

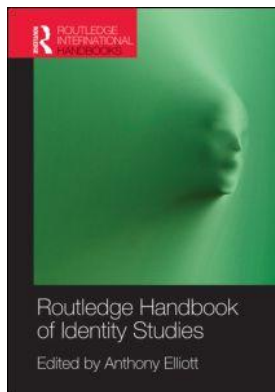
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Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## **Routledge Handbook of Identity Studies**

Anthony Elliott

### **Feminism and Identity**

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203869710.ch2>

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**Published online on: 23 Jun 2011**

**How to cite :-** Ann Branaman. 23 Jun 2011, *Feminism and Identity from:* Routledge Handbook of Identity Studies Routledge

Accessed on: 25 Mar 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203869710.ch2>

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# Feminism and identity

*Ann Branaman*

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## **Historical and intellectual development of topic**

In a basic sense, identity has always been a central issue for feminism. The nature of its significance and the degree of its centrality, however, has varied across each of the three “waves” of feminism and among the many different feminist perspectives that have developed over the latter part of the twentieth century. The primary, nearly exclusive, focus of first-wave feminism in North America and Europe was equal rights for women; the identity issue at the heart of early feminist struggle, if we could name it as such with a concept that had yet to be developed in any of the senses commonly meant by contemporary scholars, was the matter of women’s identity as human and, therefore, their claim to human rights. Fundamental to this issue was the question of women’s sameness to or difference from men. This question entered into the nineteenth-century struggle for equal rights, as it would again with the emergence of second-wave feminism in the latter part of the twentieth century. Many nineteenth-century feminists focused on men’s and women’s common humanity and, while they advocated women’s development of virtues conventionally exclusive to men, argued that this common human identity warranted the extension of human rights to women; other feminists of the era argued that women were as fully human as men, although they emphasized women’s distinctive (and, in some respects, superior) traits and abilities and used these as an argument for why women should be entrusted with responsibility equal to men’s in matters of politics and property. But while debate about human nature and natural differences between men and women surrounded the struggle over women’s rights in the nineteenth century, a self-conscious feminist interest in “identity” would not emerge until the 1970s. At this time, the concept of “identity” emerged as central to the social sciences and humanities; feminism was one of several social movements that contributed to the rise of identity studies.

Second-wave feminism renewed the first-wave struggle for equal rights as well as the debate over the extent and significance of sameness and difference between men and women: the three major forms of second-wave feminism (liberal, Marxist/socialist, and radical) differed in their relative emphasis on these issues. For some second-wave feminists, issues of identity were no more important than they were for first-wave feminists. Second-wave liberal feminists, in particular, focused on the removal of barriers to women’s equality, including the division of

paid work into women's jobs and men's jobs, devaluation and low pay of women's jobs, women's primary responsibility for housework and childcare, the "glass ceiling" that limited women's advancement into top positions, limited procreative choice, and gendered socialization of children (Lorber 2010). Among these, only the liberal feminist opposition to gendered socialization of children focused on questions of identity, but it typically resolved the identity issue by making the case for the removal of normative pressure that caused most males and females to adopt narrowly "masculine" or "feminine" identities. An emerging liberal feminist psychology buttressed this argument by simultaneously exploring the ways in which gendered socialization was restrictive and sub-optimal for the psychological development of both males and females. Liberal feminists tended to be most concerned with gender *inequality* and focused on how gendered socialization limited women's opportunities for economic or political advancement; they encouraged women to resist (exclusive) self-identification with the narrow, devalued, and disempowering roles of wife, mother, and object of men's sexual desire, or, more generally, the subsuming of their own self-identities under those of their husbands and families (as was common among white middle-class heterosexual women in Europe and the United States).

Identity was not, at least at first, a central issue for Marxist and socialist feminisms. The focus of these perspectives was women's *work*: their largely invisible and unpaid work in the home, their low pay in paid work, and their role as a reserve army of industrial labor (Lorber 2010). But many Marxist and socialist feminists gradually extended Marx's analysis of class interests and class consciousness to an analysis of gender consciousness. Through this route, Marxist and socialist feminists became interested in matters of identity. Many Marxist-socialist feminists, reflecting the broader "cultural turn" in leftist thought, concluded that gendered oppression could not be eliminated by institutional change alone but additionally required transformation of identity. Their work on psychology, consciousness, and identity drew on the several of the key Frankfurt School theorists as well as the resurgence of interest in Antonio Gramsci's work and grappled with questions of consciousness and culture. Later, identity emerged as a central concept in standpoint feminism, a perspective rooted in the Marxian notion that consciousness reflects the material conditions of our lives as they exist in particular social-historical circumstances. This perspective argued that identities rooted in the experience of marginalization and subordination were potentially generative of a critical understanding of the workings of the systems of domination from which these identities emanate (Smith 1987; Hill Collins 1990).

In contrast to liberal feminism and Marxist/socialist feminisms, radical feminism began with a central focus on identity issues. Radical feminism came to be so called, in opposition to the reformism of second-wave liberal feminism, because of its position that the oppression of women by men was the most fundamental of all oppressions. Radical feminist theorists argued that this oppression was so entrenched in culture and social institutions that liberal reform could achieve nothing other than to permit some women entrance into institutions that would continue to operate according to masculine principles and values and to reinforce assumptions of masculine superiority. Whereas liberal feminists accepted the basic values of liberal, democratic societies but called for their extension to women, radical feminists called for a thorough re-evaluation of standards, values, assumptions, and identities that they argued were rooted in and supportive of masculine superiority and male domination. An influential school of radical feminism, designated by subsequent scholars as "cultural feminism" (Alcoff 1988), focused on the origins of masculine self-identity and its key role in gender inequality. They analyzed male domination as an attempt to control, exploit, devalue, and denigrate women and femininity rooted in male envy of women's vital life energies and the positive values inherent in femininity. Cultural feminism encouraged feminists to reclaim sexual difference and the feminine principles

that had been culturally devalued, and to resist identification with dominant ideologies of the inferiority of women and femininity. Radical feminists believed that it was essential to challenge male domination in all its forms, within all social institutions, cultural belief systems, and particularly in sexuality, family relations, and personal identities.

