Pleasure and resistance?: feminism, heterosexuality and the media

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Pleasure and Resistance?

Feminism, Heterosexuality and the Media

By

Sara-Jane Finlay

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

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Abstract

Feminist theory and research has made a distinction between heterosexuality as a practice and heterosexuality as an institution and the line between the two is an area of confusion and contradiction. Discussions have been hampered by an unnecessary binary that hinders and limits theorising, working to silence the debates from either side, produce unnecessary divisions within feminism and inhibit the development of links between theory and practice. In examining heterosexuality as either an institution or a practice, it has been constructed as dangerous or pleasurable, victimising or agentic, oppressive or liberating, social or sexual. Missing between these two is a link that would suggest how these liberating activities challenge the heterosexual institution or how the analysis of the institution can make a material impact on women's sexual relationships. Women who identify as feminist and heterosexual are situated at the intersection of these two discourses where heterosexuality as an institution is defined as dangerous and oppressive, and heterosex as a practice is seen as pleasurable and liberating. To consider the intersection of institution and practice, the research asked 40 self-identified heterosexual feminists, between the ages of 19 and 68, about their sexual practice in the light both of feminist theorising around heterosexuality and its construction in the media. Taking the media as an institution that may both sustain and reinforce a discourse of heterosexuality, the research explores the mediation of women's heterosexuality and the potential for a feminist practice of resistance through the pleasurable consumption of media images. Employing a broad analysis of the media the thesis adopts a multi-methodological approach in the range of data collected, the methods employed and the analysis undertaken. It addresses three aims. First, to contribute to the wider literature within feminism about heterosexuality and sexual practice. Second, to understand the role of the media in formulating feminist and heterosexual identities. Third, to consider the use and application of a range of different methods for a feminist cultural politics. Drawing on data from qualitative and quantitative media reviews, a questionnaire study; and diaries, focus groups and telephone interviews with the participants, I discuss the construction of heterosexuality and feminism, and the women's talk about their sexual practice.

Key Words: feminism, heterosexuality, multi-methods, media consumption, popular culture, sexual practice.
Pleasure and Resistance?
Feminism, Heterosexuality and the Media

Feminist theory and research has made a distinction between heterosexuality as a practice and heterosexuality as an institution and the line between the two is an area of confusion and contradiction. Discussions have been hampered by an unnecessary binary which hinders and limits discussion, working to silence the debates from either side, produce unnecessary divisions within feminism and hamper the development of links between theory and practice. In examining heterosexuality as either an institution or a practice, it has been constructed as dangerous or pleasurable, victimising or agentic, oppressive or liberating, social or sexual (Holmes 2000). The relative paucity of empirical research (with the exception of Wilkinson & Kitzinger's (1993) and Hamblin's (1985) research with heterosexual feminists) highlights the problematic distinction that is constantly made between these two areas of feminist theory. At the risk of using generalisations, much of the work that has examined heterosexuality as an institution, has analysed and critiqued its role as oppressive, violent and dangerous (e.g. Atkinson 1974; Brownmiller 1975; Bunch 1987; Dworkin 1974, 1981, 1987; Firestone 1979; Holland et al. 1998; Jeffreys 1985, 1990; Johnston 1973; MacKinnon 1982, 1987; Redstockings 1969/1994; Rich 1980/1986). Heterosexual practice (sexual relations between men and women), on the other hand, has been seen as an important site of women's liberation (e.g. Greer 1971; Nestle 1983; Robinson 1984; Segal 1994; Vance 1984). Missing between these two is a link that would suggest how these liberating activities challenge the heterosexual institution or how the analysis of the institution can make a material impact on women's sexual relationships. Women who identify as feminist and heterosexual are situated at the intersection of these two discourses where heterosexuality as an institution is defined as dangerous and oppressive, and heterosex as a practice is seen as pleasurable and liberating.

To consider the intersection of institution and practice, the research asks women about their sexual practice in the light both of feminist theorising around heterosexuality and its construction in the media. Taking the media as an institution that may both sustain and reinforce a discourse of heterosexuality, the research explores the mediation of women's heterosexuality, and the potential for a feminist practice of resistance through the pleasurable consumption of media images.

Women's pleasure is a highly contested and disputed area within feminist theorising (Douglas 1990; Leeds Revolutionary Feminist 1981; Redstockings
1972/1994), but also an area that could provide room for resistance to women's oppression (Brunsdon 1981; Segal 1994; Wolf 1992). Sexual pleasure is a problematic area for women, and in particular, for women who identify themselves as feminists. A basic premise of feminism is that the personal is political and demands an analysis of the many facets of women's lives from explicitly political perspectives. This has created controversy within feminism. Lesbian feminists have been challenged by arguments over the role of sexual pleasure in politics, resulting in the 'lesbian sex wars', in debates about penetration, sado-masochism and pornography (Douglas 1990). Heterosexual feminists have also been asked to explain and justify relationships with men and their contribution both to feminism and resistance to patriarchy (Atkinson 1974; Leeds Revolutionary Feminists 1981; Rich 1980/1986; Wilkinson & Kitzinger; 1993). They have been reluctant to contribute to the theoretical literature from their personal experience and much of the research on heterosexual pleasure is written from radical and lesbian feminist perspectives (e.g. Jeffreys 1990; Leeds Revolutionary Feminists 1981; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 1994).

The politics of claiming women's pleasure has also been an important impetus for feminists to research women's media consumption and interpretation particularly in relation to soap opera viewing and romance novel reading (e.g. Ang 1985; Hobson 1982; Modleski 1982; Radway 1984). Determining women's pleasure in consuming media products has provided space to see these activities as resistant to oppression or the imposition of a socially determined role (Brown 1994; Radway 1984; Seiter et al. 1989).

My research draws together these various strands. Set within the framework of feminist cultural studies, it brings together women who identify as feminist and heterosexual to talk about their experiences of these two identities, and their struggles to understand their pleasure in light of the construction of feminism and heterosexuality in the media. Denzin (1991) suggests that feminist cultural studies "examines three inter-related problems: the production of gendered, ethnic, political cultural meanings, the textual analysis of these meanings, and the study of lived cultures and lived experiences and their connections to these worlds of representation" (p. 152). As such, the research demands a multi-layered approach that not only considers the women's accounts of feminism and heterosexuality, but also examines their wider mediated construction.
Chapter 1: Heterosexuality - Pleasure or Peril?

Adopting a meta-framework that considers the part the media plays in institutionalising heterosexuality, as well as its role in representing heterosexual practice and sexual relations, the remainder of this chapter introduces feminist theorising around heterosexuality and heterosex. Drawing on the distinction made in the opening of the chapter it considers heterosexuality as an institution and as a sexual practice. It provides the wider context for the research, suggesting that women identifying as heterosexual and feminist are situated at the intersection of these two approaches and offer the opportunity to understand them as a lived experience. Chapter two moves on to consider feminist media studies and their concern with the representation of women's sexuality and heterosexuality, the encoding of institutionalised heterosexuality, as well as their celebration of women's capacity to resist as audience members. Having provided a framework for the study in these chapters, chapter three details the aims of the research and the methods used in approaching their analysis.

Chapters four and five examine in detail the media's role in codifying and re-inscribing institutionalised heterosexuality. Chapter four reports the results of a content analysis of the British mass media, textual analysis of representative articles and a questionnaire study, while chapter five turns to fictional mediated representations and provides a detailed analysis of three sex scenes from mainstream film.

The remaining chapters consider in detail the consumption of these images by the women involved in the research. Chapter six adopts an 'active audience' approach to the consumption of these images by the women, looking for opportunities for resistance and pleasure. Conversation becomes central to the analysis in chapters seven and eight that consider in more detail the ways that women talk about being feminist and heterosexual in their personal and sexual lives.

Finally, chapter nine concludes the research, and addresses again the three aims listed in chapter three and their pertinent research questions. The final word comes back to me, and I speak more personally on my reflections of the research process and, feminism and heterosexuality.
Chapter 1: Heterosexuality - Pleasure or Peril?

1.0 Heterosexuality: Pleasure or Peril

Challenging heterosexuality, both as institution and practice, did not begin with second wave feminism. Jeffreys (1985), Kingsley Kent (1990) and Faderman (1981) in their histories of the suffragette movement, write of the importance that early feminists placed on disrupting the sexual system. Kingsley Kent asserts that seeing the women's suffrage campaign only as a political movement for enfranchisement neglects the attempts by the suffragettes to transform the lives of women, "...to redefine and recreate, by political means, the sexual culture of Britain" (p. 3). Jeffreys (1985) argues that contrary to the stereotype of the prudish and sexless suffragette, many were primarily concerned with sexual issues. Not only did they demand political equality, but many argued against the social construction of the male sex urge, while others supported women's right to sexual pleasure and autonomy.

This chapter considers the history of feminist debates around heterosexuality in second-wave feminism, placing the research within the current context and situating it within feminist theory. I begin by detailing feminism's interest in heterosexuality and heterosexual practice. I examine the critiques of heterosexuality as an institution and its undeniable role in women's oppression, considering some of the challenges that have been made to its institutional position. Next, I detail the analyses of heterosexual practice, and the possibly liberating alternatives that have been offered by feminist theory. Finally, the chapter suggests that women who identify as feminist and heterosexual are situated at the intersection of these two discourses where heterosexuality as an institution is defined as dangerous and oppressive, and heterosex as a practice is seen as pleasurable and liberating. Their contributions to the discussion will allow the development of a liberatory discourse of heterosexuality and provide a significant challenge to heteropatriarchy.

1.1 Feminism and Heterosexuality

Throughout feminism the basic definition of heterosexuality has been expanded to include both an identity and an institution. As an institution it supports some of the structures that form and sustain women's oppression. The notion that heterosexual relations are 'normal' and 'natural' has been rejected within feminist theory and feminists have "used the term 'heterosexuality' not just to mean sexual feelings, but to describe a political system" (Jeffreys 1990:288).
Second wave feminist critiques of heterosexuality focused on it as an institution (e.g. Atkinson 1974), offering lesbianism as an alternative or challenge to heterosexuality (e.g. Johnston 1973). Issues such as domestic violence, contraception and abortion, rape and male power, were traced to a heterosexual institution that assumed male dominance and female submission. It provided patriarchal control of women, setting up love as a trap and separating women from each other.

In the 1970's and 80's many feminist statements asked women to turn their energies to other women, to withdraw their support from men (Douglas 1990) and to develop a political lesbian identity. Wilson (1985) summaries:

Many saw erotic attraction for a man as a cornerstone of the subordination of women. [...] A second reason was that in relating erotically to a woman you lived out your politics with fewer contradictions (p. 186).

The Leeds Revolutionary Feminists wrote:

We do think that all feminists can and should be political lesbians. Our definition of a political lesbian is a woman-identified woman who does not fuck men. It does not mean compulsory sexual activity with women (1981:5).

They called for the abandonment of heterosexuality because women's fundamental oppression was built around the heterosexual couple and signified by penetration of the vagina by the penis. Political lesbianism proposed to remove all interactions between women and men, thereby depriving the institution of heterosexuality of their support and energies.

There was a backlash against the early theorising, as some feminists (both heterosexual and lesbian) began to assert their rights to physical pleasure in sexual relationships [as had some of the early suffragettes, (Jeffreys 1985)]. Feminists who continued to campaign around heterosexuality as a repressive institution that privileged heterosexual women were constructed as in opposition to those who promoted sexual pleasure as a means of freedom or liberation. Often simplistically called the 'sex wars' this era of feminism has been constructed as the radical feminists versus the sex radicals (Segal 1987), with the former continuing to critique
institutionalised oppression, and the latter suggesting sexual freedom as a way to move beyond sexual repression. The dichotomy between oppression and repression was played out over issues of pornography, with feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon (1982) and Andrea Dworkin (1981) suggesting that pornography was oppressive and symbolic of the hatred of women structured into society, and others such as Alison Assiter and Avedon Carol (1993) who argued that women's sexuality had historically been repressed such that censorship of pornography could threaten the few freedoms women had attained.

The divide forged by the 'sex wars' continues, with theorising on heterosexuality as an institution and as a practice often occurring in isolation to each other. Some, like Stevi Jackson (1995), see this as a means to critique the institution without criticising the actual sexual activities of individuals. Others, Lynne Segal (1994) for instance, suggests that recognising our heterosexual desire, and acting upon it, is a means to challenge the institution. Further interrogation has come from queer theory, where attempts are made to disrupt the accepted definitions of heterosexuality both as institution and practice (e.g. Butler 1990).

In this chapter, I trace these arguments, expanding on their impact on feminism and heterosexuality. For simplicity, it is based around the binary construction of heterosexuality, as either an institution or a practice - as oppressive or repressive, before beginning to understand the links between the two. I work from the basis that heterosexuality is deeply problematic for feminism. Although rarely recognised or challenged, feminism has constructed itself as a heterosexual movement, and simply for this reason its continuing under-theorisation is unacceptable. As Kitzinger (1996) writes, "feminism has remained (by and large) wilfully ignorant of lesbian issues" (p. 122). Hollway (1995) notes the absence of a discourse around heterosexuality within feminism, and to a certain extent this is true, but it masks an unpleasant reality. A great deal has been written about heterosexuality, both as institution and practice, but it has neglected (with a few exceptions which will be discussed later) to consider their interaction, and it is here, within both practice and politics, that a discourse will be formed.

1.2 Privilege, Power and Peril - Heterosexuality as an Institution

Most basically, critiques of heterosexuality as an institution are about power, its enforcement, and the social control and meaning it imposes on people's lives and sexual relationships (Wilkinson & Kitzinger 1994:309). It is socially constructed as an
organisation of power where sexual relations become the eroticisation of power differences, the eroticisation of domination and subordination (Jeffreys 1990, MacKinnon 1982). Kitzinger (1994a) writes: -

Sex is constructed, sexual desire is constructed, as the eroticisation of subordination. Heterosexual sex involves male power and female subordination (p. 206).

Heterosexuality then is constructed by male power. The inculcation of heterosexuality into the institutions and structures that form women's lives, relationships and oppressions, forces them "(financially, psychologically, or with fist and gun) into submission. We are forced into heterosexuality because we are oppressed" (Kitzinger 1994a: 199, italics in original). The structuring influence of domination and submission, inherent in sexual relations, is seen to frame women's experience of the world.

Charlotte Bunch (1987) writing originally in 1975: -

Every institution that feminists have shown to be oppressive to women - the workplace, schools, the family, the media, organized religion - is also based on heterosexism, on the assumption that every woman either is or wishes to be bonded to a man both economically and emotionally. In order to effectively challenge our oppression in these institutions, we must also challenge the ideology of heterosexism (p. 187).

She captures the scope of critiques and challenges that have been made to the heterosexual institution ranging from the damaging control it exerts over women's lives to the dangerous profit which is made from women's bodies. It recognises the heterosexual institution as a human or civil rights issue (Grussendorf 2000; Rowland 1996) and "suggests that we should not aim for the elimination of men, but for the elimination of the social system which creates sexism and gender" (Rubin 1975: 204). Critiques of heterosexuality as an institution move away from seeing it as merely sexual, but rather as an "institution, practice, experience and identity [...] the assumption of normative heterosexuality operates throughout society" and its impacts are not "limited to heterosexuals" (Jackson 1996: 30).
1.2.1 Extrinsic Concerns - Damage and Danger

The sex act, intercourse, is the starting point. It "becomes a means for men to force women, to hurt them, to punish them. It becomes the very symbol of their oppression" (Dworkin 1987:173). Jeffreys (1990) suggests that heterosexuality is "constructed around the fact that they [men] have a subordinate class on whom to act sexually" (p. 237) and from these power differences arise abuses such as rape, pornography and sexual violence.

Making a link between the eroticisation of dominance and submission, and women's oppressed role, MacKinnon (1987) relates this more directly to aspects of violence and damage that are inflicted on women through heteropatriarchal society. She lists "abortion, birth control, sterilization abuse, domestic battery, rape, incest, lesbianism, sexual harassment, prostitution, female sexual slavery, and pornography." (MacKinnon 1982:529). Thus, the results of men's dominance are directly linked to a heterosexual institution that harms women by controlling them through marriage, by denying their rights under the law, by constructing them as sexual objects, and by using their construction as sexually submissive, to blame them for the results. As such "heterosexual women's powerlessness and victimization are foregrounded" (Gavey 1996:52).

Rape and pornography, in particular have been considered as manifestations of eroticised power differences. In contradiction to Brownmiller's (1975) earlier analysis, MacKinnon sees rape not as an act of violence, but rather one of sex, writing, "violence is sex when it is practised as sex" (1982:73). Likewise Jackson (1999), writing originally in 1978, states that "the attributes of masculinity and femininity, learnt from the beginning of childhood [...] provide the motivational and interactional basis of rape" (p. 47). In this way "sexual behaviour is social behaviour" (p. 55), reflected in the experiences of women where "rape and sexual harassment are everyday events" (Scutt 1996:105).

Feminists have also condemned the eroticisation of dominance that is portrayed effectively in pornography. It can be constitutive of gender inequality through the meanings that it produces about men and women. Rich (1980/86) writes: -

Pornography does not simply create a climate in which sex and violence are interchangeable; it widens the range of behaviour considered
acceptable from men in heterosexual intercourse - behaviour which reiteratively strips women of their autonomy, dignity, and sexual potential (p. 46).

