North American national newspapers: the *Globe and Mail*, a Canadian paper, and the *New York Times*, an American paper. My primary concern in the selection of the newspapers was choosing papers with a wide readership, in an attempt to parallel the number of viewers on *YouTube*. My focus on North American papers was the result of my own familiarity with the culture of those likely to be commenting on the papers' associated websites, and of the large number of North Americans participating on *YouTube*. Both papers have a large online readership: the *Globe and Mail* received an average of 4.1 million visitors a month in 2014 (The Globe and Mail Media Group) while the *New York Times* site received an average of 48.7 million visitors per month in 2012. (Radwanick) Having selected the websites from which to collect my data, I moved on to selecting the specific comment sections that I would be drawing from for my analysis. Data collection happened in two phases.

Section 5.1: Phase 1

On all three sites, *YouTube*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *New York Times*, I first did a simple

search for *feminism*. On *YouTube*, I selected two videos from which to collect data: "WHY I'M

A…FEMINIST *gasp*" and "More Feminist Fails For 2015." I selected these videos for two

reasons. First, they were two of the top results of my search for *feminism*, indicating their

popularity with viewers.[8] Second, they present differing views on North American feminism,

which I thought might attract different viewers and comments. On both news websites, I selected

a greater number of objects[9] (in this case, all written articles, as opposed to videos) from which

to draw data: 14 articles on the *Globe and Mail's* website, and 10 articles from the *New York*

Times. I worked backwards through the search results, seeking out articles with comment

sections containing at least one comment relating to feminism.[10] Fewer objects were required

from *YouTube* because both videos selected contained thousands of responses, while individual

articles on news websites had anywhere from 1 to 354 comments. My aim was to collect a

similar number of comments from each source.

Once sources were selected, I began by using Fireshot, a web browser extension, to take

screen captures of the objects themselves. In this stage of analysis, I also transcribed both

YouTube videos. While I transcribed "More Feminist Fails For 2015," "WHY I'M

A…FEMINIST *gasp*" has closed captions, which I copied into a document. I then took

multiple screenshots of the attached comment sections. On *YouTube*, I did not collect all

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[8] One way videos on *YouTube* maintain their place in the search results ranking is by maintaining a high number of
views and comments.
[9] I will be using this term to refer to what the comments used as data are responding to (videos or articles).
[10] This was done quickly by fully expanding the comment sections, then doing a search for *feminism* on the page.

available comments. Instead, I captured the first few threads[11] in each video. I collected 415

comments from six different threads from "More Feminist Fails For 2015," and 511 comments

from four different threads from "WHY I'M A…FEMINIST *gasp*." On the *Globe and Mail*

website, I captured the full comment section attached to each article, for a total of 835

comments. The *New York Times* website presented some difficulties: instead of being situated at

the bottom, in the same window as the article itself (which is the case on the *Globe and Mail*

website as well as on *YouTube*), comments on the *New York Times* website pop up in a new

window, internal to the window the article is in. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: *New York Times* **Comment Section**

This setup meant that it was only possible, at least with the tool I was using, to take a shot of the

sections of the page visible to the user (whereas in all other cases, I could take a screenshot of the

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[11] Threads are individual "discussions": when a commenter posts a comment, they start a thread, which may or may not receive responses. Any responses to the initial comment (or responses to those responses) is the "thread," which may contain "subthreads" (discussions within the discussions).

entire page – even parts that were not visible). Trying to capture each comment, even when a section contained very few comments, would have been extremely time-consuming. In this case, I browsed the comments, and only took screenshots of comments and conversations I felt were likely to be good data.

All data was collected on February 28, 2015, and was at least two weeks old at the time. This was done in order to give moderators on the website enough time to remove any comments violating the website's regulations. Taking screenshots of all of the data turned out to be especially important on *YouTube*, where comments, and sometimes entire threads, can be deleted (and in several cases were).

Section 5.2: Phase 2

Once the screenshots were collected, I scrolled through them to locate potential data. I did not use data from every article I had collected comments from. I collected 25 comments from the *New York Times*, in response to seven articles, 25 from the *Globe and Mail*, also in response to seven articles, and 25 from each *YouTube* video. This resulted in 100 comments in total that would form my corpus for analysis. While I used some case-by-case discretion, I applied the following criteria to the selection of comments. First, I made attempts to limit the number of comments taken from the same poster (because comments from the same poster did not always bring new discursive strategies). I also tried to take comments from multiple threads, where possible, as different threads typically contained different topics of discussion. Comments could be original posts (that is, they could be the first post in a thread), or responses to previous posters. In order for the comments to be included in my corpus, they had to say something about feminism or women's rights, or supporters thereof, but could contain any number of other topics

as well (though only those sections related to feminism or other commenters were analyzed). Each of the selected comments was copied into a spreadsheet along with any other relevant information, and this spreadsheet was later imported into NVivo, a qualitative analysis program, for analysis.

Section 6: Data Analysis Methods

Before analyzing a comment, each object being responded to was reviewed multiple times. I conducted the analysis mostly by strategy (as opposed to by source), such that I coded each instance of a single discursive strategy across every source before moving onto the next strategy. As one of my goals in this research was to see how discursive strategies identified by various scholars related to each other, I maintained an awareness of how strategies may have complemented one another or could be collapsed into one another. Comments where analytic categories intersect will be discussed in Chapter 6.

All coding was initially done on printed PDF copies of the collected screenshots, and subsequently entered into NVivo. Coding was primarily done using NVivo, where every instance of a discursive strategy was coded. Multiple instances of the same strategy within a single comment were coded separately from each other (so that a single comment could be coded for "Co-optation" multiple times if it contained multiple instances of the Co-optation strategy). When coding in NVivo, the researcher may select an entire datum (in my case, entire comment) to be coded, or code only a section of the datum by highlighting the specific section to be coded. The researcher may then pull up all instances of a specific code at a later time, allowing them to see these instances alongside each other, without extraneous detail.

Finally, as mentioned previously, some comments were discarded and replaced throughout the analysis. When this occurred, I analyzed the new datum for all discursive strategies previously examined before continuing on where I had left off.

Section 7: Conclusion

This chapter provided a discussion of my data collection and analytic methods, in addition to the methodology driving the analysis: feminist critical discourse analysis. Two phases were involved in collecting data from *YouTube*, the *Globe and Mail* website, and the *New York Times* website. 100 comments were examined in the analysis of data. The analysis was primarily done using the NVivo qualitative analysis program. The majority of the chapter was devoted to outlining the three frameworks from which my analytic categories were drawn. Ehrlich and King (1994), borrowing from Seidel (1988), identify four types of Redefinition: Redefinition as Obscuring or Omission, Redefinition as Expansion, Redefinition as Obliteration, and Semantic Reversal. Skinner (2005) illustrates the Co-optation, Incorporation, and Translation of feminist innovations (linguistic and not). Finally, Lazar (2014) presents four Disavowals used to create a sense of distance between members of industrialized societies and systemic gender oppression: Alternate Men, Gender Oversensitivity, Alternate Context, and Generational.

Chapter 5: Individual Instances of Analytic Categories

Section 1: Introduction

In this chapter, I describe multiple instances of each discursive strategy found in the data. I begin with Skinner's Co-optation, Incorporation and Translation, followed by Ehrlich and King's Redefinitions as Omission or Obscuring, as Expansion, and as Obliteration, and Semantic Reversal, and finally turn to Lazar's Alternate Context Disavowal, Alternate Men Disavowal, Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal, and Generational Disavowal. While the discursive strategies are primarily discussed within their designated section, interactions between strategies are touched on throughout. Chapter 6 is devoted to a closer examination of comments containing multiple strategies, and how these strategies intersect with each other, what I am calling their "intersections."

Section 2: Skinner

Section 2.1: Co-optation

Skinner defines Co-optation as "the intake of a 'feminist' word, concept, recommendation, service, group and/or individual by a competing and often dominant group/institution, so the latter can appear to fulfill feminist demands" ("Researching" 57). I have elected to take a broad view of "feminist" in this section, with a focus on how Co-optation is used to "appear to fulfill feminist demand." For instance, I have chosen to view admissions of the existence of sexism as Co-optation when they occur alongside anti-feminist discourse within a single comment. Concessions of sexism's existence can, of course, be genuine, but these admissions, in the context of the data, typically introduce defenses of sexism or of attacks on feminists. That is, these particular acknowledgements of sexism are disingenuous.

The Co-optation strategy has the effect of trying to appease feminists with its use of feminist beliefs and terms. That is, it seems to be functioning as a kind of defence mechanism. For instance, in example 1[12], the author defends both himself and Playboy magazine by appealing to positive portrayals of body diversity that allegedly appear in the magazine.

Example 1 (Body Politic) (Appendix B)

(1)   Playboy and many other men's magazines do not portray size zero models like Cosmo,
(2)   Elle and most women's magazines and fashion. Playboy does not subscribe to starving
(3)   women

(4)   Now the air brushing that has been going on for a while does stink. The original Playboy
(5)   from the 50's up to the late 80's was non-airbrushed and real women with very few
(6)   having implants.

First, the user co-opts the notion of body diversity[13] to defend men's magazines dedicated to the objectification of women's bodies: the claim is that women's magazines do not portray a diversity of body types, while men's magazines do (lines 1-3). Therefore, men's magazines are less problematic for women than women's magazines and should not be judged as misogynist. Next, the commenter co-opts the same concept in order to defend himself in line 4. Here, the author offers his negative view of digital modification of women's bodies in men's magazines. This additional use of Co-optation distances the author from sexism even further: even if his arguments in favour of Playboy are rejected, he has proven himself in favour of "real" women's bodies.

Syntactically, Co-optation is frequently marked with the conjunction *but* as in the following (relevant conjunctions are underlined):

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[12] All comment extracts appearing in this thesis contain all original spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.
[13] As women's bodies are subject to constant policing by a society that embraces only a small range of physical forms body diversity is related to feminism via its rejection of this need for policing.

Example 2 (WHY I'M A…FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   like I dont want to objectify women, <u>but</u> fact is, I was quite litterally built
(2)   to stick my penis in a womans vagina, in pleasure, for the means of
(3)   reproducing and keeping my species alive. Im not justifying rape in any way
(4)   cuz thats just messed up. <u>But</u> by instinct, if I see a girl 90% naked, im going to
(5)   be turned on. i think gender equality is a great idea. <u>but</u> i also think many
(6)   femists need to be reminded what true gender equality is.

The author of example 2 uses a Co-optation strategy three times throughout the comment. The

first time is in line 1, where they co-opt anti-objectification language: "I dont want to objectify

women." The second time occurs in lines 3-4, "Im not justifying rape in any way cuz thats just

messed up," where one sees a Co-optation of anti-rape language. Finally, the last use of Co-

optation occurs in line 5, where the user co-opts the concept of gender equality: "i think gender

equality is a great idea." All of these propositions are dismissed immediately after they are co-

opted. This is logical, given the nature of Co-optation: it must co-occur with other strategies that

critique feminism, lest it be mistaken for genuine support of feminism. These other strategies are

frequently connected to the Co-optation via use of this conjunction. The author of example 3

uses this same sequence: Co-optation, conjunction, and finally attack.

Example 3 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   listen, i agree. women should be treated just as equally as men are. EVERYONE
(2)   SHOULD. regardless of race, skin colour, social class, or whatever. you be nice to me,
(3)   I'll be nice to you. simple as that. but I think the majority of feminists are just plain
(4)   stupid. In the U.S. at least..

First, this comment co-opts gender egalitarian language, in line 1: "women should be treated just

as equally as men are." This use of Co-optation to frame the commenter as pro-equality creates a

springboard for an attack on feminists, in line 3: "I think the majority of feminists are just plain

stupid." When we compare examples 1 and 2 to example 3, we see how in the first two examples

Co-optation is used as a defence of the author and their sexist views, while in the latter case it acts as a precursor to an attack on feminists.

In this section I have identified some of the ways in which Co-optation is used in anti-feminist comments online. It may be used as a defence of an anti-feminist author or sexist behaviour, or as the precursor to an attack on feminists, especially where gender equality language is co-opted to facilitate the use of a Semantic Reversal. In these cases, the Co-optation is frequently followed by a conjunction phrase.

Section 2.2: Incorporation

Skinner identifies Incorporation as when a feminist "word, concept, recommendation, service, group or individual is subsumed within a competing group/institution, such that the competing group/institution claims ownership, denying the original authorship and/or meaning" ("Researching" 57). Whereas Co-optation creates the illusion of agreement between feminists and anti-feminists, Incorporation removes that possibility by reversing ownership, ascribing ownership of feminist words or concepts, etc., to forces other than feminist ones. Importantly, Incorporation occurs via emphatic statement, which is what signals the denial of original authorship or meaning.

At best, Incorporation implies there is no reason to be a feminist: when all of feminists' victories and language are attributed to others, it appears they have accomplished nothing. At worst, when used in conjunction with other strategies, it makes feminists appear problematic. Example 4 illustrates the former case.

Example 4 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

 (1)   3) Biology gave men power, and he pretty much built everything. He even proved his

(2)   benevolence and altruism by liberating women, against his own interests. It has now
(3)   come back to bite him.
(4)   4) Women by comparison, were handed the reigns of society by governments.

In this example, men can be understood as the "competing group" in the Incorporation. The author is denying the fact that women were responsible for the liberation of women, instead attributing it to the kindness of men. Thus, women's liberation is "subsumed within the competing group." This completely erases the role of women in their own liberation, and denies the existence of many important victories achieved by the feminist movement.

In examples 5 and 6, we have a case where the original meaning of feminism is changed such that "fair treatment" and "equal rights" are *not* attributed to feminism but rather to "egalitarianism" and "equalists," respectively.

Example 5 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   Feminism is NOT fair treatment. Egalitarianism is fair treatment.

Example 6 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   feminism is NOT equal rights. Equalism is, I'll bet a lot of "feminists" are actually
(2)   just equalists.

The competing group who takes ownership of these ideas/concepts may be understood as egalitarians/equalists. In both of the above examples, the "denying of original [feminist] . . . meaning" occurs in the first line, where feminism is described as "NOT fair treatment" (example 5) and "NOT equal rights" (example 6). Each author then replaces feminism with a more gender-neutral language "ism" ("egalitarianism" and "equalism"), so that the feminist concepts of fair treatment and equal rights are ascribed to the competing group of egalitarians/equalists. This way, fair treatment and equal rights can still be discussed, but with the relationship to feminism

removed. Thus, we can see how Incorporation (of meaning) is the first step in a Semantic Reversal: one meaning must be denied before it can be replaced with another.

We have just examined two of Skinner's three discursive strategies: Co-optation and Incorporation. Co-optation involves the use of a feminist word, concept, etc., by anti-feminists or neutral parties. It may be used as way to appease feminists, that is, as a type of defence strategy in the face of anti-feminist critiques. It may also be a precursor to an attack on feminism. Incorporation is the use of a feminist word, concept, etc., by anti-feminists or neutral parties, where ownership of feminist authorship or meaning is denied. Through Incorporation, commenters deny feminist history and ties between feminism and the important gains achieved by the movement.

Section 3: Translation/Redefinition (Ehrlich and King)

Skinner (2005) defines Translation as "the reworking of [a feminist] word, recommendation or service in such a way that the initial author's intended meaning is changed or distorted" ("Researching" 57). Ehrlich and King (1994) are also concerned with the way that the meanings of feminist terms, what Ehrlich and King call feminist linguistic innovations, are "reworked." They identify four types of Redefinition that occur when feminist linguistic innovations are "appropriated by a sexist speech community" (59). These Redefinitions are: Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring, Redefinition as Expansion, Redefinition as Obliteration, and Semantic Reversal, discussed in Chapter 4, and briefly redescribed in their respective subsections below. Whereas Skinner refers generally to the change in intended meaning, Ehrlich and King's work focuses on the specific, varied ways in which this change in meaning may be brought about. As such, while this section continues a discussion of Skinner's work, it is also the

location for my examination of the analytic categories contained within Ehrlich and King's framework, as I view these categories as closely related. The words *Translation* and *Redefinition* are used interchangeably.

Section 3.1: Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring

Ehrlich and King define Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring as "the elimination or obscuring of crucial aspects of a term's definition" (65). Two terms were frequently redefined in this way in my data: *equality* and *feminism*. As I will show, these Translations relate to each other, and this relationship will be important in examining other Translations as we move forward.

Equality is redefined in two ways. First, it is used to refer solely to legal rights, as in example 7.

Example 7 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)
(1)   I have asked this to many feminist and I still haven't gotten an answer so maybe you
(2)   will answer this question. What legal right do I have in America as a man that a woman
(3)   in this country doesn't?

By omitting any elements of "rights" that are not a product of the legal system, the author Redefines the equality feminists are fighting for, reducing it to "legal" rights only. This erases any gender oppression or discrimination that does not result from a lack of legal rights, or that occurs in spite of legal protections. This, in turn, creates the impression that men and women are already equal, and that feminists thus have no reason to fight.

The other, more common Redefinition of *equality* follows a different line of thought.

Example 8 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)
(1)   'Fe'minism still focus mostly on Females. you will never see a group of feminists or

(2)   Femen. rallying for the rights of men or boy's the same as they will for girl & women.

Example 9 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   feminism doesn't promote equality between the genders. it doesn't stand up for the
(2)   rights of men, in fact it tarnishes them (the man-spread for example), it only stands up for
(3)   women's rights. that's not equal rights.

Example 10 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   they have done exactly jack and shit about men's rights, so feminists say "we fight
(2)   for equality" and then they focus solely on women.