The development of psychoanalytic-feminist perspectives in the 1970s and 1980s followed from and intensified feminist concern with understanding the formation of gendered identities and with how differences in men's and women's psychological development reflected and contributed to male domination and female submission. Some psychoanalytic-feminist theory, notably the work of Juliet Mitchell (Mitchell 1974), developed out of a Marxist-socialist feminist perspective following an emergent consensus that a psychologically oriented theory of gendered oppression was needed to complement the traditional Marxist-socialist emphasis on the economic arrangements of capitalism (Tong 2009). Other developments in psychoanalytic-feminist theory were more aligned with the cultural feminists' argument that male domination was rooted in male envy and possessiveness of women and femininity, and these drew upon psychoanalytic theory to understand the psychological basis for male domination. These strongly feminist psychoanalytic approaches joined existing critiques of gender analyses within psychoanalytic theory. Well prior to the emergence of second-wave feminism, Freudian psychoanalytic theory had been criticized by neo-Freudian psychoanalysts, most notably Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and Clara Thompson, who viewed the development of distinct male and female gender identities as socially constructed rather than biologically determined. These critics argued that women's "neurosis" derived from their subordinate position within patriarchal societies; they also reinterpreted controversial Freudian ideas such as "penis envy" as symbolic of women's envy of the greater power and value that men enjoyed in patriarchal societies. While psychoanalytic theory was viewed with animosity by leading liberal and radical feminists, including especially Betty Friedan, Shulamith Firestone, and Kate Millett, because of its historical sexism and androcentric assumptions, other second-wave feminists followed the lead of Adler, Horney, and Thompson in appropriating psychoanalytic theory to develop an analysis of the socially constructed psychodynamics of the development of gendered and hierarchical identities. Psychoanalytic-feminist theories developed along at least two relatively distinct paths. One followed neo-Freudian relational theories and focused on understanding how differences in boys' and girls' early relational environments produced gendered personalities; the other borrowed heavily from Jacques Lacan and from post-structuralist thought in its focus on the ways in which language constructs sexual difference and on males' and females' different relationships to what Lacan called the "Symbolic Order."

As second-wave feminism developed in the 1960s and 1970s, tensions emerged over the question of the social identity of feminism's "woman." Despite significant diversity in the perspectives of second-wave feminists, critics alleged that they shared a common failure to speak to the experiences and interests of women who were not white, middle class, heterosexual, or citizens of countries of the global North. Multicultural, postcolonial and global feminisms emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, challenging earlier feminist assumptions that all women shared interests with other women *as women*, that gender-based oppression was the most fundamental form of oppression experienced by any women, or that feminism could be easily organized based on an assumption of a core common identity and set of interests among women. Accordingly, the initial focus of these post-second-wave feminisms centered on matters of identity, in particular the meaning of the identity "woman" and the implications of the multiple, intersecting identities based in experiences of marginalization and subordination. As these alternatives to second-wave feminism developed, though, some versions of postcolonial feminism and global feminism shifted their emphasis away from identity and to material deprivation. Although they argue that

poverty matters far more than issues of identity to many women around the world, however, they continue to consider and critique the identity issue.

As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, concurrent with the emergence of a strong critique of the premises of second-wave feminism by multicultural, postcolonial, and globally oriented feminists, new forms of feminist theory emerged that were equally critical of the second wave but from a perspective on identity shaped by post-structural and postmodern social thought. Although many feminists were suspicious initially of the potentially de-politicizing implications of the post-structural and postmodernist critique of identity, most recognized an affinity with postmodernists' critique of "essentialism," its deconstruction of the universality of the modern Western conception of "man," and its critique of the binary, hierarchical oppositions (e.g., man/woman, reason/emotion, culture/nature) that structure modern Western thought. The thought of Michel Foucault served especially as a focal point for feminist debate about subjectivity and identity, with some adopting Foucault's view of identity as social control and advocating an "anti-identity" position, while others resisted what they viewed as the politically enervating effects of the wholesale critique of the "subject" characteristic of post-structuralist and postmodern thought. Postmodern feminism extended cultural feminists' challenge to the universality of the modern, Western conception of man by additionally challenging the universality of the concept of "woman" and the feminist political projects associated with it; like multicultural, postcolonial, and global feminists, postmodern feminists emphasized differences *among* women based on race, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and differences in the intersection of these and other social and personal differences. Postmodern feminists called for the repudiation of essentialist conceptions of identity within feminism, which they argued reflected the experiences of privileged white Western women as much as the Enlightenment conception of man had reflected the ideals of privileged white Western men. In the terminology of Donna Haraway (1991), postmodern feminists called for the recognition of "fractured identities" and for political coalitions representing diverse interests rather than a singular feminist project dominated by the experiences and goals of privileged women. Postmodern feminists drew upon the postmodernist critique of identity to challenge the idea of gendered identities as being stable, inner, and core, emphasizing instead the fluid, transient, multiple, and contradictory nature of identities. Although there are many different postmodern feminist positions on the question of the sorts of identification most compatible with feminist goals of social and personal transformation, most have agreed on the importance of the challenge to the hegemony of the modern, Western, masculine ideal and the necessity of a critique of essentialist conceptions of "woman."

Analysts disagree on the meaning and/or appropriate designation for the most current wave of feminism, with some using the term "third-wave feminism" and others "post-feminism"; there is, however, general agreement that the nature of feminism has been significantly transformed in the decades following the heyday of second-wave feminism in the 1970s and early 1980s. Third-wave feminisms and post-feminisms have been heavily influenced by the postmodern critique of identity and multicultural, postcolonial, global feminist emphases on differences among women. They resist normative standards defining the meaning of the "good feminist" and of what women *should* want (Tong 2009), adopting the position that there are no inherent commonalities in the interests and experiences of women and that the "politics" of feminism should consist solely in defending individual women's rights to define themselves and their desires in any way that they see fit. This stance has been called post-feminism by some because of its refusal to define a feminist identity or, as some would argue, to draw normative distinctions between feminist and anti-feminist patterns of identification. Some view post-feminism as a non-feminism because it seems to give implicit support to the claim that gender-based domination, restrictive barriers linked to gender, and prescriptions for appropriate

identities for men and women no longer exist; some critics argue that post-feminism is a profoundly neoliberal ideology, advocating individual responsibility for constructing one's own self-identity according to one's own independently defined desires and interests and in the absence of or irrespective of any structural or cultural constraints. Others, however, view post-feminism as compatible with the overall aims of feminism, insofar as it advocates increased power and self-determination for girls and women; according to this position, post-feminism does not require a naïve belief in gender's irrelevance as a basis for structuring, still to male advantage, men's and women's opportunities.

### **Major claims, developments, contributions**

From the beginning of second-wave feminism in the early 1970s to the present, feminist claims about identity have been complex and contested. Feminist theorists have developed critiques of dominant, masculinist conceptualizations of self-identity and have proposed alternative feminist ways of thinking about the self; they have analyzed male domination and female subordination as formative of women's and men's identities and have theorized various processes by which gender identities are produced; they have theorized avenues by which women might resist subordination and transform identities that inhibit women's agency; they have analyzed how gender intersects with other sources of identity and debated how best to engage a broadly inclusive feminist politics; they have assessed the implications of changes in gender expectations and relations that have occurred in recent decades; and they have continued a long tradition of disagreeing over the appropriate goals of and strategies for feminist (or post-feminist) politics. A significant impetus for debate on some of these issues and for criticism of the conceptions of many of the prominent feminist theorists of the 1970s and 1980s was the emerging awareness of important differences between women – based on class, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, geographic location, sexuality, (dis)-ability, or any difference that caused significant variation in life experience and interests among women. Another important source of debates in feminist theory was closely linked to debates within social and political thought, as feminist theories developed out of or in relationship to an array of competing perspectives in social theory.

