

MARGINAL RESEARCH:

REFLECTIONS ON LOCATION AND REPRESENTATION

The Feminist Epistemologies Collective (editors)
Issue 2, June 2002
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Research in progress series

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Editor: Gail Wilson (g.wilson@lse.ac.uk)

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This research in progress series is designed to bring new ideas and new findings in the field of gender studies into the public arena. The authors welcome comments. Contact Clare Hemmings (c.hemmings@lse.ac.uk; 0207 955 7572).

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The Feminist Epistemologies Collective

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Above all, we would like to acknowledge our 'Editor-in-Chief', Clare, for giving us the opportunity to participate in this extremely rewarding project. We thank her for sharing her tremendous knowledge and extending her support and guidance throughout all stages of the collective editorial process. Clare's enthusiasm and openness in encouraging collective reflection and analysis of feminist epistemological and methodological issues, both within the 'G:ERM' seminar and throughout this editorial endeavour, were an inspiration to us all and served as a crucial catalyst to the construction and articulation of ideas and insights expressed in these pages.

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PROLOGUE

The idea for this special edition of the Gender Institute Research-in-Progress series came out of my experiences in the *Gender: Epistemology and Research Methodology* course this year. The course seeks to trace a distinct political and intellectual trajectory through the history and current position of western feminist research theory and practice. It is designed to be challenging, predominantly student-led, and focuses on dilemmas arising from questions of location, experience, ethics, representation and reflexivity, as well as methodologies appropriate to resolving or highlighting those dilemmas. And perhaps more importantly, it is the only consistent pedagogical space within the Gender Institute where PhD and Masters students come together to work on shared research problems and form more abiding alliances.

That's the formal structure of it, anyway. And in light of my enjoyment teaching the course last year, I was looking forward to a similarly enlightening and productive experience. Week after week, the level of discussion was consistently high. The key contributions of theorists were analysed and the weaknesses of their arguments highlighted, always with a particular emphasis on research ethics and practice. Students discussed their own emergent research projects with a clarity and honesty usually reserved for retrospective reflections. And from my perspective, I felt challenged and supported in my own research practice, though perhaps I didn't share that as openly as I might have (retrospectively again). More significantly in the current academic

climate that values narrowly delineated individual research products above all else, I was reminded in *G:ERM* of the political necessity of collaborative feminist work, and of the intellectual value of an engaged and prioritised teaching space.

It is out of this context then that this collaborative and collectively edited project emerges, to be enjoyed by a wider audience. The articles do far more than simply reflect the discussions had in the classroom, of course. They move beyond the teaching context in stunning ways, interrogating and stretching the limits of current feminist epistemology and methodology, taking difference rather than sameness as central to both subjectivity and politics. I am proud to have been a part of this process, and hope readers of this collection will gain as much from the experience as I have.

Clare Hemmings

MARGINAL RESEARCH: REFLECTIONS ON LOCATION AND REPRESENTATION

Sabine Grenz and Angela Willey

We (the Feminist Epistemologies Collective) decided on the term 'marginal research' not to denote a sociological fact, but as a way of framing connections across the articles, and across feminist research theory and practice more generally. In this introduction we want to point to some of the different ways in which we believe the issue of 'marginality' is pertinent in both contexts, focusing in particular on the ways in which the authors in this collection stretch its limits.

When we (Angela and Sabine) first came together to work on this introduction we had both just returned to London from conferences. For Sabine, the Agenda 21 conference in Germany was a poignant reminder of the marginality of gender and the research we (academic feminists) do. This conference had several discussion groups on ecological, economic and social issues, one of which was the forum for gender related issues. The fewest number of people participated in the gender forum. Furthermore, out of ten plenary speakers only two were female. Both phenomena, the low interest in gender issues and the relative invisibility of female experts, could be seen to reflect the marginalisation of women and gender related issues in society. Certainly, this observation is not new or original but its persistence gives meaning to our title: feminist research is still marginal research.

At the Feminism and Philosophy conference Angela attended at MIT, vulnerability was a central theme, and what it might mean in the context of 'marginal/ised' research framed her thoughts on the project. A long discussion of the debilitating effects of fear-induced vulnerability was challenged by the question of whether or not vulnerability might be seen as useful, even desirable. A lone voice argued that the 'vulnerability' felt by (US) Americans post-September 11th actually represented a (now closed) window of opportunity. As we considered (mostly silently) the implications of the privilege of feeling invulnerable as 'Americans', the discussion turned to more personal reflections. Some present at the conference articulated an understanding of vulnerability as a type of openness that enabled them to live lives worth living. Vulnerability, while risky, was thus a state of being in the world that allowed one to be challenged, to learn, and to grow. This feminist openness serves as a useful starting point for the project(s) of reflexivity in which we are engaged here.

Because feminist research aims to transform existing views or ways of being in the world, it is not answerable to dominant institutional regulation in an ethical (though it often is in a practical) sense. We (feminist researchers), do however aim to position ourselves as accountable to the communities with which we are allied by our political commitments and to those otherwise touched by our research. For the contributors to this volume, that has often meant rendering one's 'selves' visible in ways that researchers working under the pretence of objective representation often do not. Our knowledges are contingent and situated, products of our own

complex and unstable locations. This refusal to claim validity across time and space poses the risk of further marginalisation within the academy.

Such questions of marginal positioning also impact the relationship between researcher and researched, which can be looked at from different perspectives: for instance, from the point of view of a researcher who considers her/himself to be the 'self' and participants to be the 'Other'; or that of a researcher who locates her/himself as marginal or as an 'Other' compared to the social majority. To problematise the assumptions of both positions then may lead to a greater representation of the complexity of power relations in research. Engaging in this reflexive process, rendering ourselves vulnerable as it were, is vital if we are to be 'answerable' for the epistemic acts – violent, inclusive, generative or otherwise - we may commit. Ambivalence around questions of vulnerability - the anxiety and discomfort it provokes - goes some distance towards explaining the investments researchers have in maintaining their invisibility as researchers and might explain why committed reflexivity in practice is, well, marginal.

Each of the articles that comprise this collection on marginal research takes up and uses a variety of the meanings of marginality (of gender in general, of reflexivity, of position, and of the rejection of positivist methodologies) upon which we have touched, but also, importantly, extends those meanings in new ways.

Lisa Perreault is concerned with the border between women's lives and a particular scientific research project, where her task is to transform completed questionnaires into computer data for quantitative analysis. This transformation of women's answers into data and, hence, into knowledge is not a smooth process. Participants do not fill in the forms neatly but leave blanks and write marginal notes. Lisa argues that fitting women's lives into categorical variables leads to a profound misrepresentation, particularly of those who are already marginalised due to the borderlands (linguistic, cultural, geographical and gendered) they inhabit. Whereas Lisa insists on the materiality of the margins in quantitative research, Sabine Grenz challenges precisely such assumptions of marginality as productive of truth in her research project on clients of prostitutes in Berlin. In her investigation of the relationship between herself and her research participants, she comes to question a feminist epistemological frame that presumes the power of the researcher and devotes itself to minimising or undermining the effects of that power. She suggests instead that one approaches research situations as spaces in which different contextually produced power relations cut across each other.

In related ways, Lata Narayanaswamy and Sherry Chopra both reflect on how what might be marginalisation in one context is precisely privilege in another. Lata explores the potential political effects of her own conflicting subjectivities on her research in South India. She foregrounds the limitations and dangers of a homogenising politics of identity that takes visible 'difference' as its basis,

interrogating the assumptions of her North American education, her 'Western' feminist commitments, and her status as a visible minority in an exercise of reflexivity that directly demonstrates its value in research practice. Through a reflexive reading of her own experiences of dislocation on arrival in Canada from India at the age of five, Sherry traces her shifting identifications and interrogates their motivations and political implications. Problematising the employment of strategic self-presentations, she underscores the urgency, for the feminist researcher, of reflecting on the potential 'political consequences of understanding self-as-fiction' (Chopra 2002: 37).

In a rather different vein, Carl Mclean explores the possibilities of a black male-identified feminist perspective. Carl's discussion highlights important ways in which feminist research may be able to prioritise axes of difference other than gender, or a more open concept of gender, in its knowledge production. Given that one can never know oneself fully, a feminist has always to explicate him/herself or his/her account, and thus reflexivity in this context is what makes a black male-identified (or any other) feminist position ethically possible and politically desirable. Josephine Wilson also negotiates questions of ethics in her analysis of the representation of trans subjectivities. She examines the multiple levels of representation that interact throughout, within and prior to the research process. Tracing her movement from a static, singular understanding of trans representation, through the process of editing and re-editing, she emphasises the need to analyse the nuances of these (re)presentations.

Sreerekha Mullassery and Carolyn Pedwell also take up the question of representation, arguing that fixed notions of marginality put 'Othered' subjects in the difficult position of needing to 'speak for' community, and that instead questions of privilege and retreat need to be re-evaluated. Sreerekha highlights the importance of self-reflection in a re-visioning of the terms of feminist debates around 'the act of speaking'. If the privileged must be silent (so the oppressed 'Other' can speak), it is always privilege that remains uninterrogated. Instead she advocates a reflexive Other-to-Other relation wherein the identity of the 'Other' cannot be assumed. Carolyn argues that while representing 'Others' remains an essential activity for academics, it is critical that we maintain accountability for the representations that we construct and present. Articulating a methodology of (intersubjective) reflexivity, she asserts that through reflecting individually and collectively on the significance of researcher and subject location(s) to the research process, while maintaining intersubjective dialogue on representational accuracy, we may be able to prevent 'discursive colonisation' (Mohanty) as academics. In highlighting the fluidity of power relations between researchers and those being studied, her methodology is designed to illuminate the ways in which the self and 'Others' are mutually constituted.

NOTES FROM THE MARGINS:

A RESEARCH ASSISTANT FACES HER SUBJECTS

Lisa Perreault

I sit in my cube on the third floor of a dingy state office building in Berkeley, California. My double Americano, still warm in my eco-friendly travel mug sits on my desk, a folding table made with pride by the California penal system. The arguing of homeless vets drifts in through the window, though the pale brown partition put up for the illusion of privacy blocks my view of their courtyard. In front of me is a stack of papers that is to be my task for the morning. The papers are surveys that were completed by women who have just given birth in hospitals in San Diego. When I receive the surveys each looks different: some are filled out in pink ink with child-like bubbles and curlicues, others are in a sombre black pen with a formal slanted print. Some papers are heavy with the weight of the letters, others almost blank with a few tentative pencil marks.

By lunchtime, these forms (pink for Spanish and white for English) will cease to be the work of Maria Gonzales or Sarah Brady. Instead they will become bytes in an Access database identified only by a unique 6-digit number in order to shield the names of the women who diligently answered the questions. As a research assistant for a public health study it is my job to transform these questionnaires into data. One person's ink markings on a page are merely a story. It is only when the names are removed and the answers standardised that these forms will have any meaning in the world of science. After

the data is manipulated and analysed, findings will be published and public health programmes created.

In the dotconomy of the San Francisco Bay Area, this project seems like charity. There are no stock options here, or kitchen fully stocked with juice and healthy snacks. When I meet other young San Franciscans at parties, I feel I am involved in a noble project. Somewhere in the distant future, this epidemiological investigation might help reduce the number of fetuses exposed to harmful tobacco smoke; it might be used to support stricter legislation for car or factory emissions; or it might shed light on the elusive biochemical interaction between caffeine and nicotine.

But often as I reflect on my day it is not pride that I feel, but frustration and unease. I am on the cusp between women's lives and science, and it is my job to turn one into the other. I edit each form to make sure all of the bubbles are completely filled in. I correct or rewrite unclear words and numbers, and draw lines through responses that do not appropriately answer the questions. I mark the forms to ensure they can be read by our scanning machine that deletes the women and spits out the data. This feels like both a privilege and a betrayal. I enjoy the labour intensive process of reading through and editing each form. While I examine each one, I catch glimpses of these women, not as research subjects but as new mothers, sweaty and flushed, exhausted and excited, nervous and happy. I worry when the babies are too small and I feel proud when a woman quits smoking. And in some ways I feel I know the research subjects. I

learn intimate details of their histories such as where they were born, how many cups of tea they drink per day, and how often they have sex. I read the boxes and bubbles as their history before they become another anonymous record in the database.