At the same time pornography also acts to reproduce those images that circulate within heteropatriarchy (MacKinnon 1987). For feminists like Itzin (1992), Dworkin and MacKinnon, pornography becomes a human rights issue, predicated on an heterosexual system of inequality which "connects violence with sex and sexual arousal, [and] makes violence sexy. It legitimates violence against women" (Itzin 1992:67). Further it dehumanises women by reducing them to "sex, a thing, to be purchased for sex, married for sex, dated for sex, used for sex, seized for sex" (Barry 1996:448).

Feminist action against rape and pornography (and the many other abuses listed by MacKinnon and others) is an attempt to confront women's oppression through the institution of heterosexuality, to understand their objectification and the power structures that maintain inequalities. In trying to stop manifestations of heterosexuality like rape and pornography, feminists are attempting to prevent its extrinsic abuses. If these demonstrations of subordination and oppression could be erased, feminists working from this perspective seem to suggest that heterosexual relationships would then be acceptable. In providing this analysis, it ignores (or excludes) some important features. It denies women agency - if sex is at all times only a reproduction of existing sexual hierarchies, than there is no hope for change or escape. "It encourage[s] 'all women' to identify themselves as victims of 'all men'" (Segal 1987:70) and "reject[s] any serious attempt to examine the complexities and confusion of our experiences as women and men" (p. 70). It does not address or appropriately problematise that "many women do enjoy heterosexual sex, and that it is precisely this pleasure in heterosexual sex that is the problem" (Kitzinger 1994a: 202) or that some women, lesbian and straight, use and enjoy pornography (Loach 1992). Many of these issues will be discussed in considering the practice of heterosex, but it does make clear the distinction being made between a critique of the institution of heterosexuality and the practice of it in individual women's lives. While the evidence for an institutionalised form of heterosexuality that controls women's life, placing them in peril, is substantial, other forms of control, those that are more intrinsic to heterosexuality, are masked by assumptions of normalcy.
1.2.2 Intrinsic Disorder - Compulsory Heterosexuality and Feminist Existence

Heterosexuality is ubiquitous and pervasive in the structures that order everyday life (Bunch 1975/1987; Richardson 1996). As such, it becomes the invisible ruler against which all other forms of sexuality are measured, so that "lesbianism and homosexuality exist in opposition to heterosexuality" (Jackson 1999: 150; Rubin 1975). Where heterosexuality becomes constructed as natural, lesbian and gay sexualities are "seen as deviant, as pathological, or as emotionally and sensually deprived" (Rich 1980/1986). Early critiques of heterosexuality as institution recognised its power to define and make invisible those that fell outside of its purview (i.e. Bunch 1975/1987; Redstockings 1969/1994). It is the sense of inevitability of heterosexuality to mask other opportunities and present itself as the face of normalcy where oppression is disguised and hidden. Women who are socialised in a male dominated society, internalise a cultural definition where their role is seen to serve, maintain and comfort men (Radicalesbians 1972/1994).

Adrienne Rich (1980/1986) labelled the enforced socialisation of women to the institution of heterosexuality as 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Compelled by economic necessity and personal safety, women do not question their heterosexuality or its imposition as a preference. At the same time, in tying their sexuality and energies to men, they are separated from other women. Losing their identification with each other, they give up that relationship as "a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, violently curtailed and wasted under the institution of heterosexuality" (Rich 1980/1986: 234).

For Rich (1980/1986) it is not surprising that women tie themselves to men through discourses of love, romance and marriage, when the alternatives are constructed as deviant and mean an exclusion from the few privileges that may exist. When heterosexuality is constructed as compulsory, and where the choices are not recognised the institution of heterosexuality is supported and maintained. It is the absence of choice that "remains the great unacknowledged reality" and in its absence, "women will remain dependent on the chance or luck of particular relationships and will have no collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives" (p. 237).
1.2.2.1 Love, Romance and Marriage

Feminists have critiqued the discourses of love and romance that surround the institution of marriage within Western culture. Atkinson (1974) was particularly critical, seeing love as an inherent part of women's oppression, in which they are complicit through internalised policing. Love becomes a political institution that is a necessary part of male domination and power, and suggests that women are "instinctively trying to recoup [...] definitional and political losses by fusing with the enemy" (p. 44). Firestone (1979) was equally condemnatory of love, but rather than constructing women as falsely conscious, she suggests that men are unable to love and parasitically feed on women's emotional strength.

Feminists have critiqued marriage as "lifelong, monogamous, cohabiting relationships, legally sanctioned [...] and producing children" (Van Every 1996: 52). Its hegemony is supported "by the State, the church, and (negative) public representations of other types of relationships" (p. 52). Carole Pateman (1988) considered it from the perspective of a social contract in which "men's domination over women, and the right of men to enjoy equal sexual access to women" (p. 2) was at issue. "In a patriarchal society," writes Stelboum (1999) "marriage and female fidelity are requirements for heterosexual relationships" (p. 43). Gayle Rubin (1975) referred to this as the traffic or exchange of women - "Women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favors, sent as tribute, traded, bought, and sold" (p. 175). It is based around a discourse of monogamy that "privileges the interests of both men and capitalism, operating as it does through the mechanisms of exclusivity, possessiveness and jealousy" (Robinson 1997: 144). It denies women access to sexual freedom and continues the separation of women from each other (Rosa 1994). Hagan (1993) considers this an intimate colonisation.

Wives are seen as subordinate, economically dependent and deferent (Johnson 1988). In Britain and North America, they continue to have major responsibility for household and caring duties (e.g. Van Every 1995). Economically women are still expected to provide unpaid labour in the family (e.g. Delphy & Leonard 1992) and are disadvantaged both within their marriages (e.g. Pahl 1989) and in paid employment (e.g. Witz 1993).

1.2.2.2 Profit

Feminist examinations of the institution of heterosexuality have revealed how some men have profited from some women. Whether through their exploitation at
home (as unpaid domestic workers) or in the workplace, feminists working from this perspective begin from the assumption that the capitalist class society works against the interests of women. The institution of heterosexuality and the sexual politics inherent within it has a material impact on women's lives. It affects "events, relations, social and economic formations and bodily experiences which have conditions of existence and real effects" (Maynard & Purvis 1995:5). Employing a materialist feminist perspective, Jackson (1999), links the eroticism of power through gender hierarchy as materially impacting on women. In this way she makes the connection between the heterosexual institution and heterosexuality, stating that: -

...the experience and practice of heterosexuality is not just about what does or does not happen between the sheets, but about who cleans the bathroom or who performs emotional labour for whom (p. 132).

Jaggar (1994) describes how these gendered expectations have also further asserted themselves within the workplace, where women are expected to do 'female' occupations, which may also require emotional or sexual labour. She notes some of the successes that feminism has wrought for women but writes:

The wage labor force remains sex segregated; the jobs available to most women are increasingly low paying, insecure, unrewarding, and often hazardous; the gendered wage gap persists; sexual harassment remains rampant; and typical career patterns and even the working day are still structured on the assumption that the normal worker has a wife at home to take care of his domestic needs and responsibilities (p. 54-5).

Issues of economics and profit though go further than women's domestic responsibilities and working opportunities. In some countries, as noted by Rowland (1996), profiting from women's bodies operates globally and across national boundaries. She describes how the sex industry in Asia has become "industrialised and incorporated into the economic infrastructure of many countries" (p. 77). The impact of the heterosexual institution then is not simply on the structuring of women's lives and relationships, but works globally to limit, exploit and damage women's expectations and possibilities.
1.2.3 Privilege and Protection

Heterosexuality as an institution has been seen to privilege those women conforming to a traditional role of femininity, whilst excluding or punishing those who choose to live outside of that role. Critiques like those listed above make it difficult to understand why women would want to remain in heterosexual relationships. As a result, many lesbian feminists began to question the privileges that heterosexual feminists accrued from aligning themselves with men and adopting roles that were acceptable to heteropatriarchy. Requests by lesbian feminists to their heterosexual sisters to examine their personal lives and to consider them in light of feminist theorising were frequently met by defensive justifications or silence, leading to what has been called (Maenad 1981) a lesbian/heterosexual split over issues of sexuality. This simplistic division does not recognise the complexity of the issues and others have called this a lesbian/lesbian split or a heterosexual/heterosexual split. Jeffreys (1990) outlines the arguments between those with a libertarian versus a radical approach to sexual politics, lines that were by no means strictly drawn between heterosexual and lesbian feminists. This section will initially consider some of the work done on heterosexual privilege, before turning to examine the responses received and their role in dividing feminist sexual politics.

1.2.3.1 Heterosexual Privilege

Heterosexual privileges are male approval, more safety from physical attack, greater ease in dealing with the authorities, getting repairs done, safety from a besieging obscene phone-caller, being able to refer to a man in the bus queue or at work which brings smiles of approval from women and men, let alone the financial advantages of being attached to a member of the male ruling class who has greater earning power (Leeds Revolutionary Feminists 1981:8)

Both heterosexual and lesbian feminists have frequently criticised the institution of heterosexuality. Few heterosexual feminists though have been willing to examine their own role in maintaining male supremacy (by continuing in relationships with men) or the rewards for their support. Segal (1987) writes that "lesbian women rightly resented the complacency of heterosexual women over the social acceptance, relative privilege and partial safety accorded heterosexual women in the wider world" (p. 65). Lesbian feminists asked heterosexual women to be aware of and account for their privilege, to understand their complicity in the
ongoing oppression of other women because of race, ability and sexuality. Bunch (1987) claims that heterosexuality works because of heterosexual privilege and states:

If you don’t have a sense of what privilege is, I suggest that you go home and announce to everybody that you know - a roommate, your family, the people you work with - everywhere you go - that you’re a queer. Try being a queer for a week. Do not walk out on the street with men; walk only with women, especially at night. For a whole week, experience life as if you were a lesbian, and I think you will know what heterosexual privilege is very quickly (p. 177).

She challenges heterosexual women to examine their privileges and to accept that their continuing agreement ensures they receive the benefits of male privilege and thus sustain their own oppression. Other writers tried to make clear the extent and seriousness of the privilege accorded to those women who remained heterosexual. Kitzinger (1994b) describes the impact of heterosexual privilege as "anti-lesbian harassment" when she writes:

And it still sounds odd, implausible, extreme, for me to claim that I am 'harassed' by having to live in a society in which heterosexuality is everywhere flaunted - on advertising hoardings, on television screens, by the church wedding bells that ring out over my house most Saturdays and by the het couples walking unselfconsciously down the street entwined in each other's arms. 'Harassment' sounds odd, too, as a term to describe legal and policy discrimination; can I be 'harassed' by a law which prevents me from marrying a woman lover, or by my university superannuation scheme which pays pensions to widows and widowers, but not the partners of lesbians? (p. 126).

Odd and implausible, perhaps, but the material concerns that Kitzinger identifies and names as harassment are as a direct result of a society which privileges heterosexuality and punishes any alternatives.

Reactions by heterosexual feminists have been characterised as ones of "fear and hostility" (Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1993: 1) and many challenged the right of lesbian feminists to ask these questions. The Leeds Revolutionary Feminists (quoted at the opening of this section) published a paper entitled "Love your enemy?"
The debate between heterosexual feminism and political lesbianism* (1981) in which they openly challenged all feminists to be political lesbians and to remove their support from men in all facets of their life. Heterosexual feminists reacted with anger, guilt and vituperation. Some claimed to feel "increasingly excluded/denied" (Grimsditch 1981:19), "ripped apart" (Gregory 1981:43), "alienated" (Attar et al. 1981:46) or construed as "collaborators with the enemy" (Gregory 1981:43). Others "object[ed] to being considered weak by my sisters" (Wright 1981:32), while one accused the authors of being "a closed grouping of cadre units" (Gregory 1981:40) designed to exclude heterosexual women from feminism, "revisionist" (p. 41), and "woman-hating" (p. 43). Yet, with all the objections "behind the angry noise is a resounding silence" (Wood 1981:48) for: -

I have never yet read or heard anywhere, heterosexual feminists speaking openly and fully of their heterosexual privilege and how they deal with that, or justifying in feminist terms their relationships with men. (Packwood 1981:29)

More than a decade later, Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1993) asked heterosexual feminists to write explaining how their heterosexuality supported their feminism. Some respondents did recognise that "to be heterosexual is to be privileged over other forms of sexuality" (Young 1993:38) and that "no matter how marginal or alienated from the culture's categories I may feel subjectively, the outward pattern of my life is [...] in harmony with the culture's heterosexist institutions" (Bem 1993:50). Crawford (1993) writes: -

No one hassles me at my child's school, at the doctor's office or at work. No one tells me I'm an unfit mother. Because I am legally married, my job provides health care benefits for my partner and family [...] Wills and mortgages, taxes and auto insurance, retirement pensions and school enrolment for the children - all the ways that individuals ordinarily interface with social structures are designed to fit people like me and my partner (p. 44).

The editors note the recognition of privilege in these statements, but also record the angry responses that they received from some heterosexual feminists invited to participate. They mention that some wrote "'How dare you assume I'm heterosexual?' and 'Don't you think you are making one hell of an assumption?"
(Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1993:5). Others simply refused to participate because they were unhappy being called heterosexual.

Kitzinger (1996) offers two suggestions for the silence behind the angry reaction. She proposes a "privilege of ignorance" (p. 129) and an agenda-setting privilege. Heterosexual feminists inability to examine their sexual practice and detail their privilege wilfully ignores their contribution to the continuing oppression of lesbians and others who exist outside of the hetero-norm. She writes:

...heterosexual feminists do not believe they need to know about lesbians' oppression as lesbians in the same way that they believe they need to know about their own oppression as women; and in not knowing about lesbian oppression, they perpetuate it.

The contributors to Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1993) and the responses to the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist (1981) paper, deal succinctly with issues of what it means to be a feminist, but offer very little about what it means to be a heterosexual feminist. In that way they are happy to discuss their oppression as women (as all women), but unhappy to threaten their privileges by a close examination of them. As a result they perpetuate the ongoing oppression of others.

Commenting directly on responses to the edited collection, Kitzinger (1996) suggests that heterosexual feminists are usually the ones who set the agenda. When asked to respond to an agenda that is not set by them, they claim to feel 'guilt-tripped' or 'silenced'. She relates this directly to work on race and class by Ettinger (1994), writing, "white people are, of course, accustomed to being the ones who set the agenda. [...] The same is true of heterosexuals: the outrage, the sense of exclusion and silencing derive from an unassailable sense of entitlement, the legacy of social privilege" (p. 137). As a result, in both these situations, an examination of the heterosexual institution on a personal level by heterosexual feminists is closed down. This leaves heterosexual feminists believing that "their position is the norm and therefore to not be requiring of any political analysis" (Jennings 1981:49).

Several feminists have responded extensively to the special issue of Feminism and Psychology. Hollway (1993; 1995; 1995a & 1996) praises the editors for examining power in heterosexual relationships, but suggests that the conceptualisation of power is oversimplified and continues "to deny the effects of
desire and meaning in sexuality" (1993: 412). She writes that it is dangerous to write "about love, fulfilled desire, safe and supported vulnerability and the intense pleasures of sexual intimacy" (p. 413), but asks, "what about the experience of having someone you love and want inside you?" (p. 413). She suggests that the meanings of sex are fluid and that "heteropatriarchy is a more multiple and contradictory constellation than radical feminist analyses can handle" (p. 415). In response, other feminists accused her of only dwelling on physical desire (Thomas 1994), ignoring the "institutionalization of male dominance" (Ramazanoglu 1994: 320), its "historical and ideological luggage" (Brown 1994: 323), and of taking a traditionally feminine perspective on desire (Jackson 1995a). Hollway's challenges, and the responses, highlight the continuing controversy in discussions within feminism about heterosexuality as institution and as practice. Importantly, along with the edited collection, it opens a dialogue around issues of feminism and heterosexuality from which further work has arisen.

Reviewing the debate, Swindells (1993) writes that it encourages a closer look at "the construction of heterosexuality, how it disempowers women, and what the political relationship is between lesbianism and heterosexuality in terms of women's liberation" (p. 44). Books such as Richardson's (1996a) edited collection Theorising Heterosexuality, re-invigorate a debate that in the past has been divisive within feminism. As well, portions of Jackson's (1999) recent book Heterosexuality in Question, were written in response to the questions raised by Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1993). She expresses her dissatisfaction at the two extremes of the debate - those heterosexual feminists who defended their practice (like Hollway, above) and the radical lesbian feminist critique offered by Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1993). While accepting Segal's (1994) "vested interest in affirming the possibility of heterosexual feminist politics and pleasurable heterosexual sex, these goals are not, in my view, best served by refusing to engage with the critique of male domination within heterosexual relations" (Jackson 1999: 159). Like the feminists that will be discussed in the next section, Jackson wants to consider ways in which the challenge of radical feminist theories can work to change heterosexuality, without condemning those women wishing to remain within it.

1.2.4 Reinterpretation and Disruption

Some feminists have worked with the ideas presented here and looked for the possibility of a reinterpretation, or disruption, to the institution of heterosexuality. Researchers have found evidence of women refusing to take on the traditional roles
assigned them in heteropatriarchy. Theorists have suggested that there are options for women beyond notions of complementarity. Others have theorised that disruptions can be possible through queer theory or political lesbianism.