Examples 8-10 make the same kind of argument: women's rights activists focus solely on

women and thus are not fighting for "true" equality. Whereas the "fight for equal rights" within

the feminist community has meant the fight to be equal to men, *equality* in the context of these

comments means fighting equally hard for both men and women. Thus, feminists are expected to

take responsibility not just for the eradication of women's oppression, but also men's so-called

oppression. Suspicion about the feminist focus on women appears in multiple comments, where

commenters take issue with the term *feminism* because of the word's blatantly female-related

stem.

In a very general way, this Redefinition of equality functions to discredit feminists and

feminism. If feminism is understood as fighting for equality, where equality requires fighting

"equally" for all genders, then feminists who focus on women's rights can be branded as anti-

egalitarian. This undermines the efforts of any initiative that seeks to level the playing field. In

example 7, the Redefinition of *equality* establishes it as having already been achieved. In

examples 8-10, equality has not been achieved, in part because feminists are not fighting for it in

its true sense. This second Redefinition paves the way for Semantic Reversal (Section 3.4).

Redefinitions closely related to this second Translation of *equality* are those of *feminist*

and *feminism*.

Example 11 (Childless, With Regret and Advice) (Appendix G)

(1)   If feminism is about intolerance of conservative women, housewives, women who
(2)   choose to be subservient, women who oppose abortion, or women who give up careers to
(3)   benefit their husbands or children, then I'm definitely not a feminist.

In example 11, we see *feminism* redefined as intolerance of some women, e.g., "conservative women." By implication, those women who are not tolerated by feminists are not themselves feminists: there are no feminist-identifying, pro-life, conservative housewives. Thus, this Redefinition of *feminism* functions to create a category of "other" women that feminists are oppressing. This, in turn, leads to a Semantic Reversal: instead of helping to liberate women, feminists are oppressing these "other" women (Section 3.4).

In other comments, feminists are described variously as "radical," "lesbian man-hating, hipsters," "pro abortion," and "liberal," while feminism is described as encouraging (and enabling) "slutty behaviour," "serial monogamy, multiple abortions, childlessness" and negative judgments of women who enjoy motherhood. In most cases, these Redefinitions amount in some way to denunciations of feminism, equating it with radicalism, mistreatment of partners, and judgment of traditional women -- and involve sensitive topics: religion, sex, politics, and reproductive rights. Overall, these Translations call into question the broader definition of a feminist as someone who believes in women's rights, or gender equality.

Section 3.2: Redefinition as Expansion

The second form of Redefinition is as Expansion, defined by Ehrlich and King as involving "expanding the definition of [a term] beyond reason . . . and then imputing this expanded (unreasonable) definition to feminists" (67-8). The data did not provide many direct examples of Redefinition as Expansion, although the sentiment that feminists are focused on trivial expressions of sexism was present in a more covert fashion. This will be discussed shortly,

as it relates to Ehrlich and King's work. One of the few direct examples of Redefinition as

Expansion comes from example 12.

Example 12 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

 (1)   if a women hits me and i hit back, its seen as me an abusive women hater?

In example 12, *abusive* is expanded to include men acting in self-defence when attacked by a

woman. This clearly unreasonable double-standard -- that a woman can hit with impunity, but a

violent man is an "abusive women hater" -- is echoed in other data (though without the obvious

Expansion of a term), and is used as evidence for the oppression of men:

Example 13 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   Feminists Want equal rights OK WHORES YOU GOT THAT AND MORE STOP
(2)   FUCKING COMPLAINING They get to hit us when they want men can't They also have
(3)   the choice to work or not men don't fuck feminists

Example 14 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

 (1)   Men are also often told that hitting women is assault and women can hit men.

Additionally, there are several examples where feminist concerns are, directly or indirectly,

described as so minor as to be trivial. That is, such concerns are described as "menial," while

women are described as "perpetual victims" with "no sense of proportion." Thus, even when not

redefining a particular term, Expansion occurs covertly in examples where feminist concerns are

represented as being about inconsequential things. This mirrors data Ehrlich and King found

where, for instance, *rape* is taken to refer to "any type of sexual interaction," and *sexual*

interference to "include hearing an older sibling discuss his/her adolescent sexual

experimentation" (68). The all-encompassing notion is that feminists are concerned about truly

minor issues.

Section 3.3: Redefinition as Obliteration

Ehrlich and King define Redefinition as Obliteration as "complete Obliteration of a term's referent" (68). Example 15 bears close resemblance to examples from Ehrlich and King's data.

Example 15 (Advice to Younger Women) (Appendix A)

(1)   I am deeply concerned to see an almost witch hunt or lynch mob mentality amongst
(2)   young women today. There seems to be a deep paranoia about the "evils of men". . . .

In this comment, we see in line 2 that "young women" have a "deep paranoia" about the "evils of men." The "evils of men" is in scare quotes, indicating that the author is sceptical of, or does not believe in, such a characterization of (some) men's behaviour. Moreover, young women are represented as being unjustified in their concern with men's behaviour when they are characterized as exhibiting a "deep paranoia" about it. The terms *witch hunt* and *lynch mob* summon up similar images of senseless reactions to men's behaviour. Specifically, these terms create a sense of unfair persecution of, and violence towards, men by women. Overall, then, this comment seems to erase or "obliterate" the fact that masculinity/men may have some problematic dimensions for "young women today."

In examples 16 and 17, feminism itself is obliterated or ceases to exist.

Example 16 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   Feminism is nothing more than a modern too Destabilize the family structure.

Example 17 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   It's called CULTURAL MARXISM and it has NOTHING to do with women's
(2)   right's . . . .

This kind of data was quite difficult to categorize at first. It does not fit into the category of Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring: it is not that a significant part of the definition has been

modified, but with the rest left intact. In examples 16 and 17, feminism is completely separated from women's rights. Feminism as a concept related to systemic gendered oppression stops existing completely: there is no such thing, only the illusion of such a thing. The fight for rights is also merely an illusion: it is actually just an attempt to destabilize the family, or else it is cultural Marxism.

Feminist history undergoes a similar process of disappearance in the data, as seen in examples 18 and 19.

Example 18 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   They [feminists] can't (and haven't) done anything. They'll inevitably self descruct.
(2)   Those who know this simply watch these dumb puppies chase their tails until they
(3)   manage to finally chew them off. Feminism is moronic, but by no means are they a threat
(4)   to anyone but themselves.

Example 19 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   They [feminists] are a loud but tiny minority, who haven't accomplished anything.

In both comments' first lines, feminist history is completely eradicated, as feminists are said to have accomplished nothing. In example 18, this occurs in lines 3-4, where the author says feminists are "by no means . . . a threat." In example 19, the same sentiment is implied when the author refers to feminists as "a loud but tiny minority." Any ability that the feminist movement might have to implement change is also questioned in these excerpts. In example 18, this is expressed in lines 3-4: "by no means are they a threat to anyone but themselves." In example 19, the idea appears in the phrase "who haven't accomplished anything." As opposed to a movement that has greatly improved the status of women, feminism here is depicted as having affected nothing.

Section 3.4: Semantic Reversal

The final type of Redefinition is Semantic Reversal. In exemplifying the phenomenon of Semantic Reversal, this section contains comments that present both men and women as oppressed; other comments focus on problematic behaviour in the feminist community. In presenting an analysis of these examples, I do not wish to imply that men cannot be oppressed, that the feminist movement has not been party to the oppression of members of all genders, nor that there is no problematic behaviour in the feminist community. Instead, I wish to highlight the fact that, similar to the Co-optation strategies exemplified in Section 1.1, these important issues are raised in these comments not to stimulate a genuine discussion but rather as a derailment tactic.

The first feature of Reversals discussed by Seidel is their representation of the dominated group as the oppressor. That is, instead of representing feminists as fighting oppression, these Reversals portray them as doing the oppressing. Indeed, the most common Reversal strategy simply casts men as the oppressed group. In example 20, an anti-feminist responds to a previous commenter's hypothetical question about the coverage of assaults against women as compared to coverage of assaults against gay men.

Example 20 (When Will Harassment Change?) (Appendix F)

(1) Are you joking? It is happens to a man - gay, straight, or whatever - it does not count –
(2) according to the feminist propagandists and sycophants that run our justice system. Men
(3) cannot be raped, harassed, or abused - according to feminist propagana those terms are
(4) reserved for use if and only if the 'victim' is female. Furthermore a female NEVER needs
(5) to provide any sort of proof, evidence or verification of her accusation. All she has to do
(6) is anonymously point at any male she choses and say 'He did it' and - bingo - end of
(7) man's career, family, reputation. If she is found to be lying, which happens, many more
(8) times than the feminists would lie us to know, the WOMAN is never punished and her
(9) name is NEVER made public - yet the innocent man has already had his life ruined.
(10) It's called gender equality.

The author opens by asserting that assault "does not count" if it happens to men (line 1). In line 2, the author attacks feminism, declaring the justice system to be under their control, which, in turn, is the cause of men's disadvantage in the court system. Feminism is first associated with propaganda -- an indication that feminism's political agenda is based on lies and exaggerations -- and subsequently sycophants -- an indication that feminists are not working for the betterment of society, but for themselves. These attacks on feminism are Reversals in the sense that feminism and feminists are held responsible for the so-called disadvantages that men experience within the justice system; that is, feminists are responsible for the oppression of men.

The next comment presents men as oppressed, but in a somewhat less direct fashion.

Example 21 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   There will be social justice when women have to register for the military draft, when men
(2)   can refuse parenthood the way women can, and when women can no longer rape men in
(3)   divorce courts.

In stating that social justice will be achieved when men's inequalities are resolved, this comment implies that women are the ones with the elevated social status, and it is men who need to catch up. Men are victimized by women, who "rape" them in divorce courts, and by a social system that forces them to register for the draft and become parents, should the women they are involved with choose not to terminate a pregnancy. This is the assumption on which many Reversals in the data are based: (Western) feminists complain about "menial" things, yet it is men who are the ones facing serious social imbalances. While example 20 specifies feminists as part of the oppressive group, in 21 the role of oppressor is open to interpretation, or possibly shared. It is not entirely clear who the author believes is responsible for these inequalities. In contrast, example 22 portrays all women as oppressing men.

Example 22 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   Even the action of suffrage was a move of inequality, women continued to refrain
(2)   from draft registration. So we have a power paradigm where 50% of the population can
(3)   vote to force the other half to war, hypothetically.

Whereas many comments co-opt feminist history, referring to a time when feminists were more

"reasonable," this comment redefines not only modern feminism, but all of feminist history by

reframing suffrage as a move to oppress men. In arguing that 50% of the population can control

the fate of men (line 2), this comment suggests that women in general are engaged in the

oppression of men. While feminists are the dominated group portrayed as the oppressor in

example 20, the Reversal in 22 presents women as the oppressor and men as the dominated

group.

Another, less common, Reversal theme is one wherein feminists oppress women. The

author of example 23 directly labels the movement "anti-male," before asserting that women are

negatively affected by it as well.

Example 23 (The Complicated Origins) (Appendix I)

(1)   the organized feminist movement has changed from one that truly wanted equality in
(2)   everything to one that has become inherently anti-male. Women who don't subscribe to
(3)   this view are criticized and made to feel inadequate.

We begin with a familiar historical thread: feminism once "truly wanted equality in everything"

(lines 1-2) but has now become oppressive, in this case even of women. Thus, the dominated

group portrayed as oppressive in example 23 is feminists. They oppress men, as they are

"inherently anti-male" (line 2), a further example of the 'reversed' power relations described in

previous examples. However, feminists here also oppress women: "[w]omen who don't

subscribe to this [feminist, anti-male] view are criticized and made to feel inadequate" (lines 2-

3).

Example 24 frames the issue more subtly, casting feminists in the oppressor role, while leaving the label of "oppressed" available to both men and women.

Example 24 (Nov. 15: This week's Talking Point) (Appendix D)

(1)   Since women achieved rough parity and equality (by the mid 1970s) every "initiative" by
(2)   feminists to obtain more than this equality has required a "mean or uncivilized" approach
(3)   to cow those who were just pointing out the essential inequality, unfairness, injustice and
(4)   often sheer stupidity of nearly all their subsequent demands.

In this example, feminists are described as oppressive in lines 1-4, where they are characterized as trying to obtain "more than . . . equality" and as using "a "mean or uncivilized" approach to cow" those who oppose them. The author distinguishes between "women" (line 1), who have achieved equality, and "feminists" (line 2), who are attempting to move beyond equality. That is, the author seems to be saying that (some) women are victimized by feminists and their "mean or uncivilized approach." Women as a group, then, are clustered differently in Reversals, depending on the context and commenter: either as oppressors of men, or as part of the group oppressed by feminists.

An interesting aspect to some Reversals is their portrayal of women as oppressive, but simultaneously as less capable or powerful than men.

Example 25 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   One side [women] is hampered by an insecurity, fear, and boundless appetite, that eats all
(2)   social programs and while the other [men] is compromised by being raised by school,
(3)   media, government that finds it politically beneficial to demonize them.

This author once again presents men as being oppressed: they are "compromised" (line 2) and "demonized" (line 3). They are oppressed first by women, who possess a "boundless appetite, which eats all social programs [leaving nothing for men]" (lines 1-2), and second by "school, media, [and] government that finds it politically beneficial to demonize them" (lines 2-3). This is

similar to other examples of Reversal seen so far. The difference here is that the author also

characterizes women as being "hampered by . . . insecurity" and "fear" (line 1), quite

stereotypical views of women. This contrast, in which women are described simultaneously as

party to the oppression of men and hindered by their fearful emotions, produces an interesting

discord. The author of example 26 creates a similar dissonance.

Example 26 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   Yes, Both sexes should have equal rights on all level.
(2)   Getting drafted, paying child support, same physical labor expectations, equal legal
(3)   punishment,...
(4)   Basically, nature chose men to rule the world, and women to populate thr world. That's
(5)   hoe nature, God wanted it, no matter what feminazi try, nature will alwayd was win.

After co-opting gender egalitarian language (line 1) -- "Yes, both sexes should have equal rights

on all level" -- the author lists inequalities experienced by men: they get drafted, must pay child

support, have higher physical labour expectations than women and suffer harsher legal

punishment than women (lines 2-3). Thus far, this appears similar to earlier cases of Reversal.

However, the comment then goes on to assert that "nature" and "God" chose men to "rule the

world" (lines 4-5), thereby maintaining the patriarchal view of men as naturally in charge. The

oppressive group is "feminazis" (line 5), who will ultimately lose their bid for power.

(*Feminazi* a term popularized by conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh, though coined by

professor Tom Hazlett (whom Limbaugh credits in his 1992 book *The Way Things Ought to Be*),

is incidentally a Reversal contained in a single word: comparing feminists to Nazis certainly

characterizes them as extremely oppressive.) In this example, men are once again described as

oppressed, and feminists as oppressive, but feminists are simultaneously characterized as

fighting a losing battle, since men were "to rule the world" (line 4) by both nature and God. In

both examples, 25 and 26, we can see that there is some struggle with Reversals that represent

men as oppressed: while they may be oppressed, men are not weak. Similarly, women may be

oppressive, but ultimately are also fearful and insecure.

Finally, in some instances of Reversal authors create a Reversal without reference to

explicitly oppressive behaviour. In the previous examples in this section, authors have

specifically described the so-called unfair treatment of both men and women by feminists. For

instance, example 20 accused feminists in the justice system of reserving the terms *raped*,

harassed, and *abused* for female victims only, and example 23 characterized the feminist

movement as "anti-male." However, in the following comments, the authors base their Reversals

on pro-woman activities as opposed to active mistreatment of men. That is, in the following

comments, moves that benefit women are recast as oppressive, despite not being inherently

oppressive towards men. For instance, a *Globe and Mail* article about a historic eighteen minute

period in the Scottish parliament in which no men spoke earned the following comments.

Example 27 (Eighteen Minutes, Zero Men Speaking) (Appendix C)

(1)   But the G&M will have you believe that MORE MUST BE DONE because there is not
(2)   110% representation of females in the workforce.

Example 28 (Eighteen Minutes, Zero Men Speaking) (Appendix C)

(1)   So suddenly sexism and discrimination are okay and something to be celebrated?

The news story these comments are in response to discusses a *single* occasion in which no men

spoke in the Scottish Parliament for eighteen minutes. The article emphasizes that there are no

formal quotas in place for parliamentary seats in Scotland, that only 35% of the seats in

Parliament are held by women, that this was a historic occasion, and that the women MPs were

all fairly elected. Despite the fact that this is clearly not an instance of men being oppressed, the

authors of both example 27 and example 28 accuse the paper of supporting and celebrating

men's oppression. In example 27, the commenter argues the paper is aiding in the oppression of

men in line 1 -- "the G&M will have you believe that MORE MUST BE DONE" -- and that

women are already well ahead of men in terms of employment -- "because there is not 110%

representation of females in the workforce" (lines 1-2). The capitalization in "MORE MUST BE

DONE" seems to indicate sarcasm. That is, in fact, no more needs to be done, because the article

indicates that women are already equal to men, and risk becoming "110%" of the workforce –

denying men jobs. In example 28, the commenter, as in example 27, uses the occasion described

in the article as proof of broad "sexism" and "discrimination." This commenter also seems to be

accusing the paper of "celebrating" "sexism" and "discrimination" against men.

Relatedly, the author of example 29 demands to know how feminism has benefited men.