As I read the surveys, it is the notes in the margins that help me piece together the stories. These notes will never end up in the results section of a published study. None of my co-workers - the lab technicians processing the blood and urine samples, coordinators who train the hospital staff, statisticians who analyse the results, or scientists who think of the questions - will read these notes. I am the only one who hears the women's voices in these margins, and it is my prerogative to decide when to change, ignore, or add an answer.

Some of the notes contextualise the stories: 'I was travelling through Europe and did not have a permanent home,' or 'I am adopted, I don't know where my parents were born.' Others are the justifications: 'I only let my husband smoke outside,' or 'I didn't use contraception because I'm allergic.' Then there are the clarifications: 'I only drink diet soda' and the confessions: 'I did have a *few* cigarettes,' or 'I didn't use condoms *every* time.' Some of these notes are straightforward. If you don't know where your parents are born, I leave the box blank, and it's simple. Other times however, the notes are important and represent an instance that cannot neatly be summarised by available categories. I have to choose a box for the occasional condom user – yes or no, there is nothing in between. Quantitative research calls it 'noise in the data' when people's real

lives do not easily fit into categories. When the data is viewed in aggregate, this 'noise' is supposed to cancel itself out leaving behind a true and accurate result. Some occasional condom users will be included in the contraceptive users category and others in the non-using contraceptive category and they will balance each other out.

It is very tempting to think that there is truth and there is noise and you can ignore the noise and hear the truth. It means that for this research project it doesn't matter if I categorise a woman as 'yes' or 'no.' But I know it does matter. I remember telling women the results of their pregnancy tests at a women's health clinic. I can see their faces upon hearing the news and sharing their relief, fears, and worries. How can these narratives and emotions be so easily dismissed as 'noise?' My decision is about real people, not just data. It is not an arbitrary decision I am making, it is a judgement. I am not a neutral observer but a person situated in a different city with my own opinions and biases. What gives me the authority to choose whether the occasional condom user should be in the 'yes' or 'no' box, and hence either a victim of failed contraception or labelled as promiscuous and careless? Sandra Harding criticises scientific claims of objectivity and the belief that through the rigorous scientific process, 'all social values can be detected and eliminated, leaving only pure facts – information – as the results of research' (Harding 1991: 40). Claims of objectivity in this survey study, as in other quantitative research, only serve to mask the privilege of dominant culture by dismissing the subjective voices of the multi-ethnic female participants.

The margins are places of ambiguities and in the notes I also read the frustrations and worries of the participants. Some women leave the boxes and bubbles empty and write all of their words and numbers in tiny print in the margins. Many of these women have had limited years of school and did not learn the rules for filling out forms. In our staff meetings we address the problem of lower completion rates of Spanish compared to English forms. But this is a problem in all research projects and science has no answers for the problems of illiteracy and inequality. Unequal voice will be a bias in our study as in all quantitative survey studies. Though this may only get a brief mention in the discussion section of the report, the implications are much greater: 'whoever gets to define what counts as a scientific problem also gets a powerful role in shaping the picture of the world that results from scientific research' (Harding 1991: 40). Thus, inequality and bias will continue to be perpetuated through scientific research.

As a feminist I am disturbed by this misrepresentation of women. Also as a feminist, I look to where women's voices are heard because I know women are not silent and passive victims. With the aid of my green editing pen and my Spanish/ English dictionary, the faltering notes in the margins can become valid responses in the appropriate boxes. Once a record is in the database, any hesitations or difficulties are irrelevant. Each record is given the same importance regardless of the immigration status, native language, or social class of the participant. The answers of a woman living in Mexico who has come across the border to give birth are weighted equally with a

white, college educated, native Californian. This is one advantage of faceless anonymity that many women will not otherwise experience as hospital patients.

Some of the women who write in the margins do so out of frustration, but it is possible to read a greater significance into their action.

Writing in the margins is like colouring outside of the lines; at times it is an act of rebellion. It disregards all of the time researchers spent debating how to phrase the questions in just the right way. Women who write in the margins tell me, 'No, I will not fit my life into your boxes. If you ask me a question, you will listen to my answer. You will listen to my answer even if it does not support your hypothesis or address your research question. You will hear my voice in my native language and if you don't understand, then you will take responsibility for translating what I have told you or for ignoring it. I will tell you if I don't like your question or if I don't understand your question.'

Sometimes this is as simple as '??????', an 'X' across a question, or another small expression that still means more than a blank. Other times the writing is more complex. Next to the bubble of 'Did not work,' on a list of employment options, one participant wrote, 'As a wife and mother I work at home and find this question offensive!'

Other women wrote 'mother' or 'housewife' next to this question to let us know that they constructed their identity in a way our survey did not permit. This question represents a clear difference between the researcher and subject agenda. For the researcher, this is a measure of social –economic status, for the subject, this is a question of identity.

Sometimes the notes in the margins are isolated acts of memorable individuals, and other times are so widespread they necessitate a change in the way we categorise the data. A common site where scientific expectations and women's lives did not mesh concerned questions of race/ethnicity. In line with the California Census, the option 'Latina/Hispanic/ Spanish/Mexican' was not included.

Technically Central and South America are considered places of origin, not a racial category. However, so many women wrote it in that they were Latina or Hispanic or Mexican, we had to change the categories in the database, and thus the way we conceptualised 'race' in the research project. Official surveys consider race to be a biological variable, but to the respondents, questions of race cannot be separated from their social context. Language, history, culture, and experiences of racism have a larger meaning than genetics and skin colour and of course even the addition of a new category does not fully represent the differences among these women.

Similarly, primary language is not a simple question in multi-ethnic Southern California. Often women wrote that they spoke two or more languages interchangeably in their homes. Many of the research subjects occupy the geographic and cultural space of the borderlands that are described by Gloria Anzaldúa (1999). Borderlands are places of strict demarcations, laws and exclusion. But they are also places of meeting, crossing and fluidity. Though many of the participants were influenced by the Mexico/California border, Anzaldúa's conceptualisation of the borderlands would also be

relevant to the women of Philippino, Japanese, Chinese and African American origins:

At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly 'crossing over,' this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollination, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making... a consciousness of the Borderlands (Anzaldúa 1999: 99).

At the boundary between self and other, legitimate and illegitimate, legal and alien, ethnicity and language do not fit neatly into descriptive categories. The consciousness of the borderland was reduced to 'noise' in this study, providing yet another challenge to the claim that quantitative research presents objective 'truth'. I heard the voices that have been lost in the name of science and know they are not 'noise' in the data, but real experiences, emotions, and knowledge that is not considered by this research project. I know that every time I make a decision about what to include or what to delete it is not objective, but a subjective intuition coloured by my location as a researcher.

Researcher location is a recurring theme in this collection, particularly in the articles by Carl Mclean, Lata Narayanaswamy and Sherry Chopra. In different ways they identify how researcher reflexivity is central to any feminist research project. In the final product of the epidemiological research project that I am involved in, my location will be erased in the name of objectivity and all of my subjective decisions will be overlooked. My whiteness, university education and native

English language mean that I do not inhabit the borderlands that Anzaldúa describes and many of the research subjects experience. Instead I occupy a different boundary, the one that separates women's lives from scientific research. This boundary is exclusive, because only correctly coded data is allowed to pass through. However, like all boundaries, this line is also permeable. Because of the limits of objectivity, the women's notes in the margins will influence the results even if they remain unacknowledged by science.

POWER RELATIONS IN INTERVIEWS WITH SEX-WORKERS' CLIENTS — OR HOW A RESEARCH SITUATION CAN PARALLEL PROSTITUTION

Sabine Grenz

In feminist research it is common for the researcher to be theorised as powerful. This assumption is related to the fact that most feminist research has been on socially marginalised groups that science subsumes under a white, 'male' perspective. Feminist researchers remain perceived as powerful because of their class background and as representatives of science. Only very few authors describe the opposite experience and criticise the assumption of a powerful researcher in all cases (e.g. Smart 1984, Phoenix 1994). In many discussions authors tend to describe power as either on the side of the researcher or the researched. In my research, however, power relations were much more ambiguous. Last summer I conducted twenty-six unstructured narrative interviews with prostitutes' clients of different ages, professions and places of origin (East/West-Germany) in Berlin. This was my fieldwork for a study investigating the construction of male heterosexuality in the context of prostitution.

During this research I experienced multilayered power relations that were not only ambiguous but resembled those of other social situations – namely gender relations in general and the prostitute/client relation in particular. In order to explore this complexity in this paper, I will analyse why participants might have had the desire to participate in my research, focusing on their desire

to be interviewed by a female researcher. I will argue that we need to look at research situations as already embedded in and representative of social relations instead of as isolated events. Additionally, depending on whom we do research we will experience different power dynamics that are never one-sided but composed of different strands of power interacting with each other.

The desire to talk

All participants contacted me voluntarily after I had run a small ad and an article in some local newspapers. This self chosen group is problematic, since only 'people who are especially prepared to give information will be ready to reveal their sexual secrets' (Kleiber and Velten 1994: 41)¹. Furthermore, it will have a 'subjective topicality and/or relevance' to them to talk about their sexual life (ibid.)². In some of the interviews, for instance, it became obvious that participants joined the project because they wanted to talk either in order to gain some clarity about themselves or to 'normalise' their individual way of coping with sexual desire. Some found themselves conflicted between realising their 'desires', and the low social value of being a punter.³

At this stage of research I interpret the willingness of the research subjects to talk in two different ways. The first interpretation arises

¹ Original text is German. I translated all relevant quotes myself. Original: 'besonders auskunftsbereite Personen dazu bereit sein werden, ihre 'sexuellen Geheimnisse' (Clement, 1990, S.296) preiszugeben.'

² 'subjektive Aktualität und/oder Relevanz'

³ Rothe (1997) who conducted interviews with sex-tourists in Thailand also describes that after the interview the men appeared to be calm and relaxed.

when it is set into the context of Foucault's (1990) *History of Sexuality Vol.I*. Foucault argues that *scientia sexualis* which had been developed during the 18th and 19th century made use of a secularised form of the confession ritual used in Christian religions as a power tool in order to investigate and categorise sexual 'perversions'. Subsequently, confession did not remain in the realm of sexual sciences but has become an everyday and compelling cultural practice that 'has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships and love relations' (Foucault 1990: 59). Furthermore, confession becomes framed as a tool to access the innermost secrets of a subject, rather than as a tool of power: 'it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, "demands" only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of some kind of liberation' (*ibid*: 60). Because prostitution is perceived as an area of sexual deviancy, one could argue that I represented the inquisitory power of sexual sciences in this context. Thus, research participants obeyed the inquisitory power that made them talk and appreciated the effect of this power as relief.

Within the same framework, Sedgwick's (1990) idea of the closet provides a slightly different perspective. For Sedgwick, the problem with sexuality is that it is so consistently examined through *scientia sexualis* that in daily life it is impossible to address sexuality in an ordinary way: just as a matter of fact. If a person discloses his or her sexuality it is immediately turned into an identity. This can silence

people who do not completely follow the heterosexual norm because they are aware of the inquisitory power potentially waiting to interrogate and judge them as either immoral or ethical, normal or deviant. People who are 'deviant' are often denied the opportunity to talk casually about their sexuality without explaining and justifying it. Nearly all of the participants in my study were aware of this problematic and had to carefully consider where and when to disclose their sexuality. In this sense, coming to an interview with a social science researcher might not simply replicate a confessional mode, but provide a unique opportunity to discuss the issues in what they perceived to be a more neutral frame.

