Bitch
The Politics of Angry Women

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This thesis is presented
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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ABSTRACT

‘Bitch: the Politics of Angry Women’ investigates the scholarly challenges and strengths in retheorising popular culture and feminism. It traces the connections and schisms between academic feminism and the feminism that punctuates popular culture. By tracing a series of specific bitch trajectories, this thesis accesses an archaeology of women’s battle to gain power.

Feminism is a large and brawling paradigm that struggles to incorporate a diversity of feminist voices. This thesis joins the fight. It argues that feminism is partly constituted through popular cultural representations. The separation between the academy and popular culture is damaging theoretically and politically. Academic feminism needs to work with the popular, as opposed to undermining or dismissing its relevancy. Cultural studies provides the tools necessary to interpret popular modes of feminism. It allows a consideration of the discourses of race, gender, age and class that plait their way through any construction of feminism. I do not present an easy identity politics. These bitches refuse simple narratives. The chapters clash and interrogate one another, allowing difference its own space.

I mine a series of sites for feminist meanings and potential, ranging across television, popular music, governmental politics, feminist books and journals, magazines and the popular press. The original contribution to knowledge that this thesis proffers is the refusal to demarcate between popular feminism and academic feminism. A new space is established in which to dialogue between the two.
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INTRODUCTION

Australians go for the underdog and now she’s [Cheryl Kernot] the underbitch, isn’t she?

John Laws

The current political climate in Australia is frightening. For the international audience, this is revealed most obviously by the so called ‘refugee crises,’ which has continued to fire a climate of hatred stoked by Hansonism. Or perhaps it is the recent United Nations report on the plight of Indigenous Australians that has tainted the view of Australia as a benevolent Western democracy. As this thesis is an examination of bitch celebrities, angry women existing in the contemporary public sphere, to commence with tandem images of refugees and Australia’s Indigenous citizens may seem jarringly discordant. These two instances highlight abrasions between domestic politics and international condemnation. They also prioritise race over gender. Unequivocally, these groups are disadvantaged and marginalised unlike the affluent celebrities around which this thesis is focused. I contest such simple binarised understandings. Distinctions between hard-edged politics and soft identity formations are too easily made. Obviously, the suffering of indigenous and refugee groups is not equatable with the disadvantage suffered by a middle class woman living in a Western democracy. That is the point. Race, gender, age and colonisation are neither easy to theorise nor contextualise. New Times need new politics.

While women have had the vote in Australia since 1902, their concerns and issues are still inadequately represented. The political process continues to discriminate against women. Across the Tasman in New Zealand, the head of the parliament and the judiciary, as well as the Queen’s representative, are all women; Helen Clarke is Prime Minister, Dame Silvia Cartwright is Governor-General, and the Right Honourable Dame Sian Elias is the Chief Justice. During the election of 1998, both the opposition and incumbent party were led by women. Notably, it is the second time the roles of Prime Minister and Governor-General have been performed by women. Australian women have not achieved any of these positions. Women in positions of leadership, be it in parliament, the court, education or business, are far from normative. It would seem that a female boss is still highly irregular. Tony Abbott, is a senior member of the Liberal Party and the current Work Relations Minister. As I write this Introduction, he has just apologised for the following statement made during a speech at an industrial relations conference:

> If we're honest, most of us would accept that a bad boss is a little like a bad father or a bad husband … Notwithstanding all of his faults you find he tends to do more good than harm. He might be a bad boss but at least he’s employing someone.³

The governmental head of Australian workplace policy is normalising leadership as a masculine privilege, regardless of ineptitude. The subsequent outrage focused on Abbott’s lack of concern about the safety of the workplace. Even his critics had assumed that all bosses were men, and that a nuclear family was preferable to other social alternatives. Masculinity has access to various models of management or leadership. Femininity is still not granted the same privileges.

For an apparently egalitarian society, women in Australia have a tenuous grasp on power. The current government has reinforced this tendency. The number of Liberal women who are Members of Parliament decreased at the last election. Australia has had a total of seven female cabinet ministers throughout its history. Mary Gaudron, our only female High Court judge, resigned in June. It is yet to be seen if the current Government will replace her with another woman. Their lack of commitment to feminist politics makes such a decision doubtful. The insistence that this job should be granted solely on merit ignores that the appointment of supreme court judges is a highly political enterprise. Merit is a ideological category and not a natural expression of an innate quality. Culturally, women in Australia are judged as lacking in the attributes required to lead. David Marshall argues that, “Masculinity continues to connote power, control, and mastery. Political leaders must demonstrate these qualities of masculinity to establish their legitimacy.”

Feminist-inspired progress means that women do have greater access to institutional power and influence. Metaphorically this progress should not be imagined as strides forward but rather as a kind of tottering inching. The most basic aims of feminism have not been met: women’s wages are still not equal to men’s, influential and high status jobs are not distributed evenly, and the courts still display bias. Women who do exert a modicum of cultural influence are still too easily vilified. The media flashpoints that participate in powerful women’s fall from grace are a discursive mechanism that supposedly confirms women’s unfitness for power. This insight has international currency, but is given a particular poignancy in Australia at the moment, as Cheryl Kernot is once again denounced by the media.

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Cheryl Kernot is famous for resigning as leader of the Australian Democrats to challenge a marginal House of Representative seat as a member of the Labor party. At the same time as the media’s dissection of Abbott’s comments, the publicity machine promoting Kernot’s political memoir, *Speaking for Myself Again* was assuring her of contemporaneous coverage. The book provides an inventory of how Labor mistreated, under utilised and failed to counter the press’s constant scrutiny of her. Within two days of the book’s release, one of the most senior political journalists in the country, Laurie Oakes, broke the news of a secret five year affair between Cheryl Kernot and Gareth Evans, a then member of Labor’s inner circle. On Wednesday, 3 July, in his *Bulletin* column, Oakes alluded to ‘the big secret’ Kernot had omitted from her book. Later that evening on Channel Nine, he stated that he had evidence of a five year affair between Kernot and Evans starting prior to her defection to the Labor party and ending in October 1999. Oakes insists that the decision on whether or not to break this story was a hard and torturous one, hence the delay. Margo Kingston provides an alternative reasoning, “As it turned out all he was doing was splitting the story so he could get scoops for both legs of his employer, The Bulletin and Channel Nine.” The media is motivated by economic concerns, regardless of how much journalists claim to be merely carrying out the job of objective democratic watchdog. Oakes claims this story needed to be told because:

5 C Kernot, 2002. *Speaking for Myself Again*. Sydney: Harper Collins Publishers. Since the release of the book ‘forests of opinion,’ to borrow Kernot’s phrase, have flourished. Abbott’s comments on bad bosses and paid maternity leave have shared the page with Kernot, much like footnotes emphasising the Government’s lack of concern for gender equity. As Kernot once again became front page news after her interview with Monica Attard, Abbott was insisting that compulsory paid maternity leave would only happen “over this government’s dead body.”


aspersions were cast on a whole lot of other people, blame was cast as to what happened to her, when obviously this underlying thing, this steamy affair, was crucial to what happened to her, crucial to her lapses of judgement. Look, it even decided when Gareth Evans left politics.\(^8\) Evans’ own alleged allusion to his affair with Kernot as a “consuming passion” is transformed by Oakes into a “steam affair.” In doing so he alters Evans’ Byronic rendering of the affair into a *film noirish* tale of sex and betrayal – one in which the blonde loses once again. He is arguing that in the service of accurate political history the public needed to know about Evans’ and Kernot’s infidelity. If this is the case why did Oakes, and others, delay so long the release of the story? Journalists claim that the affair was common knowledge around parliament house.\(^9\) Yet it was not deemed newsworthy until the release of Kernot’s book guaranteed extensive media interest and coverage. Oakes’ decision to release the story made good media sense, but offered another attack on another woman in the public domain.

For Oakes, Kernot’s sexual liaison is crucial to her political judgement. He argues that by not including her sex life in an account of the time with Labor, she failed to tell the complete story. Kernot, during the ABC radio interview responding to the media coverage unleashed by news of the affair, commented on the journalist’s interpretation:

> He is asserting his right to be the Kenneth Starr of Australia – he is assuming and asserting that his interpretation of causality – cause and effect – he’s presuming to be a psychologist, a judge and a jury on my motivation. He was wrong – he is wrong and I’m entitled to say as far as I’m concerned this is no deep dark secret.\(^{10}\)

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\(^9\) Seccombe and Fray: fulltext.

Kernot, in accordance with her book, continues to argue that the affair with Evans was not crucial to her politics. Further that she is capable of separating her political views from her sex life.

Oakes continues a misogynist discursive strategy in which women are discredited due to their excessive emotionality. Oakes, much as the Liberal MP Don Randall did before him, is using Kernot’s sexuality to undermine her politics. Women are more readily assumed to be incapable of rationality once their bodily desires are aroused than men. As the national chairwoman of the Women’s Electoral Lobby, Sandy Killick, points out, “It seems that women’s personal lives affect their professional performance, but not men’s.” This view has a potent historical lineage. The rise of democracy was accompanied by women’s insistent demands for suffrage. In response scientific discourses were increasingly used to justify women’s exclusion from the democratic process. Science was used to prove the debilitating sexual difference of the fairer sex meant they were incapable of bearing the responsibility of being democratic citizens. It was scientifically ‘proven’ that a woman’s reproductive organs made her victim to base impulses much like a dog in heat; her brain was smaller than a man’s and therefore not capable of rational thought; and her physical

11 An account of Don Randall’s parliamentary speech can be found in the Sydney Morning Herald: “On March 12, 1998, in Parliament, a Liberal MP, Don Randall, delivered a spiteful speech about the new ALP recruit in which he questioned the nature of her relationship with Gareth Evans. The sequence of events was this: Randall had condemned her for having had an affair, years earlier when she was a teacher, with a former student - an affair she admitted, but said did not begin until after the young man had left school.

Then Randall went on to ask, sarcastically: ‘Does this affection extend to the member for Holt?’ Randall finished by accusing Kernot of having ‘the morals of an alley cat on heat.”’ 2002. 'The Kernot Affair: When Truth Met a Secret and Only One Survived,' Sydney Morning Herald. (4 July) [online].

fragility made her unsuitable for the rigours of public office and debate. Oakes’ insistence that Kernot’s bodily desire incapacitated her ability for political judgement reprises these sexist imaginings. While Oakes does imply that Evans retired from politics prematurely due to the affair, none of the subsequent media coverage submits that Evans’ sexual relationship with Kernot impacted on his politics. Instead the majority of the coverage is justified by the argument that Kernot was seduced into the Labor party. Michelle Grattan writes that, “Even when she first defected, Cheryl Kernot’s infatuation with Gareth Evans seemed an obvious key to her decision.” She also eroticises Evans’ feelings, “Evans’s pride in Kernot, and his faith in how she could help the Labor Party, were obvious – and seemed very personal.” You can almost feel the frisson of Kernot’s body rubbing up against the body politic.

The media have been instrumental in emphasising Kernot’s sexuality and emotionality in such a way as to undermine her political position. A number of factors provoke a comparison between Kernot and the late Princess Diana: the media’s avid interest in Kernot’s affairs, her emotional outbursts and the revelation of adultery. Now we even have our own down-under car chase, though luckily the antipodean version did not end so tragically. Kernot writes that on one occasion Kim Beazley articulated that he felt like Prince Charles to her Diana. Clearly the public have an appetite for stories based on Kernot. However, it is debateable whether public opinion aligns with the tone of the media.

15 Grattan: fulltext.
16 Cheryl Kernot shares her recollections of the day she became an official member of the Labor Party in front of a crowd ant the Petrie Masonic Hall: “What they missed, though, was Kim saying, just audibly enough to
coverage. The audience is not always convinced that the revelations about Kernot are in the public interest. Kernot herself raises this point when reflecting on ‘that red dress.’ For those readers unfamiliar with the Australian context, in 1998 Kernot appeared on the cover of the Australian Women’s Weekly wearing a vaguely burlesque red dress and a feather boa. The mythology that the media has built around Kernot insists the donning of ‘the dress’ was a gross mistake in political judgement. Matt Price is not alone in using it as evidence of Kernot’s ‘naïve foolishness.’ Kernot suggests that contrastingly a large section of the Australian public were not scandalised:

Talkback radio registered a large number of women callers who thought I looked great in both outfits [the story was also accompanied with photos of Kernot in a more sedate violet dress] and didn’t read anything more than ‘the fun of a make-over’ into my actions. This, to me, is but one example of the dominant masculine instincts of the Canberra press gallery being out of touch with the lives of ordinary Australians.

There is further evidence that public perceptions of Kernot contrast markedly with the media’s interpretation. This evidence is primarily anecdotal, to be found in the letter pages of newspapers and on talkback radio. The media monitoring company Rehame reported that “four out of five callers to talkback radio yesterday were hostile to the media’s treatment of Ms Kernot.” Annie Harper’s letter to The Age, exemplifies public concerns that the press’s treatment of Kernot undermines the political process and may discourage women from future participation in politics:

Should I encourage my daughter to pursue her vision of social change? Will her fertility choices, her sexual preferences, her appearance, be scrutinised in public?

The future requires genuine emancipation. I hope that by the time my daughter is the ‘boss’ of Tony Abbott, the politics of women's bodies will be replaced by true women's policy in the body politic.

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18 Kernot: 111-12.
19 Allard: fulltext.
To achieve equality, women require more than rhetoric. They require structural changes to increase female representation. The public’s response to the Kernot affair suggests that certain sectors of the electorate feel these structural changes should not only occur in the parliament but also in the media. It would appear that the media, in particular the Canberra press gallery, is out of touch with public opinion. Increasingly the media are displaying a self-reflexivity lacking in critical judgement. The focus of the story shifts from the subject matter to the journalists themselves, in this case the ethics of Oakes revealing the story. What they seem to be forgetting, as Gerard Henderson suggests, is that, “viewers and readers can distinguish between a reason and a rationalisation.” The media’s role in contemporary democracies has altered. They fulfil an increasingly significant function, this role not only communicates information, but helps constitute opinion and consequently impacts on many facets of life including the incumbent government.

The media’s coverage of Kernot’s actions disputes her ability to partake in rational public discourse because of her feminine emotionality. It is implied that she left her party on a whim. Commentators have called Speaking for Myself Again a book of blame. Journalists have presented her as prone to emotional outbursts, and on occasions have seemed to go out of their way to provoke them. While Kernot was attending Labor’s 1998 National conference in Hobart, a removal truck careened into her Brisbane house injuring her husband in the process. She boarded the first plane home at five the next morning. At the airport a reporter from ABC TV news asked Kernot why she was not:

at home with [her] family packing up the house instead of attending the conference … [her] answer – ‘That is a disgraceful way to treat me in the circumstances,’ – became, in the hands of the media, an ‘emotional outburst.’\(^{23}\) Kernot’s commentary and reflections have repeatedly been translated as whingeing, tears and tantrums. Such treatment trivialises her concerns and invalidates her parliamentary role. Women’s voices are still too easily discredited. A woman’s political deliberations and justified anger become the whingeing tantrums of an oversexed bitch. Spaces for effective feminist intervention are often transitory. The bitch illuminates such openings. She can prise apart a fissure in the cultural terrain and get her voice heard. Unfortunately, Kernot and the other women in this thesis reveal how the discursive strategies that label a woman a ‘bitch’ can also wallpaper over this gap.

This thesis investigates the scholarly challenges and strengths of retheorising of popular culture and feminism. It traces the connections and schisms between academic feminism and the feminisms that punctuate popular culture. It interrogates popular culture and extracts meanings from challenging women. These women offer a panoply of provocations. They reveal a cultural faultline, one that fractures the claim that we live in a ‘postfeminist’ time. Feminism is a vibrant, relevant and needed paradigm. However, it continues to be blamed for many of contemporary society’s ills. Dangerously, it would seem, feminists “have got themselves into positions of power and influence” and have used this power “to create a general picture that most men are wife beaters, child molesters, rapists and responsible for all of life’s evils.”\(^{24}\) Or conversely feminism has failed women by making “us far too smart and rich for our own goods\[sic\].”\(^{25}\)

\(^{23}\) Kernot: 230.
or delaying for too long, the joys of motherhood. These commentaries scapegoat feminism as a contemporary folk devil. The twentieth century has experienced great social change and upheaval. We have witnessed the increasing dominance of consumer capitalist society twinned with an evermore influential mass communication media. Women are being integrated into the workforce, along with educational and political institutions. These changes are dynamic and on-going. For instance, now that women do have access to a broader range of jobs, they are demanding further changes, such as adjustments to promotional procedures so as to not penalise women for time out of the workforce due to family commitments. The bitch is a trace of these changes. By revealing that these changes involve conflict, she makes obvious there is not a natural progression toward an increasingly democratic and socially just system. She provides a thinking space. By tracing a series of specific bitch trajectories, this thesis performs an archaeology of women’s struggle to access power.

Bitch: A malicious, spiteful, or coarse woman.\textsuperscript{26}

In contemporary pop culture representations, the ‘bitch’ is more often the hero.\textsuperscript{27}

Presented above are the two poles – derogatory and complimentary – along which the definition of bitch slides. Captured is the deep ambivalence of the term. The many common adjectives – cold, dominating, sexy, uber or doeey – attached to bitch are indicative of its multiple meanings. The meaning of the word ‘bitch’ is dependent on elocution, context and the object being defined; be it a dog, man, woman, car or even a bad day. The bitch is a signifier that generates important meanings about women, as both victim and victor. Being labelled a ‘bitch’ can be deeply disempowering. Clearly articulated accounts of bias or

injustice are reduced to mere malicious carping. To claim the bitch though, can free a woman from the necessity of being always accommodating. Many popular cultural bitches and narratives (an example being the song lyrics to Missy Elliott’s “She’s a Bitch”) are iconic representations of feminine strength.\(^{28}\) The bitch is being reclaimed by women as they assert their right to be strong, angry, loud, assertive or selfish. What this demonstrates is the highly contested terrain of femininity. The bitch as an insulting term refuses women a righteous anger, frames requests as demanding and pathologises overt sexuality. By reclaiming the bitch, women are incorporating these traits as part of normative femininity.

The bitch is a figure of excess, \textit{not} an easy, attractive role model. She shares characteristics with the ‘unruly woman’ of Bakhtin’s carnival. The unruly woman was a staple character of the carnival who voiced the unspeakable.\(^{29}\) Carnival was an ambivalent space in which societal norms were destabilised through the use of laughter and the grotesque. In this space women were allowed to be offensive. The unruly woman’s body was made grotesque by:

- exaggerating its processes, its bulges and orifices, rather than concealing them as the monumental, static ‘classical’ or ‘bourgeois’ body does … Where the classical body privileges its ‘upper stratum’ (the head, the eyes, the faculties of reason), the grotesque body is the body in its ‘lower stratum’ (the eating, drinking, defecating, copulating body).\(^{30}\)

Like these unruly women, the bitch challenges normative imaginings of femininity. Instead of populating carnival she exists in the representational space of the mass media. Bitch politics is located in a nexus of consumption, production and representation. She serves a pedagogic function teaching us the limits and possibilities of femininity.


\(^{28}\) This song is discussed further in ‘Missy Elliott’s Feminist Movements.’


This thesis summons a feminist project. It intervenes and comments on important feminist debates. I wear and write my feminism proudly. This thesis does not rely solely on feminist theory, nor is it only relevant to feminist readers. It is not a ‘straight’ feminist project. Historically, feminism has been inadequate in its treatment of popular culture and media. This is apparent in feminist film theory which assesses the feminist credentials of particular images.32 Always – and perhaps rightly – other issues seem to be more important. Cultural studies is better suited to explore the subtleties of the hegemonic negotiations of popular culture. Its multidisciplinarity provides a theoretical fluidity adaptable to the specificity of the object under analysis. There is a tendency – expanded on throughout the thesis – for feminist readings of the popular to fixate on the representational aspects of popular culture. This fails to account for how feminism itself exists through representation. Jennifer Wicke, in her article “Celebrity Material: Materialist Feminism and the Culture of Celebrity,” implores feminists to recognise that, “the energies of the celebrity imaginary are fuelling feminist discourse and political activity as never before.”33 The media’s pivotal role in the formation of feminism means that feminism “cannot afford to reject celebrity culture and its practices out of hand in defence of an (illusory) authentic or totally uncontaminated intellectual theorizing.”34 She points to the need for feminism to elaborate a more complex understanding of how the media makes feminist meanings, as opposed to simply promoting academic discourse at the expense of media discourse.

33 Wicke: 758.
34 Wicke: 772.
Cultural studies has the flexibility required to analyse popular culture, as it adapts itself to account for a variety of media. This thesis examines journalism, books, magazines, television, music, the Internet and politics. It ranges over this selection of cultural products for a reason; to uncover the utility of feminism outside of the academy. By surveying this broad range of material I examine how feminism is incorporated into the everyday. More than this, it allows me to excavate the multiple modalities of feminism. This methodology works with feminism, not as a unified discipline, but as a political force compelled by varied voices. Cultural studies can track this movement. It can probe how images and moments are represented, constituted, produced and used.

This thesis is intentionally structured as a series of essays built around different figures. The advantage of this configuration is a refusal to elide difference. Each bitch feminist foregrounds different concerns and fractures and moves forward the discussion. Consequently, an understanding of feminist politics is built that remains open and resists closure. Each figure demands a different form of academic engagement and a different set of theoretical tools. By focusing on a diversity of women, I do not approach feminism as a totalitarian paradigm. The bitch is a reminder that feminism needs more models for dealing with internal dissent. She reminds us that conflict can be constructive. Simultaneously, she makes it obvious that too often women are hounded from positions of power and discredited through recourse to their sexuality. The bitch anchors and directs this discussion. She presides over feminist hotspots because she is one of the few feminine models that is enabled to articulate anger and dissatisfaction. The preoccupations of the thesis are reflected by the style of the prose. A rigorous dialogue between the academy and popular culture that remains both critical and constructive is needed. To contribute to this
project, the writing purposefully slides between the vocabulary of the academy and the interests of the popular. The tone of chapters change, adapting to the bitch celebrities and media around which they mould. Quotes poached from magazines, radio, television and song lyrics splice the writing, physically inserting the popular into the argument. Cultural studies has the most political resonance at the point where it conflates with journalism. This is not simply because complex ideas are communicated to broader audiences in a metre ‘they’ can understand. I do not invoke a dumbed down version of cultural studies. I take popular culture seriously. This thesis is not a glorification of popular ‘girl power’ icons at the expense of their more dour academic sisters. It is an assessment of contemporary feminism that actively engages with feminisms that stretch past the academy while remaining situated within it.

As a white, educated young woman, my feminism has a strong third wave inflection. I am drawn to a feminism that cannot only articulate and disentangle oppression, but that can also accept and support female empowerment and resistance. My experience is not one of unmitigated oppression. However this should never justify a sole focus on the ‘new female power,’ as Naomi Wolf describes it. It is politically reprehensible to embrace the rhetoric of the anti-victim feminists and write for those already with money, jobs, education, prospects and food. For those with privilege, there is a responsibility to increase access, while simultaneously acknowledging difference, oppression and opportunities. This thesis is neither overtly pessimistic nor utopian. It holds as its focus bitch celebrities. The meanings these women generate are incorporated by a wide diversity of women – their lessons are not just relevant to the privileged. An effective feminism needs to acknowledge and attack structural oppression. However it also needs to be theoretically complex enough
to deal with different levels of injustice. It must be able to admit and celebrate feminist victories. For they are what keep the movement inspired.

The essays presented in this thesis are not to be imagined as hard layers of igneous rock built into rigid geological strata. Rather their metaphoric exemplar is the more organically formed sedimentary rock. Various themes seep through each chapter depositing new perspectives and insights. This allows an accumulation and consolidation of overarching themes to be built up. Considerations of class, age, race filtrate through the thesis providing the connections between the different mantles. This stops a tendency towards easy narrativisation. This thesis is divided into three sections: Bitch Feminism, Pop Culture Bitches, and the Conservative Bitch.

The first part commences with an exploration of bitch feminism. This section investigates how the bitch has been utilised within feminist discourse. Specifically, I use as my examples the anti-victim and sexual harassment debates that occurred in the 1990s, both here and in the United States. ‘Bitch Feminism’ establishes the dynamic linkage of feminism and the bitch. This chapter introduces many of the major themes that are developed throughout the thesis. It commences interrogating the many modalities of feminism refusing the easy separation between academic and journalistic conduits. Academic feminism is sometimes dangerously (mis)translated by journalists claiming to write in a feminist cadence. There is much jockeying between the academy and more journalistic modes of feminism. An attention to age bubbles to the surface, because both conflicts were depicted as occurring along generational lines. I reject this facile rendering to unravel the implications of understanding these debate as generational conflicts.

chapter establishes sexuality as a central node in bitch politics. The anti-victim debate in the United States, and the sexual harassment debate in Australia, were played out across women’s bodies. The opposing sides fought to determine who possessed the truth about women’s sexuality, and who had the right to either unleash or hold the restraints harnessing women’s dangerous desires. Sexual politics was ground into both of these similar debates. The bitch, or her more girlie equivalent the ‘bad girl,’ were evoked by anti-victim feminists and helped to perform the (con)fusion of sexual politics with sexual desire.

Popular culture produces feminist voices, lessons and moments. The meanings generated in the realm of popular culture reach audiences that the academy does not. The next section presents three popular cultural bitches: Cordelia Chase as a character drawn from series television, Courtney Love who is an alternative rock singer and film actress, and Missy Elliott, a hip hop producer and rap performer. The literacies and modes of engagement required by media such as music, television, magazines and film are different than those required for academic texts. Scholars need to adapt and incorporate these new literacies. Andrew Ross, in his book *No Respect*, comments on the new role of the contemporary public intellectual:

> And their working sense of a better world will not be remote, utopian, compensatory, or authoritatively deferred until all struggles are over; it will have to be accessible, in however an impure or compromised form, in the daily micropolitical round of lived pleasures and fantasies—in other words, it will have to be articulated with forms of experience that are not always seen to be conducive to egalitarian or progressive aims and desires.\(^{36}\)

Ross emphasises the need for intellectuals to work with and through new cultural literacies. It is politically redundant to either refuse to engage with current media or to only engage with them as ideological tools of capitalism. From the rap of Missy Elliott to the white girl rock of Courtney Love and the teen camp of Cordelia Chase, these bitches attract strong

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audience support. These figures demonstrate ways in which contemporary feminism is lived by young women. Australian culture does not generate many bitches; angry Australian women garner scant attention from our media. The deterritorialisation of popular culture means Australians can source their bitch politics from elsewhere. This insight should be tempered by the caveat that these figures also support an ideology of individualism which strips feminism of its community-building politics and uncritically embraces consumerism. The popular cultural section validates the feminist meanings made in this realm. It does not deny the feminist potential of the popular but neither does it perform an uncritical celebration.

The research on Cordelia Chase commences the popular culture section because it thinks through how celebrity bitches, be they fictional or actual, invoke such intense audience identification. Celebrity bitches matter to their audiences. This realm of fandom and obsession is then excavated for feminist potential. Television is not the radical arm of revolutionary feminism. It is not often that television confronts with searing new truths. Television’s very mundaneness provides practical applications for feminism. It provides workable pedagogic models for an everyday feminism. Television is a symbolic space that responds to societal changes such as feminism. This chapter establishes the utility of popular culture for feminist politics using cultural studies methodologies.

Popular culture is an ambivalent space. Stuart Hall reminds the cultural theorist to always commence with an awareness of “the double stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it.”37 The research on

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Cordelia displays a frustration with the automatic equation of ‘girl culture’ with market susceptibility. This work on Courtney Love moves past frustration to begin teasing apart how models of effective femininity are fused to consumer capitalist imperatives. Love presents what I term, ‘makeover feminism.’ This form of feminism has women use the tools of consumer capitalism to gain access to social power. Makeover feminism is not interested in overthrowing the current order. Instead it uses the system to gain the rewards usually denied to women. Love wants the benefits offered by capitalism. She suggests that it is only once you have access to power that you can offer an effective feminism: “And you know how sisterhood is expressed? By giving each other jobs.”\(^{38}\) The term, also hints at the ugly underbelly of this type of feminist practice. Makeover feminism is cosmetic because it refuses to deal with deeper structural inequalities. The danger is that feminism becomes stripped of its politics. This chapter strives for a space in which women are not demonised for their ambition, for their consumption or for their success. Simultaneously the cost of makeover feminism is acknowledged. There are political consequences to embracing an ideology of meritocracy. That the corporeal transformations of makeover feminism accomplished through exercise and surgery are arduous and painful should not be disregarded.

Missy Elliott is also a musical performer yet the feminist meanings she generates are distinct from Courtney Love. This is primarily due to the different genres they perform in. The analysis of two music performers foregrounds the heterogeneity of popular culture. ‘Bitch’ is a highly contested term within rap. By charting the battle of a female rap performer to reclaim the word from ‘gangsta rap,’ it is further affirmed that feminism has

never just been a literary tradition. The chapter on Courtney Love foregrounds the importance of feminist histories to the strengthening of the feminist project. This chapter by focusing on rap as a feminist oral tradition refuses an easy historical narrative to feminism. There are always multiple histories. While previous discussions have incorporated considerations of race – for instance Courtney Love’s excessive whiteness is examined – the treatment of Missy Elliott provides an extended dissection of the double articulation of race and sex. It is difficult work to be able to hold and weave the threads of race, gender, class and sexuality. The layering of these chapters with their different approaches and focuses builds a complex history that attends to these different factors.

The final section of this thesis examines the conservative bitch performances of Germaine Greer and Pauline Hanson. Greer and Hanson produce tight bundles of meaning coalescing around class, race and age. They traverse class imaginings; from the upper class aspirations and affectations of Greer to the working class support and voice of Hanson. The problem of whiteness continues to be quarried. The fusion of girl power with third wave feminism once again relegates older women to the dustbin of history. I refuse this tendency in my discussion of the bitch performances of Greer and Hanson. The eminence of the conservative bitches could be construed as an irritant in my argument. These bitches, with their deleterious politics, are not retrieved as feminist role models. The politics they promote from their bitch pulpits is not to be admired and is often anti-feminist. They are conservative bitches making conservative meanings. This section demands that I write out my own bitch feminism. The retheorisation of popular culture and feminism requires a specificity be granted to the written style of discussion. While unpicking the way their discursive strategies promote – respectively and together – racist and sexist ideologies, I
refuse to dismiss or discredit their views through recourse to their sexuality. This section offers one template for conducting difference of opinion within feminism.

Greer is a celebrity feminist, arguably Australia’s and the United Kingdom’s most famous feminist. Yet her relationship with the broader women’s movement has always been contentious due to her scandalous involvement with the media. This chapter reconnects with questions raised in the “Bitch Feminism” section: how does feminism exist through representation, and what are the implications of women claiming to be feminist promoting conservative agendas? It also presents a substantial break with the first chapter. There is a more overt politics embedded in the prose. This chapter employs a specific modality: it is a bitch feminist praxis. Personally, I love Greer’s articulate bitch performance, unfortunately I cannot say the same for her politics. Her undoing as a public intellectual is her arrogance. Her own social position and power as a cultural arbiter remain unmarked. Her treatment of the ‘third world’ displays a dangerous colonialism. She also exhibits a deep disdain for working class women. Greer requires a careful treatment. I remain respectful of her place within feminism as a powerful role model and thinker, but do not ignore the colonialism and sexism embedded in her own prose.

The concluding chapter presents an extended engagement with the Australian context through an interrogation of the bitch politics of Pauline Hanson. Hanson exposes the power of the Right to mobilise the national popular in the articulation of national identity. Many of her rhetorical flourishes have been commandeered by the incumbent Coalition Government. Hanson’s popularity was partly the result of her difference to the other political players. This difference was generated by her gender, her class, her anger, her
nationalism, and her hailing of Australia’s political past with the promotion of a return to policies of exclusion and protectionism. The press’ response in dismissing her credentials, belittling her speech patterns, vocabulary and dress sense was an ineffective remedy. What eventually triggered her demise was a mixture of political naivety and dishonesty, and her own party’s unsettled acceptance of a female leader. The Hanson story divulges the still limited roles allowed to political women in Australia. It also points to the potential power of the bitch. Hanson was able to define Australian identity. She is feminism’s Frankenstein: built of feminist parts but ultimately all wrong. This chapter explores the problem Hanson presents for feminism.

The bitches collected together by this thesis combine to present a saturated account of popular feminism and feminist popular culture. Popular culture drips in the fat and gristle of life. Here I tease out the possibilities and limitations of this realm for feminist politics. Bitches are challenging women. They push against the limitations of femininity. Revealing new opportunities and the boundaries of acceptability. Women that challenge the status quo and exercise some power are still publicly vilified and diminished. Being a bitch is not just about threatening masculinity. Effective bitches mutate and extend understandings of class, age and race as well. The second wave of feminism was instigated over thirty years ago but there still remains a clamouring imperative to extend the palette of femininities that women are allowed to access. Working class women, indigenous women, angry women, articulate women, mothers and childless women all have the right to be heard.

For a discussion of how these policies from Australia’s political past infuse our present see the Introduction to P Kelly, 1992. The End of Certainty. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin: 1-16.
Bitch Feminism
TELL ME WHY?

A collection of essays based on popular figures can appear randomly selected or aligned. It may seem punctuated by puzzling gaps and odd inclusions. A reader is left wondering, why was this figure chosen and not another? In response to this problem, I supply additional webbing between the chapters. Brief inserts explain why these particular bitches need to be written about. These inserts are the viscera of the thesis, revealing the internal connective tissue that binds the argument.

Writing is a shared journey undertaken by author and reader. All journeys commence somewhere. Mine began with a quest to engage a version of feminism that had personal resonance. I was pursuing a feminism that theorised and activated against oppression but validated and encouraged women’s abilities and achievements. The debates between the anti-victim feminists and their detractors publicly canvassed these issues. A battleground had been drawn to define and defend feminism. Different contingents were claiming to reveal the truth, and connect with the real audience, of feminism. The scope of the dispute was massive; it crossed continents and was played out in academic treatise, Sunday papers and talk shows. The tone and the extent of the conflict challenged the notion of a feminist sisterhood. Clearly stark differences divided feminist thought.

The conflict exposed a desire to seal the rift and reunite the sisterhood. This could be accomplished in two ways. Firstly, by downgrading the extent of the conflict and attempting to keep it out of the public eye. Secondly, by expurgating the troublemakers to make the sisterhood cohesive again. Feminism becomes like a high school clique in which the dominant group has the power to define other factions as unworthy. Commentators use
many and varied labels to describe the women written about in the following chapter: 
‘celebrity feminists,’ ‘blockbuster feminists,’ ‘media feminists,’ ‘postfeminist,’ ‘anti-
feminist’ and ‘anti-victim feminist’ are prominent examples.¹ That these women have been 
so rigorously named is indicative of how contentious their intervention in feminist debate 
is. bell hooks suggests that obsessive labelling of feminist factions is one way the 
movement tries to ameliorate conflict:

The call for unity and solidarity structured around notions that women constitute a sex 
class/caste with common experiences and common oppression made confrontation and 
contestation difficult. Divisions were often coped with by the forming of separate groups 
and by the development of different definitions and labels …²

The use of the qualifiers ‘post’ and ‘anti’ are analytical terms informing the reader of these 
writers antagonistic relation to feminist politics. Shane Rowlands and Margaret Henderson 
in their discussion of ‘blockbuster feminism’ comment that the, “term ‘feminism’ is now 
always accompanied by an ad-speak headline qualifier, whereas earlier versions of 
feminism were qualified by political and analytical terms, such as ‘liberal’, ‘socialist’, or 
‘radical’.”³ The addition of the adjectives ‘celebrity,’ ‘blockbuster’ or ‘media’ to the word 
‘feminism’ signifies the transit of feminism into the media sphere. The large selection of 
descriptives can make discussion unwieldy as I slide between the different terms. However 
this slippage provides an important reminder of the way politics and the media entwine.

¹ See AM Cole, 1999. "There Are No Victims in this Class": On Female Suffering and Anti-"Victim 
S Lilburn, S Magarey, and S Sheridan, 2000. 'Celebrity Feminism as Synthesis: Germaine Greer, The Female 
W Parkins, 1999. 'Bad Girls, Bad Reputations: Feminist Ethics and Postfeminism,' Australian Feminist 
S Rowlands and M Henderson, 1996. 'Damned Bores and Slick Sisters: The Selling of Blockbuster Feminism 
³ Rowlands and Henderson: 13.
The bitch and the bad girl performed an important symbolic function for this conflict. The bitch signifies an independence from earlier modes of feminism. She is one of the few exemplars women have that perform dissension, active femininity and sexuality. How else do we imagine an angry woman with strong opinions without recourse to the bitch? The bitch provides a new model for feminist praxis not based on sisterhood. Unfortunately the anti-victim feminists corrupt the bitch and dilute her potency by turning her into a bad girl. The ‘bad girl’ feminism promoted by the anti-victim contingent displays a cheekily provocative (hetero)sexuality that appeals to the already privileged. The bitch is not so seductive but her stridency demands changes beneficial to a broader range of women.
CHAPTER ONE
I’D RATHER BE A BITCH THAN A BAD GIRL ANY DAY

I’m breaking all the rules I didn’t make,
I’m not your bitch, don’t hang your shit on me.

Madonna¹

I have always been contrary, as opposed to rebellious. I have a distaste for confrontation. I may own a leather biker jacket but I never wear it. I thought about getting a tattoo, but the pain put me off. My hair used to be black with striking midnight blue highlights, but as I write this it is a nice feminine shade of blond. Maybe I have the overt sexuality of the bitch, but I do not wield it like a weapon. These days, said sexuality is safely fenced within the bounds of a nice heterosexual, monogamous relationship. How traditional. I have never worn stilettos. Yet like most women I know, I have been called a bitch at various points in my life. Sometimes, I even act like a bitch. After all, bitches get what they want – they are loud, articulate and demanding. I approve of the way the anti-victim feminists claim a space for the angry, clamorous women. My problem is that often they sound like Oprah having one of her ‘light bulb moments’: “Go girl, refuse the role of victim, you can be anyone you want to be.” By endorsing these sentiments, commentators, writers and feminists are wiping out context, and erasing socialisation. The bitch persona becomes a psychological golden key to power, wealth and inner-actualisation. Herein lies the appeal of the ‘bitch’ to third wave feminism, an allure that is further polished with the sexiness of the word itself. To prove this assertion try doing a general Internet search using ‘bitch’ as

the keyword and count the pornography sites offered as hits. Personally, somebody says the
word ‘bitch’ and I see Catwoman – all black latex and shiny surfaces.\(^2\) No wonder ‘bitches’
and ‘bad girls’ are attractive to many contemporary feminists. This chapter explores the
function of the bitch within contemporary feminism.

I present an account of the feminism sold by celebrity feminists during the 1990s in their
best selling books. The antagonism between the anti-victim feminists and their detractors is
an effective marketing device; bitch-fights sell. While the celebrity feminists all had
academic training they disavowed their own academic roots and claimed a popular
feminism that wrote out class and race difference. Young women wielding the power
bequeathed to them by feminism were depicted as dangerous to hard working, honest men,
with their normal sexual desires. Myriad issues concerning women with power, the right to
define the boundaries of feminism, and female sexuality underwrote these powerful public
debates, but were masked by the focus on a generational war within feminism. This
template is often invoked to explain feminist disagreements. Germaine Greer’s (in)famous
postal war with Suzanne Moore was also pressed into a generational mould.\(^3\) The anger
expressed by the Riot Grrrls at Courtney love for selling out is also a refusal to let her grow
up. This chapter initiates a discussion on the journey of feminism through the
celebrity/popular domain.

Amongst the flowing tressed, under thirty, corn-fed, American, postfeminist feminists to
emerge throughout the nineties, I detect a trend. They all claim bitch-space. Elizabeth

\(^2\) Apparently I am not alone in this perception, Naomi Wolf uses Catwoman as an example of how to
‘Integrate the Bad Girl.’ Wolf: 244-245.
\(^3\) The same explanations were presented for the cross-Atlantic bout between Julie Burchill and Camille
Paglia.
Wurtzel flaunts her tattoos and mental instability. Naomi Wolf urges us to reclaim our corporate power and re-ignite our sexuality. Katie Roiphe revels in bad sex and late nights. Rene Denfeld rejects the orthodoxy and puritanism of those ‘wowser’ feminists in favour of (yet again) a pro-(hetero)sex and anti-victim stance. These are Ivy League girls who have thrown off the twin-sets and the Alice headbands for cleavage and bed-hair. (What was it with the long curly locks on all those coverjacket photos?) They talk about being assertive and refusing the role of victim promulgated by previous incarnations of feminism. They talk about being bad and being nasty. Through an evaluation of this form of bitch-feminism, this chapter sketches a topography of how the bitch is mobilised within contemporary feminist debates. These women are responding to and rewriting previous incarnations of feminism. In doing so, they fail to engage extensively with the multitude of ways in which previous feminisms have dealt with conflict, anger, heterosexuality and sexual choice. To give themselves something to rail against, they meld the feminist past into a cohesive and puritanical whole which constructs women as victims. As such, they display many similarities with Camille Paglia and Christina Hoff Sommers who have also expressed much antipathy towards feminism. In fact bell hooks indicates the importance, especially of Paglia, to the younger anti-victim feminists, “Without Paglia as trailblazer and symbolic mentor, there would be no cultural limelight for white girls such as Katie Roiphe and Naomi Wolf.” hooks further argues that Wolf and Roiphe are able to usurp Paglia because of the seductive powers of youth. For my analysis there are significant difference between Paglia and Sommers, and their younger counterparts. This chapter explores the antipathy between journalistic based feminists and the academy. Paglia and Sommers occupy a contrary space in this debate. While their content aligns them with the media based feminists they write from the academy. Sommers was an associate professor of

4 hooks: 86.
philosophy at Clark University when she wrote *Who Stole Feminism*? Paglia also works as an academic. The bitch feminists explored in this chapter work outside of the academy, although all have been educated within it, and all attack academic feminism. They also claim their own youth as a qualification to talk about the sexual *zeitgeist*.

Australian feminists had their own inter-feminist conflict in the nineties. In accordance with the American experience, this conflict coalesced around issues of sex, power and youth. However, the Australian manifestation was specific. The way in which this conflict was experienced differently between the two countries is instructive. Beatrice Faust, in the forward to the 1995 edition of Rene Denfeld’s *The New Victorians*, writes that:

> In Australia, Women’s Liberation was imported from America along with the New Left, but the Women’s Electoral Lobby arose from the reforming energy of the Whitlam era so equity feminism was vastly more successful in Australia than in the USA.⁵

Thus she argues that many of the issues propelling the feminism of writers like Wolf, Roiphe, and Sommers are not relevant to Australian circumstances. Second wave feminism was instigated in the United States yet American feminists failed to garner the political clout of their Australian counterparts. Significant political reforms were never won. This failure is one of the issues addressed by the American anti-victim feminists. They blame their feminist mothers for feminism’s failure. They argue that it is neither outside political forces nor the misogyny embedded in significant social structures that has impeded the advancement of American women, but the feminist movement itself. Wolf, Denfeld and Roiphe provide sustained arguments for feminism’s failure based on the fact that the movement is no longer *attractive* to young women. Popularity is not the key determinant of success. In Australia this conflict was inverted: it was the feminist ‘mothers’ who were angry at their ‘daughters.’ Even as Faust was expressing the above sentiments and insisting

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that although Denfeld’s book was important and interesting “we already have the practical programs she seeks,” one of the most potent debates in recent Australian feminist history was brewing.6 This debate was initiated by two of the older stateswomen of Australian feminism – Anne Summers and Helen Garner. In 1994 Anne Summers released a revised edition of her classic, *Damned Whores and God’s Police*.7 The final chapter of this book is a “Letter to the Next Generation” where, much like Rene Denfeld, she laments young women’s failure to proudly wear the label of ‘feminist.’8 Unlike Denfeld, she does not blame this on the failure of feminism but rather on young women’s dereliction in knowing their feminist mother’s history. In a rather patronising manner she beseeches young women to “reach out for the torch.”9

The following year, Helen Garner released the incendiary book *The First Stone*.10 This is a response to the Ormond affair in Melbourne in which the master of a residential college was accused of sexual harassment by two female students under his care. As the blurb on the back of the book advertises, Garner’s inquiry was a painful confrontation with “what feminism is becoming in the hands of her daughter’s generation.”11 Garner and Summers perform the role of the disappointed mother. Here, in Australia, older feminists do occupy positions of power. Both Garner and Summers are established cultural commentators with easy access to publication.12 In both countries this important discussion on the intersection

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6 Denfeld: xii.
8 Summers: 505-528.
9 Summers: 510.
11 Garner.
12 Additionally, Summers has also occupied various bureaucratic positions in which she advised the then incumbent Labor Government on policies that affect women.
of feminism and sexual morality was presented as a generational debate. To a large extent this acted as a masking device overshadowing the subject matter of the debate.

Often the young anti-victim feminists have been ascribed as belonging to the third wave of feminism. Insisting that these women belong to a ‘new’ form of feminism further highlights the intergenerational conflict. The third wave moniker of ‘bad girls’ emphasises their antagonistic relationship to their second wave ‘mothers’ (and society more generally). Whether or not these anti-victim feminists fall under the rubric of third wave feminism is contested. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, in the introduction to their anthology on third wave feminism, clearly position the American writers I am writing about as “postfeminist.”13 They are described as “a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticise feminists of the second wave.”14 Instead they use ‘third wave’ to describe a feminism that grew out of “the challenge that women-of-color feminists posed to white second wave feminism.”15 When Denfeld, Roiphe, Wolf and Wurtzel claim the label of ‘third wave feminist’ and colonise all the press space as spokespersons for this new wave, they erase women of colour from feminist history. Instead, they enforce the inaccurate notion that feminism is a white, middle class movement.

