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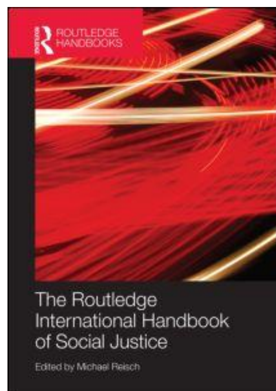

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Social Justice Feminism

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12
SOCIAL JUSTICE FEMINISM

Mel Gray, Kylie Agllias, and Kate Davies

Introduction

This chapter examines the enduring relevance of social justice feminism in an era when there is a common misconception that the goals of gender parity have been recognised and mainstreamed. It argues that a renewed interest in social justice feminism is focused on action to institute structural changes in relation to ongoing issues for women relating to paid work, unpaid care work in the home, culture and identity, sexuality, domestic violence and state welfare. The chapter focuses on Nancy Fraser's (1989, 1997, 2000, 2008, 2009) theory of social justice as one which acknowledges the complexity of examining the various dimensions of justice within contemporary welfare. It begins with an examination of social justice feminism and its key features and ends with the service-user movement as a site for direct engagement to undermine neoliberal reprivatisation discourse.

Kalsem and Williams (2010) trace the use of the term 'social justice feminism' to the U.S. historian, John McGuire, who used it to describe a movement of working- and middle-class activists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In its early stages, the movement focused on labour protection, primarily through litigation, and legislative and labour reform for women. Early on, activists recognised the movement's potential for effecting social change with the demand for social justice best seen as a response to the inadequacies of liberal justice (Barry, 2005). Hence social justice feminists in the United States pursued change 'in ways other than seeking formal equality through a constitutional amendment, a strategy that continues to be in use today' (Kalsem & Williams, 2010, p. 155). More recently in the United States, social justice feminism has been rekindled through the New Women's Movement Initiative (NWMI), which aims to address longstanding divisions, transcend differences, carve out a new feminist agenda and revive the U.S. women's movement to mobilise all women for social change and gain traction in a conservative political system. Contrary to claims that feminism is waning, or has achieved its aims, social justice feminists see feminism as an unfinished project:

> In our contemporary globalizing conditions, the feminization of poverty remains profound and is even deepening in many sites across the developed countries. Having achieved formal equality in most countries—with access to the vote and the adoption of anti-discrimination laws governing the labour force—women still face gendered

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> occupational segregation in the workplace, a gendered wage gap, 'glass ceilings', over-representation among part-time and low wage workers, the double burden of unpaid care work and wage earning, and inadequate work supports such as childcare and paid parental leave.
>
> *Smith, 2008, p. 131*

The battle over unpaid women's work, the movement of care out of the home into the marketplace as women increasingly move into paid work, and the trading of care as a marketable commodity remain central issues for feminists today. But the feminist cause of the 'personal is political' is not well-served by neoliberal post-feminism which has moved the revolution without to the revolution within. The increasing focus on personal well-being fits well with neoliberal individualism and its strategies to develop active citizens participating in the economy. Foucault (2000) called the process by which individuals become self-governing agents, acted upon by professionals and social institutions, 'biopolitics.' It obliges individuals to assume *self-responsibility* for developing their strengths and capacities to become full contributors to society. While the feminist self-esteem and empowerment movement may be seen through the lens of governmentality—as part of the biopolitical apparatus geared to empowering women to live responsibly in a way that promotes their personal and social well-being without necessarily changing social structures or challenging unjust practices (Cruikshank, 1999). Fraser (1989, 1997) believes this overemphasis on control denies the agency of women in promoting their own self-development: 'Instead of assuming that this disciplinary element is the controlling discourse, logic and force, I would say rather it's only one logic, discourse and social force among others which operate on the terrain of the social' (interview with Vivienne Bozalek, 2012, p. 140).

Diverse feminist perspectives have variously worked 'on the terrain of the social' to change the system from within (i.e., liberal feminism), advocated for dismantling oppressive social systems (i.e., radical feminism), focused on economic inequalities as a source of injustice (i.e., socialist feminist), valued women's cultures and experiences (i.e., cultural feminism), or highlighted the intersectionality of racism and poverty with sexism (i.e., woman of colour feminism or womanism) (Gray & Boddy, 2010; Moradi, 2012). This chapter calls for a reinvigoration of the critical agenda, which feminists have long pursued in their quest for a society free from discrimination, oppression, and want. Equal rights for women—equal opportunity, equal pay for equal work, and the valuing of women's unpaid work are among the many social justice causes feminists have pursued.