The desire to disclose can also be related to the relationship between the prostitute and her client. Girtler (1984) and Velten (1994) note that prostitutes often mention clients trying to meet a range of desires, such as a desire for intimate conversation. Thus, prostitutes may be allowed insights into sexual practices that regular sexual partners do not know about. It often appears as if clients have more confidence in being treated as 'normal' when they go to prostitutes than when they talk to their regular sexual partners.⁴ Furthermore, a prostitute might be seen as a neutral person to discuss problems clients are having with their partners. Hence, one could argue that the

⁴ This can be seen in two different lights: a) the prostitute herself is in a sense excluded from society because of her sexual activity, even though it is not linked to her own desire but to economic needs; b) the punter is the client of the prostitute, thus, she actually earns money with listening to him and like any other businesswoman she does not want to loose her clients. Furthermore, she knows that she spends only a limited time with this person. As a consequence she might be a more graceful listener than a partner.

relationship between prostitutes and their clients is also a confessional. This phenomenon points to two issues: that it is necessary to rethink power relations in the prostitute/client relationship, and that there may be an epistemological closeness between the (female) researcher/ (male) heterosexual researched dynamic and the prostitute/client dynamic in this context. Both issues lead me into my second point that many participants preferred to be interviewed by a female researcher.

The desire to talk to a woman

Clients who called me in order to get more detailed information on the advertised project were asked whether they would prefer to be interviewed by a man or a woman. Most of them answered that they would prefer a woman, some wanted to be interviewed by me and only rarely did they say it would not matter to them. None of them wanted to be interviewed by a man. During the course of my fieldwork I found two possible interpretations for this: the idea that women are better listeners and the interviewees' desire to objectify me as part of male sexual fantasy. Both are related to the issue of power relations in the interview scenario and can be seen as constituting a parallel between this research and prostitution contexts.

To begin with, the assumption of females being better listeners is a reproduction of the gendered power relations determining an *a priori* who has the right to speak and who has the right to interrupt or to challenge the speaker. Thus 'women frequently operate as facilitator to male speech' and 'tend not to interrupt but rather to encourage and

help the flow of men's talk' (Smart 1984: 155). However, in a research situation one could also interpret the silence of the female researcher as a 'positive sanction' (Rothe 1997: 39) that allows the interviewee to talk more openly about his 'emotions, fears, vulnerabilities, etc.' (*ibid*: 42), which again furthers the research purpose. Furthermore, one could argue that not revealing anything about herself reflects the powerful position of a researcher not to reveal anything about herself.

My experiences were equally contradictory. Sometimes I perceived the interviewees' need to talk as a clarification of their experiences and sometimes I felt that participants were insecure because they did not have any information about my sexuality. Sometimes I had to listen to paternalist advice on how to do the research as well as to assumptions about male and female sexuality with which I disagreed. In such situations I usually responded with 'feminine' politeness to avoid insults and keep the interview going. Like Phoenix (1994) I used this methodology of being silent in order to collect this particular discourse.

To think through these issues reveals a complex of power relations. If, for instance, the interviewer is silent in order not to disrupt the interview, this situation resembles the relationship between a prostitute and her client. As a business person, a prostitute would not challenge her client if she wants him to come back. To keep silent and make the other person believe one feels sympathy, however, can be both an exercise of power as well as obedience to power. And

certainly it is a powerful position not to interrupt, because one wants to collect these discourses exactly. As a result, I made use of existing gendered relations by reproducing them as far as they overlapped with professional interviewer behaviour. Simultaneously, however, power relations were not simply reproduced but also shifted because of my position as researcher and expert (equipped with inquisitory power) who did not reveal much of herself. Hence, it is necessary to see different strands of power interwoven with each other rather than theorising power as a unified phenomenon that is either owned by the researcher or the researched.

The second issue of power and gender that surfaced during my fieldwork arose around my feeling of being sexually objectified and included into my participants' sexual fantasies. Whereas I sensed that this had been at play more generally, there were only two cases in which this was explicit. One man asked me on the phone whether I could put up with him masturbating during the interview, if the story were to arouse him. I thought about cancelling this interview but was hesitant to do so. However, he then asked me to wear a skirt that would allow him to see my legs as an exchange for intimate insights into his sex-life, which finally made me cancel it. The second incident happened at the end of an interview with a foot fetishist who ended up asking me: 'What would you say, if I asked you whether I could kiss your feet?' As the question indicates, he did not ask me directly. Furthermore, I had anticipated this, since he was obviously preparing his question and I could prepare myself to answer. Thus, while in the first incident I felt overwhelmed by the completely unexpected

request, I felt more in control in the second. This was partly because he was much younger than me but also because I felt sure that he would not transgress any physical border. Instead of threatening me it was rather an interesting situation. I could observe how he prepared his request, then took it back immediately after I responded: 'I would say no'. My rejection did not have a tangible negative impact on the interview, whereas in the first case my permission was the condition for his participation.

Both the potential and the actual participant said out loud what others may have been thinking. However, to assume that this was the case in every interview where I perceived sexual desire or that in every case this desire was directed towards me would mean ignoring general features of story-telling. Schütze (1987) argues that biographical story-telling in particular causes the reappearance of emotions related to the situations that are being narrated. One does not narrate a story in a neutral way but rather imagines the situations and with this the entire sensual memory becomes vivid. Thus, participants might have felt their desire again not in response to me but in response to the process of narration itself. Or desire surfaced and I became its object just because I was the listener (instead of them having sexual intentions before the interview). Hence, even in the context of sexual objectification it is difficult to generalise who is powerful and who is powerless.

Conclusions

In conclusion, my research experiences made overlapping power relations evident to me. I could see them in the broader desire to talk, as well as in the more specific desire to talk to a woman. The desire to talk could reflect both the desire to confess sexual 'deviancy' as well as the need for a neutral and anonymous space to be able to talk freely and casually about one's desire. Both interpretations give power to the researcher because it is the participant who is in need. The desire to talk to a woman can be interpreted as a result of gender relations that are designed to facilitate men's speech. On the other hand, the positive sanction in an interview that lets participants talk can also be interpreted as power on the side of the researcher, since she does not share any information about herself (e.g. her own sexuality) with participants. As a result, in my research power was not expressed in a straightforward way but through a 'multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate' (Foucault 1990: 92). This sphere of operation was not isolated but reflected social relations and their power matrices as they exist in wider society, in this case, mostly along axes of gender and sexuality. In particular, gender relations between heterosexual men and women surfaced multilayered and referred at one level to the structural relationship between a prostitute and her punter.

As reflected in this volume as a whole, feminist researchers frequently reflect upon their own social location and its impact on the research project. Researchers tend to have their own power position in mind and rarely experience their subjects as more powerful.

However, even though researchers acknowledge the impact of their social location, research projects are still theorised as rather isolated social events. In contrast to this, I experienced the research context as a complex reflection of multiple cross-cutting power relations that could not be reduced to an opposition between power and powerlessness.

WHO AM I? THE CHALLENGE OF REFLEXIVITY IN THE CONTIGUOUSLY DOMINANT AND SUBVERSIVE SELF

Lata Narayanaswamy

As a researcher embarking on a study of gender equality in grassroots communities in south India, methodological concerns regarding reflexivity demand consideration. An engagement with reflexivity on my part as a researcher highlights the fact that oppositional identities built upon notions of political difference – such as white/black or ‘Western’/ ‘Third World’⁵ – become problematic when confronted with the reality that political identities do not develop in isolation of dynamic, fluid and, at times, antagonistic social and cultural realities and practices within which identities are nurtured. This paper will explore the limits of visibility as a basis for political difference in the context of the myriad and often contradictory locations and subjectivities I represent as an Asian, ‘Western’ researcher embarking on a study of gender equality in grassroots communities in the ‘Third World’.

The analysis will begin with a deconstruction of my own location as a visible minority woman born and raised in ‘Western’ modes of education. The issues that arise from my disparate and potentially conflictual subjectivities will be considered in the context of my relationship with the ‘Third World’ women I intend to study. The

⁵ The notion of oppositional identities as representative of power relations (e.g., ‘white’ as a political not observational distinction) is well documented in academic feminist writing, particularly in the context of ‘Western’ or ‘First World’ women versus ‘Third World’ women, (please see Mohanty, 1991a; Spivak, 1988), and in the context of white versus black women (please see Aziz 1992; Hill-Collins 2000).

process of reflexivity will be used as a theoretical challenge to the application of homogenising identity politics (see for example Aziz 1992), where groups are categorised on the basis of a single issue, behaviour or physical characteristic, denying the diversity of political, social and historical life. Reflexivity, in this regard, is a methodological tool that contextualises the political identities of both the researcher and the researched, potentially creating new political spaces within which more nuanced identities may be understood.

Everywhere at once

What are the various axes of socialisation I must consider in the process of deconstructing my subjectivities, and the locations from which they emerge? As a woman whose ethnic origin is south Indian, my interest in gender equality in a south Indian context is superficially obvious, and is undertaken in the belief that my particular location, given my connection with aspects of the cultural context, is likely to make my research expeditious. I assume, for instance, that growing up female in a middle-class, orthodox, Hindu, Brahmin, south Indian-Canadian household, I have insight into the cultural and religious norms that may be exploiting and/or subjugating women in south India. As a visible minority, I may assume a subversive kinship with other women who feel similarly downtrodden, overlooked, or discriminated against, always perceived as inferior, or as an outsider. I might reasonably assume that my greater cultural and physical similarity to my research subjects (over, say, a white woman, or even an Asian man) provides potentially more intimate contacts with my research subjects. I may even be tempted to assume that these

familiarities will lead to previously undocumented insights into the lives of my research subjects, representing a more personally rewarding experience, as well as a greater contribution to the field. Whilst my contributions will no doubt be unique, the influence of my subjectivities on how I perceive my research subjects and the research outcomes are not as linear as my initial assumptions suggest. The subjectivities that inform my engagement with knowledge are also partially constructed within the dominant discourse. Born and raised in Canada, my education is unapologetically Euro/Anglo-centric and my life is one of privilege; my expectations and perceptions of my family, my friends, my community and my government are indelibly shaped by 'Western' norms, attitudes and assumptions,⁶ thus changing my relationship with the researched in increasingly complex ways.

(Mis)perceptions

The political identity that emerges from my multiple locations is further complicated by my engagement with 'Western' feminism. As a theoretical construct, feminism may be placed as a historically marginal discourse, emerging as a response to mainstream or dominant discourses that sustain unequal power relations, with a

⁶ This is not to imply, of course, that there is any ideological homogeneity within the terms 'Western' or 'Third World'. It is merely to emphasise that my subjectivities are distinct from those of someone in south India, due largely to the socio-political context which, in turn, is generated and nurtured by overarching notions of First and Third World. Indeed, the almost universal usage of these heavily value-laden terms in themselves delineate the relative value placed on these distinct economic and political regions, and no doubt the very nomenclature contributes significantly to the self-perceptions of the peoples within them.

particular interest in the relationship between women and men. With respect to discourses on the 'Third World' however, philosophers such as Mohanty (1991a) question the assertions of a 'Western' feminist mode of thought that denies the existence of feminist struggle in the 'Third World', or indeed struggles against the cultural-imperialist nature of 'Western' feminism itself (Mohanty 1991a: 4). Her interest is to deconstruct the notion of a monolithic category of 'Third World women', emphasising that '[a]lliances and divisions of class, religion, sexuality, and history ... are necessarily internal' to all groups, whether they be "Western Women", "white women" or "Third World women" (*ibid*: 6-7) And whilst movements for political or social change based on the common concerns of, in this case, women, are essential to the process of subverting dominant discourses, there is a danger that issues are conflated with identities, which are then extended and universalised. Identity, however, is 'not neat and coherent, but fluid and fragmented ...[but] attempts to assert it seem to undermine potential solidarities between specific groups of women' (Aziz 1992: 302). The backlash against 'white' feminism, in this instance, arises from the imposition of identities that are based on perceptions that women in the 'Third World' are helpless and waiting to be unshackled from their chains of oppression, an identity that denies the existence of feminist resistance in 'Third World' countries (*ibid*).