1.2.4.1 Refusing Tradition

Research has considered the ways that some marriages have moved beyond gendered inequality to create situations where the responsibility for paid and family work is shared, regardless of gender prescriptions. Risman and Johnston-Sumerford (1998) studied 15 post-gender marriages and found that while some have been forced by circumstances into non-traditional family structures, others had actively chosen to ignore prescribed gender roles in order to foster a more equitable relationship. Van Every (1995) also conducted extensive research on the ways that some women 'refused to be a wife' and the type of 'anti-sexist' living arrangements that they made. Women in her study had rejected the role by not getting married, living alone or in a large residential group. Those who were married did not take their husband's names and active attempts were made to reject status roles within the household and share tasks equally. Although Van Every notes their attempts to create 'post-gender' relationships, many of the participants were aware of the constraints that were put on their ability to achieve this to their satisfaction. Some of the couples had to marry for immigration reasons or because of social pressure. Frequently the ability to negotiate around household duties and tasks were reliant on "men's willingness to negotiate an equal division of housework" (p. 121).

For some women, one way to attempt to overcome, subvert or change the institution of heterosexuality is to strive to raise their children to value both masculine and feminine aspects. Orbach (1993) tries to construct new masculinities and femininities so that her children are not 'gender restricted'. Likewise, another mother asks - "most of my friends feel that it is important for feminists to have sons as well as daughters: else how will they counteract the patriarchal values of non-feminist parents, media and other influences?" (Ganguly 1996:104).

Apparent in many of the contributions to a special issue of Feminism & Psychology (and other research on feminism and mothering) is awareness that being feminist makes raising children more complex (Rowland & Thomas 1996). Although these women are actively attempting to put theory into practice, some found it "an exhausting struggle" and a "battlefield" (p. 149). "Raising sons is an area which gives women potential power in transforming sexism, but the obstacles
we are up against are strong and intransigent" (Ramazanoglu 1993:61). As well as struggling to raise children to resist heteropatriarchy, the women are mothering within an atmosphere firmly entrenched in the institution of heterosexuality. Women in heterosexual relationships have to manage the imbalances of power in their personal relationships that are "compounded by the structural basis of men's power, which underlies their privileged access to resources both inside and outside the relationship" (Croghan 1993:243).

1.2.4.2 The Lesbian Continuum and Woman-Identified Women

Rich's (1980/1986) work on compulsory heterosexuality, also contained the idea of a lesbian continuum which would encompass the many different relationships that women have with each other. The recognition of these relationships, many of which have been silenced or excluded, would be a challenge to an institution of heterosexuality that assumes men's access to women. Recognition that women can interact with each other on different levels, was not new. Bunch (1987) wrote in 1978:

A lesbian is a woman whose sexual/affectional preference is for women, and who has thereby rejected the female role on some level, but she may or may not embrace a lesbian-feminist political analysis. A woman-identified woman is a feminist who adopts a lesbian-feminist ideology and enacts that understanding in her life, whether she is a lesbian sexually or not (p. 198).

Rich's formulation adds a political ingredient to these relationships and constructs them as a means to challenge the institution of heterosexuality. Janice Raymond (1986) extends Rich's idea, seeing the way that heterosexuality controls women as creating a 'hetero-reality' in which "most of women's personal, social, political, professional, and economic relations are defined by the ideology that woman is for man" (p. 11). Unlike Rich's attempts to recognise the breadth, depth and history of women's hidden relationships, Raymond applies a radical feminist analysis which insists on the political necessity of women choosing to base their primary relationships with other women, a process she calls 'gyn-affection'. Other feminists (e.g. Coote & Campbell 1982; hooks 1984; Thompson 1993) draw on ideas of a continuum, gyn-affection or 'woman-identified woman' to insist on the political possibilities that women's relationships can disrupt the institution of heterosexuality.
Many feminists express discomfort with a continuum suggesting that it has let heterosexual feminists off the hook (Rowland 1996) and that it is reductionist (Wilson 1985). It denies the relationship between lesbianism and sex or sexual pleasure (Dever 1997), and it "is appealed to by some feminists rather prematurely as a way of foreclosing on confrontation and acrimony between heterosexual and non-heterosexual women" (Overall 1994:499). In addition, suggesting that women exist along a continuum, or perhaps move along it throughout their life (Reinharz 1993), obscures heterosexual feminists' complicity in the oppression of lesbians, their refusal to examine or give up their privileges and constructs lesbianism as an "harmless sexual preference" (Kitzinger & Perkins 1993:61), completely denying the political decisions which lesbian feminists might make.

1.2.4.3 Identity Politics and The 'Queering' of Heterosexuality

Also based on some of Rich's critique of compulsory heterosexuality, is the development of an identity politics around heterosexuality. Rich (1980/1986) asks heterosexual woman to examine what it means to 'choose' to be heterosexual. hooks (1984) writes that "increasingly, feminist women who are heterosexual are making the point that they choose to have a relationship with an individual man [...] This attacks the compulsory heterosexuality which denies women the right to choose male sexual partners" (p. 155). By recognising their oppression, women begin to politicise their identity. Overall (1994) states that if it is possible to make a choice to not be heterosexual, then it must be possible to make the choice and actively take responsibility for being heterosexual. By naming oneself as heterosexual one makes "visible an identity which is generally taken for granted as a normal fact of life. This can be a means of problematising heterosexuality and challenging its privileged status" (Jackson 1995:19).

Some heterosexual feminists refuse to accept the term heterosexual. Rowland (1993) writes: -

In the women's liberation movement I think I have always been seen as a woman-identified, radical feminist, which is how I would name myself [...] I would not call myself heterosexual, but rather say that I am in a heterosexual relationship. This is because I feel women can and do exercise decisions about sexuality (p. 75).
By denying the binary divisions of heterosexuality and homosexuality (Gergen 1993), one gains the power of insisting on living by one's own definition of sexuality. In refusing to be labelled as heterosexual and ‘choosing’ one’s sexuality, these feminists attempt to subvert the heterosexual institution by not ‘playing by its rules’. Politics becomes informed by a sexuality that they define for themselves. Bem (1993) writes, “although I have lived monogamously with a man I love for over 26 years, I am not now and never have been ‘heterosexual’” (p. 50).

By choosing to build an identity around heterosexuality (rather than accepting its amorphous position), a strong place can be created in fighting for equal rights. In feminism though, this can come at a price, as it can obscure some of the questions that should be asked about this identity and its role in oppression (Tzedek 2000). Jeffreys (1984) critiques the notion that heterosexuality can ‘come out of the closet’, observing that “it is remarkable that heterosexual women who use feminist language can be so insensitive as to use such a phrase. It totally trivialises the oppression of lesbians” (p. 2). In either claiming heterosexuality as an identity, or denying its application to one’s lives, no political progress is made. Claiming the identity and ‘admitting’ to it does little more than assert that which is already obvious. Like ‘white’ or ‘middle-class’, heterosexuality is a silent or invisible, but assumed identity (Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1993). At the same time, refusing to call oneself heterosexual leaves unexamined one’s role in the oppression of others. Swindells (1993) suggests, “the resistance to labelling can serve to reinforce the oppression of others” (p. 40). Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1994) write:

The identities ‘heterosexual’ and ‘lesbian’ are not commensurate; the consequences of accepting them are different, as are the consequences of letting them go. Safe and uncontested identities and dominant group membership can readily be shrugged off as unimportant; membership of an oppressed group has to be claimed, tenaciously, despite the contradictions.

Claiming or denying an heterosexual identity is not the same as claiming or denying a lesbian identity. The process of naming is a privilege of the powerful and not something that is open to lesbian women - they do not have the same freedom to choose an identity. If they wish to live openly as lesbian, they will be labelled and castigated by heterosexual society.
Queer theory has also tried to challenge the heterosexual institution by subverting hegemonic gender roles (Butler 1990). Queer activism "is centred around actions which make gays (and supposedly lesbians) more visible in straight society" (Pamaby 1996:3). Butler (1990) suggests that identity is not stable and concrete, but rather a series of repeated performances that through repetition become accepted as a stable identity. The 'heterosexual matrix' requires that these unstable identities become solidified as opposites of masculine and feminine. Refusing to stay within these prescribed gender roles allows individuals to play subversively with gender. Citing drag queens and butch lesbians, Butler claims that these roles problematise the meaning of sex roles through their parody of the heterosexual matrix. She writes:

That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (p. 141).

Califia (1994) suggests, "'gay gender' can be a way to critique 'heterosexual gender'" (p. 179).

Queer can provide some interesting contrasting perspectives, which shed light on the socially constructed nature of the original. For example, Camille Paglia, a lesbian feminist, has expressed her 'adoration' of the penis (Picardie 1994). She says that it is natural to regard the penis as 'hot'. Some lesbians have suggested that they play with gender by having sexual relationships with men. Stein's (1997) study found lesbians performing different identities, which may include sleeping with men if "(1) such affairs were kept private, (2) they were isolated occurrences and not long-term liaisons, and (3) it was understood that individuals were 'in it for the sex' only - and not emotionally attached" (p. 160-1). On the other hand, Sedgwick (1994) explains that among the ways she identifies as a woman, her identification "as a gay person is a firmly male one, identification 'as' a gay man" (p. 209). Califia (1994) claims that gender can be played with in any relationship. After detailing an instance when she had sex with a woman 'like a man', she describes the possibilities open to them when fucking with gender.
The time after that, we might both be men. That gets very interesting, especially if one of us is straight. Believe it or not, though, we have some of our best times as women. Vanilla lesbian sex can seem pretty risqué to us hardened perverts (p. 177).

Although arising from gay and lesbian activism, Califia’s statement makes clear that playing with gender and roles is open to heterosexuals as well. “‘Queer’ heterosexuality denotes the doing of (what used to be called) heterosex while actively subverting its constructive function” (Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1994:83). For Gergen (1993), applying Butler’s gender trouble to heterosexuality means “notions of stable, internal, fixed qualities would be discouraged, in favor of temporary positioning. People would be formulated within the flux of sexual discourses” (p. 64).

Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1994) raise several problems with the application of queer theory to heterosexuality. First, no information is ever provided on how to do queer heterosexuality. Second, by blurring the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality, it makes them sexually and politically equal. Third, queer theory provides another place for feminists to hide from ever having to recognise or confront their heterosexuality. Finally, queer theory in wanting to fuck with gender, would ‘fuck with feminism’. It attempts to pervert the meaning - women’s oppression - without making any changes to the institution that supports it. Rather it tries to adjust theories to fit within the structures of the heterosexual institution (e.g. marriage between same sex couples), rather than providing any real alternatives or directly attacking the institution. Queer theory does not challenge a “gendered hierarchy” (Jackson 1999:129), it merely plays with it.

1.3 Heterosexual Feminist Sexual Practice: Power, Pleasure and Desire

Charlotte Bunch (1987) wrote in 1976, that in general, the feminist movement had been “less concerned about an individual woman's personal choice than about the institution of heterosexuality; less concerned with sex roles than with sex power” (p. 184). Socialist feminists, for example, were concerned not only with capitalism, but also the “separate power-relation between men and women that maintained women's oppression” (Segal 1983: 31). Other feminists suggested withdrawing from men and demands were made for women to examine the nature of their sexual practice (e.g. Leeds Revolutionary Feminists 1981). Different perspectives have
been offered to understand the tension that became apparent "between separatist and non-separatist feminist politics" (Segal 1983: 31). Many separatist feminists suggest that they pulled away from other feminists when their needs and issues were not being recognised in feminism and when it became clear to them that non-separatist feminists were not willing to make a detailed examination of their privilege and look for ways to assume a political identity (Jeffreys 1990). Many non-separatist feminists (although certainly not exclusively, see for instance work by Bright 1997, 1995, Califia 1994 and Sprinkle 1994, 19919) claim the split occurred as the prescriptive application of the personal and the political silenced "feminist explorations of sexuality" (Segal 1994: 55). Rejecting the links made between heterosexuality and male violence, 'pro-sex' feminists sought to examine desire and sexual practice, "its multiple meanings, sensations and connections" (Vance 1984:5).

The theorised split in separatist and non-separatist or lesbian and heterosexual feminism is obviously not that simple or clear-cut, rather it is complex and full of contradiction. It is far too easy to construct it as a divide between pro and anti-heterosex factions, but it did lead to different approaches to theorising. Where much of the work in the first half of this chapter examined critiques made by radical and lesbian feminists of the institution of heterosexuality, this section will look at some of the ways feminists have suggested of overcoming the gendered relationship between oppressors and oppressed. It examines the practice of heterosex, and as such attempts to offer alternatives to the construction of heterosex as necessarily gendered, and always about domination and subordination. Feminists working in this area see sexual pleasure as a means to overcome a repressive history that bounded and curtailed women's sexuality (MacKinnon 1987). Freedom is attained through pleasurable self-knowledge gained in sexual practice.

Early theorising in feminism around sexual practice was explicitly linked to the 'sexual revolution'. Koedt (1964/1994) used research on the clitoris to explode myths about women's sexuality. She sought to challenge the primacy of vaginal penetration and critique the coital imperative. She writes: -

All this leads to some interesting questions about conventional sex and our role in it. Men have orgasms essentially by friction with the vagina, not the clitoral area, which is external and not able to cause friction the
way penetration does. Women have thus been defined sexually in terms of what pleases men; our own biology has been properly analyzed. Instead, we are fed the myth of the liberated woman and her vaginal orgasm - an orgasm which in fact does not exist (p. 335-336).

Koedt declared a sexual pleasure for women that could be free from men. In using the research of sexologists like Masters and Johnson, which reduced sex to anatomy and sensation, feminists were able to re-interpret this so that sex was no longer "a microdrama of male dominance and female passivity; it was, properly understood and acted on, an affirmation of women's strength and independence" (Ehrenreich et al. 1987:69). Greer (1971), asserting women's right to sexual pleasure within heterosexual relationship, encouraged women to take control of their own pleasure:

The chief means of liberating women is replacing compulsiveness and compulsion by the pleasure principle [...] The essence of pleasure is spontaneity. In these cases spontaneity means rejecting the norm, the standard one must live up to, and establishing a self-regulating principle (p. 366).

While acknowledging the possible danger for women in heterosexual relationships, feminists such as Vance (1984) see the "positive possibilities of sexuality - explorations of the body, curiosity, intimacy, sensuality, adventure, excitement, human connection, basking in the infantile and non-rational" (p. 1) as sustaining and providing energy. Explorations of women's sexual identity helps in "imagining the textures and contours that would unfurl and proliferate in a safer space" (p. 3). The emphasis is on an examination of women's pleasure so that sex is not an "ideological battleground where the forces of good and evil fight to the death" but rather a place where "complex questions of pleasure, power and feminine desire" (Webster 1984:395) can be explored. Discussions of challenges to the construction of heterosex as necessarily about power and subordination, cover a range of different sexual practices from celibacy and the search for a good man, to redefinitions of sex or challenges through non-monogamy, to attempts to push the limits on sexual boundaries through radical activity. Each of these areas, will be discussed briefly, before considering the relationship between practice and theory.
1.3.1 Refusing Heterosexual Sex

Some feminists propose celibacy as a means to challenge the construction of heterosex. Cline (1993) sees celibacy as a means to subvert the "sacred cow of consumerism" (p. 1). In choosing restraint in sexual activities it provides a "sense of being single, and operating on one's own" (p. 5). She suggests that celibacy is more about "self-determination rather than with genital or non-genital activity" (p. 5) and as such, does not suggest that women withdraw completely from sexual relationships with men, but rather through self-determination, exist outside of a patriarchal order. Other feminists offer a more political interpretation, turning celibacy into an act of resistance. This can occur in three ways:

...she resists male-constructed sexual 'needs,' she resists the misnaming of her act as prudery, and she especially resists the patriarchy's attempt to make its work of subordinating women easier by 'consensually' constructing her desire in its own oppressive image (Southern Women's Writing Collective 1994: 516)

Unlike Cline's disengagement from politics, these feminists suggest a radical form of celibacy that insists sex must stop "before male supremacy will be defeated. [...] By performing the political act of sex resistance, the power imbalance is challenged and the practice of sexuality is exposed (p. 517-8).

In a manner similar to that of political lesbianism, feminists supporting celibacy as a political choice, suggest women withdraw from sexual activity with men. Unlike notions of separatism, women choosing to be celibate remain, at least in their public face, identified as heterosexual. Some of the problems with the theories offered here should be clear. Cline does not provide information on the process of becoming 'self-determined' and, although celibate, continuing to engage in relationships while existing outside of a patriarchal structure. The Southern Women's Writing Collective proposes a far more radical solution, but in continuing to identify as heterosexual does little to challenge its current structure.

1.3.2 Good Men

When challenged about their sexual relationships, some heterosexual feminists have defended themselves by attributing their ability to continue their relationship to their luck in finding a 'good' man. "With the required skill and energy, and a significant degree of luck," writes Beloff (1993:39), "one can enter into and
maintain the status of wife and of mother and have as a base for all of one's life, a family home". Others speak of finding men who were "emotionally vulnerable and intellectually open" (Yuval-Davis 1993:53), sharing "fundamental values" (S. Kitzinger 1993:54), meeting men who may be "feminists or fellow travellers" (Lips & Freedman 1993:56), or desiring partnerships that can be "egalitarian, democratic and supportive" (Gill & Walker 1993:69).