The feminist conflicts played out in the media in both Australia and America in the nineties raised important questions and hid equally as significant problematics. This project acknowledges and attacks the way that the media promotes conflict amongst women as a

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14 Heywood and Drake, eds: 1.
15 Heywood and Drake, eds: 1.
spectacle, in a manner that deflects attention from the content of the debate. The mechanics of feminist conflict are dissected. Firstly, working definitions of anti-victim feminism and its sparring partner victim feminism are established using Wolf’s work. Then Wurtzel is accessed: she reveals the importance of sex appeal to third wave feminism’s version of the bitch. While Wurtzel is not an anti-victim feminist, she does position sexuality as primary to her feminism, much as the anti-victim feminists do. She also exemplifies the youthful, journalistic commentator on feminist issues who is not aligned with the academy.

Additionally Denfeld, Roiphe, Wolf and Wurtzel all accuse feminism of failing. However, for Wurtzel this is a very personal failure: feminism has stopped her being loved. Roiphe and Wolf place feminism’s failure in a broader political context. These comparisons allow an unpicking of the way in which sex and sexual power infuse anti-victim feminism. A tandem consideration of the Australian debate further reveals the conservative political leanings of the celebrity feminists.

‘Anti-victim feminist’ is an oppositional moniker. Denfeld, Roiphe and Wolf position themselves in conflict with a brand of feminism they find outmoded and restrictive. Alyson M. Cole usefully defines anti-victim feminists as sharing “the conviction that women are no longer oppressed as a group, and that progress as individuals is now impeded by the women’s movements.”16 Crucially it is feminism that is the problem not ‘patriarchy.’ Wolf is the best known of the anti-victim feminists. Yet, originally she promoted what she would now label, ‘a victim mentality.’ The Beauty Myth, her first book, was a sustained attack on the beauty and cosmetic industries as oppressive mechanisms.17 Her second book, Fire with Fire, provided a clear break with this project. She now implores white, middle class women

16 Cole: fulltext.
to reject ‘victim feminism’ in favour of ‘power feminism’. ‘Victim feminism’ is an elastic term; broadly speaking Wolf sees it as operational “when a woman seeks power through an identity of powerlessness.”¹⁸ Victim feminism is a capacious category inclusive of a variety of feminisms. Some of the important characteristics of victim feminism include that it reaffirms sexual difference by (re)valuing traditionally feminine characteristics. Women are elevated to the status of the ‘better sex.’ Characteristics such as women’s maternal nurturing ability, pacifism and community building skills are universalised and then remoulded into a form of feminist orthodoxy. According to Wolf, this is unattractive to young feminists because it fails to incorporate a capitalist individualist ethos that values competition and the desire for money. Victim feminism is presented as conformist and exclusionary.

*Fire with Fire* provides a clear definition of the anti-victim project: women must acknowledge and embrace the fact that they possess not only a will to power but power itself. This realisation not only impacts on the individual but radically alters the movement’s internal organization. In opposition to ‘victim feminists’ Wolf claims that women are competitive, can be violent and do not possess a *natural* maternal instinct. Out of a belief in women’s inherent gentle and non-competitive natures feminists have attempted to institute collective and non-capitalist means of structuring their organisations. This, she argues, has been highly detrimental to feminist groups. While Wolf presents her ideas as original to feminism, they are not wholly new. Twenty years before *Fire with Fire*, Joreen, in her article “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” suggested similar measures.¹⁹

¹⁸ Wolf: 135.
Joreen also criticised the internal organisational structures of the movement. She suggests that, fatally, the women’s movement has no system whereby to vote for a representative so the media is left to select the voices of feminism. Ultimately this means that most women do not feel that these representatives are speaking for them. Thus, vocal and visible feminists end up being trashed because women do not feel that it is their feminism that is being expressed. Joreen clearly articulates how anger between feminists can act as a destructive force often alienating powerful and productive women to such an extent that they no longer feel comfortable calling themselves feminists. There is a tendency by these anti-victim feminists to ignore how feminism has internally addressed many of the problems they present as ‘shocking revelations’ about the modern movement. Wolf, like Joreen, presents a strong argument for how modern feminism alienates ‘ordinary’ women. Partly, the strength of her argument is sustained by the need for a feminist movement with an effective and transparent party structure. Importantly though Wolf’s work hails an audience of women attracted to cultural representations of female empowerment. As bell hooks points out power feminism “resolutely chooses to ignore the lived experiences of masses of women and men who in no way have access to the ‘mainstream’ of this society’s political and economic life.” Consequently Wolf’s project does not support a transformative feminist politics. Instead Fire with Fire functions hegemonically to support dominant and repressive class, race and capitalist regimes. An audience is interpellated that

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20 For an early discussion of this see Joreen, 1976. 'Trashing,' Ms. (April).
22 hooks: 97.
is no longer the victim of social structures. Thus eliding the lived experiences of many men and women. The subjectivity Wolf hails is an attractive one. It is enticing to be able to imagine yourself free of oppression. Unfortunately this privilege is only available to a few.

Sex is crucial to the ability to differentiate between power feminism and victim feminism. By making feminism sexy again the anti-victim feminists hope to attract ‘young women’ back to feminism. Wolf insists that the ‘bitch’ of today has a right to a strong, and somewhat messy, (hetero)sexuality. Wolf constructs victim feminists as “sexually judgmental, even anti-sexual.” Denfeld and Roiphe augment this critique. Both compare victim feminist’s sexual mores to those of the Victorians. What all these commentators do is make sexuality central to feminism. The sexuality they claim for feminism is a young white middle class heterosexuality. Sexual experimentation at college would appear to be a universal right of passage – race and class are effectively removed from their discussions. “Reclaim the Night” marches are rejected in favour of reclaiming sex. This valorisation of sex can be traced through an examination of Wurtzel’s insistence that feminism is unsuccessful because her sexuality is not universally acceptable.

Wurtzel is distinct from her contemporaries such as Roiphe and Wolf, because she does view women as victims, especially in regards to their relationships with men. Wurtzel and the anti-victim feminists work within a strongly individualist framework. Roiphe and Wolf promote the ideology of meritocracy: the self can stop being a victim through personal will. Roiphe and Wolf’s arguments extend past the private sphere into the realms of education,

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commerce, and politics. Wurtzel restricts her discussion to the heterosexual hearth. This focus makes sexuality primary to her argument. Wurtzel insists that she should be able to do what she wants and still be loved. Wurtzel writes that “For a woman to do just as she pleases and dispense with other people’s needs, wants, demands and desires continues to be revolutionary.”\(^\text{25}\) She feels that a successful feminism would create a world better able to include her and the women about which she writes. She states that, “frankly, I have a tough time feeling that feminism has done a damn bit of good if I can’t be the way I am and have the world accommodate it on some level.”\(^\text{26}\) Wurtzel argues that bitches are constructed by society as difficult because they ooze past the limits placed on them by ‘femininity.’ The Wurtzel-defined bitch is a strong, interesting, pretty, sexual, white woman who writes her own ‘operating manual.’\(^\text{27}\) She is sexy, enticing, and intrinsically damaged. She writes that:

> anytime a woman projects the kind of intense personality that all these women do, she is somebody’s idea of a bitch. This may not actually be true about Eleanor Roosevelt and Gertrude Stein, but that is only because they were not pretty enough.\(^\text{28}\)

It would seem that a woman can only be classified a ‘bitch’ when she is ‘pretty enough’ to beguile. Sex and seduction permeate Wurtzel’s text; from her naked torso on the front cover, to her own intimate confessions, and finally in the selection and treatment of her case studies. All the women she discusses possess a troubled relationship to their sexuality. Yes, they are alluring, but ultimately their sexuality damages them. Nicole Simpson bears the ultimate price, she is murdered. Wurtzel’s other subjects also attract punishment, Amy Fisher is imprisoned for shooting her older lover’s wife, and a series of tragic poets commit suicide. Wurtzel’s “bad girls live miserable unfulfilled lives, lives of great style and utter

\(^{24}\) Wolf: 148.


\(^{26}\) Wurtzel: 33.

\(^{27}\) Wurtzel: 34.

\(^{28}\) Wurtzel: 11.
misery.”29 It is here that we are pulled through the looking glass into the land of self-help. This is the same problem that fuels the popularity of John Gray’s self-help manuals: how to have a successful heterosexual relationship.30 For the ‘utter misery’ attributed to Wurtzel’s bitch is the result of being excluded from the happy heterosexual hearth. The bitch finds that “her insouciance leads to forever singledom”31 and that the world will extract “a price in failed relationships, in isolated lives.”32 In accordance with the backlash, Wurtzel argues that the strong feminist woman will be left on the shelf. When we distil her argument to its essence, Bitch is a glorified personal-advertisement hoping to convince a ‘good man’ to love a ‘bad woman.’ This book laments the current state of the heterosexual relationship.

Mimicking the self-help movement, it hopes to help us fix our relationships. However, Bitch is not an unproblematic self-help text. It does not offer a transparent solution laid out in twelve easy steps. More importantly, it is not women, be they difficult or angry, who are the problem, but forces outside of them. The solution Wurtzel proffers in answer to her primary problematic is to train the world how to love the bitch, not to train the bitch to be more lovable.

Wurtzel’s Bitch lacks political direction. For her, feminism has failed because it does not provide personal happiness. I will be a bitch here and state explicitly that this is not, nor can it ever be, a feminist promise. Feminism cannot assure individual tranquillity and satisfaction. Yes, feminism aims to improve the material conditions of women’s lives. It does agitate for improvements in work conditions and options; it aims to provide social services to women and to improve women’s health and safety. Perhaps it is arguable that

29 Wurtzel: 15.
31 Wurtzel: 386.
these improvements increase the probability of happiness. But happiness is too subjective, fleeting and contingent an emotion to be promised by a political movement. Wurtzel is grappling with the reality of women’s sexuality in a world irrevocably altered by feminism. For her, there is something tragically romantic about the way women’s desire is still disavowed outside of the heterosexual hearth. The anti-victim feminists also focus on sexuality but their discussion has broader political consequences. It is not men’s inability to love difficult women that is the problem rather it is that sex has been politicised by feminism. In all their work, there is a desire to reclaim sex from the political realm and ‘return’ it to its ‘natural’ state. A healthy sex life becomes one more marker of a well balanced person, like lots of exercise, a good diet and plenty of sleep. Issues of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and date-rape are worryingly blurred with young women’s active desire and experiences of sexual autonomy.

Ostensibly, the anti-victim feminists work hard to make feminism attractive to a broader range of women variously interpellated as ‘ordinary,’ ‘the women of my generation’ and representative of the ‘mainstream.’ One way in which they do this is by trying to make feminism ‘sexy’ again for heterosexuals. They insist that it is possible to love men and be a feminist – no great surprise for all those heterosexual women who have been part of the movement. In accordance with Wurtzel, they struggle to create a feminism that incorporates an active female heterosexuality. They are attempting to reclaim feminism from, what they claim is a separatist past. Wolf, Roiphe and Denfeld respond to the stereotype of the angry feminist. A stereotype memorably summarised by Paula Kamen as:

Bra-burning, hairy-legged, amazon, castrating, militant-almost-antifeminine, communist, Marxist, separatist, female skinheads, female supremacists, he-woman types, bunch-a-

lesbians, you-know-dykes, man-haters, man-bashers, wanting-men’s-jobs, want-to-dominate-men, want-to-be-men, wear-shot-hair-to-look-unattractive, bizarre-chicks-running-around-doing-kooky-things, i[sic]-am-woman-hear-me-roar, uptight, angry, white-middle-class radicals.34

This stereotype does impact negatively on feminism making it unappealing to both sexes.35

The anti-victim feminists blame radical feminists for the contemporary currency of this image. This is done overtly by both Denfeld and Wolf. Denfeld claims that, “They [the feminists] are telling young women they must be lesbians in order to be feminists.”36 This, of course, means that heterosexuales “aren’t welcome in the movement.”37 Wolf is more considered in her treatment. She provides a well-researched section in Fire with Fire that examines, not only how feminism has failed, but the ways in which various external forces have disenfranchised women from feminism. However, ultimately she argues:

it [the lesbian stereotype] has led many heterosexual women to stay away from the movement – not out of homophobia, but because of legitimate worries about whether their own sexual identity and concerns are represented when ‘feminism’ and ‘lesbianism’ are synonyms.38

Denfeld’s and Wolf’s glorification of heterosexuality concurrent with their fear of lesbianism’s ‘taint’ suggest that feminism needs to be forcefully separated from its link with lesbianism. They argue that an acknowledgment and politicisation of lesbianism has denied their (hetero)sexuality and promoted a climate of puritanism.

The anti-victim feminists carefully unpick the ties that bind lesbianism, feminism, sex, and anger towards masculinity. In doing this the ‘bitch’ is transformed into a ‘bad girl.’ The bitch persona, in popular imagination, derides and antagonises masculinity. Lesbianism has similar associations. Note the slippage in Kamen’s above feminist-stereotype between

35 Marking student essays of late I have been struck by the number that attack feminism for being too closely aligned with lesbianism.
36 Denfeld: 51.
37 Denfeld: 50.
38 Wolf: 78.
‘lesbian’ and ‘man-hater.’ Lesbian sexuality, by prioritising a relationship between women, is imagined as an intrinsic rejection of masculinity. By once again suggesting women’s desire is about (renouncing) men, instead of between women, lesbianism is enmeshed in the heterosexual matrix. Judith Butler suggests that perhaps lesbianism cannot be imagined outside of this matrix because “lesbian sexuality is as constructed as any other form of sexuality within contemporary sexual regimes.”39 However lesbianism does destabilise traditional eroticism because it questions what it means to possess the phallus.40 Consequently, sexual intimacy between two females is not neutral to masculinity as it suggests the instability of the phallus. Lesbian corporeality is stamped with the aggression of the bitch. Anti-victim feminists covet the sexual agency and will to power embodied by the bitch. Simultaneously they want to repudiate feminism’s antagonism towards men: to do this they disown lesbianism. The bitch is diluted and what is poured out of the anti-victim kettle is a ‘bad girl.’ It is hoped she will lure women back to feminism with the potency of her heterosexuality. Monogamy is validated but a more sexually active heterosexuality is glorified. This is where Roiphe’s and Wurtzel’s projects collide with Wolf’s and Denfeld’s – all writers insist that “The bad girl is sexual.”41 They all argue for an ‘expanded’ definition of female sexuality. Roiphe wants to be freed from the expectation to mate early and for life. These are Roiphe’s pensive ponderings on her future:

The [tarot] cards predicted a long period of wildness, of restlessness … Ten years from now, all of my friends would be in couples, filing two by two into the Noah’s ark of adulthood, leaving me behind, looking up anxiously into the sky.42

If only the world would make a space for the female ‘sexual cowboy,’ then Roiphe would not need to be so anxious about her future isolation. These writers in accordance with much good feminist theory want women to be allowed an active sexuality free from prudish

40 Butler: 88-89.
41 Wolf: 244.
judgements. Unfortunately, these sentiments are corrupted by their insistence on tying this insight to a repudiation of lesbianism. Feminism must validate and support a diversity of sexualities.

The anti-victim feminists undermine the validity of feminist activity against sexual violence, especially the campaigns that ratified ‘date rape’ and resulted in sexual harassment legislation. They argue that an overemphasis on sexual crime has distorted female sexuality. Roiphe and Denfeld, especially, argue that the attention given to date rape on college campuses is churning out a generation of victim feminists or conversely turning young women off feminism. Katie Roiphe blurs the lines between eros, sexuality and criminal offences against women by using anecdotal evidence to support assertions that require statistical verification. Her personal experiences of campus life are extrapolated into generalities. In her discussion of date rape, Roiphe writes:

People have asked me if I have ever been date-raped. And thinking back on complicated nights, on too many glasses of wine, on strange and familiar beds, I would have to say yes.43

Thus her sexual past, studded as it is with what she terms ‘bad sex,’ is used as evidence that date-rape is a mere consequence of life after the sexual liberation. In accordance with Denfeld, Roiphe posits that an overemphasis by feminists on issues such as date-rape and sexual harassment constructs women’s sexuality as passive. Roiphe writes that “the movement against rape, then, not only dictates the way sex shouldn’t be but also the way it should be.”44 The logical conclusion of this argument is that if women want sexual autonomy then they have to take responsibility for the ‘consequences.’ Denfeld also blurs date-rape with ‘bad sex’:

43 Roiphe: 79.
We do have a responsibility to say no if we don’t want sex. Experiences such as hers [Mimi’s] aren’t rape, but they aren’t positive, either. Turning them into what Mimi terms a ‘big rapist/victim thing’ doesn’t help either sex unlearn negative social behaviours. It only reinforces the Victorian notion of women as helpless victims and men as sexual predators.45

Bad sex and date-rape are two distinct issues. Mimi does not claim she was raped. She confesses to consenting to a sexual encounter, that she was uncertain about: her “body’s saying I want to,” but at the same time she was “thinking that I didn’t want to.”46 Pressure from her sexual partner was the deciding factor. Mimi translates this as a learning experience which taught her to take more responsibility for her own sexual expression. Yet Denfeld uses this example to support the notion that the politics of date-rape is corrupting people’s experiences of sexual situations. Denfeld and Roiphe suggest that the feminists have taken the fun out of sex. By agitating for legislature that acknowledges sexual violence ‘the bad feminists’ have deflated the eros balloon. Denfeld and Roiphe try to inflate the rubber (balloon) by arguing that if women would just take responsibility for their own desire they would not be embroiled in bad situations. Sometimes their argument reads like date rape is merely an issue of taxonomy. If these ‘victims’ relabelled their experience ‘bad sex’ instead of ‘date rape,’ then the damage done to them would be annulled.

According to the anti-victim feminists, the victim-feminists have also been wrong-headed in their politicising of sexual harassment. Roiphe, in particular, suggests that it is not sexual harassment that is victimising women, but the way in which the victim feminists have conceptualised it. Roiphe cites Mary Koss, who writes extensively on rape and sexual harassment, as an example of a victim-feminist. She insists that:

41 Roiphe: 60.
42 Denfeld: 80-1.
43 Denfeld: 81.
She [Mary Koss] does not see that it is her entire conceptual framework – her kind of rhetoric, her kind of interpretation – that transforms perfectly stable women into hysterical, sobbing victims.  

Both Roiphe and Wolf seem to suggest that the ideal solution to sexual harassment is ‘common sense.’ Wolf wants her daughter to “talk back or yell back or tease back.” This is preferable to her growing up in an environment where legislation and feminists construct women as powerless and in need of ‘protection’ which Wolf likens to “invisible stays and petticoats.” Roiphe was most impressed by a friend of hers who used to dissuade obscene phone callers with the pithy “Listen, honey, I was blow job queen of my high school.” Exactly how this empowers a women to dissuade sexual harassment in the workplace is unclear. For these anti-victim feminists one of the main means of victimising women is through their sexuality. This is not a revolutionary stance. What makes it publishable as ‘blockbuster feminism’ is that it absolves institutional sexism in favour of blaming the feminists.

The Australian debate was not so preoccupied with date-rape. Here, the focus was on sexual harassment. Ostensibly the discussion hoped to evaluate if the workplace had become over-legislated. It took place in tandem with a heightened preoccupation with ‘political correctness.’ There was a general sense that those feminists and multiculturalists had gone too far. It was within this cultural milieu that Helen Garner released her interpretation of the Ormond College affair. The very title of the book *The First Stone* set up an antagonistic dichotomy between patriarchy and feminism: who did throw the first

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47 Roiphe: 112.  
50 Roiphe: 101.  
51 For a discussion of this see Davis: 223-242.
stone? Was it the “dogged, even meek”\textsuperscript{52} college professor who had abused his power, or Nicole Stewart who “looked physically slight, but her presence was impressive and firm”\textsuperscript{53} It is not only Garner’s adjectival choices that divulge where her sympathies lie. She recounts early in the book how her interest in the case was piqued in August 1992 when she read a newspaper account of the story. This inspired her to write a letter to Alan Gregory, the Master of Ormond college, in which she revealed, “But I certainly know that if there was an incident, as alleged, this has been the most appallingly destructive, priggish and pitiless way of dealing with it.”\textsuperscript{54} It would seem that Garner had a very clear idea of who was in the wrong prior to researching the book. Garner presents an inter-generational feminist divide, wielding the power of her evocative prose to paint a less than flattering picture of the two complainants and their supporters. She writes from the position of a libertine feminist mother dismayed and bewildered at her priggish, neat, polished and legalistic daughters. This prickly and complex debate is effectively reduced to easily digestible copy. On one side, we have an older generation of women who are “all about sexual liberation” and see sexual communication as a complex and fluid space in which one “plays.”\textsuperscript{55} On the other side, we have a younger generation who see sex as located “in the discourse of power, and the abuse of power.”\textsuperscript{56} Garner argues that these young women have no awareness of the power invested in their youthful beauty. Problematically this results in Garner criticising “‘the appalling disingenuousness’ of young women who think that they can dress up and look all sexy and then not expect a reaction from a man.”\textsuperscript{57} In this case, Garner’s narrowing of feminist conflict to a generational fracas enables an easy dismissal.

\textsuperscript{52} Garner: 32.
\textsuperscript{53} Garner: 24.
\textsuperscript{54} Garner: 16.
\textsuperscript{55} Garner: 46-47.
\textsuperscript{56} Garner: 46.
of contemporary feminism. Garner’s reduction of a complex question to one reducible to age results in the younger women’s complaints, responses, and beliefs being painted as lacking in wisdom, as rebellious, and impetuous. It undermines their strength and their feminism. The question of ‘what is a responsible feminist sexuality?’ will never produce one answer. Garner is searching for an easy explanation that does not exist.

Once again, it is young women’s sexuality that is under attack. Garner accuses the Ormond College women of being priggish and lacking an awareness of their own power to seduce. On the surface it would appear that the American and the Australian criticisms of young women’s sexuality are opposing: the Americans fear that young women are having a passive Victorian sexuality thrust upon them by feminists, whereas Garner suggests that their sexuality is somehow dangerous and predatory. However, significantly Garner argues that currently sexuality is less free and autonomous than it was in her ‘heyday.’ The problem with young women’s sexuality is that it no longer advocates ‘free love’ instead it generates legal consequences. The curtains part on Garner’s pantomimic insistence that the sexual liberation has meant that young women now adorn themselves in seductive finery, their bosoms framed by plunging necklines, miniskirts fluttering like flags above tanned and shaved legs signifying a desire to be opened by any ogling male. Dangerously, what lurks behind this sartorial lure is not lust for unfettered sex but rather a passion for inflicting punishment. Young women are constructed as ruthless harridans bent on ruining men’s careers. Garner and other popular Australian media voices – most memorably the columnist Bettina Arndt – suggest that young women are not understanding enough of male

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58 Victorian imaginings of feminine sexuality did not only construct women as pure and in need of protection but also as dangerously out of control. The female body was seen as volatile. Mary Poovey presents the argument that Victorian medical discourse saw hysteria as “the norm of the female body taken to its logical extreme and a medical category that effectively defines this norm as inherently abnormal.” 1987. "Scenes of
foibles and are simply making too much fuss over trivial matters. Arndt suggests that men can no longer afford to be friendly to women in the workplace out of fear of litigation and ultimately this disadvantages women: “What [women] have lost is a valuable friend. Nothing more threatening that that.” This mimics Roiphe’s lament that male professors can no longer ‘bond’ with female students due to sexual harassment laws. There is nothing overtly radical in positing that young women’s sexuality is dangerous and threatening to the current order. As Jenna Mead rightly indicates this is a common and inflammatory cultural narrative expressing a fear of “the triumph of a woman’s sexuality over a man’s power.” By using this narrative to explain sexual harassment in the workplace, and in the academy, tropes of romantic love and the irrepressibility of passion are applied to the workplace. Sexual harassment is a managerial problem. Virginia Trioli points out that:

> What boils over in cases of harassment is a person’s frustration and sometimes fury at management’s refusal to confront his or her complaints, take them seriously and deal with them openly and sensibly.

Refusing to understand sexual harassment as a failure of management, and considering it a question of ‘eros’ gone wrong, offers no solutions.

Feminism has long been known for its propensity for a bitch fight – always accompanied by wailing against destructive in-fighting. This is demonstrative of a feminist refusal to own women’s anger. Anger is too easily dismissed as a negative ‘masculine’ sentiment. That paragon of virtue, the ‘good woman’ – she who does not raise her voice while

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60 Cited in, Trioli: 76.
61 Roiphe: 92-95.
63 Trioli: 77.
working within a community of loving and supportive fellow sisters – is venerated. Instead feminism needs to examine more closely how this tandem narrative of anger and its disavowal functions. In *The First Stone*, Garner forced a ready-made cultural template over the situation at Melbourne University – that of the generational war. This effectively bleached out some of the complexities of the situation. However the imbroglio that ensued produced some valuable feminist work. Important feminist books such as *Bodyjamming, DIY Feminism, Generation F*, and *Talking Up* were produced by young feminists.64 These books did more than respond to *The First Stone* they defined contemporary feminist concerns and pointed to a broad spectrum of feminist activity that spans between the academy and the ‘real world’. They also indicate some of the issues that Garner’s rendering of the debate obscures. Garner, and the ‘celebrity feminists’ (a moniker inclusive of the anti-victim feminists from the United States and Australians such as Garner, Faust and Summers), are all implicated in a discursive depiction of feminism as being in need of taming.65 This discursive strategy reassigns heteronormative masculinity the privilege of being the unmarked sign. Feminist legislation is seen as undermining heterosexual relationships. Young women are portrayed as dangerous due to both their corporeal seductiveness and their invasion of the workforce and the academy. Intelligent women continue to be perceived as dangerous.

It is no coincidence that the furore that erupted around young women, sex and feminism has been closely entwined with the academy. Garner’s inspiration was a Melbourne University residential college. The subtitle to Roiphe’s *The Morning After* is ‘Sex, Fear and

Feminism on *Campus*. Both Denfeld and Wolf devote copious text-space to ‘the problem’ of female academics and women’s studies programmes. Anne Summers’ comment on the relevancy of women’s studies is indicative of press responses on both sides of the equator:

> years on campus, arguing theories and being cosseted by a comfortable set of shared assumptions among most of their colleagues, had in no way prepared them for the real world.67

They argue that women’s studies programmes have little educational worth. All authors proffer a conservative response to the tensions triggered by feminism’s impact on academia. This impact has been twofold. Firstly, feminism has helped increase the number of female bodies populating campuses. Women are now roughly fifty percent of undergraduate students in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The books and articles of the celebrity feminists take part in a broader cultural preoccupation concerning the way female bodies have altered the power dynamics of university life. This obsessive focus on the corporeality of young women hides the other factors that have also altered the pedagogic practices of the academy such as: the increasing diversity of the students on campus, the rise of economic rationalism, and the increased use of legislation to police behaviours previously thought of as private. David Williamson’s play *Angry White Men*, David Mamet’s *Oleanna* and, the film *Gross Misconduct* all replay the same narrative elements. A young woman (perhaps dishonest) experiences her own power through a fusion of sexuality and (perhaps) feminist ideology. She uses this power to destroy the career of a man “leaving him in tatters as a form of retribution against the ‘crime of his

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66 Emphasis added, Roiphe.  
Clearly young women in the academy are ‘troubled,’ disrupting years of tradition and challenging male power.

Secondly, feminism has changed the content of the curriculum. Most notably with the introduction of a new academic programme, women’s studies. Feminist theory and practice have also influenced the curriculum of other disciplines. In conjunction with postmodern criticism, feminism questions empiricism and the objectivity of knowledge. Women’s studies has provided a far reaching critique of “the liberal idea of value free knowledge.”

It suggests that all scholarship is culturally positioned. Additionally women’s studies frequently highlights the way in which capitalism is implicated in reinforcing social injustices. Patrice McDermott points out how the anti-women’s studies backlash is part of a broader conservative agenda:

this particular attack [by Christina Hoff Sommers] on women’s studies can be understood as just another variation of the recognition on the part of conservatives that the university is one of the few social institutions designed to accommodate oppositional knowledge in American culture.

This insight is applicable to the anti-victim feminists that followed closely on Sommers’ heels. Like Sommers they aligned themselves with conservative politics by the tone of their attack on women’s studies. Their conservatism was further revealed by their approach to sexual violence and their refusal to treat it as a result of structural misogyny. Their insistence on free agency also supports the conservative ideology of meritocracy. It would seem that what these celebrity feminists are doing is trying to redefine feminism for a Right

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68 Davis, Gangland: 89.
69 McDermott: fulltext.
wing audience. Wolf entreats the movement to recognise Right wing women’s feminism.71 Feminism can ill afford to become aligned with conservative politics, and not because the Right is intrinsically ‘evil,’ nor out of a nostalgic refusal to relinquish a hippie socialist past. Rather because a ‘conservative’ feminism too easily dismisses the consequences of race, class, and gender difference. As bell hooks eloquently indicates, “This ‘feminism’ turns the movement away from politics back to a vision of individual self-help.”72 A conservative belief in free agency when wedded to a belief in the intrinsic truth of a rational scientific discourse undermines feminist cultural authority.73 It mimics self-help’s tendency to suggest that empowerment rests on a subject’s ability to be the ‘master of their universe.’ No longer is there systemic social injustice; there is only personal psychology.

Feminism has always used a range of methods and modalities to argue for changes in the gender order and to inform people of the need for feminism. The suffragettes of the first wave convened public meetings, distributed pamphlets, organised violent protests, and used fashion to signify solidarity and women’s subjugation.74 One of the second waves innovations was the consciousness raising group. These assemblies were forums in which women shared experiences and fostered feminist consciousness. Books further inflamed the urgency of the re-emergence of feminist politics. Shane Rowlands and Margaret Henderson assert that the second wave was “marked by a number of key or central non-fiction texts which have been highly influential in terms of political strategies and ideological

71 In the original hard back version of Fire with Fire Wolf wrote, “these must be respected as a right-wing version of feminism. These women’s energy and resources and ideology have as much right to the name of feminism, and could benefit women as much as and in some situations more than can left-wing feminism.”1993, Fire with Fire, New York, Random House: 126-127. In my paperback copy this statement has been removed.
72 hooks: 98.
73 McDermott: fulltext.
frameworks for the women’s movement.” As the seventies progressed, the books were augmented with feminist classrooms as women’s studies began to get a foothold in the academy. The third wave has used new technologies and the media to convey their feminism. There are confluences between the different waves and their media use. For instance the ‘women’s music’ and music festivals of the second wave are comparable to the third wave Riot Grrrl movement and their music. Feminism has often displayed the elasticity necessary to successfully incorporate a range of modes and mediums of address. It has realised that particular feminist battles have required particular methodologies. However the antipathy between the academy and journalistic feminism fractures this history. The celebrity feminists insist that there is one correct way to be a feminist, and to write feminist prose or polemic. The debate between the celebrity and the scholarly feminism raises important questions about how best to convey feminist thoughts, feelings, achievements and failures.

Both Wolf and Roiphe attack academic feminism for its specialised language. Wolf tries to dilute her offensive by acknowledging that “all professions mutate toward specialization.” However this insight is not enough to let feminism off the hook. In fact Wolf suggests that the academy is committing an injustice. The “crime was that the academy tends to sneer at those who try to translate these ideas for mainstream journals, newspapers, or TV.” The end effect of this hoarding of ideas, according to Wolf, is that normal women perceive feminism as a ‘rarefied subculture’ and turn away from it in droves. In some ways, I find Wolf’s critiques less problematic than The Morning After because I agree with her project,

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75 Rowlands and Henderson: 9.
76 This history is excavated more fully in Chapter Three, “I’m Sorry – I’m not Really Sorry” Authenticity and Feminism.
77 Wolf: 137.
which is to continue to have feminist ideals and aspirations circulating in the public
domain; to keep feminism alive and functioning for a broad variety of women. I think this
project would be best served by an engagement, and consequent dissemination, of the work
of academic feminism and not by dismissal and denigration. Nor, as bell hooks argues, is
feminism assisted by Wolf establishing herself as the lone hero of power feminism with all
“the insights and the answers.”

Katie Roiphe’s *The Morning After* displays a deep
hostility towards the feminisms to be found at the top of the ivory tower. She accuses
modern feminism of being (among many other things) as indecipherable as Carrol’s
Jabberwocky. Roiphe devotes a whole chapter to ridiculing various forms of feminism to
be found within the academy. She presents a series of caricatures she ‘met’ while at
University. Various forms are a feminist-Marxist-poststructuralist, a ‘sympathetic
feminist woman’ (very vague I know), ‘fashionable feminists’ (a heterosexual version of a
lipstick lesbian), a feminist literary critic and a ‘new man.’ Each of these forms of
feminism are proved unworthy by her belittling representation of a singular embodiment. It
is a lazy but effective way to dismiss all those who will critique her book for the politically
unsound arguments that it promulgates. Roiphe is not attacking academic feminism because
it has hindered attempts to broadcast a feminist message to a large audience. In fact, her
position is (in some ways) the opposite of Wolf’s because she credits academic feminism
with too much power. According to Roiphe they are the dominant power block on campus;
to be blamed for the noisy “Reclaim the Night” marches, the ugly and fear-inducing blue
lights and for generally making classes unenjoyable. Roiphe writes: “Sitting around the
seminar table in my classes, I sometimes feel like I am at the Mad Hatter’s tea party. Either

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78 Wolf: 137.
79 hooks: 96.
80 Roiphe: 113-137.
81 Roiphe: 113.
I’m crazy or they are.”82 She manages to simultaneously grant feminism the power to ‘Other’ her, while at the same time infantilising it via the use of a metaphor from a children’s book.

Once again it becomes apparent how close Garner’s project is to that of the stateside anti-victim feminists. Like Roiphe, her writing style blurs the lines between fiction and non-fiction. Stereotypes stand in the place of real people to affirm the ‘reality’ of a feminist conspiracy. Jenna Mead divulges how the cabal of six or seven feminists presented in The First Stone were all in fact thinly disguised depictions of her, “These six or seven women simply did not exist. The story about the feminist conspiracy is completely untrue.”83 By turning one woman into six or seven, Garner narratively bolsters the alleged power of feminism. Once feminism is inflated into an intellectual bully who malevolently enforces a restrictive orthodoxy it becomes easy to argue for its demise.

The disdain that exists between popular and academic feminism is endemic and dangerous and it deserves to be contested. While both Roiphe and Wolf reject rigid feminist definitions of femininity, they continue to argue for a very particular mode of feminist prose. Roiphe is dismissive of (post)modern feminism’s vocabulary and preoccupations because they are merely fashionable and “function as easy shortcuts, as passwords to a world of prefabricated thought.”84 Instead of engaging with the ‘real’ world and ‘real’ texts students apparently get lost in the funhouse of self-reflexivity: they are endlessly reading theory about theory. Despite Wolf’s admission that feminist ‘jargon’ is inevitable, she still feels that the feminist ideal is a democratic one which can only be achieved with the

82 Roiphe: 114.
employment of transparent and simple language. She argues that feminism should talk to all women, not just the educated, and the ordinary women requires ordinary language.

As a woman writing with a feminist sensibility from within the walls of the academy, this assertion has a particular poignancy; will anyone but an academic marker ever read this dissertation? When writing one always writes for an audience, even if that audience is just a later version of the self – as is often the case with a journal. I write with the knowledge that certain languages and formats do hail particular audiences. When Wolf insists that ‘correct’ feminist prose must be written in the ‘ordinary’ language of weekend journalism, she is assuming a singular monolithic feminist audience. There is a myriad of feminist audiences and the academic feminist audience may be just one, but it is a significant one.

Academic feminists also have a responsibility to make their ideas available and accessible to media commentators and performers. Academic feminists often seem bemused by, and lacking in an understanding of, the media. The media’s sexual objectification of women and its tendency to trade in stereotypes make it immediately suspect. Amy Erdman in the introduction to the special edition of *Signs*, devoted to “Feminism and the Media”, comments on the three themed articles:

> Connecting all three articles is a shared emphasis on the way the popular media have neither the language nor the vision to speak of systemic or cultural problems or solutions. Rather, commercial media focus on individual resistance and individual deviance.

There is a propensity to analyse the media as a tool of domination rather than a hegemonic mechanism. I do not want to overstate the resistive potential of the media. Clearly the media does present demeaning images of women and feminism. To deny or underplay the

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84 Roiphe: 127.
media’s ability and potential to communicate feminist meanings, and to be a particularly powerful site for women’s resistance, has a number of detrimental effects. As Deborah Rhode indicates:

Many women have access to the women’s movement only in the terms the press provides. If we are to realize feminism’s potential, feminists need a greater voice in shaping its public image.86

The danger is that by just berating mass communication mediums for not being feminist an environment of contempt is created in which academic feminists fail to engage with the media. It also treats the audience of mass media, which is practically everyone living in contemporary Western society, as duped. Urvashi Vaid as part of a roundtable for Ms magazine discussing “the real meaning of feminism and explore[ing] why so many women hesitate to identify themselves as feminists” comments on the intersection between feminism and the media:

I’m intrigued by how many times the conversation return to the representation of feminism or the image of feminism, as opposed to the reality of the feminist movement. We keep getting into how we are represented and what people think of us.87

It is impossible to crack open the egg of feminism and separate out the ‘representation,’ from the ‘reality.’ Feminism is an ideology that circulates through, and in, various discourses. This must always involve representation. When one distils the relationship between feminism and the media to a simple question of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ representations one masks a much more complicated consanguinity. Dangerously, it may also mask (what hook’s terms) ‘bourgeoisie feminism’s’, own investment in controlling feminist discourse. When white feminists deny the potential of the media to speak in a feminist voice, they ultimately promote written scholarship as the only feminist oracle. Consequently, women who may claim a feminist position, but who also work within the media – such as

journalists, actresses, singers and other performers and production staff – are denied their feminism. This can have highly disturbing class and race implications.

So far, this chapter has exhibited an ambivalent attitude towards anger. I have both been extolling its virtues, and rallying against it. This is not as contrary as it first appears. Anger can be generative, fostering new ideas and activity. Anger can also be exclusionary. It provides the conviction to dismiss the Other. In analysing the bitch, this thesis begins to theorise anger. A theory of anger should not simply be a valorisation or a denouncement. Anger can spark passionate and useful debate, or anger can simply block discussion. Let popular feminism and academic feminism get mad at one another if it leads to a heated exchange of ideas, but if it is merely a cold dismissal, it is not useful for the feminist movement. The sort of bitch feminism that should be embraced is the kind that leads to sharp new approaches to feminist problematics. Feminism needs a more complicated understanding of hegemony. It needs to leave behind notions of total domination. This should not be polarised into an understanding of victim feminism vs anti-victim feminism. I am not suggesting that women are empowered individuals who will be freed from the chains of domination by a belief in their own inner-power. I agree, in accordance with the majority of feminist theory, that feminism can never be a movement about individuals. Feminist politics must respond to social subjugation. However notions of an overarching indomitable patriarchy need to be left behind. The media cannot be simply understood as the tool of patriarchy. Popular culture provides the means through which most Western people interpret their lives. Hegemony suggests that disempowered groups are implicated in their own subjugation. Significantly it also opens up a space for resistance. A more thorough engagement with this understanding of power will enable more textured feminist
debate. What needs to be found is way to communicate the intricacies of feminist analysis to a broader public. The assumption that all leftist feminists imagine all women as victims needs to be countered. Feminism must continue to entitle women to name and respond to their different experiences of structural oppression. The anti-victim feminists, with their middle class imaginings of the end of disadvantage, must not be allowed to define the feminist project.
Pop Culture Bitches
CHOOSING CORDELIA

Cordelia Chase, played by Charisma Carpenter, is a teened down version of the *femme fatale*. The *femme fatale* of film noir has attracted the gaze of feminists and film theorists. Her obviously transgressive nature and the strength of her characterisation entices. Teen television does not display the same transgressive potential as film noir. Consequently theorists are not as drawn to the genre. Cultural studies also demonstrates a preoccupation with such sites of spectacle. This becomes apparent in its analysis of fan fiction. Predominantly cultural studies has theorised Slash fiction, not the more mundane Shipper or Porn Without Plot (PWP) stories.¹ This theorisation of fandom displays a fascination with the way in which television matters to people. But it also indicates a perverse (considering the cultural studies commitment to analysing everyday activities) aversion to the banal. Mundane practices and pastimes also require attention. This chapter works with the mundane as it attends to a secondary character drawn from a teen television programme. It also argues that while the fan fiction generated by *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer* is not always as obviously stimulating as Slash, these stories still reveal the elements of the show that inspire people to fashion their own utopias.

The ordinariness of the medium, and the secondary nature of the character of Cordelia Chase means the analytic gaze can easily slide over her. Frequently the televisual bitch is sidelined for a nasty wit and cutting beauty. When fan fiction writers claim Cordelia, it is often to give her the attention they think the show has denied her. I could have written on

¹ Slash, Shipper and PWP are recognised (and used) story categories by fan fiction writers and readers. These categories are explained more fully in the following chapter. Briefly, ‘Slash’ refers to homoerotic stories
Buffy, for she is also called a bitch on occasions. She is a young woman with the physical strength to get her own way and prevent others from having theirs. Significantly, Buffy is part of a new breed of action heroine already attracting critical commentary. Cordelia extends past bitch tropes. In doing so she proves the relevancy of television in communicating feminist meanings.

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written by heterosexual women, ‘Shipper’ fiction focuses on a romantic heterosexual relationship usually between main characters, and ‘PWP’ is pornographic fiction lacking a storyline.
CHAPTER TWO
RE-VAMP-ING FEMINISM: THE THIRD WAVE ON THE SMALL SCREEN

Television entertainment, as much as a sociological study, can tell us what we like about feminism, what we fear about feminism, and, perhaps most interestingly, what aspects of feminism we simply refuse to represent in popular narrative.

Bonnie J. Dow¹

I’m no snivelling, whiney, little cry-Buffy ... I’m the biggest bitch in Sunnydale.

Cordelia Chase²

Cordelia Chase is one of the characters that populates the ‘buffyverse,’ first appearing in Buffy: the Vampire Slayer (BtVS) and then in its spin-off Angel. She is glamorous, sophisticated and smart – but her main defining moniker is that of ‘bitch.’ The bitch is a standard character of television drama. Aaron Spelling is renowned for relying on ‘the bitch’ to provide his shows with potency. Alexis (Joan Collins) plotted her way through the intrigues of Dynasty. Melrose Place had the fabulously short-skirted Amanda (Heather Locklear), and Beverley Hills 90210 always had a resident brunette bitch in the neighbourhood. Television is derided for being formulaic, its genres easily distinguishable: soap opera, news, current affairs, and the ubiquitous sitcom. However to stay vital, television must supply us with new twists on old formulas. So it is not so surprising that the stock character of ‘the bitch’ has been recalibrated. This chapter traces the arc of a bitch trajectory. It rewinds and replays the video recordings of two shows stretching over five seasons, singling out the bitch Cordelia Chase, from the casts’ ensemble line up. She

² This is from 'Room with a View,' Angel, 3 November 1999. Dir. by S McGinniss. Writ. by J Epenson and D Greenwalt. [television broadcast].
provides a way to think through popular understandings of third wave feminism. Cordelia Chase is a teened down version of the femme fatale. She suggests that certain bitch characteristics are now a de rigueur part of a young woman’s feminist arsenal. This chapter lurks in the realm of obsession – it traces the bond that exists between a fan and the object of their fixation. It does this to demonstrate some of the ways in which Cordelia Chase ‘matters’.3

The space between popular culture, fandom and academia is difficult terrain to negotiate. Some academics trained in more traditional disciplines still display a discomfort with taking the popular seriously and there are still questions about how exactly to approach the excess, pleasures, banality, rudeness, badness and brilliance that all percolate through popular culture. This chapter turns its gaze to a secondary character on a late night television show, in doing so it takes a young fictionalised woman seriously. The apparent ‘triviality’ of the popular text is leavened by a consideration of Cordelia’s audience. Placing the text in a social context requires a textualisation of the audience. Ien Ang’s book Desperately Seeking the Audience suggests with its very title the difficulty inherent in rendering the audience knowable.4 However the fact that the audience can never be completely transparent to the inquiring academic gaze does not mean that it should be ignored. My consideration of audience will be augmented with some anecdotal evidence from my own fandom. I have polled a number of Cordelia Chase based mailing lists, asking the contributors why they are fans of the character.5 This is not, nor does it claim to be, a

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5 I sent the following email to a selection of mailing groups: “I’m currently writing the chapter of my Ph. D. that is devoted to the character Cordelia Chase. I know why I find her so fascinating but I was kinda hoping that some other fans might be able to tell me why they love her… 😊 Have you got a favourite Cordelia moment, and if so why that bit? Would you call Cordelia a feminist? If you are a fan fiction author how
controlled study. The results are being used to enrich my own inquiry. They are one of the multiple sources used to build a layered account of Cordelia Chase. This chapter uses excerpts from fan letters and fan fictions, and written renderings of scenes from the shows. My analysis is opened out to multiple reading positions: my own, the respondents and also journalistic accounts. This basis builds a textualised account of the audience and the primary text.

In following Cordelia’s bitch trajectory, I engage in textual analysis. This aspect of my project draws on television studies theory. Television studies is multi-disciplinary in nature. This can be traced to its (very) 1970s parentage by “three major bodies of commentary on television: journalism, literary/dramatic criticisms and the social sciences.” It continues to be a ‘swinging’ discipline, opening its arms to a multitude of theoretical perspectives. The television theory I apply is influenced by both feminism and cultural studies. Charlotte Brunsdon argues that there have been:

three particular areas of interest in the literature of … television studies: the definition of the television text, the textual analysis of the representations of the social world offered therein, and the investigation of the television audience.

Television studies has worked to differentiate itself from literary studies by offering an account of the audience. This has been accomplished in part, by insisting that meaning does not reside in the text alone, but in the process of meaning making that occurs when a reader interprets a text. It is this insight that has caused me to fold a consideration of the audience into my textual analysis. I am arguing that Cordelia performs a crucial _bardic_ function. By drawing on this concept, I am performing an archaeology of theories of the audience, as

closely do you aim to make your Cordy to the show’s Cordy? Or do you purposefully make her different in some ways? What is it about Cordy that makes you want to write fan fiction about her? If you are a Cordelia fan I would love to hear from you.”

this concept dates from the early history of television studies. However it is worth digging up and dusting off, because the bardic function enables an articulation of the way in which television communicates cultural meanings to its audience. This escapes what, Meaghan Morris termed, the ‘banality’ of rearticulating the simple formulation that “people in modern mediatized societies are complex and contradictory,” and then ditto for mass cultural texts, people using them and the meanings they generate. More importantly, when we acknowledge that television shows and characters are modern manifestations of the bard then television can be discussed as a medium that allows access to society’s central concerns. John Fiske and John Hartley argued, in their seminal work on television that:

The bardic mediator tends to articulate the negotiated central concerns of its culture, with only limited and often over-mediated referenced to the ideologies, beliefs, habits of thought and definitions of the situation which obtain in groups which are for one reason or another peripheral.