Features of social justice feminism

Kalsem and Williams (2010) see social justice feminism as 'an approach to questions of law and policy that address concerns about systemic inequities … [which is] superior to liberalism and liberal feminism because both of these approaches focus inordinately on individual liberty without recognizing other important considerations' (p. 156). This leads them to an individualistic approach couched in a discourse of well-being wherein 'respecting another person involves attending to the conditions that are necessary for her thriving … [and] seeing that she has equally available to her the basic conditions of meaningful self-direction' (p. 157). Kalsem and Williams (2010) are critical of liberal feminism, which, in practice and in legal theory, has

> focused primarily on a white, middle class, heterosexual female subject, examining her status when compared with her male counterpart. In its emphasis on formal equality, liberal feminism has failed adequately to address other social and political

> structures that support patriarchy. Social justice feminism strives to uncover and dismantle those structures, such as white privilege, heterosexism, able-ism, and classism. These concerns are evident in current strains of feminist legal theory, notably, critical race feminism.
>
> *p. 156*

For social justice feminists, social justice is a political agenda. It involves a political commitment to social—and political—action to effectively influence public policy and improve the lives of women (Box 12.1). For Kalsem and Williams (2010), while feminism emphasises putting theory into practice, social justice feminism begins with practice: 'Activists want *to do* social justice feminism' (p. 161, emphasis added). However, critical analysis has long been an important contribution of feminist theorising and action does not take place in a vacuum. It is inspired by ideas. In this neoliberal era, with activist enthusiasm severely dampened, only a revolution of ideas will kick start the new political project of social justice feminism. We see, in Nancy Fraser's work, key insights to kick start this project. Here the work of Azmanova (2012) is most apposite. She presents what she calls 'a blueprint of a feminist agenda for the 21st century,' oriented not by the *telos* of gender parity, but by an 'immanent critique' of the key structural dynamics of contemporary capitalism (p. 143).

Box 12.1 Key features of social justice feminism

Social justice feminism is:

- structural in orientation and committed to a political agenda;
- an action-oriented, bottom-up approach;
- aimed at revealing and dismantling the socio-political structures and ideologies that perpetuate oppression and distributive injustice;
- committed to empowerment beyond the removal of oppression;
- mindful of historical hierarchies and inequities;
- aware of the co-existence and intersection of multiple oppressions and committed to a coalition of agendas;
- committed to advancing social justice through action research and social interventions;
- committed to a critical examination of the individual liberty, care and well-being agendas of liberalism, neoliberalism and liberal feminism.

Together these authors sketch several ways in which social justice feminism operates. Kalsem and Williams (2010) propose:

- *Archival or archaeological approach*: Looking to history to understand subordinating structures so as to acquire more knowledge with which to understand and then dismantle the bases of societal institutions that perpetuate hierarchies and inequities: 'Social justice feminism continues the work of uncovering stories and experiences that have not been told or included in accounts of history and examining how they alter ways of seeing' (Kalsem & Williams, 2010, p. 177). This has also been described as a Foucauldian approach.

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- *Intersectional approach*: Examining the interrelationships between interlocking multiple oppressions to understand how issues of gender, race, class and other categories of identity and experiences work together to create social injustice: 'Social justice feminism … seeks to identify … the implications of race, class, and other subordinating structures' (Kalsem & Williams, 2010, p. 181). Social justice feminist recognises the absence of particular voices in the liberal feminist agenda, and might focus explicitly on indigenous worldviews as a vehicle for institutional change, for example (Verbos & Humphries, 2012).
- *Social action approach*: Ensuring that principles of dismantling interlocking oppressions inform solutions, keeping the focus on bottom-up strategies in fashioning remedies: 'Social justice feminism is committed to making material changes to people's lives … it consciously fashions strategies for social change' (Kalsem & Williams, 2010, p. 183).

Finally, Azmanova (2012) offers an important fourth approach:

- *Critical analytic approach*: 'Within a framework of analysis derived from the tenets of Critical Theory of Frankfurt School origin', which activates a form of critique whose double focus on shared conceptions and structural sources of injustice 'allows criteria of social justice to emerge from the identification of a broad pattern of societal injustice surpassing the discrimination of particular groups' (p. 143). For our present purposes 'such a perspective directs us to identify a larger systemic pattern of injustice, rooted in the key antinomies of capitalism' (p. 144).