Whereas in examples 27 and 28 a clear feminist victory is being presented as discriminatory

against men, example 29 presents feminism as problematic because while it has benefited

women, who are "more carefree now" (line 2), it has not done anything to "directly . . . benefit

men" (line 1). As will be discussed in the conclusion to this section, this is based on the

Translation of *equality* discussed in Section 3.1.

Example 29 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   What are the various things that feminism has done directly to benefit men? Let's see,
(2)   there is hum, women more carefree now , yheap that's good, and there is, and hum, and
(3)   what else, really what else? For some reason I keep picturing a pic of Dominatrix when I
(4)   hear the word feminism, you know, with its recent anti-male laws and all.

After the assertion that feminism has done nothing to directly benefit men (lines 1-3), we are

presented with a reference to vague "anti-male laws and all" (line 4). Anti-male laws would be,

of course, oppressive (although no details are provided here about what those laws might be), but

our interest here is in how the author moves from discussing how feminism has not benefited

men to discussing laws that are oppressive of men. The implication appears to be that feminists not having done anything "directly to benefit men" is in some way equivalent to the creation of anti-male laws. While examples 20-26 of this section are illustrative of the ways in which actively oppressive behaviour (such as censorship) is attributed to feminists, examples 27-29 are illustrative of the ways in which male-neutral or pro-woman events or actions are recast as expressly anti-man.

In concluding this section, I discuss Seidel's three functions of Reversal. The first of these, that Reversal "construct[s] the dominated group as the oppressor" (137), has been exemplified extensively in my data: feminists, rather than being represented as combating the oppression of women, are instead viewed as oppressors. An interesting point is that while women as a whole are also sometimes portrayed as oppressors of men, this is not always the case. In other instances, they are portrayed as oppressed, though by feminists, not by men.

The second function of Semantic Reversals is the creation of a false symmetry between prejudices: women are as prejudiced or as oppressive towards men as men are towards women. This is visible in comments conceding some oppression of women and calling for a focus on the oppression of both genders. Importantly, this function does not manifest itself in every comment: as indicated above, some comments focus exclusively on men's oppression at the hands of feminists or women as a whole, suggesting that they are the only oppressed gender.

Finally, Seidel's third function of Reversal is the reduction of certain aspects of gendered social relations to "mere verbal fallacies" (137). This is the ultimate effect of the discourse we have examined so far, and the result of the interaction of the two functions just described. When

"oppressed" and "oppressor" exchange poles, or else are said to be equally oppressed, these categories become meaningless.

Section 4: Lazar

Having analyzed my data according to Skinner's and Ehrlich and King's categories, I will now turn to Lazar's analytic categories, which involve the disavowal of patriarchy and sexism. The first is the Alternate Context Disavowal, wherein patriarchy and sexism are admitted to exist, but only in other countries, or in immigrant communities in one's own country. The second is the Alternate Men Disavowal, in which sexism and patriarchy are once again accepted as existing, but are believed to be perpetrated by 'other' men. The third Disavowal, what I am calling the Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal, refutes the systemic nature of sexism by representing ideas like "gender" and "patriarchy" as too all-encompassing. Finally, the last Disavowal is the Generational Disavowal, which concedes that sexism was a problem in the past, but that it no longer is.

Section 4.1: Alternate Context Disavowal

Lazar defines the Alternate Context Disavowal as based on "geographical or cultural 'othering'" wherein "'patriarchy' as a construct" is viewed as applicable to "gender inequalities in the so-called 'third world,' but not in 'first-world' societies" ("Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Relevance for Current Gender and Language Research" 181). Consider example 30:

Example 30 (Advice to Younger Women) (Appendix A)

(1)   all these aggrieved women looking for any sign that their rightful place as princess isn't
(2)   being respected is getting old. I would much prefer if they spent 10% of their pampered
(3)   lives giving a thought to how good they have it in our society vs their sisters around the
(4)   world.

This author references vast swaths of the globe where women are mistreated, referencing "how good [Western women] have it in our society vs their sisters around the world" in lines 3-4. This is contrasted with "our society," where women live "pampered lives." The overall message seems to be that women in the West are unjustified and misguided in thinking that they are victims of sexism. Example 31 states this message more clearly.

Example 31 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

 (1)   Women across the globe are beaten and tortured and treated less because they are
 (2)   women, but here in the U.S? some are mad for the dumbest reasons.

Here, women "across the globe" who "are beaten and tortured and treated less because they are women" (line 1) are compared with American women, who are "mad for the dumbest reasons" (line 2). Once again, Western women are mistaken if they think they are victims of sexism, with the implication that extreme, physical acts of violence are necessary indicators that sexism exists; the writer denies that such acts also take place in the U.S.. Further, we see in these two examples that countries where sexism does occur remain nameless, referred to simply as "around the world" and "across the globe." This lack of naming, arguably, indicates a lack of concern: these are nameless, faceless countries, and can remain so because the point of the discussion is not to genuinely discuss sexism in these countries, but rather to silence feminists.

Section 4.2: Alternate Men Disavowal

Borrowing from Forsberg (2010), Lazar defines the Alternate Men Disavowal as a view held by some "white, middle-class men in the West" that "'hegemonic masculinity' . . . refer[s] to 'other' men, and not themselves" ("Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Relevance for Current Gender and Language Research" 181). Two examples of the Alternate Men Disavowal occur in the data, both of which focus on sexual harassment in the office. In the first case, the

author claims that he, himself, is an additional victim of the "alpha" men who are perpetrators of sexual abuse.

Example 32 (When Will Harassment Change?) (Appendix F)

(1)   As a man, I am also frequently bullied by your attractive confident alpha male (secretly
(2)   aggressive) men, who play the game well and get the women they want and propagate
(3)   these genes. You are right that few men experience sexual abuse, but we do experience a
(4)   lot of other abuse from these types. Stop dating and marrying them!

Example 32 opens with a derailment -- the commenter draws attention away from women's experiences to focus on his own experiences. He identifies harassers as attractive, confident, aggressive alpha males, who "play the game well." He then distances himself from such men by foregrounding his own victim status.

Like the author of example 32, the author of example 33 places himself at a distance from sexist men by identifying himself as a *witness* to sexism, and additional "problems."

Example 33 (Excluded From the Silicon Valley Dream) (Appendix H)

(1)   I've witnessed many of the problems that Ms. Joy describes in my own tech career –
(2)   sexism harassment, racism. To which I'd add age discrimination and homophobia.

As a witness and not a perpetrator, the author can co-opt the language of oppression and admit that oppression exists, without putting himself in the line of fire. The Disavowal in this case, then, not only represents the author as a non-sexist, but also creates a space for him to express anti-feminist sentiments with impunity.

Section 4.3: Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal

Borrowing from Mills (2008), Lazar sees the Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal as closely related to third-wave feminism in the sense that "[third-wave] feminists have rejected the terms 'patriarchy' and 'sexism' as outdated analytical categories" and have a fear of "reading

'gender' into every situation . . . where other identities might be more relevant in given contexts"

("Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Relevance for Current Gender and Language Research"

181). According to Lazar, third-wave feminism can have the effect of erasing gendered *patterns*

of oppression, disavowing the systemic nature of sexism.

The following comment is taken from a response to the article "Excluded From the

Silicon Valley Dream," which focuses on the largely white, male tech culture of Silicon Valley,

and the pressure on women and minorities to conform to this culture.

Example 34 (Excluded From the Silicon Valley Dream) (Appendix H)

(1)   In my experience, tech culture is something that happens, not something that's
(2)   designed. Some men and women fit into it naturally, most do not. In my experience too
(3)   anyone who wants to become management has to play the game, and that goes for white
(4)   guys as well, and those who want to go that route typically work at it and sacrifice some
(5)   identity in doing so, whether male or female . . . .

Example 34 displays the Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal (lines 4-5) after an assertion that

"tech culture" is "something that happens, not something that's designed." By framing "tech

culture" as a natural phenomenon, the commenter is denying the existence of a culture of sexism

in the tech industry. They place the onus of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of those

entering the industry by reducing the issue of biased hiring practices to one of individual "fit" as

opposed to a pattern of exclusion. This also works to translate the definition of *sexism* into one

that is non-systemic.

The erasure of systemic gendered oppression can allow for the creation of a Semantic

Reversal, as seen in example 35, whereby those focused on gender create disharmony in society,

as opposed to eliminating it.

Example 35 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   Street harassment is a cultural, and in turn economic issue Poor people, who are often
(2)   black, are the main perpetrators of street harassment, whether you're a man or a woman.
(3)   This is my personal experience in London and NYC but also shown in videos showing
(4)   street harassment while walking for 10 hours (there were many made a few months
(5)   back). It's not a gender issue and making it one doesn't help.

Here the Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal appears at the end of a discussion about street

harassment. This Disavowal allows for an attack on the author of the previous comment in the

thread. Since street harassment is not a "gender issue," (line 5) she -- and anyone making similar

arguments -- is in fact part of the problem: "making it one doesn't help" (line 5).

This kind of Disavowal of gender as relevant to harassment and oppression is more

directly evidenced in the following:

Example 36 (When Will Harassment Change?) (Appendix F)

(1)   'Women, in general, don't assault men." [qtd from article] Men, in general, don't assault
(2)   women either. Nor do they assault other men. People who assault anyone are in the
(3)   minority. Focus on the individuals who have the problem. To associate them with a larger
(4)   group is nothing but pure bigotry.

Here, we see the commenter misinterpreting the words of the author they are responding to:

whereas the author likely meant that the number of assaults by women against men is smaller

than the number of assaults by men against women, the commenter chooses a different

interpretation -- the number of assaults committed by women is small. So too, they argue, is the

number of assaults committed by men. Once it has been established that men and women both

suffer at each other's hands, the focus must be on individuals -- not on a systemic pattern of

gendered behaviour. The commenter goes on to accuse the article author of bigotry for

suggesting a pattern. Once again, those who see gender as a source of oppression are part of the

problem.

Section 4.4: Generational Disavowal

Lazar describes the final Disavowal as "suggest[ing] that we are now living in a 'postfeminist' era in which sexism (and feminism) is passé" ("Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Relevance for Current Gender and Language Research" 181). There are two aspects to the Generational Disavowal: the first is its denial of the need for feminism presently, while the second is the denial of the long-term effects of gendered oppression.

The author of example 37 uses the Generational Disavowal in two ways.

Example 37 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1) Well that was 200 years ago, I don't see the point of bellyaching to modern day men
(2) about it, we had nothing to do with it. If you want someone to be mad at, build a time
(3) machine and yell at the people of the 1800s. You can vote now. And YOU'VE never had
(4) to live without voting

In addition to implying there is no longer a need for feminism, the author of this Disavowal invokes previous generations in order to create a defence for themselves and other modern men: regardless of the current status of women, modern men had nothing to do with the fact that women at some point in history could not vote. In the final two sentences, the author denies the long-term effects of sexism, suggesting that because women can vote now, they have nothing to complain about. This reinforces the defence of modern men: not only did they not withhold the vote from women, they currently do not need to support women because women are no longer oppressed.

Example 38 exemplifies the Generational Disavowal in comparing cherry-picked feminist concerns with legitimate ones from a century ago.

Example 38 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   you bring up points about how things were 100 years ago, as most people do when
(2)   defending feminism. the thing is, it's 2015 now. there are hardly inequalities and the ones
(3)   that are presented forth from feminists are just complete menial things in order to stay
(4)   relevant - basically just to say "hey, we're still being oppressed!".

(5)   you cannot sit there and tell me that the things feminists are complaining about, such as
(6)   the "man-spread" is a worthwhile cause. exactly how is that equality for men? they're
(7)   literally telling us how to sit now. that's not equality. how about all the feminists mocking
(8)   men and celebrating when a wife cuts their dick off? that's not equality. how about
(9)   feminists trying to remove urinals from bathrooms because somehow men standing up to
(10)   piss is an indication of the patriarchy? that's not equality.

(11)   feminism was needed back a few decades ago, but not today. modern feminism
(12)   tries to dictate how both men and women should act and think. actions speak
(13)   louder than words.

The Generational Disavowals take place in the opening and closing paragraphs (lines 1-3 and line 11). In the first paragraph, the author argues that most feminist concerns have been addressed, and feminism is no longer needed. This is immediately followed by an admission that there are remaining inequalities, but these are "menial."

The second paragraph presents a select list of some recent activities to which some feminists have attached their names (lines 5-10). While the legitimacy of any of these activities as "feminist" is debateable, the author uses them to illustrate feminist "nitpicking" (the man-spread, lines 6-7) and extremism (celebration of genital mutilation, lines 7-8). This list of recent, and trivial, feminist activities is then used to disavow the continued need for feminism, and legitimize a Reversal in which feminists oppress both men and women (lines 11-12).

Section 5: Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented multiple examples of the discursive strategies presented in Chapter 4. According to the scholars who developed these analytic frameworks, such strategies have the effect of undermining feminists and the feminist project more generally.

I began with Skinner's analytic categories of Co-optation, Incorporation, and Translation. Co-optation involves "the intake of a 'feminist' word, concept [etc.] . . . by a competing and often dominant group/institution, so the latter can appear to fulfill feminist demands" (Skinner 57). This should remind us of the intertextual relationship between feminism and postfeminism discussed in Chapter 2. There, I argued that a postfeminist sensibility often employs a commonsensical feminist rhetoric and mixes it with sexist language in order to create a rebuttal against accusations of sexism. The use of feminist rhetoric in order to pre-emptively defend speakers and writers against critiques of sexism is also found in the discussion of Attenborough's work in Chapter 3. In a similar way, I have demonstrated how the co-opting of feminist terms and concepts can be used as a defense of commenters' sexist views, and of their appreciation for sexist material, like Playboy. It is also used as a springboard for attacks on feminists. Regardless of what it is being used for, Co-optation frequently co-occurs with the conjunction *but* as in "(Co-optation) *but* (sexist view)." Crucially, while the Co-optation may be a genuine expression of some sentiment -- that is, the commenter may genuinely (believe themselves to) be in favour of gender equality -- the language around the Co-optation is in some way anti-feminist.

Next, in Section 2.2, I identified instances of Incorporation, defined by Skinner as when a feminist "word, concept [etc.] . . . is subsumed within a competing group/institution, such that the competing group/institution claims ownership, denying the original authorship and/or meaning" (57). Most often, Incorporation is used to imply that there is no reason to be a feminist, or that feminists are problematic. This is achieved when feminist history is no longer represented as "owned" by feminists. In example 4, for instance, women's liberation is claimed to be a product of men's kindness rather than the result of women's struggle. Incorporation also opens a word up to Translation, by denying its feminist meaning, as in "Feminism is NOT fair treatment"

(example 5). After the denial of the feminist meaning takes place -- when feminism and fair treatment are dissociated, for example -- room is made for new connections -- in this case, between fair treatment and egalitarianism.

At this point, I turned to Skinner's third analytic category, Translation. Because of the complementary relationship between Skinner's description of Translation and Ehrlich and King's descriptions of Redefinition, Section 3, dedicated to the description of instances of Redefinition, is also the location of my discussion of Translation. In Section 3.1, the Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring of both *equality* and *feminism/feminist* was documented. *Equality* was redefined either as solely related to legal rights or, more often, as something both men and women lacked. This latter Redefinition imposes on feminists the responsibility to fight as hard for men's rights as they do for women's. The various Redefinitions of *feminism* and *feminist* shifted the meanings of these terms, from a focus on women's rights or on gender equality to a focus on much more specific -- and inaccurate -- dimensions of "feminism" and "feminists", such as "pro abortion," "liberal," etc. These Redefinitions severely circumscribe the possible referents of the terms, creating the illusion of a smaller feminist movement than actually exists, with a more particular group of people.

In Section 3.2, Redefinitions as Expansion are discussed. Although only one direct example exists in the data, expanding the term *abusive* to include acts of self-defence, there are multiple indirect references to feminist concerns as "menial," and women as having "no sense of proportion." This echoes language in Ehrlich and King's data that suggests feminists view "any sexual activity" as sexual assault, and that they cast their net so wide in search of complaints that the majority of these are ridiculous and trivial. In relation to the Redefinition of *abusive*, many commenters refer to violence against men by women as being acceptable, while the reverse is not

acceptable. This concern with the physical assault of men is juxtaposed with the characterization of Western feminists as concerned with relatively minor and trivial issues.

In Section 3.3, I examined some cases of Redefinition as Obliteration. *Feminism* and aspects of feminist history are so severely dissociated from their referents that, from a feminist point of view, they become meaningless.

In Section 3.4 we saw multiple examples of Seidel's Semantic Reversal. Although in all instances men are cast as the oppressed group, and feminists as the oppressors, women in general may be grouped with men or feminists, depending on the context and the commenter. Some authors stereotyped women as weak, in addition to powerful, while in the role of the oppressor, and men as naturally in charge while oppressed, indicating some reluctance to characterize women as powerful or men as weak, despite the Reversal. In some instances, such as examples 27-29, authors based their characterizations of men's oppression not on an active oppression of men by women or feminists, but simply on gains made by women that did not directly benefit men. This is strongly related to the Redefinition of *equality* as Omission or Obscuring in Section 3.1. As described in that section, even the female-focused stem of the word *feminism* is enough to imply to many that the movement is not seeking true equality.

Finally, Section 3.4.1 briefly returned to Seidel's three functions of Semantic Reversal: construction of the dominated group as the oppressor, creation of a false symmetry, and reduction of the language of oppression to "words, mere verbal fallacies," as opposed to "part of a dominant social relation" (137). Throughout Section 3.4, we saw the representation of women and feminists as the oppressors of men, and of feminists as the oppressors of women as well. We also saw comments that conceded that some oppression of women still exists, but such

comments were adamant in calling for an equal focus on both genders, and thus they created a false symmetry, in Seidel's terms. The effect of these two functions in combination is the third effect noted above: when there are so many conflicting accounts of who is oppressed, how much, and by whom, categories like "oppressed" and "oppressor" become meaningless.