Since Fiske and Hartley first published their book in the late 1970s, feminism has moved from a peripheral discourse to a central one. Feminism has not only become pivotal to intellectual life, influencing the shape of disciplines, but also to public discourse. Feminism is one of the ‘central concerns’ of our culture. It is a primary frontier of hegemonic negotiations. Cordelia provides crucial lessons about how third wave feminism is circulating. She does not reflect reality but – alongside her feisty prime time cronies – indicates how perceptions of young women have changed. By executing a textual analysis that reads the text bardically, I am not providing an individual reading but rather placing the text in a social context.

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7 Brunsdon: 105.
When cultural theorists attend to context the political nature of popular texts is revealed. Good cultural studies must illuminate the bonds stretching between texts, identities and communities. Cordelia Chase articulates meanings about the integration of young women into the workplace. Young women are having to navigate a broader range of work environments than previous generations. They are configuring new styles of femininity that prioritise a sense of vocation, either in tandem with traditional notions of motherhood and wifedom, or as an alternative to it. New understandings of family are also being bardically rendered. Due to the rise of the city and mobility of the post-Fordist workforce friendship groups are having to fulfil some of the roles previously accomplished by the family. Significantly Fiske and Hartley argue that the bardic mediator makes only limited reference to the marginal ideologies and groups within a society. When Cordelia Chase crosses over into fan fiction she becomes more than bardic. Fan fiction is visionary. It conceives of alternative and utopic realities. When Cordelia is woven through these imaginings dominant ideologies are rewritten to incorporate marginal truths. Intense fan identification provides nodes which theorists can point to as evidence of the way texts generate politics.

The audience of *BtVS*, and to a lesser extent *Angel*, is easily likened to other audiences of ‘cult’ television shows which have inspired a rampant and dedicated fan-base with a very strong Internet presence. *BtVS* and *Angel* reward close and repeated viewing – minor characters recur once or twice a season, it is assumed that the audience will recall past events, and understand brief cursory references to them. Thus the creators of *BtVS* and *Angel* work to actively inspire a cult following like those devoted to *Star Trek* and *The X-Files*. This is confirmed by the way in which both *BtVS* and *Angel* mimic the narrative structure of *The X-Files* which helped establish “this ‘mixed format’ of traditional episodic

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10 Fiske and Hartley, *Reading Television*: 89.
and serial narrative styles while refusing the seamless integration of cumulative narrative series."\textsuperscript{11} These shows have also sparked an enlivened academic response.\textsuperscript{12} The research generated by these shows has often been used to argue for an ‘active’ audience. There have been comprehensive studies conducted that have focused on how the audience makes meaning from a televisual text and how the text acts as a generative point for the creation of their own cultural artefacts. They are part of a body of research aimed at rejecting the ‘hypodermic’ model of media reception. This work, particularly that of Henry Jenkins and Constance Penley, will be exploited in my discussion of fan fiction. This will affirm the way in which Cordelia Chase is folded into the lives of fans. Distinct from these researchers, I am not using the results gleaned from my small survey to add to the burgeoning work on how the audience functions, nor the intricate machinations of fan based activity. Or to put it another way, my surveys are not being used to once again assert that ‘Gee isn’t the audience resistive?’ Instead, I am using fan responses to help fashion a more complicated rendering of Cordelia and to help me articulate the meanings she generates.

Fans display a different sensibility in relation to their favoured texts than casual viewers. These texts occupy an important place in fan’s mattering maps.\textsuperscript{13} The way in which fans of \textit{BtVS} relate to and make sense of characters is specific. Andrew Ross, points to the need to disclose how intellectuals act as cultural arbiters:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In particular see H Jenkins, 1992. \textit{Textual Poachers}. London: Routledge.
\item Grossberg: 82. Grossberg argues that, “Mattering maps define different forms, quantities and places of energy. They “tell” people how to use and how to generate energy, how to navigate their way into and through various moods and passions, and how to live within emotional and ideological histories.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
It [his book] must also be a history of intellectuals—in particular, those experts in culture whose traditional business is to define what is popular and what is legitimate, who patrol the ever shifting borders of popular and legitimate taste, who supervise the passports, the temporary visas, the cultural identities, the threatening ‘alien’ elements, and the deportation orders, and who occasionally make their own adventurist forays across the border.  

Intellectuals play a crucial role in defining the legitimate. Ien Ang was confronted with a manifestation of this when she received her respondent’s correspondence about their love (or hatred) of *Dallas*. She found that their responses were repeatedly framed within the discourses promoted by “the ideology of mass culture.” That is they were lacking in discursive means to legitimate their love of the show. While they were able to refute the “odd reactions” they garnered because of their love of *Dallas* through recourse to the ideology of populism (whereby we are all allowed our own tastes), Ang’s *Dallas* fans lacked a strong and cohesive way in which to both articulate their own love of the show, and to refute the criticisms of others. Contrastingly, the fan communities of *BtVS* and *Angel* do have access to empowering discursive strategies that legitimate their love of the show. Their inclusion in a fan community allows them to be part of a ‘taste culture’ in which Whedon’s televisual texts are clearly more important than say opera or the news. They are not isolated viewers indulging in a guilty pleasure. They have access to a community that validates the importance of their favourite television text. While casual viewers of *BtVS* and *Angel* may dismiss the shows as campy examples of teen television, fans know they are viewing ‘quality television.’ In recognising the shows as such the fans are relying on expert definitions, their show has been judged by the border guards that

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14 Ross: 5.
17 T Mayo, 2001. ‘Buffy the Vampire Slayer,’ *SFX*. (March): 80. Mayo in the middle of his lacklustre review of the fourth season of *BtVS* writes “So why bother with this one at all? Because it’s *Buffy*, you fool, and even substandard *Buffy* remains still some of the best fantasy television ever produced.”

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police the popular and granted a visa. Unlike *Dallas*, *BtVS* and *Angel* are critically acclaimed, and while they have not garnered the academic attention bequeathed to *The X-Files* or *Xena*, it is still early days.¹⁹ Academics attracted by the passion of fan’s commitment to the show and the critical acclaim are beginning to write on *BtVS*.²⁰

Fans engage in a particular modality of viewing distinct from the more generalised attention usually granted to the television. Raymond William’s book *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* was influential to television studies because it introduced the cogent concept of ‘flow.’²¹ Williams suggested that, “In all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organisation, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow.”²² Williams argued that cultural commentators trained in literary traditions of analysis were drawn to commenting on individual programmes as isolated units.²³ His insistence that television is experienced by the viewer as a continual flow or stream of programming has influenced a variety of researchers. Gray indicates that Grossberg and Radway are part of this tradition because they argue:

> that reception ethnographies should be studies of ‘everyday life’ that explore the plethora of texts encountered across different media and the ways in which these are constitutive of subjectivity, something which is, in their terms, always in process.²⁴

While I agree that it is important to examine how television is folded into the domestic everyday, I suggest that fan’s experiences of their favourite televisual text inspire a specific

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²⁰ I have yet to find an academic article on *Angel*.


²² Williams: 86.

²³ Williams: 87.

modality of viewing. The respondents of my questionnaire are fans of *BtVS, Angel* and more specifically Cordelia. Most are involved in the writing of fan fiction. These people are dedicated to their favourite show. The shows are often subject to repeated viewing; the lines memorised, the scripts read, the overall arcs probed. Fans of a text do not grant it half-hearted attention while doing the ironing. They study the text.

At the moment I have on loan from another fan a set of three homemade video cassettes filled with ‘season three goodness.’ They are lovingly labelled, and their boxes encased with pictures of the cast. As a fan myself, I understand this attention to detail. I have a beautiful store-bought boxed set of season two videos. Their packaging reminds me of another obsession from early in my childhood, the boxed set of the Narnia chronicles I received one year for Christmas.25 A personal correspondence from one of the representatives of BlackStar, a successful net video distributor stated: “I can say that ‘Buffy’ and ‘Angel’ would be up among our best sellers since BlackStar was founded - no doubt about that!!”26 Before the advent of the video-recorder, it could be successfully argued that television texts were ephemeral and to burden them with the kind of analysis that requiring repeated viewing was to remove them from their context. Now, this argument is not so easily sustained. The fan showers their favourite text with just as much, if not more attention, than the cultural critic. For instance no self-respecting fan of *BtVS* would ever mistakenly call Spike (James Marsters), Sid: though they might comment on the similarities between the sexy vampire and the Sex Pistol’s bass player.27 Yet, Susan Owen

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25 The Narnia Chronicles are a popular set of seven children’s books by C.S. Lewis.
27 As an interesting aside the show enforces this comparison. See ‘Lovers Walk,’ *BtVS*, 24 November 1998. Dir. by D Semel. Writ. by D Vebber. [television broadcast]. In this episode Spike is driving out of Sunnydale while singing along to the Sex Pistols’ version of ‘My Way,’ *Kiss This*. 1992. Virgin. Track No: 16. [sound recording].
does exactly this in her otherwise very astute article on the intersection between *BtVS* and feminism.28

The generic conventions which govern the form of *BtVS* and *Angel* elicit a particular style of fan engagement. These shows are created to appeal to a knowing and tele-literate audience. They draw on multiple genres thus suggesting the possession of a broad understanding of genre conventions by the audience. For those readers unfamiliar with the shows I will contextually situate *BtVS* and *Angel*. *BtVS* was first released as a movie in 1992, before being reincarnated in 1997 as a television series on the new youth oriented Warner Brothers station.29 Joss Whedon, the script writer of the movie, and the creator of the series, claims that the director of *Buffy*, the movie, “took an action/horror/comedy script and went only with the comedy.”30 This was rectified with the creation of the series, which successfully managed to fuse horror, comedy and drama. It also manages to mingle the demands of action series with those of a more relationship-based serial. *Buffy* the movie was clearly part of the teen film genre; home to the high school bitch who roams the corridors ruling the school in her short cheerleading skirt (think *Heathers* through to *Bring it On*).31 It had the stock teen film characters, new-girl, geek, cheerleader, minus the fascination with the male jocks. Where *BtVS* changed the formula was in its presentation of gender. Whedon’s soundbite condensation of the show’s premise is:

Literally, I just had that image, that scene, in my mind, like the trailer for a movie – what if the girl goes into the dark alley. And the monster follows her. And she destroys him.\textsuperscript{32}

The female characters of the buffyverse are strong, independent and articulate. The medium of television allows the characters to develop at a more measured pace. In feature films a personality must be conveyed successfully within a restricted timeframe: be it that of the pithy short film or the epic. Whedon describes the developmental arcs allowed characters by television as one of the attractions of the medium: “The idea of living with a character and putting them through allsorts of experiences for what could be years is an opportunity a movie could never afford.”\textsuperscript{33} We often think of television as an artistically-challenged medium. The ‘boob tube’ is framed as film’s poorer cousin. However, as Christine Gledhill, argues the “contradictory demand of the market” for new products mean that television must provide “novelty, innovation.”\textsuperscript{34} Consequently, television often produces surprisingly fresh new popular art. Shows like \textit{Twin Peaks}, \textit{The X-Files} and \textit{The Simpsons} have all twisted old genres into new forms, and shown a startling self-reflexivity while doing so. \textit{BtVS} is not easily gendered or genred.

\textit{Angel}’s genre is more easily defined. Ken Tucker with the hyperbole expected from \textit{Entertainment Week} writes of \textit{Angel}: “Whedon and [David] Greenwalt’s idea of a spin-off is inevitably different – riskier, more audacious – from the norm.”\textsuperscript{35} While \textit{Angel} is undoubtedly a successful and distinctive series, Whedon and Greenwalt have taken fewer

\textsuperscript{35} K Tucker, 1999. ”Angel” Baby,’ \textit{Entertainment Weekly}. (3 December): 79. David Greenwalt is co-executive producer with Joss Whedon for both \textit{Angel} and \textit{BtVS}. Jordan Levin, the WB’s vice president of programming describes their relationship thus; “In Joss Whedon’s case, he was introduced to David Greenwald [sic] who was very successful in his own right. So it’s finding those strong co-e.p.’s or finding strong non-writing producers that allow these feature writers to focus on script, story and character.” Kit: fulltext.
risks with their spin-off show. *Angel*, particularly in its first season while it was ‘finding its feet,’ was a far less complicated show than *BtVS*. It had three principle cast members in comparison to *BtVS*’s ensemble cast of eight regulars. This meant that its episodes were more contained than those of *BtVS*. *Angel* drew heavily on the private-eye genre. *Angel* (David Boreanaz), the main character, runs a ‘detective-agency’ albeit a supernatural one which is staffed by the requisite Girl Friday; Cordelia is transformed from highschool bitch to bossy secretary, and the trusty sidekick; played consecutively by Doyle (Glenn Quinn) and Wesley (Alexis Denisof). Importantly, the episodes often centre on a single ‘case’, which is resolved by the end of the episode; “it was a series much more focused on the proverbial guest-star of the week …” This contrasts with *BtVS*’s multiple story arcs that stretch over anywhere, from a few episodes to the whole season. This change in locale from Sunnydale – a sunny suburban Californian town – to the nightscape of Los Angeles has repercussions for the character of Cordelia Chase. Her removal from high school means that she can no longer be the resident jeer-leading bitch. Instead, the generic demands of the detective show require that she becomes the wise-cracking dame. She is still a bitch, but this is no longer all she is. An increased empathy with other characters complicates her rendering of the bitch.

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36 The primary cast of *BtVS* fluctuates. But in *BtVS*’s season four, which ran concurrent with *Angel*’s first season, Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar), Giles (Anthony Head), Willow (Alyson Hannigan), Xander (Nicholas Brandon), Spike (James Marsters) and Reily (Marc Blucas) all appear in the opening credits. Xander’s girlfriend Anya (Emma Caulfield) makes very regular guest appearances and Willow’s partner be it Oz (Seth Green) or Tara (Amber Benson) also appear regularly.


38 As I write *Angel* is four episodes into its second season and appears to be complicating its structure with longer story arcs.
Cordelia wasn’t exactly the most developed character in the Scooby Gang, and the general feeling was that transplanting her from Sunnydale to Los Angeles wouldn’t do much to add flesh and blood to the self-centred bitchiness. Naturally, though, as one of *Angel*’s three primary stars, it became inevitable that depth would have to be added.

Ed Gross, *SFX* magazine.

Cordelia’s entrée into a new show alters the character’s ‘spatial materialism’ – that is the way in which power circulates around her to form a material context. She becomes a primary cast member, thus requiring fuller characterisation. The Cordelia of *BtVS* was played for laughs and used to move the plot forward through the exposition of home truths. Her new role demands more. Additionally, her imbrication in the workforce impacts significantly on her ‘personality.’ Both the show itself and the world within the show are more masculine spaces than those of *BtVS*. Cordelia still calls on her inner bitch to help to negotiate these new spaces however the bitch is no longer her constant face. Being a bitch is a strain; you cannot afford to rest on your quips. The bitch is only ever as good as her last insult and her mode of attack invites a similar combative response from her ‘opponent.’ The bitch is an onerous role to perform but it does have its uses. When Cordelia uses bitch-repartee to negotiate her work-space she highlights its contested nature. Masculinity and femininity exist relationally. The bitch is at her best when she forces us to acknowledge this. She brings politics to life by compelling an awareness of this space as contested.

The instability of Cordelia Chase’s bitch performance is enhanced because the character exists across two shows. Over time Cordelia acts like a bitch more infrequently. This is instructive since it indicates the strategic nature of the bitch performance. Though her bitchiness is diluted it is still invoked in times of crisis. The next section of this chapter

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39 Gross: 37.
begins to investigate the specificity of her bitchiness. To do this I must snatch out the
thread of her lineage from amongst the tangled popular cultural ‘ball’ she is enmeshed in.

Popular culture is renowned for its insatiable appetite to consume a multitude of discourses
and textual practices and regurgitate them once more out into the cultural landscape.

Popular culture consists of unbounded texts. BtVS and Angel combine and re-work a range
of popular cultural forms. As Tucker writes of Greenwalt and Whedon “these guys are
serious pop artists working from their hearts and minds …”41 Both shows play with genre
conventions, and draw on a variety of styles to help convey their storylines.42 One of the
primary traces – left by a past bitch – that can be rubbed into prominence if scratched with
the stylus of film studies is that of the femme fatale. Cordelia is a teened down version of
this archetype. Her characterisation plays off and mutates the femme fatale.

Femme fatales are famous for dominating film noir. The genre was initially defined by a
body of films that were produced in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. However
there are contemporary films that have been analysed under the rubric provided by the
study of film noir. This mode of film attains its name via “its expressive use of darkness:
both real, in predominantly underlit and night-time scenes, and psychologically through
shadows and claustrophobic compositions.”43 The dark ladies of film noir stalked their way
through these shadows. Though they often meet a gruesome death – presented as deserved

41 Tucker: 79.
42 There are a number of fan sites on the net that try and trace these connections for the not-so-popular-
cultural-literate. For every episode, they provide encyclopedic-like explanations of all references to popular
culture (and the odd one to high) embedded within the show. For instance The Sanctuary a site devoted to
Angel has very comprehensive episode guides that includes sections titled ‘Pop goes the culture,’ which traces
the pop culture references; and another section called ‘Its all an allusion,’ which discusses the influence of
other shows and movies on that week’s episode. The Buffy Guide also covers the same sort of material, but in
relations to BtVS, in their episode guide under the headings ‘References,’ ‘Monstervision,’ and ‘Notes.’ JM
March 2002.
by the narrative of the film – these strong female characters have been reclaimed by feminist scholarship. In fact it is this apparent contradiction that makes them so ripe for feminist readings. This ambiguity opens them up to multiple readings. The *femme fatale* has been used as evidence of women’s subordination under patriarchy and as an example of a rare site which “afforded women roles which are active, adventurous and driven by sexual desire.” The original noir heroines were ‘deadly dames,’ their existence threatened the hero: “the heroes success or not depends on the degree to which he can extricate himself from the woman’s manipulations.” This threat was signified both narratively and stylistically. Janey Place provides a partial summary of the stylistic elements associated with the *femme fatale*:

> The iconography is explicitly sexual, and often explicitly violent as well: long hair (blond or dark), make-up, and jewellery. Cigarettes with their wispy trails of smoke can become cues of dark and immoral sensuality, and the iconography of violence (primarily guns) is a specific symbol … The *femme fatale* is characterised by her long, lovely legs.

The *femme fatale* manipulates men with her narcissistic sensuality. She is a creature of desire and destruction.

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Kaplan, ed: 18.
Kaplan, ed: 16.
Place: 54.
relationship with Angel and Willow is reassuring her. Buffy was late for her date with Angel last night, and when she got there Cordelia was sitting, flirting and laughing with him. Halfway through Willow and Buffy’s conversation the woman in question, Cordelia, walks in, goes straight to the mirror and starts to apply her shiny lip-gloss. Buffy tries to throw Cordelia off Angel’s scent by telling her: ‘Angel’s a vampire, I thought you knew.’ To which Cordelia replies disbelievingly, as she finishes up her glossing and tosses it in her bag: ‘Ohhh, he’s a vampire, of course, but the cuddly kind! Like a care bear with fangs.’ Willow confirms that Angel is indeed a vampire. At which point Cordelia strides across the room and dominates the screen, and them, as she delivers the final retort: “You know what I think. I just think, you’re trying to scare me off cause you’re afraid of the competition. Look Buffy you may be hot stuff when it comes to demonology, or whatever. But when it comes to dating I’m the Slayer.”

“Halloween,” Episode 6, Season 2.\(^49\)

Like a good foundation brushed across Cordelia’s cheeks, the *femme fatale* colours her while still allowing her contemporary American teenageness to emerge. Clearly Cordelia possesses the self-obsessed narcissism of the *femme fatale*; bewitched as she is by her own reflection. In fact it is arguable that her flirtation with Angel demonstrates an infatuation with her own power to attract, not an attraction to the resident undead embodiment of “perfected masculine appeal.”\(^50\) Cordelia is so busy practicing her feminine wiles that she fails to notice that Angel is a vampire. The way in which Cordelia is costumed for her three seasons on *BtVS* is decidedly odd. Unlike the other female characters on *BtVS* Cordelia’s costumes are not the latest in “small-designer-label trends.”\(^51\) Rather they display a retro-aesthetic, she is continually encased in blouses, sheath dresses and twin-sets, all of them form-fitting. In the above scene, Cordelia is adorned like a high school version of the *femme fatale*, her outfit a sexy interpretation of a standard school uniform: her legs are revealed by a very short pleated skirt, her bosom contained by a tight vest with a starched white collar peaking over the top and her long dark hair swinging behind her, punctuating

\(^{49}\) ‘Halloween,’ *BtVS*, 27 October 1997. Dir. by B S Green. Writ. by C Ellsworth. [television broadcast].

\(^{50}\) Susan Owen argues that Angel is the “most sexualized and eroticized of all the characters in the series.” Owen: fulltext.

\(^{51}\) Udovitch: 40.
her utterances. Cordelia is aware of her sexuality and its power to manipulate, as is made obvious by her claim, “But when it comes to dating I’m the Slayer.” One of the respondents to my survey (and a fan fiction writer), Kate Keene, comments on Cordelia’s sexuality:

Most of the time, she’s more concerned with what she thinks of boys/men rather than what they think of her, which shows a sexual maturity/confidence that I saw lacking [sic] in the other female characters on Buffy. (Which is the only reason I was willing to consider her as a sexual partner for Giles … with the other girls the relationship would be too sexually unequal).52

Her noir ancestry is made evident by her narcissism, her sexuality, her visual presentation, and her uneasy relationship with other female characters.

Cordelia is a teened down version of the femme fatale, fit for the high school corridor and the small screen. The impact of the televisual medium itself means that Cordelia’s sexuality cannot be as overt as that of her filmic counterpart. Significantly, Cordelia lacks the
deadliness of the classic femme fatale. Her sexuality may at times be knowing and manipulative, but it is not deadly. Kate Stables, in her article “The Postmodern Always Rings Twice: Constructing the Femme Fatale in 90s Cinema,” argues that 1990s cinema was liberally populated by a new version of noir’s feminine archetype. The erotic thriller, as exemplified by Basic Instinct, relied on the potent mixture of sexuality and death embodied by the noir ‘spider woman.’ Stables acknowledges the polysemic nature of these texts and realises that Basic Instinct “could be variously reviled as misogynystic [sic] fantasy and celebrated as a feminist tour de force, condemned for blatant homophobia and celebrated as the ultimate cult lesbian movie.” However, she claims that ultimately the femme fatale is still constrained patriarchally. She points out that erotic thrillers often:

have repeated and elaborate sex scenes which fundamentally alter the films’ generic make-up, their narrative rhythm, their visual and stylistic codes, and above all our perception of the femme fatale.

The fatale that populates the erotic thriller is defined through, and only knowable via, her sexuality which is presented as titillation for the male gaze. While the television bitch is often sexualised, it is in a way significantly different from her filmic counterpart. Prime-time television cannot access the codes of soft-core pornography in the mode of film, especially R rated film. The televisual bitch may be painted using shades of noir, but she is not as opened up to the male gaze, nor is she as pathological as the cinematic bitch.

Cordelia is not required to devote all her time to smouldering and sexual manipulation. Consequently she has time for a job. This is significant to my claiming of her as a third

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55 Stables: 166.
56 Stables: 167.
57 While both Angel and BtVS have been moved to the 10:30 pm time slot in Australia, in the United States BtVS plays as early as 7:30 and Angel at 8:30 pm.
wave icon. Stables argues that film presents a “reductionist concept of the 90s fatale” via her overt sexualisation thus rendering her career merely “notional.” If the fatale does have a career it is more often than not one closely related to the ‘beauty’ professions such as modelling, singing, acting or working as an airhostess. Contrastingly, in the buffyverse a sense of vocation (not tied to appearance) is central to the characterisation of all the major female characters, and Cordelia is no exception.

The three main characters of Angel have just managed to survive the season finale. Their offices have been blown-up so they are forced to work around Cordelia’s kitchen table. Wesley is researching, his books spread around him, Angel is lurking and Cordelia appears with a plate full of sandwiches. “Here eat,” she states while plonking the plate in front of Wesley. Wesley and Angel exchange a disbelieving look as Cordelia moves towards Angel with a nice tall glass of blood. “You too,” she offers. Putting Angel’s look of discomfort down to embarrassment she reassures him, “Don’t be embarrassed. We’re family.” Wesley is now clearly bamboozled by Cordelia’s uncharacteristic domestic offerings. An empathetic “What?” from Cordelia breaches Wesley’s confusion. He barely stutters the response, “Well its just I … I’m not used …” Angel finishes his sentence for him, “He’s not used to the new you.” Cordelia’s face is awash in comprehension: “I know what’s out there now. We have a lot of evil to fight. A lot of people to help.” Just before fan’s of Cordelia everywhere weep at her transformation into Mother Therasa, she continues with: “I just hope skin and bones here can figure what those lawyers raised sometime before that prophecy kicks in and you croak.” She pauses, “That was the old me wasn’t it?” Angel: “I like both of them.”


Initially Cordelia was characterised through her vainness, bitchiness and self-obsessed nature. However, by the end of the first season of BtVS, her character was developing beyond these narrow confines. “Out of Mind, Out of Sight,” the eleventh episode of a twelve episode season, saw Cordelia stalked, kidnapped and attacked by an unpopular girl

58 Stables: 174.
whom she had snubbed. This is the first episode to hint at Cordelia ‘layers’; it was demonstrated that she was capable of feeling loneliness, and that she was scholastically motivated. She may have been coddled by wealth, but she still strived for good grades and a quality education. Much is made of Cordelia being in the top 10 percent of her class academically, so as to stop the easy labelling of her as a ‘bimbo.’ She was accepted by various Ivy League Colleges but could not attend due to her father’s loss of income. Cordelia always has goals and is always depicted striving towards them. So she responded to her now more limited circumstances by going to Los Angeles in search of stardom. This is consistent with the filmic *femme fatale* who works within industries reliant on women ‘giving good face.’ However this is later complicated within the show when Cordelia realises her true vocation is ‘helping the helpless.’ No longer is her job at Angel Investigations the secondary task done to pay the rent while waiting for her big break. Now she acknowledges the importance of her work at Angel Investigations and wants to be there. She tells Angel in “Untouched” that he ‘can’t fire her’ because she is ‘vision girl.’60 There is a clear narrative continually developed in the show about Cordelia and work, about her place in the economic world. This parallels the rest of the Scooby gang’s development on *BtVS*.

I am not claiming Cordelia Chase as a third wave feminist role model simply because she has a job. Working outside of the home is not necessarily a feminist action. I am indicating that the workplace is a particular site of activism for third wave feminists. As Melissa Klein points out, the third wave has a marked difference from “the social context of the second wave that is historically specific: the sheer number of women of all races and classes in the

workplace.\textsuperscript{61} This insight is bardically rendered in both \textit{BtVS} and \textit{Angel}. \textit{The Mary Tyler Moore Show} – what is arguably the first sitcom clearly affiliated with feminism – was groundbreaking for depicting a single woman in a work environment.\textsuperscript{62} Now it is expected that our television heroines will work. What makes Buffy and Cordelia special is that they are not merely working, they have found their vocation. When Buffy claims “I am the Slayer,” which she does in a number of episodes, it is an empowering feminist moment; she is confident and sure of her rightful place in the world. Cordelia’s struggle to find her niche has been more marked. She is not so obviously a hero, for instance she was not called to fulfil the destiny of the Slayer. Her’s has been a gradual process of growth. It is important for young women (and men) to see female characters on television that are not there merely to have relationships or to look pretty. Cordelia’s dilution of noireness does not affect her political potency. For it is her very teened-downness that makes her useful to third wave feminism. It is her imbrication in the world of work and her commitment to be part of a community that makes her so effective.

\textit{Excerpt from a fan fiction written from Buffy’s point of view:}

There was silence, and suddenly without thinking, I laid my head on Cordelia’s shoulder, at the moment all the past anger, all the past bitter fights and torrid arguments, all the hurtful

\textsuperscript{60} ‘Untouched,’ \textit{Angel}, 17 October 2000. Dir. by J Whedon. Writ. by M Smith. [television broadcast].


\textsuperscript{62} Dow: 26.
words that flew from the both of was [sic] gone in an aura of unity. She and I were one person then, I began to realize how much I had in common, how much I had envied and despised her, because I thought she had managed to achieve the life I would never have.

But fate was never that clever, or that kind. Because here she was, in my position, three years ago with even less support than I had.

“You and I are the same, Cor.” I said swiftly, looking to the same nonexistant place of refuge she was seeking. “Never wanted to admit it.”

“The characters of Buffy and Cordelia are inextricably linked. Buffy comments on this similarity when she says to Angel “Before I was the Slayer I was … well … I don’t want to say shallow … but let’s say a certain person, who will remain nameless, we’ll just call her Spordelia looked like a classical philosopher next to me.” The characters are formed in reference to one another. Cordelia Chase started off as the teened down version of deadly seductress to Buffy’s rejuvenating redeemer. These two archetypes are drawn from film noir but have been substantially altered by teen film conventions. The schism between the pair continues to function in the same way in both film genres but the particularities of the characterisation of the two archetypes has been altered by teen film. Cordelia is the progeny of film lineage but ultimately her immersion in the televisual buffyverse results in a complicated rewrite of the femme fatale. Initially, Cordelia’s construction as bitch performed the same crucial, but simple, plot function bequeathed by her filmic ancestry: her badness contrasted with, and helped establish, the goodness of the main character.

Season one sees Cordelia the undisputed reigning queen of a bitchy clique, referred to memorably by Angel as the Cordettes:

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65 Place: 63.
A bunch of girls from wealthy families. They ruled the high school. They decided what was in, who was popular. It was like the Soviet police if they cared about shoes.66 Buffy may be an impassioned protector of the innocent but she also cares about shoes. The initial gimmick of the show relies on Buffy being undeniably valley girl: decked out in fashionable clothes, chewing gum and only conversing in ‘slanguage.’ However for her to be the heroic star of the show she must also be depicted as having depth. This is partly achieved by contrasting her with Cordelia. Buffy may worry about being fashionable but it is Cordelia who is obsessive about it. Cordelia is Buffy’s incipient; her presence on screen acts as a marker of Buffy’s development. The disjunction between the two characters is further emphasised by their friendship groups. Cordelia’s peers are judgemental and fickle. In contrast, Buffy’s friends may be goofy but they are also caring and committed. Buffy is established as the blonde caring hero through a binary opposition to Cordelia the brunette, selfish bitch.

This opposition once established is not allowed to stand. The clear distinction between Buffy and Cordelia (first blurred in “Out of Mind, Out of Sight”) is decimated in season two’s opening episode “When She Was Bad.”67 The television serial allows characters the ability to develop and change. Characters not only suffer repercussions for their actions but are depicted learning from these repercussions. While film also depicts the drama of action followed by consequence, television allows longer and more detailed character arcs. “When She was Bad” dramatises Buffy still reeling from the effects of season one’s finale in which she died before being resuscitated by her close friend Xander. She returns to Sunnydale at the end of the summer holidays only to alienate all those closest to her. Buffy acts like a bitch. This culminates in a very sexy, and deleterious, dance sequence. Buffy entices

66 ‘Room with a View.’
Xander on to the dance floor and then commences to dance with him in a very sinuous and seductive manner. This is the act of a bitch, because Xander has a major, admitted and unrequited crush on Buffy. Additionally this dance is performed purposefully in front of Angel; Buffy’s emerging love interest, and Willow; who at this point is still in love with Xander. Once Buffy finishes her ‘dance’ she saunters from the club leaving everybody but Cordelia in her stunned wake.

Following Buffy out into the alleyway Cordelia confronts her:

| Cordelia: Buffy, you’re really campaigning for bitch of the year aren’t you. |
| Buffy: As defending champion you nervous? |
| Cordelia: I can hold my own. You know we’ve never really been close, which is nice cause I don’t really like you that much. But you have on occasion saved the world and stuff so I’m going to do you a favour. |
| Buffy: And this great favour is? |
| Cordelia: I’m going to give you some advice – Get over it. |
| Buffy: Excuse me? |
| Cordelia: Whatever’s causing the Joan Collin’s tude – deal with it. Embrace the pain. Spank your inner moppet. Whatever. But get over it because pretty soon you’re not going to even have the loser friends you’ve got now. |

“When She Was Bad,” Episode 1, Season 2. 68

The distinction established between Cordelia as bitch and Buffy as redeemer disintegrates in this scene. This is not a simple reversal of roles. Cordelia is no heavenly angel deigning to rectify Buffy’s fall from grace. She is still a ‘bitch,’ confident in her ability to remain the defending champion of the term. This scene shows bitchiness being used positively; as a jolt and a warning. Cordelia is not Buffy’s ‘friend’ but she is not afraid to give Buffy the advice she needs. Television usually plays the bitch as a negative force. She is depicted attempting to sabotage other women. She steals their men, their jobs and their emotional.

67 ‘When She was Bad,’ BtVS, 15 September 1997. Dir. by J Whedon. Writ. by J Whedon. [television broadcast].
68 ‘When She Was Bad.’
equilibrium. There are few instances like this, of bitch-support. Cordelia’s advice may be delivered in classic bitch style, but the directive is genuine. This is the bitch at her best. It is moments like these that allow her to be claimed as a representative of the third wave. Feminism can use the bitch’s truth telling abilities. The bitch has the ability to unmask ideologies. She makes it apparent that – not only – is there ground that is being contested but that there needs to be dissension.

Cordelia’s advice to Buffy suggests a depth not normally allowed to the bitch. It demonstrates an awareness of others, clearly Cordelia is not always completely self-obsessed. Her characterisation is permitted to extend past the limits imposed by the archetype. Cordelia is a hybrid-bitch. Melissa Flores, fan fiction writer, offers that the reason she is inspired by the Cordelia character to write fan fiction is that:

Umm ... honestly it's the layers. :-) Cordelia Chase has always been such a source of inspiration to be [sic] because quiet simply she WASN'T what she appeared. As a longtime BTVS slayer, I would get continually frustrated with people dismissing Cordelia Chase as an airheaded mean bimbo bitch and always thinking that there was nothing more to it. Cordlia [sic] the character is fascinating, [sic] because she's honestly NEVER what she appears to be, and her childhood and recent experiences are evidence of that.  

Over time we are given information about the character that provides scope to their personality. Significantly, with teen television we get to see the characters grow-up. They face a series of common coming of age trials. The viewer is able to relate their life journey to that of the characters. Timothy Shary in his review of *Pretty in Pink: the Golden Age of Teenage Movies* laments Jonathan Bernstein’s lack of “meaningful interrogation of how … different (stereo)types are portrayed and operate in teen films.” Bernstein has named some of the characters that populate teen film such as stoners, princesses, cheerleaders, Geeks, Jocks and Dweebs but has failed to employ the critical lens that has been applied to

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70 Shary: fulltext.
other genres such as westerns and film noir that would allow scholars to “address teen films beyond their novelty or use as a mere genre, and the greater ramifications of teen films …”\textsuperscript{71} While this chapter does not deal explicitly with teen film there also needs to be a discussion of the ramifications of teen television. Television characters of loved shows resonate in our lives in different ways than famous film characters. Their continuing presence creates tighter bonds as Henry Jenkins so convincingly argues.\textsuperscript{72} \textit{BtVS} uses filmic stereotypes self-reflexively and continually provides those stereotypes with more depth. Thus we are allowed to see beyond the façade of the head cheerleader to the ‘person’ beneath. We see characters grow; allowing an empathetic comparison of their lives with ours. Fan fiction enables the writer some control over that growth.

One of the underlying themes of this thesis is the target, function and purpose of women’s anger, especially between women. The bitch, with her strident tone, is usually presented as a slightly (or extremely) perverted form of femininity. Cordelia and Buffy’s alleyway confrontation is important to feminism for three reasons. It can be claimed as a televisual instance which provides an example of how to use one’s inner bitch positively. That is, as an inspirational third wave moment that delineates a harnessed and useful style of bitch anger. We can also read the scene bardically. Deducing from it that young women are developing new confidences and forms of interpersonal communication that have important feminist repercussions. Finally, we can stretch our interpretation of the scene beyond its textual boundaries by a consideration of \textit{BtVS} fandom. So the significance resides not solely in the moment but in how fans plait these instances into their own lives. What is the

\textsuperscript{72} Jenkins.
significance of these young female television heroes for their fans? By asking this question, we are reminded that television does not simply reflect society. It is implicated in the construction of everyday commonsense understandings. Stuart Hall, in his article “New Ethnicities,” argues that there needs to be a concentration on the politics of representation that “gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation – subjectivity, identity, politics – a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life.”73 So Cordelia is not merely expressive. She is not a mimetic representation of an actual, strong and angry woman to be found in the real world. Nor is she a simple embodiment of a new breed of third wave feminist. She is constitutive. She feeds into identity formation. A consideration of fandom provides one example of how this is manifest.

Excerpt from a fan fiction written from Angel’s point of view:

Her warmth, her pulse, her blood were calling to me and I could feel my control slipping as my emotions played havoc with my senses. At the time I focused on what I had to do to get her out of there, what it would take for me to get away from her. I never considered the true ramifications of my actions.

If I had only know then what would happen to Cordelia I would have kept her with me, I wouldn’t have let her out of my sight. If I had known, I would have held her forever.

‘Holding On,’ Prophecy.74

Constance Penley and Jenkins are two theorists renowned for writing about fan fiction. Their work has defined the field. Both of them also have broader academic concerns. Jenkins’ has written on Science Fiction fandom and its practices in ways that extend past fan fiction alone. Penley’s work blends together feminism, psychoanalysis, science fiction,

literature and film. Regardless of their more varied interests any discussion of fan fiction is bound to cite these two theorists. Their work on fan fiction displays a preoccupation with the phenomena of ‘Slash.’ Slash fiction consists of homoerotic stories usually written by heterosexual women about the relationship between two male characters; famously Kirk and Spock. Writers of this form of fiction are commonly termed ‘Slashers.’ Penley asks why it is that these fan fiction writers “are drawn to writing their sexual and social utopian romances across the bodies of two men, and why these two men in particular?”75 Both Jenkins and Penley proffer that the answer to this question resides in the Slasher’s desire for a utopic future where there is equality between the sexes. They argue that in the Star Trek universe the two bodies most suited for an equal erotic partnership are Kirk’s and Spock’s. The female audience’s desire for a heterosexual relationship grounded in equality was not fulfilled by the available television texts. The ‘couple’ with the most generative potential for this brave new style of loving were Spock and Kirk. Thus they were appropriated by the fans and rewritten. Penley positions Slash as a “hybridized genre that ingeniously blends romance, pornography, and utopian scenic fiction.”76 It is a continuation of the female/feminist literary tradition of writing a better more equitable future. Once stronger more equitable heterosexual relationships started being screened on the television they too got enfolded into the world of fan fiction.

The fandoms produced by The X-Files, Xena: Warrior Princess and BtVS have rewritten the world of slash. Xena has generated lesbian (or F/F) Slash and The X-Files spawned a new breed of fan called a ‘Shipper.’ Shippers write heterosexual romances focused around specific couples. BtVS fandom has had its own impact on fan fiction and Slash. BtVS has an

75 Penley: 153.
76 Penley: 137.
ensemble cast, as opposed to a central pairing, this has resulted in an eclectic archive of fan fiction which is inclusive of M/M, F/F and Shippers. As fan fiction author Hth [sic] writes:

> People in BtVS fandom, so far as I can tell, have totally scrapped the whole notions of dual citizenships, preferring to be the jetsetting dot.com millionaires of the slash world. They go where they like, they write what they feel like, and they have a blast doing it … While most BtVS fans don’t seem to think in terms of favorite pairings, they all have their favorite characters … 77

Traditional Slash (M/M) is fascinating, there is just something so weird about the idea of heterosexual women writing homoerotic fiction, or to state the case more bluntly – gay porn. This weirdness is generated by the lack of understanding of the mechanics, the emotives or the politics of homosexual sex. Slash removes homosexuality from its context. More positively, it also suggests some sort of rupture in the hegemonic consumption of media texts. It is a moment of resistance beckoning to cultural theorists. However, Slash has now mutated and it is no longer irrefutably written in a homoerotic metre. Penley argues that male bodies are crucial to Slash because the female authors are “alienated” from “twentieth-century women’s bodies.”78 She reasons that Slashers are “ Rejecting the perfect Amazons that populate much of female fantasy/sword-and-sorcery writing, the K/Sers (authors who write Kirk/Spock stories) opt instead for the project of at least trying to write real men.”79 It is disputable the K/Sers are attempting to write ‘real’ men, with ‘real’ bodies. After all Spock was a Vulcan and they both have rather large penises – in Spock’s case a large green penis – very reminiscent of traditional pornography. Slashers may be rejecting the physical perfection demanded of the female physique by ‘normal’ media imaginings, but they are not writing ‘real’ men. The desire to model a utopic relationship through a depiction of an erotic relationship between two men occurred because at the time they ‘were the best men for the job.’ This position is supported by the fact that now that

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78 Penley: 154.
there are other bodies available – both masculine and feminine – Slashers are writing their stories across heterosexual partners, in addition to the more ‘traditional’ homosexual pairings. Unfortunately, this means that cultural theorist’s interest in Slash may pall. Romance fiction does not seem nearly as fascinating as homoerotica. It also suggests that we need a reworked definition of Slash that is not solely reliant on homoerotics to define it.

The central erotic pairing of X-Files fan fiction is heterosexual. The ‘Shippers’ of The X-File fandom write their desires across the bodies of Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) and Fox Mulder (David Duchovany). Christine Scodari and Jenna Felder explore the implication of this pairing in their article “Creating a Pocket Universe: ‘Shippers,’ Fan Fiction, and The X-Files Online.” A consideration of this article in tandem with the BtVS fandom produces a new definition of Slash. Scodari and Felder suggest that Shippers like Slashers continue the tradition of imagining an equitable relationship between the sexes. They caution the NoRomos – those X-Files fans who actively campaign for no romance to occur between Scully and Mulder – against ‘discrediting Scully’ so as to couple ‘Mulder with a worthy male.’ They argue that this is just another form of thinly veiled misogyny that stops women ever being depicted in an equal relationship with a man. Thus Shippers claim a Slash lineage because they continue the tradition of writing gender-utopic fiction. Thus ‘homoerotics’ is replaced by ‘emancipatory-erotics’ as the primary defining characteristic of Slash. This allows commentators to continue to trace both the desires of female fans and their ‘grass roots’ feminism without being put off by the ‘banality’ of romantic fiction. It also allows a recognition of the changes that have been wrought within televisual discourse; change based in societal reconfigurations. The depiction of female

⁹⁸ Penley: 154.
⁹⁹ Scodari and Felder: 238-257.
characters has come along way since the Starship Enterprise first flew across our television screens. Today’s female characters are more centrally placed in the narrative, the roles allowed them are more varied, they are more assertive, more likely to be employed and are not always married with children.

Slashers are renowned for taking a little bit of subtext and creating a rich and complex literary universe. Scodari and Felder argue that Shippers need their subtext much more overt than Slashers. Shippers are more reliant on textual support. Scodari and Felder write:

Unlike “Slashers” who delight in defying a text they know will never grant their fantasy (Penley, 1991), Shippers having tasted what they crave, find fanfic’s ameliorative potency dissipated as soon as hopes appear fruitless.  

There is a marked decline in Shipper activity when the number of moments (in recently aired episodes) implying some romantic feeling between Mulder and Scully decrease. Slashers on the other hand need very little subtext to support their imagined pairings. This I also claim as a marker of Slash. Slash is written about pairings that are not overtly supported by the particular television text’s cannon. Thus I claim Cordelia and Angel as a Slash pairing but Angel and Buffy as a romantic pairing.

Here I must digress slightly from my meta-argument to tease out some of the implications of the Shipper fiction produced by fans of the Buffy/Angel relationship. B/A fiction dominate BtVS fandom. Angel was Buffy’s love interest for the first three seasons of BtVS. There’s was a doomed and tragic love story – as one would expect of a relationship between a Vampire Slayer and a vampire. Their love was possible because even though Angel was a vampire he had been ‘cursed’ with a soul so instead of being an evil vampire

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81 Scodari and Felder: 244.
82 Scodari and Felder: 249.
he was a good one – ‘a care bear with fangs.’ The first season of *BtVS* had Angel lurking in the shadows only to emerge occasionally to help the Slayer in her quest to fight evil. In the second season their relationship progressed to the stage where Buffy gave her virginity to him – such a dated expression I know. Framing a young women’s virtue as a gift, while depicting masculine virginity as something to be rid of as quick as possible, perpetuates the exulted status of girlhood to the detriment of womanhood in our society. For theorists, this moment of penetration is when the show became interesting. My research has revealed a marked preoccupation by academics for this scene and its repercussions. It is this transitional moment that also acted as the catalyst for the emergence of the B/A shippers. During their ‘evening of passion’ Angel (and one would presume Buffy) experienced ‘one true moment of happiness,’ and such were the terms of his curse, that once experiencing this flash of happiness he again lost his soul and reverted to being evil. Being the Vampire Slayer, it was now Buffy’s sacred duty to kill Angel. So amongst much angst, she stabbed him through the stomach and dispatched him to hell, thus contravening the “horror-film convention dictating that virgins are the only ones who ever get out alive and alluding to the all-too-real emotional turmoil of that first failed relationship.” This has got to be one of the worst ‘first-time’ narratives on television, she sleeps with her one true love only to wake up to a monster. Slowly, Buffy realises that her vocation as a slayer demands that she kill him, regardless of her ambivalences as his lover. Buffy is depicted as having both the strength and the resources to cope with the death and destruction generated by her first failed relationship. Being a show steeped in supernatural mysteries, Angel managed to

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83 Season three of *Angel* saw a marked increase in the amount of (sub)textual support for an Angel and Cordelia romance.
Owen: 24-31.
85 Fudge: 21.
return from hell early in season three with soul intact. Sadly, our lovers were now constrained by the knowledge that they could never truly ‘be together’ because it would release Angel’s evil alter ego – Angelus, (the name used to distinguish evil Angel from good Angel).