What is needed is a 'model of social justice able to satisfy feminist concerns with empowerment and autonomy … [while bringing] political economy back into the treatment of normative issues of justice' (Azmanova, 2012, p. 144). Additionally, one might argue that the increasing commitment to feminist-informed research methodologies and intervention frameworks align with and extend the social justice feminism agenda previously described. Reflexive methodologies that involve engaged and fluid relationships between researcher and participants and that conceptualise participants as co-researchers and promote community involvement in conceptualisation, data collection, analysis, and distribution are designed to address hierarchies of knowledge and power inherent in traditional research methods (Alkon, 2011). This type of research is political in nature and purpose, with the aim of questioning, realigning and illuminating the dimensions of power and privilege (Reid, 2004). Similarly, counselling, group and community work interventions that focus on the recognition and dismantling of client–worker power relations, emphasise the socio-political construction of client 'problems' and increase client critical consciousness contribute to social justice feminism's aims (Parker, 2003).

Azmanova (2012) calls for a shift in the nature of feminist inquiry, enabled by the gains of second-wave feminism in shifting the balance of relational power between the sexes by granting women access to economic, political and cultural resources:

> This newly gained relational power gives women the opportunity to exercise structural power (to use the conceptual dichotomy coined by Susan Strange)—that is, the power to change the rules of the game, the norms structuring the environment of social interactions, in a word —the power to alter the very model of the political economy of capitalism in advanced liberal democracies. In order to reconstruct a feminist agenda along these lines, we need to bring political economy back into the normative debate on justice …. Rather than analyzing capitalism from the point of view of exclusion,

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> subordination, disempowerment of a particular group (i.e., women), such a perspective directs us to identify a larger systemic pattern of injustice, rooted in the key antinomies of capitalism.
>
> *pp. 144–145*

Social justice feminism, then, is a critical feminism which, unlike earlier forms of feminism, which sought to liberate and empower women to redress patriarchal social imbalances by linking women's oppression to patriarchal values, attitudes, and practices that undervalued women's contribution to society and subordinated their interests to those of men, focuses on the structural aspects of social problems:

> Social injustice is not simply a matter of arbitrary unequal distribution of power that causes oppression; it is rooted in the specific structure of social relations for a given society and the particular types of institutions and norms these relations engender.
>
> *Horkheimer [1937] 2002, in Azmanova, 2012, p. 146*

Socialist and Black feminists have come close to this perspective in highlighting how class, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, and other dimensions of identity intersect in women's oppression. Social justice feminism aims to take action to 'ameliorate ableism, ageism, classism, heterosexism, racism, sexism, transphobia, and other forms of injustice … and to recognize the coexistence and intersections of these oppressive forces' (Moradi, 2012). However, 'endorsing pro social justice attitudes may not necessarily translate into engagement in social justice activism' (Moradi, 2012). What distinguishes social justice feminism from other forms of feminism is its strong links between social justice and social action (Kalsem & Williams, 2010; Moradi, 2012). The 'action' is a key focus given the widespread misconception of the second-wave feminist movement's

> relative success in transforming culture [which] stands in sharp contrast with its relative failure to transform institutions. This assessment is doubled-edged: on the one hand, feminist ideals of gender equality, so contentious in the preceding decades, now sit squarely in the social mainstream; on the other hand, *they have yet to be realized in practice.*
>
> *Fraser, 2009, p. 98, emphasis added*

Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice

While Fraser's theory of social justice focuses on the macro level of structural engagement, Ingrid Robeyns (2005, 2009) draws attention to its convergence with capability theory through its central mantra of parity of participation. Whereas Nussbaum (1995, 2000, 2006, 2011) and Sen (1999, 2002, 2009) emphasize individual capabilities and functions in their human capabilities approach to social justice, where Fraser differs is in her emphasis on interaction, specifically on the terms on which people interact, whether as equals or not, yielding 'a more robust sense of sociality' (interview with Vivienne Bozalek, 2012, p. 148).

Fraser (2005, p. 73) posits 'parity of participation' as a means of conceptualising, and working towards the complex goal of social justice. Parity of participation 'requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life' (Fraser, 2005, p. 73) with consideration to the constitutive domains of economics, culture, and politics. Fraser suggests three crucial reparative mechanisms for each of these domains: *redistribution*, *recognition*, and *representation*. The explicit

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stipulation of redistribution as a component of social justice is crucial to this model, as it responds to a perceived failure to adequately capture the structural components central to social justice feminism. The model does not underestimate the importance of recognition, but acknowledges dangers implicit in group identity struggles that fail to recognise the heterogeneity of individuals and which reinforce stereotypes.

Fraser (2001, p. 24) proposes instead, a 'status model' that focuses, not on group identity, but on the ways in which the status of people is subordinated. The cultural or social aspect is constructed, not according to a group identity, but in relation to the structural ways in which certain people are prevented from full participation in society. Her framework suggests that redistributive measures are important, as is structural change to recognise status subordination; social justice cannot be achieved without ensuring that material and financial goods are allocated in a more equal way, addressing the imbalances and the inability of some people to participate fully. Recognition and redistribution were the foci of Fraser's earlier works, but her more recent consideration of the framework explicitly includes representation, noting that measures to redress political subordination and incapacity of some groups to participate fully, or be represented, in the political process are crucial (Fraser, 2008).