### ***Feminist perspectives on self-identity***

One important contribution of feminist theory to identity studies has been the exploration of normative questions about the values inherent in dominant conceptions of masculinity, femininity, and humanity; in different ways, feminist scholars have challenged the assumed virtues of masculinity and have posed alternative visions of identity, subjectivity, or selfhood as more compatible with feminist politics and values.

As second-wave feminism developed in the 1970s and 1980s, a key point of contention was the question of what sort of identity women *should* want. Three major positions on this question emerged. The first position, adopted by earlier feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century and Simone de Beauvoir in the middle of the twentieth century, was to advocate that women claim their autonomy and subjectivity as defined by Western Enlightenment thought. Wollstonecraft and de Beauvoir were contemptuous of femininity constructed according to the dominant standards of their day, viewing women who adhered to these ideals and norms as lacking in human virtue or, in de Beauvoir's words, "mutilated" and "immanent" (1953). Shortly after the emergence of second-wave feminism in the 1970s, though, cultural feminist theory began to move feminist theory away from its relatively uncritical adoption of these prevailing and presumably masculine ideals of self-development.

A second position on identity emerged out of the cultural feminist project of challenging the presumed superiority of masculinity over femininity; cultural feminists focused attention on the positive values and attributes associated with femininity and developed by women even in the context of their subordinate roles. Instead of encouraging women to renounce caretaking roles as wives, mothers, nurses, pre-school teachers, or in any of a number of jobs usually performed by women and involving service to the needs of others, cultural feminists called for recognition of the value of and the skill and competence inherent in the nurturance and caretaking women provide. Challenging Lawrence Kohlberg's claim that women were usually incapable of advanced moral reasoning, psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982) famously argued that women only seemed to be morally inferior to men if one assumed, as Kohlberg did, that adherence to abstract principles was the highest form of moral reasoning. Women, Gilligan argued, had a *different but equally admirable* approach, considering the particularities of actors and the circumstances they faced when making moral judgments about behavior. Kohlberg *defined* this as an inferior form of moral reasoning, but Gilligan argued that there was no defensible basis for concluding that it was a lesser moral position. Gilligan's work played a particularly significant role in the larger cultural feminist project of reclaiming the value of attributes associated with women and femininity.

A third position developed out of criticisms of the cultural feminists. Critics identified a tendency for cultural feminists to uncritically valorize stereotypical feminine attributes and behaviors and uncritically accept all women's identities as inherently worthy of positive recognition. So, rejecting both the uncritical acceptance of a masculine standard and an equally uncritical embrace of the feminine status quo, the emergent position necessarily subjected dominant conceptions of *both* masculinity and femininity to careful critique, recognizing valuable components of each but shifting attention to the ways in which the *gender system*, the binary and hierarchical opposition between masculinity and femininity and structured inequalities of power between men and women, produces contradictions and distortions in the development of gendered identities.

An early example of this third position is represented by psychologist Jean Baker Miller's *Towards a New Psychology of Women* (1976). In this work, she systematically outlined the positive worth of qualities, attributes, and behaviors associated with femininity and women's roles and challenged the dominant tendency to devalue and denigrate many of these; in addition, though, she also analyzed how many of these potentially valuable qualities could become distorted and harmful when developed from a position of subordination. Caretaking, for example, is a highly valuable and admirable skill that had been culturally devalued through its association with the feminine. While Miller argued that it should be revalued, she also argued that it could be distorted when practiced by a person whose emotional development had been stunted and damaged by subordination: under such circumstances, it could devolve into the projection of one's own denied and unrealized needs onto the object of care, resulting in a failure to respond empathically to the needs of the person to whom care is directed. Miller similarly subjected masculinity to systematic critique, showing how attributes associated with masculinity were, in some common manifestations, unworthy of the valorization they had received. She distinguished between valuable and harmful manifestations of several masculine attributes, showing how the hierarchical gender system systematically distorted potentially valuable attributes into harmful and anti-social forms. Although Miller's work was influential among feminist psychologists and broadly popular, her work was not all that influential among second-wave feminist theorists, likely because her work initially was misconstrued as aligned with the early argument that gender roles harmed both males and females. Nonetheless, her work is one of the early attempts by feminist theorists to illuminate the limitations of uncritical valorization or devaluation of masculine or feminine qualities.

This third position is manifested in contemporary feminist theorizing in which scholars pose alternative visions of identity, subjectivity, or selfhood that they measure against feminist politics and ideals. In departure from 1970s cultural feminism, these more contemporary visions do not seek to reverse the masculine–feminine hierarchy of values, but instead attempt to break out of the hierarchical gender system with a wide variety of alternative concepts of identity they provide. Although feminist theorists have hardly reached consensus on the worthiness of various alternative visions of identity, subjectivity, and selfhood, the key points of the feminist critique of dominant Western and masculinist concepts of self is a broadly shared position among feminists.

Meyers (2010) identifies the Kantian subject and *homo economicus* as the two key dimensions of Western post–Enlightenment conceptions of selfhood. Building on a large body of feminist work on this topic, Meyers argues that these models of selfhood portray *male* subjectivity as the highest form of human subjectivity. In other words, these models elevate the Kantian moral subject who exercises independent judgment through the use of abstract, rational principles and the rational economic actor, *homo economicus*, who makes rational decisions in order to maximize self-interest in the marketplace, over “lower” forms of subjectivity that lack rationality or autonomy. Meyers argues that these dominant models not only imply male superiority by defining stereotypically masculine styles of thinking as the highest form of human subjectivity, but they are also fictional in their characterization of human subjectivity. Summarizing major themes of feminist critique, Meyers (2010) argues that these dominant models of selfhood:

- 1 deny the rootedness of subjectivity in personal relationships and unchosen circumstances;
- 2 ignore the ways in which subjectivity is shaped by the intersection of multiple social identities, such as gender, race, nationality, age, or sexual orientation;
- 3 assume that structural domination does not penetrate the “inner citadel” of selfhood;
- 4 assume the transparency of the self to the gaze of its possessor, the immunity of the self to noxious influences, and the reliability of reason as a corrective to distorted moral judgments;
- 5 deny internal diversity and conflict within selves;
- 6 assume self-sufficiency and absence of responsibilities to others with emphasis on the self’s capacity for independence and planning;
- 7 fail to take into account internalized oppression and the process of overcoming it.