B/A shippers are the foundation of *BtVS* fandom. The tragic separation of the principal character and her ‘one true love’ caused a rupture that fans rushed to mend with their fiction. Fans now inspected the Buffy cannon for moments that supported an eventual Buffy and Angel reunion. They wrote endless stories in which Buffy and Angel were happily together. As with *The X-Files* fandom, the *BtVS* fandom was initially dominated by Shippers. Consequently there is a profusion of heterosexual pairings within the *BtVS* fan fiction archive. However, if this was where it stopped it would just be a simple repeat of *The X-Files* fan community. As Hth pointed out, people involved with *BtVS* fandom are the ‘jetsetting dot.com millionaires of the slash world.’ They move with ease through endless permutations of erotic pairings and they do seem to display more of an affiliation with a particular character than a specific pairing (B/A shippers excluded).

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*Excerpt from fan fiction depicting an encounter between Angel, Cordelia and Doyle: Mental communication among Angel, Doyle, and Cordelia is indicated by slashes //like this.//*
Opening the jewelry case, Angel held a small golden Claddagh ring in front of her. //In Claddagh Ireland, near my home of Galway, this ring has come to symbolize that love and friendship shall reign. We’re giving you this ring as a symbol of our commitment and as mark to the world that we belong to each other. Cordelia, do you accept this ring, this expression of our devotion to you?//

“Yes, oh God, yes.” Cordelia’s voice was broken but both men heard the loud cry from her soul.

Aware of the tears falling down both their faces, Angel removed the ring from its velvet setting. Reading his unspoken thought, Doyle held out her left hand. Slowly, Angel placed the ring on her finger, the heart facing towards her hand.

Angel continued. //From this night, we’ll wear these identical rings as a sign of our covenant, our promise. We are joined in heart, soul and mind. A spell may have brought us together, but not even death will separate us.//

Unable to stand anymore, Doyle placed a kiss on her cheek. Not to be outdone, Angel placed a kiss on her other cheek. Cordelia breathed deeply, trying to rein in her tears and the emotions singing through her entire body.

//This is beautiful, but it’s all wrong. There are only two hands holding the heart, there should be three.//

Doyle laughed. //It’s perfect, darling. There’s a hand for both Angel and I. You’re the heart in the middle. Who else would have a crown but our Queen?//

“The above excerpt comes from one of my favourite fan fiction websites, ‘The Power of Three.’ It is a sizeable site devoted to fan fiction based on an ongoing ménage à trois between Angel, Cordelia and Doyle. Doyle (Glenn Quinn) played Angel’s half-demon sidekick for the first nine episodes of Angel. He then sacrificed himself to save a huddle of persecuted demons (they were the good guys) – thus the name of the episode ‘Hero.’ This website is a substantial and dramatic rewrite of the Angel canon; Doyle is brought back to life via the use of some powerful ‘sex-magic,’ Cordelia, Angel and Doyle are able to communicate psychically and they are involved in an ongoing sexual relationship with one another. Unlike Shippers, these authors do not require a lot of textual sub-text. It is easy to decipher the trace left by utopic fiction on this site. Whereas the K/S Slasher wrote a utopia of equality across two male bodies, here these Slashers write their desire for an

intimate, sexual equality across the minds of a man, a woman and a man. The fiction archive of this site suggests that the bond of telepathy enables a more intimate and intense bonding. In common with Slash authors of old, this is a love that exists outside the bounds of ‘normal’ heterosexuality. Additionally, it shares with K/S an expansion of the normal confines of embodiment. Angel and Doyle are both, at least, part Demon. This endows them with superhuman strength, and the odd additional ability, for instance Angel has a very keen nose for blood’s aroma, Doyle occasionally morphs into his demon self and Cordelia gets visions of people who require their help. Of course, all three characters are gifted with telepathy. In a number of the stories, this common repertoire is expanded upon as they discover new talents bequeathed by their bond. In one fiction Cordelia discovers that she does not have to use contraception. Due to her new powers she can control when she will conceive. This site performs the extension of Slash. It is utopian fiction incorporating a spectrum of sexual difference. The erotics include heterosexual, homosexual and bi-sexual encounters. Importantly the three characters get to inhabit the other’s body/thoughts. Ideas of family are reworked beyond the nuclear family. Here the intimate family bond is rewritten to include three adults without children.

‘Family’ is a rich linguistic signifier for a complex lived experience. Governmental, educational and media institutions all work to restrict definitions of family. Angel and BtVS rewrite notions of family around adult friendships as opposed to biological ties. They suggest ways in which people separated from their families can build the close sense of community associated with familial bonds. This theme is taken up by the fan fiction authors writing for ‘The Power of Three’ and expanded upon. Yet, is it just a wee bit naff to be investing this fictional trio with so much significance? Is it all just too banal, like

87 There are at least sixteen authors currently contributing to this website.
being asked to look at a dreadful homespun mixture of romance and macrame? Hopelessly out of date, slightly embarrassing and, well, kind of bad? It is hard to write about fan fiction without at least pondering the word ‘banal.’ These reflections led me to Meaghan Morris’s generative article ‘Banality in Cultural Studies.’"88 She comments on the banality of the template that too often shapes Cultural Studies arguments. She writes:

If a cultural dopism is being enunciatively performed (and valorized) in a discourse that tries to contest it, then the argument in fact cannot move on, but can only retrieve its point of departure as ‘banality’ (a word pop theorists don’t normally use) in the negative sense.89 Here Morris argues that the distracted attention valorised by academics such as John Fiske and Iain Chambers dilutes the potency of cultural studies as a political movement that tries to challenge and alter people’s production/consumption habits. (The terms ‘production/consumption’ are slashed here because Morris also argues for a more complex rendering of the production/consumption nexus.) Instead she argues that Cultural Studies offers up endless versions “of the same article about pleasure, resistance, and the politics of consumption”90 that presents “the sanitized world of a deodorant commercial where there’s always a way to redemption.”91 Cordelia, and the buffyverse more generally, are not written about here to once again trace the contours of the resistive audience. Though the fan fiction authors, I have used do embody resistive reading strategies. Like Morris I feel this point has already been made. Cordelia is important because of the lessons she articulates about young womanhood. It may be banal to stick your conquering flag on top of a resistive moment and go ‘ooh look at the clever audience experiencing an empowering moment.’ However, it is not so banal to examine the how and why of text’s mattering.

88 Morris: 147-167.
89 Morris: 159.
90 Morris: 156.
91 Morris: 161.
Fan fiction was chosen not because it demonstrates an audience rewriting production, or displaying the art of the everyday but because it shows changing aspirations of utopia. Television may function bardically but fan fiction is visionary. Both art forms communicate lessons about the changing topographies of everyday realities. Cordelia suggests a sexuality wielded by a young woman, not extracted from her via the male gaze. There is an embodied physicality to her performance that does not undermine her intelligence. She is no dangerous siren luring men to their doom yet this does not empty her of sexuality. Her’s is not the pathology of the *femme fatale*. Importantly, having a vocation is seamlessly interwoven with the successful performance of femininity. Her compliance with capitalism and her overt desire for consumer objects is tempered by her involvement and care for others. Cordelia’s job is helping people, a job she performs with the support of her modern family. *BtVS* inspires such a rabid fan base because of the potentialities it suggests for the viewers and for its validation of fan activity.

What struck me as particularly banal during the writing of this chapter was not the fan fiction but the academic reading of the relationship between the television texts and consumerism. Morris warns us against claiming the popular as empowering and failing to see the oppression that is also articulated through the medium. I am not claiming that the capitalist ethos that underwrites the show and the character of Cordelia is unproblematic. There is an offensive valorisation of consumption. Cordelia likes money and pretty things. The show is clearly caught up in regimes of beauty. All the characters are young, slender, clear skinned, attractive and predominantly white. The clothes are fetishised objects that not only aim to start fashion trends but succeed in doing so. To theorise my way out of this hole is beyond the scope of this chapter. But that is not the primary reason I avoid dealing here with this issue in depth. I am weary of reifying the equation of woman equals
consumer equals cultural dope. The articles I have read on BtVS have all been critical of its support of consumerism. Rachel Fudge terms Buffy “a Hard Candy-coated feminist heroine for the girl-power era.”92 Allowing Buffy to be a heroine while remaining deeply suspicious of her being “all tied up in the pretty bow of marketability.”93 Susan Owen in the concluding comments of her article about BtVS warns against the consumerism promoted by the show: “her body project remains consistent with rescripted body signs of American commodity advertising.”94 I agree that BtVS and Angel, through the character’s bodies and homes, support a society based on avarice and acquisition – as does all dramatic television. The screen is a seductive medium, its surface seduces and glamorises. This is taken advantage of by producers and advertisers. It is also to some extent unavoidable – nearly anything displayed on the screen becomes desirable. This insight is worthy of the academic attention it has garnered. Yet, there is a specificity to the foregrounding of this insight in any academic discussion of BtVS. For instance why the failure to discuss how The X-Files helps establish consumer goods such as mobile phones and lap top computers as desirable objects? Yet it seems a requirement that articles on BtVS address capitalism and consumption. This can only be the result of the conflation of girl-culture with mindless consumerism. I also feel that it demonstrates a feminist unease about money and consumption. Feminists want women to be part of the workforce, but they are not so comfortable when women start getting paid beyond subsistence level. Feminism’s aversion to capitalism is a gift bequeathed by the close ties forged between feminism, and both, Marxism and Socialism. These early comrades helped weave a feminist movement with a strong social conscious. However it has left us with a feminist movement floundering to

92 Fudge: 21.
93 Fudge: 20.
94 Owen: fulltext.
help women make sense of their mass imbrication in the capitalist work machine. A lacuna that television is being left to address.

The academy mines popular culture for a variety of reasons. It is used illustratively to add pep to arguments. It is evaluated, usually so as to point to some lack that needs addressing. We can see this trace in feminist responses arguing against the stereotypical representations of women on television. All these approaches have their relevancy. However sometimes academics need to question whether or not their treatment of popular culture is a form of cultural appropriation. Are they translating these cultural traces for a middle class audience or are they making a sincere attempt to engage with the content? They need to listen to the voices and concerns that are connecting with an audience.
THE AFFECT OF POPULAR MUSIC

Popular music has great affective power. It is the soundtrack to our lives. Yet it remains a very difficult site to write about. How do writers translate the *jouissance* of music into the language of analysis without loosing the passion? I include two popular musical performers so as to provide a comprehensive excavation of the relationship between music and feminism. The connection between the two realms is more entangled than commonly understood. The second wave of feminism was accompanied by the strains of ‘women’s music.’ Activists organised feminist music festivals, they trained women in the skills of music production and provided a means of distribution. The third wave reconnected with this history through the music of the Riot Grrrls. This chapter unearths these narratives. In doing so, it demonstrates that popular music has generated strong and inspiring feminist voices.

It is impossible to deny Courtney Love’s bitch credentials. She aggressively disseminates her opinions with her music, interviews and website. Her bodily performance is transgressive. Admittedly, she now dresses up for award shows but those classic Love images in which her underpants and inebriation are shockingly on display continue to circulate. Writers of popular feminist books such as Germaine Greer and Elizabeth Wurtzel demonstrate both fascination and perplexity with Love’s manifestation of celebrity feminism. References to Courtney Love litter both *The Whole Woman* and *Bitch*, yet where she stands in relation to feminism is never made clear.¹ This can partly be blamed on the

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Wurtzel.
paradoxes she embodies. It also demonstrates an interest in her feminist meanings but a refusal to treat them thoughtfully. The feminism communicated through rhythm, lyric and melody deserves to be taken seriously. Most significantly, it requires a new language of interpretation, affectivity and application.
CHAPTER THREE
‘I’M SORRY – I’M NOT REALLY SORRY’: COURTNEY LOVE & NOTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY

She has always known what she wanted and what she wanted was to be a star.

Lynn Hirschberg¹

This chapter tells a story. In a way, it is one of the classic American dreams. It is the tale of someone – lacking in cultural capital – who makes it. It confirms the myth of meritocracy which underwrites America: anybody – if they want it enough and work hard enough – can make it. Yet the protagonist of this tale has not gained the usual universal praise that the embodiment of the dream expects to garner. Instead family services took over custody of her child, and a documentary accused her of successfully plotting to murder her husband.² Many, including friends, ex-lovers, her father, journalists and various celebrities, have expressed open animosity towards her. This is the story that circulates around and through the celebrity of Courtney Love.

The narrative I spin makes no claim to be a ‘True Story.’ When writing on celebrity, it is impossible to convey the ‘truth’ of the real person. The media’s many portraits and the audience’s multitude and mutable perceptions have morphed the person into a media cyborg wearing a ‘celebrity skin.’ The issues of our time play out on the surface of their skin as an audience stare in rapt attention. Greil Marcus worried that his exploration of Elvis would “merely reduce something we cannot quite get our heads around to something

that can be laid to rest by a line.” Marcus emphasises the difficulty facing cultural commentators who write about stars: the temptation to remove inconsistencies so as to provide a smooth argument. To be a ‘star’ is to embody an array of contradictions. To write out these discrepancies is to remove what makes Love – and all stars – fascinating. Instead I choose to let the contradictions pierce this narrative. The overarching structure of this chapter is linear: Courtney Love’s public life divided into three clear stages as marked by her band’s albums. Still, recurring and clashing themes interrupt this linear progression. I argue that Love is particularly relevant for feminism. That her celebrity communicates an array of contrasting feminist meanings. This chapter contends that Love’s make-over, from punk rocker to movie star, highlights the contentious place that discourses of beauty and authenticity have within feminism.

**PRETTY ON THE INSIDE**

In the September of 1991, Hole released their debut album, *Pretty on the Inside*. This was a punk album, as signified by the voice of the angry young woman that screamed out on the title track:

> Slut-kiss girl won’t you promise her smack?  
> Is she pretty on the inside?  
> Is she pretty from the back?\(^5\)

Poppy Brite, the writer of Love’s unauthorised biography, writes that “*Pretty on the Inside* is often described by non-enthusiasts of punk as difficult or even impossible to listen to.”\(^6\)

Listening to Hole’s first album is like hearing the visual equivalent of a large, weeping wound. This is music for a narrow niche market. This is an audience which defined ‘success,’ not by record sales but by credibility, consequently the bands that had the most prestige in this scene were the ones judged to be the most ‘authentic.’ Love states that:

> When I was making *Pretty on the Inside*, I had just been kicked out of Babes in Toyland, and I had a real chip on my shoulder. I was like, ‘I’m gonna be the angriest girl in the world, fuck you!’ I didn’t want to have a crack in my surface and put anything *jangly* on there.\(^5\)

This is why *Pretty on the Inside* is more ‘punk-sounding’ than a lot of the early punk records. In comparison The Clash, The Damned and The Jam sound positively melodic. In spite of – or perhaps as a result of – this purist punk sound, *Pretty on the Inside* sold very respectably for a punk debut album and was well reviewed in the music press. In fact it sold more than *Bleach* – Nirvana’s first album.\(^8\) However, this was a record in search of credibility, not massive sales. Love never intended for Hole’s debut to be one of those “Big, huge records with something to say” where “art and commerce are meeting,” that

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5 ‘Pretty on the Inside,’ Track No: 10.  
came later.\textsuperscript{9} What she wanted – and had pretty much achieved – was credible fame, or as she put it ‘Big Respect Fame’ as opposed to the ‘Valley Fame’ of Paula Abdul.\textsuperscript{10} What she had not quite realised yet was that it was antithetical to ‘Big Respect Fame’ to publicly desire it. Love’s youthful endorsement of all things punk would later be complicated by her imbrication in the music industry. This section of the chapter examines the way discourses of punk and credibility/authenticity intertwine and are refracted through Courtney Love.

For like Rock ‘n’ Roll, itself Love is simultaneously authentic and unauthentic. One of the founding tropes of punk is that its artists despise the ‘corporate machine,’ that all they really want to do is make music and the business men keep interfering with their artistic integrity.

Punk has never been as pure as its audience has wanted, or believed, it to be. The Sex Pistols were never just angry young men who wanted to rock; they were from the very beginning a commodity. Javier Santiago-Lucerna writes:

\begin{quote}
\textit{punk was supposed to function outside the corporate culture industries. Still, punk is instructive because it shows very explicitly the role scandals play in how popular music is configured as a desiring object.}\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

Santiago-Lucerna is arguing that punk sold itself as a commodity through the use of ‘scandal.’ This suggests that the clear distinction that punk, and rock, tried to forge between art and commerce is unsustainable and that ultimately this ideological position will collapse in on itself. The punk rant against the capitalist system is ultimately just another mechanism that moves units. However, my mobilisation of this argument does not mean that I think punk sold out. To suggest that there is recourse to a pure pre-capitalist artistic space is politically naïve. Artistic merit and media savvy are not mutually exclusive

\textsuperscript{10} Hirschberg: 157.
categories. This argument is often used – consciously or not – antithetically to feminism. Too often, women performers have been more easily and readily presented as talentless mouthpieces of the pop machine. This argument has been used like a weapon to deny women’s talent and to limit their success and influence. There are now more women in the music industry with success and power. They have managed to challenge – in many instances successfully – the limitations forced on them. Yet the female punk musician’s awkward position in the punk world suggests that this is still a site of contestation.

Punk has provided a crucial site within rock music for female musicians to defy both public perceptions and the music industry’s sexist understandings of the proper female performance of the popular music artist and fan. Punk’s original manifestation in the late 1970s provided an alternative to the dominant career mould established for women musicians: that of the pop chanteuse. The Slits and The Runaways demonstrated that women could do more than merely sing, or sing and gently strum within the parameters of the folk genre. Women could now play a band full of instruments. Punk allowed women to perform a model of anger on stage that was defiantly aggressive, loud, and confronting in its unfamiliarity. Punk also helped generate a new articulation of female fandom that extended past the notions of the teenybopper and the groupie. In spite of these promising beginnings, the ‘boys’ continued to be much more successful than the ‘girls,’ as indicated by record sales, and as further signified by their cultural longevity. During the 1970s in the United Kingdom, The Sex Pistols had seven top ten hits, while Siouxie and the Banshees had one, and The Slits peeked at number sixty. The more successful punk bands to incorporate women conformed to the standard model of female vocalist and male

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instrumentalist – Siouxsie and the Banshees and the more new wave Blondie. Gitanoa Garofalo and Jessica Rosenberg argue that:

In the late 1970s, punk initially had been very profeminist (the ideals of feminism fit in with punk’s do-it-yourself [DIY] ethic of self-empowerment and independence from authority), but as it became commercialized around 1977, its ideals became assimilated into the mainstream patriarchal belief systems.12 The modality of the music industry in 1977 meant that The Slits, Poly Styrene and The Runaways would never experience the critical and commercial successes of their male counterparts. By 1991 the cultural landscape had altered in significant ways and the Riot Grrrl movement was possible.

The term ‘Riot Grrrl’ is inclusive of both a musical genre and a grouping of young feminist activists. Bands that have been labelled part of Riot Grrrl include Bikini Kill, Huggy Bear, Bratmobile and Heavens to Betsy. Hole, like L7 and Babes in Toyland were jokingly called ‘foxcore’ by Sonic Youth’s Thurston Moore in the late 1980s.13 The ‘foxcore’ movement was affirmed as a precursor to the Riot Grrrls. There is, however, slippage between these terms. The journalistic narrative of Riot Grrrl continually folds Hole through the mixture. Rolling Stone, in their Women in Rock special issue, acknowledge Love as ‘the bankable star’ to emerge from Riot Grrrl; she was: “A woman who could dress the part, articulate the ethos, and play the game well enough to totally transcend the genre.”14 The bands of Riot Grrrl are the most visible and commercial manifestation of the movement. Their impact on the music industry was strong enough to have them labelled a ‘genre.’ Hole is the band with highest commercial profile derived from either foxcore or Riot Grrrl. Consequently Hole acts as an entrance point for fledgling Riot Grrrls. Jessica Farris describes how she got

involved in Riot Grrrl: “My best friend’s sister was into Hole and then she got into Bikini Kill. I found out about Riot Grrrl through a zine type of thing.”¹⁵ To be a Riot Grrrl does not necessarily involve being in a high-profile band, but it does involve being part of an active fan community. Thus the bands of Riot Grrrl are very important to the movement as a whole. Ednie Kaeg Garrison describes Riot Grrrl as “a recent young feminist (sub)cultural movement that combines feminist consciousness and punk aesthetics, politics, and style.”¹⁶ Most Riot Grrrls are white teenage girls who define themselves as Riot Grrrls through their involvement in community activities, which include going to concerts and conferences, reading and producing zines and participating in Internet-based communities.

Riot Grrrl originated from Seattle and Olympia, Washington D.C. and challenged the role of women, and in particular ‘girlhood,’ within rock. Savage writes that, within rock discourse, “The excitement of young women was devalued in favor of male preoccupations like ‘technique,’ ‘artistry,’ and ‘authenticity’ – a division which still persists today.”¹⁷ Within Rock ‘n’ Roll, the primary role available to girls was that of the fan, but girl fans were perceived as undignified, they tended to emote as opposed to evaluate. Riot Grrrl attacked this construction of girlhood on two counts: it encouraged the formation of all-girl punk rock bands and it valued the creativity of its girl fanbase. This is evidenced by the importance placed on the production and consumption of zines to Riot Grrrl, (an activity which was also integral to the early punk scene). Punk provided the Riot Grrrls with a ready-made template that compels a fusion between feminism and popular culture. The close affiliation forged between punk and Riot Grrrl is not surprising, considering the

¹⁵ Cited in, Garofalo and Rosenberg: 817. This article contains excerpts from interviews with a selection of ten Riot Grrrls.
aspirations of the two movements. Punk’s early inclusion of women provided the Grrrls with strong role models. Donna Gaines writes: “In part due to punk’s do-it-yourself philosophy, women in the ‘70s began to express their sexual identities and preferences without outside interference.”\(^{18}\) These women may not have received Abba’s financial bounty in the late seventies, but they left enough of a cultural trace to be continually mentioned as important influences by later generations of female musicians. The do-it-yourself ideology of punk was very encouraging to young women without much prior rock and roll experience. Mavis Bayton in her article ‘How Women Become Musicians’ tallies many of the problems faced by young female musicians.\(^{19}\) Primarily, young women lack a peer group that encourages and supports the playing of rock music. Riot Grrrl emphasises ‘playing’ regardless of the level of mastery over an instrument. This means that young women without much musical experience form bands. Riot Grrrl encourages young women to establish supportive communities that foster creative output generated by issues they find relevant.

A mechanism through which to distinguish third wave feminism from the second wave is its active and reflexive inclusion of difference, particularly in regard to race, sexuality and class. In some ways, the Riot Grrrl movement confounds this easy distinction, for even though it is inclusive of sexualities that do not conform to the heterosexual matrix it is not very inclusive of racial or class difference. Rosenberg and Garofalo provide a reason for the whiteness of Riot Grrrl:

Most of the problem lies in the fact that Riot Grrrl travels primarily through punk rock, a very white underground, zines, and word of mouth, which tend to go from white girl to white girls because of racial segregation.\textsuperscript{20}

They do not offer an explanation for why Riot Grrrl is primarily the domain of the middle and upper class, or how they have defined this distinction. Considering the way class has always punctuated the narrative of punk, this appears to be a looming lacuna in their argument, but this absence is not as contingent as it first seems. Gender acts to mark the difference of Riot Grrrl; consequently class no longer needs to function in the same manner it does for male manifestations of punk. Early English punk is associated with the working class because of its anti-corporate stance, and its angry aesthetic. Savage explains the frustration of (English) punk as the result of “an impossible double-bind: [they were] intelligent in a working-class culture which did not value intelligence, yet unable to leave that culture because of lack of opportunity.”\textsuperscript{21} Not all of the early punk performers were from working class backgrounds, but those who were not still cultivated and projected “an air of glaring, proletarian menace.”\textsuperscript{22} Punk framed itself as a generational war: it was the overfed baby boomers against the recession-reared proto-Xers. Thus the signifier of ‘working class’ was crucial in establishing punk’s break with the rock music of the time and, more generally, with ‘hippy’ culture. Riot Grrrl does not require ‘class’ to perform in the same way.

To mark their difference from their musical contemporaries, to define a new genre, the early punks used signifiers of working classness – Johnny Rotten’s crumbling teeth, dirty jeans, ripped t-shirts and the idiom used in lyrics and interviews. Bourdieu argues that within any field of cultural production, there exists struggle to define limits. Within any

\textsuperscript{20} Garofalo and Rosenberg: 811.
\textsuperscript{22} Savage, \textit{England's Dreaming}: 46.
field there are agents that participate in ‘border disputes,’ and to do so they must possess a
certain amount of ‘cultural capital.’

Gender, for the Riot Grrrls, performs many of the
same functions that class did for punks. The female bodies that form the bands of Riot Grrrl
establish difference from other ‘grunge’ punk bands. Riot Grrrl challenges the boundaries
of punk to such an extent that it is labelled a new genre. To generate this kind of
recognition from the music press Riot Grrrls must possess a form of cultural capital.

Bourdieu, in his discussion of how change is enacted in a field states:

  each of the agents commits the force (the capital) that he [sic] has acquired through
  previous struggles to strategies that depend for their general direction on his position in the
  power struggle, that is, on his specific capital.

It is feminist cultural capital that enables Riot Grrrl to emerge as a genre. This is animated
by a literacy in punk, and other popular cultural discourses, for they provided the
knowledge and skills necessary to manipulate the punk-genre into a new mould. In
labelling Riot Grrrl as part of the third wave, we ignore the ways in which Riot Grrrls
extends second wave knowledges and mechanisms.

Due to the political, structural and social changes instigated by second wave feminism, Riot
Grrrl is made possible. The second wave examined institutional ways in which women in
the workforce were kept in low-paid and low-prestige positions. We see the application of
these second wave knowledges in the Riot Grrrl’s understanding of the position of women
in the music industry. In their Riot Grrrl ‘manifesto,’ Bikini Kill insists that Grrrls must
“take over the means of production in order to create our own moanings.” There is a
rejection of corporate production and distribution in favour of self-publishing and
independent record companies. They insist this is the only way in which their angry female

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24 Bourdieu: 143.
25 Garofalo and Rosenberg: 812.
voice will be effectively disseminated because of a misogynist or ‘un-grrrl friendly’
industry. In writings on Riot Grrrl, what has distinguished it as a third – as opposed to a
second – wave manifestation is the way it uses popular culture and technology. Ednie Kaeh
Garrison states:

I do not assume that activists in the Second Wave didn’t also use grassroots forms of
communications technologies, but, rather, argue here that the Third Wave has a different
relationship with these technologies.

Third wave feminism is distinguished from the second wave by a greater literacy in popular
culture and technology: this enables both a critical approach and a willingness to work
within systems critiqued for being patriarchal. Second wave feminism provided the Riot
Grrrls with an interpretative framework with which to understand the music industry but
popular cultural literacies, in particular a punk literacy, supplied the mechanisms through
which to voice their dissent. It is crucial to remember that third wave feminism, rather than
being a radical break with second wave, is in fact an extension. The feminisms that predate
the third wave provide the cultural capital that propels this new feminist manifestation.

Third wave feminism, and more particularly Riot Grrrl, has been likened to guerilla
warfare. If that is the case, then the terrain on which we fight is still patriarchal but the
weapons with which we fight come from a new power, and that is feminism. Catharine
Lumby, in her discussion about the ‘conflict’ between the second and third waves of
feminism, argues that many of the second wave feminists:

are slow to acknowledge the consequences of the power they’ve acquired. They’re unable,
or unwilling, to see feminism itself as a system, with institutionalised rhetorics, priorities,
and techniques of disciplining the ranks.

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26 For an overview of the way various Riot Grrrls have created new networks to distribute their cultural
products see: J Smith, 1997. 'Doin' It for the Ladies-Youth Feminism: Cultural Productions/Cultural
Activism,’ in Third Wave Agenda, eds. L Heywood & J Drake. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press:
226-238.
27 Garrison: fulltext.
28 C Driscoll, 1999. 'Girl Culture, Revenge and Global Capitalism: Cybergirls, Riot Grrrls, Spice Girls,'
In Australia, the US and the UK, feminism can no longer be labelled a minority discourse. It would appear that the second wave refuses to acknowledge the power it has gained while the third wave takes it for granted as a part of its arsenal. Crucially, it is a feminist consciousness that propels Riot Grrrl, not a class consciousness.

Class does not exist a priori of class consciousness. E. P. Thompson argues in his influential book *The Making of the English Working Class* that it is “in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness.”\(^{30}\) Class functions quite differently for Riot Grrrls than it does for the punk movement more generally. The thread of gender dominates Riot Grrrl to such an extent that the more subtle interplays of class can barely be discerned. When evaluating class, it is often forgotten that ‘class’ is a narrative used to explain the material conditions of the contemporary world, as opposed to an absolute and distinct palpable thing. Significantly, it is through ‘consciousness’ that ‘class’ is activated as an explanatory framework. John E. Toews, in his introduction to *The Communist Manifesto*, argues that Marx, when he first theorised our modern understanding of class “indicated that this class was still more of a historical construct that an identifiable reality.”\(^{31}\) Marx used the notion of ‘class,’ and the economically exploitative relationship and dissolution between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, to predict the coming revolution. The proletariat were to be the harbingers of the revolution because they were the most alienated from the products of their labour. However his brilliantly constructed plan for the revolution was one that was forced over the historical reality:

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In the *Manifesto*, there is evidence of the difficulty Marx experienced in adapting his theoretical identification of the proletariat as the agent of universal human revolution to the empirical evidence he possessed about the actual wage-earning classes in the new industrial enterprises.\(^{32}\)

The working class of the industrial revolution were not the superseded male artisans reduced to machine operators of Marx’s imagination, but rather children and women. This was a tension that Marx would reconcile in his later work. What is significant here is the way in which it was acknowledged from the beginning that class is a mechanism used to make sense of the difference in the material conditions of a population.

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**Seen your repulsion and it looks real good on you**
**I don’t want to live what you had … you have put me through**
**I wanted that shirt and I, I wanted those pants**

Hole\(^{33}\)

Those who write about Riot Grrrl primarily focus on the feminist and gendered ramifications of the movement, however they, like myself, feel some need to at least nod to the ‘class question.’ This is usually but a cursory nod, in which there is a quick description of the Riot Grrrls as middle and occasionally inclusive of upper class.\(^{34}\) This is an easy rendering of class, which glosses over the complicated ways cultural capital and cultural literacies are circulating through Riot Grrrl. Riot Grrrls clearly possess a form of cultural capital, not usually associated with the working class. Not only do the Grrrls have the cultural capital bequeathed to them by feminism, but they also demonstrate fluency in the language of technology. They use computers to partake in Internet communities and

\(^{32}\) Marx: 42.
\(^{33}\) ‘Teenage Whore,’ Track No: 1.
\(^{34}\) See Garofalo and Rosenberg: 811.

Klein: 224.
produce zines. This level of literacy with computers is common for people from a relatively high socioeconomic background. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

    Households with incomes of $50,000 or more were twice as likely to have access to a home computer and three times as likely to have Internet access at home, compared to those of households with incomes of less than $50,000.35

This is comparable to the situation in the USA.36 Additionally, Riot Grrrls are known for forming electric bands, which require expensive instruments and equipment. These factors have meant that theorists have been quick to claim that Riot Grrrl is not a working class formation but a middle and upper class one. Admittedly, there are connections between possession of technology and associated literacies and class but they are not as undeviating as assumed. In a post-industrial society, class can no longer be flawlessly predicted from income level. One can be a working class Riot Grrrl, that is from a low socio-economic background. Riot Grrrl is a category not completely closed to working class girls because it is not completely reliant on material conditions. As Ellen wrote to the online zine RiotGrrl:

    The web is not the universe. riot grrrl is still very much alive, not in your sorority girl circles, but in real life, grass roots, punk communities [sic]. alive in people who don't own computers or have email addresses.37

Cultural capital, especially in relation to popular culture is not necessarily easily reducible to class. It says nothing to dismissively categorise Riot Grrrl as a middle class manifestation. All it indicates is that ‘class’ is too big a theoretical category to ignore, while failing to establish how class is actually functioning. A feminist consciousness, as opposed to a class consciousness, is crucial to the politics of Riot Grrrl. Consequently, not all Riot Grrrls are middle class, but it is partly a middle class sensibility that underpins the Riot Grrrl accusation that Courtney Love and Hole are sell-outs.

These lyrics from “Rock Star” – the final track on Hole’s second album – declare Hole’s graduation from the Riot Grrrl school of musicology. David Frick, in an otherwise glowing review of Live Through This for Rolling Stone, saved his one criticism of the album for this track:

‘Rock Star,’ a sharp kick in the eye of the indie rock flock (in particular, the Olympia, Wash. chapter of Riot Grrrl USA) seems an unfitting sign off, a cheap shot not up to the albums greater kicks … and besides, its too easy to shoot pigeons from a perch built with David Geffen’s money."

“Rock Star” is a bitchy song about the Riot Grrrl movement with which Hole and Pretty on the Inside are associated. This song rejects the orthodoxy that permeates the seemingly

anarchist Riot Grrrl scene. It is also Hole’s response to the animosity that was beginning to be directed at them by various Riot Grrrls. The Grrrls were accusing Hole of ‘selling-out.’ This is the same accusation that is embedded in the above Rolling Stone quote which calls attention to the corporate money that produced Hole’s new album. An accusation that acts to ameliorate the corporate money and sponsorship that underwrites the magazine itself. This section of the chapter traces the foundations of the accusation of ‘sell-out.’ Why did the Riot Grrrls feel so betrayed?

The release of Live Through This saw the animosity between Riot Grrrl and Love begin to bloom. Many individual Riot Grrrls continue to claim Hole and Courtney Love as both influential, and a favourite, however Love is also used to define what Riot Grrrl is not. For instance ‘Grrrl love, not Courtney Love’ was the official slogan of a 1996 Riot Grrrl convention. When Hole first began incorporating tracks from Live Through This into their live shows, some Riot Grrrls were less than impressed. Live Through This was not as ‘raw’ musically as Pretty on the Inside. There was still the recognisable Courtney-yell but this was infused with more of a pop sensibility, Hole were beginning to add a bit of ‘sugar’ to their punk mix. Tracks like “Doll Parts” and “Miss World” were melodic enough to be played on commercial radio. This softer sound resulted in Hole being accused of selling-out by some Riot Grrrls. Love describes a concert in Atlanta where:

we’d go into one of our pop songs, they’d start chanting: ‘Don’t do it! Sellout!’ … Girls were throwing Riot Grrrl zines at me and stuff. I was like ‘Uh, I’m really glad you’re here, girls, but check it out: I can write a bridge now.’

39 Fricke: 84.
41 Track No: 6.
42 Track No: 2.
43 Brite: 136-137.
To the Riot Grrrls, who embraced a resolute commitment to stay ‘underground,’ producing a song that had the potential to be a commercial success was to compromise your artistic integrity. Musically, Hole were growing, consequently they were no longer prepared to embrace a musical ethos that eschewed mastery and skill. Courtney Love had always admitted that when it came to punk she “was New Wave more than hard-core.”44 Love’s lack of ‘P.C.’ – Punk Correctness – is made even more evident when she claims Fleetwood Mac as an important musical influence.45 Love had always been fascinated by the glamorous mythology that encircled rock stars not just the artistic integrity of their music. Melissa Klein, in her article ‘Duality and Definition’, highlights an important conundrum:

Another paradox of punk feminism is that it exists within what has traditionally been youth culture, yet no one stays young forever. So what do we do now? How do we grow up?46 Pretty on the Inside was a strong debut album, but Live Through This, their ‘sophomore album,’ was the product of a much more proficient and tighter band. The Riot Grrrls, as a youth movement, refused to attend Hole’s graduation party. They lacked a modality for celebrating a band’s ascension from small-scale indie-success to commercial.

The trace left by second wave feminism on Riot Grrrl adds a ‘bitch-potency’ to their punk accusation of selling-out. The mix of punk and feminism that created Riot Grrrl has resulted in a strong strain of separatism, that acts not only to exclude and censure men but can also be mobilised against other female musicians. This separatism is not characteristic of third wave feminism. Third wave feminism demonstrates an ability to, and acceptance of, working within ‘patriarchal’ systems. For instance the third wave ‘frock politics’ explored in the next section of this chapter, does not simply slip into a second wave derision of the fashion industry and its resultant consumerism as being bad for women. In

44 Hirschberg: 155.
45 Hirschberg: 155.
accordance with the second wave, Riot Grrrl’s operations are usually grass-roots, localised and aim to form new networks that help women produce and distribute information and cultural products.\textsuperscript{47} There are clear correlations between Riot Grrrl and the ‘women’s music’ genre that originated in the seventies and resulted in the creation of the record label Olivia. Olivia was devoted to not only producing and distributing female performers, but also training women for a variety of jobs in the record industry. By the eighties ‘women’s music’ labels were finding that their rosters were dwindling, partly due to a lack of resources, but more significantly because of the desire of female artists to avoid marginalisation. A significant number of new female musicians were “Recording for (primarily independent) labels outside the women’s music community.”\textsuperscript{48} By mimicking the second wave ethos of ‘women’s music’ Riot Grrrl remained primarily a North East American phenomena, with the occasional international off-shoot such as Huggy Bear, and the odd West Coast chapter.\textsuperscript{49} What both Riot Grrrl and ‘women’s music’ lacked was the commercial means of distribution that would allow a broader audience. Riot Grrrls remained committed to releasing their work through small, independent-labels. They felt that this was the only way they could maintain control over their image and their art. This has resulted in a very uneasy relationship with the media. In late 1992 the Riot Grrrls instituted a ‘media blackout’ because they felt the major press were misrepresenting the movement.\textsuperscript{50} The Riot Grrrls were enacting a refusal to advertise their product. While fostering the creation of new bands, zines, films, conferences, comics, Riot Grrrl has ultimately acted to constrain some of the potentialities of the movement by refusing to deal with media outlets not run by fellow Riot Grrrls. When Love called the Riot Grrrls a “little

\textsuperscript{46} Klein: 223.
\textsuperscript{47} For a discussion of the various cultural products by Riot Grrrls see Smith: 226-238.
pack of oestrogen terrorists well, oestrogen lemmings,”51 she was reacting to their refusal to accept her and other rock women’s success and imbrication within the corporate rock industry and its media affiliates.

Riot Grrrls’ refusal of the post-Live Through This Love is not just a rejection of commercialism. To merely explain it away as this is to ignore a problem endemic to ‘Women in Rock’ and also to feminism itself. The Riot Grrrls had no way to incorporate the musical growth of Love because they lacked a narrative which incorporated aging. Where is the modality for the aging generation-X woman? This lack should not be explained away as just another example of our society’s idealisation of youth and beauty. For this approach exclusively focuses our attention on the female body and the way it functions as sexual object. What this argument masks is the way feminism (and women more generally) continually misplace their own history. Faludi’s Backlash provides a strong argument for the public telling of feminist histories.52 The Riot Grrrls’ rejection of the more mature Love once again halts communication occurring between the generations, and feminist histories being transmitted amongst women. Gillian G. Gaar, in her history of ‘Women in Rock,’ demonstrates that this lack of female history, or story telling is pervasive. She quotes Charlotte Caffey of the Go-Gos, the first all-female band to have a number one album, pondering the ferocity of the media’s interest in their success, “I think it’s just that there’s not a lot of female bands. Once there’s more, people won’t make such a big deal out of it.”53 As Gaar explains what this interpretation fails to consider is that “Heart’s Ann Wilson had made a similar statement herself in an interview – thirteen years

previously.” Gaar establishes that there have been regular media cycles, which highlight the new ‘trend’ of an influx of women musical performers. Each time it has been suggested that this trend will not seem so strange when the number of women in the industry increases. The history of women in rock is repeatedly made new again. This lack of communication between gener(ation)s of women is very problematic to feminist organisation. For example, Gaar suggests that female rock musicians belatedly understand their oppression within a feminist context. Continually young female musicians in their twenties (try to) refuse to be categorised by the label ‘woman.’ They insist that their gender is irrelevant to their art. Only to realise later in their career how crucial it was to the opportunities made available to them by the rock industry. Women throughout the history of rock have thought that they would be the exception to change the status quo. As the first chapter demonstrated this insight into the way the generation gap functions between women can also be applied to the feminist movement more generally. The feminist ‘bitch-fight’ depicted in the media is a hegemonic masking device that perpetuates a generational schism once again denying feminism the power inherent in a historical narrative.

There is an awareness amongst women in rock of the way in which the media searches out and focuses on the conflict amongst female musicians at the exclusion of other issues.

Louise Post, from Veruca Salt, is frustrated by the way journalists seem to look for rivalry amongst women:

I have a definitive answer to the ‘do the press try to pit women against each other’ question. That would be ‘Yes’ … Everyone wants a cat-fight and I’m just not going to play that game. I’m determined.

53 Gaar: 274.
54 Gaar: 274.
Women need to be more tolerant of each another [sic]. Post’s response expresses a common feminist desire to paper over conflict between women in the public arena, and to instead focus on community building. An understanding of the way in which women musicians’ public image is often in the hands of male journalists underwrites Post’s desire for the women of rock to keep their differences to themselves. Perhaps this is best expressed by Liz Phair when she states:

Reading badly put together interviews drives me crazy. Drives me utterly crazy. It’s such a drag to be manipulated into this personality that comes across on the page. It’s retarded: its guy-retarded … That pisses me off, I really hate when my personality’s so tightly boxed. Rock journalists look for and promote public female fights in order to ridicule and dismiss the opinions of the women involved. Post’s proffered solution is an echo of the second wave’s insistence that feminists should not ‘air their dirty laundry in public.’ However, feminism requires a more comprehensive response to women’s anger and competitive spirit than to simply wish it away.

The media-driven circulation of ‘generational’ conflict is dangerous to feminism, but this does not mean that Riot Grrrls should ‘shut up’ and resume being ‘nice girls.’ To use an often repeated maxim Riot Grrrl was all about putting the ‘grrr’ back in girl’: it celebrated women being loud and angry. Though I think we should be weary of a media fanned conflict between feminist generations, there is an aspect of the Riot Grrrls’ anger that requires celebration. There is room for public fighting about preferred music style and form of production amongst female musicians. Women should be allowed to be aggressive and competitive. Courtney Love in her interview for Rolling Stone’s ‘Women of Rock’ issue was asked:

Do you feel competitive with other women artists?’ [Her answer] Yeah totally. There’s something wrong with that? Hello? Were you supposed to deny being competitive? … I did

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55 Raphael: 95.
56 Raphael: 229.
an interview with Stevie Nicks and I asked her, ‘Did you ever have any rivals?’ She said no, and I was like, ‘Boy, you missed a fun thing.’57

In Love’s rejoinder, there is an attempt to rewrite the way in which anger, and competition amongst women, is interpreted by the media. On the surface Riot Grrrls’ ‘fascistic’ policing of politically acceptable female musical artists aids the rock journalists desire to depict a ‘bitch-fight.’58 While I agree that there is a simultaneous need for acceptance of mistakes and gentle support, competition and conflict are also necessary aspects of the creative process. Strong, successful and confident women should not be derided for expressing difference in the public arena. Perhaps it is not just men, but women too, who have a problem with this particular face of femininity.

**Celebrity Skin**

*Let’s start a fire
Let’s have a riot! Yeah it’s awful
It was punk
Yeah, it was perfect now it’s awful*

*59 A friend went to a party and told Jennifer, [Finch of L7] ‘Courtney was wearing Chanel and she had a glass of champagne in her hand, but her makeup was exactly the same.’ It wasn’t quite right. I had this publicist who was obsessed with Madonna and obsessed with me and she decided to make me into a star. I just couldn’t pull it off. I’d get zits.*60

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57 Sirota: 166.
60 Hirschberg: 155. This incident took place just after the film Straight to Hell starring Courtney Love was released. 1997. Dir. by A Cox. Writ. by A Cox and D Rude. Commies from Mars Corporation, [motion picture].
By late 1996, with the release of *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, Love had corrected her previously flawed performance of ascendant movie star; there were no zits this time around.61 Love’s break with punk, and punk femininity, was further exacerbated by *Celebrity Skin*, Hole’s third album. *Celebrity Skin* sounds like ‘hard candy,’ it is a heavily crafted album; the East-coast rough punk sound is replaced with a smooth West-coast rock sensibility. In the four years between the two albums Love had hired Jody Foster’s publicist, had more rhinoplasty, swapped her kinderwhore look for Versace and now used a lipbrush. She had enacted a very public refusal to be contained by her infamy as the punk pin-up Grrrl. Instead she courted the approval of what she termed the ‘grown-ups.’ Love was leaving her riotous twenties behind, but how does a female rocker grow up, without being incoherent and faded like Deborah Harry, or continuing to wear the same eye make-up for thirty years in the style of Chrissie Hinde? Kurt Cobain signed off his suicide note

with the reminder that “it’s better to burn out than to fade away.”62 To which Love later responded “It’s better to rise than fade away …”63 The question is: how?

Feminism has a tendency to poorly theorise the groomed and/or pretty woman. Gloria Steinem has been dismissed as a ‘feminist pussycat’; her early job as a playboy bunny providing an easy dismissal.64 It is argued that instead of embodying an example of feminist resistance, she demonstrates a compliance to the ‘panoptical male connoisseur’ whose gaze controls her every action.65 There is something incredibly wrong with this perspective. It demeans and dismisses a whole range of female experience. It presents all women who partake in the beauty industry, be it pleasurably or not, as suckers and it proffers a very narrow definition of correct femininity: one that must exist outside of consumer culture. Sandra Lee Bartky tries to lessen the derision ensconced in her argument that women are docile bodies, with a nod to the ‘initiative’ and ‘ingenuity’ displayed by women in their performance of endless beauty rituals.66 Ultimately, this attempt to soften the misogyny concealed in her argument fails when she asserts that women who rewrite their surface, through the use of fashion and make-up, lack the ‘self determination’ required for an activity to be labelled artistic.67 Bartky denies that there is any possibility for a body actively engaged in regimes of beauty to use those regimes as a site of empowerment: “The provision of a beautiful or sexy body gains a woman attention and some admiration but little real respect and rarely any social power.”68 The implication is that beautiful women

61 ‘Reasons to be Beautiful,’ Track No: 5.
64 Wurtzel: 17.
66 Bartky: 75.
67 Bartky: 72.
68 Bartky: 73.
are essentially a ‘powerless elite.’ Women do use cosmetics and clothes, (as do men) to aid in the construction of specific identities. Admittedly, some of these identities are more empowered than others, but knowledge about clothes and cosmetics does provide women with social power. A well groomed surface has the ability to grant women the discursive power of authority (it grants their voice more legitimacy) and the possibility of social mobility within patriarchal structures. Knowing how to marshal the weaponry of artifice is a form of cultural capital.