In answering the question, 'aren't there any exceptional men?' Hagan (1993) replies: -

No. The myth of the exceptional man is a product of denial. [...] To pretend that a few of us have escaped [from the conditioning of the dominant culture] destroys our only opportunity to create authentic relationships that require men to confront and change their basic conditioning (p. 67)

From Hagan's perspective, all men are conditioned to be oppressive to women. Only in challenging their role in oppression will they be able to acknowledge and give up their privilege. It is not a matter of luck, but rather political commitment.

Despite the declarations of the feminists above, some work has noted that being a 'good' man, committed to the questioning of masculinity, is not necessarily found attractive to women. Schultz (1995) writes: -

If she [a feminist] becomes involved with a feminist man who feels the same need to examine assumptions about gender (including his own masculinity) on a political and personal level, both partners are in a state of flux. Within this shifting matrix, men who explore alternative ways of being sexual are often considered undesirable: too many assumptions are up for grabs (p. 59).

Hunter (1993) expresses a similar problem: -

A male person with little or no interest in trying to dominate and oppress females might find the male role script distasteful, and consider relating sexually to women differently; indeed, from overhearing female conversations, it might seem that women are perpetually on the lookout
for such fellows. Unfortunately, women may demand a more sensitive man, but aren't sure of what to do with one when they find one (p. 157).

Both Hunter and Schultz do not blame women, but rather consider it as part of the sexual script or routine into which both women and men are socialised. Schultz suggests that feminists seek out relationships with traditional men "not only because that is the kind of man they have been taught to desire, but because as the woman's identity shifts and changes, she can use this man as a reference point and as a source of strength and stability" (1995:59). Hunter writes that erotic attraction: -

...depends on the tension created by setting men against women in a power struggle, setting them at cross-purposes with conflicting interests that create the possibilities of vulnerability and domination (1993:163)

In order to find scripts that operate outside of these patterns, Schultz turns to queer theory and Hunter calls for a re-definition of heterosexuality to include a range of masculine behaviours.

1.3.3 Redefining Sexual Activity

Disputing the connection between sexual activity and an heterosexual institution which oppresses women, feminists seeking to redefine heterosex dispute the link made between the penis and the phallus (Smart 1996). Charging these theories with a biological essentialism, Segal (1987) writes: -

...we are forced to leave behind the complex historical formation of men's social power - and how this social power confers a symbolic power to the penis as the defining characteristic of the male - to return to a naked sexual capacity which can be, and therefore is, used to control women. In the description of the relentless power of the steely prick, the biological, so forcefully ejected from the front door, swaggers in, cocksure, through the back (p. 101).

Rather, Segal suggests, sexuality should be redefined and placed within context. Likewise Jackson (1996) writes that although the act of penetration within a patriarchal society is loaded with symbolic meanings of male power and can often be coercive, "it cannot be assumed that it invariably carries this singular meaning" (p. 35). She goes on, "to argue that it does is to treat the physical act as meaningful
in itself, as magically embodying male power without any intervening processes" (p. 35). Like Segal, Jackson objects to the link made between women's pleasure in heterosexual sex and the message of some feminists (e.g. Jeffreys 1990; Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1993; Kitzinger 1994a) that "we must all be wallowing in a masochistic eroticisation of our subordination" (p. 35).

In attempts to break the connection between power and penetration, some feminists have tried to redefine what 'real sex' means from "sex = coitus = something men do to women" (Jackson 1999:75), to something that includes a much wider range of experience. Chalker suggests that "this view of sexuality encompasses a broad continuum of activities that may provide sexual pleasure - a dream, a thought, a conversation, cuddling, kissing, sensual massage, dancing, oral/genital stimulation, and intercourse" (p. 49). Orgasm may be a component of these activities, but it is not necessary, "nor is intercourse any more important than other forms of sexual expression" (p. 49). Redefining sex means removing penetration and male orgasm as the boundaries of 'real sex'. Ehrenreich et al. (1986) note that "we insisted on a broader, more playful notion of sex, more compatible with women's broader erotic possibilities, more respectful of women's needs" (p. 193). Some feminists suggest an egalitarian form of sexual activity where "'sex' is defined by what it isn't: any sexual interaction based on power such as the power men have over women" (Newton & Walton 1984:242). Others assert their right to empowerment, integrity and respect for the choices they make (Rowland 1996).

While noting the importance of the redefinition of sex in recognising "women's broader erotic possibilities" (Ehrenreich et al. 1986: 193) and the promotion of non-penetration as a safer sex option (McPhillips et al.: in press), other feminists offer criticisms. Newton and Walton (1984) highlight the difficulty in understanding and doing 'egalitarian sex'. Scott (1987) suggests that women bear the burden of redefining sex and insisting on its practice, while Campbell (1980) suspects that the redefinition has little influence outside of feminism. My own concern with attempts to redefine heterosexual activity lies in its address. It is unclear whether the redefinition proposed is of heterosexual activity in general for all women, or to make heterosexual activity acceptable within feminism (e.g. is this sex just for feminists, or for everyone?). If it is the latter, it does little to actually change the oppressive structures of heterosexuality itself - those intrinsic qualities raised in the first section. If it is the former option, many difficulties have already been
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acknowledged. In particular, research on safer sex campaigns has emphasised the difficulty for women to negotiate for sex on their own terms and the continuing primacy of penetration to sexual relationships.

As both Holland et al. (1991; 1994 & 1996) and Miles (1993) found "safer sex is not easily negotiated within heterosexual relationships" (p. 509). The process of empowerment and negotiation around sex is made even more difficult because of young women's inability to recognise and identify their own pleasure and desire (Fine 1988; Holland et al. 1996). Without a clear understanding of what they actually want, young women do not know for what they are negotiating. Gavey (1996) and Holland et al. (1994) found women's inability to articulate their desire limits their ability to negotiate for pleasurable sex. Extending this perspective, Crawford et al. (1994) suggest that what is needed is a new discourse of "sex as pleasure, separating pleasure from procreation, and acknowledging women as active, desiring and sexually assertive subjects, not necessarily centred around the erect penis" which can "challenge and confront established power structures" (p. 585).

Many of these studies found that sex was still considered to be penetration of the vagina by a penis, followed by male orgasm. Proper intercourse "starts with penetration and ends when the male achieves orgasm" (Holland et al. 1996:30). Young people describe penetrative sex as a natural and normal part of a relationship that symbolises the intimacy and love between the couple (Gavey et al. 1999). Encouragement, in safe sex literature, to use a condom, centralises sex as penetrative (Scott 1987).

1.3.4 Non-Monogamy

Some feminists suggest that practising non-monogamy is a means of subverting the constraints usually placed by heteropatriarchy. Much of the theorising has come from lesbian feminists reflecting on the possibilities for relationships not built in the heterosexual pattern (e.g. Bindel & Scanlon 1996; Bindel et al. 1993; Rosa 1994). It is seen as having the potential to challenge gendered power relations, highlight the political problems of heterosex and disrupt some of the assumptions that are made about behaviour (Campbell 1980; Robinson 1997). Robinson (1997) warns that in most work "non-monogamy is equated with 'swinging' or 'extra-marital' sex, not with a conscious feminist politics which sees non-monogamy as a potentially radical act" (p. 154, and see Jeffreys 1990). She
argues that non-monogamy should be re-examined within the new feminist debates on heterosex as a viable option for women to employ agency in their sexual decisions. Stelboum (1999) writing about non-monogamy for lesbians, suggests that as a political statement it "rejects the confining heterosexual models of monogamy" (p. 45) and can challenge heteropatriarchy.

While non-monogamy may reject the heteronormativity of monogamy and the attempts by the heterosexual institution to control the access of men to women, it nonetheless can be problematic. Although women engaging in non-monogamy are actively choosing to reject a traditional feminine role, none of the literature addresses the continuing coital imperative that remains within the sexual activity. Second, it is not clear how engaging in sexual relationships with a series of men will be removed from the power implicit in heterosexual sex. Finally, as action in isolation and within the context of a patriarchal society, its meaning would be ambiguous, particularly in the manner in which these activities would challenge a heterosexual institution.

1.3.5 Pushing the Limits

Taking the argument of liberation through sexual activity to its conclusion, some feminists (heterosexual, lesbian and bisexual) suggest that sexual pleasure and its exploration can be a means of empowerment and subversion of heteropatriarchy. Celebrating the right to consensual sexual pleasure, they also recognise the dangers of this desire in current society (e.g. Vance 1984). Segal (1994) encourages women to reclaim their "sexual agency" and "revive a richer and more inspiring feminist culture and politics" (p. xi). Feminists should take charge of their sex lives, recognising the oppressive discourses by which they are constructed and challenge heterosexism so that "everytime women enjoy sex with men, confident in the knowledge that this, just this, is what we want, and how we want it, [...] we are already confounding the cultural and political meanings given to heterosexuality in dominant sexual discourses" (p. 266). She stresses that "there is feminism and there is fucking" and that "straight feminists [...] have everything to gain from asserting our non-coercive desire to fuck if, when, how and as we choose" (p. 318). Hollibaugh (1984), a lesbian feminist, describes the celebration of sexual desire as taking a "riskier stance to define and act on our desires", while Nestle (1983) remembers her mothers enjoyment of sex, writing, "don't scream penis at me but help to change the world so no woman feels shame or fear because she likes to fuck" (p. 91). "I'm thought of as a person who is optimistic about sex, someone who
thinks of sexual knowledge as salvation and inspiration" writes Bright (1997:18) explaining her crusade for sexual liberation to counter the "stupid sex questions" (p. 16) by which feminism has been 'torpedoed'.

MacKinnon (1987) calls this the "derepression hypothesis" (p. 71) because it is based on viewing civilisation as male dominant in which female sexuality has been repressed. It assumes that anything which gives pleasure is "'good' - typically natural, healthy, pleasurable, wholesome, [...] and should be approved of" (p. 71). So in order to reclaim sexual pleasure for women they celebrate "the diversity of desire and refuse to condemn practices like S/M" (Cameron 1992:42). "Male dominance is curiously absent," writes Jackson (1997:60), "as if women are subordinated by or submit to nothing or no-one in particular". Challenges to libertarianism have resulted in defensive replies (e.g. Califia 1994), essentialist justifications (Smart 1996), claims of 'victim feminism' (e.g. Bright 1997; Roiphe 1993), and constructions of sex as a matter of individual choice (e.g. Segal 1994). Neglected within ideas of 'derepression' are the power structures that frame each sexual activity. Segal (1994) for instance, insists on women's "non-coercive desire to fuck" (p. 318), while ignoring that women have yet to come to terms with the coercion to make them fuck. Until women have a clear understanding of the discourses that pressure them into heterosexual sex, it is impossible to assert this right (Gavey et al. 1999). Segal (1994) assumes strong, empowered women who can stand up against current thought and demand to have their sex their own way. Commenting on Segal (1994), but also providing a central critique of libertarian attitudes towards sexual freedom, Jackson writes that:

...heterosexuality is not about anatomical males having sex with anatomical females, but is an institutionalised sexual practice which could not exist in any meaningful sense in the absence of the hierarchical division between men and women. Coercion and inequality are not accidental features of heterosexuality, but are constitutive of it. [...] It is not just the normativity of heterosexuality that is the problem, but the subordination of women which is integral to it (Jackson 1997:98).

Sexual agency and sexual freedom, while desirable attributes, are not fully and equally available to women. Without an examination of the oppressive structures that surround sexual activity, it remains firmly rooted in inequality. First, it is largely based on individualistic approaches to women's freedom. Few connections are
made and little understanding of feminism as a communal movement is apparent in the theories offered here. It is for the individual to assert their 'non-coercive right to fuck', rather than for change to be made for all women on a larger scale. Second, considering the practice of heterosex does not confront the ways that we think and fantasise about sex. Can we claim that freedom to act sexually is really freedom, when it is based on fantasies like these:

I'm the perfect example of someone who has a million kinky fantasies that I have no intention of ever performing. I love to imagine being a submissive, degraded punished damsel in gang-bang distress, but in real life I can barely take the softest spanking. I'm an S/M tiger in my dreams, but a wuss between the sheets (Bright 1997:121).

These fantasies or dreams usually begin with my body being stretched, one brutal man on each limb, pulling me in opposite directions, literally spreading me wide open so that some immensely huge penis - there is no one or nothing on the end of it - begins to enter me, stretching me, ripping me, my vagina, wide open as it pushes its way deeper into me (Rose Ann in Friday 1973:121)

Simply asserting rights to sexual pleasure, does not in anyway examine the structures of heterosexuality, the pressures and coercions, which make these kind of scenarios sexually exciting for women. Finally, a discourse of sexual freedom simply works to mask the inequalities and oppressions that exist. By speaking this way about sexual practice, feminists do not need to face the inequalities that may be integral to their relationships or condemn their desire to continue to practise heterosex.

1.4 Feminist Heterosexuality: Practice and Institution

Research around feminism and heterosexuality is either a critique of the institution of heterosexuality or a reconstruction of the practice of heterosex. It is little wonder that discussions between critics of the institution and supporters of the practice have frequently been acrimonious when they are, ultimately, discussing different things. A critique of heterosexuality as an institution does not consider its establishment in or perpetuation of sexual practice. It is theorised that "only in the system of oppression that is male supremacy does the oppressor actually invade and colonise the interior of the body of the oppressed " (Leeds Revolutionary
Feminists 1981:5), but this is not the experience of women who insist that "they have voluntarily chosen to engage in sexual intercourse, and that they enjoy it, and have orgasms through it" (Kitzinger 1994a: 200, her emphasis). As well, in analysing and criticising the heterosexual institution, feminists do not offer a means to change heterosexual practice, to remove the power differential, control factors or possibility of male violence (with the exception of complete separation from men). At the same time, proponents of alternative sexual practice as a means to subvert or resist heteropatriarchy, rarely make the links to the wider institution of heterosexuality or explicitly detail the way in which their actions will challenge the oppressive structures. While critiques of the institution are broadly based, solutions found in sexual practice are individually based. For Hamblin (1985) an examination of the practice of heterosex "accepts male power and control as 'givens' and attempts to get a better deal for women within this male-defined context" (p. 106). She sees the institution as based on male power, and to which the only solution is separatism. She suggests that the problem with both these approaches is that they do not allow for the possibility of change. "The first accepts the status quo of male power as 'given' around which it hopes to accommodate women. The second, whilst recognising the centrality of male power within heterosexual relationships, sees it as static and unchangeable" (p. 106). She asks "how can we confront and challenge it in our own sexual relationships with individual men?" (p. 107).

One area in which there is the possibility to make the links between theory or institution and practice is in research on heterosexual feminists. Little work covers this topic. In 1985, Hamblin reported on the findings of a questionnaire that had been included with Spare Rib. Eighty-four questionnaires were returned, and like the study from Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1993), revealed a “long grey stream of heterosexual misery” (p. 12). They described their sexual practice as a ritual of heterosexuality operating along a continuum from normal sex, to the “creation of specific sexual expectations”, “crude and subtle sexual pressure” and “ultimately legitimates the use of male force against women” (p. 108). Women reported that definitions of real sex involving penetration were influential in setting expectations of sexual relationships and were used to legitimise pressure and force, particularly when the women were seen to resist. She found that “most men are extremely reluctant to relinquish control in heterosexual relationships and allow the woman the space and opportunity she needs to express (or even discover) her own sexuality” (p. 114). Women talked of their struggles to overturn the meanings of sexuality defined by a heterosexual institution and the challenges this created in their own
relationships as they worked to transform them. When asked of what a sexual relationship with a man on their own terms would consist, respondents provided answers such as space, control, not to have to always give in, sharing, no power-trips, recognition of them as a person, being able to say no and not feel guilty and "being able to satisfy your sexual appetite in the way in which you wish" (p. 121). Hamblin claims that these women, in actively working to create sexual relationships outside of the confines of the institution of heterosexuality, were "actively engaging in the process of creating a feminist heterosexuality" (p. 123, her emphasis). In Hamblin's research, we find evidence of attempts by heterosexual feminists to deal with their sexual practice, but few links being made to the institution of heterosexuality. In trying to recreate their sexual lives in order to step outside of the confines of institutionalised heterosexuality, the feminists are not forcing change on the institution.

In contrast to Hamblin's findings, Wilkinson and Kitzinger's (1993) respondents chiefly addressed heterosexuality as an institution, rarely addressing their sexual activities directly (although exceptions can be found in contributions by Brown, Gill and Walker, and Thomas [1993]). Adopting a radical feminist perspective, many of the contributors sought to critique the institution of heterosexuality and their placement within it. Robinson (1993) addresses its hegemonic nature, Mapstone (1993) considers inequality in the workplace, and Sheila Kitzinger (1993) looks at its role in childbirth. Here again is evidence of the split between practice and institution. Hollway (1993) responded to the collection and complained of the failure by the contributors "to address questions of heterosexual desire, pleasure and satisfaction" (p. 412). She would have liked "an affirmation of the pleasures of heterosexual sex" (Thomas 1994:318). As Thompson (1994) notes, and I have outlined earlier, considerations of heterosexuality as an institution are usually critical, whereas those that address heterosexual pleasure, like Hollway, attempt to reclaim it through constructions of resistance, subversion and challenge.