One of the key contributions of feminist theory, particularly in the 1970s and early 1980s, was its critique of Western, masculinist models of self-development and the positing of alternate models that paid more attention to relational capacities, empathy, care, interdependence, emotional expressiveness, vulnerability, and other attributes associated with women’s roles and cultural expectations of femininity. Irrespective of later criticism of these perspectives for uncritically valorizing women and femininity, never again would there be a credible feminist, or *any*, conceptualization of self that would deny the inherent rootedness of the self in relationships and the enormous value of relational skills long associated with women’s roles and cultural standards of femininity.

But even if there was widespread agreement on these basic points, there was hardly agreement on the conceptualization of self that should replace those widely agreed to be lacking in merit. One debate among feminist scholars concerned the question of whether conceiving “self” or “identity” as an integrated and unified whole was inherently repressive, denying internal complexity and validating a form of self-policing that would make it difficult to struggle toward freedom from oppressive standards. On one side, some postmodern feminists, including



feminist scholars influenced by Foucault, followed Foucault's line of argument and made the case that "self" or "identity" was inherently repressive; the quest to attain a unified sense of self only solidified the power of the dominant patriarchal discourse, so resistance could be achieved only by breaking with the idea of self or identity. Other feminist theorists, some influenced by their work as psychoanalysts or psychologists, argued that the absence of a core sense of self is an excruciatingly painful experience indicative of a severe level of psychological damage; it could not be a viable feminist strategy for resisting male domination.

Acceptance of the necessity of the self, though, opened the question of how to create a feminist self. A feminist conceptualization must, on the one hand, make sense of the myriad ways in which consciousness is distorted, selves are harmed, or domination or subordination internalized as individuals establish and maintain gendered identities but, simultaneously, make sense of the desire and ability to resist the internalization of dominant identity models, critically reflect on the internal contradictions between competing bases of identity, act as agents in choosing selves or in creatively constructing their own self-identities, and acknowledge people's ability to transform their self-identities. Yet another line of feminist theorizing, rooted in critical theory, cautioned against seemingly widespread tendencies among feminist theorists to dismiss the ideal of autonomy as an inherently masculinist concept that denied the fundamental rootedness of identity in relationships; instead, theorists such as Jessica Benjamin (1988, 1995) and Allison Weir (1996) have developed conceptualizations of "autonomy" and "intersubjectivity" as complementary rather than contradictory ideals.

### ***Conceptualizing the formation of gendered identities***

Although the claim is not unique to feminism, one of the most basic ideas of feminism is that gendered identity is not natural or inevitable but is socially constructed. As Simone de Beauvoir (1953) famously put it, "Woman is made, not born." This idea has largely been taken for granted among feminist theorists, although a few in the radical feminist tradition have embraced some biologically essentialist elements. In general, though, the key differences among feminist theorists come in the ways in which they conceptualize the processes by which gendered identities are formed.

Feminist psychology began from a liberal feminist perspective and has emphasized the role of culture, societal structures, and sex-linked behavioral and emotional norms in producing characteristic "masculine" and "feminine" identities in men and women. In the 1970s and 1980s, research focused on parental socialization of children, identifying both overt and subtle differences in how parents socialized boys and girls such that boys came to internalize a masculine identity and girls a feminine identity. A predominant theme that emerged from this research was that rigid expectations for masculinity in boys and femininity in girls limited the development of both. Rigid expectations for males to be masculine and to avoid qualities associated with femininity, it was argued, limited males' ability to express a range of emotions, to empathize with others' experience, and to develop satisfying emotional intimacy in their relationships; it also tended to result in a preoccupation with power, dominance, and superiority, which, in some cases, manifested in uncontrolled aggression resulting in self-harm and violence to others, intolerance of vulnerability, and a tendency to denigrate women and femininity. Conversely, rigid expectations for femininity were equally, if not more, limiting for girls and women, causing them to have less self-confidence, a weaker sense of independence, lack of an achievement orientation, an excessive preoccupation with meeting male-defined standards of feminine attractiveness, and an emphasis on meeting the needs of others that often resulted in subordination and self-abnegation. In the 1970s, a predominant ideal espoused by feminist psychologists

was the ideal of androgyny; building on empirical research, feminist psychologists argued that both males and females were psychologically and socially better adjusted if they incorporated the positive aspects of both masculinity and femininity into their personalities.

Psychological research on the damaging developmental consequences of sex-typed socialization, and the promotion of the ideal of androgyny, quickly drew criticism from feminists who argued that the perspective minimized the relationship between gender *difference* and gender *inequality*. Many feminists thought that such perspectives downplayed the benefits that men obtain, and the disadvantages suffered by women, as a result of sex-typed socialization; males and females were not, it was argued, equal victims of rigid sex-typed socialization, with men as damaged as much by expectations of invulnerability, for example, as women were by expectations for meeting exacting standards of physical attractiveness or for putting the needs of others above their own. Masculine identity, it was argued, offered men power; feminine identity, conversely, led to the subordination and objectification of women.

Not only was psychological research criticized for its neglect of the link between gender difference and gender inequality, but it was also criticized in several other ways as well. Two of these lines of criticism led to alternative ways of thinking about the formation of gendered identities. On the one hand, psychoanalytically oriented feminist perspectives argued that psychologists' preoccupation with sex-role socialization was too superficial in its understanding of how children come to internalize gendered identities. The acquisition of gendered self-identity was not so much a matter of sex-role training, that is, teaching children to behave according to cultural expectations of sex-appropriateness, but rather involved deeper, more unconscious, differences in the ways parents related to and identified with their children depending on the child's sex. An equally damning but completely alternative line of criticism came out of post-structuralist social theory and sociological theory and research. This criticism alleged that the psychological perspective was wrong to assume that gendered identities were deeply rooted in the personality. Critics argued that gendered identity was only as stable as the power and pervasiveness of societal structures and cultural norms that dictated the continual enactment of gendered identities in everyday social life.

### *Psychoanalytic feminism*

Arguably one of the most significant developments in feminist theorizing of identity was the development of psychoanalytic-feminist theories in the 1970s and 1980s. Following the publication of Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), which called upon feminists to take Freudian psychoanalytic theory seriously as a theory of the development of masculinity and femininity in modern patriarchal societies, psychoanalytic-feminist theorizing developed along two seemingly divergent paths: one, represented by Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin, explained how masculinity and femininity were deeply inscribed in persons' psyches as a consequence of the complex emotional dynamics of the relationship between parents and children during infancy and early childhood; the other, represented by Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, shared the premise that masculinity and femininity were deeply inscribed in persons' psyches during infancy and early childhood but explained this instead as a consequence of the acquisition of language and culture by which all human subjectivity is formed.