Finally, Section 4 focused on the four Disavowals outlined by Lazar. In Section 4.1, the Alternate Context Disavowal is used to frame the Western world as a haven without sexism. This Disavowal works to silence feminists by implying that Western women should not complain about sexist behaviour in the West, given the circumstances other women must endure.

In Section 4.2, examples of the Alternate Men Disavowal demonstrate two separate ways an author may choose to distance himself from other men—men who embody hegemonic masculinity and who are typically said to be perpetrators of sexual harassment and abuse. In the first example, the author casts himself as a *victim* of the "type" of man who harasses. In the second example, the author describes himself as a *witness* to acts of sexism within his industry. Crucially, both men represent themselves as embodying "alternate" kinds of masculinity.

In Section 4.3, examples of the Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal are presented. Such Disavowals deny the existence of a pattern of sexist behaviour, reducing all instances of oppression to singular experiences. This pattern-denial can then support a Semantic Reversal wherein those who recognize a pattern of oppression can be said to be disrupting the social order, as opposed to improving it. It also works to Redefine as Omission or Obscuring the fact that sexism is systemic.

Finally, in Section 4.4, authors employing the Generational Disavowal deny both the present need for feminism and the long-term effects of oppression. In the first example presented, the author chastises a feminist for complaining to modern men about past acts of oppression, while in the second, the author compares select, recent feminist practices with century-old feminism, ultimately as a way of trivializing the former.

Crucially, all of the Disavowals except the Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal concede the existence of some sexism, just not in the community of the person doing the disavowing. In this way, every Disavowal is a form of Co-optation. Specifically, Disavowals use feminist language or concepts, but attempt, to create distance between themselves and sexist attitudes and behaviours. The Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal is slightly more complicated. It concedes that some poor behaviour may occur, but denies any larger pattern of sexist behaviour. Thus, "sexist" behaviour becomes simply "poor" behaviour produced by single individuals. Here, we see evidence of the kind of individualism found in postfeminism and libertarianism.

Chapter 6: Intersections of Discursive Strategies

Section 1: Introduction

This chapter focuses on extended discussions of a select few comments containing multiple examples of the discursive strategies exemplified in the previous chapter. Examples 40, 41 and 42 contain intersections of strategies from Skinner and Ehrlich and King's work, while examples 43 and 46 contain intersections of categories from all three frameworks.

Section 2: Skinner and Ehrlich & King

In the following section I will exemplify, by analyzing a number of comments, the interaction between the discursive strategies identified by Skinner and by Ehrlich and King. Some of the examples have been previously discussed, in whole or in part.

Example 40 displays multiple instances of Co-optation, Redefinition, and Semantic Reversal. Example 39 is provided as context, as it is the comment that example 40 is responding to.

Example 39 (Childless, With Regret and Advice) (Appendix G)

(1) Feminism is about freedom from sexism and patriarchy. It has nothing to do with
(2) delayed adolescence, addiction, needing to live in the burbs, or getting everything
(3) you want. I think the author's confusions about what it means to be a feminist led her
(4) in odd directions. A physician's wife can be a physician herself... or anything else
(5) she wants to be if she is willing to work for it, even if she has children. Waiting for
(6) the right partner may mean that biological reproduction is no longer an option, but
(7) biological realities are what they are, and the author does not mention pursuing
(8) adoption. I doubt anyone thinks every single life decision they ever made was
(9) perfect, but hiding behind some false idea of feminism does not do women any
(10) favors.

Example 40 (Childless, With Regret and Advice) (Appendix G)

(1)   Spare me the patriarchy. Equality is a must. But equality means social equality (not just
(2)   employment) and the "patriarchy" is the one that most (note I said most, not all) women
(3)   expect to pay for their date,s ask them out, and show them (women) what is offered rather
(4)   than BOTH sides paying, both sides askign out, and both showing themselves to each
(5)   other who they are. The "patriarchy" referred is still around in bits and pieces but it sur
(6)   isn't what it used to be but there is defiinitely, in the social arena at least, feminism that
(7)   defines itself as "have my cake and eat it ot" because it's the man who pays, asks, and
(8)   proves (most of the time, all the time as all people, en and women, are individuals)

The author opens with a derisive comment about patriarchy, before launching into a co-opting of

the term *equality*: "Equality is a must" (line 1). This is followed by a Redefinition as Omission or

Obscuring of the term *equality* in a clause introduced by the conjunction *but* where it is

suggested that feminists have settled for employment equality, and are resisting the achievement

of social equality for men (lines 1-2). That is, the equality feminists are fighting for is Redefined

as solely employment equality, obscuring the fact that feminists are fighting for social equality as

well. Since the author's concerns are to do with social equality in romantic (heterosexual)

relationships and feminists are described as not fighting for social equality, feminists can be

blamed for allowing these concerns to thrive. This, in turn, is followed by a Reversal, in which

the patriarchy is said to work in favour of women and to men's disadvantage, as opposed to

being problematic for women and benefitting men (discussed in Chapter 5, Section 3.4). The

author lists the ways in which patriarchy benefits women and disadvantages men, before making

another concession via Co-optation: "The 'patriarchy' referred is still around in bits and pieces"

(line 5). Here, the author is responding to the use of *patriarchy* by the previous commenter

(example 39, line 1). As the author of example 39 seems to be using *patriarchy* to refer to

women's oppression, the author of example 40 appears to agree that women's oppression

remains "in bits and pieces." Once again, Co-optation is followed by a conjunction phrase: "but

it sur isn't what it used to be" (lines 5-6). Thus, the author agrees that women are still oppressed,

but dismisses this idea immediately after conceding its existence. While the first instance of Co-optation (line 1), the Co-opting of the term *equality* lends credibility to the author because it seems to match feminists' calls for equality, this instance (line 5) seems to serve as a defence against future attacks: it cannot be said the author does not recognize some inequalities faced by women. Concurrent to this defensive strategy, the author produces a Semantic Reversal to cast men as oppressed (line 7-8). This Reversal then allows for a secondary Reversal of *feminism* at the end of the comment, described as "have my cake and eat it to" (line 7). This second Reversal blames feminists for the existence of benevolent patriarchy and, indirectly, men's oppression. Feminists are not ignorant of their privilege; they are actively causing social inequality to continue.

The author of example 41 employs Co-optation, Redefinition as Obliteration, Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring, and Semantic Reversal.

Example 41 (More Feminist Fails For 2015) (Appendix J)

(1)   According to Erin pizzey...a woman who briefly participated in the early stages of
(2)   feminism. Feminisim is nothing more than a modern tool Destabilize the family structure.
(3)   hiding under the Guise of equality for everyone. and I believe her....

(4)   I have yet to see a feminist leader of any kind stand up for the rights of a male as avidly
(5)   as they do females. Erin Tried to create a shelter for men who were abused by there wives
(6)   do you know the result of that? Feminazis sent her death threats and burned her house
(7)   down....

(8)   yes women have gotten bad treatment over the span of years maybe even centuries.
(9)   however true equality can never be gained by solely focusing on one Sex.

(10)   women suffer, men also suffer. women feel men also feel, men kill & rape &
(11)   women do those things to... they just get less time for it in jail then men do...
(12)   Equality Huh?

The author opens with a Redefinition of "feminism," based on Pizzey's description, so that its referent, as this referent is understood by feminists, is Obliterated: "nothing more than a modern

tool Destabilize the family structure hiding under the Guise of equality for everyone" (lines 2-3) (discussed in Section 3.3).

The next paragraph provides two pieces of evidence that feminists are anti-equality. First, feminist leaders do not "stand up for the rights of a male as avidly as they do females" (lines 4-5). This involves the kind of Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring of *equality* discussed in Chapter 5, Section 3.1: in order to truly be pro-equality, feminists must be fighting as hard for men as they are for women. Thus, feminists are represented as anti-equality, given the Redefinition of *equality* that occurs in this example. The second piece of evidence for feminists' anti-equality stance comes in the form of a Reversal: "Erin Tried to create a shelter for men who were abused by there wives do you know the result of that? Feminazis sent her death threats and burned her house down" (lines 5-7). This historical account (based only partially in fact -- feminists never burned down Pizzey's house) demonstrates feminism's oppression not only of men, but of women. Feminists indirectly oppress men by resisting efforts to create shelters for them, and directly oppress Pizzey by threatening her. The feminist-as-oppressor Reversal is succinctly contained in a familiar element of anti-feminist rhetoric: *feminazi* (line 6).

At this point, the author pauses in their attack to employ some Co-optation: "yes women have gotten bad treatment over the span of years maybe even centuries" (line 8). The current "bad treatment" of women is conceded, and the implication is that it is unacceptable, unlike in example 40. Despite its unacceptability, we still encounter a *but* statement: "however true equality can never be gained by solely focusing on one Sex" (line 9). This is a restatement of the Redefinition of *equality* in lines 4-5, that is, that equality requires equal advocating for men's rights by feminists. Thus, while the Co-optation is not cancelled out here (because focussing on

both sexes is not incompatible with conceding that women have received "bad treatment), the conjunction is used to create a Reversal: feminists are keeping us from "true equality" (line 9).

The last paragraph begins once again with Co-optation, this time of gender egalitarian language, stating basic similarities between men and women: "women suffer, men also suffer. women feel men also feel, men kill & rape & women do those things to" (lines 10-11). This is followed by an inequality that only men face, receiving more jail time than women, and a sarcastic "Equality Huh?" (lines 11-12), creating a final Reversal wherein men are oppressed not just by feminists, but by the court system. Given the comment's opening paragraph, where feminism is described as "nothing more than a modern tool Destabilize the family structure," the author's focus throughout the comment on the oppression of men, and lack of commentary on family structure, is revealing. While the author claims to believe Pizzey's description of feminism as a "tool to Destabilize the family" their focus in fact is solely on the second part of the Redefinition, where feminism is said to be "hiding under the Guise of equality for everyone." That is, the focus of the comment is on Redefining equality as something only achievable if feminists spend the same amount of time and effort advocating for men's rights as they do advocating for women's, and thereby demonstrating that feminists are oppressive.

Example 42 follows the same trend as the previous two, beginning with Co-optation, followed by a Redefinition of equality, and a Reversal. It closes with another Redefinition.

Example 42 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   Everyone deserves fair treatment, that I agree on. Feminism is NOT fair treatment.
(2)   Egalitarianism is fair treatment. Do you fucking pay attention to the negative things seen
(3)   about men? Nope, you only pay attention the negative things seen about women. Women
(4)   are considered superior in some ways to men. Are any women seen as porn users, rapists,
(5)   pedophiles, relationship abusers ect.? No they aren't.

(6)   Feminism therefore, is NOT fair treatment.

(7)   Feminists for all I can care for can bitch all they want. I'd rather have society remain as it
(8)   is than have it based on feminism. Feminists also can literally make ANYTHING sound
(9)   sexist.

The author opens with Co-optation of gender egalitarian language in line 1, asserting that the

author is in agreement that "Everyone deserves fair treatment." We know that this is specifically

related to gender equality because the author follows this up with the accusation that feminists do

not "pay attention" to men's problems, only to women's problems, that men suffer in some ways

more than women, and that some negative stereotypes only apply to men. This Co-optation is

followed by the emphatic declaration that feminism is not fair treatment, the essential thesis of

the comment. In its place, the author suggests "egalitarianism" (line 2), a suggestion made

throughout my data. The difference between egalitarianism and feminism is not immediately

clear until the author provides some evidence for the thesis: the same Redefinition of *equality* via

Omission or Obscuring seen previously. Equality is being discussed under the guise of "fair

treatment." The author of the comment is describing fair treatment solely in terms of social

perceptions and stereotypes, and is focusing on negative views of men. In the author's view, "fair

treatment" must involve feminists seeking to alter those negative views of men. From a feminist

perspective, the "fair treatment" being sought by feminists is based on more than negative social

perceptions and stereotypes, and works on the premise that women are at more of a disadvantage

than men -- as a result, feminists seeking fair treatment focus more on aiding women than men.

Thus, the commenter redefines the "fair treatment" being sought, obscuring the connection

between broader social issues faced by women and what might constitute "fair," given these

issues. Since feminists do not abide by this redefined view of "fair treatment," they can be

branded as anti-equality. Logically, then, egalitarianism focuses on the problems faced by both

genders, granting equal weight to men and women's issues, which qualifies as "fair treatment" as the commenter has defined it.

After restating the comment's essential thesis in the second paragraph: "Feminism therefore, is NOT fair treatment" (line 6), the author closes their comment with a final Reversal. The author states in lines 7-8 that they would rather the current status quo remain than live in a society based on feminism. Whatever the author's view of current gender dynamics, their statement indicates a perception that a feminist society would be worse than the current state of affairs. An explanation for why this would be the case follows in lines 8-9: "Feminists also can literally make ANYTHING sound sexist." The implication is that a feminist society would be one wherein free speech is threatened, because feminists are overly sensitive to perceived sexism.

These examples have demonstrated some interactions between the analytic categories outlined by Skinner and Ehrlich and King. All three follow a similar pattern. They begin with the Co-optation of the feminist concepts of "equality" and "fair treatment," and of historical poor treatment of women. This is followed by a Redefinition of the kind of equality that feminists advocate for. In example 44, this equality is redefined as employment equality, while in the latter two examples the implementation of equality requires advocating for men's rights. This Redefinition in all cases precedes and legitimizes a Reversal. In example 40, this Reversal is one wherein patriarchy works to disadvantage men, because it causes them to be subservient to women, and thus oppressed by them. In example 41, the Reversal casts feminists as oppressors both of Erin Pizzey (and thus potentially of women more generally), and of men, because they fought against the creation of men's shelters. In example 42, the author imagines that a world based on feminist ideals would be less equitable than our current situation, in part, because

feminists can frame even innocuous statements as sexist, and thus may threaten free speech. The

pattern then seems to be that Co-optation is used in order to assure readers that the commenter

believes in gender equality, which makes the Redefinition plus Reversal pattern more difficult to

challenge. The Redefinition of *equality* is then used to demonstrate that feminists are not fighting

for what they say they are: if feminists say they are fighting for equality, but the author redefines

equality, then feminists can be said to be lying. The author can then implement the Reversal

which, because of the Co-optation used, seems unbiased.

Section 3: Skinner, Ehrlich & King, and Lazar

This section contains an analysis of two comments, each demonstrating an interaction

between Lazar's Disavowals and the analytic categories from the other frameworks discussed in

this chapter.

In example 43, we find instances of Co-optation, Redefinition, Incorporation, and the

Alternate Context Disavowal.

Example 43 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   listen, i agree. women should be treated just as equally as men are. EVERYONE
(2)   SHOULD. regardless of race, skin color, gender, social class, or whatever. you be nice to
(3)   me, ill be nice to you. simple as that. but i think the majority of feminists are just plain
(4)   stupid. In the U.S at least.. i have met feminists who get mad because i hold a door open
(5)   for them, because "i think they cant do it themselves" or "are too weak to do it because
(6)   their women" and if i dont hold the door open for them, im "a mannerless douchbag". So
(7)   how can we win? would you get mad if i said you are beautiful? (which you are, cant
(8)   help being a man) because i have seen feminists get offended when a man compliments
(9)   them (10 hrs of walking in NYC as a women video being a great example) i feel like
(10)   some feminists dont even want true equality. like if a man hits me and i hit back,
(11)   its seen as self defense, but if a women hits me and i hit back, its seen as me being
(12)   an abusive women hater? i should be able to hit back no? not to say you do, but i
(13)   feel like a lot of feminists just hide behind the word feminism instead of admitting
(14)   they hate men. Women across the globe are beaten and tortured and treated less
(15)   because they are women, but here in the U.S? some are mad for the dumbest

(16)   reasons. They want rape to stop and dont want to be used as an object, but they
(17)   show up to a protest 90% naked. like i dont want to objectify women, but fact is, i
(18)   was quite litterally built to stick my penis in a womans vagina, in pleasure, for the
(19)   means of reproducing and keeping my species alive. Im not justifying rape in any
(20)   way cuz thats just messed up. But by instinct, if i see a girl 90% naked, im going
(21)   to be turned on. i think gender equality is a great idea. but i also think many
(22)   feminists need to be reminded what true gender equality is.

The author begins with a Co-optation of gender egalitarian language, as well as a selection of

other assertions of non-discrimination (lines 1-3). This is followed by the nearly-ubiquitous but

statement, which precedes an ad hominem attack against feminists (line 3). This attack is

mitigated by another instance of Co-optation: feminists "[i]n the U.S at least" are stupid (lines 3-

4). By specifying that the author only means to include American feminists in their attack, the

author suggests support for feminists elsewhere. This way, the author is established as not anti-

feminist, providing a defense against bias. Thus, "[i]n the U.S at least" acts as both an Alternate

Context Disavowal -- by implying sexism does not occur in the U.S. -- and Co-optation -- by

being somewhat accepting of the need for feminism elsewhere. The attack in lines 3 and 4 -- "the

majority of feminists are just plain stupid" -- is buffered on both sides: the preceding Co-optation

(lines 1-3) acknowledges the importance of equality along many axes, while the succeeding Co-

optation (line 4) demonstrates support for feminism, at least outside of the United States.