Love’s physical transformation demonstrates a disciplined mobilisation of bodily surfaces. She is knowingly altering her appearance so as to provide herself with more economic power. David Marshall argues that:

> Celebrity status also confers on the person a certain discursive power: within society, the celebrity is a voice above others, a voice that is channeled [sic] into the media systems as being legitimately significant.

Love’s physical transformation increased the cultural reach of her celebrity, no longer was she merely relevant to the ‘indie’ crowd, her “recurrent coverage by mass-market women’s magazines” indicates that “suburban women over 35” are also fascinated by her particular style of celebrity. It is stating the obvious to point to the relevancy of beauty and appearance to the successful performance of female celebrity. There is a danger that we will fail to theorise the specific ways embodiment, subjectivity, gender and fame coalesce around particular celebrities. I do not proffer Love as the example of utopic femininity. How can she be when the production of her new ‘surface’ is demanded by the cultural industries in which she works? Women’s imbrication in regimes of beauty requires a

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70 Marshall: X.

careful and complex theorisation. The remainder of this chapter picks through the feminist contradictions packed into Love’s transformation into ‘beautiful garbage.’

The accusations of selling-out that Hole had thrown at them with the release of Live Through This were but a whisper in comparison to the cacophony that heralded Love’s very public make-over. Playboy told us that her “thirst for attention” and her “obsession” with Hollywood left her “old rock friends shaking their heads.” Concluding their picture of her as a mad, loud, mixed-up, manipulative and unruly women made famous by her husband’s death and talent, they wrote of Love that she “turned old friends (and even her late husband, whom she had cremated) into ashes and new pals into springboards.” Love’s open ambition is twisted into a pathology that is communicable to everyone with whom she comes into contact. Interestingly, it is Love’s ‘new look’ that makes her ‘disease’ even more apparent to a sceptical media and an unconvinced public. Natasha Stott Despoja, in her article on Love for The Age, wondered why it was that with vocal feminist women, be they politicians, published feminists, sports or rock stars, as soon as they posed in glamorous clothes their “IQ is presumed to plummet?” Our society insists that only the attractive are worthy of attention, while simultaneously refusing to admit that a beautiful woman can have a feminist voice. It is this tension that plays across Courtney Love’s celebrity skin.

Love’s early incarnations of the grotesque or unruly woman were grounded in her physique. Her loudness, her sexuality, her claiming of feminism were visually confirmed

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72 ‘Celebrity Skin,’ Track No: 1.
74 Karlen: fulltext.
through her ‘ugly power.’ Her bodily performance of unruliness confronted: Love was taking up public space reserved for the traditionally attractive woman. Her marriage to Kurt Cobain, in part, attracted so much vitriol because “Here’s this new rock star—Kurt—and he’s supposed to be married to a model and he’s married to me.” As the ugly duckling, she should know that there is no chance of dating the lead singer, rather her role is to provide headjobs to the roadies. Love, as an early nineties icon, embodies the publicly transgressive woman who acts both as a safety valve and as a site which allows women to think through and negotiate new ways of being. There is an easy feminist appeal in the loud woman who openly parodies and disturbs the beauty myth. In Love’s case this appeal was initially strengthened by her alternative ‘cred.’ Within middle class, university-educated taste cultures, the same taste cultures which breed the majority of published feminists, Love’s music was more admirable than either Madonna’s or the Spice Girls’, because it was ‘independent.’ It had the Marxist trace left by its punk association. Thus, a broad range of feminists, inclusive of the Riot Grrrls, accused Love of selling-out when she began to acquiesce with traditional representations of femininity. Elizabeth Wurtzel expresses a common sense of betrayal when she writes that she ‘is happy to see a talent’ like Love on the cover of Harper’s Bazaar but she would “have liked it a lot better if she’d done it on her own terms, in her own kinderwhore dresses, or even in Vivienne Westwood or Anna Sui – but not, dear God, in Ralph Lauren!” Love, with her choice of hair, of clothing, make-up, physique and plastic surgeon was no longer unproblematically using her body to make feminist meanings, she was no longer grotesque.

75 Despoja: fulltext.
76 ‘Pretty on the Inside,’ Track: 10.
77 Hirschberg: 157.
79 See Rowe.
80 Wurtzel: 213.
Feminist reactions to Love’s make-over focused on the gender ramifications of Love’s transformation, at the expense of the implications to class and race. Love’s ‘new look’ is not merely a response to hegemonic femininity, separated out from her class and her whiteness; these three strands weave through one another. Susan Bordo, in her much published article on the slender body, argues that toned and muscled bodies make meanings about class. Until recently, muscles signified the working body, thus muscles were primarily linked in the popular imaginary with working class, black, criminal and male bodies. This association was drastically re-written in the 1980s (a project continued in the 1990s). The gym-toned body manifested the will to strive and achieve. It became a surface that communicated inner-control and an ability to participate successfully in a culture steeped in the ideology of meritocracy. The film *Flashdance* provides an example of this ideology in operation. Through hard work, the working class body of Alex (Jennifer Beal) is transformed into a body that can move into the upper-middle class world of, both the ballet and her lover (the owner of the company where she works). Bordo writes that, “To the degree that the question of class still operates in all this, it related to the category of social mobility (or lack of it) rather that class location.” Love’s ability to control her body

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81 Celebrity Skin,’ Track No: 1.
84 This example is drawn from Bordo: 95.
85 Bordo: 95.
provides her with middle class respectability. It confirms her mastery over dangerous impulses, in particular her tendency for drug abuse. This ability is crucial if she is to be employed as a film actress. The movie company producing *Larry Flynt* refused to pay the insurance premiums demanded due to her drug history. Instead this cost had to be covered by the producer Oliver Stone, the director Milos Foreman, her co-star Woody Harrelson and Love herself.\footnote{Brite: 188. She confirms that they each ‘contributed $100, 000 apiece for a separate ‘high-risk’ insurance policy.’} To be employed in Hollywood, Love must be pretty, groomed, toned and drug free.

For the publicity stills that accompanied *Larry Flynt*, and later *Celebrity Skin*, it was not only the muscles under Love’s skin that had changed but also the colour of the skin itself. The Love, of both *Pretty on the Inside* and *Live Through This*, presented a sullied whiteness to the world. Her face was powdered to an ethereal white, then this was slashed
with bleeding make up, and finally a mess of over-bleached hair framed it. Marshall writes: "The pallor of the rock star recalls the consumptive starving artist or the genius whose body has been ravaged by excess and drugs." Love’s female body meant that when the stylus of rock mythology tried to impress the above stereotype on her flesh the final result was different to the male version. The sexed specificity of her corporeality meant she conveyed a particularly feminine version of sullied-purity. This is captured by the term she used to describe her look, ‘kinderwhore.’ Traditionally the white faced, blonde woman has had angelic connotations. Richard Dyer, in his exploration of the beatific white woman, argues that:

The white woman as angel was in these contexts both the symbol of white virtuousness and the last word in the claim that what made whites special as a race was their non-physical, spiritual, indeed ethereal qualities.

Love played with the signifiers of this form of femininity, she was lit so as to make her whiteness glow. Ultimately what Love conveyed however was a corrupted whiteness. Instead of embodying purity, the audience knew her whiteness was a result of a culture of late nights and excess. The made-over Love is painted a completely different shade of white. The sun, the solarium or the beautician’s brush has made sure she is evenly tanned. No longer do Love’s tattered hemlines reveal bruised, white legs of such a vivid hue that they seem plump, but taut and tanned pins. An all-year tan is a contemporary indicator of wealth and health. Love’s whiteness is no longer shockingly transgressive; instead it is politely respectable.

This newfound respectability seems to empty Love of political potency, all her transgressive ability seems suppressed behind a plastic smile. Spin, in an interview

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advertised with the coverline ‘Bitch, Sellout, Murderer,’ asked Love to justify modelling for a Versace campaign, subtext ‘selling-out to the corporate machine,’ she replied:

I fucking wanted to do them. They seduced me plain and simple … and I love their clothes, and I love the weirdness and coolness of their clothes. I'm sorry – I'm not really sorry.89 Love rebels against being a role model, while at the same time claiming to take pleasure in the artifice of fashion. Her response is in many ways typical of the third wave.90 Bartky’s article is characteristic of a second wave perspective on fashion, it concentrates on the way in which women present themselves for the male gaze. This perspective simply updates Laura Mulvey’s use of psychoanalysis to illustrate why women are sexual objects in film, with the application of Foucault to demonstrate how the fashion industry turns women into self-policing docile bodies.91 This particular rendering of Foucauldian feminism has been critiqued through an examination of the way in which women use fashion as a site of pleasure and empowerment. One of the ways in which this has been done is through a different reading of Foucault which relies more on his notion of ‘resistance.’ Additionally, the dismissal of fashion as frivolous and mindless is a typical misogynist interpretation of spaces and pastimes associated with the feminine. Through both queer theory and third wave feminism there has been a reclaiming of the resistive potential in the performative nature of fashion.

A queer lens allows Love’s make-over to be read as an example of a woman playing with appearance in such a way as to make the masquerade of femininity clearly apparent. However, in Love’s case, this argument is undermined because the face she now presents is more compliant than transgressive. It is harder to argue for the pleasure involved in the

90 See Reed: 124. Reed writes, ‘For third wave feminists, there is no one right way to be: no role, no model.’
performative, when a successful performance requires surgical knives, pain and time set-aside for recovery. How can submitting to plastic surgery not involve being compliant to hegemonic notions of femininity? To begin answering this question I first examine how Love herself explains her submission to the plastic surgeon’s knife. She argues that in order to sell a large amount of records she needed to be pretty.\(^92\) She clearly places plastic surgery within the realm of commercial necessity. Many stars who undergo surgery explain it as something they did for themselves, to make themselves feel better, or they deny all accusations of ‘tweaking’ by cosmetic surgeons. Love links the need for surgery to the requirements of the workforce. Kathryn Pauly Morgan argues that a woman may submit herself to the knife because:

> her access to other forms of power and empowerment are or appear to be so limited that cosmetic surgery is the primary domain in which she can experience some semblance of self-determination.\(^93\)

Morgan’s article explains women’s use of cosmetic surgery as being underpinned by the desire for a ‘privileged heterosexual affiliation’ that is the desire for a successful mate.\(^94\) While this is a factor for a large amount of women, this argument conceals the importance that beauty and attractiveness have on the job market. It supports the very un-feminist assumption that women are defined through their association with men, as opposed to what they do or achieve. Most women work, consequently their status is no longer as clearly reliant on that of their spouse. The workplace is becoming increasingly influential in forming acceptable femininities.

Embedded in the criticisms of Love’s make-over is the demand that beauty be natural. Our contemporary assumptions about natural beauty are born from a blend of Christianity and

\(^92\) Raphael: 13.

Classical Greek suppositions. Christianity idealised inner beauty, while the Cartesian dualism bequeathed by Greek philosophy meant this ‘inner’ beauty was judged and demonstrated by the outer surface of women’s bodies. The white woman angel’s connection to God was made apparent by her ‘natural’ beauty. Simultaneously women’s confinement to the private sphere meant there were few other avenues for them to garner prestige or value. Men were valued for their achievements in the public sphere. Love berates people who attack her for having had surgery because:

One of the reasons that we tend to accuse people of plastic surgery - because it is an accusation - is because if you do, you're altering your appearance. You're lying … You're not advertising correctly.

Love is accused of advertising faulty goods. She is a crumbling house dressed up with a fresh lick of paint. The artifice of her appearance does not reflect her natural or inner beauty.

Crucially, this authenticity discourse denies a space for the ambitious woman. Love has always declared her blonde ambition. Her ambition was too mammoth to be confined to a genre, as she fought to be both a rock and a movie star. Her ambition both confronts and revolts. In the dreadful documentary Kurt and Courtney, Nick Broomfield (the documentary maker) interviews Love’s biological father (Hank Harrison) and a past lover (Rozz Rezabek-Wright). What astounds in both these interviews is the vitriol directed towards Love and her celebrity status: How dare she be ‘all she wants to be’? They are affronted by the fact that Love planned to become famous and incredibly angry that she had the gall to achieve this goal. It would appear that women are only allowed success if it is bequeathed to them by a higher power, like a husband. It is permissible that women be

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94 Morgan: 332.
95 Beauty is never natural. Beauty consists of a set of culturally agreed upon physical characteristics.
96 Weiss.

135
discovered due to the glow of their natural beauty or more generally granted a rise in status
due to their affiliation with a more powerful male. But the undeserving ‘bush pig’ must
never achieve her own ascendancy. The danger in feminists simply dismissing the make-
over, or more generally women’s everyday imbrication in regimes of beauty, as a
destructive patriarchal mechanism is that it denies women access to important avenues of
power. In many ways it simply mimics patriarchy’s refusal of ambitious women.

Oh, and I will make myself so beautiful
Oh, and everything I am
Miles and miles of perfect skin
I swear I do, I fit right in

Hole98

The title track of *Pretty on the Inside* hears Love alternate between screaming ‘my pretty
power’ and ‘my ugly power.’ Likewise this chapter has explored Love’s mobilisation of
embodied celebrity both pre- and post- make-over. The book *Fame Games* suggests that
celebrities perform a specific societal function: they help us “deal with the gap between the
social and the private, between stability and change.”99 Furthermore, the authors argue that
celebrity is crucial to the “process of disseminating interrogating and constructing
identities.”100 Love’s manifestation of celebrity has a particular resonance for feminism. In
the contemporary media-rich environment celebrities can and do embody feminist identities
in a way that is relevant for large audiences.101 Part of Love’s attraction is that the
feminism she presents is so ideologically discordant. Readers can extract the meanings that

97 Kurt and Courtney.
98 Track No: 5
100 Turner, Bonner, and Marshall: 16.
101 See T Brabazon and A Evans, 1998. 'I'll Never be Your Woman: The Spice Girls and New Flavours of
are relevant for them and discount those that are not. As discussed in “I’d Rather be a Bitch than a Bad Girl Any Day” the feminist movement lacks a formal system for electing representatives. This often results in the media deciding which feminist voice garners the most attention. Love is a media elected voice of feminism – a ‘feminist celebrity’ – chosen because across Love’s skin tumble an array of contemporary feminist contradictions. These are the same contradictions that attract and repel popular feminist writers.

Love has feminist punch because of the knowing way she manipulates her celebrity. Initially her ‘ugly power’ attacked the tightly delineated prettiness of the chanteuse, validating awkward adolescence. Not so surprisingly, considering the nature of female celebrity, her ‘pretty power’ gave her access to a larger audience. She has used her public voice to discuss feminist concerns: such as the position and wages of women in the rock industry, body image and the way in which female celebrities are presented in the media. Recently she has used her rock celebrity to criticise the distribution of record label profits, and to argue for different contractual obligations between artist, record buyers and record companies. Courtney Love is a loud, angry woman who takes up space. It is of course appalling that women are expected to be pretty if they are to be successful. The fact that women’s discursive power is dependent on their compliance to particular regimes of beauty requires a feminist solution. However, it is crucial that whilst simultaneously mounting a feminist attack on the visual conformity demanded of women by the workforce, that feminism does not acquire a new orthodoxy. Feminism must remain committed to being

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inclusive of difference. It is not the place of feminism to join in the chorus of voices that
tell women the correct way to dress, groom and make themselves up.

Make-over feminism is not a political template. It is clearly imbricated in patriarchal
systems that cause pain to women: be it the gruesome cut of the surgeon’s knife, or the
more mundane rip of beautician’s wax-strip. Make-over feminism suggests that it is not
time to throw out the beauty paraphernalia and slip into regulation dungarees. The
exploration of fan fiction in the previous chapter demonstrated that there is a tradition of
writing by women that imagines utopian feminist worlds. While it is important to envision
utopias, it is equally important to provide contemporary workable versions of feminism.
Make-over feminism may appear politically compromised but at least it allows women
some social mobility. It has the potential to provide a sense of empowerment. The made-
over woman demonstrates a form of mastery over herself and others. Feminism demands
equal wages for equal work, it wants women to have a ‘room of their own’ and be
financially independent, but it still struggles to encourage women who reach these goals.
Love’s vilification as a bitch is a caution to feminism not to despise blonde ambition.
Courtney Love’s celebrity provides women with an example of a successful performance of
make-over feminism.
The history presented in “I’m Sorry – I’m not Really Sorry’: Authenticity and Feminism” was a white history. It traced the journey from the women’s music of the second wave to the Riot Grrrl thrash of the third. Elliott corrects this white rendering of history. She reveals the power, potency and passion of music performed by black musicians. Black performers are not used as proof of a more ‘authentic’ musical expression. A discourse of authenticity always hides regimes of value steeped in cultural ideologies. When mobilised to judge Hole’s music it meant the band were vilified for a change in musical direction, while at the same time masking the commercial underpinning of the music industry. When applied to music produced by black performers it often enforces a perception of blackness as physical, primitive and emotional in comparison to a whiteness that is cerebral, civilised and rational. Instead, in this chapter, attention is paid to the contextual specificity of Elliott’s music. Black women experience duel axes of oppression. Due to their race and gender they are doubly silenced. Music is one site where their voices are broadcast. This makes rap and hip hop music a particularly powerful political oratory platform.

Missy Elliott is not included to endow this thesis with ‘black cred.’ Elliott is not discussed because she provides a corrective. Rap has been an active site in the reclamation of the bitch for normative femininity. Rap’s incorporation of bitch politics and bitch anger is a robust popular cultural feminism. Female rap performers talk back. They use music for political purposes. Elliott demands inclusion because in addition to doing this, she exerts a strong measure of control over production. She supports other female musicians by producing them, signing them to her label and writing songs. She presents a strong
demonstration of the bitch’s importance in negotiating sites pulsating with gendered tension, like the workplace.
CHAPTER FOUR
MISSY ELLIOTT’S FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

When white critics write about black culture ‘cause it’s the ‘in’ subject without interrogating their work to see whether or not it helps perpetuate and maintain racist domination, they participate in the commodification of ‘blackness’ that is so peculiar to postmodern strategies of colonization.

bell hooks

Elliott is no subaltern. She speaks with a voice of her making. She has produced over twenty number one hits, so it is a voice with extensive cultural penetration. Elliott demonstrates how the term ‘bitch’ is being reclaimed within popular culture. To not include Elliott would be to disregard an important feminist pop culture moment. bell hooks warns white feminists against ignoring “the more crucial issues involved when a member of a privileged group ‘interprets’ the reality of members of a less powerful, exploited, and oppressed group.”

Taking hooks’ admonishment to heart, I will use the first section of this chapter to pick through how and why this white woman is going to talk about discourses of race and some of the subsequent ideologies of racism. The position I take is not apologetic (nor defiantly defensive). I think white people need to write and think critically about race. We have a responsibility to engage with this terrain. Too often white theorists simply erase race from their considerations by selecting homogeneous white examples to demonstrate their arguments. Instead I explore Missy Elliott as a significant artist in her own right. I also contextualise her by placing her within the narrative of black popular music. Finally, I listen to what Elliott has to say about being a bitch.

WRITING BLACKNESS, BEING WHITE

Feminists of colour challenged white feminist’s racism and refusal to deal with difference. As a result this dialogue generated the most productive change to feminist theory and praxis to have occurred in the last thirty years. Consequently, feminism and postmodern critical theory have developed complex ways of mobilising difference. Women of colour have contributed to the feminist challenge to academic discourse for being exclusionary and embodying its bias in the prose. A composition can be biased if it is written from an ‘objective’ position which conceals the partiality of the author; or if it uses exclusionary grammar, such as personal pronouns; or if it employs a writing style that excludes working class or other marked knowledges. There needs to be space in the academy for various styles of writing. bell hooks continually indicates the way in which writers are censored. She makes her writing process transparent in response to the varied attacks her work attracts. hooks discusses one such attack in her article on Katie Roiphe:

‘The Morning After’s’ dismissal of black women connects with the recent attack on Women’s Studies published in ‘Mother Jones’ which suggested that among those ‘not very academic folks who are being read that should not be read’ were black women writers (myself and Audre Lorde). Not only are marginalised writers scrutinised, but their academic credentials undermined. In response to these insights, this chapter does not claim as an overtly academic space as some of the others.

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2 hooks, Yearning: 55.
3 She does this by revealing the reasoning behind her chosen style of prose. She aims to engage with “diverse perspectives, new ideas, and different styles of thinking and writing.” hooks, Yearning: 6.
This chapter works in the slippery space between popular feminism and academic feminism. “I’d Rather be a Bitch than a Bad Girl Any Day” affirmed a woman’s right to speak and write with a complex and specialised vocabulary. This confirmation was tied to an awareness that one of the reasons people are so threatened by academic feminism is because it implodes the notion of objective truth with a celebration of difference. I cannot claim to know what it is to write as a black woman in the academy. I do know what it is to feel one’s writing, one’s creative impulse censored. I join the struggle in contesting a space for more creative forms of writing within the academy. Academic prose will be pierced by colloquial phrasing and the ‘I’ who writes will surface with more alacrity than usual. This act hopes to destabilise the cultural stratification that has feminist popular culture dismissed for not being serious enough, and academic feminism attacked for being removed from reality. By writing in a more conversational idiom these distinctions are not unconsciously reified.

In an attempt to make sure this discussion of blackness is not another act of colonisation, I make the next segment of this chapter an engaged discussion with bell hooks. bell hooks – there can be no denying – is a feminist bitch. Her prose style is confrontational and she often makes theoretical points springboarded off the backs of friends and acquaintances. This makes her theoretical insights personal. To read the roundtable discussion that took place between hooks, Urvashi Vaid, Naomi Wolf and Gloria Steinem on the topic of the contemporary meaning of feminism, is to observe hooks continually challenging Wolf, and to a lesser extent Steinem, on the racist assumptions embedded in many of their statements. For example:

N.W.: But I also have heard straight women say, ‘I am intimidated to go to feminist meetings because I feel like there’s this judgement against me because I sleep with the
enemy.’ It is very clear to me that I haven’t slept with my enemies. Straight women are not facing the kind of entrenched, gutter discrimination that lesbians are, but there’s too much sexual judgement going on.

B.H.: I think that this is really racialized, Naomi. I don’t hear women of color saying, ‘I can’t go to feminist things because of lesbianism.’ I hear them saying, ‘I cannot go to feminist things because of the racism of white women and because these movements don’t meet my needs.’

Finally, in response to Wolf, hooks exclaims, “Naomi, I don’t feel like I even understand where you’re coming from …” In relation to oppression white women are used to occupying the moral high-ground – after all we live with patriarchal subjugation. Thus there can be a sense of confusion and defensiveness when confronted with our own oppressive role. Reading hooks is to be continually reminded of the many ways in which I as a white woman oppress. The challenge is to struggle against re-enacting this domination, to make a commitment to not embody racist ways of being. While I am not certain on the way to go about this, I know remaining silent is not the solution. To remain silent is to be complicit with racist ideologies.

hooks warns against the colonial relationship inherent in interpreting a (more) marginalised group’s reality. Unfortunately, as a white theorist this leaves me floundering; how exactly can I talk about racism without addressing blackness (as well as whiteness), or to put it another way, ‘race’? Am I colonising black cultural forms and knowledges in talking about rap? The answer to these two questions resides in the careful unpicking of the two terms ‘race’ and ‘racism.’ Robert Miles argues that a discussions of ‘race’ that too easily conflates ‘race’ with ‘racism’ perpetuates the racial divisions that underpin racism. That is, it is too easy when discussing ‘race’ to assume the ‘naturalness’ of racial divisions. Thus there is a failing to articulate the way in which ‘race’ is a culturally generated category that

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5 hooks et al., 'Let's Get Real About Feminism: the Backlash, the Myths, the Movement': fulltext.
6 hooks et al., 'Let's Get Real About Feminism: the Backlash, the Myths, the Movement': fulltext.
allows and justifies racist behaviours. This insight is somewhat complicated by the fact that discourses of race have also been utilised by marginalised groups for resistance. In this instance, ‘race’ is mobilised to cohere and motivate groups for social change. Miles specifies the Black Power movement in the United States as an example of this. However, regardless of this more positive usage of a discourse of ‘race,’ too often a discussion of race means that the concept of racism is used “in a loose or undefined manner.” It is indisputable that the mobilisation of racial difference is crucial to the circulation of racist ideologies. Discourses of race enable people to be categorised into groups that are then positioned in a social hierarchy. Thus, racist ideologies flourish in the chasms created through racial division. A discussion of racism therefore requires an engagement with the way in which blackness and whiteness are established relationally, and a foregrounded awareness of the artificial and dangerous nature of the reification of these differences. In accordance with hooks, I argue that writers should be especially wary of the way in which they approach talking about more marginalised social groups. This caution does not mean that commentators should refrain from entering the discussion.

Both hooks and Miles call for analyses of racism to be specific and theoretically rigorous. My discussion of Missy Elliott finds racism assembled around a number of specific nodes, which are moved through and returned to in the course of this essay. There is the racism that has already been touched on – my own. It is something I tackle through the writing, as I search for assumptions and try and remove them. Then there is the racism that clusters around white readership practices. Black popular music moves through space and crosses national and racial barriers with ease, but what are the implications of this? When read by a

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8 Miles: 73.
white audience are these cultural products used to help reify racial difference? There is also the institutional racism that is embedded within the music industry. Finally there is the ideological articulation that occurs between racist and sexist ideologies through a black female performer. It is this nexus I am going to attend to first through a discussion of rap as black feminist scholarship.

**Rap as Black Feminist Scholarship**

Black feminist scholarship demands that an oral feminist history be recognized and valued through its successful incorporation and retrieval of non-literary feminist genres. The narrative of feminism is ‘rewritten’ through the inclusion of difference. One oral tradition to attract scholarly attention is that which is articulated by African-American female singers and musicians, particularly those emerging out of the jazz and blues traditions. Juanita Karpf extends this time-line past the twentieth century and back into the nineteenth with her account of Amelia L. Tilghman: a woman who both taught and performed cultivated music in Washington D.C. and Montgomery in the 1800s.¹⁰ Karpf argues that:

> Consistent with the embryonic black feminist movement of her day, she [Amelia L. Tilghman] used her gifts as a teacher and musician to subvert white solipsism and galvanize a sense of community among blacks in Washington, D.C., and Montgomery.¹¹

Thus African-American musicians are firmly positioned as activists within their communities. Sherri Tucker also performs an historical reclamation with her discussion of

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⁹ Miles: 98.


¹¹ Karpf: fulltext. Karpf uses the terms ‘cultivated’ and ‘art’ music to refer to what is more commonly understood as ‘classical’ music.
two African-American all-female big bands that performed in America during the forties.¹²

A comparison is established between the two bands based on style – both musical and visual. Billie Holiday is worked into the mix as another embodiment of black feminism. Tucker extends the argument presented by Karpf when she discusses the performer’s embodied performance as, in itself, feminist. In her discussion of Billie Holiday she argues that:

> Even as Holiday redefined the role of jazz singer to equal status (rather than inferior opposite) to the jazz instrumentalist, she staked claim to the socially respectable feminine difference represented by the word ‘lady.’ Holiday made the title ‘Lady’ cross the color line and transformed it to include a range of backgrounds and behaviors traditionally excluded from the pedestal.¹³

This is a lived and performed feminism. Black womanhood is actively reclaimed as a site of value. The activist tradition is also continued as various band members’ campaign for pay improvements.

White cultural commentary has a tendency to approach musical performers as mere entertainment. Apart from those operating within specific genres deemed political – for instance folk music and particular strands of rock. Specific rock performers are judged worthy of wearing the mantle of credibility.¹⁴ This construction of rock as more culturally significant than pop serves a racist and misogynist agenda. To illustrate this point, I use David Pichaske’s article “Poetry, Pedagogy, and Popular Music: Renegade Reflection.”¹⁵ Pichaske argues that English Departments need to broaden their subject matter: they should expand to include ‘rock poetry.’ This would represent “an expansion by genre not race,

¹³ Karpf: fulltext.
¹⁴ See previous chapter for a discussion of the feminist implications of the easy labelling of rock as more ‘authentic’ or ‘credible’ in comparison to pop.
class and gender.”\(^\text{16}\) For the changes wrought by a consideration of ‘race, gender and class’ have resulted in “classes full of sterile postmodern game-players and culturally diverse mediocrities” such as “Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Michael Harper, Cathy Song and Rita Dove.”\(^\text{17}\) These poets, he argues, do not reflect the “real life of college students” in the way that “Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, Jim Morrison, [and] the Legendary Woody” do.\(^\text{18}\) Here we see rock mobilised for a conservative ideology in which ‘normal’ America is white, male and middle aged. Difference is to be weeded out of the classroom because it promotes ‘mediocrity’ and does not attract the ‘majority.’ Lacking an understanding of how ‘quality’ can act as an exclusionary measure Pichaske can boldly argue that rock poetry will be held accountable to standards of quality in a way which postmodern poetry texts are not. Once again the culturally validated voice is white and male.

This call to include popular music as part of the academic syllabus or even more specifically, to teach contemporary poetry to students, is neither new nor ‘renegade,’ as Pichaske claims. Black communities have long been arguing the significance of music as a political discourse. Dierdre Glenn Paul’s article “Rap and Orality: Critical Media Literacy, Pedagogy, and Cultural Synchronization” is a useful comparison to Pichaske.\(^\text{19}\) Like Pichaske she argues for the inclusion of popular music into the pedagogy of the classroom. She clarifies why rap should be used as a teaching tool in High School classrooms with a


\(^{16}\) Pichaske: fulltext.

\(^{17}\) Pichaske: fulltext.

\(^{18}\) Pichaske: fulltext.

large demographic proportion of black and Latino students. When commenting on the resistance of other teachers to this idea she states:

It was difficult for many of them to grasp that a number of their students viewed rappers as respected cultural workers in communities for which “Being ‘within community’ requires more than residence, it requires moral action and political praxis.”

Here the struggle to admit rap into the classroom is framed as a politicised act. Paul presents a much more complex exegesis, which takes account of the cultural positioning of musical genres. She does not just argue for rap being used as a pedagogic tool because of its ‘artistic’ merits: criteria that deny an understanding of music inclusive of its relation to class, race and sex. She indicates the way in which rap performers are often understood as doing political work both through their music and in other activities. For instance Missy Elliott has been honoured with Heroes Award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences for “her creative output and charitable work with organizations like ‘Break the Cycle’ and ‘NARAS’ ‘Grammy in the Schools.’” Break the Cycle is an organisation that works with teenagers who have backgrounds in which there was domestic violence to try and ‘break the cycle.’

By dismissing music (and musicians) as ‘just entertainment’ does it make it easier for a white record buying public to ignore the political implications of this appropriation? It is axiomatic to discuss rock and roll as an art form gestated by African-American creativity only to be appropriated by white commercial interests and performers. Rather than repeat this familiar history, I want to examine a specific contemporary manifestation of cultural appropriation. This involves a consideration of the production and consumption of rap music. I will not explore white performers appropriation of the genre though there are

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20 Paul: fulltext.
examples of this: from the Beastie Boys through to Eminem. Rather I chose to examine black artist’s production of music and its consumption; paying initial attention to how a white audience reads it. Do white readership practices cause black cultural products to be whitened and straightened? Is this an example of the ‘exotic’ being rewritten by the readership? These questions do not generate easy answers. The next section of this paper examines gangsta rap as an example of a black cultural product, which is incorporated into white culture in such a way as to affirm prejudice. However, I complicate this understanding through consideration of the rap produced by African-American women.

Gangsta rap is defined by its lyrical preoccupations (violence and misogyny), the gender of the performer (male), and its geographical affiliation (the ghetto). Kheven LaGrone writes that:

America was surprised in the summer of 1991 when the entertainment industry’s receipts proved that gangsta rap’s primary market was not the inner city as might be supposed, but white suburbia.\(^{22}\)

He mounts a convincing argument to explain this curiosity. He argues that it is integral to white America to consume images of the “Nigger.” That “Like a good horror movie, gangsta rap sold white America, the ‘mainstream’ its worst racial nightmares.”\(^{23}\) Thus, gangsta rap produces contemporary images of ‘Niggers’ that confirm white prejudices. And which further act, to confirm white America’s centrally positioned morally upright nature through a binary opposition to a dangerous, threatening, immoral and sexually promiscuous blackness.\(^{24}\) Here LaGrone is suggesting that gangsta rap is instrumental in producing a dominant cultural image of the ‘Other.’ This is not a harmless shadow. LaGrone suggests

\(^{23}\) LaGrone: fulltext.
that this image is so strong that it physically damages middle class black youths. He argues that: “If the Black middle class teen internalised the ‘nigger,’ he must invalidate, by definition, his own middle class existence/experiences.” Thus gangsta rapper is implicated in the high teen suicide rate ravaging this demographic. LaGrone’s argument convinces that the white audience’s appropriation of black images continues to damage black communities in the United States.

Let us take the deck of LaGrone's argument and reshuffle it with a few new cards, such as feminism and cultural studies, and see how it changes the hand. LaGrone’s argument for gangsta rap being just another racist manifestation of ‘The Nigger’ is based in ‘economism.’ That is, he draws a straight economic line from white consumption to racism. Stuart Hall states that “‘economism’ is a theoretical reductionism. It simplifies the structure of social formations, reducing their complexity of articulation, vertical and horizontal, to a single line of determination.” Economism is a very crude form of Marxism which simplifies social formations as the result of the economic. It fails to account for the mediations that occur between differing cultural strata. In LaGrone’s case, it means that though he does look at how racism is articulated as a classed category, he fails to account for how it is gendered. The universal ‘youth’ LaGrone discusses is a male. Black women are erased from his analysis. The statement from the above paragraph demonstrates a slippage between the ‘black teen’ and the masculine pronoun ‘he.’ He is effectively reinforcing gangsta raps dismissal of black womanhood. Thankfully, black feminists

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25 LaGrone: fulltext.
27 Hall, 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity': 418.
themselves have mounted a multi-faceted response to gangsta rap which ranges from a national campaign to ‘clean up’ the lyrics to the reply-in-type voiced by female rappers.

Rap is an oral culture. In common with oral cultures it recycles, appropriates and style mixes (aesthetic characteristics also associated with the postmodern). Rap can also be distinguished by certain vocal features. It utilises call and response to structure lyrics. Brent Wood argues that:

Rap’s foundation was poured when the political poetic heritage of the 1960s and the competitive stage patter used by the MC to keep the dancers moving began to merge with the African-American traditions of Signifying, playing the Dozens, and Toasting, all of which showcase verbal dexterity and prowess in exchanges of ritual insults.28

Importantly Wood indicates the way in which rap is based on a series of exchanges of ‘ritual insults.’ What this suggests is that rap music is not merely black men telling black women that they are ‘Hos.’ Though when this trade of insults takes place between genders the political ramification of these insults changes. The way in which they circulate gains a new potency. I am not denying that many of the lyrics of gangsta rap are misogynist in a way which impacts on black women especially. However, that does not mean we are justified in refusing to listen to the response generated by black women. Gayatri Spivak warned that:

white men, seeking to save brown women from brown men, impose upon those women a greater ideological constriction by absolutely identifying, within discursive practice, good-wifehood with self-immolation on the husband’s pyre.29

Let us be wary of performing a double subjugation by not listening to what black female rappers have to say. This not only denies their voice, but also attempts to limit what an acceptable response to oppression is. It implies that black women can ‘talk-back’ only through official women’s groups or the academy. By engaging in a ritual play of insults

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with gangsta rappers, female rappers keep open the dialogue with black men while contesting their view of black womanhood. It is also worth noting that this ritual parley provided them with a market opening.

Refusing to listen to female rap performers is to be implicated in racist understandings of femininity. ‘Femininity’ is a highly policed category. What is defined as acceptable and how it is lived by various women changes across race, class and age lines. However this is not to deny how they also function in relation to one another. As I write this, the best and worst dressed issue of *Who* magazine has just been released. I love trashy magazines and its almost impossible for me not to buy the best and worst dressed issue. However, over time I have become more and more disturbed by this raced division. Again and again what marks the worst dressed is their deviation from white standards of good taste. Female rappers are often proffered as examples of the worst dressed, Lil Kim is a frequent inclusion. White feminists often decry the unfairness of the beauty industry – a well know example of this is Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*. They rarely foreground the way in which definitions of beauty are raced. The refusal to listen to rap is also a refusal to see this kind of womanhood. Yet it is often more radical and politically potent than white equivalents. Black women rap artists are occupying a political forum with a long history. I am not claiming here that ‘black’ music is essentially more politically persuasive than that ‘wishy-washy-white shit.’ I am arguing that the history of black oppression in America has meant that music has been used as a political forum in the past and continues to be in the present. Perhaps this is best understood as a ‘spectral effect.’ Here rap is not the modern

day equivalent of blues, for rap has a history that distinguishes it from this tradition. Rap
does not “simply restore the past in a cycle of the eternal return,” rather it presents “the
enigma … of history, flashing up before us at a moment of danger.” This is best
eclucidated through an example. So let me introduce Missy ‘Misdemeanor’ Elliott.

**Introducing Missy ‘Misdemeanor’ Elliott**

*The very idea of Missy Elliott is tantalizing: a daring young woman from the Dirty South—currently hip-hop’s most innovative region—who can sing soulfully and rhyme forcefully, who can write and produce hit songs, who’s smart enough to be sonically innovative and yet keep it mainstream, who’s ambitious and original enough to create her own style of dancing and mix a sci-fi twinge into her aesthetic to invoke the feeling that she’s a few ticks ahead of her time, which is probably the truth.*

31 For instance Lil Kim was included in the ‘Shock Horror!’ section. 2001. ‘Best and Worst Dressed,’ *Who Weekly.* (September 24): 97.
32 Wolf, *The Beauty Myth.*
Missy Elliott is no Billie Holiday. This is not a woman broken by the industry in which she finds herself enmeshed. Rather, Elliott is distinctive for the easy way she wears the multiple mantles of producer, writer and performer. She has helped to write and/or produce over 20 hits. She is a performing artist in her own right, having released three albums – *Supa Dupa Fly, Da Real World* and *Miss E...So Addictive.*\(^{35}\) Elliott resisted the money offered to her by Sony and Puff Daddy for the deal offered to her by Elektra which included her own label, Gold Mind. Included on their still small (but growing) roster are Nicole Wray, Torrey Carter and Lil’ Mo. Importantly, for Elliott having her own label means that:

> No pictures go out unless they’re OK’d by me, I call for the video budgets. In any situation, I’ve got total control over my project, and I think that’s the most important thing. Don’t nobody know what your really want to do but yourself.\(^{36}\)

This is no female chanteuse. She is a highly talented, creative, multi-skilled modern diva. One with both a social and a feminist consciousness.

Destiny’s Child are the most successful female R & B group at the time of writing. Their single “Survivor,” which was the theme song for the movie *Charlie’s Angels,* was ubiquitous on popular radio and shopping centre sound systems when released.\(^{37}\) Most people are at least vaguely familiar with their images; three beautiful, skinny black women in brief, shiny and matching outfits. It is this model of femininity that is most probably most associated with rap and R & B; scantily clad and beautiful. Rap, more than R & B, is also associated with outrageousness. Lil Kim is perhaps the most shocking at the moment dressed in lurid lurex with peek-a-boo cutouts. Missy Elliott is not as overtly sexualised as

some of the other rap divas. As David D states during his interview with Elliott, “Ok. You being a female in today time, I mean you definitely taking a different approach than two of Hip Hop’s biggest Divas, Lil Kim and Foxy Brown.” Missy Elliott’s wardrobe has no dresses. Instead it is choked full of pants, suits and sneakers. This is not a woman who goes to award ceremonies dressed in bikini tops, low-slung minis and high heels. She is much more likely to be wearing a Versace male suit adorned with razor blades. This is the working woman as performer. She embodies a different way of taking up space. One which is less objectified, reeks of fun and remains beautiful.

It would be easy to class Elliott as being one of the boys. I have heard her described as ‘Puff Mommy.’ This moniker fits her into the same mould as the successful and controversial rap performer and producer Puff Daddy. This does not account for her close working collaborations with other female performers. Elliott is an example of an ambitious woman who actively mentors and helps other female (and male) performers. Feminist scholarship has indicated that it would be beneficial for women to form mentoring relationships with one another. Elliott embodies an example of this in practice. Some of her most successful collaborations have been with women performers such as Lil Kim and Aaliya (who just recently and tragically died in a aeroplane crash). She also helped produce, with Rockwilders, one of the tracks for the Moulin Rouge soundtrack – “Lady Marmalade,” a reworking of the LaBelle classic. This track fused the vocal talents of Lil Kim, Pink, Christina Aguilera and Mya. The three performers to be promoted by her label

39 This is an actual outfit she wore to the Grammy Awards in 2000.
41 Lil Kim et al., 'Lady Marmalade,' Moulin Rouge Soundtrack. 2001. Interscope. Track No: 2. [sound recording].
so far are all women. There is some evidence that Elliott conceives of her label as a fostering ground for female talent. At the re-launch party in June, 2000, she was quoted as stating:

I fell like I’m going to open up a lot of doors … A lot of men, like Puffy, throw showcases for their artists, but females need to get out there and do stuff like this. We’re just too used to this being a male-dominated field.\footnote{J Vineyard, 2000. 'Missy Elliott Re-Launches Gold Mind Label.', \textit{Rolling Stone}. [online] <http://rollingstone.com/news/newsarticle.asp?nid=11002&cr=2751> Accessed: 13 September 2001: fulltext.}

This is third wave feminist praxis that impacts not only on her audience (for whom she is an inspirational figure) but also on other women within the hip/hop, rap and R & B industries.

\textbf{SHE’S A BITCH}

\textit{Music is a male dominated field. Women are not always taken a seriously as we should be, so sometimes we have to put our foot down. To other people that may come across as being a bitch, but it’s just knowing what we want and being confident. If I’m paying people and they’re not handling by business right, I have to check them.}\footnote{M Musto, 1999. 'Master Missy; \textit{Interview}. (June). [online] FindArticles. Gale Group. Accessed: 19 September 2001: fulltext.}

Missy Elliott works in a male dominated industry. The role of the female performer has always occupied an uncomfortable space within the music industry. As the discussion on Courtney Love revealed it is common for the female artist to have her creations attributed to a male Svengali, or be described as a marketing phenomena famous more for her looks than her talent.\footnote{Diane Kirkby demonstrates that in Australia in the late nineteenth and early}
twentieth century women’s work was progressively domesticated through legislation and popular representation. Census takers increasingly defined women as dependents working for their spouse or family and not as sole wage earners. By being defined as such women’s work was tied to the home, and they were increasingly limited to the roles of domestic labourers or washer-women. Thus working spaces became gendered and women were positioned as subordinate to men. The two world wars also saw major upheavals in the definition of women’s work. Rigidly gendered spaces became leaky because of the infiltration of women’s bodies. Female workers threatened the role of the male breadwinner. Susan Faludi’s *Stiffed* describes women’s entrance into the paid workforce post-War World Two as one of the causal agents of the ‘crisis in masculinity.’ How work spaces are negotiated is a central concern of third wave feminism. Gender politics, or the schism between the sexes, has definitely been agitated by women’s increasingly equal participation in the paid labour market. The bitch as a female archetype is frequently drawn on to make sense of the way in which females occupy this space, by both men and women. Often when used by men it simply defines women in the workplace as a problem: ‘She’s a bitch,’ means she is causing trouble. This is what Elliott is commenting on in the statement that opens this section. Elliott, in common with a lot of female rappers, works to reclaim this term for positive usage.

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44 For an interesting discussion of this phenomena in relation to Madonna see S Daly, 2000. ’Like an Artist,’ *Vanity Fair.* (November): 52-59.
Missy Elliott challenges the genderisation of spaces within the music industry. She does not just sing/rap, and she does not just dance, she is famous for her writing and production skills. Whitney Houston when commenting on her collaborations with Missy Elliott and Lauren Hill stated, “How proud I am of my Sisters, of our geniuses … There is no limit now. They write; they produce.” Courtney Love, another talented performer and writer, has had overt accusations levelled against her by the music press that her work is not her own. She has been accused of being a talentless hack riding on the coat tails of male genius. No similar accusations have been publicly levelled against Missy Elliott. Perhaps this is the result of their two differing approaches to the public circulation of their private lives. Love was involved in a high profile marriage with a talented musician, which both her and Kurt Cobain freely discussed in media interviews. Elliott actively discourages any discussion of her love life. Perhaps this is why Elliott remains an autonomous individual in the public’s opinion whereas Love is (almost) more famous for her famous lovers.

Regardless of this public perception Elliott does indicate that her creative control has caused conflict in her work space. Elliott has not enacted the familiar recourse of insisting that she really is a nice person. Instead she has indicated how the label of ‘bitch’ is too easily attached to women who are simply ‘in control,’ ‘aggressive’ or simply in charge of running the work space. Additionally, through her artistic expression she has

reappropriated the term. Elliott states with some pride that “people have told me that when they play this record at the clubs, every female in there is like “SHE’S A BITCH!!” It’s like a ladies’ thing!” Here ‘the bitch’ is no longer a label thrown at them by threatened masculinity but a useful persona to help women negotiate a contested space. This space is not just Elliott’s studio but also the dance floor on which those screaming dancers are stomping.