The implication here, of course, is that feminism, in this instance, *is* the dominant discourse, and arises out of 'Western' assumptions and attitudes about equality and power. Indeed, the political identities I

impose on my research subjects derives from every aspect of my 'Western' feminist subjectivities, and result in my particular (mis)perception of the universal forces oppressing women in south India, their position in relation to men or other women, and how I might tackle these power imbalances. This list of characteristics includes but is not limited to: women as a group are uniformly oppressed; women are downtrodden by the system; women are not aware of their position, or are unable or unwilling to do anything about it; women are not mobilised; women are not educated; there is no understanding of gender equality; and being a woman is an important, if not all encompassing, disadvantage. And while some or all of these things may be true for some women some of the time, they are certainly not true of all women all of the time, or all women even some of the time, nor are they realistically limited to women in the 'Third World'. In short, all of these assumptions imply that women do not have *agency*, and that they need feminism, as we define it in the west, to liberate them from their cultural and colonial chains of oppression. And yet, the political identity of women in south India is surely constructed from a more dynamic interaction between dominant discourses on the one hand, and the subversive agency of women who have, as Mohanty (1991a) emphasises, developed a variety of local alternative (including feminist) discourses to respond to social and political inequality.

One result of this is that the non-homogenous group of 'Third World' women struggling to have local feminisms recognised are likely to perceive 'Western' feminism as an oppressive discourse that

reinforces unequal power relations in terms of region. This contradiction further polarises my own oppositional identities, since my original intent in engaging with feminism was to struggle alongside the people I research, not to devise solutions to problems based on identities I imposed from my own political framework. The potential solidarity between my research subjects and myself as women engaged in power struggles is, as Aziz (1992) describes, undermined by the perceived imposition of delineated political identities based on 'Western' feminist frameworks. Reflexivity demands, then, that I deconstruct my position on two levels: the personal, where my experiences are tinted by my First World lenses from my location as a visible minority, and the theoretical, where I must consider carefully the formative influences of 'Western' feminisms on the perspectives that result from looking through these lenses. I seek to build new knowledges based on feminist struggles that derive from local experience, needs and expectations, yet I am fearful of being unable, consciously or unconsciously, to disengage from the 'Western' feminist analytical framework that I must necessarily deconstruct. I therefore constitute a part of the dominant discourse, of which feminism, in this particular instance, forms a part, educated within its boundaries, assumptions and expectations, even as I strive to subvert it. The bifurcated subjectivities that derive from my socialisation processes begin, then, to reflect the tension inherent in visibility as a means of delineating distinct categories that underlie political identity.

Reflexivity working

The recognition that I represent, consciously or otherwise, aspects of the dominant discourse, is merely a first step in grappling with oppositional political identities. The danger persists that I will approach my research with very specific expected outcomes that are laden with pre-conceived notions and expectations, many of which are likely to align with socialisation processes, feminist or otherwise. It is clear that there is nothing linear or even obvious about how my multiple subjectivities will frame my approach to understanding the political identities of my research subjects, or the socialisation processes through which these identities are nurtured. In essence, the notion of difference is not static but fluid and contextual; how visibility is construed in 'Western' contexts to frame the discourse on political identity is unlikely to mean the same thing in a different, in this case 'Third World', context.

Whilst, for instance, I may retain particular socio-cultural insights into the unique impacts of religion and culture on south Indian women, it would be naïve to assume to have insights into how these factors are perceived and experienced in the south Indian political and economic context. Furthermore, the way in which gender intersects with other axes of inequality, such as class, caste, age or marital status, are just as likely, if not more so, to be viewed as principal barriers to equality in a way that gender alone is not. Difference in this context is therefore framed in a multiplicity of interrelated ways, and may not foreground gender alone as a basis upon which to build a political

identity. For feminists engaged in a struggle where power imbalances in gender relations are problematised as the principal sites of oppression for women, a politics of difference that requires a more subjective, interconnected and nuanced reading of gender as one of many sites of inequality marks a politically significant move. Engaging with reflexivity may highlight new dimensions of political difference that characterise the research subjects which fall outside my own location and assumptions. Indeed, identifying the limits of my own interpretive framework creates space for a more nuanced understanding of local feminisms arising from the political identities of my research subjects.

Visibility as a means of understanding difference is also challenged through a reflection on the consequences for my research of my identification as a 'female visible minority', which in itself implies the existence of a distinct, defined political category. Whilst it is true that I have experienced some degree of subjugation as a woman, and a few instances of oppression, with respect to both race and gender, these experiences are not readily transferable to the south Indian context. On the one hand, women in a developing context are, in terms of mainstream (mis)perceptions, essentially defined as the subjugated, oppressed 'Other', and indeed, these characterisations have been broadened to incorporate discussions about 'Third World' or migrant women in the First World. On the other hand, while they are the visible minority in the First World, or the 'Other' in the context of much of mainstream theorising, they would, in fact, constitute the (in)visible majority in south India, where physical characteristics are

not the determinants of difference. In other words, the question is, visible to whom? How this might be problematic is in understanding how experiences of discrimination, subjugation and oppression are formed, lived or interpreted when the people doing the discriminating, subjugating or oppressing are physically similar to the ones I am studying, where the boundaries of discrimination are perhaps determined by distinctions that would not have the same meaning in a 'Western' political context. This type of experience is not simply explained through an understanding of colonial legacies or the formation of race relations in the West, two reference points that I am inclined to employ in order to understand discrimination in my day-to-day life. Indeed, colonial discourses are based on visibility where 'black' is 'visibly' the Other and therefore constitutes a viable political identity distinct from 'whiteness', a distinction that is not relevant in the south Indian context where I am conducting research.

Thus my shared ethnic origin with the researched, which may be initially perceived as an advantage over, say, a white or male feminist researcher, should not be assumed to lead to more privilege in terms of access to people or resources, or to people being more willing to open up to me, or to my being perceived as more understanding. It is just as likely that I will be perceived as much as an outsider as anyone whose ethnic origin is not south India, and therefore I may not presume that my location has any in-built advantages. The point simply is that being visibly female and south Indian does not automatically translate to a shared political identity with those women I intend to research, despite the fact that discourses around political

difference often hinge on demarcating political identities along lines such as gender or ethnic origin.

Conclusion

The limits of political identities based on visibility are considerable, as this reflexive exercise has demonstrated, given the variability of social, political and historical contexts from which a multitude of diverse subjectivities derive. It highlights the importance of reflexivity as a methodological tool, because it provides a way not only of contextualising my own political context as a significant factor in the research, but also an alternative basis upon which to build an understanding of the political context from which the identities of my research subjects emerge. As the deconstruction of my own location has emphasised, reflexivity is essential to revealing those political distinctions and categories, such as 'Western' and 'Third World', that are so often employed to simplify the research process, as presumptuous and deterministic. The process of reflexivity may create a space within which to build diverse, dynamic spaces for new political identities to develop, highlighting the importance for the researcher and the researched of not dislocating themselves from imbued, and, at times, oppositional political contexts from which identities themselves arise.

LOCATION/DISLOCATION: THE ETHICS OF BEING NOWHERE AND SOMEWHERE

Sherry Chopra

'For these characters, identity is often theater, dependent on the audience's gaze, and therefore contingent.' – Inderpal Grewal (Grewal 1994: 244)

Feminist theories of location emerged as attempts by theorists to situate themselves in response to critiques of the universalising category of 'woman.' In her attempt to articulate a 'politics of location' in the mid-1980s, Adrienne Rich acknowledged that she spoke, theorised and wrote from a specific place in the North American context, stating that 'a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist, I am created and trying to create' (1986: 212). By interrogating her position, Rich took an important stand against universalism. She did not, however, destabilise categories such as 'white,' 'lesbian,' 'woman' and 'North American' and therefore implicitly maintained their legitimacy. Others have taken up the theorisation of location, while simultaneously attempting to destabilise unitary categories of identity, and the binaries they compose. Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledge' calls for a view from the body which 'is always complex, contradictory, structuring and structured...versus...the view from nowhere, from simplicity' (Haraway 1991: 195). For Haraway, location is vulnerable, against finality, closure and stability; it is a process more than a position. Avtar Brah's 'locationality in contradiction' attempts to reconceptualise location while theorising experiences of

dislocation. Brah describes location as multiaxial, a positionality of dispersal and 'simultaneous situatedness within gendered spaces of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age; of movement across shifting cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries; of journeys across geographic and psychic borders' (Brah 1996: 204).

Theorists such as Haraway and Brah have attempted to problematise stable categories of identity and the binaries that they are composed of. Yet the destabilised self raises a number of new issues that are of central importance to feminist epistemology – especially those surrounding the ethics of self-presentation, and the political consequences of understanding self-as-fiction. I conceive of the 'self' as a manifestation of shifting alliances; the convergence and performance of aspects of 'identity' as they are formed and performed within spaces influenced by material and historical processes. In this article, I will try to ground such theoretical conceptualisations by mapping out my personal attempts to locate myself amidst perpetual feelings of dislocation. Here, I find Brah's reading of the concept of 'interpellation' useful; she interprets the term as 'the process of signification whereby we come to "live" (albeit largely unconsciously) our symbolic and psychic relationship to the social' (1999: 8). I will argue that the shifting manifestations of the 'self' that emerge through this process must be interrogated; while acknowledging, validating and theorising experiences of dislocation, we are ultimately ethically responsible for our self-representations, especially when we engage in the 'production' of feminist theory.

Recollecting my personal trajectory, I can see how I have repeatedly constructed, aligned and realigned myself to different groups, or to my ideas of what these groups represent(ed). Through this process, I constructed narratives of self, enabling me to manage, or navigate through, feelings of dislocation. Mapping my history now allows me to interrogate my constructions of 'self' and consider the contexts in which they were produced and the purposes they served for me at the time.

Thinking about location and dislocation continually brings me back to two incidents. Neither can be thought of as important in any major sense, though I now see them as significant in terms of the constitution of 'self' and identity as I have been suggesting. The first incident, my first time experiencing (seeing, being in) an apartment building, marked my first day in Canada at age five. I was confused about where I was going, not understanding that it was permanent or even able to conceive of what that meant, sad about leaving family and friends in India, and exhausted from the flight; yet I was satisfied when I stepped out of the elevator into my new home in Toronto. I sat down to take it all in: the plush purple carpet, the mirrored walls and many rooms behind closed purple doors. For a very happy minute I thought all of it was ours, only to be jarred into reality as my mother dragged me off the floor. Our house was *behind* one of those purple doors; a one bedroom flat eight of us would share. I had never seen an apartment building before. That people lived stacked above, below and next to each other like that shocked me, as did the fact that I rarely saw any of them. No one knew who you were, no one

came by and no one seemed to care. If people lived behind all those doors, where were they?

The second incident, my first exposure to the word 'divorce', occurred not too long after the first. Someone in my class used the word casually in conversation. Though my parents had made sure my English was fluent, forcing me to speak it in India against my will, I had never heard the word before. Yet everyone around me seemed to know what it meant. I still remember the combination of surprise, pity and disapproval I felt when I found out. Even then, I understood that this was a 'bad' word; something my parents would not approve of me knowing. Did Indians get divorced? I was sure they didn't. Without being very conscious of it, I began to understand and construct 'difference' between 'me,' 'us,' and 'them.' 'Us' and 'them' were different, and I had to be able to exist in both spaces. 'Apartment' and 'divorce' – my introduction to them made clear that I was in a different place, where these things were normal to the people around me. Of course, India is not a place without apartments and divorces, and I would have learnt of them had I stayed there. But, as a middle class, upper caste child in a small town outside New Delhi, the context in which I would have learned of, and the associations I would have attached to them would likely have been very different. My abrupt introduction to both 'apartment' and 'divorce' marked my 'difference' and my first powerful feelings of dislocation.

Donna Haraway has argued that we 'repeatedly historicise ourselves in the present historical moment by reconfiguring our identities

relationally.’ According to her, there ‘is no such thing as a subject who pre-exists the encounters that construct the subject. Identity is an effect of those encounters’ (Bhavnani and Haraway 1994: 21). The incidents I have described – encounters with spaces, meanings, and people for whom things like ‘apartment’ and ‘divorce’ seemed natural, contributed to my construction and understanding of self as ‘Other.’ These incidents were bolstered by countless others; being ridiculed for my mangled Hindi during trips back to India, my resistance to many ideas presented to me as ‘Indian’, the way my white friends from elementary school pinched their noses in response to my mother’s cooking (before they realised Indian food was trendy). I was the ‘Other’ in both the society I was raised and the one in which I was born.