The author then presents evidence for the claim that feminists in the U.S. are stupid: they

are ambivalent about a patriarchy that is benevolent, and they take offence at compliments (lines

4-6). As a way of illustrating the offence that feminists can take in reaction to compliments, the

author alludes to a video, "10 Hours Walking in NYC as a Woman"[14], a video that was created to

document instances of street harassment directed at a woman in New York. While the video is

intended to communicate a feminist meaning -- that women are subject to large amounts of

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[14] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1XGPvbWn0A

sexual and frightening commentary while walking the streets -- the author incorporates the video into the comment, removing the feminist meaning and replacing it with their own: women are too easily offended, and mistake men's benign compliments for street harassment. Use of the term *compliments* (line 8) by the author is inconsistent with the feminist meaning of the video. This Incorporation then leads into a Semantic Reversal (lines 9-10): "i feel like some feminists dont even want true equality." This is an escalation of the attack in lines 3-4. Whereas in lines 3-4, feminists were represented as ridiculous, yet harmless, the Reversal in lines 9-10 reflects something more nefarious. As evidence of feminists' disregard for "true equality" (line 10) the author describes men as being viewed as "abusive women hater[s]" (line 12) for what the commenter sees as mutual gendered violence. In light of this unfair characterization of men's self-defense as "abusive," the author decides feminists are not advocating for "true equality" and, indeed, become oppressors as opposed to fighting against oppression. Like the discussion in Chapter 5, Section 3.2, the commenter expands the use of the term *abusive* here to include legitimate acts of self-defence and, by implication, attributes this expanded meaning to feminists.

This is followed by further Redefinition, this time of the word, feminists: "i feel like a lot of feminists just hide behind the word feminism instead of admitting they hate men" (lines 12-14). This is Redefinition of the term by Omission or Obscuring, and is similar to the examples from Chapter 5, Section 3.1, wherein *feminist* was redefined by narrowing who the term could include, such as "man haters."

This Redefinition by Omission or Obscuring leads into an Alternate Context Disavowal: "women across the globe are beaten and tortured and treated less because they are women, but here in the U.S.? some are mad for the dumbest reasons" (lines 14-16). Here, a comparison is made with the previous feminist concerns listed: while women in the U.S. concern themselves

with trivial problems, other women are facing legitimate concerns. Not only does this imply that the only true acts of sexism are physically violent, it also erases the experiences of women in the U.S. who are "beaten and tortured and treated as less because they are women." With this information, the reference to U.S. feminists encountered in line 4 can be re-understood. The author's reason for specifying that feminists "[i]n the U.S. at least" are "stupid" is that American feminists do not face real sexism.

The Alternate Context Disavowal found in lines 14-16 is mitigated somewhat immediately after it is produced by the admission that rape, at least, is a concern in the U.S.: "They want rape to stop and dont want to be used as an object" (line 16). However, this is in turn followed by victim-blaming, considered by Seidel to be a Reversal: "but they show up to a protest 90% naked" (lines 16-17). Seidel describes this type of victim-blaming as a Reversal because it constructs victims as the ones with the power to stop their oppression: here, women are constructed as having the power to stop rape and objectification, if they dress differently. This type of reasoning is of course very familiar to feminists: rape and objectification, though oppressive to women, are ultimately caused by them. The Semantic Reversal is followed up by more co-opting of feminist language, seemingly to legitimize the Reversal that has just taken place, including a *but* statement: "like i dont want to objectify women, but fact is" (line 17). The author maintains that he is opposed to objectification, a feminist sentiment, but proceeds with more victim-blaming and Redefinition by Omission or Obscuring (lines 17-21).

There are two Redefinitions in lines 17-21, both by Omission and Obscuring. The first Redefinition involves the term *objectification*. The author has just stated they do not want to objectify women (line 17). However, they also say that they are aroused by seeing women mostly naked (line 20). The use of the conjunction *but* between these two propositions, i.e., not

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wanting to objectify women, *but* at the same time being aroused by naked women, suggests a conflation of sexual desire or arousal and objectification. That is, objectification is an uncontrollable result of arousal, or else objectification and arousal are one and the same. What is omitted or obscured here is the agency required to objectify someone: if objectification is an uncontrollable reaction, there is no agency. Thus, *objectification* is redefined twice: in one case by Semantic Reversal -- because women are presented as causing their own objectification via their state of dress -- in the other by Omission or Obscuring -- where objectification is characterized as an uncontrollable response.

The second Redefinition involves the term *rape*. The Co-optation of feminist, anti-rape sentiments -- "Im not justifying rape in any way cuz thats just messed up" (lines 19-20) -- is telling: it insinuates a connection between rape and sexual arousal given that the Co-optation is followed by a *but* statement: "cuz that's just messed up. But by instinct, if i see a girl 90% naked. . ." (line 20). This reinforces the connection between rape and being "turned on": "But by instinct, if i see a girl 90% naked, im going to be turned on" (lines 20-21). This implies Redefinition via Semantic Reversal: arousal, connected to rape, occurs because of how women choose to dress. As with the Redefinition of *objectification* via Reversal just discussed, this Redefinition of *rape* is a Reversal because women are presented as causing their own rape due to their clothing choices. Additionally, the connection between rape and arousal is similar to the one we just saw between objectification and arousal: we are looking at another case of Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring, this time of *rape*. In this case, what is omitted or obscured is the connection between rape and power, since arousal is being presented as the reason for rape. Thus, just as with the Redefinition of *objectification* discussed in the last paragraph, *rape* is Redefined twice: once by Semantic Reversal -- because women are depicted

as causing their own rape -- and once by Omission or Obscuring -- because the connection between rape and power is obscured, so that rape is blamed on arousal instead.

The comment ends with another Co-optation of gender egalitarian language, connected to a Reversal via a *but* statement: "i think gender equality is a great idea. but i also think many feminists need to be reminded what true gender equality is" (lines 21-22). Here, the Reversal is located in the phrase "feminists need to be reminded what true gender equality is," when taken in context with the rest of the comment. In this comment, feminists have been accused of causing difficulties for men when they do not accept their chivalry or compliments, and when they brand men defending themselves from physical violence as abusive, and of hating men. Given all of this, the author implies that what feminists are mistaking for "true gender equality" is the oppression of men.

The final comment under examination in this section is example 46. It contains Co-optation, Incorporation, Redefinition by Omission or Obscuring, Semantic Reversal, and a Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal. As it is part of a longer thread, data 44 and 45 have been provided as context.

Example 44 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   Women are allowed to grow hair wherever they want, most guys just don't find it
(2)   attractive. I don't see how that's a reason to join a movement containing such hate…

Example 45 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   you must be around the wrong type of "feminists."

(2)   Feminism is NOT full of hate. As someone who identifies as a feminist, I do not hate
(3)   men in the slightest. . . .

(4)   What I (and other feminists) hate is society being run to cater to men. . . . I hate that it's
(5)   socially acceptable to harass a woman on the street. . . .

Example 46 (WHY I'M A...FEMINIST *gasp*) (Appendix K)

(1)   Feminism by definition has nothing to do with hate, but unfortunately it has become
(2)   a hateful movement. Look at the people championing it, for example Anita Sarkeesian,
(3)   someone who does hate men and often lies yet she receives support from the feminist
(4)   community. Or Rebecca Watson, who tries to infect existing groups with her odd brand
(5)   of feminism. Look at any feminist tumblr page and some blogs and you'll find misandry
(6)   from privileged white women. . . .

(7)   Street harassment is a cultural, and in turn economic issue. Poor people, who are often
(8)   black, are the main perpetrators of street harassment, whether you're a man or a woman.
(9)   This is my personal experience in London and NYC but also shown in videos showing
(10)   street harassment while walking for 10 hours (there were many made a few
(11)   months back). It's not a gender issue and making it one doesn't help. . . .

The author opens with Co-optation of feminist history and a feminist definition of feminism: the author concedes that the original definition of feminism was not hateful, nor was the movement ("it *has become* a hateful movement," lines 1-2). This Co-optation introduces a Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring of *feminism*, discussed in Chapter 5, Section 3.1. Feminism here is Redefined as a movement about hating men. The author then provides evidence for this hatred of men from activity within the feminist community (lines 2-6), by feminist "leader" Anita Sarkeesian and feminists on the blog site Tumblr. Sarkeesian has received criticism (from within and from outside the feminist community) for some of her behaviour, but this is not discussed at any length. Instead, she is simply said to "hate men" and lie often (line 3). The last piece of evidence for the Reversal is a generalization about feminist Tumblr pages and other blogs, where the reader is invited to find examples of misandry (lines 5-6). Like *feminazi*, *misandry* is a single word containing the Reversal in which women oppress men, as opposed to the opposite (though *feminazi* creates a Reversal in which feminists specifically are oppressive). Following this use of the term *misandry* the author takes advantage of some genuine criticism of the feminist movement, citing "privileged white women" as the source of the misandry (lines 5-6). This is another Co-optation: the author is organizing a defence against accusations of bias by appearing

to agree with feminists who have called into question the (problematic) behaviour of privileged white women in the movement.

In the second paragraph the author responds to the previous poster's complaint that "it's socially acceptable to harass a woman on the street" (example 45, line 5) with a Redefinition of *street harassment*. This is done using a variety of tactics. First, the author employs a Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring, defining *street harassment* as a "cultural" and "economic" issue only (line 7), and omitting the gendered element of this kind of harassment. Second, by referring to the perpetrators as "people" (line 7), and victims as either "a man or a woman" (line 8), the author reinforces the Redefinition of *street harassment* as not a gendered phenomenon by not expressly assigning blame or victimization to a specific gender.

As evidence for this Redefinition, the author uses personal experience and Incorporation of the "10 hours" videos discussed previously (see example 43, lines 9-11). Though these videos were originally designed to reveal experiences of women facing street harassment, the author here is using them to turn street harassment into a solely economic and racial issue, changing the intended meaning of the videos. Finally, this paragraph ends by explicitly stating what has thus far only be implied: street harassment is not a "gender issue," as demonstrated by the previous "evidence" (line 11). The Redefinition and Incorporation have lead up to a Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal. This is, in turn, used as a springboard for a Reversal, aimed at the feminist the author is responding to, who is charged with creating unnecessary gender trouble: "making it [a gender issue] doesn't help" (line 11). This is a Reversal in the sense that a feminist is being blamed for creating friction between genders, such that the blame for street harassment shifts from men who perpetrate it to feminists who characterize it is a gender-related problem.

Section 4: Conclusion

This concluding section focuses on synthesizing themes and relationships uncovered throughout my analysis. Co-optation occurred frequently, often accompanied by some form of Redefinition. The relationship between these strategies is most obvious in the intersections of strategies identified in Section 3 of this chapter. There, authors frequently begin their comments with the Co-optation of gender egalitarian language. This is then followed by a Redefinition of this language, where authors impose their own definitions on feminist terms, and then hold feminists accountable for not meeting the standards they have themselves established. This can be contrasted with other uses of Redefinition, which make feminists and their concerns seem trivial and/or ridiculous. The Redefinition of *equality* seen in examples 40, 41 and 42 is unique because it is the Redefinition that most easily allows a Reversal to be implemented. That is, after Redefining *equality*, commenters typically employ a Reversal, accusing feminists of being anti-equality, and contrasting the anti-equality positions of feminists with the true seekers of gender equality, those who often advocate for men. Redefinitions of other terms can also be used to employ a Semantic Reversal. For example, the Redefinition by Omission or Obscuring of *feminist* in Chapter 5, Section 3.1, example 11, allows for a Reversal in which feminists oppress certain non-feminist women. Similarly, the Redefinition by Expansion of *abusive* in Chapter 5, Section 3.2, example 12 creates a scenario in which feminists appear to villainize men's legitimate acts of self-defense against women's physical attacks. This sets the stage for a Reversal in which feminists can be said to oppress men because they do not allow them to defend themselves against attack. However, the Redefinition of *equality* is especially powerful because it directly targets feminism's primary goal: equality between men and women.

Lazar's work brings a clearer understanding of patterns to the analysis. The majority of the Disavowals can be said to fall under the category of Co-optation in that they acknowledge that sexism exists, as Co-optation does, but at the same time place authors at a distance from sexism in some way. The Alternate Context and Alternate Men Disavowals concede the existence of sexism, but "elsewhere": in other places or people. Unlike the Alternate Context Disavowal, the Alternate Men Disavowal, as it appears in my data, keeps sexism particularly close to home, as near as the workplace. However, it does not allow for the recognition of oneself as contributing to sexism. These are different from the Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal, which has the effect of denying the systemic nature of gendered oppression, thus denying the broad patterns of sexism and patriarchy, and blaming instances of sexist behaviour on lone individuals, or systems of oppression not related to gender. Authors can also use this strategy as a springboard for Semantic Reversal, where those who recognize and call attention to the gendered patterns of oppression are labeled social disrupters, as opposed to responsible citizens calling attention to oppressive behaviour.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This research stems from an interest in online communication, discourse surrounding feminism, and the ways in which discursive strategies can function to undermine feminism. Computer-mediated communication is an extremely popular form of communication, and comment sections are of interest specifically because, writes Nielsen (2014), "[t]he technology that has enabled online comments provides an interesting avenue for study because its purpose has not been clearly defined and depends upon whose values have been foregrounded" (471). As a dedicated feminist and netizen, I am personally interested in how discursive strategies are used in discussions about feminism online and what sorts of "values" get "foregrounded" in such discussions. As a researcher, I am interested in the ways that discursive strategies identified by other researchers as contributing to a feminist backlash discourse can be used to analyze a single corpus and how such strategies may intersect with one another. In relation to both of these points, Herring et al.'s argument that knowledge of discursive strategies and how they work can be used to better resist oppression online is a powerful reason to study how these strategies are used to undermine feminists online. Herring's argument resonates with the work of critical discourse analysts who view the analysis and deconstruction of discriminatory discourse as useful in the denaturalizing and demystifying of its ideological assumptions.

Data for this thesis was collected from 10 comment sections. Two of these were in response to two different *YouTube* videos, while the other eight were in response to articles on two news websites: the *New York Times* and the *Globe and Mail*. These sites were chosen for their large audiences, and for their grounding in North American culture, the culture with which I am most familiar. The methodology guiding the study was Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis,

in which gender is viewed as an ideological structure that "is enacted and renewed in a society's institutions and social practices, which mediate between the individual and the social order" meaning that "asymmetrical gender relations cannot merely be explained by individuals' intentions." ("Feminist Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis" 147) This principle of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis is important to my analysis as it has allowed me to critique the postfeminist and libertarian assumptions frequently expressed in my data, which hold that matters of oppression are individual, rather than systemic. My method involved using analytic categories from the frameworks found in three other studies: Skinner's Co-optation, Incorporation and Translation; Ehrlich and King's Redefinitions, which I understand as subcategories of Skinner's Translation -- Redefinition as Omission or Obscuring, as Expansion, and as Obliteration, in addition to Semantic Reversal; and Lazar's Alternate Men, Alternate Context, Generational, and Gender Oversensitivity Disavowals.

Data analysis revealed several interesting relationships between different strategies. Before the analysis phase, I had already identified a close relationship between Skinner's Translation and Ehrlich and King's Redefinition. As the analysis progressed, I identified a similarly close relationship between Skinner's Co-optation and three of the four Disavowals found in Lazar's work. The relationships between frameworks are summarized in Figure 2. The dashed line connecting Incorporation to Translation/Redefinition is meant to highlight the connection between the denial of meaning involved in some instances of Incorporation, and how this denial of meaning is the first step in some Redefinitions.
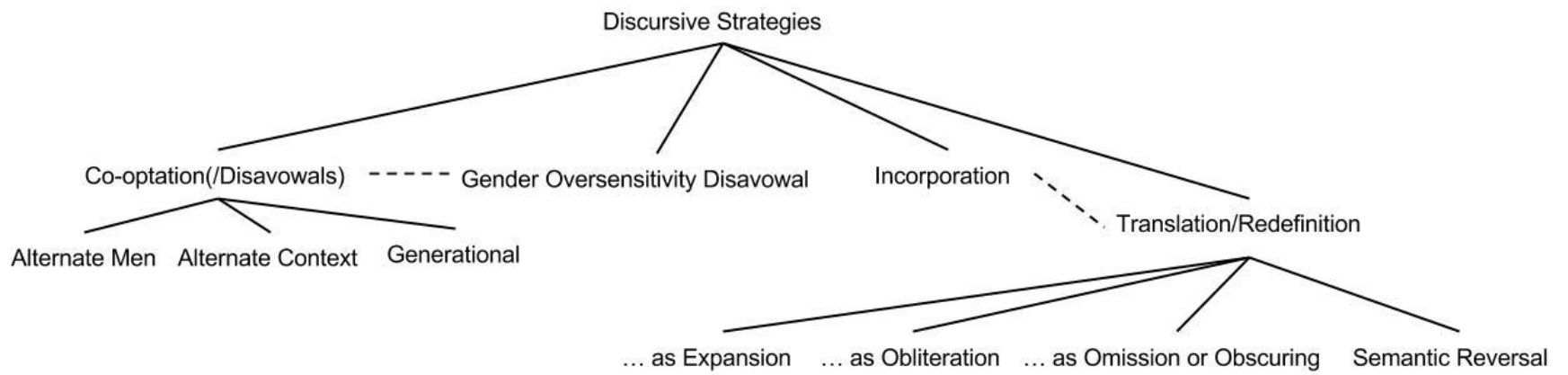
Figure 2: Framework Relationships

Co-optation and the Alternate Man, Alternate Context, and Generational Disavowals were found to relate to each other in that these three Disavowals concede the existence of sexism -- and thus co-opt the feminist concept of sexism. The Gender Oversensitivity Disavowal, however, because it denies the systemic nature of sexism, does not seem to involve Co-optation in the same way. All Disavowals, nevertheless, do work to defend the person implementing them against accusations of sexism: either by situating sexism elsewhere, or else by denying its existence. In this way, the Co-optation involved in these Disavowals is consistent with postfeminist discourse which, "is characterised as deploying what might be regarded as broadly 'feminist' sentiments in order to justify certain behaviours or choices, but these sentiments have become severed from their political or philosophical origins." (Whelehan 156)

With regards to Translation, Redefinitions as Omission or Obscuring, as Expansion, and as Obliteration were often used to highlight the "ridiculousness" of feminism. Semantic Reversal, another kind of Redefinition, was somewhat different in its function: it was typically used to frame feminists and women as oppressive of men. This Reversal of the oppressed and oppressor roles is not surprising, given the intermingling of postfeminist and libertarian ideas online. Postfeminist sensibility characterizes men as increasingly mocked, sexualized, and under threat of violence from women, while simultaneously portraying women as increasingly empowered and as having power over men. Libertarianism creates a distrust of external authority, such that groups like feminists, who seek to impose rules, both online and offline, in an attempt to better women's lives, are viewed as oppressive.