Nancy Chodorow's classic *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978) was one of the most significant contributions among psychoanalytic feminist theories rooted in "object-relations" psychoanalytic theory, a perspective that built on the ideas of neo-Freudian theorists such as D.W. Winnicott, John Bowlby, and others who shifted away from the classical Freudian focus on instinctual drives to an emphasis on the early relationship

between the infant/child and primary caretaker(s) as formative of identity. Chodorow's basic argument was that women's role as primary caretaker of infants and small children produces a tendency for girls to develop personalities rooted centrally in relationships to others and a tendency for boys' personalities to be marked more by an emphasis on independence, power, and success. In her view, there are a number of differences in how parents (and especially mothers) relate to girls and boys that contribute to this basic difference in personality development. First, mothers tend to identify with girls more than they do with boys, while they are more likely to experience boys as sexual others. Because of her greater identification with the girl as well as the decreased likelihood of the mother–daughter bond being perceived as incestuous or threatening to the father, the mother allows the female child to remain in the symbiotic bond of infancy longer than she does the male child. In families characterized by the mid-twentieth century's conventional middle-class male breadwinner/female homemaker family form, the development of masculine identity occurs largely in the absence of the kind of real relationship to the father that the girl has with the mother. Insofar as both boys and girls develop their primary senses of self in relationship to their usually female primary caretaker, boys learn to define masculinity as that which is “not feminine,” as separation from the mother, as independence, and in terms of an often idealized image of the father's and men's attributes and roles in society. Hence, the boy moves toward the glorification of the father and of masculinity and the promise of “having” a mother/wife when he attains the independence, power, and achievement of his father or other adult men. For both boys and girls, the mother (or other primary caretaker) is the first and most powerful love object; the girl, in contrast to the boy, learns that she may never *have* (the presumed heterosexual) mother but, through her mother's identification with her, that she may *be* like her. Both men and women are motivated, usually unconsciously, throughout their lives to recreate the intensity of the symbiotic mother–child bond of early infancy. Whereas the boy struggles to gain autonomy, power, and success in an unconscious effort to live up to the masculine ideal that will allow him to “win” the mother, the girl recreates the mother–infant unity vicariously through mothering and nurturance of others, usually husband and children.

A decade later, Jessica Benjamin published other work in this line of feminist theorizing, including *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (1988) and, later, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (1995). Like Chodorow, Benjamin's work is heavily rooted in neo-Freudian object relations theories; Benjamin relies heavily on Chodorow's theory, in fact, to develop her own theory. In contrast to Chodorow, though, Benjamin shifts from explaining the reproduction of gendered personalities to explaining the psychodynamics of domination and subordination in relationships. *Recognition*, or intersubjectivity, is the term Benjamin uses to characterize relationships between two people in which both are able to recognize the other as an independent subject, identifying with the other while at the same time acknowledging their difference. To be able to relate to other human beings as equals, Benjamin argues, requires most importantly that the developing baby/child learns to see its mother as an independent subject with needs and desires of her own. Failure to recognize the subjectivity of the mother, in her view, impedes our ability to see others in the world as equals (Benjamin 1995).

In Benjamin's analysis, domination and submission are relational orientations that express not inequalities of positive attributes and resources but rather an obstruction of mutuality built upon denial of the subjectivity of oneself or the other. Domination and submission result, she argues, when there is a “breakdown of the necessary tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals” (1988: 12). Patterns of domination or submission are attempts to get either recognition of self or connection to the other when integration of both seems impossible. Benjamin showed that both domination and

submission ultimately fail to gain either recognition or connection. On the side of the dominant, recognition of the other is necessary to give meaning to the other's recognition of oneself; though illusions of such can be temporarily sustained, achievement of meaningful recognition by others is ultimately impossible without recognizing the independent subjectivity of others. On the side of the subordinate, the subordinate who sacrifices the drive for recognition of self in order to gain connection to the dominant other renders oneself inessential and risks loss of the connection to the dominant other for this reason. According to Benjamin's analysis, neither domination nor submission can achieve even their one-sided purposes of gaining recognition or connection; mutual recognition is necessary for both but is denied in relations of dominance and subordination. Even as Benjamin argues that domination and submission ultimately fail to produce fulfilling relationships, however, Benjamin suggests that such patterns are widely prevalent in our culture and are fostered by heterosexual gender complementarity. Despite the illusions upon which they rest and the dissatisfactions they may cause, both dominants and subordinates gain some compensation through sustaining such relationships.

Given a breakdown in mutual recognition and connection in the relation between self and other – a breakdown which Benjamin suggests happens frequently in our culture in the early relation between parent and child – domination is a compensatory way of establishing differentiation from the other. Domination entails differentiating from the other not by recognizing the independent subjectivity of the other but rather by denying the independent subjectivity of the other. Masculinity, according to Benjamin's analysis, is achieved by disavowal and repudiation of femininity (p. 164). Independence, according to the culturally dominant male model, means establishing difference, power, and control in relation to the devalued maternal object (p. 78) – an illusory independence that ultimately backfires or at least requires continual defensive work to maintain. The contradiction produced by defining independence and male superiority on the basis of disavowal of femininity is that such a disavowal means dis-identification with that which was satisfying and fulfilling in relation to the mother and creates a sense of helpless dependence on the maternal object (p. 174). In reaction to this helpless dependence on the mother outside themselves, according to Benjamin, men attempt to do without her or to dominate her (p. 174).

In addition to serving the function of establishing a defensive sense of differentiation, domination also allows the subject to maintain control over a source of drive satisfaction. Domination makes for a sense of differentiation or independence from the devalued object, but it is only an illusion of such (since the other is not given up as a source of drive satisfaction.) Not only does domination entail using the other as a source of drive satisfaction, but also using the other as a negative pole against which one's independence, superiority, and power are defined. The position of domination does produce some dissatisfaction – for example, loneliness in not having a person recognized as an independent person with whom to relate, an underlying sense of threat at the possibility of the emergence of the independent subjectivity of the subordinate, a diversion of energy into defensive functions – and is ultimately contradictory. As long as masculinity depends on disavowal of femininity and dis-identification with the valued maternal capacities of tenderness and holding, the mother remains the only source of goodness. Yet, at the same time, reduction of her to an extension of self or object of drive satisfaction risks using her up; similarly, defensive idealization of autonomous individuality, rationality, self-sufficiency, competition negates the value of alternative orientations associated with the mother so thoroughly that needed maternal resources are experienced as worthless (pp. 205–6).