Dance and movement are not easily theorised. The dance floor – a speed of moving bodies that glisten with beads of sweat and are wreathed in smoke and light – deflects the inquiring gaze. Styles of dancing and music are rapidly rewritten. Making academic articles seem dated – who wants to read another article about punk music or the rave scene when what is happening now is ____ – fill in the blank. But these spaces of movement and music are politicised and do warrant academic attention. They reveal important lessons about, race, sexuality, class and gender. Missy Elliott’s music video for the track “Get Ur Freak On” features a dance floor. This dance floor does not belong to a nightclub, it belongs to the realm of the televisual. However, it is important to remember that dancing is not restricted to nightclubs, it takes place in lounge rooms, bedrooms, parties, stages, fields and on the television.

This video clip is resonant with meanings about both heterosexuality and female autonomy and female friendships. Not surprisingly for Missy Elliott, this is a futuristic video clip. The *mise-en-scene* is suggestive of one of the recent slew of movies in which martial arts meet

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49 Colliton: fulltext.
the future, primarily *Tomb Raider*.\(^5^0\) The set is a hybridised version of an ancient ruin and a

disintegrating urban streetscape. The expression and movement of Missy Elliott and other

characters are consistent with the ‘*Tomb Raider*’-theme. The video opens with a man

scaling walls. Missy Elliott’s body, at various points of the video, extends past the bounds

of ‘realistic’ behaviour: she can hang by one arm from a chandelier for a prolonged period

of time, her tongue can unfurl like a fly-catching lizard’s, and her head can stretch out on

an extendable neck. The landscape of the video is rife with dancing. Part of me wants to

read this video as a visionary utopia created by Elliott. She, being the star of the show, is

foregrounded. There are a number of shots of her dancing by herself or framed by two

more dancers. These feature shots of Elliott are interspersed with cuts to the dance floor,

which is not revealed in its entirety until half way through the clip. When Elliott is included

in the frame with the dancers she is depicted on the outskirts of the group facing and

singing/rapping to the camera. Elliott always appears separate from the other dancers with

which she is sharing the frame. While Elliott herself is never ‘paired,’ most of the other

dancers are. The group on the dance floor is divided into heterosexual couples. Their

movements are fluid and interchangeable. Both partners throw each other around. They

both transition through positions of ‘dominance’ and ‘submission.’ Near the end of the clip

a couple are shown in a loose, casual and intimate embrace facing directly to camera and

rapping. Dancing depicts interaction, the body ‘converses’ with space around it or with

other bodies. Here heterosexual bodies are depicted ‘dialoguing’ in a sharing and intimate

manner. Elliott is the compeer of this space, not part of the actions but crucial to its

facilitation. She has composed a version of heterosexuality which is intimate, fluid, caring,

\(^5^0\) Missy Elliott released a remixed version of this track using the vocal talents of Nelly Furtado for the movie

soundtrack.
sexy and equal. While she herself remains separate till the end of the clip where she is seen driving along in a car with three of her female friends.

Movement through space can reveal the hidden topography of sexual politics. In this clip, Elliott is empowered enough (by the music industry) to compeer the space of heterosexuality. However, it is only within the confined space of the car with her three girlfriends that Elliott can actually merge with the community around her. As part of a same sex group she can join in the communal movements as their heads all sway and jerk to the music. Though it is still clear who is in charge as it is Elliott who is driving the car. Importantly, when the dancers are both male and female Elliott remains quite distinct from the action. It is as if a too thorough imbrication in the heterosexual matrix will dilute – or remove – Elliott’s ability to control the landscape of the clip. Heterosexuality still compromises the woman in charge. Simultaneously it undermines the authority of the masculine partner. As Whitney Houston so usefully indicated society has indeed changed, and women do now occupy positions of creative authority, however this ability is still contested. This becomes quickly apparent when a woman is partnered with a man and the assumption surfaces that he must be more talented than her. It seems the only way out of this bind for the successful woman is a public refusal of (hetero)sexual intimacy. Consequently, it becomes evident that Elliott is still very much confined by the industry in which she works. She is allowed to be creative and to produce art with a feminist consciousness propelling it, but to do so she must remain aloof from heterosexuality.

The way Elliott moves and takes up space broadens definitions of acceptable femininity. Elliott’s first clip for “Supa Dupa Fly” “blew a crater in cliched hip-hop video by becoming
supa dupa fly in an inflatable viny suit and goo-goo glasses." She was not contained by the generic conventions to push her fuller figure into a revealing outfit. In fact she emphasised her size. The “Get Ur Freak On” video continues this pattern. We cannot yet dismiss the axiom ‘fat is a feminist issue’ as a cliché. It would be morally corrupt in a culture in which eating disorders are on the increase simultaneous with a inexhaustible number of idealised images of the female body as emaciated and toned. In Elliott’s clips female dancing is not there for the voyeuristic gaze in the same way it is for the majority of hip hop videos. We are not compelled to look at fetishised black ‘booty.’ Increasingly the African-American female bottom is the repository of sexual desire. Now that due to plastic surgery breasts have become generic it is the bottom that seems to be stimulating the jaded appetite of the contemporary libido. This is a trend that Elliott’s videos combat. Sexuality and the sensual body are rewritten within a new set of parameters that allow a variation in body size, less fetishisation of body parts – such as breasts and bottoms – and a sense of communication between the male and female dancers.

Missy Elliott seems most at ease when she is laughing and moving with her girlfriends as they drive along. This should not be misread as separatism. Elliott is no separatist bitch. She promotes collaborative relationships through her art and her work practices. Missy Elliott describes her depiction of heterosexuality on Missy E...So Addictive:

I realized we went through years of ‘I Hate You’ records, and then we went through the ‘Gimme My Money Records,’ and we went through the ‘Taking Care of Business Records.’ It was time to do some sexual healing music. You know, some Marvin-type stuff. I wanted to cross all boundaries. Not put any limits on myself. Where everybody else was being ‘mad at their man’ I wanted to do a sexy record.54

So far I have discussed the sexed or gendered dimension of this dance floor and have failed to comment on how it is racialised. All the dancer’s are black. Here the ideological articulation of gendered relationships exists in a raced nexus. I have waited until now to comment on this dimension because I do not want to affirm essentialist notions of black sexuality. Instead I chose to discuss the ideology of gender in a general way before focusing on how race influences this articulation.

A continual foregrounding of race reifies racial difference. But to ignore it continues the racist practice of appropriating ‘black’ culture for ‘white’ theory. The aspiration for ‘sexual healing’ articulated by this video is grounded in a shared history of racist oppression. This history steeps through gender relations. It has left a strong desire and a political awareness of the rift between the sexes and a desire to move past it with some ‘sexual healing.’ bell hooks when commenting on her political positioning states:

> I try to debunk the stereotypical assumption that feminist politics are rooted in anti-male sentiments and at the same time point out that such an assumption, made on a constant basis, will destroy the possibility of progressive political solidarity between black women and men.56

For hooks, the knowledge that men are oppressed too is made obvious by the historical oppression of black men. This awareness stops a simplistic rendering of all men as the oppressor, and generates a feminist praxis that desires union with black men. A similar political impetus underwrites Missy Elliott’s third album.

55 How this is manifest is discussed by feminists of colour such as hooks, but there is no comparable work by white feminists.
Spirituality is integral to the ethics that underwrite this aspiration for a progressive political union between black men and women. When doing the reading for this chapter, I was surprised at how often black artists and theorists indicate the importance of spirituality and god to their work. It threads through the work of bell hooks and Missy Elliott and is integral to Cornel West’s oeuvre. Perhaps it is West who best summarises the way in which a strong spirituality helps generate the strength to deal with racism:

> It is the love ethic of Christian faith – the most absurd and alluring mode of being in the world – that enable me to live a life of hope against hope without succumbing to a warranted yet paralyzing pessimism or to an understandable yet miserable misanthropy.\(^{57}\)

References to God and the importance of faith pepper Elliott’s interviews.\(^{58}\) I wonder how integral Elliott’s spirituality was to her ability to move through the anger conveyed by her ‘bitch personality’ to a space of ‘sexual healing’? Missy Elliott performs a model of the bitch trajectory. She moves through anger towards a form of cohabitation. How her spirituality did or did not enable this movement cannot be made transparent. However it does indicate a troubling lack in feminist theory.

‘Movement’ can refer to a single body in space or it can refer to mass political movements, such as feminism. Mass movements require many individual articulatory agents. This chapter has examined the ‘movement’ in feminism. I have limited my analysis to one body, that of Missy Elliott. The way Elliott moves generates feminist meanings within a racialised frame. Discourses of race delimit the way in which Elliott moves and also how that movement is read. Dancing is political. Elliott wears the mantle of bitch to negotiate the studio and her working world. This is a space in which she must be in control and the bitch persona allows her to do this. Yet she does not present this as a stable state. It is a

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58 See ‘Missy Elliott Speaks,’ *Davey D homepage:* fulltext.
mantle the women in charge is hoisted with and that she can then use to her advantage. The bitch is a lonely archetype. To be labelled a bitch is to be separated out for attention; to somehow be labelled ‘wrong.’ Missy Elliott performs this separation when she takes to the dance floor. She takes up the space and her movements are distinctive. Her very physicality, her size, shape and the style of movement eke out a space for her within the music industry which is distinctive for its difference. Missy Elliott is *phat.* Elliott raps and writes sexual healing, with her boasts of bedroom prowess, but the dance she performs is no tango. She is detached from the action. She dances alone. Elliott knows that being a woman in charge of the work space results in being called a bitch:

If a male came out saying “She’s a bitch,” we would have been very upset. But for me, I feel like that’s almost like getting two black people – and this is a perfect example of how standards are crazy – and they say “What’s up nigger” and it’s cool. But you may get a white person to say it and we’re offended by it. So I think, when it’s coming from a girl saying “She’s a bitch,” it’s like females can take that better than a guy saying it. And as females, we know that a lot of time when we are in control, and we are aggressive that’s what they call us anyway.59

Missy Elliott is the bitch trajectory because she runs the show, she wears the label of ‘bitch’ to get ‘her shit done,’ thus actively reclaiming the term, before moving beyond it.

Elliott’s dancing is political because of what it communicates. Elliott reminds that feminism should never solely be a written discourse. Feminism not only has to be about anger but also about joy. Feminism can dance, and it knows how to sing.

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Hirshey, 'Rhymes & Misdemeanors': fulltext.
59 Colliton: fulltext.
The Conservative Bitch
INTRODUCING THE ORIGINAL CELEBRITY FEMINIST

How could I not include Germaine Greer? When Greer first became a celebrity feminist with the 1971 publication of *The Female Eunuch* her public persona was not that of the bitch. Instead, as *Life* so memorably declared, she was the “Saucy feminist that even men like.”¹ As she has aged this has changed. Perhaps this is best demonstrated by a caricature graphic that accompanied a review of *The Whole Woman*.² The cartoon emphasised the lines on her face, her sagging breasts (see what happens when you do not wear a bra?), and had her ghoulishly brandishing a chopped off penis dripping blood. These days Greer is depicted as a bitch. She is a threatening harpy.

I first decided to include Greer because I was interested in what happens to ageing feminists: how does the media depict them? A close engagement with Greer impacted on the focus of my analysis. I began to pay more attention to what she was saying as opposed to what was being said about her. In many ways Greer’s position is dated and conservative. Greer forcefully demonstrates the destructive power of the bitch to set discursive limits. Greer percolates through journalistic discussion and popular perceptions of feminism. The question asked in the following chapter is why? This close aligning of Greer with feminism in the popular imaginary is problematic for a series of reasons. The bitch with the force of her personality is not always a positive manifestation. Like the cliché bitch, Greer does not offer support to other women. Disdain drips from her prose, especially in her treatment of popular culture. The feminist voices circulating in contemporary media are undermined by

Greer’s approach to popular culture. The inclusion of Greer became paramount because she illuminates the powerful and contradictory cultural impact a bitch can have.
CHAPTER FIVE
GERMAINE GREER: A SEDUCTRESS & A FEMINIST PROVOCATEUR

In everything I was their pupil; in everything I have written I hope can be found the imprint of my love and respect, admiration indeed, of poor women, women’s women.

Germaine Greer

Dogs eat dogs naturally, it would seem, but bitches may be different. Certainly women bosses are regularly described in the lifestyle pages as tougher and meaner than men, which can be largely interpreted as a perception on the part of employees that decisiveness and straightforwardness become stridency when manifested by a female.

Germaine Greer

Germaine Greer is one of the most well known feminists of our era. Her rhetoric has pierced and troubled public discourse for more than thirty years. Yet as I once more read through Greer’s essays and books, I find myself conflating the words ‘misogynist’ and ‘feminist.’ I do not find the imprint of love that Greer claims marks her work. I am not alone in commenting on her lack of love, respect and admiration for women, and particularly for the poor and disenfranchised working class. A lack that becomes especially apparent in contrast to her exoticisation and reverence of poor ‘third world’ – or as she terms it ‘peasant’ – women. Greer, more than any of the other bitches in this thesis, demonstrates how misogyny can be internalised by those who fight for liberation.

This thesis maps the place of bitch celebrities within Australian, American and English society. It does this, partly, to suggest some of the ways in which feminism can incorporate

internal antagonism. In clear opposition to the younger bitch feminists I have already discussed, Greer does paint a picture of helpless women in need of saving. Her polemic aims to liberate an audience of duped women. The Western women Greer writes of are subjugated primarily by the multi-national corporations, the media, and medical institutions. They need Greer to be their saviour by making them aware of their plight and suggesting a means of liberation.³ Greer is a provocateur, rather than a saviour. This chapter’s traces the tension between Greer’s claim to save women and the provocative role her public persona performs. This does not undermine Greer’s vital place within feminism. Her provocations do produce real feminist effects. Greer is the ultimate bitch feminist – as such, it is crucial to track the ways in which her form of feminism has functioned for and within the movement. Additionally, my engagement with Greer demands that I apply a bitch-methodology – here I must practice what I preach – harnessing anger in a way that does not lead to stasis nor self-aggrandisement through debasement of the Other.

I first read The Female Eunuch when a teenager at the behest of my mother. I have much admiration for Greer and her place within the second wave of feminism. Greer – the ‘sexy’ feminist – appeals to my third wave sensibility. Yet as intellectually mature, I find many aspects of her work increasingly problematic. This thesis contends that feminism is now robust enough to incorporate dissent. But I am wary of wading in with my lavender bovver boots and giving Greer a good kicking. This wariness is generated by a variety of causes. Partly, it is the result of being brought up a ‘nice girl’ by a feminist mother who always taught me respect for my female elders. There are also sound political reasons for my caution that extend well past politeness. As established in “I’d Rather be a Bitch than a Bad

² Greer, The Whole Woman: 300.
Girl Any Day,” feminist conflict which is understood through recourse to a mother/daughter model reifies the idea of a generational divide within feminism. It embalms both participants in roles that undermine their arguments. The ‘mother’ is bequeathed with authority at the cost of being ‘out of time’ and not really understanding contemporary conditions. The ‘daughter’ is an ‘upstart’ who does not really grasp the overall historic narrative within which the discussion is embedded. For the observer of the conflict, the mythic nature of the discord between the two is far more interesting than the actual content that fuels the argument. This insight could suggest that feminists should try and depersonalise conflict by treating feminist theory as anonymous. That is, they should engage with feminist content without acknowledging the source of that content.

Unfortunately this solution spawns a greater problem. It erases feminist histories. It is crucial to acknowledge the embodied specificity of Greer’s feminism. Ideas are not free floating. They are generated by bodies enmeshed in a cultural milieu. To dissociate ideas from their corporeal origins is to erase context.

I have considered carefully how to write out my approach to Greer. She overtly positions herself within the tradition of the public intellectual, a role much more readily accepted in Britain than Australia. Her links to the academy are to be found in her part time tenure and her more academically focused books such as *Slip-Shod Sibyls*,4 *The Obstacle Race*,5 and her two theses – the first on Byron, the second on Shakespeare. Yet unlike the majority of academics she is effective at disseminating her ideas to audiences outside the academy. Her books, and newspaper columns find broad audiences and she also incorporates television into her political arsenal. Greer’s polemic is marvellously written. It is witty, erudite,

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catchy and confronting (occasionally slipping into bombast). Part of the reason for its accessibility is because Greer uses much anecdotal evidence including judicious elements of her own biography. This leaves her open for critical attacks which undermine her definitive feminist statements by pointing out the contradictions in her actual life. I purposefully narrow my critique to Greer’s public writings and interviews. Admittedly, Greer, in a feminist act, writes her body, her life, and her emotions into her public writings/persona. Consequently, there cannot be a clear demarcation of Greer’s private and public life (if this is ever possible). Yet this does not provide justification for an easy recourse to a focus on the female body at the expense of the feminist voice. Journalistic accounts of prominent women too often concentrate on their sexuality and relational status at the expense of foregrounding what they are actually saying. Thus we are privy to long descriptions of how they look, what they are wearing and what sort of family situation they are embroiled in. The first few paragraphs – journalistically the most important paragraphs – focus on how many children they have and to whom they are married. As Deborah Rhode argues, “This kind of coverage not only diminishes women’s credibility, but it also marginalised their substantive message.”6 Greer’s focus on sexual politics and liberation (which she distinguishes from equality) make her particularly vulnerable to public dissections of her private life and sexual habits. Her credibility rises and falls on who she has fucked, why she has fucked them and whether she liked it. Thus her political convictions are invariably compromised through her sexual positions (literally).

The public intellectual occupies an important political and social role. Society supports them in the hope of garnering learned and lucid opinions on significant social concerns. The advent of the mass media has altered the way in which these messages are transmitted

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6 Rhode: fulltext.
and selected. Often journalists are quite dismissive and antagonistic towards ‘intellectual’ opinions. This contrasts with the accepted reliance on ‘expert’ opinion – used for situations requiring a more ‘scientific’ deciphering. However, when we enter into the realms of social commentary – requiring an academic based in the humanities – the intellectual is often dismissed as being no more ‘expert’ than the journalist. John Hartley frames this as an attempt to control the “politics of knowledge, a struggle between intellectual culture and popular media, for the creation and education of citizen readers.”7 The feminist public intellectual resides in an even more contentious space. In the heated discussions on the role, place and identity of the public intellectual – to be found in journals and more academically inclined magazines – the feminist public intellectual is disavowed from the media stage.8 The fusing of the female body with the intellectual body is still not readily accepted. The effect of this is twofold: it blinds people to the existence of female intellectuals and dissuades women from entering the intellectual fray. Here Elaine Showalter cites Bruce Robbins:

To begin on the other hand with the grounding of intellectuals, with a recognition of ties, bodies, situations, is thus a necessary step toward the demasculinizing of the discourse about intellectuals, the creation of a conversation that women might have motive for joining.9 Greer performs this aspiration. Her body, her ties, her social positioning are shot through her public prose. Primarily, this is what marks her work as feminist. This and her discussion of ‘women’s issues’ such as rape, abortion, domestic violence, the medicalisation of the female body and sexual roles. Her female body verifies her feminist credentials, while her erudition and her vocabulary verify her as an intellectual. I maintain

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9 Showalter: 132-3.
there is a difference between critiquing her work as an intellectual (feminist of course) and undermining her authority or credibility by recourse to her biography and sexuality.

This may seem like an ingrained distinction, but it is not. Ian Britain demonstrates the slippage between valid critique and sexist critique I aim to circumvent. Greer insists that many of the convictions that underlie *The Female Eunuch* stem from her time in Calabria, where she spent the summer of 1967 finishing her doctoral thesis.\(^\text{10}\) Contrastingly, Ian Britain in a chapter devoted to Greer titled “The Return of the Captive: The Equivocations Germaine Greer” grounds *The Female Eunuch* in Greer’s brief marriage to Paul du Feu:

> In the very brevity of its ‘season,’ it might be tempting to see Greer’s marriage as a kind of experimental performance in which some of the ideas for her first major book, *The Female Eunuch*, were conceived or tried out. There was nothing quite so calculated about either; although the impact of the marriage is palpably registered in the book, and there are some suggestive analogies with performance in the book’s own genesis, arguments and presentation.\(^\text{11}\)

Britain, with very little self-reflexivity, grounds Greer’s impetus for writing *The Female Eunuch* in her three week marriage. It would seem for Britain that only a woman unhappy in love could have unleashed that sort of ‘vitriol’ on the world. Yet Greer insists that:

> The experience of those three months [in Calabria] underlies all my thinking, to an extent that can surprise even me, even now. I realize that my dissatisfaction with the theory of the feminine mystique stemmed partly from the view of another kind of womanliness, of women as adults, women as workers, women as female rather than feminine, that I absorbed that summer.\(^\text{12}\)

She then clearly links this influence on her thinking with the genesis of *The Female Eunuch* when she writes that she came home to London and “wrote a book that drew more heavily than immediately appears upon the Calabrian experience, *The Female Eunuch.*”\(^\text{13}\) Here, Greer positions the book as the outcome of her evolving thoughts on female oppression. Clearly, her experiences in a foreign country provided the intellectual distance required to

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12 Greer, *The Madwoman's Underclothes*: xxiii.
gestate critical insights into her own cultures mores and norms. I do not doubt that Greer's marriage, along with all her relationships, fed into creation of *The Female Eunuch.* However, Britains’ reductive approach continues a tradition in which women’s voices are ground into their sexuality.

When picking through Greer’s writings in an attempt to discern how she conceives of her role as an intellectual, the webbing connecting her vocation to a personal history is dense. Bastions of academia such as libraries and educational institutions have always been central to Greer’s life. This is particularly evident in her most autobiographical work to date, *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You.* After her father’s death, Greer tries to discover his history. Her family knew barely anything about him prior to his engagement to her mother and it transpires that what they did know was largely false; his name was not originally Greer, he was not born where he claimed and his parents were not who he said they were. This is a deeply personal journey through Greer’s familial genesis. Her suburban past is leavened by her academic achievements. Then later, the emotional turbulence generated by the uncovering of deception and uncertainty is soothed via the balm of the academy and the library; “Libraries are reservoirs of strength, grace and wit, reminders of order, calm and continuity, lakes of mental energy, neither warm not cold, light nor dark.” Ultimately, these places of refuge replace the family as the centrifugal force in Greer’s life. The beseeching tone communicated by the tile of the book accurately reflects the arc of the narrative. Greer longs for a confirmation that her father truly did love her. Her long journey does not bequeath this posthumous conciliatory moment. Instead dinner at the high table with a group of Cambridge dons provides the joy of belonging:

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13 Greer, *The Madwoman's Underclothes:* xxiv.
I wondered what Reg Greer would have made of the sight of his daughter in her doctoral gown drinking deep of the burgundy in such distinguished company. I loved it; I loved the oak panelling, and the stylised stucco grape vines that riotied symmetrically above my head ... I don’t know if he would have been proud of me for holding my own or even if he would have known whether I was holding my own or not. As far as I know he never read a word I wrote or saw or heard any programme I made.16

Greer glories in the academic company of men. She glories in being the “only girl in the gang.”17 She is proud of her ability to be literate in the discourses of academic Cambridge. Greer has obtained the cultural capital through education which allows her to traverse this terrain. She has journeyed far from the family hearth learning lessons that her father could not have taught her – substantiated by her claim that her father may not have been able to distinguish if she was ‘holding her own.’ Greer feels validated by academia in a way she does not by her Australian upbringing. Whether this is an intellectual arrogance which refuses empathy to her disavowed original family or simply pride in her multiple cultural literacies I am not sure.

Greer occupies a unique position in the public arena and it is this that makes her so important. Her’s is a thoughtful public performance of a private life. This may at first not seem so revolutionary. After all the discussion of Courtney Love indicated how the modern phenomena of celebrity functions to blur the distinctions between private and public. Audiences use celebrities to help make sense of social change This accords with Catharine Lumby’s argument that the modern media environment is being increasingly feminised as it incorporates gossip, scandal and the family into its coverage.18 However, Greer’s celebrity performance is specific. She inserts the female body into public discourse in uncommon ways. We may be used to seeing the female body as a commodity fetish but we are not as

15 Greer, Daddy, We Hardly Knew You: 70.
16 Greer, Daddy, We Hardly Knew You: 151-2.
17 Showalter: 137.
18 Lumby.
used to the female body being discussed seriously in *The Guardian* in all its corporeal complexity. It may be here, in this fusion of body with intellect, that Greer’s penultimate contribution to feminism resides – after the inspiration of *The Female Eunuch*. Yet, does Greer – in this role – function as the token intellectual woman? Greer in her discussion of Sappho, the famous poet from Lesbos, writes:

> Sappho is above all things a token woman; her function is to be always the single, the only one. Her existence is as the exception that proves the rule, therefore her freakishness will always be stressed, to the extent of turning her into an intellectual and emotional hermaphrodite.\(^\text{19}\)

Greer also describes herself as a freak, “These were the fifties, and I was a freak waiting to be born.”\(^\text{20}\) She functions as the “exceptional intellectual in a community of men.”\(^\text{21}\) While there are other female public intellectuals, and other strong feminist voices ultimately Greer is the dominant feminist public intellectual. Camille Paglia perhaps functions in a similar way in the United States but she lacks the cultural longevity of Greer, as well as the clear feminist pedigree. The question must be asked, why is it that Greer occupies this social role? Why is it that Greer has been allowed to sit at the table among this particular cultural elite?

The conundrum of Greer’s cultural positioning explains why she is subject to such strong feminist interrogation. A large amount of this rhetoric can be found in journalistic responses and reviews of Greer’s publications. This public dialogue is not mere jostling for position. Reviewing and discussing Greer’s latest work creates an important forum in which feminist aims and ideals can be teased apart and questioned. Greer is read and reviewed with an energy placed on few other feminists. In some ways, she mimics Sappho’s place in literature – she is the lone female genius. There is a detectable

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\(^{19}\) Greer, *Slip-Shod Sibyls*: 105.

\(^{20}\) Greer, *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You*: 70.
ambivalence in Greer’s writings towards women ordained by the media into public prominence. Greer is well aware of the dangers inherent to her public face. As are other feminists who do not want feminist discourse publicly limited to the version Greer endorses. It would be a major problem for feminism if Greer ever became feminism. Greer and her work must be vigorously interrogated by a diversity of feminist approaches because not to do so leaves her as the sole feminist oracle. Yet this does not answer the question: why is it Greer’s voice that dominates and not another’s? There is something imminently ‘acceptable’ about not just Greer’s brand of feminism but also the way in which she presents it. Perhaps the answer lies in Greer’s ‘limited’ effrontery. While Greer problematises gender in many other aspects she is highly conservative. Her presentation of race operates in a colonialist framework. She comes from a clearly middle class position, as she pontificates “I always called myself middle of the middle class.” There is a nostalgia for bygone times and place that is more often equated with Right wing views than the left. Greer can and does act as a bitch-advocator, projecting her voice for the benefit of the disadvantaged. The strength of her vocal projection means she is often dismissed as a strident bitch. However, there is also a darker side to Greer’s ‘bitchiness.’ Perhaps this is best expressed with the expression ‘haughty-bitch.’ Greer’s class position clangs against her feminism and out of the resulting collision comes some very worrying arguments. The next part of this chapter traces some of Greer’s troubling conservative tendencies and explicates some of the ramifications this has for women who are not white and middle class.

21 Showalter: 136.
23 Greer, Daddy, We Hardly Knew You. 19.
First, I will examine how Greer folds a consideration of racial difference through her work. The mark of colonialism stains Greer’s feminist voice. In *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You* Greer shares a moment with the reader – she is sitting on a crowded Indian beach trying to write in her journal only to be continually interrupted by insistent young Indian men:

> Some of them, emboldened by their smart western apparel, tight nylon shirt with huge collar, flared synthetic trousers and high-heeled plastic shoes, dare to sit down and stare fixedly at me. ‘Move. Go. Be off. At once,’ I say in a piercing mem-sahib voice.24

This is not a brief instant of tactical superiority, Greer consistently writes in ‘a piercing mem-sahib voice’: a voice drenched in colonialism, washed with classism and misogyny. Greer’s attention often turns to ‘peasant’ women living in the third world.25 She claims that they are central to her intellectual project. As already discussed, Greer asserts that her experiences with the ‘peasants’ of Calabria helped generate her first book.26 She suggests her visits to Brazil, Cuba and Ethiopia impelled her ‘coming of age.’27 Further, they helped establish “the outer limits to my [Greer’s] intellectual system.”28 This claimed centrality requires further interrogation. Greer’s primary project is to write polemic that examines Western women as manifestations of the ‘female eunuch’ in the hope of compelling liberation. As such it is inaccurate to claim third world women as central to her project. They are not the audience she writes for, nor the subject she writes on the most extensively. Rather, Greer’s reflections on ‘peasant’ women and extended family networks bolster her polemic on Western women. There is some verity to Greer’s claim that she does not go travelling in the hope of bringing “the gospel of liberation to the heathen.”29 What she does do is ‘come home’ preaching liberation for ‘modern’ women gleaned from the ‘honest,

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24 Greer, *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You*: 82.
25 The word ‘peasant’ is commonly used by Greer. It suggests the third world is placed in a feudal relationship to the first.
26 Though it is worth noting that Greer somewhat contradicts this assertion in the new introduction to *The Female Eunuch* when she claims that her first book did not ‘deal’ with poor women because she did not know them. This is commented on further later in the chapter. *The Female Eunuch*: 11.
uncomplicated heathen folk.’ Greer’s ‘peasants’ verify the existence of the whole woman; who is so sadly missing from Western geography. Greer believes that consumer or commodity culture attacks the whole woman, replacing womanliness with the unattainable and restricted performance of femininity. In her essay on the place and role of women and feminism in Cuba she clearly states her position:

For a feminist like me who considers that the combination of dazzle with drudgery is one of the most insidious ways in which women in our society are subject to stress, the multiplication of contradictory demands upon the Cuban woman is cause for concern.\(^{30}\)

Greer is arguing that as the ‘third world’ succumbs to capitalism and consumer culture the whole woman disintegrates. In the new forward to the twenty-first edition of *The Female Eunuch* Greer insists that, “Wherever you see nail varnish, lipstick, brassieres and high heels, the Eunuch has set up her camp.”\(^{31}\) Third world women act as markers of first world oppression. They make obvious our own rejection of the whole woman in preference for barbie.

Good feminism acknowledges oppression. It also realises that there is a specificity to that oppression. Race, class, age, religion, all impact on how an individual experiences oppression. Peter Tatchell reasons that, “The idea that there are hierarchies of oppression – that some peoples’ rights are more important than others and more worthy of redress – must be rejected.”\(^{32}\) While this may be a valid argument when aiming to change law and legislature it does not hold as an experiential truth. Oppression is impressed differently into distinct bodies. The racism suffered by a black male body incarcerated in South Africa under apartheid is vastly different to the sexism experienced by white middle class women

\(^{29}\) Greer, *The Madwoman's Underclothes*: xxvii.

\(^{30}\) Greer, *The Madwoman's Underclothes*: 266.

\(^{31}\) Greer, *The Female Eunuch*: 12.

in the workforce in Australia. bell hooks pierced the complacency of, and made apparent the racism inherent, to liberal feminism. Her insistence on the need “to acknowledge that we all suffer in some way but that we are not all oppressed nor equally oppressed” has far reaching consequences. When it is taken seriously by liberal feminists it demands an overhaul of feminist thought and praxis; it requires the serious acknowledgment of difference. Greer’s intentions are no doubt honourable. Greer recognises that her first book did not “deal with poor women (for when I wrote it I did not know them) but with the women of the rich world, whose oppression is seen by poor women as freedom.” Her attempt in her subsequent work to address this gap is admirable, at least she is trying to envision feminism within a global context. Ultimately however, this is a project which fails. Rather than exploring the specificity of oppression, Greer’s peasants function as a pure, uncorrupted insipient woman; once again the foreign is discursively rendered with a racist hue.

The chapter “Mutilation” in *The Whole Woman* provides an example of how Greer uses peasants to confirm the status of Western women as eunuchs. The forced nature of this comparison is particularly startling in this chapter. In eleven short pages, the reader is treated to an array of confronting contradictions. This tendentious chapter examines female genital mutilation, contrasting the mutilation practices of certain African countries such as the clitoridectomy and infibulation, with the hysterectomies, Caesareans and episiotomies performed in the West. Greer suggests that the outrage invoked in the West by African female genital mutilation is an example of Western standards being forced on third world countries. She argues that male genital mutilation does not provoke similar outrage.

34 Greer, *The Female Eunuch*: 11.
Furthermore, the West mutilates its own bodies with impunity (body piercing and tattooing are presented as currently ‘fashionable’ examples) so why cannot African women?\textsuperscript{36} She suggests that female genital mutilation is often a female ritual and thus perhaps has nothing to do with patriarchal oppression. Most shockingly she writes:

Certainly in many of these cultures tightness in the vagina is prized by both men and women: the susceptibility of African women to HIV and AIDS is greatly increased by the almost universal use of astringent herbs to tighten the vagina. Penetration of a tight dry vagina causes pain but pain can become indistinguishable from pleasure in a state of high sexual arousal.\textsuperscript{37}

Here Greer appears to be arguing that the fatal health risks born by Sudanese women because of their desire for a ‘tight pussy’ are justifiable for cultural reasons. Perhaps in another theorist this would not be quite so shocking. But Greer has always marshalled statistical health evidence to try and enlighten Western women to their own supplication to patriarchal distortions generated by the medical and beauty industries. This is clearly evidenced in the second half of this very chapter when she comments on the Western practices of episiotomies and Caesareans. Greer admits that, “Some, perhaps most, of the pressure for extirpation of the uterus comes from women themselves.”\textsuperscript{38} (Much like in the case of Sudanese female genital mutilation). Yet here the statistical discrepancies in the rate of hysterectomies between countries with similar health profiles make evident that not all are medically necessary. Consequently:

Unnecessary episiotomies, Caesarean sections and hysterectomies all represent assaults on femaleness, assaults that are the more difficult to recognize for what they are because of the patient’s enforced posture of isolation and submission.\textsuperscript{39}

Is Greer purposefully trying to shock? After all she claims that good polemic must make the reader uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{40} Perhaps by contrasting the two forms of genital mutilation she

\textsuperscript{35} Greer, \textit{The Whole Woman}: 94-105.
\textsuperscript{36} By presenting body piercing and tattooing as fashionable Greer effectively trivialises these activities, stripping them of the dignity she attributes to the long standing, and seemingly static, African practices of infibulation and female circumcision.
\textsuperscript{37} Greer, \textit{The Whole Woman}: 97.
\textsuperscript{38} Greer, \textit{The Whole Woman}: 104.
wants to throw into relief Western women’s own ‘idiocy’ (it would not be the first time).
Yet, there is a tendency in her work to view the third world through a nostalgic lens that transforms suffering into noble dignity. Greer shows no awareness of the epistemic violence she performs in translating third world experience for the first.41 I applaud her call to acknowledge that the Western view has faults. She admirably prods and questions some of our dearly held cultural assumptions. I do not applaud her reification of the ‘noble savage.’

Applying a wash of postcolonial theory to Greer’s inter-weaving of first and third world illuminates the neocolonialism threaded through her work. Greer acknowledges that there is a relationship of power occurring between consumer capitalism and peasant societies. Yet, she fails to demonstrate any reflexivity in relation to her own role as privileged scholar. Edward Said’s directive insists that we examine the intellectuals role:

No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society.42 The scholars work is always political and always implicated in the social understandings that drench their own culture. Greer’s role as both a public intellectual and a feminist scholar imbue her work with authority. This authority is a result of her place within a discursively disseminated tradition. An application of Said reminds the reader that Greer does not present some intrinsic truth when she depicts these women for a first world audience. Rather, she continues a scholarly tradition in which the Other is used to define

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40 Greer writes that, “Some books are incitements to action, none of them good books, for the principal function of written, even polemical writing, is to stimulate thought, to stimulate creative thought in particular. That means producing confusion in place of certainty, melting concepts so that they may reform and coagulate in new relationships. The way of doing this may be quite violent, for settled certainties resist corrosion and demand vitriol.” G Greer, 1984. *Sex and Destiny*. Melbourne: Secker & Warburg: ix.
41 Spivak: 271-313.
and construct the West. Meyda Yegenoglu examines how Western feminism uses the Orient:

Rather than speaking as if feminism and Orientalism are clearly distinct and separable political articulations, I would suggest that we demonstrate how Western feminism, as it attempts to represent cultural difference by reiterating the economy of sameness, is inextricably complicit with masculinism, Orientalism, and imperialism.43 Yegenoglu is grappling with the way that feminist discourse, even when it suggests that Oriental women are superior to Western women – especially when it does this – still perpetuates Orientalism. As she succinctly points out merely trying to replace old accounts of Oriental women with more ‘truthful’ accounts means that, “the Orientalizing economy which constructs the Orient cannot be radically called into question.”44 Clearly then Greer does not operate outside of colonising frameworks, Greer’s peasants remain first world ‘inventions.’ Greer’s role as both a feminist and a public intellectual means that she is a powerful articulatory agent of an Orientalising economy.

What is Greer gaining or creating by using third world women as an example of wholeness for her primary market - Western women? In the introduction to The Whole Woman Greer divulges where the inspiration for the book arose:

I gazed at women in segregated societies and found them in many ways stronger than women who would not go into a theatre or a restaurant without a man. I learned the limitlessness of women’s work from labourers, beggarwomen, tribeswomen. I learned about sexual pleasure from women who had been infibulated, about the goddess from great ladies whose hands were untouched by toil and from labouring grandmothers burnt black by the sun.45 A National Geographic imagining varnishes Greer’s work: you can sense the peasants peeking from behind their head shawls or proudly displaying their naked bosoms. Said warns us that Orientalism “views the Orient as something whose existence is not only

44 Yegenoglu: 86.
displayed but has remained fixed in time and place for the West.” Greer’s peasants fulfil a similar function. Reminding us in the West of not only what we have lost but also what we have gained. They provide a mistaken directive for the women who are reading her books in England, the United States or Australia. They offer no solution but merely a hankering for the past. Greer cannot bear to see her peasants corrupted. While she was in Calabria in 1967, she bonded in particular with a child named Mariuss. When she returned in 1985 she:

felt a cold fear that the coming of the fair stranger that summer had deflected the course of his life; it seemed all wrong that he should be keeping an English flower garden around the old house where nine of them had lived together. I didn’t dare wait to see what my little cavaliere servente had become but climbed into my old Ford and went on my way. Greer’s fear of change, even if the variation in behaviour is as benign as the growing of a flower garden, invokes Said’s Orientalist discourse in which the Other must remain forever the same. Greer’s use of the Other both fails to help Western women make sense of their own oppression and refuses to allow the Other to change. To remain ‘dignified’ Greer’s peasants must remain forever poor. More significantly it reifies the opposition of self and Other which underpins racist ideologies. National identity and difference is often constructed on the ground of sexual difference. Cultural and sexual difference are discursively rendered through one another. They require a more cautious and complex consideration than that given by Greer.

A lack of intellectual reflexivity also marks her treatment of women and popular culture. It is worth trying to decipher whether Greer is a great feminist thinker or instead (simply) a feminist provocateur and performer. Greer’s intellect is contested. She is variously complimented on her wit, broad knowledge, quickness and ability to debate and lambasted for being a sloppy and undisciplined thinker. Christine Wallace, the unauthorised author of

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45 Greer, The Whole Woman: 5.
46 Said: 108.
Greer’s biography, yearns to be ‘spared any further patchily progressive pronouncements from one of the outstanding personifications of intellectually arrested development …”48

Anne Coombs in her history of the Sydney Push describes Greer’s intellect as “formidable.”49 Further in an aside she writes “(Della and Greer are believed by some to have had the sharpest minds in the Push).”50 Why the chasm between Wallace’s impatience with Greer’s ‘arrested development’ and Coomb’s respect for a ‘formidable’ intellect? This contradiction can be explained with recourse to Greer’s intellectual history.

Greer’s intellect was formed more in the crucible of libertinism than feminism. The Push were an intellectual community who advocated libertinism. They inhabited the pubs – and to a lesser extent the tertiary institutions – of Sydney. It is amongst these people where Greer ‘came of age.’ The mentoring role the Push played for Greer is made apparent by her desire for their continuing good opinion: “For if ever, of anyone, I desired a good report, I desire it of them, my guides, philosophers and friends, the Sydney Libertarians.”51 Coombs memorably describes the Push as a group of “pessimistic anarchists.”52 They were heavily influenced by the philosophy lecturer John Anderson, and the works of Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Wilhelm Reich. They accepted the notion of the Leavisite cannon of great English literature though they contested what was worthy of inclusion. The Push, not surprisingly for an intellectual community established in Australia during the early 1950s, was highly masculine. Common male pursuits such as gambling and drinking at the pub

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48 Wallace: 20.
50 Coombs: 138.
51 Coombs: 304.
52 Coombs: 56. There is some blurring between the categories of ‘libertarian’ and ‘member of the push.’ Ann Coombs described the Libertarians “as the heart of the Push.” They were “the central group who fashioned the philosophy – a philosophy of anarchism, pessimism, sexual freedom and anti-careerism.” Whereas the Push “refers to the wider social network that developed around the Libertarians …” Coombs: viii-ix.
were dominant. Male thinkers commandeered the scene and cultural products wrought by male hands were the ones that were respected. Jean Buckley when commenting on her time as part of the Push stated:

It was no coincidence that the women who survived best in that social environment were academics, because they were doing male work. They could operate on the same wavelength of detachment as the men. Some of them did it a lot better than the men – Germaine Greer was a case in point.53

The trace, left by the libertine misogyny of the Push, is still apparent in Greer’s work today. It is the reason why Wallace can accuse Greer of being an example of arrested intellectual development. The deleterious effect of the continued influence of the Push on Greer is made apparent through close attention to her attitude to married women. Wives often bear the brunt of Greer’s disdain. To verify this claim I trace Greer’s attitude to wives, and show that it has not significantly altered in the thirty years of her public presence.

*The Female Eunuch*, in accordance with many second wave feminists, argued that marriage was not an institution conducive to women’s liberation. Controversially, Greer argued that men were also emotionally stunted by marriage. This perspective is more libertine than feminist. It is an assertion based on a belief in individual liberty and sexual freedom. It is also an argument that obscures how men benefit from the institution of marriage.54 *The Female Eunuch* suggests that men suffer greatly from the demands of marriage partly as a result of their burdensome, emotional, stupid and demanding wives. In the hierarchy of *The Female Eunuch* wives are lower on the scale of humanity than husbands – at least husbands can engage in intellectual conversation and debate. Greer happily sees wives banished from the dining room for their ‘infantile’ behaviour:

53 Coombs: 205.
54 For instance it is reported that married men have a longer life expectancy and earn more money than their single counterparts. See ABS, 1997. 'Death rates lower for married Australians,' *Australian Bureau of*
The ignorance and isolation of most women mean that they are incapable of making conversation: most of their communication with their spouses is a continuation of the power struggle. The result is that when wives come along to dinner parties they pervert civilized conversation about real issues into personal quarrels. The number of hostesses who wish that they did not have to ask wives is legion.55

Greer, the sexual crusader, fashioned her identity in opposition to cultural norms that demanded a woman must eventually become a wife. There were few female examples on which to model herself. One literary example was Kate, drawn from The Taming of the Shrew. Kate was that exceptional thing, a woman worthy of marriage: “The submission of a woman like Kate is genuine and exciting because she has something to lay down, her virgin pride and individuality.”56 Whereas her sister Bianca remains “the soul of duplicity, married without earnestness or goodwill.”57 The corollary to Greer’s rhetoric is that it is not the institution of marriage that dulls women into boring wifehood but rather that boring women, make boring wives. The Female Eunuch was a rallying cry. It aimed to shake women out of complacency and open their eyes to the potential of liberation. As such the odd slur can be forgiven as provocation. The Female Eunuch for all its faults believes in the power of women to grow and change. It believes that a revolution (of sorts) is on the way.

That Greer’s disdain for women has not shifted is not excusable. Third wave feminism – and here I let the term retain its slipperiness so as to include the feminisms generated by black, coloured and young women – insists on the need to accept the spectrum of difference that fractures the universal ‘woman.’ Greer’s continued contempt for wives refuses this insight. An examination of a recent stream of vitriol directed towards two famous wives reveals how Greer’s scorn escapes past the confines of married women to splatter on

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56 Greer, The Female Eunuch: 234.
57 Greer, The Female Eunuch: 234.
women more generally. Specifically Greer’s misogynist approach to the female spouse implicates working class women.

Greer’s continued disdain for married women is made apparent by her recent attacks on Cherie Booth (married to Tony Blair) and Victoria Beckham (married to David Beckham and more commonly known as Posh Spice). Cherie Booth is dismissed as a ‘concubine.’ Greer’s explanation for this insult: “She’s an intelligent woman doing an important job. I don’t want to see her coming around being a wife.” The sneer invested in that last word palpitates off the page. Yet, comparatively, Booth is lucky, as she is deemed too intelligent to be a wife. Poor Posh is assessed as so untalented a warbler that all she is good for is to be a wife:

She says her career is important but I think that is nonsense. She should be around a bit more [at home] or somebody else is going to move in on the unguarded flank if she is not careful. What one would not like to see is the career of a peerless footballer brought low by the ambition of a less than brilliant pop star. She should have another baby in the interest of poor old Brooklyn.

Posh should stay home, have babies and make sure she is more sexually available to her husband? These are not feminist sentiments. Greer still shares the Push’s contempt for those they termed ‘Alf and Dafs’ – married couples from the suburbs. The women in the Push who did get married and had children found they could no longer sustain the hectic cycle of social engagements – an impossibility without the support of their partners. They were known as ‘Push widows,’ left at home to care for the children. Feminist insight

illuminates the structural impediments that leave women abandoned and intellectually atrophying. Good feminism neither blames such women for their imbrication in sexists institutional structures nor does it free them of all responsibility. It places their experience in a social context and suggests means of improvement. Greer is still suggesting that all some women are good for is ‘being a wife.’ Greer’s contempt for Posh and Booth is no longer functioning as a trigger to propel women into action. When Greer’s rhetoric is stripped of its impetus or belief in change what is left is its underlying disdain for the women she once hoped to challenge. This exemplifies Greer’s ‘arrested development’ and it is dangerous. Disturbingly this disdain for women is primarily a disdain for working class women. Greer’s misogyny has a classed specificity. This ignores the differing array of choices that are available to working class and middle class women/girls. Note how it is the middle class Booth who is too good to be a wife whereas Posh whose class position is more ambiguous is the ‘Bianca’ banished to domesticity.