My race and ethnicity were the ‘parts’ of me that I felt left me most vulnerable, and so I constructed my ‘Otherness’ primarily in terms of these categories. I realised that no matter how much I tried, I would never be the same as my ‘Canadian’ (white) peers. Later, I began to understand that my desire for sameness was the product of racism under the guise of ‘multiculturalism.’ In response, I began to insist on my ‘Otherness.’ I aligned myself with a confused and generally ahistoric conception of ‘India,’ and more specifically with ‘Indian women.’ The ‘Indian woman’ I constructed was, like I partially believed myself to be, oppressed and misunderstood, yet part of a long and powerful tradition. I created a tradition for myself and exoticised it. I exoticised myself. I did not question why and how I presumed to know about this ‘Indian woman,’ where I was seeing her

from, how I was trivialising my class and geographical privileges, how I benefited from such an alignment, or the purposes 'she' served for me. Instead, I managed my feelings of dislocation by focusing on or aligning myself to particular identities, thereby erasing the understanding of differences that my experiences of 'apartment' and 'divorce' revealed.

Issues surrounding the ethics and possible effects of my representations of 'self' have become salient as I engage in the study and 'production' of feminist knowledge. Where I locate myself at a particular time determines where I locate the 'Other.' The erasure of difference in order to navigate through experiences of dislocation has significant consequences for research. Realising this, I ask the following questions: What effects do constructions of 'self' have on the production of knowledge? How is the construction of 'self' as a member of a particular group important yet problematic? How do such representations reflect power dynamics and how do they effect my construction of 'others'? Faced with such questions, I have re-examined my belief in the unproblematic legitimacy and innocence of strategic presentations of self as 'Other.' I do not feel any longer that I am 'allowed' such representations because I live in a racist society. I have come to realise that such presentations simplify complex realities and legitimise rigid binaries; they can therefore, signify an act of aggression. Where strategic representations are constructed and utilised, they must be acknowledged as such and destabilised continuously. Motivations for such representations, as well as the perceived benefits and effects must be interrogated. Without honest

assessments of these representations they become more dangerous than politically useful and can allow me to position myself as the authority on the 'Other,' and appropriate their experience for self-serving reasons. Irresponsible representations of 'self' and 'Other' are not my right; they are constructs I must try to make visible as I continue to redefine myself in shifting contexts amidst feelings of perpetual dislocation.

ON A BLACK MALE-IDENTIFIED FEMINIST LOCATION

Carl Mclean

Introduction

A recurrent issue in the nascent field of men, masculinities and male identity theory has been how debates around the politics of location for female feminist writers relate to that for males who may also claim to write from feminist perspectives (Lingard 1999; Schacht and Ewing 1998; Digby 1998). What are the types of feminisms claimed by these writers and what is their apparent self-interest in adopting them? Writing as someone who claims both a feminist perspective and a black ethnic identity, is there some way in which I could conceptualise of my work as located in a black male feminist perspective or is this purely illusory, an oxymoronic positioning?

On being 'male-identified'

Within men and masculinities writing, despite the common acknowledgement of poststructuralist/ queer thinking that has helped to disrupt any fixed understanding of gender (thus relational, indeterminate or fluid), there is still a tendency for an implicit equivalence of masculinities research with the study of 'biological' males. As writers such as Halberstam (1998) identify, this leads to a *de facto* reinscription of the fallacy of biological determinism even if (as is frequently the case) the explicit theoretical framework used in such work is avowedly quite the opposite. These concerns structure the use of the term 'male-identified' in this essay, which is intended to designate a space that does not close down the possibility that male

subject positions might not correspond to biological men. While this may seem an esoteric point of terminology, I feel that it is of great significance in a field where terms such as men/masculinities/male identities are sometimes used interchangeably. I use the term 'male-identified' in this article to open up the terrain such that, for example, an FTM (female-to-male) transgendered researcher's own location in feminist discourse may possibly be meaningfully thought through.

The confused male-identified feminist

The position of 'biological' men within a feminist context has been ambiguously viewed – not least by male writers sympathetic to feminism themselves (Heath 1987). Whilst research from feminist perspectives can vary greatly, a common theme is the close attention paid to the way in which dominant power relations work to discursively re/structure and re/produce knowledge paradigms. Intended is the illumination of the inequitable nature of these power relations in order to challenge knowledge paradigms, with a view to permanent disruption. But what would be the investment of male identified writers in disrupting this process? If location and positioning are epistemologically formative then can one have a black male-identified transformative feminist politics that does not rely on ethnic location alone?

The position of male-identified feminist writers seems contradictory as they/we attempt, on one level, to write about their gendered selves as male-identified (as identifying with male subject positions and/or bodily-identifying as male) whilst also reflecting on their gendered

identities so as not to occupy those repressive masculinist positions perceived as dominant in a Western ideological context. One reading might be to view all male-identified feminist writers as taking pleasure in the pain of beration by (female -identified) feminist writers on the one hand, and a self-imposed isolation from other men themselves (so at best masochistic, and at worst psychotic positions).

In this vein, some intellectuals allay doubts about the position that 'biological' men can have in relation to feminist discourse – the relationship is an impossible one (Heath, 1987). Under this formulation, male(-identified) participation in feminist projects is always characterised by appropriation and domination, with feminism as institutionally vulnerable to such masculinist subversion at all times. By inference other male subject positions constellate within and between hierarchies of groups of men (such as gay and/or black masculinities subordinated to white heterosexual men for instance). This corresponds to Bob Connell's use of hegemony as a framework that has been widely used in male identities theory to conceive of the power relations and differences within and between men (Connell 1995).

Such readings of male-identified positions within feminist theory seem not to take the concept of difference seriously. It is useful to think through difference in terms of the Derridean concept of *differ/ance* here, where identities can become enscribed by the very process of their own erasure (i.e. in contesting dominant masculinities one can open up the terrain for thinking through very different

conceptualisations and contributions of what it is to be 'male-identified'). Here, the place of black male-identified feminist thought is neither to supplant existing feminist theory nor erase it, but to look to the possibilities signalled by the differences that feminism has created and exposed. To reiterate the central question, is difference within masculinities the only way transformation might be subjected?

My own investment and interest comes from one who attempts to write from a black male-identified perspective and, perhaps unsurprisingly, I feel that difference has too frequently been conceptualised as reductive rather than productive of feminist epistemologies and its relationship with ontology and experience. That pain, struggle and the oppression of women is all too often conspicuous by its absence or understatement in many apparently male-identified feminist texts remains true and indeed worrying (Jardine 1987). However, as argued in the following sections, a deterministic appraisal of difference in the context in terms of male-identified locations wastes the potential that such voices may bring to the realisation of feminist goals (Boone 1989).

Difficulties of knowing self/other

A key issue in feminist thinking that in some part undermines the binary construction of male-identified feminism as either impossible or dominant is the unknowability of what is closest in, the self. The nature of our own situatedness, discursively specific to temporal, cultural and social contexts limits the extent to which we can ever know ourselves or others. This inability to speak of or for oneself or

the 'Other' reveals the impossibility not only of men's but also of women's relationship to feminism – neither are ever able to fully hold the 'truth' of their relationship to feminist projects, nor fully account for themselves or their 'subjects'. As Michael Awkward (1999) perceptively identifies, the differing reactions he has experienced from other (female-identified) feminist scholars, have placed him both as 'not feminist enough' (in his attempt to write from a black and male-identified perspective at all) and 'too feminist' (in that his investment in doing so seems suspect in terms of what little 'return' he may get back from writing from a feminist perspective). The author surmises that these reactions of 'too much' and 'not enough' form two sides of the same coin and speak far more of the differences within and between feminism(s) than of his own location. The responsibility that the researcher then bears is how s/he will accommodate these demands and what strategies are available for use in the ethical conduct of feminist research.

Ontology, epistemology and experience

In relation to what strategies emerge as most appropriate in order for one to research from a black male-identified (or indeed any) location, I have found Elspeth Probyn's conceptualisation of the gendered self's formation at the intersection of the ontological and the epistemological, particularly useful (Probyn 1993; 1996). Her analysis explores the space between the way in which we are and the ways in which we understand, and takes seriously an understanding of 'experience' as the ontological aspect of the self rather than that which is essentially male or female.

In this regard, there tentatively emerges a space where male-identified feminist perspectives may be grounded in a way that challenges its rendering as oxymoronic and its location as biologically grounded. If the ontological is one aspect of self and the difference between that and epistemological understandings of the self constitutes a critical relation to one's own gender, a critical male-identified position can emerge as not imply oppressive but constituted through difference and therefore subject to change. 'Experience', in another register, need not be reduced to autobiography then.

This calls for reflexivity to account for the 'self' in terms of how it is formative of the research enterprise itself. One can speak of the *process* of reflexivity in this context, which does not represent a simple confessional form where any meanings and intentions, values and ethics have to be read off against the grain of the text. What is called for is an ongoing introspection that constantly revisits the male-identified feminist researcher's location, the field of research and the power relations in-between. This represents a sustained attempt to relate theory to experience, something Probyn herself does in 'Outside Belongings' (Probyn 1996) where she tries to articulate what it feels like to be divided against oneself, to be aware of multiple discourses running through us and constructing us differently at different moments.

It is this sense of motion that I feel can be traced through a black male-identified feminist position. Through an exploration of female

(-identified) feminist positions in African-American literary theory and what they have said about participation of men, Awkward (1999) argues that male-identified feminists need to get down to serious work that involves struggle and pain, not just mere guilt or admiration. He argues that there needs to be a sustained attempt to incorporate the experience and history of black men within feminism, while recognising that there is a need to avoid the danger of hegemonic domination and penetration of the ideological male body that is doubled when it comes to black males.

Awkward (1999) looks to black feminist literary work as a way of conceptualising new and potentially nonpatriarchal figurations of black families and of black males (in a literary metaphor he describes this as a 'rebirthing twice' of the black male subject). He theorises his own personal investment, positioning and location as a black male in this literary canon through an outlining of his own mother's cautionary intent for him not to grow up like his absent father. Reinforced by the physical and psychic scars of brutality borne by his mother as a result of his father, Awkward identifies how he was allowed the space in which to define his gender in oppositional ways to the dominant black masculinist discourses of the time (that, for him, seemed only to speak of dehumanisation and castration by white men and black women). Intellectually, Black feminist literary criticism helped Awkward to comprehend those parts of his social world that he would not otherwise have been able to access –

I work within the paradigm of Black literary criticism because it explains elements of the world about which - for strictly autobiographical reasons - I care most deeply. I write and read as I do because I am incapable of escaping the meanings of my mother's narratives for my own life... Afro-American women's literature has given me parts of myself that - incapable of a (biological) 'fatherly reprieve' - I would not otherwise have had (Awkward 1999: 83)

Ultimately, for the author, the question of who considers or permits him to be a feminist emerges as irrelevant in relation to the more urgent task of taking up an anti-patriarchal position and to contribute in some way to dismantling the phallogentric rule that he identifies African-American women (and men) as suffering under. In this vein, if we consider the area of black male sexualities, an approach that takes seriously the multiplicitous desires and discourses that run through a theorised and lived sense of experience, qualitatively differentiating it from any simple form of unreflexive autobiography seems entirely appropriate, (Probyn, 1996).

Conclusion

Using Probyn's (1993; 1996) insightful analysis together with Awkward's (1999) outline of gendered locations in black feminist literary studies, I have very briefly sketched ways of identifying black male-identified feminist positions that have the potential to open up the terrain where one can discover a position from which to speak that neither elides the importance of feminism to 'his' work nor ignores the specificity of 'his' gender.

This, I feel, is relevant to wider feminist epistemology within the men/masculinities arena. Far too frequently, one can read texts that

present either an abstracted theoretical account of male identities often according to a hegemonic model, or personalised accounts and experiences that are then extrapolated as exemplary of 'the male condition' as a whole (this is particularly found in psychoanalytic work). Feminist epistemologies on the other hand, do not always grapple well with the concepts of difference, experience and ontology. Common to both perspectives is a tendency not to address difference via experience as a site for deep theoretical elaboration. I have some sympathy with resistance to why such strategies are so evident for it is clear that an epistemological elaboration of the production of the self in any contingent situation, since this is not an easy thing to operationalise. However, Awkward's mobilisation of a deeply theorised sense of experience is an insightful demonstration of what this process may look like. What is beyond doubt is that the potential of male-identified feminist perspectives to contribute fully to contemporary feminist research will not be realised until such strategies are increasingly adopted. And such a contribution is surely intended by anybody - of whatever gender identification - when working from a feminist perspective.