The difficulty with either of these approaches is that they address institution and practice separately, but conflate the issues within them, treating heterosexuality "as a monolithic, unitary entity" (Jackson 1999:164) and not considering the complexities of both heterosexual practice and institution. As Jackson writes, heterosexuality becomes either simply eroticised power in its institutional form, or a pleasurable experience that must be redefined in order to be reclaimed. She
suggests that it is necessary to understand and conceptualise heterosexuality as both a unitary and fragmented concept. "When talking about the system, the institution, then, we need a unitary concept; but when talking about identities, practices and experience we can afford to - indeed must - address diversity" (p. 164). I would suggest that it is looking at the intersection between practice and institution or between practice and theory in which a feminist heterosexual discourse and identity will be developed. Like Jackson, I do not think it is necessary to attack individual heterosexual feminists, but rather to "address intersections between different identities, social locations and patterns of dominance and subordination" (p. 165) through collecting, understanding and analysing the experiences and practices of women who identify as heterosexual and feminist, within a culture imbued and constrained by the institution of heterosexuality.

1.5 Moving Forward

The central concern of this research project is to consider heterosexual feminists’ practice of heterosex, and through that to address some of the critiques made in this review. Like Jeffreys (1990) and Dworkin (1974), I too see the act of heterosex as representative of the moment at which women’s subordination is continually recreated. Henry (1984) questions the "place of sexual issues in perpetuating male dominance" (p. 40). I would suggest that sexual issues are deeply ingrained in the perpetuation of male dominance and that "male power in heterosexuality remains firmly entrenched" (Jackson 1999a: 40). Heterosex is the starting point from which theories to challenge it develops, and as such it is necessary that our discussions of heterosexuality as practice and institution begin with heterosex. Feminism, in its concern with the practice of heterosexuality, has ignored the activity of heterosex. I believe it is necessary to begin discussing the act and move outward to and make links between, the practice, politics and institution of heterosexuality. Unlike Thomas (1994), I think that understanding what goes on between the sheets, is directly linked to who washes them, and I am interested in how heterosexual feminists make that link.
Notes to Chapter One

1 By institutionalised heterosexuality, I refer to the way in which normative constructions of heterosexuality are "bolstered by law, the state, [...] social construction" (Jackson 1999: 5) and the media.

2 The term heteropatriarchy recognises "the way in which heterosexuality is institutionalized and practised under patriarchy" (Jackson 1999: 133). In addition, like patriarchy, it is not used as an absolute term suggesting that all women are oppressed in the same way all the time, but rather as something which pejoratively positions women in general while recognising that their experiences of power and oppression may vary.

3 I do not mean to suggest that rape is only something that happens in heterosexual relationships, but rather that it is based on an eroticised power difference, in this way, anyone is a potential victim of rape - gay men, lesbians or other heterosexual men.

4 Not only capitalist societies benefit from women's work, Rubin (1975) notes that "women are oppressed in societies which can by no stretch of the imagination be described as capitalist" (163) and that their labour is also exploited.

5 Discussions around heterosexual privilege have also acted to divide feminists along other lines. Black feminists writers (e.g. Moore, 1998) suggests that for some women who are oppressed through race or class, as well as sex, aligning yourself with a man may provide privileges which help to alleviate some of the other oppressive circumstances. Researchers on disability have noted the tension apparent when a feminist speaker, addressing a disabled audience, presented sexual harassment as an issue that affected all women. One woman remarks, "You know, I use a wheelchair, and when I go down the street I do not get to be sexually harassed. I hear nondisabled women complaining about it, but I don't ever get treated as a sexual object" (Asch & Fine 1988:29, my emphasis). For this woman, sexual harassment becomes a privilege because it recognises her as sexual.

6 Although Parnaby (1996) notes the overwhelming 'maleness' of queer activism, and the reclamation of the name queer itself is based on its original use against gay men.

7 Although Bright, Califia and Sprinkle have all defined themselves as feminist in the past, and credit feminism for their initial sexual liberation (Bright, 1997; Califia 1994), they currently employ the term sex radicals.
2.0 Pleasurable Viewing and Viewing Pleasure

Considering feminist thinking on heterosexuality and its omnipotence, one is usually drawn to ask how and why it has consistently avoided direct challenge. How is it normalised and maintained? How are we inculcated in its constant reproduction? One site in which it is claimed that the heterosexual institution is maintained, re-asserted and normalised is through the mass media. Feminist researchers have long been interested in the influence of the media in framing and contributing to women's oppression. Power, pleasure and gender have been the structuring framework of feminist media researchers' examination of the media process and its product. It assumes a connection between the practice of media production, the media text and its representation in terms of gender as a structuring mechanism of women's "material and symbolic worlds" and their "experiences of them" (van Zoonen 1994: 3). It has examined both the representation of women and the creation of these representations as well as the limiting effects of the stereotypes produced. It challenges and problematises areas of representation and production, and questions their significance, their meaning and their relationship to the processes of consumption.

Central to these debates and analyses are issues of the construction and representation of women's sexuality. Researchers query the nature and effect of this construction (e.g. Winship 1987), its position within a framework of spectatorship (e.g. Kuhn 1985), the types of meanings that are 'constructed' (e.g. Pollock 1977/1992), their role in the social construction of heterosexuality (e.g. Epstein & Steinberg 1995), and the ability of women to resist these images (e.g. MacDonald 1995).

Researchers are also interested in women as an audience and their consumption of media texts that institutionalise and reify heterosexuality such as romance novels (e.g. Radway 1984) and soap operas (e.g. Hobson 1982). The concern in this work is the nature of pleasure, its problematisation, and its possibilities for empowerment or resistance to patriarchal hegemony (e.g. Seiter et al. 1989).

Situated within the structuring framework of power, pleasure and gender is an argument of viewing pleasure and pleasurable viewing. Working within feminist media studies this chapter considers how the institution of the media plays a role in
maintaining and normalising heterosexuality and male dominance. In moving from a
discussion of the representation of the institution of heterosexuality within media
texts to its consumption by audience members, we move from a consideration of
mediated heterosexuality to the daily practice of heterosexuality within women's
lives.

2.1 Mediated Heterosexuality - Viewing Pleasure

Second wave feminism was quick to identify the patterns of power that
existed throughout the mass media. It was clear that men owned and controlled the
media and that it was their ideas, opinions and values which dominated both in
production and representation (Dyer 1987; Coote & Campbell 1982). Tuchman
(1978) suggested that women are "symbolically annihilated" in the media through
under-representation. Others (e.g. Courtney & Whipple 1983; Haskell 1987; Lazier
& Kendrick 1993; MacDonald 1995; Mellen 1973) focused on misrepresentation.
Whether through quantity or quality many feminist researchers take the view that
media representation has the power to shape women's self-understanding (e.g.
Ferguson 1983; Myers & Biocca 1992; Wolf 1992); and in response much work has
been done to "combat cultural stereotyping of women and their experience" (Dyer

Feminist media research examining institutionalised heterosexuality and the
representation of women's sexuality tends to concentrate on two broad areas. The
first examines the involvement of women in the production of media images, based
on the assumption that a lack of women involved in production provides a
foundation for the limited and inaccurate representations discovered through an
analysis of the text. Research assessed the role of women in media production, the
extent of misrepresentation, under-representation and the codes and signs that the
media text relies on to limit women's sexuality. Much of the research has been used
as a basis for intervention within the media and "[t]here have been calls [by
feminists] for equal opportunities in employment and a challenge mounted to
discredit sexist content" (Dyer 1987: 7). The text itself therefore becomes the
second main area of research. Using techniques of content and textual analysis,
feminist researchers examine the representations of women and their sexuality in
the media and find them distorted and imprecise. Such research operates within the
dominant 'effects' paradigm (Gitlin 1978) which originated from American empirical
social science. Moving beyond the text and incorporating a 'deduced other',

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researchers working from a psychoanalytic theoretical perspective examine both the text and its relationship to an imagined spectator and the impact this has for women in developing a limited subjectivity.

2.1.1 Representation: The Media Text

Feminist examinations of media representation through quantitative content analysis, qualitative textual analysis and semiotics have generally found representations of women to be limited and stereotyped and constructed for the benefit of men and to the detriment of women. In order to understand more completely the relationship between the media text and the representation of women and their sexuality, each of these methods of analysis will be discussed in detail, providing an explanation not only of the form of analysis but its usefulness in assessing the relationship between women's sexuality and the media and its purported detriment to women in general.

2.1.1.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis defined by Berelson (1952) as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (cited in van Zoonen 1994: 69) has been used by feminist researchers to examine both the under-representation of women in the media as well as their distorted and stereotypical nature. In research using quantitative content analysis, representations of women in a particular media and the range of roles in which they are represented or the themes that are incorporated in relation to them are counted. This allows for a large amount of media material to be analysed and as such can make claims to being representative of a particular type of media product. It has been useful for feminist research across a range of media as a means to analyse representations in advertisements (e.g. Courtney & Whipple 1983), news media (Sanders 1993) or as experts or authorities in the media (Marecek et al. 1978). For instance, Gerbner et al. (1982) looked at a yearly week long sample of prime time drama programmes from 1969 to 1981 and found that in general men outnumbered women by three to one. Unsurprisingly, the only programmes in which women are found to be represented equally to men are in daytime serial dramas (Cassata et al. 1979) where not only do they comprise 50 percent of the cast, but older women are found to have more significant roles than older men.
Of particular interest is content analysis that examines the stereotyping of women's sexuality and their sex roles and is useful in providing a 'snapshot' on the status of women within the media text. Early studies such as Bardwick and Schumann (1967) found that women inhabiting 'commercial land' seldom work outside of their home, abhor odours and dirt, have primary responsibility for the family and whose central concern is their appearance (similar results were found by studies such as Dominick & Rauch 1972; McArthur & Resko 1975; and Henderson & Greenberg 1980). Good sexuality for women was contained by marriage (Seiter 1983). Men on the other hand are intelligent, dominant, the voice of authority and sexy both inside and outside of the home. Interestingly, the results of these studies have not changed drastically. Lazier and Kendrick (1993) in their summary of studies on women in advertising found that the women occupy three main roles - as mothers, housekeepers and aesthetic objects, and that women continue to be seen less frequently than men, to be more one-dimensional characters, and represented as less intelligent and in a narrow range of roles (most of which are generally low-status or subservient). In re-assessing the work conducted on sex-roles and stereotypes, Lazier and Kendrick conclude that the advertisements do, in some way, reflect a dominant heterosexual culture, when that culture is seen as one of patriarchal power which protects against change and which:

...turns the issue of imagery into one of power and explains why 'modern' ads reflect the mythical more than the mathematical. The ads also reflect the ongoing confusion in our culture [...] of what women are - as we grope with what we'll let today's women do or be, we at least agree on how she will look." (p. 207).

Feminists analysing pornography and its representation of women's sexuality also utilised content analysis. Like much mainstream media research, content analysis is used as a means of assessment. Research considers the types of roles portrayed (e.g. Cowan et al. 1988), the construction of sexual desire (e.g. Brosius et al. 1993), the racist and sexist content (e.g. Cowan & Campbell 1994), violent content (e.g. Malamuth & Spinner 1980) and more frequently, the role and portrayal of women (e.g. Jensen & Dines 1998).

Brosius et al. (1993) conducted a content analysis of 50 randomly selected pornographic videotapes targeted at heterosexual consumers. Their purpose was to examine the reality of contemporary pornography. Their analysis showed how
the sexual ‘reality’ of pornographic films significantly diverges from a feminist construction of a ‘sexual’ reality for women, but how little it differs from actual reality.

Jensen and Dines (1998) content analysis supported Andrea Dworkin’s (1988) four elements of pornography - hierarchy, objectification, submission and violence - finding that women were frequently fetishised, centralised and controlled by men, although it was the male pleasure (represented by ejaculation) which was the ultimate goal. Violence in the videos was “portrayed as heightening the erotic charge of the scene” (p. 82). Within novels, “[t]he power imbalance [...] was overwhelming” (p. 91). Reflecting the intrinsic power differentials of institutionalised heterosexuality, men typically were in positions of power, with women as their subordinates ready and willing to have sex. Women were objectified, degraded and treated with violence.

Content analysis for feminist media researchers is extremely useful in illustrating the limited and possibly negative relationship between women, their sexuality and the media, particularly in pornography, as well as highlighting the ongoing maintenance of heterosexuality. It is clear from the examples cited (and the many others available in bibliographies such as Signorelli 1985) that content analysis provides a persuasive body of literature to demonstrate the stereotyping and limited portrayal of women and their sexuality.

As a method, content analysis is restricted in what it is able to tell us about the construction of women and heterosexuality in the media. Although it is able to provide a summary of a large body of material it tends to give precedence to the surface content as the place where meaning is constructed, without looking at the meaning embedded in, or implied by the representations. It also places weight on the frequency of occurrence as being indicative of meaning and does not take into consideration the interaction of both the producers and the audience in meaning creation (van Zoonen 1994) or that the apparent objectiveness of this method is often tailored by qualitative concerns. Content analysis provides a clear indication that the media offers limited representations of women and encodes the institution of heterosexuality to men’s advantage, but does not provide a deeper analysis of the underlying themes and discourses which structure this representation. It also does not tell us what the particular meanings these representations may carry or the ways that meanings can be contested.
2.1.1.2 Textual Analysis and Semiotics

Qualitative textual analysis, conducted through a process of close reading of a small sample of texts focuses more intently on image construction and narrative structure. Similarly, semiotics examines the signs and codes contained within a media product to understand their ideological function. Feminist textual and semiotic analyses examine issues of power, gender and ideology, in many different types of media products - film (e.g. Rapping 1993), advertising (e.g. Kane 1990/1997) or melodrama (e.g. Ang 1990a). Of central importance to this chapter are the textual analyses or semiotic research that feminists conduct in regards to the construction and coding of women's sexuality, the ideological limitations placed on it and the normalising of heterosexuality to the exclusion of any other sexual option.

Construction of Women's Sexuality

Feminist researchers have concluded that women's sexuality is always constructed as 'other', as different from and less than men's. In certain instances it is constructed as predatory and dangerous, in others virginal and simplistic - it is never posited as natural and normal. Mellen's (1973) work examining women and their sexuality in film remains relevant today. She found that in general sexually liberated female characters were forced into degrading situations and rarely left with options for happiness. This theme is still apparent in current films like Body of Evidence, Thelma and Louise, and Pretty Woman where sexually active women are belittled or punished for their liberated sexuality.

Using an in-depth analysis of Klute, The Touch, Carnal Knowledge and The Diary of a Mad Housewife, Mellen illustrates the limited and categorical ways in which women's sexuality is constructed. Her conclusion is that:

...women are destined to act out the sexual roles of either (a) seductive mother [...] (b) castrating bitch [...] or (c) passive, childlike recipient of the brutalities of the male (p.73).

These stereotyped sexual roles and identities remain and are repeatedly reasserted in current films. It is not difficult to think of examples similar to the ones used by Mellen - Diane Keaton's character in The Good Mother represents the seductive mother, unable to be both sexual (in being unmarried and having a lover) and a parent. Both Glenn Close in Fatal Attraction and Demi Moore in Disclosure are clear
examples of the castrating bitch, although the punishment for the former is far more severe than the latter, and the character played by Kim Basinger in 9 1/2 Weeks is a passive childlike woman at whom the males' brutalities are directed.

Linda Singer (1990) refers to many of the same narrowly defined sexual roles outlined by Mellen, but goes further to suggest that the sexual identity of the women in films moves between that of object of desire to castrating predator, but rarely beyond these confines. She refers specifically to Glenn Close's character in Fatal Attraction, but the desperation of the sexual identity this creates for women can be found in Disclosure, Angel Heart and Black Widow.

In analysing Blue Velvet, Wittenberg and Gooding-Williams (1990) note the excess of visual clues that divide women into 'good' and 'bad'. The colour of hair and clothing, the redemptive or condemnatory power, the virginal purity as opposed to the alluring sexuality, all act as visual, aural and auditory codes to the stereotyped sexuality available to the characters in film and coded meanings of heterosexuality.

Finally, Elayne Rapping (1993) updates the ideas originally expressed by Mellen. She finds that women appearing in current movies are “far more demeaned and abused than in other media” (p. 44) and that the characters fall into four categories. She writes:

For single, independent women, the dominant trend is the bitch-from-hell horror film in which the frustrated, bitter, 'independent' woman puts some version of the perfect American home or workplace in mortal danger (p. 44).

Specifically she refers to movies such as Fatal Attraction, The Hand that Rocks the Cradle, Single, White, Female and Basic Instinct. She claims that the message in all these films is quite clear:

...women who choose, or are forced, to make it on their own inevitably become so deranged with unhappiness as to represent a threat to all of western civilization. Stop this woman before she ruins the world! (p. 45).

The second category of single women that she identifies is the pathetic 'woman on the loose' who “can't really cut it in a man's world” (p. 45) including
characters in *Jagged Edge*, *Sliver* and *Jennifer 8*. She claims that these movies serve to warn "single, ambitious women that they are no match for the male world they dare to enter on their own" (p. 46).