Posh performs the Thatcherite English myth of class ‘transformation,’ where wealth is a currency able to be converted into class progression. Class tensions play out on her rigidly disciplined body. Her starved and muscled physique, her dermatologically treated skin and her cosmetically enhanced cleavage are a physical metaphor revealing the work needed for class ascent. The celebrity moniker ‘Posh’ is a rich signifier of class meanings. It is not just used to refer to an object of distinction it is also an insult thrown at those who transgress class boundaries. Victoria Beckham went to a predominantly working class school. However, her family were newly wealthy, with an expensive house and affluent cars. Their socio-economic difference was isolating and Posh was teased because of it. Her nickname as part of the Spice Girls built on this history. Posh’s pop persona was brunette, sneering, stand-offish and relatively (I emphasise relatively) more sophisticatedly attired than the
other four girls. However, she always lacked the cultural capital associated with the upper classes in Britain – the accent, the education, the connections, the taste in clothes, furnishings, and food. Class is a slippery and heavily burdened signifier. As John Frow argues class position is “not necessarily unified or non-contradictory.” However its cumbersome nature does not mean we should abandon it as an analytic tool. Nor should we ignore that class is a lived category impressed upon us both spatially and emotionally just because it is hard to discuss with precision. Greer’s dismissal of Posh hinges on Posh’s classed embodiment. It is the working class body that Greer banishes to the marital hearth. She reinforces the hegemonic rendering of working class Western women as cultural dupes. Not only have they failed Marxist intellectuals by neglecting to rise in consciousness and enact the revolution they have also failed women’s liberation. This is the bitch at her worst, failing to acknowledge the richness of other women’s experiences, failing to see their strengths and simply using her power to attack.

Greer claims to be the “middle of the middle class.” The house she grew up in:

had no music, no instrument, no record player, no paintings, no books, no flowers, no good cooking, no pretty furniture, no pudding, no cheese, no wine, no parties, none of the things I now deem essential to the good life.

For her what distinguished her family as middle class was their disdain for popular Australian culture. Greer built on this contempt by immersing herself in ‘scholarly’ pursuits thus increasing her middle class cultural capital. Now her class status is leavened by her economic position. Pierre Bourdieu argued in his influential book Distinction that, “art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social

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61 Greer, Daddy, We Hardly Knew You: 19.
62 Greer, Daddy, We Hardly Knew You: 19-20.
function of legitimating social difference.” Greer continues to view her middle class
tastes as the legitimate tastes. Her validation of middle class cultural pursuits over working
class ones is problematic because Greer’s books trawls evidence from an extensive range of
sources. She gathers information primarily from literature but also from forms of popular
culture such as magazines, television, music and film. The comparative lack of popular
cultural sources and their cursory treatment suggests that Greer judges popular culture
inferior to her own cultural pursuits. Greer treats the popular media that suffuses her own
culture much as the anthropologist of old treated the foreign. There is the same amazed
distance, the same quest for objectivity and the same air of superiority. This stems from her
early Leavisite education from which she absorbed a “characteristic moral seriousness,
hostility to modern commercialism and harsh, exclusive view of what constituted superior
English literature.” There is a certain amount of shame associated with any enjoyment she
gleans from such media – particularly the television. As evidenced by the following
anecdote. While travelling with David Plante, they spent an evening watching The Sound of
Music. Plante observed of Greer that “tears were dripping down her face.” Yet despite this
response, she still claimed it was ‘shit’ before getting up and changing the channel. For
Greer, television is not a medium to be involved with nor to respond to. Part of her role as a
public intellectual is to act as cultural interpreter. Yet the popular mass media are poorly
integrated into her work. When she does use them her lack of respect means she does not
apply the same academic rigour to them as she does to literature.

Popular culture is poorly handled by Greer partly because she lacks a crucial self-
reflexivity in relation to her own class position. Particularly regarding her membership of,
what Frow describes, as the “knowledge class.”66 This consists of intellectuals, a stratum of the professional-managerial class. Here an intellectual is defined as “all of those whose work is socially defined as being based upon the possession and exercise of knowledge, whether that knowledge be prestigious or routine, technical or speculative.”67 The knowledge class performs a crucial hegemonic role as cultural gatekeepers. Frow reminds us that intellectuals must not forget the class role they play when they assign value to texts. He warns against reifying the binary between high and low culture through an awareness of how regimes of value function to structure societies. This insight makes apparent how Greer’s disdain for the ‘popular’ is a function of her class position as a cultural gatekeeper. It was no coincidence that Posh’s pop talents were criticised and found wanting in comparison to her husband’s success as a footballer. For Greer it would appear that football still wears its trace as a form of ‘authentic’ folk culture whereas pop is a ‘tainted’ product of the mass media. In an advanced capitalist society this distinction is untenable (if it was ever possible). As Stuart Hall points out, to claim an ‘authentic’ working class culture “neglects the absolutely essential relations of cultural power – of domination and subordination – which is an intrinsic feature of cultural relation.”68 Her class allegiance means she fails to engage extensively with popular culture and easily dismisses it as ‘shit.’ Her position regarding popular culture goes part way to explaining her acceptability. She does not challenge middle class sensibilities. Greer’s version of feminism is ideally suited for readers of The Guardian. High cultural pursuits remain preferable. Greer’s admiration for Shakespeare, for famous and dead male masters and for women’s poetry shines through in her cultural allusions.

66 Frow: 14.
67 Frow: 90.
68 Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular"," in Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: 460.
As she trained in English literature, it follows that Greer draws most of her examples from this realm. It would appear that Greer’s love of books was formed in opposition to a love of film. As a child, she was “taken to the movies once” she then “screamed in such terror at the cartoon that showed aeroplanes with teeth like sharks tearing at each other in the sky” that she “was never taken to a cinema again.” Greer, has every right to prefer poetry to film, just as I have every right to enjoy action films more than art house cinema. However when one’s taste preferences become integrated into prose, the treatment needs to be careful and considered. Her reification of high culture over low culture does have worrying class implications. Further she fails to communicate how power operates in the interface between a popular text and its reader. Popular culture is the staccato beat that runs through The Whole Woman it appears at random moments and it is mentioned briefly. The more literary references are blended into her argument. They are melodic. The First Wives’ Club warrants one sentence during a discussion on male desire for the prepubescent female while more than two pages are devoted to the memoir, As If, by Blake Morrison the poet and critic. Greer fails to understand how popular culture functions hegemonically. The chapter most devoted to popular culture in The Whole Woman is “Girlpower” this chapter examines magazines aimed at adolescent girls. When concluding she warns the reader that, “The propaganda machine that is now aimed at our daughters is more powerful than any form of indoctrination that has ever existed before.” Hegemony is never just a case of ‘top down’ power. Yes, popular culture does function to impress the values of the dominant power block on the less powerful, but it is also, and always, a site of struggle. John Fiske,

69 Greer, Daddy, We Hardly Knew You: 1.
70 Greer, The Whole Woman: 216-224.
71 Greer, The Whole Woman: 318.
though he is often accused of overstating his case, provides a crucial corrective when he writes:

hegemony does not denote a static power relationship but a constant process of struggle in which the big guns belong to the side of those with social power, but in which victory does not necessarily go to the big guns – or, at least, in which that victory is not necessarily total.\(^{72}\)

Greer’s inelegant treatment of popular culture ellipses this crucial insight. Greer fails to see the resistive potential in popular culture.

Greer has written two books that deal very overtly with regimes of value. Both are critical histories of women artists. The first, *The Obstacle Race* excavated the history of women painters and sieved it through the question, “How good were the women who earned a living by painting?”\(^{73}\) The artists are judged using criteria based on what Greer terms “the sociology of art.”\(^{74}\) The book concludes that there are no great female painters because:

you cannot make great artists out of egos that have been damaged, with wills that are defective, with libidos that have driven out of reach and energy diverted into neurotic channels.\(^{75}\)

A similar conclusion is reached in her book on women poets, *Slip-Shod Sibyls*.\(^{76}\) Both books argue that, within their chosen artistic genre, there has been a comparative lack of women participants (in relation to men) and the few there have been are overrated and patronised. She insists that a body of good women’s poetry remains:

unwritten because women were disabled and deflected by the great tradition itself, while a select band of arbitrarily chosen token women, all young, beautiful and virtuous, were rewarded for their failures.\(^{77}\)

This is in accord with Greer’s major thesis that only ‘whole’ women are capable of full participation in society. There is undoubtedly more than a kernel of truth in Greer’s

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75 Greer, *Slip-Shod Sibyls*: 327.
76 Greer, *Slip-Shod Sibyls*. 

detailed and scholarly analysis. Her argument highlighting the lack of institutional support and training given to female artists is particularly convincing. However, there is a definite lacunae in her refusal to probe the regimes of value by which she judges her artists. She uses institutional criteria to judge her artist’s works. Hall reminds us that:

the cultural process – cultural power – in our society depends, in the first instance, on this drawing of the line, always in each period in a different place, as to what is to be incorporated into ‘the great tradition’ and what is not.78

This line is commonly drawn by educational institutions. In accordance with these institutions Greer’s ‘cultural policing’ reifies the distinctions between high and low culture in such a way as to confirm high culture’s dominant position. Feminist scholarship has indicated this is not just a question of class. The high/low cultural distinction is also used to disparage women’s cultural genres.79 Though she does support female folk art Greer also supports patriarchal judgements.

Greer’s approach to masculinity and her valuation of male dominated cultural institutions is problematic and often contradictory. For instance The Female Eunuch insists that we retain sympathy for men’s oppression, while The Whole Woman presents a consistent picture of men as the enemy. Life and experience do change opinions and political beliefs. Greer’s altered doctrine prompts her to write the memorable denunciation, “A few men hate all women all of the time, some men hate some women all of the time, and all men hate some women some of the time.”80 Men’s (apparent) intrinsic hatred of women is compared to women’s undying love of men, “It would matter less that she discover that men hate her if

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77 Greer, Slip-Shod Sibyls: xxiii.
78 Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular"': 463.
79 See Ang, Watching Dallas.
80 Greer, The Whole Woman: 281.
she did not love them and need to be loved by them.”

If Greer’s denunciation was a current and consistently held view that clearly broke with her previously held opinion then the alteration in her stance would be one of the normal changes in opinion wrought by the life cycle. However this is not the case. The inherent contradiction in her stance is current. Greer’s insistence on all men’s inherent misogyny has not altered her own undiminished affection for men. This became apparent during an interview she granted Carol Lloyd while on the publicity circuit promoting *The Whole Woman*. If Lloyd had been more familiar with Greer’s life and oeuvre she would not have been nearly so baffled by the fact that “the author of ‘The Whole Woman,’ which casts men as hate-filled victims of their own quasi-innate desire for control” managed to begin their interview “with not one but three wistful recollections of ultra-masculine men.”

Greer’s strong and overt sexuality has meant that her life has been punctuated with the ‘balling’ of quite masculine men. As she has aged this has been tempered by her preference for what she terms ‘boys.’ Unfortunately, she refuses to address this contradiction between her spoken and her written word with any depth. Her sexual bond with masculinity has similarities with her brand of academic engagement. Both inadvertently end up privileging men at the expense of the women she claims to love and represent. I am not endorsing the sentiment that to be in any way masculine or imbricated in highly masculine institutions is to warrant a heated feminist berating. However, in Greer’s case her equivocations result in a misogynist rendering of femininity.

81 Greer, *The Whole Woman*: 176.
83 ‘Balling’ is one of Greer’s preferred words for sexual intercourse as it does not imply male domination or action in comparison to female passivity.
Greer is never a female eunuch – it is all those other Western women subjugated to capitalism, the beauty industries and patriarchy that are castrated. Greer, charmingly, acknowledges her own privilege but the charm and acknowledgment do not elide the dangerous distancing this creates between the self who writes and those ‘others’ she scribes into being. It is easy to demonstrate the distance Greer creates between herself and the ‘masses’ of women she writes both for and about. The following example is extracted from Greer’s essay on rape, “Seduction is a Four-Letter Word” (first published in *Playboy*).

Consistent with Greer’s oeuvre, this essay is peppered with an array of anecdotal evidence.84 After presenting this evidence Greer reveals:

> In nearly every case I have described, the details were told to me by the men, who explained their comparatively humane attitudes toward me as a result of my own respect for myself and my own straightforwardness in sexual matters, both results of my unusually privileged status as a woman.85

She then goes on to tell us how the victims of these crimes felt, “The girls who have been mistreated in the ways I have described, take the fault upon themselves.”86 What distresses about this paragraph is not just its reliance on the perpetrators for source material, but also the way Greer unproblematically talks for and about these women, immediately after her admission that she has never talked with them. Greer claims the fully actualised title of ‘woman’ but the raped women are reduced to diminutive ‘girls.’ It is Greer who realises that ‘petty rape’ – what is now commonly termed ‘date rape’ – is the result of a misogynist culture. The ‘girls’ merely marinate in their own guilt and internalise the culture’s lack of esteem for women. I am not surprised that it is the men who are coming to Greer with their stories of sexual ‘exploits’ with ‘stupid’ women. I hope the women are finding a more sympathetic ear elsewhere. The hypocrisy embedded in Greer’s stance outrages and alienates. Katie Roiphe refutes date rape statistics because none of her friends have

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84 Greer, *The Madwoman’s Underclothes*: 152-168.
85 Greer, *The Madwoman’s Underclothes*: 163.
confessed experiencing this trauma to her.\textsuperscript{37} Perhaps in common with Greer it is her arrogance and lack of empathy that ward against shared confidences.

Greer concludes the politically suspect chapter on abortion in \textit{The Whole Woman} with, “All this suffering, all this mess, is the direct consequence of the insistence upon the accessibility of the cervix to the ejaculating penis.”\textsuperscript{88} Greer is arguing that the solution to the complex abortion debate is easy: those ‘silly women’ just have to stop having sex with the evil ‘rod of domination.’ This is bound to alienate fertile heterosexual women. Especially considering the hypocrisy in Greer’s own claim that the primary attraction of her new young lover is that his penis produces sperm like a tap.\textsuperscript{89} Greer’s demonising of men in \textit{The Whole Woman} has two very negative effects. Firstly, it confirms the myth that all feminists ‘grow up’ to be bitter shrews. It enforces the cultural narrative that if you are a feminist there is no way in which you can remain happily monogamous you must eventually become a ‘man-hating bitch.’\textsuperscript{90} Secondly, it continues to paint Greer as that exceptional ‘girl’ who is in fact worthy of being part of the ‘gang’: she alone is qualified to be a contemporary of influential and intellectual men. For feminism this is a highly problematic stance, it places her in a hierarchally superior position to the women she claims to represent. Her groundless and misogynist attacks on other women are baffling to young women when taken out of context. It is this aspect of Greer that explains why young women do not endorse her as a feminist role model. I have one anecdote of my own that challenges Greer’s arsenal. When teaching feminist theory as part of an undergraduate

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{86} Greer, \textit{The Madwoman's Underclothes}: 163.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Roiphe: 52.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Greer, \textit{The Whole Woman}: 93.
\end{itemize}
cultural studies unit there is often resistance. When young women are asked why they do not want to claim the term ‘feminist’ as an identity marker the reply is often vague yet the muttered words ‘Germaine Greer’ can be easily picked from the ramble. The inspiring firebrand of the second wave appears to have morphed into an embodiment of the backlash. For young women, she has become what they do not want to be.

There is a side of Greer that is very dangerous to feminism. Greer’s prose is powerful fuelled as it is by equal measures of wit and vitriol. For popular polemic it is very ‘clever, clever’ wearing her erudition in her wide allusions. Her prose provokes and seduces. It works best when it seduces women into wanting to be loud, smart and public, when it inspires them to live their lives large. However we must remember that the face of the seductress is twofold. It entices but also embedded in the provocateurs stance is a wish to be tamed. There is an acquiescence to hegemonic societal norms. Greer provokes but it is within clear bounds. While she rebels against compulsory femininity, she upholds racist and classist regimes of thought. There is a reason why the senior editor of the anti-abortion and largely Christian journal *The Human Life Review*, Faith Abbott McFadden admires Greer, and it is not for her feminist stance. McFadden attempted to review *The Whole Woman*. Unfortunately due to the bad language she was not able to read the book and based her commentary on other people’s reviews. Though rather shocked by (what she heard of) Greer’s philippic she concluded her ‘review’ with the comments:

> I think I know now why my husband liked Germaine Greer, and I have come to sort of like her too—not her writings, but her, or the fragments of herself that she’s revealed.  

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90 For a discussion on the unrealistic expectation that feminism be responsible for making women happy see Murphy: 159-167.
Damned by faint praise indeed. What is it about Greer that causes the senior editor of a highly conservative journal to claim that she likes Greer? The streaks of conservatism that run through Greer’s politics with a frightening consistency. McFadden likes Greer because of her cultural pursuits specifically her enjoyment of and participation in the choral music of the Catholic church. McFadden is asserting a class allegiance with Greer.

Back in 1971 when *The Female Eunuch* first came out, Greer was modern. Her views in fact were shockingly contemporary. They challenged the status quo. Unfortunately her politics have not altered much since 1971. The most radical change lies in her rejection of the doctrine of ‘sexual freedom’ in preference for a stronger sense of sexual responsibility. Greer’s work lacks a crucial intellectual self-reflexivity. The academic theory she uses to analyse popular culture continues to value high culture over low culture. This reifies class distinctions to the detriment of working class people. Greer’s work suffers from its lack of engagement with cultural studies and theorists of postmodernity. As a bitch Greer is at her best when she is loud and fabulous. This is particularly apparent in her public speaking engagements. Greer is at her worst when her inner ‘haughty-bitch’ has free reign. Margaret Talbot accuses *The Female Eunuch* of a “certain amount of head-girl disdain for lesser—and especially less sexually liberated—females.”92 This tendency in Greer is still apparent in her scathing comments on Victoria Beckham and Cherie Booth. Greer’s ultimate fault is a lack of self-reflexivity about her own position as a public intellectual.

Feminism needs public intellectuals. The popular culture section established the requirement for an everyday feminism. An interpretation of feminism that is sung, danced or acted serves an important and valued function. Feminist popular culture is meaningful and weighty. So are feminist intellectuals who provide public translations of complicated and fresh feminist theory. The intellectual has the capacity to articulate the way in which disparate sites of oppression work with and through one another. For instance they can make us aware of how the paid maternity leave debate when twinned with a panic about fertility enforces a conservative expectation about the role of young women. Women need affirmation about their intellectual potential. We need models of intellectual achievement. There also needs to be a variety of feminist voices engaged in the discussions that take place on the terrain of the public intellectual. This thesis asserts that women need to be able to publicly age, grow and change. I am not arguing that now Greer is post-menopausal she should be shunted off to the retirement village. What is needed are some new feisty celebrity feminist voices with which she can dialogue. As the first chapter suggested, the voices of the young can be just as conservative as those of the aged. Feminism needs a loud public intellectual that talks about inclusivity and difference.
With Hanson, more so than with the other bitches in this thesis, I feel the need to defend her inclusion – to justify why she is a bitch. There is something about her that eludes the tag of ‘bitch’ that the media has tried to stick on her back. The reason for this is that Hanson is sympathetic towards masculinity. This contrasts with one of the primary defining characteristics of a bitch - a strong derision of men and masculine power. Hanson “laughingly admits that all her best friends are men.”¹ She has “found men to be a lot better as friends.”² More significantly, the politics she promotes are advantageous to Anglo-Saxon men. Hanson’s policies and her political personality attract male support because One Nation is a masculinist project. Marilyn Lake argues “When speaking for ‘Australians’, Pauline Hanson speaks to the subjectivities of men – marginalised, rural, white Australian men – tapping into their pervasive sense of loss.”³ A common response when I mention to people that I am including Hanson in my thesis is: ‘Why are you including her? She’s not really a bitch is she?’ They are responding to the fact that even though Hanson’s politics are fuelled by the bitch’s need to attack, she is not attacking men. This is indicative of the way in which the label ‘bitch’ is awarded to those women who challenge hegemonic masculinity. This is a limited definition of the bitch.

² Dodd: 20.
Hanson demands inclusion because she does embody a number of ‘bitch’ characteristics. There is the anger that is associated with being a bitch. She may not be attacking hegemonic masculinity but she does mount an offensive on many other social groupings in, and outside, Australia. It is a nationalist anger Hanson expresses; an anger of ‘righteous indignation’ fuelled by the state of ‘our’ country. While the politics that fuel this anger are far from new to the Australian context, that they are voiced by a popular female politician is new. Hanson is a conservative bitch. Predominantly, this thesis explores how the bitch archetype can be a boon for feminism. It did this especially in its exploration of the popular cultural bitches, positioning them as strong third wave feminist role models. What Hanson reveals is feminism’s shadow. She is a woman propelled to her position by changes feminism has wrought in society. Yet her engagement with feminism is deeply antagonistic and damaging. Hanson’s political project is oppressive to a broad spectrum of women – Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders, immigrant (especially of Asian origin), and intellectual women as well as single supporting mothers. Indigenous Australian and immigrant women have had the outcome of Hanson’s rhetoric of racism and fear enacted on their bodies. Her rhetoric led to a climate of race hatred. Sam Watson, in his article “Hanson: a Murri Perspective,” laments that “Schoolchildren were targets in the playground and beaten, Black men and women were spat upon and abused in the street by whites, and Black offices were painted with racist graffiti.”

Similar narratives were conveyed by various ethnic groups and organisations. Memorably, Catherine Tan provoked the Prime Minister to say sorry for the racism displayed towards her children while addressing the Chinese Chamber

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of Commerce in Perth. Hanson’s broad attacks on the ‘intellectual elites’ – those who she
would not trust to do her shopping – undermine women who work within these fields. It
especially undermines the feminist project. As a feminist, Hanson makes me deeply
uncomfortable. She is an angry bitch whose politics need unravelling.

‘Pauline Hanson,’ is a name that invokes a response. She is one of Australia’s most notorious political figures. Hanson erupted onto the political scene in 1996 with such violence that her name was mentioned 2,645 times in the mainstream print media that year alone.¹ Hanson was both a national phenomenon and an international one. She warrants inclusion in my bitch pantheon for a series of reasons. Australia’s celebrity machine does not produce many bitches. Instead its iconography is rife with larrikins, mates and various manifestations of laconic masculinity in accordance with the ANZAC myth.² There is a certain eccentricity allowed to Australian male public figures. Bob Hawke can cry on television. Michael Hutchinson is made more alluring by his drug use and kinky sex. Russel Crowe can recite poetry as part of his BAFTA speech. These men can be loud and difficult. In contrast, our female icons are generally charming, attractive and nice. Kylie Minogue, Nicole Kidman, and Cathy Freeman do not challenge the ‘pleasantness’ of hegemonic femininity. They are not angry women. Freeman’s famous victory lap cloaked in both the Australian and the Aboriginal flag at the 1994 Commonwealth games was a gesture towards reconciliation, as opposed to anger. Kidman refuses to publicly discuss the reasons behind her marriage break-up – to get angry in public. As Joe Joseph points out a major factor in Minogue’s sexual appeal is the “way she camouflages her ambition.”³ Our cultural mythology does not have a model for an angry woman – for the bitch. An analysis of Hanson allows a discussion of why this might be so and what are some of the

² Many commentators have noted the importance of the ANZAC myth to Australian National Identity See Kelly, The End of Certainty: 11. Hanson invoked this mythology at the launch of One Nation, when she claimed a vote for her party would “restore our ANZAC spirit and our national pride.” Cited in, Dodd: 228.
consequences of this lack. This thesis has generally celebrated the bitch arguing that this archetype performs a crucial feminist function, but Hanson demonstrates how the bitch can attack the feminist project.

In many ways, Hanson’s working life and identity as a self-supporting woman have been enabled by feminism. Feminist ideologies underwrite Hanson’s belief in her ability to manage her life and career. Hanson is a twice divorced woman with four children. The last divorce was granted in 1987. Hanson has been an unmarried, self-supporting woman with four dependents for over fifteen years. She states that, “When I was just at home with the children I got bored and wanted to get out and be an individual.”4 Her second husband actively impeded her search for work outside of his business. Hanson “Began to feel trapped in this marriage and dominated by Mark.”5 So she left and started her own business: the famous fish and chip shop. Apparently she is not contemplating any further marriages.6 This is a classic second wave narrative. Unfulfilled in the role of supportive wife and always available mother, she yearns for something more. She feels dominated and stifled by her husbands. So she packs her bags and strikes out on her own. Eventually making it onto the international stage as a member of parliament. In recounting this story, I feel myself slip into a Barbara Taylor Bradford novel – working class girl makes good. The only element missing is the dashing hero.

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4 Dodd: 21.
5 Dodd: 24.
This sense of herself as an autonomous working woman has clashed with her constituent’s more repressive view of gender politics. Margo Kingston shares an anecdote gleaned from the 1998 Queensland election campaign:

One Nation leader Ms Pauline Hanson yesterday backed abortion on demand, stunning supporters who surrounded her during a visit to Goombungee. ‘It is every woman’s right to determine her body … to decide her body,’ Ms Hanson said. She was responding to a question from the crowd as to her policy on abortion. The small crowd was silent after the statement, with some supporters shaking their heads.7

After this, Hanson refused to answer questions on abortion. Clearly her constituents were not ready to hear her message about a woman’s right to control her body. Hanson does not claim feminism but she does live a range of feminist principles. She believes in a woman’s right to equal pay for equal work. She believes in a woman’s right to determine her own body. She affirms women’s ability to perform leadership roles. However she works hard to distance herself from the label of ‘feminism’ with statements such as, “some women have pushed feminism too far and they are pulling us down with their views, to the extent where we are losing the respect of the men.”8 And: “I also believe in looking after the male, making sure the food is cooked and the clothes are washed and ironed. I would treat a man like a king.”9 One of the fascinating attributes of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party is that it is headed by a woman but attracts male supporters who have trouble accepting a woman’s leadership.

The populist politics of hatred and fear peddled by Hanson have previously been voiced by male politicians such as, Joh Bjelke-Petersen and Graeme Campbell. Growing up in Perth in the late 1980s meant that Jack van Tongeren and his Australian Nationalist Movement

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8 Dodd: 20.
9 Dodd: 20-1.
(ANM) are indelibly imprinted on my memory. The city was defaced with ‘Asians Out’ posters. This was soon followed by a series of fire bombings of Chinese restaurants. Eventually Jack van Tongeren and a number of his supporters were imprisoned. They made apparent just how easily prejudice can turn to violence and reminded Perth residents of the hatred that bubbles through our civic body. Pauline Hanson is not merely a ‘mouth-piece’ for the newly disenfranchised. To think in this way erases Australia’s racist history. Hanson is a phenomenon where celebrity, populist politics, conservatism and femaleness all collide. That Pauline Hanson supports a nationalist agenda is revealed by her party’s name. The moniker ‘One Nation’ defines and restricts what it means to be an Australian. She wants to reclaim the ground lost to multiculturalism and ‘reunite’ Australia as a homogenous population. This imagined population is white, working class and predominantly male; it consists of John Howard’s Aussie battlers. One Nation makes apparent how discourses of nationalism rely on racist ideologies. The nation is defined in opposition to those Others who ‘contest’ its borders. Hanson positions Asians and Indigenous Australians as outside and threatening to the ‘healthy’ Australian nations state. As much as small ‘l’ liberals may wish to argue that this is ‘un-Australian’ – working against a national ethos of egalitarianism and a ‘fair-go’ for all – it is in fact a very Australian rhetoric. It is important to understand Hanson, not as an embarrassing political anomaly, but rather as a contemporary voice demanding a return to the politics of the ‘Australian Settlement.’

Robert Miles argues that when tracing racist occurrences, “one assesses not the consequences of actions but the history of discourse in order to demonstrate that prior to

\[10\] ANM did not run for political office. Some of the more politically reactionary groups reject our current political system as inherently corrupt and thus refuse to engage with it except for in an antagonistic manner.

\[11\] This is a term coined by Paul Kelly. For a definition of the Australian Settlement see Kelly, The End of Certainty: 1-11.
the silence (or to the transformation), a racist discourse was present.”\textsuperscript{12} It is important to acknowledge how Hanson, and now Howard, rearticulate two of the primary tenants that underwrote the Australian Settlement. That of Protection and White Australia.

Australian democracy has a peculiar history. Our sense of nationhood was founded on both racist subjugation and exclusion. The antipodes were ‘white’ outposts of the Empire/civilisation stranded in the Southern Hemisphere. At the time of federation the creation of Australia as a nation state was imagined as a unique opportunity. The country’s isolation was considered an important factor in the creation of a new egalitarian society. Pride was taken in the fact that the Australian colonies had not perpetuated the divisive class system of England. Australia would become superior to Britain and even the United States of America by excluding the ‘inferior’ races. It was only by doing this that “the dignity of labour and a decent standard of living would be preserved, caste divisions avoided, and social harmony maintained.”\textsuperscript{13} To uphold these ideas, Australia needed to be protected from an influx of cheap immigrant labour. The white citizenry also needed to ‘forget’ the history of indigenous slave labour. In 1907 the idea of wage protection was enshrined in law. Thus instigating a tradition of government intervention in labour control in the hope of making Australia a ‘working man’s paradise.’ Paul Kelly writes that eventually: “Protection and White Australia became fused into a self-reinforcing emotional bond. Protection was the core of Australia’s consciousness.”\textsuperscript{14} This was not a fleeting moment in Australia’s history. The White Australia Policy was enacted from Federation until 1966. It was not until “1973 the Whitlam Government abolished the final vestige of

\textsuperscript{12} Miles: 85.
\textsuperscript{14} Kelly, \textit{The End of Certainty}: 4.
official racial discrimination.”15 The Labor Government’s of Hawke and Keating from 1983-1996, and to a lesser extent the Coalition Government of Fraser, with their emphasis on multiculturalism and establishing strong trade ties with our Asian neighbours, are a recent and short departure from the norm of Australian politics. Hanson makes obvious how confronting this has been for a sizeable portion of the Australian electorate.

Hanson voters desire a return to a policy of Protection. They want migration curbed and their jobs protected. Robert Miles suggests that to effectively counter racism the economic and social situations that are disenfranchising the working class need to be altered, as often “racism helps to make sense of the economic and social changes accompanying industrial and urban decline.”16 However Hanson did not arise at a time of particular economic stress. The racism that underpins One Nation is not merely the result of working people worrying about job security and the amount of money in their pay packets. One Nation’s racism is inexorably entwined with their articulation of Australian Nationalism. This is made most apparent by their policies towards Indigenous Australians. These policies are based in the beliefs of One Nation supporters that Aboriginal land rights and Government help for Indigenous Australians have gone too far.17 Roughly ninety percent of One Nation voters support these sentiments. More shockingly, fifty percent of other voters are in agreement with One Nation on this issue.18 Clearly Indigenous Australians still occupy a contentious place in the Nation State for white Australians, and this is not because they are worried that Aboriginaals and Torres Strait Islanders are going to be stealing their jobs. WK Hancock’s 1930s insight that what Australian’s fear “is not physical conquest by another race, but

16 Miles: 81.
rather the internal decomposition and degradation of their own civilisation” clearly still has contemporary currency. Indigenous Australians are still imagined as corrupting the homogeneity of the Australian nation and therefore weakening the state. One Nation’s project is dangerously racist. It is a deeply divisive politics that has impacted financially through funding cuts, emotionally through exclusion, and physically through an increase in assaults on disadvantaged groups.

Hanson’s voice is one manifestation of a conservative politics of dissatisfaction. Perhaps if Margaret Thatcher has fallen through Alice’s rabbit hole and ended up ‘down under,’ she would have resembled Pauline Hanson. Both Hanson and Thatcher attracted the vote of skilled working class men. Franklin argues in relation to Thatcher that:

> Through an analysis of voting patterns, she goes on to claim not only that Thatcher’s initial electoral success was the result of a swing to the right by skilled working-class men, but that women have been moving away from the right.

The conservative bitch attracts a consistent demographic. Arguably, the Liberal/National Coalition under the leadership of John Howard, just won the most recent Australian Federal Election partly through their co-option of the policies that One Nation, apparently, did not have. Their last election campaign slogan - ‘I get to decide who comes in to my back yard’ – was paraphrased Hanson. She famously voiced these sentiments in her 1996 maiden speech:

> Of course, I will be called racist but, if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country.

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18 Bean: 149.
20 See Bean: 136-152.
22 Dodd: 225.
Though she most probably underestimated how frenzied the media response would be, Hanson was right, she was labelled a racist. By 2001, the same sentiments could be used in an election campaign for a major party. Arguably it is the strength of Hansonism that enabled this Governments’ current policy on asylum seekers. This clearly counters the commentators of the late 1990s who revelled in dismissing Hanson for not being a real politician. McKenzie Wark blithely dismissed One Nation’s 1998 Aboriginal affairs policy as a ‘non-policy.’23 Phillip Adams constructed Hanson as a bag lady of prejudice in a scathing opinion piece that insisted, “One Nation has no political agenda – other than the wreaking of havoc.”24 Pauline Hanson and One Nation did, and still do, have policies. Admittedly as a new party there was a general sense of uncertainty, changeability and naivety to many of these policies. Their tax policy ‘Easytax’ was disastrous:

‘Easytax’ called for the replacement of all existing taxes by a two per cent tax on all transactions and was widely criticised even by ONP [One Nation Party] supporters in the farming and small business communities.25

Not surprisingly for an electoral party capable of eliciting 10 percent of the vote, there were a variety of reasons why people supported One Nation, (including the appeal of Hanson as a charismatic leader). However, a crucial factor to this support was One Nation’s policies, particularly in regard to immigration, funding for Indigenous Australians, the family court, and law and order (gun control legislation fell under this heading).26 When these commentators morally condemn Hanson, as Adams did, or dismiss her as simply ignorant along the lines of Wark, they fail to understand Hanson’s supporters. They merely reinforce the opinions of those who are already anti-Hanson. Additionally, in doing so, they

26 Bean: 136-152.
propagate the conviction that female politicians do not deal in hard politics but rather appeal to the emotions of the voting public.

Natasha Stott Despoja, the current leader of the Democrats, applies what she terms the ‘Alexander Downer Test’ to female politicians. In her mind she simply replaces a female politician with Alexander Downer and asks if the same judgements or criteria would apply to him. For instance, “Would someone ask Mr Downer his age so comfortably?”27 I have found myself applying the Alexander Downer Test to Pauline Hanson. Would her policies and her politics have been written about differently if she was a man? The answer is yes. Female politicians occupy a specific cultural position in Australia. Hanson needs to be analysed as a product of the Australian political system. She is not a historical anomaly. Rather, she is the logical result of Australia’s treatment of both the political Right and female politicians. These arguments need to be further illustrated. A cursory retelling of the history of women in Australian politics will help illuminate Hanson’s place on the political stage.

HANSON IN CONTEXT

Australia was an early pioneer in women’s suffrage. The colonial settlements of South Australia, Western Australian and also New Zealand, were the first in the world to grant women the vote prior to 1900. However, Australia had the longest lag, in the Western

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world between the federal “right to stand and the achievement of parliamentary representation.”28 Furthermore it was not until the 1970s that significant and incremental changes regarding women’s representation began to occur. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including lobbying by women’s interest groups, and changing expectations in the electorate regarding the need for women politicians. The earlier gains in the Senate most probably helped compel an imperative to increase the level of women in the House of Representatives. Members are elected to the lower house using a system based on single-member electorates. Such systems significantly disadvantage female members. It has been demonstrated that when political parties need to select a single member they predominantly chose men but when they have to present a party list on the ballot paper they are more likely to “select a balanced ticket which mirrors to some extent the different elements of the electorate.”29 Hence women have traditionally been much better represented in the Senate than in the lower house.30 This tendency was emphasised in Australia by the vagaries of our two party system. Of course Members of both the lower and the upper house have to be preselected. Consequently it is party policy and politics that has the most influence on both the number of women nominated and the seats for which they are nominated. The conservative Liberal Party has had strong rural support and has not prioritised women’s rights. Traditionally members of the Labor Party have risen through the ranks of the union movement, this has resulted in a highly masculine political culture. Due to both party’s internal structures the tendency to preselect men as candidates was reinforced.

30 Originally Members were elected to the Senate using the same system as the House of Representatives. It was in 1948 that the Senate shifted to a system of preferential voting using a single and transferable vote.
Historically, Australia’s two party system effectively hobbled women’s ability to sit in parliament. Feminist intervention has been crucial in counteracting this tendency. Femocrats and external feminist organisations have lobbied for affirmative action policies. Within the two main political parties activists have sought changes. The Liberal Women’s Forum, like the Labor organisations Emily’s List and Labor Women’s Network, have “actively sought out prospective candidates and ran familiarisation and training programs for women prior to the preselections.”\(^{31}\) The Labor party has an affirmative action policy that aims to guarantee women’s participation in the party decision making structures as well as allocating “a minimum of 35 per cent of Federal parliamentary seats” in the House of Representative to women.\(^{32}\) These initiatives have seen higher numbers of female candidates fielded. Though the Liberal Party’s lack of an affirmative action policy no doubt explains why it fielded less female candidates for the 2001 election than it did in the previous two elections. Both parties are still more likely to endorse female candidates in marginal or unwinnable seats. This not only limits the number of female representatives but also restricts women’s political careers. To ascend in the party hierarchy one needs to be a sitting member for more than one term. Commenting on the recent election Marian Sawer indicates that:

> While women constituted 24 per cent of members of the House of Representatives, they represented 43 per cent of the seats held by their respective parties with a notional margin of less than 1 per cent.\(^{33}\)

This tendency to field women candidates in marginal seats is echoed in Britain. Their 2001 election made apparent how important affirmative action policies are to female political representation. In 1997 the benefits of a since abandoned affirmative action policy meant that women were elected in unprecedented numbers. Jackie Ashley, in her article on the English Labour Party, compares the 1997 result with those of 2001:

Of 37 safe Labour seats that became vacant ahead of the 2001 election, only four went to women (11 percent). That compares with 11 out of 32 safe Labour seats (34 percent) at the 1997 election.34

The comparable situations in England and Australia provide a strong argument for the inherent bias of the dominant parties’ selection process. The bias of the parties is reinforced by the electoral system itself. Pauline Hanson performs this history. She was originally just another Liberal female candidate in an unwinnable seat.

Hanson was originally endorsed by the Liberal Party for a safe Labor seat. As the historical record has demonstrated, it is not unusual for women to be nominated for ‘unwinnable’ seats. It is in fact indicative of the treatment marshalled out to women by the major parties. How very inconsequential Hanson was to her own party was further emphasised by her disendorsement two weeks before the election. This was unprecedented. No other Member has been disendorsed so close to an election. It is arguable that her dismissal was seen as a safe way to diffuse the race debate that had been brewing in Queensland. Hanson was not the only coalition politician making racist remarks at the time. Bob Burgess, a Queensland National Party Candidate had “described naturalisation ceremonies as ‘dewogging ceremonies’” and then National Queensland MHR Bob Katter had referred to ‘enviro-

Nazis,’ ‘femi-Nazies’ and ‘slanty-eyed ideologues.’ Neither of these male politicians were ejected from their party. Hanson was John Howard’s ‘fall-guy,’ so to speak. She was expendable and so used to distance the Liberal Party from the sentiments being espoused by their coalition partners. It was presumed that she would not win the seat, especially without the party behind her. On the slim chance that she did get elected, as an Independent Member, she would be quietly subsumed into parliament for her one term. No one could have predicted the furore that would erupt after her maiden speech. Though it was eminently predictable that a small party aiming to pierce the complacency of the two major parties would be headed by a woman.

In the smaller parties, the bias against female participation is not so systematically entrenched. With the Greens and the Democrats this is also the result of policies of social justice and a clear commitment to female participation. Contrastingly the National Party does not display the same commitment and consequently has few women sitting Members. One Nation like the National Party espouses Right wing attitudes to gender politics. They do not endorse an affirmative action policy or even express a commitment to female participation. The reason that they had a female leader until 2002 was due to Hanson founding the Party. She did not have to navigate the institutional sexism of the two major parties. It makes sense that the Democrats were the first political party in Australia to have a female leader. It makes even more sense that this was not a ‘one off” occurrence but rather has been established as the norm with four female leaders since Janine Haines.

36 Both of these members were elected into parliament in the 1996 election. Bob Katter has since become an Independent Member.
McKenzie Wark commenting on the strong role of women politicians in the Democrats writes:

The careers of Australian Democrat Senators Natasha Stott Despoja and Cheryl Kernot showed just how effective it could be having a base in the media rather than the old style party machine of the Liberal and Labor Parties.\(^{37}\) The historical record demonstrates the relationship between women in small parties and the media is much more complex than this. The crumbling trajectories of Despoja and Kernot’s political careers demonstrate the limitations of this bond more so than its effectiveness.

Wark is right, however, in indicating the connection forged between women, small parties, the media and celebrity. In contrast with male politician’s path to office through the usual party machinations, Wark implies that the path for female politicians particularly, rests on their ability to articulate an appealing celebrity to their chosen constituency. With Hanson this link is further exacerbated. It is a highly ambivalent position for women to occupy. On one hand, their relationship with the media is mutually beneficial. The media is attracted by the relative scarcity of female politicians, they have the appeal of the exotic. The media is enticed by the female politician’s body. The sexualisation of the female form allows sex into parliamentary coverage. They are presented as the sexual object and/or the maternal body. Thus they may gain more coverage than their male counterparts making it easier to communicate their message to constituents. On the other hand, this coverage may undermine their politics. Their message may be trivialised by its imbrication in the media. Especially if they appear in traditional feminine media such as women’s magazines or talk shows as opposed to in the political commentary of the more highly regarded papers and current affairs programmes. A clear example of this, eluded to in the introduction, occurred when Cheryl Kernot appeared on the cover of a 1998 *Women’s Weekly* dressed in evening

\(^{37}\) Wark: 19.
dress and wrapped in a feather boa. The media have a tendency to bleach out the complexities of a person and present them as a recognisable character. In the case of the Women’s Weekly cover, Kernot was ironically costumed as a ‘whore’ – the dress was red satin and rather burlesque. The article addressed her and her family’s response to a recent ‘sex scandal’ played out in press regarding a relationship she had with a younger man prior to her entry into politics. Thus the article was critical of the press’s coverage of Kernot as a ‘Damned Whore’ and was trying to reposition her as one of ‘God’s Police’ prior to the upcoming election.

Anne Summers established with her highly influential book Damned Whores and God’s Police the deep cultural resonance these two archetypes have in the Australian context. She argues that the notion of women as whores was ratified by the early transportation of convict women. The God’s Police exemplar emerged later as Australia was transforming from a penal colony into a collection of settlements of free citizens in the 1840s and 1850s. Summers argues that it was during this time that “the bourgeois family was propagated.”

The stereotype is characterised by:

a general prescription … that women as wives of men and mothers of children were entrusted with the moral guardianship of society, that they were expected to curb restlessness and rebelliousness in men and instil virtues of civic submission in children.

The contemporary currency of this type is observable in the media’s treatment of female politicians. Particularly when they are presented as more honest than their male colleagues. Australia’s first, and only, two female premiers, Joan Kirner in Victoria and Carmen Lawrence in Western Australia, were expected to fulfil this role. As Summers states:

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40 Summers: 67.
41 The Chief Minister of the Northern Territory is currently a woman, the Honourable Clare Martin.
The women premiers had the sour satisfaction of being told they were only given the jobs because they were female, that they were a much-needed, highly visible and thus handily symbolic contrast to their inept or corrupt male predecessors. Their gender was responsible for their high visibility and marked their difference from ‘the boys.’ Lawrence’s depiction in the media as a frumpy housewife in polkadot dresses and glasses suggested she would be a marvel at whizzing a broom through parliament and sweeping out Labor’s corruption. Ultimately the stereotype that helped install her into office also intensified her public disgrace when she failed to meet the public’s expectation of ‘Godliness.’ Such an effulgent image is hard to live up to glowing as it does with the aura of sainthood. Just think of all our ‘fallen’ women politicians – Ros Kelly, Carmen Lawrence, Bronwyn Bishop, Cheryl Kernot and Natasha Stott Despoja. Politics involves compromise but a member of God’s Police must remain ever vigilant no matter the political temptations.

**Celebrity or Politician?**

Hanson’s political ascent to the head of a small but influential party further affirms the intricate bonds that unite female politicians, small parties and media coverage. As with the female Democrat leaders, the media was crucial in establishing Hanson’s high profile. Wark is correct when he writes:

> The rise of Pauline Hanson showed how political operators could mobilise a populist movement with the help of a leader with an instinctive grasp of celebrity power and distinctive articulation of a view of the fair go.

As a figurehead, Hanson was good copy. As Margo Kingston points out, “Hanson’s unsavvy working-class persona made her an exotic curiosity … She was the unthinkable

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42 Summers: 49.
43 Wark: 21.
setting her sights on the impossible.” She performs the classic Australian tale of the underdog who battles the big boys. This exoticism was only emphasised by her gender. Kingston when pondering one of Hanson’s above the knee skirts writes, “I started to get a sinking feeling about that skirt, fearing the extremity of her difference from the main players was escalating her election publicity.” While Wark indicates the importance of celebrity to the women leaders of small parties, he fails to tease out how their gender impacts on both their celebrity and their politics. There is a conflict between these two performances – of politician and celebrity. As politicians, women are still expected to demonstrate the morality and political interests of a member of God’s Police, but as celebrities they are sexualised. This tension can impact negatively on their political careers. This is what occurred when Hanson was forced to resign as leader of her own party due to a coup by a faction from Western Australia. Hanson’s example differs from the other small parties. While the Democrats and the Greens are on the Left side of the political fence and have firm and articulated feminist policies, Hanson operates as a member of the political Right, which makes her rise all the more remarkable as most of these parties are headed by men. It is not coincidental that in order to lead, Hanson had to form her own party. It also makes sense that due to her gender, her position within her own party has been unstable for the entirety of her political career. This will be explored in more depth later in the chapter when I examine in more detail how Hanson functions as member of the political Right.