RE-PRESENTING THE REPRESENTED: A REFLECTION ON THE MULTI-LAYERED REPRESENTATIONS OF VARIED TRANS SUBJECTIVITIES

Josephine Wilson

This paper is an examination of some of the questions on which I am reflecting regarding the representation of trans⁷ people in my current research on varying trans subjectivities. Specifically, I will be looking at representation of trans as an interactive project, which functions on multiple levels within the relationship between researcher, researched and their wider societal context(s). I will argue that representation of trans occurs in a number of different spaces, contexts and forms prior/during the research (read representational) project and that each of these influence each other and interact in a highly complex way. This kind of analysis questions the simplistic representational accounts of truth and untruth, and questions fundamentally the distinction between the lived and (research) representational experiences. As a result, I will argue, it is very important to consider the research process in these terms as a powerful, complex, and contextualised representation and of itself.

My examination of these issues has arisen not only out of work previous to this collection, but also during it. My paper, and my

⁷ The term 'trans' here is used as an umbrella term with some qualifications. It is used to refer to the multiple trans subjectivities that exist and overlap, yet cannot be said to be the same. The term 'trans' here refers, though not exclusively, to those people who 'define' themselves as transsexual, transvestite, drag queen/king, gender-blender, transgender, etc. Though I use this term in this way, I interrogate it below along with other terms that attempt to signify (represent) these multiple experiences and subjectivities.

subsequent study, has benefited greatly from what Carolyn Pedwell (2002) describes in this volume as ‘intersubjective reflexivity’ occurring in the process of editing this collection. In the first two drafts of this paper I tried to see the problems of representation exclusively in terms of factors which *obscured* the reality of trans subjectivity. These factors included the structural ‘invisibility’ of certain trans subjectivities and experiences; the under-representation in law; the misrepresentation by medical discourse as well as contemporary feminist and queer theory; and the over-representation in popular culture. Despite a cursory deconstruction of the notions of ‘truth’ and ‘identity’ I still implicitly saw many of these factors obscuring a ‘fixed’ trans identity, as if trans identity existed somewhere beyond the influence of these factors. Furthermore, by doing this I managed to exclude certain expressions and experiences simply by attempting to define completely what it was that I was representing. In complete opposition to my overall research project then, which attempts to move beyond these rigid definitional examinations, I managed to imply that I had a clear idea of what is and what is not ‘true’ trans subjectivity and experience. This form of analysis did not allow me to see the connections between each of the ‘factors’ that I had attempted to isolate. It was not until I entered into the editing process that I began to see what connected these ‘factors’ into a coherent analysis. Not only were my fellow contributors/editors able to give me specific advice on the paper’s contents, but the *process* itself allowed me to see that representation is always an interactive dialogical process, that can never be carried out in isolation. The process of editing in a large group of researchers, all attempting to open their

perspectives to the multiple implications of their work (as so excellently elaborated on in the introduction of this collection) became something of an analogy and a starting point for the way that I would then view the multiple layers of trans representation.

Through the editorial process as well as with subsequent help from my peers⁸ I managed to tease out much more clearly the elements of my own experience that not only influenced my desire to write this kind of paper, but also to begin a project to represent trans in its multiple forms in the first place.

In the first drafts of this paper I noted how convincingly I think Pat Califia⁹ argues that anyone who researches (and represents) trans people has a personal and emotional interest in the results and a political objective in mind (1997: 2). I have my own emotional and political agenda in researching trans issues, especially in terms of a variety of experience rather than in rigid and isolated terms. My awareness of this obviously makes me more amenable to Califia's argument. I define myself as 'trans', in part because none of the other terms seems to fit my experience. I find that neither the term transsexual nor transvestite (nor any of the other available 'trans' terms) currently reflects exactly my gender and sexed experience and self-definition. I do not see myself in the medical/psychiatric discourse

⁸ Here I wanted to specifically acknowledge and thank my friends and colleagues, Angela (Angie) Willey and Sherry Chopra as well as Arjun Shamlal and Jo Brain, all of whom went so very far out of their way to help me to reflect on and articulate my thoughts regarding these representational issues.

⁹ I refer to Califia as 'Pat' and as 'she' here as the text I reference was written before transition. Pat Califia is now Patrick Califia and defines himself as he and male.

of disease and cure, nor do I see myself exactly in much of the literature on trans in general or in popular culture. Saying that, I am (at least on a partial level) aware of the way that these forms of representation directly and indirectly influence my perception (and representation) of myself and others. This is reflected in this paper and in my own political goals. As a direct result of my personal experiences I find a more complex understanding of representation convincing because it so closely resembles my own sense of self. The desire for a more complex understanding of representation also directly mirrors (and influences) my political aim to open a space for a more varied and complex account of trans subjectivities.

The paper has become something of a reflective process then, the tracks of which would normally be lost in the seamless editing of a cut and paste word processed document, only presented to an open audience after three carefully edited drafts. In this 'final' version I will attempt to retain some of these tracks. Instead of an examination of what factors obscure trans subjectivity therefore, I will look at the individual's act of representation as a project often confused by definitional notions of identity that are presented as existing beyond the multiple and inter-related processes of representation. In this sense, 'identity' and 'representation' become a terrain where trans knowledge is (sometimes problematically) negotiated, signified and reflected.

In the first two drafts of this paper I examined each of the obscuring factors in trans representation in isolation. In my original drafts, the

first factor I analysed was the assertion that trans is often seen as (read represented as) 'invisible' in a number of contexts. I noted, for example, that many trans subjects engage in 'passing'¹⁰ and that this presented those who were attempting to represent them with a particular problem, namely how to 'identify' trans subjects? I saw this as problematic not only in terms of practical methodology (it may simply be hard to identify trans people who pass so successfully that they 'integrate' completely into 'wider' society) but in terms of definition. Self-definition, I noted, is obviously highly contingent on how an individual or group sees a term (trans, transsexual, transvestite, drag, transgender etc.) as representative of themselves and their experience. This has particular ramifications in terms of the representation of trans. For example an individual or group may define themselves exclusively in terms of the sex that they have or seek to become, rather than as transsexual. Another example with a slightly different emphasis would be Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan's (1993) objection to the term 'transgender' as an umbrella term as she sees the term itself as excluding and negating her experience and existence as a person who has changed sex rather than gender. I do not believe that anyone who does or does not choose to define using these terms is misguided or 'falsely conscious'. In fact, it seems clear that there are simply many different experiences that might and might not be included within these terms. However, it is when these terms are *seen* to be applied universally to a particular kind of

¹⁰ 'Passing', like many terms relating to trans, has many meanings. Here, I use it to refer to the practice/intention to appear as a person having the body of the opposite sex. This includes those who choose to physically change their body and those who manipulate the perception of their bodies through dress.

experience and they fail in some respect to do so, that I would want to question their validity as accurate representations.

I originally analysed this only in the most cursory sense, on the basis of ethics. Should I represent someone who simply did not see themselves as part of my 'sample'? What kind of power of definition did I hold¹¹? I did not, however, question why it was that these terms of representation were problematic in the first place. If, for example, the term 'transgender' does not represent all of those it purports to, then surely it cannot be said to be representative, in and of itself. What effect do these terms (and the identities that they signify) have on the (mis)representation of trans subjectivities?

The problem of terminology has been noted by a number of recent theorists. The terms 'transsexual' and 'transvestite', for example, have been attacked for the same reason that the term 'homosexual' has been, namely that they originate in a medicalised, problematically pathologising, discourse. That said, 'transsexual' and 'transvestite' remain in common usage as fundamentally representative (used even by those who question their origins), in support networks, academic literature and as the basis for activism. Though I agree there is a convincing argument for the reclamation and redefinition of terms, this cannot eliminate the influence of problematic (medical) discourse upon them, and the subjectivities that they seek to represent/signify.

¹¹ These questions are still important, especially concerning the power relations within the representational process. Due to space constraints I cannot go into this here, but it is excellently discussed in detail by Sree Mullassery (2002) in this collection.

This problem also exists in the other ‘obscuring factors’ that I originally listed. For example, I noted in my first drafts that far from being absent in popular culture and research, trans is constantly discussed and examined. Pat Califia, notes that ‘[t]o be differently-gendered is to live within a discourse where other people are always investigating you, describing you, and speaking for you...’ (1997: 2). The ambivalences of especially early representations of trans is noted by several recent theorists. Califia provides an excellent example of how problematic this (mis)representation can be. She examines the representation of transsexuals by Gender Identity Clinic (GIC) Practitioners, a group whose huge influence not only affects government policy but also the very definition of who is and who is not ‘transsexual’, and subsequently those who are eligible for Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). GIC representation is based on a pathologising discourse that sees transsexuality as a disease, to be cured through SRS. It is also based on highly problematic notions of gender and sexuality. The problem arises however, when we attempt to separate out the ‘imposed’ from the ‘accurate’ representation. In this vein, Jay Prosser (1998) highlights some of the difficulties that arise from recent questioning of the discourse around transsexual ‘diagnosis’ in GICs. He argues that despite criticisms of the ‘wrong body’ narrative in terms of over-medicalisation and biologism, it does provide a language for transsexual experience and thus does reflect that experience.

Problematic (formalised) representations are not limited to this context. For example, certain feminist and queer theorists have been

critiqued for misrepresenting trans subjects to further their own goals and perspectives¹². I discussed this originally in relation to the final obscuring factor that I listed in my first two drafts, namely the influence of the representer. I have already noted how I feel my particular personal/political investment affects my impetus to represent. It seems clear that in all of the cases that I have examined above, the influence of the person doing the representing has a direct influence on their results.

So what we find are several inter-related levels of 'representation'. Trans is represented on the level of the self, the level of popular culture, the level of medicine, the level of academia and the level of community. In each space, representation reflects the personal and/or communal goals as well as the experience of the representer(s). However, none of these representations occur in isolation, they all interact and affect each other. The narrative representation of the individual is influenced by the representations produced by popular culture and community terminology in the same way that medical definitions must on some level be affected by the same self-produced narratives.

On the surface this presents us with a problem around notions of truth. One of the goals that I concluded my initial drafts with centred around my desire to present a 'more accurate' representation of trans subjectivity. This sentiment has not diminished, though the emphasis

¹² e.g. Jay Prosser (1998) and Vivianne K. Namaste (2000)

has shifted. In my first conception of accuracy I believed that by simply ‘taking into account’ the possible obscuring factors of both problematic visibilities and invisibilities of trans representation I could provide a more accurate representation. Now I am much more inclined to view these same problematic visibilities and invisibilities as an integral part of current trans experience. This is not to say that I believe that the representations themselves are all personally or politically desirable. Certainly I take issue with a number of contemporary trans representations. However, these representations do have an impact on trans experience, and it is this impact that needs to be traced.

I believe that it is impossible to ‘escape’ the multiple layers of trans representation that exist before and during the research project. They are themselves part of the realities of the people that are being studied just as they are a part of the realities of the people who are doing the researching. Being aware of the nuances of these multiple representations is essential for a *more* accurate subsequent representation.

OTHER-TO-OTHER: THE ACT OF SPEAKING¹³

Sreerekha Mullassery

The first book on feminism that my friends and I discovered was 'The Second Sex'. We went through the book, thought it was impossible to handle, too big, and too much of a struggle to read in English. I read aloud, 'One is not born a woman'—and asked my friend in a humorous way—'Didn't I tell you that before...?' And we laughed -it was the first time feminist theory had recognised me as the Other. I am still on my way to being a 'feminist', to representing the 'Third World', to interpreting my 'sexuality' and my 'Otherness'. My positions and locations remain fluid, unfixed and multiple. This 'ritual' (Bola and others 1998:106) of positioning myself before I speak is necessary to make my engagements and positioning clearer for the reader.