Although ultimately less satisfying than mutual recognition might be, domination does serve the compensatory functions of sustaining a sense of power, independence, and value as well as maintaining a stable source of drive satisfaction. The distorted nature of domination is expressed

in this contradiction: “wanting to devalue and control the other while still drawing sustenance from her, wanting to keep mother in captivity and yet alive and strong” (p. 8). The recognition of the independent subjectivity of the other, in fact, is necessary both to give meaning to the other’s recognition of oneself and to give emotional meaning to the connection with the other.

Chodorow’s work had been criticized for its apparent argument that, because gendered personalities emerged from particular childrearing systems, the solution to gendered personalities – and the inequality that they reproduced – lay in a particular arrangement of mixed-sex shared parenting. In Benjamin’s account, though, what are more important to destabilizing the gender system than the particular family arrangements are the patterns of love and identification that characterize early parent–child relations. Current patterns build masters and slaves, so a new pattern is needed. For Benjamin the new patterns must permit both male and female children to establish a deep sense of connection with adult caregivers, while also giving them the means to differentiate from those caregivers and develop agency as autonomous subjects. The foundation for this alternative pattern occurs in both the pre-oedipal and oedipal phases of development in relationship to mothers, fathers, or other primary caretakers. The key to subverting the system of gendered domination and subordination, or at least the avoidance of rigidity as children recognize sexual difference during the oedipal period, is for the developing child to be able to recognize mothers, fathers, and themselves as “love objects” and “like subjects.”

Across the Atlantic and contemporaneously, other scholars were engaged in a seemingly very different mode of psychoanalytically oriented feminist theorizing, one rooted in the psychoanalytic theory of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, two of the most influential contributors, differed from Chodorow and Benjamin in their emphasis, following Lacan, on the formation of subjectivity via internalization of language and culture rather than the actual relationships of a child’s early life. They viewed the development of identity as a process by which children emerge from the symbiotic unity of the early relationship between mother and infant. This process was possible only by the child’s entrance into the patriarchal “Symbolic Order.” But because the Symbolic Order was thoroughly patriarchal, only boys and men were able to fully establish subjectivity within it. The subjectivity of girls and women could never be as fully developed and absolute, not only because patriarchal discourse constructs the woman as other to the male subject, but also because girls and women were more likely to maintain intra-psychic connection to the preverbal semiotic realm of the mother–infant symbiosis.

Irigaray argued that women in Western culture have been associated with “nature” and “matter” in contrast to men’s association with “culture” and “subjectivity”; further, *all* women are defined fundamentally by the role “mother.” Irigaray saw women’s position in Western culture as Beauvoir had: men are subjects; women are “other.” Psychoanalytic theory and Western philosophy, she argues, are two influential discourses that deny women autonomous subjectivity and portray them as lacking in mature subjectivity. The only possibility for a woman to assume a subject position, she argued, was by assimilating to male subjectivity, transcending nature and entering culture. Irigaray argued that there was no separate subject position for women; insofar as women assume masculine subject positions, however, they reinforce the hierarchical opposition between culture and nature and mind and body and, by association, between men and masculinity and women and femininity. Consistent with her rootedness in post-structural social theory, Irigaray found these oppositions untenable. She believed that both men and women would have to reconfigure their subjectivity in such a manner as to reflect their understanding of themselves as equally nature and culture (Donovan 2005). Departing from Lacan’s view of the Symbolic Order as fixed, unified, and a-historical, Irigaray believed that a different Symbolic

Order could be constructed, one that allowed *real* sexual difference by allowing subject positions that women could assume without renouncing everything associated with women and femininity.

According to Kristeva, women can use their less complete entrance into the Symbolic Order as the basis for their intra-psychic resistance to the patriarchal order. So, in direct opposition to de Beauvoir, who urged women to assert their own subjectivity over and against the subjectivity of others, Irigaray and Kristeva urge women to tap the power of the semiotic, preverbal relational realm to which they have privileged access and from which they can counter the dominance of patriarchal logic and principles. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* (Kristeva 1984), Kristeva had established the ground for thinking that the patriarchal order is never as stable as a more determinist Lacanian account would have it. In this work, Kristeva rejects the structuralist view of language as fixed and homogenous, constructed on the basis of a unitary social order. For Kristeva, subjectivity is constituted on the basis of both symbolic and semiotic dimensions of experience; even as the patriarchal social order attempts to marginalize the semiotic, subjectivity cannot ever be absolutely divorced from the unconsciousness processes, heterogenous drives, and maternal power associated with semiotic experience. The Kristevan subject is inherently a “subject-in-process” – structured by the Symbolic but at the same time, by virtue of the semiotic experience from which it cannot detach itself, subversive of it. In patriarchal society, however, cultural myths and male ideals of power serve to relegate semiotic experience (and women who are associated with it) to a marginal position. Subjectivity in patriarchal society becomes a matter of striving to achieve autonomy from semiotic experience – from heterogeneous drives and from the early experience of relation to the mother. The political problem, for Kristeva, is to recover these marginalized experiences – for example, experiences of abjection, melancholy, foreignness – in such a way that they can provide a basis for creative resistance (Elliot 1991). Because the semiotic can only exert creative power through the mediation of symbolic experience, however, Kristeva suggests that it may be up to men – who have achieved a more stable position within the Symbolic Order – to experience a crisis in their own system of meaning and to then seek reinfusion of subjectivity with semiotic experience. Even so, Kristeva found a basis of resistance to the patriarchal order within women’s own experience of marginality.

In *Black Sun* (Kristeva 1989), Kristeva suggests a creativity inherent in women’s depression – a depression which stems not only from failure to identify with a meaning outside, but also from the failure to find sustenance in the loveless maternal bond. Kristeva suggests that depression is a powerful affect and source of integration that allows the subject to resist the emptiness of the Symbolic Order and to create outside of it. In depression, a woman experiences the meaninglessness of the order outside herself. She attempts to create in herself integrity apart from the outside world. Depression is her support – although a negative one – that makes up for her failure to be validated within the outside world (p. 19). In other words, she constantly utters “that’s meaningless” when invited to take up an identification in a world she knows to exclude her most fundamental desires (p. 19). In her depression, she refuses to lose until she has been compensated for her loss (p. 5); an identification with male ideals in a patriarchal order which denies her, severs her from the maternal power with which she identifies, is no compensation. Kristeva characterizes depression as “the imprint of a humankind that is surely not triumphant but subtle, ready to fight, and creative” (p. 22).

Kristeva argues, in *Black Sun* as in other works, that creation out of depression is possible only by identification with a third party – with the father and/or with language (p. 23). The function of psychoanalysis, as she sees it, is to provide the missing identification – this time one that provides a real compensation for her early loss – that makes it possible to move out of the deadening mother–child fusion. But, does this make the psychoanalyst the new bearer of

patriarchal law? Kristeva does not think so. Patriarchy maintains itself by excluding the desires which emanate from experience of primal loss, and with it women's power. Instead of being another – but more deceptive – political discourse which mobilizes our energies into exclusive identifications, psychoanalysis can work only by joining the power of our heterogeneous experience with language. Psychoanalytic interpretation points to the unpredictable elements of human existence, those which resist incorporation by a unitary system of meaning; yet it does not leave them in a politically inert state of meaninglessness but attempts to approach them and bring them into thought and language in a way that renders them meaningful and effective (Kristeva and Waller 1982).