For women attached to men the roles are even starker. She identifies one role as "the property and playthings of generally attractive and sympathetic men" (p.46). These women appear in *Indecent Proposal, Mad Dog and Glory* and *Honeymoon in Vegas*. In each case, the main male characters barter for the women. In the final category "fantasy men miraculously save women stuck with brutish mates, offering true love and companionship (of a kind generally not seen in movies or real life) with a man worthy of it" (p. 46-7). She finds the premise of these movies both absurd and insulting. "In a world in which women - in our personal lives at least - do in fact have the right to choose mates or matelessness, to divorce, to move to another town, to change careers, etc." (p. 47) these movies appear as a travesty of women's abilities.

Interestingly, although a body of work exists on women's sexuality and its construction and misrepresentation in media texts, little research analyses actual heterosex scenes in mainstream film. Mellen (1973) mentions briefly that the films she examined do not offer images of women "engaged in a mature, mutually satisfying sexual relationship with a male who recognizes her as an individual" (p. 73) and that film's "sexual daring and [...] obligatory nude scene do nothing to conceal a negative view of women" (p. 73). Generally research has been "more about what is sexy than about sex" (Smith 1991: 132) and represents a deficiency in the research about the media's construction of sexuality. Textual analyses have generally been limited to the representations of the female characters and the ways in which that femininity is encoded as sexual, rather than with a more detailed examination of the images of this sexuality in action, most obviously within sex scenes. Of the films mentioned in this section on the construction of women's sexuality, *Klute, Body of Evidence, Fatal Attraction, Disclosure, 9 1/2 Weeks, Angel Heart, Blue Velvet, Indecent Proposal* and *Basic Instinct* all contain explicit scenes of heterosex which have clearly been ideologically coded and are available for analysis as places in which sexuality is being constructed. Feminist media research needs to develop a clear understanding of the textual importance of these sex scenes and their role in constructing mediated sexuality.
Feminist research has considered images of sexual activity in terms of pornography. Andrea Dworkin (1981) has used extensive textual analysis to reveal what she believes are links between representation and ideology. In conducting her textual analysis Dworkin attempts to find the links between the institutionalised male power of heterosexuality and its representation in pornography. She analyses films, magazine photographs and novels to find evidence of different forms of power in the text and offers examples of these same powers in society. For Dworkin pornography is the site in which men express their true beliefs about women so that she is controlled by objectification, violence and terror. It is interesting to note that although Dworkin claims links between representation and ideology, she also suggests that this is an ideological perspective that is hidden, that is not publicly stated. It is the private face of ideology in a sense, distanced from the 'real' world, but harmful and dangerous nonetheless. For Dworkin women will only recognise their freedom when pornography no longer exists. She argues for a link between text, representation and ideology. She sees pornography as damaging and controlling in women's lives and illustrates this through the many examples she analyses.

The creation of images of women's sexuality as limited and traditional, centring on their domestic and sexual roles (Dyer 1987) and contributing to the maintenance of institutionalised heterosexuality is not exclusive to film, but can be found in textual analyses of the confining romantic narratives within magazines for young women (McRobbie 1991), the pornographic codes used in glamour advertising (Borzello et al. 1985; Wolf 1992), romance novels (Modleski 1982) and popular music and music videos (Pratt 1990).

**Sexual Limitations and the Policing of Heterosexuality**

Research more specifically on the representation of heterosexuality in the media has found it narrowly defined and heavily policed. Using textual and semiotic analysis, researchers have successfully shown the continual reclamation and revalidation of heterosexuality - even in situations in which it is confronted.

The constant validation of heterosexuality is a recurring theme in many different media texts. Epstein and Steinberg (1996, 1995) conducted research on the construction of heterosexuality on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. Generally this programme is seen as espousing a feminist and anti-racist rhetoric (Squire 1994),
but any subjects dealing with non-straight issues are received in an uncomfortable silence because heterosexuality is presumed rather than stated (Stein 1994; Epstein & Steinberg 1995). Frequently issues dealt with by the programme seem to put heterosexuality in peril (Epstein & Steinberg 1996), but the 'twin frameworks' of both therapy and a presumption of heterosexuality provide resolution and although questioned, institutional heterosexuality is never actually threatened.

Other programmes, like *LA Law* offer an apparent disruption to the heterosexual norm by the inclusion of gay or lesbian characters. Yet Mayne (1997) writes that "the final shot of each episode reiterates [...] a utopian heterosexuality, a complementarity of men and women in the face of the massive disorder..." (p. 95). Likewise, Harding (1994) analysed the BBC's adaptation of *Portrait of a Marriage* and found that heterosexuality and homosexuality are clearly contrasted as binaries throughout the programme, with the inevitable result of reinforcing heterosexuality as norm and homosexuality as deviant.

Textual analysis has not only highlighted the continual recuperation of heterosexuality, but also the exclusion and/or diffusion of the disruptive possibility of gay and lesbian characters within the mainstream media. Although some work has been done to 're-claim' mainstream work by looking for gay and lesbian content or subtext (e.g. Russo 1981/1987; Treut 1995; Weiss 1992 Whatling 1997; White 1995), other researchers have outrightly challenged the heterosexism of most media products (Fejes & Petrich 1993; Gross 1989; Kielwasser & Wolf 1992).

Some researchers suggest that "though often heavily coded and 'disguised', lesbian characters and images of the lesbian (often cast as a disturbing force) have regularly recurred in popular films..." (Tasker 1994: 172, see also, Weiss 1992). Tasker notes a couple of possible constructions of sexuality for the lesbian characters. Like Pussy Galore in *Goldfinger*, the lesbian character can be converted to heterosexuality by the sexual prowess of the hero, or like Catherine in *Basic Instinct* she can be portrayed as a psychopathic killer and when proven 'innocent' be punished for her wanton sexuality.

Kitzinger and Kitzinger (1993) also suggest that "[w]hen lesbian (and gay male) sexuality is represented, it has routinely been portrayed as dangerous and perverted, inextricably intertwined with violence and despair" (p. 10). Weiss (1992) uses textual analysis of films that she believes carries a lesbian 'subtext' to develop
categories for the coded lesbian in film. She states that because dominant culture insists on making homosexuality both invisible and unspeakable that its cinematic history must be found in "innuendo, fleeting gestures and coded language - signs that should be recognized as historical sources" (p. 32). In each instance where there is a possibility of lesbian or gay sexuality breaking the smooth surface of heterosexual resolution, it is contained and normalised.

Textual analysis is helpful in highlighting the means in which lesbians can be coded into different media texts as well as contained by them. But again, these are clearly individual analyses. For instance, Weiss suggests that lesbian viewers are able to find and delight in the hidden lesbian and to read the cues hidden within the dominant text. While Hantzis and Lehr's (1994, see also Moritz 1994) work on the American drama *Heartbeat* and its single lesbian character suggest that simply having a positive representation of a lesbian or gay character 'is not enough'.

While content analysis may be helpful for feminist researchers in providing an overview of the representation of women in the media, textual analysis, or the close reading of media texts, allows feminist researchers to find evidence for the limited and stereotypical roles that may be highlighted by content analysis. Textual analysis provides the means to highlight the many different ways in which the relationship between women and the media could be described as limiting and oppressive in the manner in which it has been constructed, coded and 'naturalised' by the media, based on an assumption that mainstream images are adopted as the norm in society against which everything else is measured. But as with any semiological analysis, in the end, it is ultimately arbitrary, determined by the opinions and experience of the individuals involved in analysis. It does not take into account the meanings that may be deduced by audience members and the different readings that can be made of similar codes and connotations. Queer theory readings of ostensibly straight texts may offer a way beyond the limits of textual analysis. By refusing to "fix desire" and instead choosing "queer desire", we become readers who "make strange, who render queer the relations between images" (Probyn 1995: 7), bodies and representations (e.g. Creed 1995; Miller 1991).

The (unspoken) concern frequently hidden within both content and textual analysis is of the effect of these representations on the audience. It posits the text as powerful over the audience and can be accused of "mobilizing a hypodermic
model of media influence" (Morley 1989: 16). A great deal of research exists around the possible effects of the consumption of limited and stereotyped portrayals of women by children and by women themselves. Kevin Durkin (1985a & b) provides an extended review of television and sex-role acquisition for children through a review of content analysis studies and effects research. For women there exists a large body of research (e.g. Bray 1996; Diamond 1985; Garner et al. 1980; Myers & Biocca 1992) on the effects of images of the 'ideal female body' and its possible role in causing/increasing anorexia amongst young women (indeed, recent government initiatives have also made this connection).

Researchers on pornography have been particularly interested in media effects. Extensive research (e.g. Perse 1994) has tried to link male violence towards women to porn usage. As Fisher and Barak (1991) conclude, research on the media effects of pornography is highly inconsistent and frequently leaves more questions than answers. It is perhaps too simplistic to think that an equation exists which would explain away men's violence towards women without understanding both the place of pornography and its contributions to institutionalised heterosexuality.

Morley notes (1989) "[o]ne point of interest here is that these 'television zombies' are always other people. Few people think of their own use of television in this way. It is a theory about what television does to other, more vulnerable people" (p. 16). While agreeing with Morley's point that this may be an unspoken perspective in some textual and content analysis, I would like to stress that these forms of analysis have been extremely important for feminists in developing an influential and convincing literature on the limited and stereotypical representation of women and their sexuality in the media, in particular in pornography. In addition, the overwhelming consistency between many studies suggests that the problems highlighted in the media's treatment of women's sexuality are inherent within heteropatriarchy.

### 2.1.2 Psychoanalytic Film Theory

Moving away from a strictly textual analysis, psychoanalytic theory allows for a theorised spectator and examines the relationship between the spectator and the film text through an application of Freudian psychoanalysis. Like Freud and Lacan, film theory is interested in the symbolic (Metz 1975) and the way in which "cinematic
meanings are constituted for viewing subjects" (Kuhn 1982/1993: 44). What becomes of interest for these theorists is no longer the text in isolation, but rather “the ways in which the cinematic 'apparatus' addresses, and constructs, the human subject who is its spectator” (Thornham 1997: 33). Crudely put, Freud places 'woman' as other, as different from and opposed to male. Although his theories on male sexual development are well detailed and documented, he is less clear on female sexual development, and relies on seeing them as 'not-male'. As a result, an application of his different theories to film, although generally from the male spectator position, highlights the construction of women's sexuality as dangerous, deviant or non-existent. Bellor (cited in Bergstrom 1979) has suggested that film is reliant on addressing a male spectator to the expense of the female spectator and the female characters. 'Woman' is continually determined by her relationship to the male - again, both spectator and character. For the woman spectator to enjoy a film, she must take up a masochistic position and see herself (or the female character) as absence, as merely reflected in the male. On the whole, much film theory from this perspective ignores the sexual differences created in the filmic spectacle. Two studies are of particular interest to feminist interventions in psychoanalytic film theory around sexual difference (and highlight the continual heterosexual structuring even within the analysis). Early work done by Laura Mulvey (1975/1992) was seminal in its use of psychoanalytic film techniques for a feminist analysis. A great debt is owed to her earlier work and it will be discussed in detail below in order to illustrate both its importance and some of the techniques of this form of analysis. In addition, Mary Ann Doane's (1982/1992) work on 'masquerade' is central to some of the arguments around femininity and film.

Mulvey (1975/1992) was concerned with the semiotic role of woman as sign within patriarchal film narratives, and also centralised the debate around sexual difference that arose in psychoanalytic film theory. She appropriated psychoanalytic film theory as "a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form (p. 22)".

Using psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey emphasised the role of woman as the "linchpin to the system" (p. 22), through her 'castrated' lack (in not having the powerful phallus) she is the "bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" (p. 23). In viewing film, the male spectator is provided with two different types of visual pleasure, firstly the voyeuristic pleasure of the objectified and eroticised woman; and
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secondly the narcissistic pleasure of viewing his ideal ego in the form of the dominant and central male character. These two different forms of looking contribute to the male/active, female/passive binary and while excluding the woman, also function as a means to provoke her erotic display, both for the characters in the story and the male spectator. Woman becomes defined by "to-be-looked-at-ness" (p. 27) and bears the full burden of the gaze in order to circumvent the male figure becoming sexually objectified. Mulvey suggests that there are two ways that the male spectator may resolve this fear, through a sadistic determination to understand it or through a fetishistic objectification of the figure of the woman. She writes that this goes far beyond the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' because she becomes the filmic spectacle. Through the use of editing, narrative, camera movement, an illusion is produced and its power comes from the alignment of the:

...three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the profilmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion (p. 33).

Mulvey's conclusion is that to undermine the structuring and containing power of these gazes it would be necessary to destroy the pleasure and satisfaction of the imagined viewer and highlight films' dependence on the active and passive mechanisms of heterosexuality.

Other theorists have suggested less totalitarian solutions, although with little instruction or clarification of 'how' it would occur. Rose (1986) suggests that the woman spectator could perhaps revert to an earlier form of feminine sexuality, untainted by patriarchy, or perhaps adopt a masculine position from which to view - which is Mulvey's suggestion in her later writing (1981).

Mary Ann Doane's (1982/1992) work continues the question of female spectatorship asking "[w]hat, then, of the female spectator? What can one say about her desire in relation to this process of imaging?" (p. 230). Working from Mulvey's binaries of masculine/active and feminine/passive, Doane suggests that it is perhaps instead, "an opposition between proximity and distance in relation to the image" (p. 230) which for the female spectator causes problems because she is both the observer of the image and the image itself. Rather than suggesting a position of transvestism (where the female spectator adopts a male position [Mulvey
Doane asks, what of the flaunting of femininity, the production of an excess of femininity? She suggests that by adopting femininity as a masquerade, the feminine spectator is able to hold it at a distance. "Womanliness", she writes, "is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade's resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as, precisely, imagistic" (p. 235). The use of masquerade, "involves a realignment of femininity, the recover, or more accurately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance" (p. 235). Doane emphasises that this is not something specific to women, but something that has been borne of necessity, a necessity that has not been paramount for men.

Like Mulvey, Doane has used psychoanalytic theory to elaborate the sexual difference that is explicitly marked and negotiated in film. In conclusion she writes that through both the theories around image and apparatus, the cinema has produced a particular position for the female spectator which lacks the necessary distance for an appropriate or adequate reading of the image and which is related to a culturally assigned place. While acknowledging the difficulty of these positions for the female spectator, Doane emphasises that theorising around a spectator position for women should not be dismissed or simply seen as repressed. It must be recognised as formed by its repression and its position within a patriarchal power hierarchy.

Doane's work is significant to feminist film theory in general and this thesis more specifically because of its usefulness in marking the ingrained ideological narratives in cinema. Women's assignation to a culturally situated place is both ideologically and culturally produced, as well as being structured socially, economically and politically. She attempts to link women's subjectivity with their position as spectators, but as with the earlier work that theorised the possibility of a less masochistic spectator position, there is little sense of how women are to escape from this position, to adopt a strategy of masquerade. In her attempts to link female subjectivity and spectatorship, it seems difficult to escape from the existing situation in order to find the distance (or proximity) necessary for masquerade.

Psychoanalytic film theory is extremely useful in highlighting, analysing and identifying the detrimental relationship between women's sexuality and the media. It, perhaps more than content or textual analysis provides interesting evidence for the structuring principles both around film practise and film viewing. But there are
some difficulties with the analyses as presented. On a personal basis they are difficult to read and based on complex theory that will do little to enlighten the 'normal' film viewer. More problematically, in basing an argument on the detrimental relationship between women, their sexuality and the media, psychoanalytic film theory has some drawbacks. First, in terms of female spectator positions as either one of masochism, primordial femininity, masculinisation or excess, the theories do little to explain how these positions are taken up or mobilised. Second, in ideas like the male gaze or female subjectivity, psychoanalytic film theory seems to suggest that masculinity and femininity equals male and female (van Zoonen 1994), a point stressed by Doane's attempts to link women's subjectivity with their spectatorial position. Third, most analysis seems to be ahistorical, suggesting that this is the way it has always been and will always be. Fourth, it suggests the position available to the female spectator is always one of powerlessness, because she is denied the possibility of her own gaze and is always the object. The analysis and theory itself continually recuperates the very heterosexual matrix it attempts to deconstruct. Fifth, psychoanalytic theory, like content, textual and semiotic analysis, lacks an engagement with the audience and assumes a singular interpretation of the media images. As a means to reveal and understand ideological processes and influences, semiotic and psychoanalytic theories are effective, but in understanding individuals' comprehension, consumption and pleasure of these texts, they provide little information. The work conducted is theoretical and has no empirical audience basis. Finally, psychoanalytic theory rests firmly on a heterosexual binary (Wilton 1995). Where in these theories (outside of Freud's ideas of bisexuality) would the lesbian spectator be placed? What is offered for her pleasure?

Content analysis, textual or semiotic analysis and psychoanalytic film theory have been useful for feminist researchers wishing to examine the institutionalisation of heterosexuality and the possibly detrimental relationship between the media and women. As a means to identify the broader representation of women in the media, the codes and ideologies which define and delineate these representations and the possibilities for women's subjectivity as spectators, these methods of analysis have been helpful in highlighting the suggestion that there is a negative relation. They also make it clear that simply examining a text or its process of production does not provide a complete understanding of the relationships between women and the media. Is it enough to say that the relationship between women and the media is a detrimental one when clearly it is something that provides pleasure, information and
encouragement to women? Would it not be more appropriate to begin to understand the role of women as audience? Perhaps to suggest that the relationship between women in the media is not negative, but rather one in which women - as consumers - exercise some resistance to encoded institutional heterosexuality.