Academia is a place to 'speak' and the academic world believes or should believe that it is important to speak. After a long 'his'tory of speaking, there has been a rethinking of the act of speaking itself, and thus a debate on the 'proper' ways to speak. As the theoretical yearning of contemporary western feminism saturates itself with the doing and undoing of definitions, it provides an endless path, interpreting and reinterpreting the Others. There are two ways in which the debates on Others are interpreted in contemporary feminism. Firstly, they are interpreted as occurring between the Self

¹³ This paper is written mainly as a response to Linda Alcoff's paper on 'the problem of speaking for others' (Alcoff 1995: 97-119).

and the Other. Secondly, it is interpreted as an Other-to-Other discourse which could be an 'interactive universalism where every Other acknowledges the Other' (Benhabib 1987: 81,92).

In this paper I analyse some debates in feminist theory about the act of 'speaking for' Others. The paper is presented as a rereading of the existing approach of the Self-Other relationship towards an Other-to-Other relationship. Even though this is not a new argument, from this position I would like to problematise the ways in which such an argument is interpreted and accepted within the discourse on 'speaking for' Others in particular. In order to problematise the Self-Other relationship, I argue for an Other-to-Other discourse where silence and speech, the oppressed and the privileged, the act of 'speaking for' as well as the act of 'speaking against' and vice versa, are not in contradiction with each other. My intention is to point out the need to diversify existing definitions and interpretations for defining who and what is the Other, and to address many other subjects outside the categories of recognisable Others.

Others of the Other

There have been many important contributions in feminist theory towards problematising the already defined Others. In postcolonial theory for instance there have been various interventions through critiques of the 'Third World'/ the East / the 'developing' or the 'Third World women', the 'veiled woman' etc. It is also possible in the same manner to deconstruct the 'West', the 'developed' or the 'western feminist'. In this volume, the articles by Carolyn Pedwell and Sherry

Chopra address issues of Othering from different perspectives. Carolyn's paper on 'Seeing the Self in the "Other" and the "Other" in the Self: Developing Methodologies for Representing "Others"', addresses the possibilities of an Other-to-Other dialogue through the process of intersubjectivity. She questions any act of 'retreat' by the academic privileged from 'speaking for' Others and argues that the academic world should be accountable for both its speech and its silence. In her article 'Location/Dislocation: The Ethics of Being Nowhere and Somewhere', Sherry Chopra analyses the process of Othering within and between identities. She constructs herself as a destabilised self, contingent on its Other. In her attempt to locate her 'Self' and its 'Other', Sherry raises important questions of representation and voice and I see this piece as contributing to this work, and ask that the reader view it in this light.

While problematising the issue of 'speaking for' others in the context of western feminism, Trebilcot's debate on the issue of 'not speaking for' and justifying 'speaking only for myself' is worth analysing. Trebilcot (1988) in her paper on 'Dyke Methods', refuses to 'speak for' others and claims that she speaks for herself and those who identify with herself, a lesbian community or a 'wimmin's space'. Such a statement raises more questions than it answers in this context. While she speaks for her self, can Trebilcot separate herself from the 'wimmin's space' as a collective? Is it possible for Trebilcot within this 'wimmin's space' not to create or keep any hierarchies while she speaks for herself? Is her self-representation different from others who 'speak for' others? In making representation a matter of

identification here, I believe Trebilcot obscures the need for subjects with 'wimmin's space' to take responsibility for their exclusions. For example, subjects of lesbian community might also need to take into consideration undefined sexualities-those who can not define / understand their sexuality, those who feel they have never had a chance to develop, identify, express their sexuality, those whose sexuality has been forever oppressed or exploited beyond self-realisation. These Others with undefined sexualities will not be represented and accepted within Trebilcot's 'unproblematic' 'wimmin's space' and are excluded from her (self) representation as if identification were simply an act of will. Here Trebilcot denies the pervasive nature of power relations within the 'wimmin's space'.

The speaking 'Others'

Outside the debates on 'speaking for', is the issue of speaking (as in the case of 'speaking against' or on the question of 'retreat') problematised enough in feminist theory such that one could afford to consider it as 'arrogant, vain and unethical' (Alcoff 1995: 97-98) to speak for others? Within the academic community, those who only speak (those who always speak or sometimes 'do' something or listen to / with others) consider speaking as the 'real' act of power where silence seems to be its opposite. But it is problematic to believe that those who speak are fully 'in power' and those who don't are 'powerless'. This contrast is untrue even if the audience (a collective) maintains absolute silence. It is a constructed, shared and imagined myth within the academic world that speaking is the only recognised medium of power.

Both in academia and the world outside the 'silent' Others whom Spivak named 'the subaltern' have ways of dealing or acting within a realm of power in day to day life, where they may not necessarily consider 'speaking' a useful medium (Spivak 1998: 283). For Spivak it is impossible to 'speak for' the subaltern woman where the subaltern is not in a position to respond to the 'epistemic violence' of imperialist education and / or the imperialist project. Here it may also be necessary to think, whom would the subaltern women want to speak with / against? Is it the subaltern women's primary concern 'to speak'? Is their silence equal to their powerlessness? Who is (would be) the listener for / of the subaltern?

'Listening' too is an act. In some situations the Other prefers to be silent. A difference emerges at some level where the dominant privileged realises the need to 'listen' as conditional and the decision of the oppressed to be silent might be followed by alternative forms of resistance. There are times when these two meet, when the privileged is told it is time to listen to / be silent and the oppressed finds its voice and speech. But considering the 'his'tory of power relations within institutionalised academia, the silent/oppressed may not even consider it as essential to ever have a dialogue with those who only speak. This situation is not a 'desired end', but one configuration amongst others and one option that does not always have to be viewed as the ideal starting point to challenge the privileged.

While the privileged speak...

In the search for transformative possibilities of representation within subjects of feminisms, Claudia Castaneda in her paper 'The Child as a Feminist Figuration- Toward a Politics of Privilege' (Castaneda 2001) discusses the child as the Other of a feminist subject-who is privileged in relation to the child. There are always claims of 'knowing' the child and it is represented everywhere, but for her it cannot be the child's self-representation. She points out the need for a speaking subject (the privileged) to be accountable to an Other, where the continuous representation of the Other as Other should be problematised.

Alcoff advocates four sets of interrogatory practices 'to evaluate actual instances of 'speaking for': (a) the impetus to speak must be carefully analysed and in many cases, fought against; (b) one must interrogate the bearing of one's location and context on what we are saying; (c) there must be accountability and responsibility for what an individual says; (d) one must analyse the probable or actual effects of the words on discursive and material contexts (Alcoff 1995: 111-13). For Alcoff, 'speaking for' still asks for 'retreat' unless these conditions are satisfied. In this context I believe it is important to problematise the issue of 'retreat', of listening, of 'speaking to', of silence, of feeling guilty as the privileged, and of guilt being the justification for not speaking. Alcoff's position on the privileged follows the assumption that the location or context of the privileged is the primary contributory fact leading to the impossibility of avoiding a 'retreat'. Thus, on the one hand 'retreat' is an option open only for those who are privileged

and on the other hand, for the oppressed there always seems to be some authority given to the privileged 'to represent' (or not).

As one of the 'privileged', speaking for 'myself' may not always necessarily mean that I support, justify or sympathise with my own locations and contexts. Within my own locations as privileged I could still 'speak against' my privileges from / with a critical understanding of my self and the Other. Thus the speech of a privileged does / should not necessarily have to be always 'speaking for' myself. Furthermore, not speaking (retreat) by the privileged is an act of passing on the speech from one to the other as Carolyn Pedwell points out in her article where there is always some one else to 'speak for' the oppressed. And therefore arguing that the privileged shouldn't speak / needs to be silent / has to just listen or retreat, indicates an expectation that the silent / oppressed should then speak, i.e. to leap to fill the gap left by the benevolently 'retreating' privileged subject. In other words, does the privileged need (first) to be silent so that the oppressed can speak (later)?

Here, in order to substantiate my position on the issue of 'retreat' in an Other-to-Other discourse, I believe there is a need to diversify the term 'privileged'. Who is privileged, when and how? Firstly, the privileged may be a dominant group, representing the dominant cultures, ideas and politics, misrepresenting / hiding their privileges from Others. Secondly the privileged may know their privileges, understand the dominant politics, represent / speak about themselves, their own privileges. At different levels of the relational

discourses between the Others, there are many stages in which the process of Othering invades each and every subject: the oppressed as privileged and the privileged as oppressed. Thus the process of Othering by an unstable self is important so that all the subjects have their 'own' spaces within the discourse and they are constructed / deconstructed, defined and redefined. 'Retreat' by the dominant privileged could thus obstruct the process of redefining and destabilising the Others, since the overdetermining oppositional structure remains intact.

A dominant privileged in a discourse does not represent her / himself while she / he speaks for Others. For them the issue of 'speaking for' the Other / representing the Other is often in conflict with the act of 'speaking about' Others since within the process of 'speaking about' the Other, they would have more possibilities of distancing themselves from discourse. Thus for the privileged who does not identify her / himself with the 'dominant', 'speaking for' should neither be an issue of responsibility nor be associated to any feeling of guilt. It should be just a question of speaking about her / himself to Others. Thus the only possibility of 'speaking for', is to speak about / for 'oneself' as a privileged / oppressed person.

It is important to realise that outside an Other-to-Other discourse, speaking is a process where those who 'speak' *only* speak and the 'Others' can only contribute, they can't represent, can't speak for themselves. Only an Other-to-Other discourse opens up possibilities of challenging the fixed dynamic between a privileged / who speaks

and the oppressed / who are silent. Here silence of the privileged as a retreat cannot be justified. The privileged, reproducing the privilege and the Other contingent on its subjectic position, reproduces the hierarchical power relations between the subjects.

At this level, for a rereading of the discourse on 'speaking for' toward an Other-to-Other relationship in feminist theory, it is important to differentiate 'speaking for' from speaking 'about / to / with'. This needs a clarification on why Other-to-Other discourse and what exactly is meant by it. Towards an attempt to define what creates an Other-to-Other discourse, I consider the act of speech - words, meanings and language itself - as created through a dialogical process where one cannot separate one's self from any particular discourse. The self exists and speaks for itself only when it is a part of discourse. So who speaks and who doesn't could follow the question, how and why does one speak? Here the act of 'speaking for' should include the option for the act of 'speaking against' too, where the presence of the privileged Others within a discourse can have the option to adopt flexible, fluid selves within those very power relations. Therefore, if the location of the privileged is not 'fixed' it is possible that they can question their own privileges and so be reflexive towards their positioning in an Other-to-Other discourse. The Other-to-Other discourse should be a process where when I speak, I speak for myself as the Other, to the Other and thus this is a two way process. The 'Others' speaking from totally different locations and differing experiences could contribute to each other and could engage with the hierarchies without 'retreat'. This is a situation

where A speaks for A / about B. It is different when A speaks for B / about B. A speaking for B doesn't leave a space for B to respond and that is when 'speaking for' arises. And when A speaks, A should speak for / about A, about why and how A is A as well as how A understands B.

Finally, there is the issue of who is speaking and *about what*. In academia one normally keeps on speaking to those who can speak. Very rarely we (if I may represent the academic world) listen. Even while we listen, we speak about what we listen to. Sometimes academics even collect the responses from the audience leaving a second response to our answers ignored. And in situations where the listener (the audience) doesn't respond / speak / ask, then who will ask / speak to us other than ourselves?

To conclude, I would say that my attempt in deconstructing the homogenised categories of 'the Other' is not an attempt to get rid of the Other *per se*, but rather, to diversify the concept of Others, beyond specific inclusions / exclusions so that there is always space for defining and redefining another Other. An Other-to- Other understanding and sharing of experiences is thus a better alternative than the construction of a self / other dichotomy or self-other relationship. And for the 'privileged' in academia it is necessary to engage in an Other-to-Other discourse since 'knowing' the Other is necessary before theorising it.

SEEING THE SELF IN THE 'OTHER' AND THE 'OTHER' IN THE SELF : (INTERSUBJECTIVE) REFLEXIVITY - A METHODOLOGY FOR REPRESENTING 'OTHERS'

Carolyn Pedwell

Efforts on the part of privileged speakers to represent less powerful subjects often result in the appropriation of 'Other's' voices through the discursive colonisation of their heterogeneity, subjectivity and agency. From Chandra Talpade Mohanty's perspective, conceiving of 'Third World women' as a homogeneous category,

...colonises and apparently appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women... in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political agency (1991a: 71).