### *Foucauldian feminist theories of identity*

As seemingly different from one another as were the two versions of psychoanalytic-feminist theories, both shared the assumption that gendered identity was deeply rooted in the human psyche and that its explanation revolved around the development of the self in the early years of life. A very different line of feminist theorizing of identity, however, drew on the work of Michel Foucault and departed from the interior focus of psychoanalytic-feminist theory by developing a far more exterior analysis of institutionalized practices in everyday life as the basis for gendered identities. Sandra Bartky and Judith Butler are two well-known feminist theorists who have drawn on the ideas of Foucault to develop theories of gendered identity.

Bartky draws upon Foucault's analysis of the construction of self-identity through discipline and surveillance, extending Foucault's emphasis on practices more characteristic of the lives of men to an analysis of a distinct set of bodily practices central to the construction of femininity. Bartky (1990) analyzes the "techniques" or disciplinary practices that produce the feminine body, distinguishing three categories: "1) those that aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration; 2) those that bring forth from this body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements; and 3) those directed toward the display of this body as an ornamented surface" (p. 65). These disciplinary practices, she argues, profoundly shape female identity and subjectivity, representing a "modernization of patriarchal power." Bartky argues that patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability become "internalized" by nearly all women, causing women to see themselves as bodily beings from the perspective of a generalized male witness. But, following Foucault, Bartky argues that this internalization of patriarchal power cannot be understood simply as repressive or disempowering, but that it also "can provide the individual upon whom it is imposed with a sense of mastery as well as a secure sense of identity" (p. 77). To challenge the patriarchal construction of the female body, Bartky argues, threatens women with deskilling, denying the worth of the vast array of skills required by these bodily disciplines and with a loss of identity tied to a sense of competence in the performance of these bodily disciplines. Most crucially, the abandonment of these bodily disciplines may threaten the individual's sense of herself as a person at all, since having a "feminine" body is crucial to most women's sense of self.

Following a parallel line of Foucauldian reasoning, with the publication of *Gender Trouble* in 1990, Judith Butler established herself as one of, if not *the*, most influential contemporary feminist identity theorists. Butler's main contribution was her theorization of gender, sex and sexuality as *performative*. In her view, if masculinity or femininity appears in men and women to be natural or "core," this is only because men and women repeatedly enact masculinity or femininity in their bodily stylization. For Butler, this is anything but a voluntary choice; "regulative discourses," "frameworks of intelligibility," and "disciplinary regimes" dictate the range of acceptable stylized acts and coerce individuals to maintain the appearance of having a "core"

gendered identity. Butler challenges Chodorow's theory of the development of gender identity, arguing that gendered identities are neither "internalized" nor as fixed, coherent, and uncontradictory as Chodorow's account suggests. She argues that children of both sexes identify with both men and women, not only in their early relationships to their primary parents but also to a wide array of other people and idealized images of masculinity and femininity.

### *Sociological perspectives on gender and identity*

The idea that gender is something that a person *does* rather than something a person *is* has a somewhat longer history in sociological theory and research than in general social theory. Coming from the interactionist and ethnomethodological traditions in sociology, West and Zimmerman (1987) famously developed the concept "doing gender," a concept similar in its most basic concept to Butler's performative theory of gender. In this classic work, they argued that gender was *not* a set of internal traits but rather was something that people do in their everyday interactions and social relationships. The routine "doing" (i.e., performing) of gender in everyday life creates the appearance of essential differences between men and women. Interestingly, Erving Goffman had argued essentially the same point in *Gender Advertisements* and "The theory of the relations between the sexes." Because Goffman was an outsider to feminism, though, his work on gender identity was not widely recognized within the feminist literature. His ideas, however, greatly influenced West and Zimmerman's conceptualization of what it meant to "do" gender.

In sociology, West's and Zimmerman's concept "doing gender" has become foundational; sociologists working from other traditions of sociological theory and research have contributed in various ways to advancing the notion that gender is an enactment rather than a set of internal traits. Barbara Risman (1987), for example, employed the "microstructural" perspective in sociology to demonstrate the inaccuracy of common assumptions about differences in women's and men's abilities to care for and nurture small children. In her study of men who had become the primary caretaker of their children following desertion by or death of the mother, she found that the men often surprised themselves with the development of seemingly new, more feminine, *traits* as they took on the job of primary caretaker for the children. Risman concluded that the widespread belief in women's superior nurturing and caretaking capacities was supported by the widespread expectations that women *should* provide nurturing and caretaking. When situational expectations changed, as they did in the study for the men who had newly assumed the role of primary caretaker (a role that carries expectations of *maternal* care), men's maternal capacities turned out to have equaled those of female mothers. The "doing gender" concept has become the dominant understanding of gender among feminist sociologists; rather than conceptualizing gender as deeply rooted in individual psyche, sociologists tend to see gender as rooted in social positions and expectations.

### **Criticisms**

Feminist theorizing of identity is anything but a "normal science." There are seemingly irreconcilable differences in certain core assumptions. Some see identity as deeply rooted in the psyche, while others view identity as an externally mandated everyday performance. Some hold the establishment of a coherent, authentic, and autonomous identity to be a desirable human outcome, while others are equally convinced that gender can only be toppled by an assault on the integrated self. Some emphasize the importance of a person's relational biography in constructing self-identity, while others place far greater emphasis on culture, language, and



discourse. Although the lines of these disagreements are clearly drawn in the arena of feminist theory, one of the hallmarks of that arena is that the disagreements lack ferocity. While these may have been hotly contested issues in past decades as feminism struggled for *its* identity, they hardly seem so contentious now. The most prevalent view among the vast array of scholars in the area, however, seems to be to accept that each of the competing perspectives on these core questions provide valuable but partial insight.

Basic points of agreement have emerged out of dialogue among feminist theorists of varying perspectives; mostly, feminist theorists have come to a consensus on the validity of a set of criticisms that had been directed against earlier feminist work on identity. Three major criticisms of these earlier feminist theories of identity are widely accepted by contemporary theorists:

- 1 The early theories are essentialist and exclusionary in their failure to carefully think through the implications of diversity among women for theorizing identity and for conceiving a non-essentialist, non-exclusionary feminist politics.
- 2 The early theories are misguided in their focus on identity and neglectful of structural, institutional, and material dimensions of gender inequality.
- 3 The early theories are overly deterministic, incapable of making sense of women's agency and resistance to dominant identity frameworks.