Critics such as Honneth (2001) and Butler (1998) argue that Fraser's delineation of the cultural, economic, and political dimensions of social justice creates a false distinction. For them, recognition is central and intrinsic to social justice; economic and political inequalities stem from misrecognition. Butler (1998, p. 44) refutes the distinction between identity and economy as a 'resistance to unity,' while Honneth (2001) argues that the identity/economy dichotomy presented by Fraser is an overly oversimplified notion of identity politics, which fails to appreciate that cultural inequalities *are* as complex as structural inequalities. Although their emphases are different, Fraser, Honneth and Butler all recognise that social justice requires consideration of identity, status, economics and, increasingly, politics.

For Fraser (2009), the relationship between feminism, social justice and capitalism is a volatile and complex one. She acknowledges the economic emphasis of early 1970s feminism, which featured during a period of state-based capitalism and explored concerns such as equality of wages and undervaluing of work often undertaken by females, such as caring, and was concerned with structural inequalities. However, in Fraser's (2009) view, from here the feminist movement grew increasingly focused on identity and cultural aspects, which coincided with the emergence of neoliberalism, whereby 'women's emancipation is harnessed to the engine of capitalist accumulation' (pp. 110–111). Neoliberalism favoured market forces over state intervention and emphasised individualised notions of empowerment as participation in the marketplace. For Fraser, this individualised, neoliberal slant came at the cost of structural and systemic reform, and closely tied with the over-emphasis on identity that she sought to address through the device of parity of participation.

Key sites of women's fight for social justice

In *Theorizing Patriarchy,* Sylvia Walby (1990) outlines six key sites of women's oppression which remain relevant to social justice feminism today: paid work, unpaid work in the home, culture and identity, sexuality, violence and the welfare state.

Paid work

The debate over women's paid work has many sides. Second-wave feminists pushed strongly for equal pay for equal work and for a lifting of what Gay Bryant (1985) called the 'glass ceiling,' where wages

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for women appeared to reach a finite level despite there being no limit for men's work. Fraser (2009) aptly captures the way in which second-wave feminism has been unwittingly co-opted by the forces of neoliberalism, which has thrived on the feminist cause of emancipation from domesticity and empowerment through labour market participation, thus serving 'to legitimate a structural transformation of capitalist society that runs directly counter to feminist visions of a just society' (p. 99).

> Second-wave feminism proceeded from the point of view of the injustice of exclusion: exclusion from the system of production of economic and symbolic power which, being androgenic and economistic, devalorized and disadvantaged women. The old agenda was, largely, driven by a concern with … economic, political and cultural parity between men and women. It asked … how can women achieve parity in well-being with men, and proposed a variety of gender-equalizing strategies such as full access to the labour market (against the androcentric 'family wage'), together with the unmasking of non-economic inequalities as sources of injustice. The new agenda is to be oriented … not by a concern with *parity* within the old institutional model of the political economy of capitalism, but by a concern with the *model of well-being itself.*
>
> *Azmanova, 2012, p. 144, emphasis in original*

> The set of preferences constituting the formula of well-being that emerges from empirical research seems to go beyond the 'work–family balance' to include personal autonomy from the demands of both the workplace and the family. It is this model of well-being (combining work, care, and leisure) that the growing decommodification capacities of modern societies is to put into practice.
>
> *Azmanova, 2012, p. 150*

Echoing Fraser, Azmanova (2012) notes:

> It was the espousal of labour market participation as a criterion of gender parity that had enabled neoliberal capitalism to hijack the feminist agenda and appropriate it to its goals, to the detriment to the broader feminist goals of empowerment and autonomy.
>
> *p. 153*

Although the target is the structure of social relations that engenders oppression, criteria of social justice emerge from the identification of a broad pattern of societal injustice surpassing the discrimination of particular individuals or groups (cultural or identity politics):

> In this light, women's victimization is but a symptom of structural dynamics negatively affecting also the alleged winners in the classical feminist agenda of critique. The analysis ultimately produces a model of social justice in a formula of socially embedded autonomy that unites work, care, and leisure.
>
> *Azmanova, 2012, p. 143*

In short:

> Critical social analysis finds its direction … in the concrete *experience of social injustice*—as displayed in specific human suffering. Applied to contemporary debates on social justice, the ontological centrality of suffering (rather than the deontological positing of foundational values, such as, say, liberty or equality) means that we should seek to