In reversing the roles of oppressor and oppressed, this kind of Semantic Reversal was frequently preceded by an important Redefinition (as Omission or Obscuring) of the term *equality*. Most often, this term was redefined to suggest that in order for feminists to be truly

seeking equality, they must demonstrate equal vigor in campaigning for men's rights and

women's rights. Indeed, an important pattern that emerged in relation to this Redefinition was

the use of Co-optation, followed by a Redefinition of *equality*, followed finally by the Semantic

Reversal discussed above. The Co-optation (i.e., co-opting feminist terms and ideas) in these

cases provided evidence that the commenter was "unbiased." That is, this Co-optation acted as a

pre-emptive defence against any accusations of bias, similar to what Attenborough found with

respect to the use of 'f-'categories in defending one's opinions about material potentially

considered as sexist. The Redefinition of *equality* was then used to launch an attack on feminists,

who, with this Redefinition, could be described as not truly fighting for equality. This attack took

the form of a Semantic Reversal, in which feminists were said to behave oppressively towards

men, and sometimes towards women as well.

Before moving on to discussing possible directions of future research, I would like to

briefly comment on some of the limitations of this project. The study examined only a selection

of comments in response to a small number of articles and videos, on websites heavily based in

North American culture. Thus, future research is needed to determine the generalizability of my

findings. Additionally, given that all qualitative research is somewhat interpretive in nature,

interpretations may be informed by an analyst's political perspectives. It is possible, for example,

that a non-feminist would arrive at different interpretations of my data.

It is my hope that the broad findings outlined above will provide not only a better sense

of how the analytic categories used in the analysis interact with and complement one another, but

will also provide a better sense more generally of how anti-feminist discursive strategies are used

online, and how they are informed by both libertarian values and a postfeminist sensibility. I

would like to close with some suggestions for future research. This research might involve

examining discourse using the same (or other) analytic categories across different websites, perhaps with special interest paid to different sites', authors' or channels' relationships to feminism. For instance, are the comment sections on different news sites more or less open to more overt anti-feminist discursive strategies? Does this differ according to whether or not the content creator is pro-feminist (since journalists at some sites moderate the comments on their own stories)? On a site like *YouTube*, where channel owners generally manage their own comment sections, how different are the comments left on pro-feminist and anti-feminist videos? Is it the case that anti-feminist videos breed more overtly anti-feminist comments, because the channel owner seems more in favour of them? Or do pro-feminist videos garner more overt comments because commenters are more likely to attack a pro-feminist creator? Another interesting research path might be to analyze the interaction of more overt forms of anti-feminist discourse, such as sexual harassment, with more subtle anti-feminist discursive strategies, like the ones analyzed here. Similarly, more work devoted to charting the similarities in how different marginalized groups are targeted by discriminatory discursive strategies could be of use. Finally, we might be interested in learning more about the way that knowledge about these discursive strategies becomes known and shared, especially in online spaces. For instance, the phrase "but what about the men?" and variations thereof often appear in online contexts to mock men who bring up male-centered concerns in a discussion of women's issues. Such a phrase, then, works as a kind of metadiscursive commentary that users might employ strategically when encountering the kind of Semantic Reversals which portray men as oppressed by women. In other words, how can we better share the knowledge that will allow feminists, or indeed other marginalized groups, to defend themselves against the kind of discursive strategies I have identified in my thesis?

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Appendix A

Advice to younger women: Practise manning up

Margaret Wente

Special to The Globe and Mail

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A new scourge stalks the land. It's called "manspreading."

Manspreading is what men do when they splay their legs wide on public transit, taking up more than their share of space, so as to give their manly parts plenty of air.

"It drives me crazy," Kelley Rae O'Donnell, a New York actress, told The New York Times. "I find myself glaring at them because it just seems so inconsiderate in this really crowded city." Her crusade has drawn thousands of enthusiasts. Now, the New York subway system has created an illustrated poster campaign to chasten the guilty. It says, "Dude ... Stop the Spread, Please."

Manspreading is certainly bad manners in a crowded subway – and so is other stuff, like people wielding giant backpacks. At first, I couldn't believe that it had become a thing. "Of all the grievances cooked up against men, this must be the dumbest," my husband groused.

But to many people, manspreading is about so much more than manners. It's another example of the arrogance, disrespect and microaggression men inflict on women. "It's a metaphor for that larger space-taking that happens," Lyndsay Kirkham, an English professor at Humber College, told the Toronto Star. "You don't have to be a feminist to recognize and agree with the fact that men are given permission to take up more space in our society."

How should society deal with manspreading?

Well, there's the blame-and-shame approach. A Tumblr page called Men Taking Up Too Much Space On The Train has become a huge hit. (Its description: "A classic among public assertions of privilege.")

Or there's the public-education approach. (Toronto's transit system, for one, has so far declined to follow New York's lead.)

Or we could deal with it the old-fashioned way. When some clod has his leg splayed in front of the seat you want to sit in, you say, "Excuse me," and sit down. Give his leg a little nudge if he doesn't respond. That usually works. In most cases, the underlying problem isn't hostility but cluelessness.

We need to stop monsterizing men. We also need to stop encouraging women to believe they are as helpless as kittens with the vapours.

Women are not weaker vessels. That is the fundamental premise of feminism, as I recall. We have discarded that belief as discriminatory and patriarchal. We've tried to raise our daughters to be strong and independent, confident and secure – resilient, resourceful, tough-minded, able to deal with what the world throws at them. That is the road to equality.

So where did we go wrong? Instead of lionesses, we've turned turned our brave and fearless daughters into neurotic, quivering piles of jelly.

How did that happen? How did we create an entire class of highly privileged, mostly affluent young women who feel unsafe on campus, microaggressed at every turn, utterly unable to cope with the garden-variety misdemeanours of boys and men, who have been behaving badly since time began despite our many efforts (most quite successful) to civilize them?

Well, you know the answer. The universities are hothouses for a grievance culture that sees racism, sexism and misogyny under every rug. Many of the faculty derive their livelihoods from it. These institutions have constructed increasingly elaborate codes of conduct and large administrative apparatuses to detect and uproot these evils, however subtle and invisible they may be to ordinary people.

The dental hysteria at Dalhousie is another symptom. Some of the male dental students did something serious, and it cannot be condoned. But asinine locker-room jokes are not rape. They aren't in the same universe as rape.

If my daughter were one of the women in that class and told me what was going on, the first thing I'd ask her is: What are these guys like in person? Are they disrespectful pigs or are they decent people? (The answer, evidently, is that they are decent people.)

Then I would suggest that the adult thing for the women to do is to say, "This is outrageous and offensive, and you have to cut it out and apologize, or else we're going to have to take it up the line." Nine times out of 10, the guys will apologize, look shamefaced and cut it out. If not, it's time to take it to the dean, who will deal with it swiftly and sternly, unless he's an utter incompetent. Only if *that* fails to produce corrective action do you leak it to the CBC, where it becomes a *cause célèbre.*

Maybe the women did those things, or maybe they didn't. If you really do think you've been brutally violated by a few crude, juvenile jokes, then maybe you do go straight to nuclear.

"Perpetrators" and "survivors." That's the desperately inflated language that serious people are using to discuss the tawdry Dal incident. Fifty thousand people have signed a petition to have the male students expelled – even though they have no idea who did what or how extensive it was.

Here's some advice for young women: Practise manning up. Like it or not, the world beyond the cloistered halls of academia is teeming with guys who take up too much space and occasionally act like total jerks. Sooner or later, you will have to learn to deal with them. Fear not. You can.

Body politic: Why do vintage Playboys appeal to female customers?

ADAM BISBY

Special to The Globe and Mail

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July, 1979. (Photos by Matthew Sherwood for The Globe and Mail)

I blush when the wrapping paper comes off the April, 1973, issue of Playboy. There's no nudity on the cover of my 40th-birthday gift – just the nose, chin and glossy red lips of Swedish model Lena Soderberg, who has a postage stamp on the tip of her tongue.

My heterosexual male mind is flummoxed. I might have expected a gift of throwback pornography from a male friend, but not from a woman who isn't my wife. I know my friend Amanda Smith has a deep love of all things vintage, which extends from her living room to the

optical store she owns in Peterborough, Ont., and that she enjoys a cheeky laugh. But I'm also aware that many women find Playboy's erotic photos an objectifying affront to feminism. So I'm not sure why my modern, liberated, platonic pal is giving me one.

Then I learn that women are enthusiastic purchasers of vintage Playboys – and that the challenges of feminism aren't so clearly defined.

My "birthday issue" isn't among the dozens of men's magazines from the 1960s, 70s and 80s artfully arrayed around the west-end Toronto vintage emporium Mrs. Huizenga. "I get lots of them, but I have a hard time keeping them in stock," says owner Catherine Huizenga, who sells the periodicals for between $5 and $10. "Women often buy them as birthday gifts or aphrodisiacs, but mostly they buy them for themselves."

Across the country, vintage, antique and used-book dealers say back issues of Playboy are flying off the shelves. The magazine came to life in December, 1953, and pre-1980s issues are hilarious retro romps. The mid-century-modern aesthetic they showcase is all the rage – "These magazines are showing up on a lot of coffee tables," Huizenga says. The pictorials, interviews, cartoons and kitschy advertisements are being embraced by interior and fashion designers, and celebrated in museum exhibits and on the female-dominated Pinterest digital bulletin board.

Catherine Huizenga, left, and Amanda Smith look through old Playboy magazines at Mrs. Huizenga in Toronto.

This is one trend I can embrace: More Playboys could be coming my way as gifts (from anyone); I like the idea of my wife giving me one (for any reason); and I like the idea of women giving them to one another. But it still doesn't add up. If the goal of feminism is to achieve equality between the sexes, then shouldn't modern, liberated women oppose the dissemination of "Entertainment for Men" from any era?

The appeal of vintage Playboys is all about context, says Jennifer DePoe, director of Toronto's annual Feminist Porn Awards and manager of the city's Good For Her sex shop.

"In the sixties and seventies it was taboo to be empowered by your sexuality. Your role was to be an object for men," she says. "These Playboy models went out and said, 'I own my sexuality, I'm going to put myself in this magazine and I'm going to get paid for it.' This was pretty feminist for the times."

DePoe agrees that the trend is also fuelled by a widespread backlash against modern depictions of women.

"Back then, people weren't expected to have this very specific body type that's impossible to achieve. Looking at old Playboys nowadays, it feels like you could almost be that person." DePoe calls old Playboys the "comfort food of porn," and adds that the ubiquitous pornography of today "doesn't appeal to a lot of people when it's unrealistic or degrading."

April, 1968.

By now I'm getting mental whiplash from all the backlash, and it gets worse after speaking with Anne Eaton, an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Illinois-Chicago who specializes in feminist critiques of pornography.

After I outline the vintage trend, she immediately references Ariel Levy's 2004 book *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, which explores the rise of "raunch culture," the objectification of women by other women (think *Girls Gone Wild* videos and pole-dancing classes).

"Pornography is pitched to women as a way of affirming their sexuality, and in a sense, of being feminist," says Eaton. Again, I can't figure out the catch.

Playboy's objectification of women and disregard for female gratification are both troubling, Eaton says, but the most alarming gender imbalance involves the allocation of resources.

"These magazines are part of a mechanism that makes women hypervigilant about their sexiness, and makes them put all this time, effort and money into being sexy.

Men, meanwhile, can focus on their careers and other important aspects of their lives."

The rise of vintage Playboys, Eaton says, extends the reach of raunch culture to a cultured, "hipsterish" demographic that embraces the vintage images with an ironic, playful wink. Feminist critics, the professor says, face the classic accusation of being "deeply unlikeable, unattractive, humourless bitches" who can't take a joke.

March, 1970.

Now I'm even more confused, and conflicted, over the vintage trend. I'm all for gender equality, but does female attractiveness have to suffer in order to achieve it?

Is my birthday Playboy part of a mechanism that determines what female attractiveness should look like? Is this the same mechanism behind $250 bikinis, Brazilian waxing and the litany of other female predilections I find utterly incomprehensible?

While shopping in Mrs. Huizenga, the friend who gave me the magazine sets me straight. "Women like looking at old Playboys because there are real bodies inside," Amanda says, as if to a small child. "Men like looking because those bodies belong to naked women. It's natural."

I can't argue with that. But in fairness, I should probably run out to buy a $250 Speedo and a gallon of hot wax.

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Eighteen minutes, zero men speaking: How Scotland's Parliament made history

MARK MacKINNON

EDINBURGH — The Globe and Mail

Published Thursday, Nov. 20, 2014 9:25PM EST

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History was made Thursday in Scotland's Parliament. Not just when Nicola Sturgeon was sworn in as the first woman to hold the First Minister's post, but also in the 18 minutes of parliamentary to-and-fro that followed.

Jackie Baillie, acting leader of the Scottish Labour Party, asked the opening set of questions, pressing the new First Minister to improve the system for providing drugs to cancer patients. Then Ruth Davidson, the leader of Scotland's Conservatives, prodded Ms. Sturgeon about the justice system's release of violent offenders before their full sentence was served.

In answering both women, Ms. Sturgeon pledged to work constructively with the opposition. All the while, Tricia Marwick, the first woman to serve as the presiding officer, or speaker, of Scotland's Parliament, moved proceedings briskly along.

In what might have been a first in a Western democracy, eight questions and 18 minutes of parliamentary debate passed without a male voice being heard.

When a man finally did get a chance to ask a question, Willie Rennie of the Liberal Democrats said he was "tempted to get in touch with the 50/50 Campaign" – a joking reference to a group that lobbies for gender equality in European parliaments.

The remarkable exchange represented the culmination of a process that began in 1999, when the British government first devolved some powers to a newly created 129-seat Scottish Parliament, and the Scottish Labour Party immediately pledged that 50 per cent of its candidates for the chamber would be women. Women won 40 per cent of the seats in the 1999 election.

Though that share has since dipped to 35 per cent (compared to 23 per cent in the British Parliament in London and 25 per cent in Canada's House of Commons), women continue to play more and more prominent roles in Scottish politics. Earlier this year, Alex Salmond, Ms. Sturgeon's predecessor as First Minister and leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), set an informal quota of having women make up 40 per cent of his cabinet.

"[Ms. Sturgeon's] elevation represents a snowball that is gathering momentum, a long overdue and welcome trend that we might call the feminization of Scotland," columnist Rosemary Goring wrote in The Herald, a Glasgow-based newspaper. It was no mean feat in a rugged country where much of the economy is driven by male-dominated industries like oil extraction, fishing and banking.

The parliamentary and cabinet quotas, Ms. Goring said in an interview, helped women climb in politics by setting "a bar below which things can no longer slip."

Ms. Sturgeon used her inaugural speech as First Minister this week to say she hoped her rise would send a message to Scottish women and girls that "no glass ceiling should ever stop you from achieving your dreams."

She immediately positioned herself as a family-friendly leader, telling parliament that, if the SNP is re-elected in 2016, her government would increase the scope of Scotland's publicly funded child-care program to 30 hours a week from the current 16.

But the change in tenor inside Parliament on Thursday was perhaps more remarkable than the substance of what was said. First Minister's Questions, a half hour of debate held every Thursday at noon in Scotland's post-modern parliament building, was an often raucous affair during the seven years Mr. Salmond lead the SNP government. Mr. Salmond's opponents would attack his plans to take Scotland out of the United Kingdom and the combative Mr. Salmond would attack his opponents right back.

But Mr. Salmond stepped aside after the pro-independence side lost a September referendum, clearing the way for his long-time deputy, the 44-year-old Ms. Sturgeon, to take the helm.

"This is my first day in office. I could stand up here and, in response to any of the questions that I am asked, engage in the usual defensive ding-dong. … But I want to come to this job with an open mind and a willingness to hear proposals from members on all sides of the chamber," Ms. Sturgeon told Parliament in response to one of Ms. Baillie's opening questions.

Her opponents say they plan to take Ms. Sturgeon at her word. Several said they hoped a Parliament run by women would remain the more constructive and less combative place it seemed to be on Thursday.

"It was indeed quite consensual and quite polite. … I think the new First Minister was at pains to try and suggest that there will be a different way of doing things under her regime," said Patricia Ferguson, a long-time Labour parliamentarian.