While there is little agreement about which earlier theorists were most misguided or which current theorists persist in these errors, there is broad agreement that the set of criticisms directed against earlier work are serious charges that future work should confront.

The charge of essentialism and failure to think through the implications of diversity among women for theorizing identity and for developing a broadly inclusive political agenda is one that nearly all Western feminists have taken very seriously. Among contemporary feminist theorists, Chodorow's work exemplifies better than any other the problem of essentialism in early second-wave feminist theory. Chodorow's work, critics contend, make a number of problematic essentialist assumptions: the universality or at least widespread prevalence of the male breadwinner/female homemaker white middle-class family form; heterosexuality; coherent, unified gendered identities; and seamless reproduction of distinct gendered identities and roles. Critics have questioned how such a theory could make sense of the formation of gendered identities in the context of an array of diverse family forms that depart from these assumptions. Chodorow and other second-wave feminists have responded to these criticisms and have attempted to move away from theorizing the formation of gendered identities as a generic process and from the view of the child's early relational context as necessarily the most important determinant of identity development. In more recent work, for example, Chodorow (1995) develops a theory of gendered identity as a cultural and personal construct. Because of Chodorow's role as exemplar of the pitfalls of essentialism, however, the prevailing tendency among contemporary feminist theorists is to dismiss this entire line of relational psychoanalytic-feminist theorizing. Even if one of the costs of the essentialism charge was to foreclose or stall some lines of feminist theorizing that had yet the opportunity to mature, the charge of essentialism has been generally productive; it has led to a broadening of feminist dialogue across class, race, nationality, culture, sexual orientation, or other social differences. And it has also led to critical reflection on the implications of multiple, intersecting social identities on an individual's sense of self-identity as well as on feminist conceptions of the shared experiences and political interests of women.

The charge that feminist theorists' focus on identity is misguided is not one feminist theorists of identity would readily accept; their continued analysis of such matters belies this point of view. Nonetheless, most feminist theorists, including those whose work has focused heavily

on identity issues, take seriously what they hear as a warning to keep in focus those sorts of things that were important to both liberal and Marxist-socialist feminists in the 1970s and that are important to postcolonial and global feminists in the present: material needs, work issues, and the vast array of institutional barriers to the achievement of gender equality. Judith Butler's work, for example, has been heavily criticized by feminist theorists with a more materialist orientation for her seemingly exclusive focus on culture and discourse as constitutive of gendered identities and for her seemingly trivializing portrayal of "drag" and other forms of stylistic gender non-conformity as viable strategies for the subversion of gender. Nancy Fraser's classic essay "From redistribution to recognition?" (Fraser 1997) best summarizes what has become, arguably, the prevailing view among feminist theorists of identity: material redistribution and identity recognition are *both* important projects in the quest for social justice and are, in many instances, fundamentally related and mutually determinative.

Finally, the charge of determinism has been directed toward nearly all of the major feminist theories of the social construction of gendered identities. This is hardly surprising, since the primary aim of these theories was to explain the persistence of gendered identities and the relationship of them to gender inequality. Nonetheless, feminist theorizing of agency and resistance in the 1990s responded to this charge by shifting from explaining the structuring of identity by the male-dominant/female-subordinate gender system to theorizing women's agency and resistance. This theorizing of agency and resistance proceeded in at least a few different directions. Among psychoanalytically oriented feminist theorists, one avenue involved theorizing the internal contradictions, distortions, and intra-psychic pressure that might provide the impetus, *if* appropriately interpreted, for women to resist domination and/or for men to relinquish their dominant subject positions. In each of the theories considered here, there is variation in the relative emphasis on theorizing of resistance and agency in comparison to the emphasis on explaining how masculinity and femininity, domination and subordination, and male superiority and female inferiority become intra-psychically established. Of the four, Chodorow's theory was considered most determinist because it seemed to suggest that the construction of gendered identities was a seamless and self-perpetuating process and underplayed the ways in which these identities were fraught with contradictions and distortions, even though a thorough reading of her work reveals that she too recognized these. At least some part of the appeal of French post-structuralist psychoanalytic-feminist theories as North American and British feminists began reading translations of this work in the 1980s and 1990s was that they seemed to attribute an intra- psychic basis of resistance to and subversion of the patriarchal Symbolic Order.

Among Foucauldian/feminist theorists, debate about resistance and agency formed the basis of a division between at least a couple different varieties of Foucauldian-feminism. One version of Foucauldian feminism, exemplified by Bartky and Susan Bordo (Bordo 1993), drew upon Foucault's analyses of discipline and surveillance to develop an analysis of the disciplinary project of femininity, focusing on the techniques of bodily transformation women readily learn and perform to establish femininity. Bartky and Bordo were heavily criticized by other feminist theorists for portraying women as passive robots who willingly succumb to the forces of discipline, always striving to more closely approximate idealized images of femininity. Critics contend that women have a range of reasons and desires for dieting, exercising, or other work on their bodies and that it is simplistic to reduce it all to an imposed effect of disciplinary power (McLaughlin 2003). A very different version of Foucauldian-feminism draws upon Foucault's ideas about power and resistance to theorize possibilities for women's resistance to gendered power relations. Foucault's conceptualization of power, these theorists argue, departs from more typical understandings that define some people or groups as *having* power and others as *lacking* power; according to Foucault's conceptualization, power is inherently relational and is played out in

many forms in everyday social relations (Sawicki 1991). For Foucault, power is all-pervasive, extending through what he called “capillaries” of power into all aspects of people’s everyday lives; because power is relational and active, however, there are an abundance of opportunities for everyday resistance to gendered power relations.

Another line of feminist theorizing about agency stems from feminist efforts to understand gendered identities in the context of what several non-feminist social theorists have designated as the post-traditional era. Following the movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the rapidly increasing rate of female labor force participation that began also in the 1970s, the “traditional” (1950s–1960s) roles of men and women that formed the basis for second-wave feminist theories of male domination and female subordination had become far less pervasive than theories such as Chodorow’s had suggested. Some argued that it no longer made sense to conceptualize gendered identities in terms of domination and subordination; others argued that gender had become far more fluid and flexible, with men and women far less constrained by gender norms in their development of self-identity. Some theorists of de-traditionalization, reflexive modernity, or individualization had argued that gender no longer weighed heavily at all as a determinant of a person’s identity, that it had become largely irrelevant as both constraint and basis of inequality. Recent feminist work on identity (e.g., Adkins 2002) has engaged with these theories; while dismissing the notion of gender’s supposed irrelevance, this work attempts to conceptualize the formation and enactment of gendered identities in ways that take into account the implications of the changes associated with the idea of post-traditionalism.

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