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> derive normative criteria of evaluation from an analysis of broadly shared experiences of social injustice.
>
> *Azmanova, 2012, p. 146, emphasis in original*

Unpaid work in the home

Closely related to the issue of paid work is the costing of women's unpaid work in the home, particularly in relation to care. Feminists have noted the close relationship between justice and care, especially since neoliberal social policy robs individuals of their status as rights-bearing subjects (Lloyd, 2006; Orme, 2002). Those who do not fit the neoliberal self-help, self-care, self-responsibility well-being agenda are forced to 'rely on the discretion and benevolence of others who care for them' (Lloyd, 2006, p. 1173). In short, for social justice feminists, justice and care are inseparable, rights to care are essential, and care is a social obligation.

Some feminist ethicists, like Benhabib (1995), Koehn (1998), Tronto (2000), and Held (1993, 1995) in her earlier work, maintain that an 'ethic of justice' has to be balanced with an 'ethic of care' despite the complex and contentious relationship between them. Indeed, since the development of the autonomous adult human being requires nurture and care, there is a strong case for an ethics of care on the one hand and, given the constraints within which care is practiced, for an impartial, fair and universal concept of justice on the other. This is important in light of the conditions in which externally determined standards are brought to bear on relationships of care, particularly when people have impaired decision-making capabilities. Hence, there must be an agreed standard of care for those in need to avoid paternalism, subjectivism and unfairness. Care must be connected to justice or it would become a random practice.

It is crucial, then, to acknowledge the inextricable links between the political 'rights and justice' agenda and the moral 'care' agenda and to recognise the impact of each on the other. As Gray and Lovat (2007) note, even though we might have laws and procedures to ensure a just system wherein people have rights, without compassion there is no guarantee that these systems will function in a humane way. Neither justice nor care by themselves are sufficient. Justice says everyone is entitled to the same treatment but an ethics of care may lead to differential treatment as it may dictate that some people are needier of care than others based on situational and often subjective judgements. Thus, an ethics of care is not necessarily just and a just system is not necessarily caring. Nevertheless, for Fraser (interview with Vivienne Bozalek, 2012) justice is the primary category. She sees how care is organised to be precisely a question of social justice and how various welfare models are evaluated rests centrally on their propensity to realise and balance a diverse set of elements that make up social justice.

Culture and identity

Reflecting core second-wave feminist concerns, Walby (1990) states that 'the keys to the patriarchal relations in culture are the differentiation of the discourses of femininities and masculinities, and the valuation of masculinity above those of femininity' (p. 104). It is presumed that gendered categories linked to cultural beliefs provide common knowledge about culturally expected characteristics and behaviours (Ridgeway, 2011). By enacting these taken-for-granted truths, we often fulfil, reinforce or give evidence to their very existence. As Daly (in Walby, 1990) describes:

> Patriarchal beliefs and practices are at the core of all the world religions, including the contemporary Western world's equivalent of medical science. In all these ideological

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> systems, or discourses, there is a tradition of domination of women by men. In all there are practices of sado-rituals against women which are authoritatively justified within the system of thought as good for the woman, so that she might marry, be healthy or pure.
>
> *p. 101*

Over time, there has been a shift from femininity primarily grounded in biology and sexuality and defined in the domestic sphere (Walby, 1990, 2011). While 'motherhood' remains a significant element of femininity, contemporary sites of inequity reach beyond the family and the home. Gendered barriers to particular male-dominated spheres, such as industry and the military, are no longer explicit, but remain in muted status beliefs, practices, denials and rules that prevent equity of access for women. Culturally driven gender inequities can also be observed in debates about fertility treatments and control, women's lower positions and remunerations in paid work, and forms of pornography that depict violence against women.

In her theory of social justice, Fraser (1997, Fraser & Honneth, 2003) has attempted to create links between *recognition* central to cultural identity politics and *redistribution* as a feature of structural politics and, more recently adding *representation* to deal with transnational rights within nation-states (Fraser, 2009). In this three-dimensional model, she seeks to articulate the complexity of justice, too frequently defined in terms of distribution mediated by gender differences:

> By distribution I mean: does everyone have access to jobs, does everyone have roughly equal income and access to resources and so on. While that is certainly a huge part of the story and very important, one also needs to take *cultural aspects* into account of how one is recognized or misrecognized in terms of one's perceived attributes and also political voice or representation which entails how one is included or excluded from justice claims.
>
> *Fraser, interview with Vivienne Bozalek, 2012, pp. 144–145, emphasis added*

Importantly, for Fraser:

> Social arrangements are just if, and only if, they institutionalize the possibility for people to participate on a par with one another in all aspects of life … As I see it there are essentially three different kinds of structural obstacles to parity of participation, namely distributive inequality; recognition or institutionalised misrecognition and relations of political representation that institutionalise obstacles to parity of participation.
>
> *Interview with Vivienne Bozalek, 2012, p. 147*

Sexuality

Social justice feminism has had an ongoing engagement with issues of inequity related to female sexuality, particularly the way it is constructed, used to control women and violate human dignity. Across time, women's bodies have been viewed as the property of men and their sexuality regarded as defective and or dangerous (Weitz, 2003). 'The desire to control women's reproductive functions and to maintain control over their sexuality has been a major impetus behind various restrictions on women's public role, ranging from seclusion and veiling to more subtle pressures and disincentives' (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 17).

Second-wave feminism challenged the binary and biological construction of gender and heterosexuality and the notion of the social construction of sexuality was increasing articulated after the

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1970s by theorists such Judith Butler, Anne Oakley and Simone de Beauvoir (Featherstone & Green, 2013). Since this time, feminism has critiqued the impacts of patriarchal and heteronormative arrangements in areas such as female orgasm, media objectification, body image and eating disorders, prostitution, sexual harassment, interracial marriages, the recognition of non-heterosexual desires and partnerships, female genital mutilation and foetal rights.

Third-wave feminism has claimed a movement from victim-centred feminism to the explicit and free exploration of sexuality through notions of 'girl power', celebrations of agency and what some refer to as the 'raunch culture' (Walby, 2011). However, such conceptualisations are often dismissed as true forms of opposition to problematic gender relations and representations of women's new found freedom. Rather, some view them as a continuation of masked oppression under neoliberalism's guise of individualism and commercialism (Walby, 2011). Additionally, the recent acceptance of non-heterosexual partnerships in some Western countries is often conditional on adherence to heterosexual norms and models (Butler, in Featherstone & Green, 2013). Also, the complete dismissal or lack of inclusion of transgendered and transsexual people in such responses signals the inequities that remain.

Violence

Second-wave feminism has been the primary source of recognition for, and response to, child abuse, sexual abuse and domestic violence in the 20th century (Damant, Lapierre, Kouraga et al., 2008; Scott, 2001). Radical feminists critiqued pathological explanations of gendered violence in the 1960s and reconstructed it as a form of collective patriarchal power and control perpetuated by inadequate economic protection for women and criminal justice systems reluctant to intervene in domestic matters (Damant et al., 2008; Walby, 1990). Refuges were established across the Western world for women and children to 'leave violence', rape crisis centres were opened and the coexistence of child abuse and domestic violence was increasingly recognised (Laing, 2003; Walby, 1990). By the 1980s, liberal feminism's influence was evident in social education and criminal justice and law reform.

Feminist gains in relation to gendered violence have been significant, particularly in the areas of social awareness and legislation. However, violence perpetrated by men against women and children still exists as an area of inequity. There appears to be a dichotomy between the way feminism has conceptualised violence and the way intervention is provided to the individual (Papadima, 2007). The discourse of child abuse, sexual assault, and domestic violence as a form of *trauma* has contributed to a focused mental health and managed care approach to female victims of violence, often to the neglect of social justice responses (Dietz, 2000). The criminal justice response continues to be critiqued in terms of inequitable access for different groups of women and children, and the undermining of victim autonomy and empowerment (Bailey, 2010). The gains of maternalist feminism—which focuses on the conditions of women as mothers—are often undermined by the 'equal rights' focus of family courts. Walby (2011) suggests that the men's rights project:

> involves an acceptance of the public gender regime, and an attempt to increase their own influence by using the discourse and practices of equal treatment borrowed from public feminism, against maternalistic feminism and against the privileging of women as mothers.
>
> *p. 17*

'Equal access' to children following separation and divorce often ignores and sometimes facilitates ongoing gendered violence and negates 'real justice' for women who are often the primary caregivers of children.

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Some argue that when violence against women and children is conceptualised as a human rights and social justice issue, it is less able to be critiqued as an extreme stance or immovable condition (Walby, 2011). United Nations' recognition of 'gender-based' has supported this approach. By refocusing on male violence as "a minority form of socially unacceptable conduct," rather than as an act that benefits men collectively, progressive men are more able to stand in support of such violations (Walby, 2011). Social justice feminism requires political, ideological and therapeutic responses to violence that conceptualise the right to safety as the responsibility of the state, and ensuing interventions that respect the autonomy, dignity and worth of women and children without pathologising the impacts of violence.