As a result of this homogenisation, all 'marginal and resistant modes and experiences' (Mohanty 1991a: 73) are erased and 'Others' are characterised as having no ability to shape the social relations in which they operate and thus no capacity to disrupt the status quo. When 'Others' are frozen into such pre-constituted, homogenous categories it becomes impossible to analyse specific historical differences between 'Third World women' and thus impossible to theorise legitimate strategies for positive social change.

Furthermore, representing 'Third World women' in this way promotes ethnocentrism which reinforces dominant western values and modes of representation. The construction of the poor, victimised, oppressed 'average Third World woman' presumes and promotes the contrasting implicit self-representation of western women as

educated, modern and liberated. When privileged speakers implicitly use the 'Other' merely to define themselves, 'Other's' voices and subjectivities are silenced and discursive patterns of authority are upheld. In this article, I intend to argue that if academics are to represent 'Others' in ways that are true to 'Others' needs and interests and serve to deconstruct traditional discursive hierarchies, we must strive to assume ongoing accountability for the representations that we construct. Subjecting one's self and one's work to a constant process of (intersubjective) reflexivity (an ongoing personal and collective reflection on location and its effects), is essential if we are to develop effective methodologies for representing 'Others'.

In order to prevent the appropriation of 'Other's' voices and thus to avoid reinforcing dominant modes of representation, it has been argued by some (Deleuze 1977, Baudrillard 1982) that academics should retreat from speaking for 'Others' and represent only their own situated experiences. In support of this argument it is claimed that no matter how careful a speaker who seeks to represent the 'Other' is, the very act of speaking for someone else signifies an unacceptable demonstration of dominance. As Gabrielle Griffin (1996:172) articulates, 'We may resent someone whom we see as more powerful than ourselves representing us purely because this act is an expression of their power relative to our powerlessness.' Thus it is argued that if we speak only for ourselves, we avoid discursive colonisation and do not interfere with 'Others' capacity or motivation to articulate their own subjective presentations of self.

I want to argue that the strategy of speaking only for one's self is not only implausible, but likely to lead to the reinscription of dominant relations of power. Firstly, as Alcoff (1995: 109) asserts, the idea that one can 'avoid the problematic of speaking for by retreating into an individualistic realm is based on an illusion.' She explains, 'there is no neutral place to stand free and clear in which my words do not prescriptively affect or mediate the experiences of others, nor is there a way to demarcate decisively a boundary between my location and all others' (*ibid*: 108). It is evident that an individual cannot separate her or his own practices of representation from the locations, situations and discursive practices of others. Secondly, it should be clear that speaking only from one's specific experience and location is precisely what has led feminists to discursively colonise other women in the past. As Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1997:12) point out,

Speaking only from, about, and in relation to our own (untheorised) positions of relative privilege has, in fact, been part of the *problem* of feminism, contributing to its false universalising, and imperialising tendencies to the extent that it is hard to reconceptualise 'speaking for one's self' as part of the *solution*.

Not only is it difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of how individuals could speak only for themselves without affecting the representation of 'Others', but even if it were possible to do so, the political advantages of this practice appear negligible.

What I want to stress is that refraining from representing 'Others' entirely does not erase discursive relations of power, but in fact serves to reinforce them. The academic who makes a rule never to

represent the experiences of those positioned outside her or his own particular social and political location may assume that she or he is preventing the misrepresentation of 'Others'. This person's silence, however, does nothing to ensure the silence of other privileged speakers who may have no qualms about representing 'Others' in less than ethical ways. Thus, the political effect of retreating from representation is often a dismissal of accountability for the negative effects of the discursive representation of 'Others' within academia. As Alcoff (*ibid*: 108) asserts, 'the declaration that I "speak only for myself" has the sole effect of allowing me to avoid responsibility and accountability for my effects on others; it cannot literally erase those effects.'

It should be emphasised that there are certainly times when it is not appropriate or politically necessary to represent the 'Other'. Privileged speakers should always carefully question their impetus to speak. As Alcoff once again points out, however, there are numerous examples of the practice of speaking for others that have been politically effective in advancing the needs of those spoken for and that in some cases, certain political effects can be achieved in no other way. If academics are to represent 'Other's' in ways that result in empowerment instead of continued subordination, they must strive to assume ongoing accountability for the representations that they construct.

Reflexivity in Practice: An Intersubjective Exercise

I now turn to a more detailed analysis of how to address these epistemological and methodological issues of representing 'Others' in practice. It is my intention in this paper to advocate an integrated methodology of (intersubjective) reflexivity for representing 'Others' which would involve the ongoing and interconnected processes of reflecting individually and collectively on how one's location (both as a researcher and as a subject) relates to and bears on all stages of the research process while simultaneously maintaining an intersubjective dialogue among researchers and subjects on how representations of those being researched can be constructed and presented to the greatest degree of mutually defined accuracy.

A crucial first and ongoing step in assuming accountability for one's representations of 'Others' is to perform an analysis of reflexivity in relation to one's location as a speaker. As Kim England (1994: 87) argues, 'we need to locate ourselves in our work and to reflect on how our location influences the questions we ask, how we conduct our research, and how we write our research.' It cannot be emphasised enough that adopting a reflexive stance in regards to one's research must be a continuous process that structures the contours of one's study from start to finish. Moreover, thinking reflexively should be a practice in which one continually engages and learns from throughout one's entire body of work and experience as an individual.

The importance of the intersubjective component of this methodology is underscored by the conviction that the success of any process of reflexivity can be enhanced when engaged in collectively, as aspects of our location that are not obvious to us may be made visible (Alcoff 1995). By maintaining a dialectic between the researchers and those being researched throughout the tautology duration of a study, one can heighten the likelihood that the creation and presentation of knowledge about 'Others' will indeed be an intersubjective exercise. As Renate Klein (1983: 94) emphasises,

Whenever possible, feminist methodology should allow for such intersubjectivity; this will permit the researcher constantly to compare her work with her own experience as a woman and a scientist and share it with the researched, who will then add their opinions to the research, which in turn might again change it.

From Klein's perspective, a methodology that allows women to study women in an interactive process that deconstructs the 'artificial object/subject split' between the researcher and researched will end the exploitation of women as research objects. To expand on Klein's argument, emphasising such intersubjectivity in the research process should serve to break down the researcher/researched power dichotomy for anyone (be they male, female or otherwise identified) seeking to represent the subjectivities of 'Others' within the study of gender relations. In his article in this volume, for example, Carl Mclean (2002) examines the methodological and epistemological implications and dynamics of writing from a male-identified black feminist perspective, exploring the ways in which 'debates around the

politics of location for female feminist writers relate to that for males who may also claim to write from a feminist perspective' (McLean 2000: 43) His approach can be usefully extended to the process of breaking down the researcher/researched; object/subject binary. In attending to the process of becoming a subject it may be easier for any researcher of gender studies to illuminate the heterogeneity of the people s/he is researching by reflecting on the historical, social and cultural complexities and contradictions in these subjects' lives. Furthermore, instead of depicting 'Others' as frozen in positions of complete powerlessness and subordination, academics may be able to conceive of their 'subjects' as agents with the capacity for resistance and the ability to shape the social relations that also shape them. What is essential to the effectiveness of this process of (intersubjective) reflexivity is a serious commitment to 'actively, attentively and sensitively "hear" the criticism brought forward by "Others"' (Alcoff:112). As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues (paraphrased *ibid*: 110) the intellectual should neither abnegate her/his discursive role nor presume an authenticity of the oppressed, 'but still allow for the possibility that the oppressed will produce a 'countersentence' that can then suggest a new historical narrative.' It should be emphasised, however, that in actively listening to the voices of 'Others', one should also be aware of the significance of their silences. From this perspective, 'countersentences' may not always be constituted of spoken words. As Sreerekha Mullassery discusses in her article in this volume, 'Other – to – Other: The Act of Speaking' (Mullassery 2002: 65), 'Others' have ways, other than speaking, 'of dealing or acting within a realm of power in day to day

life, where they may not necessarily consider “speaking” as a useful medium.’ Moreover, remaining silent can also be a form of resistance on the part of ‘Others’. As Sreerekha points out, ‘considering the “his”tory of power relations within institutionalised academia, the silent/oppressed may not even consider it as essential to ever have a dialogue with those who only speak’ (*ibid*: 65).

In acknowledging research subjects as agents who may actively resist within the research process, practicing (intersubjective) reflexivity should highlight the fluidity of power relations between researchers and those being researched. The goal of this methodology of accountability would be to develop what Maria Mies refers to as a ‘double consciousness’, in which ‘we begin to see both ourselves and each other as we exist in the material world’ (cited in Archibald and Crnkovich 1999:114). Perceiving the research process with a ‘double consciousness’ should clarify for the researcher that she or he may not in fact always, or in every regard, be more privileged than the research subject (the ‘Other’). While the researcher may be more privileged than the subject along some axes of social, economic, political or epistemological power, the subject may possess more leverage or agency within other realms. Moreover, these axes of power may shift during the research and interview process. As Sabine Grenz discusses in her examination of ‘Power relations in interviews with sex-workers’ clients’ in this volume (2002:16),

Power relations were not simply reproduced but also shifted because my position as a researcher and expert (equipped with inquisitory power) who did not reveal much of herself. Hence, it is necessary to see different strands of power interwoven with each other rather than theorising power as a unified phenomenon that is either owned by the researcher or the researched (*ibid*:22).

It thus appears possible that both the researcher and the subject might assume the position of 'Other' simultaneously during the research process, which might provide the opportunity for increased identification and understanding between the two parties on a different dynamic level. Thus by bringing the process of (intersubjective) reflexivity to bear on every aspect of their studies, those who seek to represent 'Others' can foster greater accountability by contemplating how relations of power influence the ways in which the self and the 'Other' interact and reflect each other.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that no methodology for representing 'Others' could allow any researcher to assume full accountability or ensure complete accuracy for the representations that she or he constructs and presents. This is an issue that Josephine Wilson addresses in her piece, 'Re-Presenting the Represented: A reflection on the multi-layered representations of varied trans subjectivities' (2002) in this volume. Questioning 'simplistic representational accounts of truth and untruth', she problematises assumptions that one can definitively and accurately know and represent 'what is and what is not "true" trans subjectivity and experience' (Wilson 2002: 53). Thus, the goal of achieving total accuracy in representing 'Others' is clearly a misguided notion. The

impossibility of ever uncovering and faithfully representing true and essential identities, however, does not mean that one cannot successfully utilise a feminist methodology of accountability. Proposals such as the one introduced in this paper may increase one's control over at least some of the effects of representation. This in turn can reduce the possibility of misrepresentations that reproduce discursive hierarchies and perpetuate material exploitation and inequality.

Finally, if our goal is to assume greater accountability by representing the heterogeneity of 'Others' and avoid freezing them into binary categories, it is clear that we must deconstruct the category of 'Other' itself. As Jean Carabine (1996: 68) asserts, 'a focus on Other is problematic because it tends to shift the debate back to a preoccupation with binary oppositions and runs the risk of locking differences... up in the oppositional categories of oppressor and oppressed.' If we are to break down this linguistic opposition and hence disrupt the power relations that it represents, we must continually remind ourselves that people do not and cannot occupy fixed positions of identity. As has been discussed, relations of power intersect and shift and thus 'privileged' speakers may not always be more powerful than their subjects. Thus deconstructing the Self/Other binary may require developing new ways of conceiving of power dynamics within the researcher/subject relationship. Sreerekha argues in this vein that 'an Other – to – Other understanding and sharing of experiences is a better alternative than the construction of a self-Other dichotomy or self-Other relationship'

(Mullassery 2002:70) By practicing (intersubjective) reflexivity, we can highlight the intersection and mobility of identities by focusing on the construction of the self and 'Other' in relation. As Erica Burman (1996:139) argues, 'we should work to recognise ourselves in Others... to understand the dynamics of mutual investment and provisional privilege.' By exploring the ways in which the self and 'Others' are mutually constituted, we may gain the conceptual tools to erase the discursive and material barriers that exist between these two positions.

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