First though, I tease out how Hanson’s body performs as a celebrity through a discussion of her appearance. All public figures have their physical presentation commented on to some extent. As evidenced by the preoccupation with Paul Keating’s Armani suits and John

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Howard’s short stature and wild eyebrows. However, for the female politician appearance is more marked than for their male counterpart. Natasha Stott Despoja, in accordance with a number of female politicians, feels that, “Women in power are still subject to greater levels of media scrutiny and are commonly described in terms of their appearance and family status.” When modern celebrity discourse meets the public body of the politician, there are worrying consequences. There is an uneasy overlap between the celebrity body and the political body and the collapse of the binary plays out its consequences across women politicians. The contemporary media-driven ascendancy of the celebrity indicates a feminisation of the public sphere. This clashes with the idea of the political body which is impressed with ideas from an earlier time, when democratic ideals, and the bodies that communicated those ideas, were equated with mind and civilisation. Modern celebrity discourse slides sex back into the political body. With Hanson, this is further complicated by the classed nature of her bodily performance.

Hanson is not only a woman. She is a working class woman. The media’s interpretation of Hanson’s appearance displays an uncommon preoccupation with her class. In the media’s reaction to Hanson’s appearance the split between an intellectual elite and a working class audience becomes apparent. The elite failed to display any understanding of working class taste cultures or any empathy for working class knowledges and concerns. It is important to remember that these considerations are never just a matter of ‘taste.’ Rather, as John Frow states, “These are questions not just about criteria, but about whose stories get told, and,

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46 Despoja, ‘Feminism and Public Life,’ in *Bodyjamming*: 270.
47 Hartley.
crucially, about who gets to make these decisions, who doesn’t and on what grounds.”

Hanson makes transparent that only certain kinds of bodies and speech are allowed in the political arena. The media’s vitriolic response to Hanson’s choice of frocks and their fascination with the sexual appropriateness of her attire suggest that working class women and working class sexualities are excluded from Capital Hill.

That certain bodies really should not be let into parliamentary spaces was made very apparent when Hanson swished into the tally room on the night of the West Australian election in 2001 resplendent in her party dress. Maggie Alderson, writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald* described her frock as a “zebra and hibiscus print backless halterneck sundress.” She concedes that the “dress looked fine on her – for a beachside singles party in Noosa.” She went on to claim that Hanson’s attire was so inappropriate as to be equivalent to Italian MP porn star La Cicciolina’s “baby-doll nightie ensembles.”

Alderson was most shocked by Hanson’s apparent lack of bra. Her’s was not the only fascinated voice of outrage. After all, everybody knows that politicians wear suits. It would seem Hanson and her frock were far too overtly sexual to allow her to be taken seriously as a politician. However Alderson’s objections are not just objections about sexual proprietary. What she is disapproving of is, what to middle class eyes, appears as the overt sexuality of the working class body. When this body penetrates an election tally room, it

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48 Frow: 155.


50 Alderson: fulltext.

51 Disturbingly this mimics the 1973 media coverage meted out to the first women’s adviser to the Prime Minister, Elizabeth Reid. The media constantly ridiculed her attire and seemed particularly obsessed with her lack of bra. A 1973 article in the *Herald* entreated ‘the sisterhood’ to “please stand still for a moment and stop wobbling under their T-shirts,” before going on to describe Reid as dressed “in flared jeans, tank-top and no bra.” Cited in, M Sawer, 1990. *Sisters in Suits*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin: 18.
ruptures the space. It is important to remember that while this frock stands out as a particularly pertinent example of Hanson’s sartorial excess even when Hanson did wear the regulation skirted suit her class was still too apparent. Jennifer Rutherford describes her first meeting with Pauline Hanson at a fund-raising cocktail party and dinner in July 1997:

Hanson was wearing her signature military jacket. Canary yellow emblazoned with black ribbon and brass buttons sporting a bouquet of roses gilded with golden ribbon. Flashes of gold on ears and fingers, brilliant vermilion nails and hair on fire, she was every working class girl’s dream.52

The elite press responded to these markers of classed gender with derision. Even those commentators who should have known better – as Sverndrinin Perera points out – could not resist mocking the inappropriateness of this particular body being political.53 Catharine Lumby comments on Hanson’s spoken expression: “her halting dentist’s-drill voice and her challenged vocabulary.”54 She continues this mode of description: “her clothing is cheap, her make-up draws attention to itself and she explains herself with all the actual charm of someone delivering a prepared speech at a Rotary function.”55 Lumby is a seasoned media commentator. This comment is drawn from her book Gotcha, a feminist cultural studies engagement with the contemporary media environment (though it was first printed as an article in Age). Responding to this comment’s first appearance in the Age Perera scathingly reminds the reader that Lumby must be aware of “the multiple ways in which ‘correct’ standards of dress, behaviour and speech are used to ensure political conformity.”56

Lumby’s treatment of Hanson in Gotcha does ultimately indicate an awareness of this. She concludes that the Hanson phenomena teaches that, “Rational, educated discourse doesn’t

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55 Lumby, Gotcha: 235.
56 Perera: fulltext.
speak to everyone in contemporary democracy—indeed, contemporary democracy is characterised by diverse voices and diverse kinds of speech.” Strangely, Lumby while discussing the ineffectiveness of attacking Hanson’s less than informed rhetoric, or as Lumby describes it Hanson’s ‘politics of feeling,’ her disdain for Hanson’s appearance, voice and vocabulary underwrite and undermine her own argument. Lumby in operating within a middle class liberal normalising narrative even as she aims to step outside it.

Hanson’s appearance makes obvious who is allowed to speak in a democracy. The rhetoric of political representation that underpins our democratic system suggests that a democracy represents all people inclusive of their differences. That is everybody has a voice. Hanson reveals the mendacity of this claim. Both in her overt criticism of the political system for no longer representing the ‘true’ Aussie battler and also by her very presence. John Frow in his thoughtful book, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, ponders the politics of speaking. He suggests that:

> Whereas the act of speaking for others denies those others the right to be the subjects of their own speech, the refusal to speak on behalf of the oppressed, conversely, assumes that they are in a position to act as such fully empowered subjects.\(^\text{58}\)

When I apply this statement to Hanson, a number of factors become apparent. When our political system claims to speak for everybody, important voices are lost. These are the voices of the marginalised. Democracy promises that the marginalised gain representation but in reality our political system provides homogenous politicians. Judith Brett provides proof that the “parliament of 1950 was far more representative than the parliament of today.”\(^\text{59}\) In fact, in many ways the parliament of 1901 was even more representative. In

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\(^{57}\) Lumby, *Gotcha*: 240.

\(^{58}\) Frow: 163.

1901, 13.5 percent of parliamentarians were tradesmen and workers in 1996 it was 1.2 percent. Simultaneously “politicians are becoming a class unto themselves … party officials and those previously employed by politicians make up 10 per cent of the parliament.” In 1901 they made up less than 1 percent. Their homogeneity has only increased since Federation. Hanson articulates people’s frustration with this. The press’s response to her demonstrates that even those who espouse a politics of social justice, are only prepared to hear certain voices articulate a politics in opposition to the mainstream. Ron Brunton was right to criticise commentators:

who make much of their commitment to feminist and egalitarianism, but whose sneering personal attacks on the ‘fish and chip shop bitch’ reveal their true misogyny and contempt for ordinary Australians.

I disagree with the content of Hanson’s politics. She clearly reveals an important rupture in our political system. She shows us not only democracy’s failure but also the Left’s failure to hear. The commentators on the Left with their attacks on Hanson’s class and gender not only display a frightening hypocrisy they fail to critically counter Hanson’s appeal. Their attacks on Hanson merely polished the markers that were attracting people to vote for her. This explains why David Oldfield encouraged public disputes between the media and Hanson supporters. It only reinforced One Nation voter’s belief that the media was in league with other powerful institutions in attacking ‘Aussie battlers.’ As Rutherford points out One Nations supporters “didn’t behave according to the prevailing perception of how Australians identify with and judge political figures”. The very working class markers that alienated the middle classes, attracted the primarily working class constituency that voted for One Nation. Additionally, Rutherford presents a compelling argument for

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60 Brett: 29.
61 Brett: 29-30.
63 Rutherford: fulltext.
Hanson’s sex appeal being another factor in attracting electoral support. She argues that for the older working class men who voted for Hanson, part of her appeal was a certain vulnerable sexuality that still valiantly fought for them.

**ONE NATION’S MASCELINIST AGENDA**

One Nation attracted votes with its Right wing masculinist agenda. Sixty percent of Hanson’s supporters were men. Murray Goot in his analysis of the voting profile of One Nation supporters states that, “What differentiates One Nation from both Labor and the Nationals is the consistency of this difference [the large proportion of male voters] – a consistency which holds for every age.” To divine why people support Hanson one needs to analyse why she appeals to a primarily male demographic. The answer lies with both her policies and her personality. The far Right has traditionally been a male bastion. The federal election campaign in 1998 was the first time One Nation had to explicitly state their polices. In doing so it became apparent how linked One Nation was to other far Right political parties and organisations. Many of their policies were lifted straight from other organisations. For instance, Easytax was compiled by a ‘fringe group of accountants’ – the very notion of which sends shivers down my spine. The family policy was “the wish list of disgruntled divorced men’s groups.” One Nation’s health policy was co-presented by, Dr Ray Danton and Dr David Cunningham. Dr Cunningham belonged to a far Right doctors organisation that “believed Medicare was an evil socialist experiment.” That this is One

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64 Rutherford: fulltext.
67 Kingston, Off the Rails: 111-12.
68 Kingston, Off the Rails: 165.
Nation best practice is suggested by their continuing tendency to do this. In 2001 Greg Roberts reported that:

Ms Hanson has asked Ms Robyn Spencer, who has links with extremist groups such as the anti-semitic League of Rights, to revamp One Nation’s immigration policy in time for the campaign.69

However, Hanson’s relationship with the Right is an unstable one. Not all of One Nation’s policies are in accord with the political Right. For instance Hanson’s support of state funded abortion, property rights for homosexual couples and her already mentioned economic nationalism have more in common with the Left. What really differentiates Hanson from her other Right wing cronies is her gender. The leaders of other Right wing parties are men, and within her own party, most of the members are men. Her gender complicates her relationship with the Right. It partly explains the reach of her appeal. Her celebrity softened the racism of her politics by suggesting that here was one of God’s Police to clean up the political mess. She was not just another xenophobe. However it also made it very hard for her to operate an effective political party. The men she was hiring often found it hard to work under a woman hence her high turnover of staff. Hanson lacks a feminist consciousness or framework to explain the constant betrayals by her male advisers.70 Instead these workplace disagreements were understood as Hanson valiantly having to oust Machiavellian male advisers intent on manipulating her. It was a problem that a woman was articulating this politics of discontent. To attract her voters Hanson had to make it very clear that she was speaking for men. This was why One Nation presented such a hyper-masculinist project. Her policies aim to protect a ‘threatened masculinity’ from outside threats: from immigrants taking their jobs, from politicians stealing their guns,

70 Tara Brabazon suggests that feminism is like a toolbox when everything is progressing smoothly there is little need for feminism and you can leave the box unopened but “If relationships end, we lose our job or confront sexual impropriety – suddenly we need the toolbox.” Hanson refuses to use the toolbox. 2002. Ladies Who Lunge. Sydney: UNSW Press: x.
from Indigenous Australians getting their funding, and from women leaving their men. Her approach to the Family Court makes apparent how very disadvantageous to women this masculinist project can be. It is indicative of the way in which Hanson connects with what commentators have named – perhaps with undue hyperbole – the ‘crises in masculinity’. Hanson’s engagement with this ‘crises in masculinity’ mimics the worst of the men’s movement.

The ‘men’s movement’ is a relatively recent phenomenon, incorporating a variety of different and politically oppositional projects. It is inclusive of the ‘spiritual and cultural men’s movement’ perhaps best exemplified by Robert Bly’s books and workshops, as well as the emergent academic discipline. Most controversially, people (primarily men but not solely) “working in the category of ‘men’s rights,’ such as in securing child custody or monitoring funding for women’s groups” also claim to be part of the men’s movement. The aims of the latter group are often in direct conflict with feminist ideals and policies. The branch of the men’s movement intent on ‘men’s rights’ is wed to an imperative and belief in the right to violently control women. The most disturbing aspect of the rhetoric is to be found in the justifications of men ‘driven’ to violence by ‘unfair legislation,’ “Every time a non-custodial parent resorts to violence there are now letters to newspapers suggesting that this shows men’s powerlessness in the face of a system biased against them.” This is a disturbing discursive shift that re-legitimates male violence against women. Men are victimised to such an extent that violence is their only recourse? Once again it becomes a masculine privilege to own the feminine. Underlying many of these

72 Kamen: 27.
Father’s Rights Groups is a belief that the family unit is being undermined by a feminist-influenced breakdown of the nuclear family. Spousal maintenance and child support contribute to this breakdown because they make it too easy for women to leave their husbands. Consequently, “women should be forced to be financially reliant on men, and that financial reliance should be linked to being contained within a traditional family unit.”74 Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party have aligned themselves with this manner of men’s groups.

In her maiden speech, Hanson insisted that the “The Family Law Act, which was the child of the disgraceful Senator Lionel Murphy, should be repealed.”75 Further affiliating herself with the ‘non-custodial’ parent (a thinly veiled euphemism aiming to hide the gender biased slant of her argument) she states:

> custodial parents can often profit handsomely at the expense of a parent paying child support and, in many cases, the non-custodial parent simply gives up employment to escape, in many cases, the heavy and punitive financial demands.

The party’s continued support of this position was established when One Nation Senator Len Harris delivered his first speech to parliament. Family Law and custody were the first issues addressed:

> I am appalled that approximately one million children do not live with their fathers in Australia … providers should not be forced into poverty and a position that restricts their opportunity to develop a new family.77
Men’s rights to jobs, new families and freedom from financial responsibilities are clearly established as more important than a single mother’s desire to bring her children up with a decent standard of living. Hanson and the One Nation Party claim to speak for mainstream Australia.\textsuperscript{78} Regardless of this rhetoric, the way in which father’s are treated within the family court remains a minority issue. Marian Sawer reveals that parties using custody issues as their sole platform, such as Abolish Child Support or the Family Law Reform Party, received between 0.16 and 0.44 percent of the vote.\textsuperscript{79} Admittedly One Nation’s vote is larger than this, but as Murray Goot and Clive Bean have separately indicated One Nation vote’s are mainly attracted on the basis of issues of immigration, Aboriginal ‘advantage,’ and law and order.\textsuperscript{80} The numbers agitating for changes in Family Law are small (but vocal). Regardless of this, “The amendments of the Child Support Act went ahead, reducing transfers to custodial parents and increasing control by non-custodial parents over how the remainder was spent.”\textsuperscript{81} One Nation was integral to the political impetus that generated these changes. The rhetoric that underpins these changes has far-reaching effects. Men become the majority, the mainstream who are allowed to speak, and women once again are reinforced as a minority political voice. The Right claims the National Popular. The question must be asked: how marginal are white men’s voices? This is patriarchal ‘clawback’ in action. Any change in male advantage impels a need to repress what suddenly becomes female ‘advantage.’ This generates a panicked counter response. Lynne Segal indicates this in her discussion of the contemporary perception that certain men are ‘failing’ “both at school and in the job market” when she reminds us that this

\textsuperscript{78} In her maiden speech Hanson claimed, “everything I have said is relevant to my electorate of Oxley, which is typical of mainstream Australia.” This was an oft repeated theme with Hanson claiming to speak for ‘Australians.’ Hanson: fulltext.

\textsuperscript{79} Sawer, ‘Emily’s List and Angry White Men: Gender Wars in the Nineties’: fulltext

\textsuperscript{80} Bean: 148-9.

Goot, ‘Hanson’s Heartland: Who’s for One Nation and Why’: 72.

\textsuperscript{81} Sawer, ‘Loading the Dice: the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women’: fulltext
discussion is based on “the assumption that men should always be the dominant sex.”\textsuperscript{82} The bitch who speaks for angry, white men is a potent bitch. Female support adds a legitimacy to male claims and helps shift the rhetorical ground out from under feminist argument. It helps to suggest that the feminist position is marginal, for if both men and some women are making the argument against just women alone then surely the group with both sexes is the majority. This is why male voices need to be part of the feminist project.

**A ‘Politically Correct’ Conclusion**

Hanson’s relationship to feminism is further complicated by her use of a discourse of political correctness. Hanson’s emerged on the back of the debate on sexual harassment law that took place in the media after the 1995 release of Helen Garner’s book about the Ormond affair, *The First Stone*. The broad strokes of this debate are outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. In that discussion I indicate the ramifications of the debate for feminism. Meaghan Morris and Jenna Mead hint at this debate’s importance in fostering an environment in which Hanson’s One Nation could flourish.\textsuperscript{83} Garner’s book did not cause Hanson. The rise of Hanson was the result of a multitude of factors. The 1996 election swing to the Right has been understood by some commentators as a reaction against the Keating Government and its promotion of ‘minority rights.’\textsuperscript{84} The controversy over sexual harassment law triggered by *The First Stone*, prior to the election, provides an early indicator of the changing tone of political debate in Australia. The media coverage promoted “relentless PC-bashing and myth-mongering about feminazis and loony ethnics”

\textsuperscript{84} Brunton: 38-47.
because, they argued, these groups “prevented ‘ordinary Australians’ from speaking.”85

Apparently decent Australians could no longer deliberate on the ‘reality’ of ‘eros’ in the workplace, because ‘normal love play’ had been mutated into illegal behaviour by over-educated feminists. A discussion of sexual harassment law was sidelined into a divisive debate on free speech. By allowing the discussion to be framed in such a way the media were crucial in establishing an environment which allowed Hanson’s “views to become respectable so very quickly.”86 She was able to establish her right to express racist views by asserting that she was simply refusing to be shut-up by the politically correct thought police. The Right had encountered a rhetorical flourish, with political correctness, that enabled them to close down Left wing politics. Unlike their Right wing counterparts those ‘PC Lefties’ were not enacting their right to free speech because:

the ‘politically correct’ abuse the privilege that is freedom of speech for personal ‘profits and comfort’ as they ‘pursue their own agenda’, whereas those ‘intimidated’ by the contempt of the traitors, the PIC [politically incorrect], have only the good of the nation in mind.87

Consequently when Hanson espoused her hate-fuelled politics she was not polluting the political flora of our nation, but in the words of John Howard, helping to lift “the pall of censorship on certain issues.”88 In fact Howard welcomed “the fact that people can talk about certain things without living in fear of being branded as a bigot or a racist.”89 Hanson was being labelled a bigot and a racist by certain members of the community and media, but Howard usefully indicates how hard it was to make the label stick.

85 Mead and Morris: 257.
86 Mead and Morris: 257.
89 Ricklefs: 52.
It is shocking that Howard is able to imply that Hanson is not a bigot or a racist. Hanson claimed that she was not racist because “a racist means a person who considers their race to be superior to others. I have never, never stated anything like that whatsoever, and I never will, because I don’t feel that way.”\textsuperscript{90} Instead she insists that, “by treating Aboriginal people as disadvantaged, you are saying they are an inferior race.”\textsuperscript{91} Consequently Indigenous Australians should not be given any special legal, political or economic privileges that acknowledges their first people status. She argues that her party presents a policy of absolute equality and pads this claim with the naïve disclaimer, ‘so how can this be racist?’ Even ignoring that absolute equality, in its refusal to acknowledge different axes of disadvantage, ultimately enforces iniquities, this claimed penchant for absolute equality was false. The policy was not applied consistently. At the launch of One Nation Hanson claimed her Party would, “treat all Australians equally and, in so doing, abolish divisive and discriminatory policies such as those related to Aboriginal and multicultural affairs.”\textsuperscript{92} One Nation’s health policy provides a demonstration of this (mis)directive in action and exemplifies One Nation’s racist attitudes towards Indigenous Australians. One Nation spokesmen, Dr Ray Danton and Dr David Cunningham, advocated removing special health programmes for Indigenous Australian and subsuming this cost into the “‘overall health fund’ for all Australians.”\textsuperscript{93} Contrastingly aged and rural Australians warranted ‘special treatment’ and would be allotted a greater amount of health funding. Absolute equality did not seem to count if you were a ‘battler.’

\textsuperscript{90} Kingston, \textit{Off the Rails}: 124.
\textsuperscript{91} Kingston, \textit{Off the Rails}: 11.
\textsuperscript{92} Dodd: 232.
\textsuperscript{93} Kingston, \textit{Off the Rails}: 166.
Admittedly One Nation’s immigration policy no longer explicitly designates race as a reason for exclusion from Australia.94 No doubt the language of intolerance has been diluted in response to the sustained media attacks. However remarks made by party members, One Nation’s relaxed policy towards backpackers, and Hanson’s formative and high profile statement that ‘we are in danger of being swamped by Asians,’ makes clear who One Nation imagines as capable of becoming Australian. MC Riclefs comments on the Asian immigration debate of 1996-97:

When Hanson said that Asian immigrants ‘have their own culture and religion and do not assimilate’, she revealed both her profound ignorance of the facts of Asian immigration history and their irrelevance to the issue. This was a subjective assertion that some people—indeed about half the people of the world—could not, in Hanson’s eyes, become Australian.95

Those who are not of Asian descent do not require such strict policing. One Nation’s immigration policy supports an influx of young backpackers.96 That these backpackers may overstay their visas is not thought sufficient reason to stop this ‘important cultural exchange’:

when ever we attract tourists there will always be a percentage that will overstay but this is not reason enough to put up impossible obstacles that unnecessarily hinder our tourist facilities and cost Australian jobs.97

Obviously, One Nation fails to imagine an Australia swamped by British backpackers. Regardless of Hanson’s claim not to promote a politics of intolerance her policies were deeply racist. That she could insist this was not true, and she was instead a victim of politically correct libellous labelling is a dangerous indicator. It suggests that Hanson has helped move the whole tone of political debate in Australia to the Right.

95 Ricklefs: 59.
96 2001. 'Immigration,' One Nation Official Homepage: fulltext
The bitch is a powerful contemporary archetype that has the ability to convey feminist politics and praxis to a broad range of women. Her antagonistic engagement with hegemonic masculinity and the heteronormative gender order proffer new ways of living femininity. She is a trailblazer, as such she is often a magnet for animosity. The bitch is at her best when she embodies and communicates truths that we, as a society, find confrontational. Hanson may not challenge the gender order but she does voice uncomfortable beliefs. The current Government’s refusal to say sorry to the Stolen Generations illuminates just how important it is that Australia confront and incorporate its racist history. As a nation we seem to revel in forgetting. Hanson should remind that Australia can ill afford to disregard the history that the Australian Settlement has bequeathed. She also reminds us that not everybody has benefited from changes in a workforce altered by economic rationalism in tandem with a global economy. Rural men, people not part of the new information industries and workers with minimal education are the losers in the post-Fordist job market. Hanson provides an important voice for these people. Hanson, in bitch style, has conveyed and performed uncomfortable truths. She has highlighted deep dissatisfactions in the Australian citizenry.

The conservative bitch is a feminist paradox. Too often voices raised in righteous criticisms resort to misogynist derision. Instead of engaging with her politics they attack markers of femininity. This can be as obvious as drawing attention to her attire and grooming or more insidiously by dismissing her politics as emotive as opposed to cerebral. This type of

98 Stuart Hall indicates some of the ways post-Fordism impacts on the workforce: “Second, there is a shift towards a more flexible specialized and decentralized form of labour process and work organization, and, as a consequence, a decline of the old manufacturing base (and the regions and cultures associated with it) and the growth of the ‘sunrise’, computer-based, hi-tech industries and their regions.” And “Fifth, there has been a decline in the proportion of the skilled, male, manual working class and the corresponding rise of the service
engagement must always be named as the misogynist drivel it is. Additionally, feminist commentators have traditionally supported women in male dominated workplaces. Australian parliaments can still be pragmatically described as such. Consequently there is an argument for endorsing female politicians regardless of politics. The conservative bitch demonstrates a complicated consanguinity with feminism. She is partly enabled by the paradigm. It is feminist social changes that have increased the public forums and roles allowed to female voices. Hanson’s effectiveness was partly enabled by her ability to wrest the discourse of political correctness off the Left and reinscribe it with Right wing twang.

Tony Lynch and Ronnie Reavell argue that Right’s possession of the national popular was possible because:

They managed this in part because of the logic of the ‘politically correct’/‘politically incorrect’ distinction they took from radical feminism enabled them to draw a not always unjustified picture in which it was the conservative right that stood for individual freedom, as against the ‘totalitarian’ impulse of the ‘social justice’ obsessed and activist Left.99

The public depiction of feminism gave a vehemence and potency to Hanson’s railing against the politically correct elite. Ultimately, however, the conservative bitch is not and should not be promoted as a feminist icon. Feminist writers are just starting to argue that feminism should not be so closely tied to a Left political agenda.100 Regardless of whether or not such an argument is legitimate, the conservative bitch undermines the feminist project. In her support of a masculinist agenda, she promotes a conservative view of gender politics. Once again, women function to bolster masculinity. She limits the choices available to women.

99 Lynch and Reavell: 33.
100 Wolf, Fire with Fire.
Class is a theoretical tool useful for explaining differences in access to social mobility, cultural capital, economic opportunities and other socioeconomic markers. A concept of class remains crucial to feminist thought. The chapters on Courtney Love and Germaine Greer thought through the implications of the class position of the theorist to the production of knowledge. Not acknowledging the way in which the class of the commentator impacts on their intellectual position means that the bias in selection and treatment of topics is disavowed. The dangerous ramifications of this lack were vigorously demonstrated during the rise of Pauline Hanson and One Nation. Hanson was a working class woman. Unlike the working class subversion of punk she did not present a resistive politics palatable to middle class theorists with Marxist sensibilities. The politics of dissatisfaction mouthed by Hanson was confronting for its ignorance and bigotry. Unfortunately, so was the majority of commentary denouncing her.
Ending
CONCLUSION

The bitches in this thesis express their feminism with song, dance and the written word. They occupy parliamentary pulpits, talkback radio chairs, recording studios, rock stadia, classrooms, lecture theatres, magazine offices, and the television screen. Though they express a broad range of feminist modalities, their selection is not random. My choices are anchored around three main axes – feminism, popular culture and conservatism. These realms have permeable boundaries. Feminism, popular culture and conservatism bleed through their limits. The bitch and her politics do not provide the answer for feminism. There is no single answer. Instead, the bitch helps to identify current feminist issues and models a range of strategic responses. Feminist politics must remain adaptable to the diversity of women’s experiences and concerns. Claiming one authentic feminist voice is always an act of exclusion. While rejecting orthodoxy and embracing vicissitude feminism must maintain the strength to name the practices and institutions that provide women with options and resources, and to counter those that arrest their progression towards equality.

This thesis has presented an extended engagement with a myriad of feminist voices and the various audiences that respond to them. It explores the strengths and weaknesses of popular cultural feminism and a feminist popular culture and the spaces in between.

The protean nature of popular culture means that feminist ideologies are now firmly enmeshed in the media’s matrix. Popular culture does not just disseminate ‘McFeminism’ – a mass produced, easily accessible, slickly packaged version of feminism lacking in any real nutritional value. The feminism presented by popular culture is easily enfolded into the familiar lives of its audiences. Popular culture interprets the difficulties and joys of living with the changes wrought by feminism. It translates feminist ideologies into digestible
soundbites. It fills a pedagogic gap left by feminist theory about the everyday difficulties in aligning feminism with daily life. Feminism is not always palatable, nor should it be. Sometimes feminism needs to be complicated and confronting. Sometimes, the best medium to convey a feminist message is the complex language of postmodernism or postcolonial theory. And occasionally, as the bitches in this thesis have demonstrated, popular culture produces complex and challenging women of its own.

Now that popular culture is where feminism is defined, the movement needs to develop a more complex self-reflexivity about its own insertions into this terrain. Refusing to do so will have a detrimental effect on popular understandings of the feminist project. It is essential that feminism maintains its relevancy to a broad audience, that crosses class, race and age lines. This diversity must not dilute the strength of feminist politics. The problem with identity politics is that the combined clout of a large group is reduced by fragmentation into smaller and competing special-interest factions. The challenge is to continue acknowledging plurality while simultaneously motivating extensive community support. To do this, the academy and the media must work through and with one another. Popular culture is lacking in narratives that help knit feminist consciousness. Its propensity for stories of individual achievement fail to make meanings about communal politics. It provides feminist moments but it fails to inform about the operations of structural inequalities. Feminist consciousness requires an awareness about the injustice of women’s shared subjugation. Academic feminists must demonstrate that the ethos of individuality promoted by the likes of the anti-victim feminists do not promote feminist politics, for they do not tackle institutional forms of discrimination. The anti-victim feminists undermine the need for legislation to tackle sexual discrimination and violence.
Popular representations of feminism can be inaccurate and alienating. Distortions of feminism require overt opposition and the disseminating of counter narratives. The commentators participating in the current debate in Australia on paid maternity leave imply that feminism is mainly attributed with gaining rights for middle class white women. Finance Minister Nick Minchin has called it a type of “middle class welfare.”¹ This ignores the benefits proffered to a broad spectrum of women, and families by paid maternity leave. Though I caution that paid maternity leave will not benefit all women. Once again casual and part time workers and women who do not have children are expunged from consideration. Dangerously, the discussion of paid maternity leave has been twinned with a consideration of the declining fertility rate. This has been an effective strategy in depicting feminism as against maternity while simultaneously promoting the rights of the already privileged. The conservative sheath encasing this debate has been further enhanced by a series of expositions offered by middle class working women that feminism has ‘done them wrong.’ It would seem that these women no longer want the rights won by feminist struggle. Alex May rants at ‘the feminists’ for forgetting to mention the necessity to:

\[\text{do it [give birth] before you ovaries shrivel up … and when you do it, try to put all those thoughts of equal pay and education out of your head otherwise you won’t enjoy it.}^2\]

Feminism is denounced because women are having children later and because, somehow, it has made the experience pall in comparison to paid work. Kathy Evans tackles the declining birth rate. She argues this decrease is the result of women not wanting to experience the confronting corporeality of pregnancy. She rather flippantly suggests that we should:

Blame feminism. Blame my mother. When you grow up with the self-assurance that your world is not that much different from that of a man’s, it comes as a rude shock to find it can be.\(^3\)

Feminism seems to get the blame for an awful lot these days. Feminist advocates working for paid maternity leave are trying to increase the time a mother can spend with her newborn child. They are supporting a woman’s choice to be a mother. Yet commentators continue to claim that feminism has devalued motherhood.

Bettina Arndt is shocked that the discussion about maternity leave has failed to consider the children, thus affirming a conservative feminism in which women are maternal and child bearing. She cites Graham Vipani, a professor of paediatrics and child health at the University of New Castle:

> It has been quite obscene the way the debate has been run as a women’s issue, in complete isolation from the benefits of young children being able to spend longer periods with their primary care givers.\(^4\)

Paid maternity is a ‘women’s issue,’ to suggest that this debate be refigured as an ‘infant’s issue’ is ridiculous, but it does manage to make feminists once again appear anti-children. Simultaneously it ignores the symbiotic relationship between mother and child in favour of discursively positioning the infant as an individual. Feminists are harangued for forcing women to work and alienating them from their maternal instincts. What underlies both these interconnected debates is the belief that feminism has promoted the rights of women to be selfish workers/consumers and consequently women are no longer fulfilling their unpaid community building roles. The stereotype that supports this debate is of the over-achieving woman dressed for success in her shoulder padded suit with a baby under one arm and a briefcase dangling from the other. The image reinforces a ‘common sense’

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\(^2\) May: fulltext.

understanding of feminism as a middle class and selfish movement. It etiolates the complexity and breadth of feminist history and aims.

This is not an example of Faludi’s ‘backlash’ in action. The concept of a ‘backlash’ is too temporally specific and fleeting. It suggests that anti-feminist rhetoric is the instantaneous response to specific female gains. This fails to account for the ongoing nature of anti-feminism while offering the spectre of a conspiracy. Anti-feminism is better understood with a Foucauldian model of power that can account for both the oppressive and constitutive ways in which hegemonic institutions structure subjectivities. Judith Butler comments on the double articulation performed by discourses:

the understanding of performativity not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains.6

Performativity is not understood as a subject’s ability to enforce their own will, but rather as the resistive potential configured by the very discourses that dominate. This accounts for how media discourses that aim to produce docile bodies also produce flashpoints of resistance.

Feminism is right to be wary of popular culture. Sexuality remains a primary spoke turning the wheel of women’s oppression. The media’s heady concoction of sex, desire and consumption instigates a suspicious and antagonistic mode of engagement. Advertising does reduce women to sexual objects to sell products and this is oppressive. It does elevate youth and beauty as the two characteristics most important to desirable womanhood. Disturbingly, the discursive practices of advertising continue to cross pollinate with other

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media genres; product placements in films are becoming normalised, and increasingly Internet companies are being used to sell product lines associated with television programmes. The relationship between sex, desire and consumption is far more complex than – sex sells products by making us desire them. It speaks to our psychology and the process of identity formation. Stuart Hall comments on the role of the symbolic in the construction of identities:

They [identities] arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongings, the ‘suturing into the story’ through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field.7

One of the projects of cultural studies is to unravel “the deep connection between sexuality, desire, and the emotional roots of domination.”8 This impetus has revealed that one reason for popular culture’s effectiveness is that it activates a discourse of pleasure. Cultural studies theorists investigate this better than feminism. Feminism too often fails to engage with the pleasure embedded in the popular. This is evidenced by the feminist blockbuster texts lambasting popular culture for suppressing women arcing between Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch and Naomi Wolf’s The Beauty Myth. It is all too apparent in the campaigns of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin to rescue women from pornography.9 Or sometimes feminists do attend to the pleasure of the popular but only to argue that this pleasure seduces women into being complicit in their own subjugation. This

5 Faludi, Backlash.
6 Butler: 2.
tendency is confirmed by the slew of screen theory inspired by Laura Mulvey’s discussion of the female audiences of narrative cinema.\textsuperscript{10}

Additionally, the augmentation of feminism with cultural studies provides a series of methodologies for working through the way in which feminism is produced within popular media discourses. This interdisciplinary blend of feminism and cultural studies has a history. Feminism has had a lasting impact on the topics and methodologies of cultural studies. The first feminist book out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, \textit{Women Take Issue}, was produced by the Women’s Study Group. This was the eleventh publication of the Working Papers in Cultural Studies assembled by the Centre – the previous Working Papers had contained a mere four articles on women and their issues. The Women’s Study Group had to struggle to convince the board of the veracity of their claim: that women’s concerns were worthy of academic attention.\textsuperscript{11} The contributors to this book aimed to centre class as the central concern of cultural studies with their accounts of the private worlds of women, from teenage girl’s bedrooms to the lives of working class housewives. They argued “that society has to be understood as constituted through the \textit{articulation} of both sex/gender and class antagonisms …”\textsuperscript{12} This insight was stretched by later cultural studies theorists to include the articulations of sexuality and race. Feminist intervention demanded the inclusion of women’s genres, such as soap opera and romance novels, into the field of cultural studies. The contemporary meld of feminism and cultural studies can be termed ‘popular cultural feminism.’

\textsuperscript{10} Mulvey: 22-34.
\textsuperscript{12} CCCS Women’s Studies Group, ed: 10.
Catharine Lumby and Susan Hopkins are Australian practitioners of popular cultural feminism. They both theorise the cultural dissemination of feminism. Lumby argues that:

We need to engage with the debates in popular culture, rather than taking an elitist and dismissive attitude towards the prime means of communication in our society. And we need active attempts to produce diverse forms of speech, rather than reactionary campaigns to suppress speech.\(^{13}\)

Lumby argues that the ideological richness and cultural primacy of popular culture requires feminist engagement not censoring. Lumby and Hopkins do not view cultural texts as “straightforward sexist misrepresentation or dangerous ideological vehicles.”\(^{14}\) Instead they aim to understand the appeal. This is important work; commentators do need to negotiate the production of speech rather than simply assess the feminist veracity of speech acts. This thesis contributes to this enterprise. Yet the work of Lumby and Hopkins is flawed. While they are successful in excavating the media as a site of feminist meaning – that is they validate media speech – they fail to affirm ‘diverse forms of speech.’ They falter when it comes to writing through the multiple articulations of gender, race, class and age. They remain privileged white women writing for and about a homogenous audience.

Dangerously, especially considering Australia’s political climate, there is an absence of a consideration of race. Whiteness remains unmarked, and the cultural products of people who are black or coloured are ignored. Disturbingly this lack remains unproblematised within their work. They provide no justification for the absence of a consideration of race. Lumby and Hopkins help to discursively constitute feminism as white and privileged. The consistency with which feminists of colour are written out of history is shocking. bell hooks laments that white feminists only footnote women of colour when they are talking about race. She argues that this practice ignores the breadth of women of colour’s

\(^{13}\) Lumby, *Bad Girls*: 174.
intellectual participation in feminist theory. The contribution of black activists to the second wave is also forgotten:

The history written so far by white and Black scholars largely obliterates individuals such as Cellestine Ware, Florynce Kennedy, Patricia Robinson, Barbara Omolade, Daphne Busby, Safiya Bandele, and France Beale – Black activist who wrote about feminism before 1973, as well as Black women’s groups such as Mothers Alone Working, a Mount Vernon/New Rochelle group, and the Third World Women’s Alliance (which edited a newspaper, *Triple Jeopardy*).

Rosalyn Baxandall is writing about the United States but this insight is applicable to an Australian context. In *Bad Girls* Lumby traces Australian feminist history in order to account for the current ‘generational’ conflict. It is a white chronicle. Perhaps this can be explained by Australia’s history of racial segregation. It was not until 1963 that Indigenous Australians were granted universal suffrage. And “Formal equality for Indigenous voters at Commonwealth level did not come about until 1983.” Indigenous women were disassociated from early second wave feminism much as they were excluded from the nation state. However this historical lacunae makes it even more important that race is integrated into discussions concerning mediated public life.

Missy Elliott models a bitch politics that extends beyond anger towards reconciliation and inclusiveness. Out of all the bitches in the thesis it is her politics I most admire. When surveying the cultural terrain, commentators have a responsibility to be inclusive of

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14 Hopkins: 215.
17 Lumby, *Bad Girls*.
difference. One of the reasons why popular culture is so attractive is that it is ideologically aggregate. Audiences are hailed by the very inconsistency that academics berate. Australian popular culture is just beginning to narrativise the nation’s racial intolerance on celluloid. Film such as *Beneath Clouds*, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, and *Australian Rules* explore the mechanics of racism.\(^{19}\) Television dramas and commercial recording artists still shy away from this difficult past. Actors such as Deborah Mailman on *Secret Life of Us*, or the singer Christine Anu, are not angry instead they function to suggest the possibilities now allowed to Indigenous Australians in a more tolerant time. Televisual performers and popular musicians carry the burden of reconciliation. That Pauline Hanson was able to claim the “ordinary Australian” as Anglo Saxon proves that whiteness remains central to Australia’s national imagining. Evocatively bell hooks cites Paule Marshall, “That line ‘they had behaved as if there had been nothing about themselves worth honoring,’ echoes in my dreams.”\(^{20}\) Part of the struggle of the second wave involved inserting women into history. Women artists, soldiers, nurses, and statesman were excavated from the past and celebrated. This was a substantive contribution to broadening the possibilities women could imagine for themselves. Written feminism must partake in honouring black and coloured artists. When white writers attend to race by including black examples there is a danger that blackness becomes exoticised, or is expected to do all the work of talking about race. ‘Doing race’ is not simply the inclusion of black examples, though this is preferable to simply eliding them from consideration. Whiteness must not remain unmarked. To do so bolsters its cultural authority and perpetuates the marginalisation of other groups.

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\(^{19}\) *Australian Rules*, 2002. Dir. by P Goldman. Writ. by P Goldman. Australian Film Finance Corporation, [motion picture].

Age is another relish flavouring the political marinade of this thesis. I have not only engaged with the poster girls of the third wave. Women transitioning through various points in their life cycle have been analysed. This is part of my refusal to understand feminism along easy generational lines. There are troubling repercussions to understanding feminism in this way. As Lumby reminds us, “The enticing sound of sharp generation sword play is all good box-office stuff, but any scrutiny of contemporary feminist issues doesn’t unpack neatly along generational or even political lines.”

A preoccupation with the spectacle of a ‘vicious’ cat fight deflects from the issues causing the encounter. Intergenerational debates promote divides resulting in the loss of important feminist histories. A insufficiency of historical knowledge causes the repetition of ineffective strategies. The structural mechanisms that isolate and disadvantage women remain unnamed and therefore escape modification. This inclination was explored in the discussion of women in rock: each new successful female artist imagined themselves a groundbreaker. A dearth of historical knowledge allowed the rock industries functioning hegemony – which incorporated a limited number of successful female artists – to remain unchallenged. Histories provide knowledges to inform feminist activism.

The cultural industries demand that female celebrities are frozen in time. Plastic surgery, make-up and photographic techniques are all employed to stave off the aging process. Our most iconic female celebrities have made the ultimate sacrifice by dying young – Diana and Marilyn will never get old. Feminism needs narratives in which women grow up. Susan Hopkins claims that Madonna is “Still playing the rebellious ‘teen,’ flaunting her fluid sexuality, making trouble and gleefully avoiding the real world, Madonna apparently

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*20* hooks, *Yearning*: 34.
refuses to grow up.” When Hopkins claims Xena and Madonna as girl heroes, she denies them adult power. Madonna and Xena are no longer girls, they are women. Girlhood has been recently granted the provisional power to fight and to be active but we must ask, how real is that power? The televisual girlhood heroes – to be found on BtVS, Dark Angel and Alias – are emaciated. Their physical power is inversely proportional to their bodily mass suggesting the symbolic nature of this gain. Real girls, as Diana Bagnall points out, “aren’t in charge of much at all in the greater scheme of things.” Madonna’s womanly body wields real power. Her body bears wrinkles, children, and muscles. She has artistic and economic control of her brand. Hopkins claims rebelliousness as a marker of the new girl hero. I cannot help but wonder if this masks the actual passivity of girlhood, while at the same time ignoring the mutinous urges that often accompany maturity? It is only when one bangs up against a damaging relationship, a glass ceiling, a lack of childcare or other multitude experiences of sexism that the need to rebel becomes paramount. Society needs stories that track the journey of women who age and fill out their skins. Girl power is not enough and it never will be.

Feminism has been one of the major agents of social change in the twentieth century. The Spice Girl’s infectious – or depending on your perspective trivial – message of ‘girl power’ attested to the marketability of feminist aspirations. Girls want to be told they can do anything. The reality is that young women cannot easily access power. I have been teaching for three years. When I enter the classroom I make an effort to look professional. I leave my jeans and trainers at home in favour of conservative skirts and understated knit-wear. I even wear foundation. Still I am regularly mistaken for a student. The bodies of young

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21 Lumby, Bad Girls: xviii.
22 Hopkins: 43.
women are not read as authoritative. They are not easily slotted into educational institutions or managerial roles. Increasingly we do casual work, without access to holiday and sick pay. Feminism should not be implicated in disenfranchising the diversity of young women’s voices.

Class has pierced and troubled the narratives explored in this thesis. The decline of Marxism has not diluted the relevancy of class to understanding the social world. The classed nature of much feminist theory remains disowned. Middle class taste cultures influence the selection of subjects and their handling. The working class alliances of Courtney Love and Pauline Hanson contributed to their public vilification. Middle class commentators desire a particular kind of resistive articulation from the working class. This leaves little space for the aspiring working class body chasing class mobility, or for the raw resentment that often accompanies the expression of political dissent. Feminism needs to acknowledge the way class slices through the paradigm. It must not only endorse the prosciutto of high theory but also the luncheon ham of working class dissatisfaction.

The prominence and popularity of the conservative bitch remind the Left of the need to harness the bitch’s potential. My argument has presented the conservative bitch as a politically retrograde force. But Greer and Hanson are effective in pushing conservative agendas. Greer’s comments are regularly published in newspapers and in Britain she is persistently included on panels and news shows as a ‘talking head.’ Hanson’s political impact cannot be underestimated. Left wing politics needs to ponder the nature of adversarial, aggressive feminist politics. It needs to attend to the fate of Australia’s female politicians. Though it is hard to mourn the loss of Hanson, her political trajectory is similar

to many Left wing politicians. There is a lesson there. Hanson should not have been
attacked for her accent, vocabulary and dress sense. Just as Kernot should never have been
depicted as a carping cry baby with an overdeveloped libido. It should not have been so
hard for Despoja’s Democratic Party colleagues to accept the leadership of a young
woman. That it was proves that the bitch needs validating.

This thesis has depicted women growing and changing in the public arena. It traced
Kernot’s political change of heart, Cordelia’s entrance into the work force, Love’s
progression in musical style, Elliott’s movement from anger to reconciliation and Greer’s
changing feminism and growing conservatism. It has attended to the fluidity of women’s
experiences validating their journey towards maturity. Women’s anger has been
acknowledged as a rational, thought through response to inequality. Bitch feminism angrily
indicates sites of contestation. The bitch feminist confidently strides in and takes
possession of space, but her occupation is only ever fleeting. Anger names problems. It
starts movements but it does not solve life’s uncertainty. Feminist flashpoints require
textualisation. Moments need to be translated by a feminist consciousness that engages a
broader political context.

Commentators writing in a feminist metre do have certain responsibilities. The written
word grants ideas an authority. “Re-Vamp-ing Feminism” indicated the significance of the
intellectual as a cultural border guard – to poach Andrew Ross’s phrase. The written word
is not transient or ephemeral like most popular culture. Writing is a culturally validated
intervention in the struggle over meaning. Consequently commentators need to carefully
attend to the way they write through considerations of gender, race and class. It is a
difficult endeavour. “Germaine Greer: a Feminist Provocateur” discussed how feminist theory can fuel colonial imaginings. An insipient other propelled Greer’s feminist rhetoric to liberate Western women. This chapter demonstrates that it is possible to ward against and recognise the more overt mechanisms that entrench marginalisation of particular social groupings. However the subjectivity of the writing process means that it is impossible to make transparent all ideologies that infuse the prose. It becomes imperative to listen and respond to a plurality of voices. The functioning axes of race, age and class are revealed through dialogue. This thesis investigated the scholarly challenges and strengths of a retheorisation of popular culture and feminism. It has revealed the close consanguinity between the two and the need for a more considered approach to this relationship.
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