The welfare state

In re-examining second-wave feminism, Fraser (2009) casts its emergence 'from the anti-imperialist New Left, as a radical challenge to the pervasive androcentrism of state-led capitalist societies in the postwar era' (p. 97). The women's movement at this time held 'emancipatory promise with its expanded sense of injustice and … structural critique of society' but this changed dramatically in the social context of rising neoliberalism, characterised by welfare cutbacks and the demonisation of welfare mothers (see also Cruikshank, 1999). Welfare policy has been a key focus of Fraser's (1989) 'politics of need interpretation' in which she highlighted problems with welfare professionals' tendency to construe service-user needs as 'self-evident' rather than socially constructed and structurally determined.

In *Unruly Practices*, Fraser (1989) was not alone in highlighting the Juridical–Administrative–Therapeutic (JAT) nature of the welfare system. The juridical element referred to service-users' welfare rights and claims and their consequent entitlement or not—an administrative decision—to benefits and services based on needs interpretation—as a mental health and behavioural issue requiring therapeutic intervention. Cruikshank (1999) highlighted the role of middle-class professionals, such as social workers, in constructing the role of the service user and their interests in keeping the welfare apparatus intact, to guarantee their future work prospects. In returning to this theme in *Justice Interruptus*, Fraser (1997) provided a gender-based analysis of why welfare fell short of its anti-poverty, anti-exploitation goals through the hypothetical construction of three models of welfare—the Universal Breadwinner, Caregiver Parity and Universal Caregiver.

The core of her theory of social justice was the notion of 'parity of participation,' which stems from her belief that recognition and redistribution are needed for service users to act as equals and peers in social interactions with welfare professionals and service providers to which she later added the role of representation to recognise the rights of transnationals—immigrants and refugees—in Westphalian nation-state-based welfare systems (Fraser, 2009). Fraser (2009) coined the term *étatism* to refer to state-organised capitalism's infusion with a technocratic, managerial ethos that relied on professional experts to design policies and bureaucratic organisations to implement them, and tended to construe service users in economistic terms as clients, consumers and taxpayers rather than active rights-bearing citizens.

> The result was a depoliticized culture, which treated questions of justice as technical matters, to be settled by expert calculation or corporatist bargaining. Far from being empowered to interpret their needs democratically, via political deliberation and contestation, ordinary citizens were positioned (at best) as passive recipients of satisfactions defined and dispensed from on high.
>
> *Fraser, 2009, p. 102*

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This 'passive dependency' mantra became central in what Fraser (in an interview with Vivienne Bozalek, 2012) refers to as the reprivatisation discourse reinforcing welfare restructuring and the emergence of welfare-to-work regimes: 'The whole idea of too much bureaucracy, too much government, too much red-tape, too expensive entitlements, fiscal pressures, the deficit, the need to cut … [constitutes] a huge tsunami of … pro-market as well as conservative pro-family discourse' (p. 141). In theorising the *étatist* state role in contemporary neoliberal discourse, Fraser (2009) highlights a way forward for social workers more closely aligned with social movements to counter the powerful privatising discourse of neoliberalism. This places social justice feminism's core site for action squarely in combating neoliberal discourse that is putting the very future of the welfare state in jeopardy.

For Eisenstein (2005) and Fraser (2009), there are important connections and tensions between the nature and extent of state intervention, capitalism and feminism. Their contentions regarding the relationship between the state, capitalism and social justice can be traced to Marx's critiques of capitalism, whereby economic participation was seen as a potential source of power for citizens, as an essential component of the production process, and also a means of repression whereby the wealthy retained and built power (Alway, 1995). Eisenstein (2005) emphasises the significant impact of the feminist movement on the workforce, particularly within the United States, describing 'a complex interaction between a set of corporate and government strategies to maximise profitability, and a social movement that sought to maximise options for women, most centrally, their economic opportunities' (p. 495). She draws parallels between the notions of independence and self-reliance that had been achieved by the feminist movement in asserting a rightful place for women in the workforce and economic activity, and notions of individualism and self-reliance that dominate the neoliberal movement.

For social justice feminists, like Fraser and Eisenstein, the type of empowerment proposed by neoliberalism has been too easily attached to notions of independence and freedom associated with the feminist movement, resulting in a misappropriation of social justice feminism. Privatisation of health, social and welfare services, globalisation of the workforce, and reduced state-funded welfare support have potentially damaging impacts on the most subordinated women in a society who may lack the means, information, education and mobility necessary to 'compete' in a marketplace. Although it has been highly criticised by many feminists as a male-dominated and objectifying institution (McKinnon, 1989), the State has an important role to play in the type of redistributive measures posited by Fraser (2001) as essential to achieving parity of participation.