2.2 Viewing and Pleasure: Resistive Consumption?

Alasuutari (1999) suggests that there have been three 'generations' of media research on the audience. The first, 'reception research', is directly related to Hall's (1973) 'encoding and decoding model', and represented by studies such as David Morley's (1980) work on Nationwide. He terms the second-generation 'audience ethnography' and includes within it research such as Ang's (1985) study of Dallas, and Hobson's (1982) study of Crossroads. He identifies three shifts in the reception paradigm that create this new generation. First he suggests there was a move from "an interest in conventional politics to identity politics, particularly to questions about gender" (Alasuutari 1999: 5) that is apparent in the works referenced above. Second, "much more emphasis was laid on the functions of the medium" (p. 5), considering its social function or the role in the home, exemplified by Morley's (1986) Family Television. Third, rather than being concerned with a particular programme, "researchers started to look at reception from the audience's end of the chain" (Alasuutari 1999: 5) and became concerned with "the role of the media in everyday life" (p. 5) (i.e. Gray 1992, Hermes 1995).

Alasuutari dates the start of the third generation, entitled 'a constructionist view', to the late 1980s, when writers began to question the nature of the audience (i.e. Fiske 1989c; Ang 1989). He suggests that the "new agenda of cultural audience studies" (Alasuutari 1999: 6) is not yet a "clear-cut paradigm" (p. 6), but rather a trend that is beginning to emerge "where researchers place their study in a larger framework" (p. 6).

2.2.1 The Rise of the Active Audience

Arising from the field of media sociology, 'uses and gratification' research examines the audiences' ability to gratify particular needs through media consumption (Katz et al. 1974). Although the 'uses and gratification' approach tends to focus on individual differences, personality and psychology (rather than social or cultural contexts [Morley 1989]) it provides critical media theory with the notion of the
active audience (McQuail et al. 1972). Through Stuart Hall’s (1973) 'encoding/decoding' model the audiences’ power to negotiate meaning from media texts is recognised. He suggests meaning "cannot be fixed, single and unalterable, but must be capable of signifying different values depending on how and with what it is articulated" (Hall, interviewed in Cruz & Lewis 1994: 9), so that within a range of meaning it remains polysemic. Polysemy refers to the texts’ potential to contain multiple meanings, allowing for many different interpretations. Hall (1973) does not suggest that the text is universally polysemic but rather that because it is structured in combination with other elements (the broadcast process, the demands of advertisers, the need to deliver an audience etc.) that its meanings are delimited, affecting a closure and providing a preferred meaning.

The open or polysemic media text that "can and often is read oppositionally" was greeted as "good news" (Gamson et al. 1992: 373). Media texts are considered sites of struggle for meaning where media consumers "construct meaning in ways that go beyond media imagery" (p. 373). Some of Hall's caution about the dominant encoding of media texts is lost in the excitement around ideas of the open text. John Fiske (1987) suggests that it is no longer necessary to look for closure in a text, but that it is more important to begin to find the "gaps and spaces that open television up to meanings not preferred by the textual structure" (p. 64).

An early attempt to examine Hall's encoding/decoding model 'in action' was conducted by David Morley (1980) in his Nationwide study of the audience's interpretations of a news programme. Morley suggested that members of similar "sub-cultural formations or groupings [...] would share a cultural orientation towards decoding messages in particular ways" (p. 15). Groups made up of students, apprentices, managers and trade unionists, watched an episode of Nationwide and then discussed their interpretations. Morley analysed these for dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings.

2.2.2 The Active Audience and Reception Analysis

Emerging during what Alasuutari (1999) has identified as the second generation of audience research was a concern with ethnographic reception research. Morley's work (and others like it, e.g. Katz & Liebes 1986) moves away
from the concept of the passive spectator at the mercy of the text, to a strong and active audience. Livingstone (1991) writes:

The direct link between the meanings inherent in the text and the consequent effects of those meanings on the audience has been broken, not only because viewers may choose which programmes or programme segments to watch or because texts may target different audiences, but also because the same 'virtual' text may mean different things to different audiences (p. 288).

The negotiation of meaning from television texts becomes a socially situated activity (Fiske 1987) and opens up audience research to the ethnographic approach of reception analysis. Research such as Radway's (1984) on women reading romantic fiction, Hobson's (1982) on women and soap opera and Fiske's (1990) on women and game shows fall within these criteria. In each instance audiences were seen as active producers of meaning and were interviewed for their interpretations, in some instances after shared viewing (Hobson 1982). The concern of these projects was with women as a specific audience and their ability to interact with the text and occasionally, to subvert its patriarchally embued meaning. It represented a move away from a determined meaning of the media text, to its negotiated reading and consumption within individual contexts.

Eldridge et al (1997) note that "work on the 'active audience' often prioritizes the issue of pleasure, trying to understand, instead of ignore, people's enjoyment of mass culture" (p. 154). Working against the notion of a passive audience, it involves them in "the active interpretation of [media] images and their meaning" (Press 1991: 173). The idea of the "active audience' was initially considered radical. It enlarges the audience research agenda by including everything from attitudes and motivations, to actions and speech, to the generation of ideas and meanings" (Nightingale 1996:7).

2.2.2.1 The Audience's Power

In addition to suggesting the interpretative and meaning making ability of the audience, some critical media theorists try to illustrate other ways in which the audience has demonstrates its power.
McQuail (1969) suggests media consumption is ritualised in everyday life. He writes that the "structure of programming becomes tied to an unchanging of the daily life, interests and capacities of the average citizen" (p. 81). Bausinger (1984) suggests that as people became used to the media technologies (television, video machines, computers), they slowly appropriate them into their life causing "a neutralization, an embourgeoisement" (p. 345), until they are only noticed when they breakdown. For Bausinger, the consumption and interpretation of media products is firmly embedded in the everyday routine of the audience.

Hermes (1993) was surprised by the unimportance of media consumption in the everyday for her participants. She "suggest[s] that from time to time, all of us [...], engage in virtually meaningless media use" (p. 493). She asks then how one, as a researcher understands the meaninglessness of everydayness and suggests that one must come to comprehend the "relative importance of the media text and media use" (p. 500) through understanding both "their daily routines [of media use and], superimposed on these routines, specific legitimatory discourse, schemata that explain and justify media use" (p. 500).

The meaninglessness and everydayness of media use robs the text of influential power and posits media consumption as an unimportant activity for the audience. This approach provides a strong argument against textual determinism. As Hermes suggests the 'everyday' may be the site of meaninglessness, but it is also the site of both meaning production and social and political change. Routine social practices are where meaning making occurs, and as such should be examined rather than dismissed. The status of the everyday must not be reified but critically appraised.

One of the major motivations for Fiske (1989a, 1989b) in considering the active audience was to examine the possibility for resistance to ideology through pleasure. He suggests that "pleasure, which affords the escape from [...] the norm, becomes an agent of subversion because it creates a privatized domain beyond the scope of a power whose essence lies in its omnipotence, its omnipresence" (Fiske 1989a: 64). His research (and others like it e.g. Ang 1985; Brown 1990a, 1990b, 1994; Hobson 1989; Radway 1984) is criticised for removing itself from a political economic critique. Ang (1996) notes that most recent research on audiences has been concerned to understand "how audiences are active meaning producers of texts and technologies" (p. 8) and tends to celebrate or exaggerate their power.
McGuigan (1992) comments that this means that structures of power are rarely being considered and links are only reluctantly made to "economic determinations, technological and policy changes" (p. 128). Similarly, Corner (1991) suggests that in research concerned with audience reception "the question of an ideological level of media processes, or indeed of media power as a political issue at all, has slipped almost entirely off the main research agenda" (p. 267). Ang (1996) goes on to propose that it is possible to close the gap between the economic and cultural (her term), or "between the emphasis on interpretation and emphasis on effects" (p. 10) in considering the 'active audience' as "a condensed image of the 'disorder of things' in a postmodernized world" (p. 10).

The move from a passive, homogenous audience to an active one is extremely important, but it does risk swapping one shallow assessment for another (Livingstone 1990/1998) or to move from macro assumptions to micro situations (Morley 1993). As Alasuutari makes clear in describing his third generation of audience research, regard must be given to the negotiation of meanings within contexts by a heterogeneous audience. Livingstone (1990/1998) instead calls for an examination of the interrelation between texts and audiences. Corner (1991) and Morley (1993) also point out that research done on the active audience in terms of particular genres (e.g. soap operas) has been used to make generalisations to all media audiences. Corner suggests that rather than avoiding the question of the media's power by looking for more and more details of viewing, it is important to address, and not exclude issues of meaning and genre.

The idea of the active audience often appears as a celebration of "semiotic democracy" (Fiske 1986) that envisions the interpretative realm as a marketplace in which the audience member can exercise choice in meaning making. Murdock (1989) critiques this notion from a materialist perspective. Like an economic marketplace, certain individuals (or organisations) have more buying power and more persuasive selling techniques (particularly within institutionalised heterosexuality). The open marketplace of the liberal democracy is not an area of free trading when some of the shoppers (and salespeople) are materially limited from equal competition. As Ang (1990) notes audiences may be active in many different ways, but this activity does not actually imply any power.

Active audience theory may perhaps have gone too far in its creation of 'cultural heroes' (Ang 1996) - celebrated warriors in the army of semiological
guerrillas (Carragee 1990) - but the importance of this research cannot be underestimated. For feminist researchers it provides the means to see women as an active audience challenging the notion that they are powerless victims. It tends to ignore the material restrictions that may be placed on women's interpretation by a heteropatriarchal and oppressive socio-economic context1 (which is discussed further in section 2.3.2).

To suggest that an audience is active and that messages are polysemic goes a long way to negating the power of the text to influence and control women's subjectivity. Audiences can be seen to have control over their interpretative activities and for feminist researchers this is an important move, but as Ang (1996) suggests we must be wary of turning audience members into 'cultural heroes' (or heroines). Audience and textual research must be set within a framework that acknowledges the relative power of each. Suggesting that the power of the media is all determining may rob the audience of any interpretative abilities, suggesting that the audience can control and manipulate the media to its own ends also ignores the ideological coding of our mediated world. It is not enough for feminists to dismiss the media as negative because of its stereotypical representation of women or continual recuperation of heterosexuality, nor is it possible to dismiss the interpretative power of the audience. Rather it seems a crucial move to begin to understand women's situated pleasures in consuming media texts, to comprehend their interpretation, their activity and the influence of both text and context.

2.3 Pleasured Viewing and Viewing Pleasure

As media research on audiences began to develop, the field focused on questions of what sort of meaning audiences were making of the texts they consumed and how it "might relate to ideas about the power of the media and about the constitution of public knowledge, sentiment and values" (Corner 1991). For feminist media researchers considering women as audience, research from this perspective became concerned with the politics of pleasure and the power that was available for women in media consumption. In looking for resistive readings, Comer (1996) notes that research tends to focus on either the interpretative process, examining both the signification of media products and the activity of the audience, or the "social relations of interpretative difference" (p. 287) that examine the impact of different contexts on social structure and action.
Ang and Hermes (1991) problematise the essentialist nature of research which looks at class differences in media consumption and interpretation, and at gendered audiences as ‘woman’, naturalising sexual difference and reasserting the definitions of masculinity and femininity. They write that “[t]his is not to deny that there are gender differences or gender-specific experiences and practices, it is however to suggest that their meanings are always relative to particular constructions in specific contexts” (p. 315) and that it is understanding the discourses and contexts by which particular gendered positions are created which is important. They suggest that gendered practices are articulated in media consumption. Because this is a process that must occur over and over again, everyday, in order to sustain “established gender meanings” (p. 319), there is also room, under certain conditions, for women (and men) to take up different positions, for disarticulation, in other words, for women not always to be women. Through their interaction with particular discourses and their presentation in the media, women may not always consume the media from a gendered position of subordination.

An important facet of the project of feminist media studies is to ‘re-claim’ and ‘re-validate’ women’s pleasures. Across feminism, work is undertaken to assert the value of arts and traditions which are conventionally feminine or which provide particular pleasure to women (Brown 1994; Wolf 1992). Within media research this extends to an examination of the pleasure women receive from reading romance novels, watching soap operas and viewing ‘weepy’ films (Brunsdon 1981, 1989 & 1997; Modleski 1982; Radway 1984). “For feminism” as Tasker (1991) writes, “this engagement was also deeply rooted in the desire to reclaim a women's culture” (p. 86) and for women to be “taken seriously as active creators of their own daily lives and experiences, instead of being 'medicalized' as helpless victims of dominant culture” (van Zoonen 1996: 47). Brunsdon (1989) notes that the research was “sometimes motivated by a desire to defend the audience and its pleasures” (p. 124) and sometimes to investigate the negotiation that occurred at cultural sites. As an example, research by Ang (1985) on Dallas examines the different aspects of the programme that provide pleasure for its viewers whilst acknowledging its general dismissal. Reasons for the enjoyment of the programme range from relaxation, fashion-viewing, personal involvement with the characters, fantasy, self-reflection
and self-projection. They derive pleasure from the programme because of the involvement of their imagination.

Stacey (1994), making links between women's practice of media consumption and structuring aspects of the institution of heterosexuality, suggests that "women's pleasures have been located in the relationship between the patterns of narrative and of scheduling, and the sexual division of labour and resulting social organisation of women's lives" (p. 43). Generally the analysis of these pleasures has occurred in three ways. First, feminist researchers using textual and semiotic analysis assess the possible resistive readings that might be contained within mainstream texts and available for women in their media consumption. Second, through ethnographic approaches they consider the context and practice of women's media interaction to highlight women's continuing oppression and the possible space that they might provide for resistance to hegemonic patriarchy. Finally, researchers examine the situated practice of media consumption and the 'use' to which media texts or the process of their consumption contributes to resistance in women's daily lives. Each of these different areas are examined in detail, before concluding with research that considers a more holistic approach to women's pleasure and empowerment, explicitly making links between practice and structure. It is important to note that little of this research problematises the nature of women's pleasure, and this is considered before concluding the chapter.

Feminist media research has focused on women as audience members and the construction and consumption of their pleasure, but little considers their sexuality explicitly. What is important for this project is to understand the importance of feminist theories of audience power in order to conceptualise the position of women as audience in viewing and interpreting images of sexuality. This final section of the chapter argues that whilst recognising the valuable contributions of this research to a feminist media politics in highlighting the possible power that media consumption provides for women, the results are often individualised and context specific, celebrating pleasure over politics and offering little to a wider feminist movement that demands change.

2.3.1 Resistive Reading: Textual Approaches

Feminist media researchers use textual analysis of media products as a means to suggest possible places for women to make resistive readings. Research
tends to concentrate on “women’s genres” which are seen to contain a “construction
of narratives motivated by female desire and [...] governed by a female point of
view” (Kuhn 1984: 18). Particular genres are seen as gendered and constructed to
draw “both on [the] femaleness (the audience, the protagonists) and [their] femininity
(as subject position or set of cultural competencies)” (Tasker 1991:90).

Some researchers suggests that these genres offer the opportunity for
women audience members to make readings which resist the media text and
therefore dominant ideology (Mumford 1995). For instance, Madonna has been
analysed as a feminist symbol that works against the traditional image of women as
dependent and reserved (Lewis 1990) while also offering women an image of
strength in combination with active sexuality (Kaplan 1987).

Other researchers consider the ways that a narrative structure inscribes a
place of activity and pleasure for the audience. Modleski’s (1982) textual analysis of
soap opera and romances attempts to reclaim for women a position of power in
interacting with the text. She posits the female viewer as the ‘Ideal Mother’ who has
knowledge of all aspects of the characters and plots. She is not a mindless dupe,
accepting all that is placed before her, but she actively schemes and plots with the
characters, working through the story situations with the benefit of overarching
narrative knowledge. The woman consumer is, in a sense, in control of what she
views or reads because of her detailed knowledge of both the genre and the soap
opera technique.

In a similar manner, Ang (1990a) finds textual pleasure for women viewers of
Dynasty. In identifying with the various melodramatic characters, women are able to
understand the formation of their own subjectivity and are offered a validation of
feelings through indulging them. For Ang, these become moments of truth and
redemption, where women realise what it means to be ‘woman’. She sees fantasy
and fiction as a place where this identification can occur without suffering the
realistic consequences.

Largely underrepresented in these analyses is the place of the actual
audience. As an attempt to provide a scholarly examination of genres that have
been frequently dismissed as unimportant pap, the works are crucial in reasserting
women’s right to pleasurable media constructions, yet they suffer from many of the
criticisms offered earlier. In addition, in focusing exclusively on the text, the actual
process of women's understanding, meaning making and consumption is divorced
from a situated reality and becomes an individualised encounter with a specific
media text. It separates women from their contexts and suggests that the
interaction of a woman and a media text occur in individualised isolation.