But Ms. Ferguson said she wasn't convinced Ms. Sturgeon – who in the past has shown she can be just as combative as Mr. Salmond, famously getting into a televised shouting match with former Labour leader Johann Lamont during the referendum campaign – had changed her stripes for good. "I think time will tell. [Ms. Sturgeon] is not unknown for getting into robust debates."

And the era of a female-dominated Scottish Parliament may not be a long one. Ms. Lamont resigned the Labour leadership last month, clearing the way for a leadership contest next month in which the lone female candidate is considered a long-shot to win the three-way race.

"Unfortunately," Ms. Ferguson sighed, "we're going to elect a man."

Nov. 15: This week's Talking Point – the price of going green – and other letters to the editor

Contributed to The Globe and Mail

Published Saturday, Nov. 15, 2014 3:00AM EST

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Values of feminism

I was dismayed to see that Gary Mason reported that the National Post's Barbara Kay had received "obscenity-laced hate mail … from feminists." Any woman (or man) truly committed to the values of feminism – equality for all, regardless of gender – would not engage in hateful, accusatory discourse.

I'd suggest the hate mail was the product of individuals purporting to be feminists.

Mr. Mason calls for an end to "gender polarization" and "negative stereotyping." Accepting that "feminists" sent the hate mail perpetuates that view.

Katie Almond, Toronto

Abusers diminish legitimate male issues

Gary Mason

The Globe and Mail

Published Friday, Nov. 14, 2014 3:00AM EST

Last updated Friday, Nov. 14, 2014 10:34AM EST

There isn't a man I know who's read or heard about the Jian Ghomeshi affair without shaking his head. Leaving the particulars of that case aside, none of my friends feel differently than I do when it comes to violence against women: It's one of the most cowardly acts there is.

Every man who hurts a woman diminishes the way decent men everywhere are seen. And it allows some to more broadly perpetuate the image of us as evil miscreants. This, in turn, helps push many legitimate concerns men have farther into the shadows.

I admit to saying this with trepidation. Often, looking at my gender through anything other than a purely critical lens can be a dicey proposition. But the reality is that male stereotyping is prevalent in our society. Consequently, the real problems men have are sometimes diminished.

On Monday, the Canadian Centre for Men and Families opens in Toronto. It's being billed as the first national home for dealing with many of the larger problems facing men, such as increasing suicide rates and declining university enrolment rates. The centre will assist male victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence, offer mentorship to boys considered to be at risk and support fathers battling a family law system many perceive as favouring mothers.

"We're not competing for victim status," director Justin Trottier says. "This is more about raising awareness that many issues we tend to think about as women's issues affect both men and women."

Mr. Trottier knows already that the centre will likely be denounced for taking away resources from women. He's been associated with the Canadian Centre for Equality, which is backing the venture. The organization has tried to stimulate a discussion about the portrayal of men and it hasn't always gone well. Events have been protested by feminist organizations that refuse to subscribe to any thought that there is a real counterpart to misogyny.

Misandry is a term that is slowly gaining currency in our language and academic literature. It's defined as anger and contempt for men. It is underscored by research that suggests men are commonly characterized in popular culture as violent, vulgar, insensitive boors. McGill University academics Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young have done the deepest research in

this area and are about to come out with their fourth volume in a planned five-part series on the topic.

The books deal with a gamut of issues, from the scorn that often exists for men in mainstream media to the flawed history of the origins of patriarchal societies. The two academics insist their work is not an attempt to diminish the realities of misogyny but rather an effort to show that while we are always ready to condemn the demeaning of women, we are not as prepared to do the same when it comes to men.

It's not easy work. While it has been praised in many quarters, it has been predictably denounced in others. The authors are in good company: The National Post's Barbara Kay has been a frequent writer on this topic and has explored the notion that men's pain does not always elicit the same level of sympathy as the pain of women. The obscenity-laced hate mail she has received from feminists would have scared less courageous people off of the subject.

I, too, realize that this topic will engender little sympathy in many quarters. If men are feeling lessened and misrepresented in the world, they now know how women have felt since the dawn of civilization, the argument goes. If the pendulum has swung in women's favour in terms of how they are portrayed in films and on television – patronizing and belittling exceptions notwithstanding – it's only fair.

Perhaps I'd feel the same way. Misandry is, in part, a reaction to real misogyny. Antipathy toward men is grounded in deep and bitter personal experiences for many women. But that doesn't change the fact that most men are not bad men. And I think we need to address fundamental questions around identity and the impression that the constant stream of negative images about men is leaving on boys.

Gender polarization hurts us all. There's no excuse for negative stereotyping of any kind.

Appendix F

When will harassment change? It already has

Margaret Wente

The Globe and Mail

Published Saturday, Nov. 22, 2014 8:00AM EST

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Those sickening stories about powerful, predatory men refuse to go away. Just as the Jian Ghomeshi revelations started dying down, the Bill Cosby business reared its ugly head. America's dad alleged to be a serial rapist? As with Mr. Ghomeshi, there are so many women with similar stories that it's difficult to write any one of them off as someone with a grudge.

Along with the relentless focus on campus "rape culture," these incidents paint a depressing picture of a world in which men still prey on women every day, in ways both large and small. Is this picture really true? Has nothing changed since the dawn of feminism? What more can be done to stop it?

Ask 10 women and you'll get 10 different answers – answers that will invariably be shaped by their own experiences. For what it's worth, this is my answer.

I grew up when harassment was pervasive. Without exception, every woman I know had to fend off unwanted advances from bosses, colleagues, parental friends and complete strangers from the time they became teenagers. For me, these incidents were relatively rare, and there were never any consequences for having said no. For some of my friends, there were. One was hired as a research assistant, only to discover that the unwritten part of her job description included sex with the boss. She was 22. Devastated, she quit and went on unemployment.

Every woman I know has been groped, rubbed, leered at and whispered to obscenely by strangers, who also occasionally expose themselves on subways and in other public places. We grew up in a world where casual street harassment was as familiar as the traffic lights.

Every woman I know has had to grapple with drunken men – colleagues, bosses, friends, dates – who didn't want to take no for an answer. Most of us, I'd guess, have had some kind of sexual encounter that we didn't really want or later regretted.

These experiences aren't unique to women, but they mark a fundamental difference from the life experiences of men. As girls grow up, they get used to being hit on. Eventually, as they pass their sexual prime, it stops. Power and position help. No one hits on IMF director Christine Lagarde. They hit on interns and hotel maids. It's important for men to understand that this is still a fact of women's lives.

It may be unpopular to say so, but nothing short of castration could force all men to behave. Evolutionarily speaking, we're not so far removed from the days when a guy signalled that he liked you by hitting you over the head with a club and dragging you into the bushes. Civilizing influences can improve behaviour in remarkable ways, but they can never quite erase the influence of sex drive, testosterone and aggression. In their sexual prime, men think about sex constantly. They're perfectly happy to have sex with complete strangers. None of this excuses men who assault women, but it does remind us that they're wired differently. Women, in general, don't assault men. Anyone who pretends that there's no difference between the sexes in sexual thoughts and behaviour is doing a grave disservice not only to biology, but to young men and women who are struggling to comprehend each other.

So, what's different today? Quite a bit.

There's been a sea change in ordinary workplace conduct. These days, among the professional classes, no one would dare to remark in public on a young woman's dress, appearance or sexiness. No one hits on interns unless they're total idiots. Men do not make sexual jokes, or talk in a sexual way, about women. Bad actors will always be with us, but for the most part, the kind of conduct I saw 30 years ago simply isn't tolerated today – certainly not in any business with a functioning HR department. Every workplace has policies around harassment that are taken seriously by management, because the penalties for ignoring them can be severe.

Street harassment has changed too. The construction site full of catcalling workers is much rarer than it used to be.

It's also far more likely that women who've been harassed or assaulted will have their complaints taken seriously. This is not at all to say that all predators are brought to justice. Sex crimes are hard to prove and the standards of evidence are high. But police, institutional and public attitudes have changed dramatically.

One more thing. For powerful people, sex crimes – even suspicions of sex crimes – are far less likely to stay buried. And look at the consequences: Mr. Ghomeshi's career is ruined. Mr. Cosby is in disgrace – banished from the networks, his beloved Jell-O-loving codger image completely shattered. Three and a half years later, Dominique Strauss-Kahn still hasn't recovered from his lecherous encounter with a hotel maid. These people are now box-office poison. Other powerful men with mean streaks will no doubt have taken note.

So, yes, a lot has changed. Our daughters, sons and grandchildren are growing up in a world that's far less tolerant of casual abuse against women. It would be grossly inaccurate, and also morally wrong, to teach them that men are predators and women are their prey and that legions of women are silenced and abused by a deeply misogynistic, patriarchal culture. This wasn't even true in the 1950s, and it's less true than ever today.

Will we ever get rid of leering crazies on the subway, or drunken men who don't want to take no for an answer? No, we will not. The good news is that our tolerance for serious crimes against women, as well as for the casual harassment that used to be a part of everyday life, is approaching zero.

Childless, With Regret and Advice: Don't Wait for the Perfect Picture

By
Susan Shapiro

January 23, 2015 12:23 pm January 23, 2015 12:23 pm

Credit Christian Hansen for The New York Times

Growing up, I rebelled against my beautiful redheaded mother, a domestic goddess. A feisty orphan from the Lower East Side, she had revered the four older siblings who took care of her. She married my father at 19, planning to start her own big family. After working as a secretary and office manager to put him through medical school in the Midwest, she became a proud stay-at-home mom. She had me at 27, then my carrot-top brothers arrived, 17 months apart (called "Yiddish twins"), followed by a third boy. As the oldest and only girl, I was "mommy's little helper," which I resented. She was always cooking, feeding, cleaning. I felt born in the wrong role, resolved to escape taking care of babies.

Like my mother, I fell for a handsome pre-med as a teenager. A few years later, the condoms we used failed and I was late. He gallantly offered a ring and would have made a good father. But unlike Mom, I was dark-haired, liberal, ambitious and unready to wed at 19. As a feminist, the

idea of relocating to play physician's wife seemed prehistoric. I terminated the pregnancy, aced college early, then headed East for graduate school.

While my new blond lawyer boyfriend studied for the bar, we lived in my $400 monthly apartment share, sleeping on a futon in a divided room. When my diaphragm also proved fallible, at 22, I decided against having a child again. I was broke, unmarried, restless, with addiction problems I hadn't solved.

At 35, I joyously danced down the aisle in a black dress, beside a tall, sardonic screenwriter I adored. We worked crazy hours, teaching by night to pay rent. Five years later, finally debt-free and able to afford a spacious two-bedroom, I went off the pill. Nothing happened. Infertility tests showed we were both Tay-Sachs carriers, a degenerative disease known to kill the child by age 4. In vitro with genetic engineering would cost $30,000 that we didn't have, with a chance the Tay-Sachs couldn't be determined until an amniocentesis.

"Maybe it's not meant to be," said my close girlfriend in the suburbs, whose I.V.F. treatments led to disabled twins. "My husband and I only wanted kids. You want the big city, a passionate marriage, exciting professions. You couldn't handle this." I took her warning to heart. We stopped trying.

I called my male therapist a chauvinist pig when he labeled my childlessness "a biological tragedy." What seemed tragic was that it took me until my 40s to feel together enough to bear a child. By then it was too late. I feared God was saying: "I offered you the miracle of birth. You don't get to choose when."

As my career blossomed, my college and grad students became surrogate children. When my favorite 37-year-old protégée said she and her fiancé were postponing pregnancy until they were more settled, I yelled: "Freeze your eggs now!" As if guiding my younger self, I explained that you didn't need a ring, big place to live, and commitment to stay home, the conservative model that I had seen as sexist. You could have a job, busy urban existence, stay single and have a child with help, day care or a different kind of partner. I was really pleading: Don't wait for a perfect picture, the way I did.

I celebrated when an undergraduate had a child herself, then married and had a second daughter with her husband. Another pupil raised her baby with her sister, a doctor, who supported their family. A lesbian colleague had a son with a sperm donor. Many women I knew on the traditional route ended up divorced, raising children alone anyway.

I was jealous when friends had children in their late 40s and even at 50, using frozen ova, embryos and via surrogate. I wished I had done psychotherapy sooner to heal my head, put genetic therapy to fix the fetus on a layaway payment plan, and stored my eggs as the technology vastly improved. I should have gone to my parents, who surely would have helped out for another grandchild. While I'd fought for equality, vociferously an abortion rights advocate, I didn't know that some women need to battle to have a baby, too, blazing a different path to motherhood. Wasn't feminism about getting everything you want in life?

After her four children graduated from college, my still-dazzling mother enjoyed a thriving party-planning business for 15 years. In her 60s, she quit to be the grandmother of five. So she'd had jobs she enjoyed for 25 years, before and after motherhood. By 50, I felt blessed in work, love and real estate. Yet some nights I'm haunted walking by the empty room in our apartment. Maybe my mother aced the modern female clock by realizing: You can have it all, just not at the same time.

Susan Shapiro is the best-selling author of eight books and co-author of "The Bosnia List" recently published by Penguin Books.

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Excluded From the Silicon Valley Dream

By
Anna North

November 11, 2014 9:37 am November 11, 2014 9:37 am

Credit Mattel

 "I feel alone every day I come to work," writes Erica Joy, "despite being surrounded by people." In a widely read Medium essay, she chronicles her experiences as a black woman in a tech industry dominated by white men. And in so doing, she shows how deep the effects of exclusion can go.

In various tech roles, she writes, she has faced harassment — a co-worker making comments like "I bet your parents abused you as a child" — as well as pressure to conform to an inflexible work culture. At a job in New York, she writes:

"I stayed late playing multiplayer Battlefield, I quickly learned a bunch of classic rock songs so I could play Rock Band and Guitar Hero with the team, I don't like beer so I went out to beer taverns and drank water. I remember asking if we could do other outings that didn't include beer and getting voted down. I continued to lose myself for the sake of being included amongst my co-workers." When she left that job, she says, "I just put down the life I'd picked up from others."

Now she works in Silicon Valley, and she details her current experiences in a series of bullet points, including "I am constantly making micro-evaluations about whether or not my actions will be attributed to my being 'different'" and "I feel like I've lost my entire cultural identity in effort to be part of the culture I've spent the majority of the last decade in."

At The New Inquiry, Christopher T. Fan interrogates a particular aspect of tech culture: its lionization of the "nerd." In tech mythology, he writes, nerds are consistently depicted as moving "from marginalized identity to predominant position of power." And yet the allegedly marginalized men allowed to triumph in such narratives are always white: "The mythology of the avenged nerd grew out of the biographies of figures like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Steve Wozniak: straight, white, male outcasts who transcended their nerdiness."

It's white men who hold the most power in tech, he adds, despite the popular conception of the industry as predominantly "white and Asian":

"When we hear repeated that Facebook, Google, and LinkedIn are 91 percent white and Asian, be warned that Asians are being used as human shields. When it comes to leadership positions, there is no 'white and Asian' problem. There, it's a 'white and male' problem. Where Asians are overrepresented is in 'tech' positions. Whites lead, Asians code."

In Silicon Valley, he writes, "white nerds get their revenge, while Asians have to invent other narratives."

In an essay at The Baffler, Astra Taylor and Joanne McNeil also address the cultural hegemony of the white, male tech worker. They call him the Dad:

"Demographic data confirms that economically and educationally privileged white men — 'Dads,' if you will — dominate Silicon Valley engineering and executive roles, which means they dictate who gets to join the team. Like devout upholders of high school hierarchy, entitled techies are notorious for alienating and excluding others only to justify their childish cliques with buzzwords like 'culture fit' — which really just means 'one of the guys.'"

And, they write, the "myth of the Internet as an even playing field" allows Dads to pretend discrimination doesn't exist:

"Since the Internet is open and there are no gatekeepers stopping women from going online, it must be an equal place. See? With that, voilà, all those old pesky social problems are resolved — feminism, at long last, can finally be over and done with, and civil rights can be something we celebrate as a historical triumph. The unexamined corollary of all this crackpot utopianism, though, is that if women programmers and executives fail to get ahead in the industry, the fault must be entirely their own — they're ill disposed to coding, they don't design or delegate effectively, or they possess some other amorphous personal failing that's almost always a coy shorthand for neither white, male, nor 'one of us.'"

Ms. Taylor and Ms. McNeil outline a number of consequences of the dominance of Dads, including harassment of women online and off and a general unconcern with privacy. Ms. Joy, meanwhile, makes the case that a tech culture totally designed around white men can affect not only the careers of those who aren't white men, but their very sense of self. After years of operating within such a culture, she writes:

"I have to search through myself and figure out what characteristics I've dropped in order to fit in. I have to sift through my personality and pick out the bits that aren't really me. I have to understand who I am without the detritus of the habits and behaviors I've picked up while trying to assimilate."

As Ms. Taylor and Ms. McNeil note, "culture fit" is often seen as an excuse for hiring and promoting only young white men. And Ms. Joy does point out that she's forced to consider "if and when I've encountered racists (the numbers say it's almost guaranteed that I have) and whether or not they've had an effect on my career."

But what she also reveals about "culture fit" is what it can require of those who aren't part of white male tech culture: namely, that they sacrifice parts of who they are in order to keep their jobs.

The Complicated Origins of 'Having It All'

By JENNIFER SZALAIJAN. 2, 2015

Credit Illustration by Javier Jaén

A woman sits on the edge of a desk, a spray of pink daisies to her left and floral paper on the walls. The desk bears the gentle clutter of somebody busy but not overwhelmed: a leaning stack of papers, a cup filled with too many pencils, a tangle of paper clips. The woman wears a plum-brown dress, cinched at the waist and unbuttoned at the collar, large button-pearl earrings and still more pearls looped around her neck, along with a gold pendant chain. With her hands clasped loosely in her lap, she smiles, her mouth curved into a languid grin.