In the context of developing nations, there is significant debate about the extent and nature of state intervention necessary to support social justice feminism and the problematic relationship between capitalism and feminism. Women have often been the source of cheap labour to promote capitalist agendas in wealthy countries. It is contentious as to whether this has been empowering for women, promoting opportunities to overcome patriarchal domination and generate economic independence, or abusive, reinforcing disparity and powerlessness experienced by the world's most poor. International agencies and non-government organisations have, in many developing contexts, usurped the role of the State in providing resources, funds and programmes to promote gender development. Microcredit programs have flourished as a form of women's development, whereby women's cooperatives are provided small loans, the interest from which generates funds to further women's projects (Eisenstein, 2005). While, according to neoliberal ideals, these types of interventions promote economic independence and choice, they may fail to address the structural inequalities that lead to impoverishment or to alter women's social position, and mean that States fail to take responsibility for supporting long-term welfare and social reform.

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Conclusion: the service-user movement as a key site of engagement

Engaging with service users is one way in which social justice feminists empower ordinary citizens 'to interpret their needs democratically, via political deliberation and contestation' (Fraser, 2009, p. 102). In revivifying the concern with *process* characteristic of second-wave feminists and *action* as core to social justice feminism, the relation between state and society might be re-imagined 'to transform those positioned as passive objects of welfare and development policy into active subjects, empowered to participate in democratic processes of need interpretation' (Fraser, 2009, p. 105). Findings from a recent study of mental health and homelessness service users (n = 24) in Australia reinforce the propensity for a model of participatory parity to serve the social justice agendas of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups and individuals (Davies, 2012). For these service users, neither consumerist, nor conventional 'rights-based' approaches to participation had achieved the radical or structural reform they saw as necessary to improving their status. Issues of identity were important to the service users, who saw that stigma and discrimination attached to people with experience of mental illness and/or homelessness affected their capacity to participate as full members of society. However, there was resistance to social justice mechanisms that did not acknowledge individuals' complexities and many facets, with one mental health service user, Claire, noting, that while mental illness 'can be a very pervasive part of your life, it is just one part of your life. Most people have lots of other facets to them as a person than their illness.'

Just as proposed by Fraser (2005), economic participation was important, and barriers to work, education, recreation and housing were compounded by neoliberal connotations of participation as consumerism. Service users rarely had the means, resources or capacity to make informed selections about the social, health and welfare services they accessed, and most of them, particularly those with experience of homelessness, were marginalised because of their very inability to 'compete' in the mainstream marketplace. Most significantly, what these people sought, as individual users of welfare services, and as advocates and representatives in service-user and self-help groups, was the opportunity to create *change* and *reform*. These service users took part in consultations, forums, committees, surveys, research, advocacy campaigns, protests, paid consumer roles, and so on, not only for the purpose of their individual empowerment, but for the purpose of achieving a broader social justice, whereby the status of their peers, particularly those without the means to 'participate,' could be improved.

By joining with the self-help and service-user movement, state institutions might be made more accountable to ordinary citizens. However, the participatory relationship between the service-user movement and the state is one that has been fraught. Service-user movements have traditionally tended towards 'rights-based' notions of participation, where the state offers participatory opportunities to citizens as part of a democratic right. This has resulted in many examples of tokenistic practices and an emphasis on consultative and representative forms of participation that often leave the most vulnerable and marginalised service users out of the process (Arnstein, 1969; Cruikshank, 1999).

The alternative neoliberal conception of participation as a consumerist activity and the 'dangerous liaison' (Eisenstein, 2005, p. 488) between feminism and capitalism has failed to achieve feminism's structural ambitions for social justice (see also Fraser, 2009). Fraser's (2001) model of parity of participation provides an important framework for conceptualising a complex, structural relationship between service users, the state and civil society. Fraser (2008) suggests that all people subject to the governance of a particular structure have rights and obligations of participation and posits a dialogic approach, whereby the people themselves determine what constitutes parity of participation. She warns of the danger of recreating

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sovereign state models through any attempt to align counter-publics perfectly with state-like powers; in her view, the feminist movement ought to be radical, flexible, grassroots, based in civil society and not shaped in the image of bureaucracy.

In beginning to conceptualise the workings of a dialogic approach, the importance of a deliberative democracy model also becomes apparent, acknowledging the value of citizen forums and multitudinous means for citizens to engage in democratic processes. The role of feminists within such a social justice framework becomes to hold the state to account, to actively shape and contribute to policy and to work alongside and within state and civil society institutions to formulate fair and equitable welfare mechanisms. The domains of identity, economics and politics become the measures by which the feminist movement can measure and shape its progress towards social justice.

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