Helen Gurley Brown was 60 when this picture was taken, and she had reason to be pleased. She had been editing Cosmopolitan magazine for nearly two decades, bringing her mix of workplace

confessionals and candid sex tips to a growing demographic of single working women. The photograph would be the cover of her next book, "Having It All: Love, Success, Sex, Money . . . Even if You're Starting With Nothing," published in 1982.

Three decades later, "having it all" sounds less like peppy encouragement and more like an admonishment or reproach. The most common incarnation of these three little words is now reserved for the endless debates over whether women can balance the demands of career with the demands of motherhood — an equilibrium that, as the economy continues to grind its gears, feels increasingly out of reach. Last month, The New York Times reported that the percentage of American women in the work force has been falling over the past decade and that 61 percent of nonworking women cite family responsibilities as the reason.
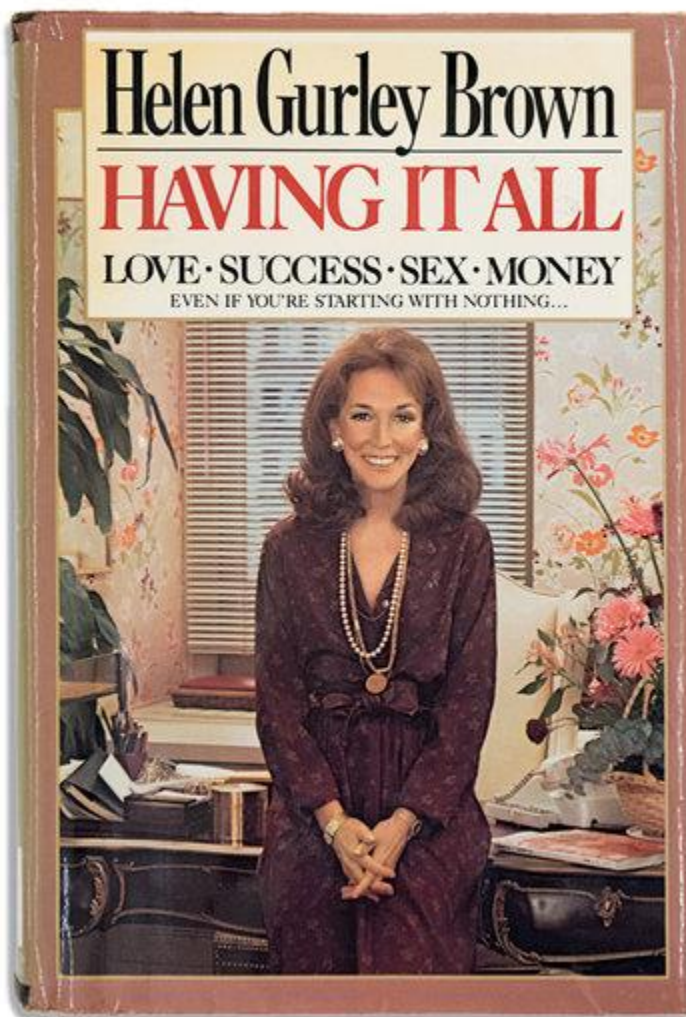
Helen Gurley Brown argued vehemently against her editors' choice for the title of her 1982 book. Credit David La Spina/The New York Times

Brown's book now looks like a charming artifact from a more hopeful time. With "Having It All," she wanted to reach women who might be ready for more — more love, more money, more stability and, inevitably, more sex — and were willing to work for it. Brown, who fought her own way up from a childhood of poverty in the Ozarks, tailored her advice to "mouseburgers" like her: women who are "not prepossessing, not pretty, don't have a particularly high I.Q., a decent education, good family background or other noticeable assets." The book is filled with precisely detailed instructions on everything a woman needs to know to " 'mouseburger' your way to the top," including whether to sleep with your boss ("Why discriminate against *him*?"), what to eat ("You may have to have a tiny touch of anorexia nervosa to maintain an ideal weight . . . not a *heavy* case, just a little one!") and how to please your man ("Don't grab too hard" and make sure to "keep your teeth *behind* your lips"). Lena Dunham cited "Having It All" as an inspiration for her own recent best seller, "Not That Kind of Girl," but the legacy of Brown's book is less palpable in Dunham's memoir (which isn't so much sincere advice manual as over-the-top confessional) than in the phrase that has persisted as a burden and a cliché ever since it was printed in red on the cover in 1982.

Today, "having it all" is evoked so frequently and facetiously that it has become akin to some malign joke — heard, hated, yet repeated ad nauseam. When the question is posed about whether women can "have it all," the answer arrived at is typically no, along with some incredulous scolding of those women who ever had the nerve to think they could. (In an article titled "Why Men Still Can't Have It All," a correspondent for Esquire magazine expended some 6,000 words to complain that women were complaining too much.) "Please, let's stop talking about 'having it all' and start talking about the real challenges of 'doing it all,' " Senator Kirsten Gillibrand wrote in her recent book, "Off the Sidelines," dismissing the phrase as "an absurd frame." Even Anne-Marie Slaughter, a former director of policy planning for the State Department, who has suggested that "having it all" might sound less ridiculous if the American government offered more support for working parents, acknowledges that the term carries little currency these days; in a 2012 cover story for The Atlantic, she recalled that younger women would thank her for "not giving just one more fatuous 'You can have it all' talk."

The popular thinking is that the term went from empowering to delusional, running up against the hard truths of reality to get worn down to the spurious fantasy underneath. Feminists, according to this narrative, were the ones who promised women they could have it all — rewarding career, loving partner, cheerful brood — and then couldn't deliver. Conservatives have been particularly enamored of this story. "Feminist groups like to pretend that women can have it all without sacrificing time with families," Carrie L. Lukas, a managing director of the Independent Women's Forum, wrote in her 2006 book about feminism. The Federalist peddled a similar argument: "Women ask about having it all because they were told they could have it all . . . by women like [Gloria] Steinem."

The idea that feminism was the source for such a pernicious ideal has become so widely assumed that even Patricia Ireland, a former president of the National Organization for Women, seemed to subscribe to a variation of this notion. "Twenty years ago, it was a triumphant phrase and also a demand," she told William Safire in 2001 for a column in this magazine, but "the phrase has come to carry with it a sense of being overwhelmed." Hence the sad fate of the Career

Bogeywoman, her soul sucked dry by her high-powered job, her children barely nourished by the dregs of maternal instinct that managed to survive her outsize ambition.

Once you start digging into the origins of the phrase, however, this narrative begins to unravel. "Having it all," at least as it applies to women and work, has a relatively limited pedigree. Ruth Rosen, a scholar who has written extensively about the history of feminism, told me that you can't find much archival evidence of the phrase before the tail end of the 1970s — and even then, it wasn't so much a feminist mantra as a marketing pitch directed toward the well-heeled "liberated" consumer. In 1980, two years before Brown's book, Joyce Gabriel and Bettye Baldwin published "Having It All: A Practical Guide to Managing a Home and a Career"; true to its promise, Gabriel and Baldwin's book offers straightforward tips on how a working mother might make the most of her scarce time. ("Strive to do two things at once," the authors advise, like letting your nail polish set while you blow-dry your hair.) Women's magazines and Madison Avenue might have been selling the concept, but it was after Brown's book landed on the best-seller list, Rosen says, that the phrase gathered real cultural momentum, becoming shorthand for having kids and a career.

There is, then, no small absurdity in the fact that Brown's vision omitted children. Only six of the 462 pages of "Having It All" mention them, and Brown has a hard time disguising her suspicion that children aren't so seamlessly integrated into her program. Admitting her own lack of firsthand knowledge on the subject, she quotes several of her time-starved mother-friends as authorities and sounds mildly flummoxed that anyone would willingly undertake such an endeavor: "Isn't that a hard sell if you ever *heard* one?"

What's more, the book's title wasn't her idea. She detested it. Her biographer, Jennifer Scanlon, told me that months before "Having It All" was published, Brown wrote a letter to her editors pleading with them to use the title she wanted, "The Mouseburger Plan."

"I've always always visualized this as a book for the downtrodden," Brown said, "a book by a near loser who got to be a winner, instead of somebody who sounds — based on the title — like a smartass all-the-time winner from the beginning." (Which might explain the surprisingly cozy cover image; the photographer, Klaus Lucka, told me that Brown was adamant about the décor. It conveys, he said, the warmth of a "suburban home office" rather than anything too corporate and sleek.) She conceded that she would accept her editors' choice, but not before emphatically reiterating her objections: " 'Having It All' sounds so [expletive] cliché to me."

And there you have it — we somehow took a puffed-up corporate come-on, one that made Brown herself chafe more than 30 years ago, and twisted it in the collective memory into a false promise of feminism. The built-in vapidity, the vagueness with which "having it all" specifies everything and therefore nothing, allows us to talk as if we know everything we need to know about working mothers while saying nothing substantive about the particular challenges they face. To say that women expect to "have it all" is to trivialize issues like parental leave, equal pay and safe, affordable child care; it makes women sound like entitled, narcissistic battle-axes while also casting them as fools.

This rewriting of recent history that blames the women's movement for women's troubles is just one part of the "backlash" that Susan Faludi wrote about more than two decades ago. It is a self-perpetuating feedback loop of distortions and half-truths. The false accusation of betrayal has "a way of turning women away from making demands on society," Rosen says. The real betrayal lies not with the women's movement but with those who would rather keep us distracted by a never-ending sideshow than pay attention to the world as it really is.

Jennifer Szalai is an editor at The New York Times Book Review.

A version of this article appears in print on January 4, 2015, on page MM9 of the Sunday Magazine with the headline: Had It All. Today's Paper|Subscribe

Appendix J

More Feminist Fails For 2015 Transcript

My prediction for two-thousand-fifteen more stupid feminist causes we saw a whole doozie of them in two-thousand-fourteen first the hashtag activists set about to make George Orwell proud with the ban bossy campaign celebrities like Beyonce threw her weight behind the campaign to ban the word bossy the idea is that girls are less interested in leadership because they're worried about being called bossy so it's kind of insulting to imply that girls are this weak that they have to overcome the torture of a word they just want to ban the word altogether despite the trauma of being called bossy when they were younger all of the women featured in the campaign turned out to be incredibly successful in their own right so it's less about protecting weak little girls and more about limiting thought totalitarian state style meanwhile the Iraqi parliament was preparing to pass a new law that would legalize rape prohibit women leaving the home without the permission of their husband and legalizing marriage to nine-year-old girls there was no multi-million dollar feminist media blitz to bring attention to this situation nor did Beyonce back some heavy P-S-A to put pressure on the government of Saudi Arabia over their characterization of female drivers as potential terrorists and there were all sorts of ridiculous things that feminists wanted to ban in two-thousand-fourteen man-spreading they want to ban men sitting with their legs spread on public transportation rather than you know cross them effeminately the campaign says that it's a space thing and some women took their hatred for men to the extreme with the hashtag kill-all-men and that's pretty self-explanatory but apparently that was ok for Twitter but when one woman dared to start the hashtag women-against-feminism insulted harpies set about to demand that Twitter suspend her account meanwhile ISIS is asking Twitter for suggestions on how to kill a captured Jordanian pilot no harpy rage there but one thing that they didn't want to ban nipples that's right while women in Pakistan are being stoned to death for marrying men that they're families didn't choose the feminists of the free world are demanding that they be free to post nip pics on Instagram girls in the Middle East are being sold into sex slavery for as little as ten dollars by ISIS but in the creepy call to have the freedom to post her nipples on social media Miley Cyrus Photoshopped an image of her childhood head attached to a grown woman's body yes this is really the big freedom that feminists are fighting for and what is it about clothing that is so offensive to feminists anyway who can forget shirt-gate a scientist took a giant leap for mankind when he was able to achieve the first-even landing of a spacecraft on the surface of a comet but he was promptly brought back down to Earth when feminists attacked his choice of clothing a colourful bowling shirt featuring scantily-clad cartoon characters and it was a shirt given to him by a female friend but feminists also don't like superhero T-shirts or being mocked by Star Wars fans they want women to have the freedom to make their own choices except when that choice is for a traditional role and feminist Guardian journalist JessiCa Valenti thinks wrapping Christmas presents is really oppressive y'all and apparently the Christmas holiday is oppressive to feminists around the world Femen activists promoted the stealing of baby Jesus from nativity scenes as port of its Massacre-of-the-Innocents campaign their demand abortion as a woman's right so they're going to simulate killing babies to make this happen today's version of feminism is a total joke what used to be women fighting for the right to vote and the right to own property has been high-jacked as a means for social engineering by the authoritarian politically correct brigade it has very little to actually do with women's rights but since the word feminism has become a part of pop culture in two-thousand-fourteen and of course there's the ramp up for the twenty-sixteen elections with possibly two female contenders I predict even

more stupid feminist causes in twenty-fifteen these will be exploited to promote cultural Marxism confuse gender roles belittle man and mislead women all while completely ignoring genuine women's rights issues

[Note: there is an advertisement at the end of the video. This advertisement has to do with workout supplements, not feminism, and was not commented on in any of the data I collected.]

Appendix K

WHY I'M A…FEMINIST *gasp* Transcript

The rumors are true, what they've been saying about me… I, have to come clean. I, Laci Green, am a feminist. "What, you're a lesbian now?" "Man hater! Hairy armpits!" "Say it ain't so!" Shh, it's going to be okay, those are just stereotypes. I think that feminism is both kick ass and super important, and here are a few of my reasons why. I'm a feminist because girls are taught in public school that one she has sex she'll "lose a part of herself". Because women who have a lot of sex are sluts while guys are studs. Amanda Todd, Felicia Garcia, Cherice Moralez, because of the sexism that drove them to end their lives. I'm a feminist because I was told the first time I had sex would be painful and bloody! I was terrified! Because 1 in 4 young women are sexually assaulted and society stills asks "what was she wearing?" Because male victims of rape aren't believed since guys want sex all the time anyway, right? Because of cat calling, and street harassment, because no, it is not a f*cking compliment. I'm a feminist because my first boyfriend sexually assaulted me and when I went to my friends for help, they called me slut. Because when I speak at universities about the absolute necessity of consent, there are people in the audience….who laugh. Because boobs are used to sell everything from burgers to soap, but don't you dare breastfeed out in the open! [raises her arms to reveal armpit hair] Because this shocks and terrifies people. I'm not even kidding. You should see some of the looks that I get. I'm a feminist because of how much pressure we put on girls to value their appearance above everything else. Because of labiaplasties, boob jobs, hymenoplasties. Because our culture considers it normal to cut off part of an infant's penis. I'm a feminist because male orgasm in the movies is rated PG-13 while female orgasm is rated R. I'm a feminist because in 2013 there were over 700 bills proposed to regulate a woman's body. And for men? The right number: zero. I'm a feminist because the political body making decisions about my body is over 80% male. Wow. Because men occupy the top runs of not just politics but every industry in the world. I'm a feminist because jobs! Jobs! Women only hold one in four STEM jobs. We own six percent of TV stations. Five percent of executive positions in the media. Because when I was younger and I took on a leadership role, all the adults in my life said: "You're being bossy." And let's not forget that sneaky little pay gap. By the time the average woman reaches sixty years old, she will have made four hundred and fifty thousand dollars less than a man in the same exact position. That's like a fancy ass house! A truck load of chocolate bars! Or ten. And hell, I'm not even surprised by it. At my first job I learned that my less qualified male coworker was making almost twice as much as me. I'm a feminist because the media told me that women are my competition, destroying my friendships with them for almost twenty years. Because gender roles! Because of that one size fits all binary that shoves us into boxes and erases who we are. I'm a feminist because in tenth grade someone called my best friend a pussy, and it tore him up for weeks. And I realized the worst insult is to be compared to a woman. Because boys are shamed for being emotionally open, because that's a "girl thing", and womanhood is "weak". Weak! Haha! Nevermind the fact that it was most likely a woman who pushed your body out of her vagina. I'm a feminist because my father never once did the laundry, made dinner, or cleaned the house. When I suggested he help, my grandpa told me I was out of my damn mind. Wow. Out of MY mind? Am I taking crazy pills? I'm a feminist because people still say that asexual, bisexual, and transgender folk don't exist. I'm a feminist because same sex marriage is a no brainer. Because in thirty four states it's legal to discriminate against someone who's transgender. Really? Really? I'm a feminist because representation! It matters! And LGBT folks, women, and particularly

women of color hardly ever have their stories told on screen. I'm a feminist because I believe that the world should be safe for girls. Everywhere. Because half the girls in Yemen will become child brides. Because 65% of Brazilians believe that a woman who dresses in revealing clothes deserves to be raped. Because in Saudi Arabia, women still can't vote or drive. I'm a feminist because in every corner of the world every day, women's bodies are used as a battleground in wars started by men. Raped, beaten, sold into slavery, mutilated, burned with acid. I'm a feminist because when I dare to get pissed odd at injustice, I'm just another "angry feminist" who's "on her period". I'm a feminist because of the reality that there are people who would take these words more seriously… [Man] if they were coming out of my mouth. [Return to Laci] Most of all, I'm a feminist because I believe in gender equality. And my eyes are open, my mind is active. I know…we're not there yet. Thanks for supporting me here on sex plus babes, I would like to know are you a feminist? Tell me why or why not down believe and I'll see you next time.