2.3.2 Reading in Context: The Situated Consumption of Media Texts

Other research attempts to move away from a consideration of the text in
isolation to its interactions with an audience, believing that "[m]eaning and pleasure
are more likely to be produced in the contextual relationships between texts and
their viewers than discovered in a text in isolation" (Deming 1992: 206-7).
Examinations of different contextual situations using ethnographic methods of data
collection serve to highlight women's continuing oppression or the restrictions placed
on their pleasure.

Early research on radio serials by Hertzog (1941, in Brunsdon 1981)
examined the impact of socio-economic context to media interpretation for women.
She suggested that social context played an important role in the interpretation and
understanding of media products. Much later, arising from the cultural studies
tradition, other researchers began to consider the importance of understanding the
actual viewing context in interpreting media consumption. In 1982 Hobson studied
women's consumption of the British soap opera Crossroads. She discovered that
"watching television is part of the everyday life of the viewers" (p. 110), who would
go to the extreme of changing their domestic routine to watch the programme, while
family viewing situations changed both the level of concentration and the
perspective that the individual had on the programme.

Like Hobson, Seiter et al.'s (1989) participants planned and timed their
household duties according to television schedules so that programmes could be
listened to during particular times or watched as a reward. The practice of soap
opera viewing and the evaluation of its importance to the women can be seen as an
attempt "to resolve contradictions inherent in domestic work" (p. 230), and, in this
context, "television reveals the constraints of housework as unpaid labour" (p. 230)
and the structuring of institutionalised heterosexuality.

Ann Gray (1992) moves away from media consumption to consider the
introduction of new leisure technologies into the home. She investigates the "social
and cultural aspects of the domestic environments within which the VCR takes its place" (p. 252) to assess its contribution to women's continuing oppression. She found that the introduction of a new entertainment technology does little to disrupt the existing domestic structures of familial ideology. As with other leisure opportunities, women feel guilty about taking the time to use the VCR, although some suggested that they might use it as a reward when their daily tasks were completed (Gray 1987).

Still within the domestic context, Press (1990, 1991) examines the impact of class and gender on women's television consumption. She concludes that women's reception of media products (in this instance television programmes, particularly Dynasty) is affected both by their "position as women in [...] society and their membership in social class and age groups" (1991: 177). Middle-class women are oppressed within the family and the workplace as women, but working-class women are additionally oppressed because of their class membership. Paradoxically she suggests that although mass media can foster conformity, it also can encourage resistance to dominant groups.

While these projects are commendable in their examination of women's oppression within the domestic sphere, they are limited. In moving from text to context, they tend to exclude detailed understandings of the textual interpretations of their audience and centralise the importance of particular contextual aspects. Corner (1991) writes:

> Put simply, the problem is this - 'what do you include in context and where does context stop?' Or, put the other way round and more dramatically, 'what don't we have to consider?', 'what doesn't contribute to the construction of meaning here?' (p. 278)

These are important questions to ask of research projects relying on context to 'prove' women's oppression. How and why are contexts chosen? What sort of political decisions lead Press to look at class and age or Gray to consider the introduction of a new technology to the domestic context? Ang (1996) warns of contextualism gone wild and of the need to determine particular concerns. Yet in focusing on a particular context and its relationship to women's oppression,
resistance or empowerment could create a reductive causal relationship that does not consider other variables.

2.3.3 Pleasure as Resistance

The research that considers women's contextual relationship to media consumption highlights the structuring of their lives under institutionalised heterosexuality. Other feminist media researchers look for the ways in which women understand and make use of the media text. In looking for places in which women are empowered by the media they combine the strengths of resistive readings with that of women's situated viewing practices. Instances that are claimed as empowering can be as simple as the pleasure provided in seeing the portrayal of strong women characters (Hallam & Marshment 1995) or expressed through consumer practices (Partington 1991).

Much of the research on women's empowerment through media consumption revolves around its use in the social network. Seiter et al. (1989) found that "over and over again" (p. 233) the soap opera text was the product of "collaborative readings [...] of small social groups" (p. 233). They note in conclusion though that this was part of a shared female identity that did not include men and suggested to the researchers that "the opportunity to produce meanings and pleasures by engaging with a discriminated popular text is 'paid for' by women's willingness to conceal these pleasures and meanings whenever the dominant discourse is spoken in a social situation" (p. 244). Hobson's (1990) research on women audiences and the workplace examines the way that women create a separate community within their offices based on discussions about different television programmes. She suggests that "women use television programs as part of their general discourse on their own lives, the lives of their families and friends and to add interest to their working lives" (p. 62). Rather than seeing audience members as passive viewers she states that "the discussion after television programs have been viewed [...] completes the process of communication and locates television programs as part of popular culture" (p. 62).

Other researchers suggest that the discussion of popular culture products provide opportunities both for empowerment and resistance. Long (1994) found that women in book groups use their group discussions and the insight and support that they provide to "negotiate a passage for themselves out of a housebound existence
and back into the world of professional employment" (p. 202). Popular culture for these women not only provides empowerment but also encourages them to make material changes in their daily lives. Brown (1990a; 1990b; 1994) would propose that women in these situations are creating a form of feminine discourse based on a 'women's culture' of gossip, ballads and soap operas which "exists alongside dominant culture, and that insofar as women who use these cultural forms are conscious of the form's otherness, they are practising feminine discourse" (Brown 1990a: 205). She contends that women set up boundaries and contexts of discourse in which to express their pleasure in resistance by speaking in illegitimate ways. Other researchers also contend that popular culture provides the opportunity for both resistance and empowerment through women's conversation. Lee and Cho's (1995) ethnographic study of Korean soap fans and their shared viewing experiences found that this provided an opportunity to "challenge the traditional patriarchy within limits, using the skills they know best" (p. 357). They describe that this took various forms but that it seemed to indicate "women's continuous struggle to expand their own social space" (p. 357) within the limits of heteropatriarchy.

Studies such as the ones discussed above are compelling because they posit women as strong, active and resistant viewers who work within patriarchal limitations to create their pleasure and are empowered by it, using the popular culture products that are provided. At the same time I am cautious of the celebratory tone that is taken in their discussion. Pleasure and the possibilities for resistance that it creates must always be placed within context. Women's media consumption cannot be divorced from its contextual limitations and the resistive possibilities must always be placed within these confines. Indeed, Stabile (1995) suggests that insisting on finding resistance in media consumption can erase "the relationship between the text and wider context or reduces it to a fairly transparent causal relationship" (p. 406) such that simply watching soap opera means a woman is resistant to patriarchal positioning. As Mumford (1995) notes, viewers are free to "reject or resist the dominant meaning of the soap opera text, [but] they must begin with the text's attempts to position them and, [...] that positioning is emphasized by the heavy weight of dominant ideology" (p. 7). Media texts and discourses may be empowering for women but pleasure can also be accused of inspiring complacency (Radway 1984). Simply suggesting that women can freely take and use the discourses they choose does not take into account the entire process of encoding and decoding nor does it consider the confines of the political economy of the
media. In order to understand more clearly the creation of these 'women's genres' and their consumption, it is necessary to take a more holistic approach to the analysis of women's pleasure so that both the practices of production and the act of consumption can be placed within their proper context and an assessment of their contribution to women's empowerment and resistance can be made.

2.3.4 Reviewing Resistance: An Holistic Approach

Few feminist media research projects have considered the different aspects of production, transmission and consumption. The tendency in media research to divorce the studies from their wider socio-economic and political context obscures the wider structuring of women's oppression. Holistic approaches allow for links to be made between the institution of the media and the practice of consumption, as well as to the wider socio-economic fabric. As such, the approach suggests that each stage is more complex than any in isolation. Three feminist media studies that I encountered consider a more holistic analysis of women's genres - Hobson's (1982) research on Crossroads, Radway's (1984) seminal study on romance novels and Taylor's (1989) research on Gone with the Wind.

Hobson's examination of Crossroads (1982) began as both a textual study and a study of the production processes of the programme. She was concerned to understand the professional ideologies that informed both the writing and editing of the soap opera. During her research, one of the oldest and most loved characters - Meg - was 'fired'. As a result of the public outcry this change caused, Hobson's study moved away from the text and began to reflect more directly the viewer's involvement with the programme. She found that the viewers were intimately involved in the programmes, not only rearranging their schedules to ensure viewing as mentioned above, but frequently being reliant on it and other media products to combat their loneliness in the home. By focusing on the clash between the audience's desire to keep 'Meg' and the production company's (ATV) desire to remove her, Hobson's analysis highlights the lack of power of the audience (Nightingale 1996) although she suggests that the modification made by the producers for Meg's removal (she is moved on rather than killed) is a victory.

In Reading the Romance, Radway (1984) provides an examination of the production of romance novels, a textual analysis of their main plot devices, and a study of their consumption by a group of US women living in 'Smithton'. She begins
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by looking at the institutional matrix within which the novels are created. What is of interest in this production process is the control an editor has over the books because of their formulaic and categorical nature. Many of the publishing houses provide guidelines to aspiring authors (e.g. Lowery 1983/1995) to ensure the replication of a formula that sells. The publishing houses are concerned to win and keep women readers and Radway suggests that in doing this they "confer status and power upon the reader" (p. 43) by their concern with fulfilling the audiences' expectations. But she also notes that women make up more than half of the book reading public and that their continuing interest in romance drives a lucrative business.

She began a textual analysis of the romance novels in order to discern the patriarchal discourses with which they were imbued but her interaction with the readers drew her away from the text to understanding the context of their reading to examine the "complex social event of reading where a woman actively attributes sense to lexical signs in a silent process carried on in the context of her ordinary life" (p. 8). It was important to the women in her study to assert their right to indulge themselves in a good book and to have the romances seen as 'edifying' because it introduced them to worlds and ideas outside of their community. Pleasure is created by subversion of traditional values but then contradicted by using these same values to justify resistance. Radway recognises "that romance reading originates in a very real dissatisfaction and embodies a valid, if limited, protest" (p. 220).

Taylor's study on Gone with the Wind (GWTW) is interesting in two ways, first because it analyses both the production, text and audience reception of the film and second because it is one of the few studies to consider the consumption of a filmic text by an actual audience rather than the theoretical film spectator of most film theory. She writes, "I have focused on this work not by looking critically and in isolation at the book and film, author and film producer, or indeed just my own responses, but rather by asking how GWTW lives in the imaginations, memories and experiences of individuals and groups" (p. 17). Using letters, interviews and questionnaires completed by (mainly women) fans of the film, she analyses the text and its production using both her critical perspective and their responses. Like Radway's readers the women expressed an interesting mixture of escapism and education, it was "clearly a major source of historical knowledge and pleasurable understanding" (p. 204). Taylor suggests that one of the reasons for its incredible
success may be because it centralises women's lives and the important roles they had during wartime, even when left at home away from the fighting. She proposes that the pleasures of GWTW for women involve a shared community, a sense of nostalgia and use of the book or film "to comfort and help us to explain and work through real problems and dilemmas" (p. 232). While acknowledging the racism and presentation of black characters, she hesitates to condemn because, "many women have responded against the apparent grain of the work, seeing it as an argument for peace, not war, and for equal rights for all people, rather than white domination" (p. 233).

Studies such as the ones reviewed above provide a much clearer picture of the relationship between women and media in terms of its construction, control and consumption. It highlights the constraints that surround media consumption and reinforce its situated practice, understanding "media consumption as a site of cultural struggle, in which a variety of forms of power are exercised, with different sorts of effects" (Ang 1989: 102). In addition, in using a range of different methods, it gains the strengths of each while counteracting some of their individual limitations.

Modleski (1986) suggests that "the examples of 'resistance' that these critics cite are in fact often anticipated and even prescribed by the culture industry" (p. xii). Many media texts are beginning to include what could be considered feminist ideas that are then nullified and defused by a more traditional ideology (D'Acci 1992; Mumford 1995). In fact, this perhaps provides the impetus for a continuing examination of the mass media process by feminists in order to understand how particular genres participate

...in the wider network of mass media expressions, the larger ideological structures whose combined power, redundancy, and relative consistency make resistance more difficult - or, what may be worse, that turn 'resistance' into a parlor game in which arguing with the TV set substitutes for participation in movements for social change (Mumford 1995: 118).

Holistic approaches to media research are able to assess and consider the ways in which hegemonic norms can be stretched to accommodate, contain and normalise
women's apparent resistance, a process termed "hegemonic bending" by Gauntlett (1996).

The re-claimation and re-validation of women's pleasure is an extremely important project but it must be cautious of slipping into "the radical populist presumption that popular audiences can be trusted to exercise an almost instinctive capacity to 'resist' most of what they attend to via the media" (Comer 1991: 281). Nightingale (1996) notes that "we may all sleep better for knowing that lots of resistance to dominant ideas is going on among the 'subordinate classes', but surely we should also note that that resistance is 'safely' contained, from the perspective of the powers controlling the media" (p. 56). Resistance, like pleasure, can be difficult to define, identify and analyse, and as researchers we should be cautious not to elide it with audience activity that could just as easily be an active investment in an oppressive ideology (Stacey 1994). Gledhill (1988) suggests that women's pleasure in media consumption can be a powerful agent for change, yet I would advise care. Unless resistance can be securely identified and seen to exist beyond the individualised moment of consumer/media interaction then there is little to contribute to a feminist cultural politics. Individual moments of resistance may not lead to collective moments of action and may breed an individualistic form of feminist politics in which women can choose feminism as an approach to life, and discard it at will. If the feminist movement becomes reduced to individual choice, its power as an agent of change is severely diminished.

2.4 Viewing Pleasure and Pleasured Viewing

Analysing the relationship between women, their sexuality and the media provides the means to assess different aspects of both theory and method for feminist media studies. In considering the media as an institution in which normalised understandings of heterosexuality are continually encoded and re-inscribed, a review of theory surrounding representation of women and their sexuality and the contribution of psychoanalytic film theory highlighted the inadequacy of current portrayals of women in mainstream media texts. In addition, the assessment of content and textual analysis allowed for a discussion of the important contributions that these methods have made to feminist media theory whilst highlighting their limitations and singular interpretations. It suggested that further examination needed to be made of the audience and their consumption of
media products, while at the same time recognising the importance of the textual analysis that has occurred.

The second section of the chapter turned to the practice of media consumption. I suggest that as consumers women are actually able to exercise some power in their interactions with the media and from that perspective, the possible negative influences of representation and spectatorship can be negated or at least softened. A detailed examination of the many different ways in which the power of the audience has been theorised highlighted the need to see this viewing process within context and to understand its place within women's lives both in terms of the construction of their sexuality in representation and the empowerment that may be possible in the contextualised relationship.

The final section of the chapter assessed the resistive textual readings that feminist media theorists have made, the research that considers women's media consumption in context, studies which have suggested empowerment through consumption, and work that considers both processes of production, text and consumption as a holistic practice. As with the earlier sections, questions were raised about the nature and efficacy of resistance within these individualised experiences and their contributions to a feminist cultural politics. They also make clear links to the work discussed in Chapter 1. Pleasure and resistance act as the framework of many of the studies discussed throughout the chapter, but the nature of this pleasure is rarely problematised instead it is often uncritically celebrated. Radway (1984) suggests that pleasure can be problematic for feminist media researchers as it has a tendency to inspire complacency. Like the critique offered in Chapter 1, the assumption that pleasure is inherently liberating is simplistic and superficial. Pleasure does not change oppressive structures it may merely make them easier to accept. Many of the studies discussed acknowledge the importance of the audience's pleasure, but there is little examination of its nature or of its radical possibilities. Modleski (1982) recognises the importance of the analysis of these 'women's genres' to feminism when she writes: -

Given the radical nature of the feminist task, it is no wonder that college students occasionally cut their women's studies classes to find out what is going on in their favourite soap opera. When this happens, it is time for us to stop merely opposing soap operas and to start incorporating
them, and other mass-produced feminine fantasies, into our study of
women (p. 113).

Radway (1984), on the other hand, acknowledges both the difficulties of basing a
feminist analysis on pleasure and the radical possibilities that it may contain:

If oppositional impulses or feelings of discontent such as those
prompting romance reading can ever be separated from the activity that
manages them in favour of the social order, it might be possible to
encourage them, to strengthen them, and to channel them in another
way so that this very real disappointment might lead to substantial social
change (p. 18).

I suggested in Chapter 1 that the de-repression hypothesis assumes that
women's sexual pleasure is inherently a good and liberating thing. There is
also an assumption in much work on women as media consumers that if
something is pleasurable it must be good. Like work that has problematised
the nature of heterosexual pleasure, feminist media research must also
problematise the pleasures of media consumption.

Several themes of central importance to this thesis have been highlighted in
considering the relationship of women, their sexuality and the media from these
perspectives. First, representation of women and in particular women's sexuality
has been restrictive and stereotyped. Second, the need within feminist film theory
to move beyond the text and spectator relationship to consider women as audience
has been stressed. Third, that women as audience do have some power and are
able to negotiate and interpret media texts to their advantage. Fourth, the singular
and individualised nature of the research has been highlighted and problematised
through a questioning of the nature of pleasure and resistance and the search for
the empowering moment in media consumption. Finally, the importance of an
understanding of the media process from production to text to consumption
emphasises the need for an holistic approach to media studies in order to provide
some understanding of the nature of interactions between women, their sexuality
and mediated heterosexuality. It is suggested that only through an assessment of
media images of women's sexuality, an understanding of their interpretation by the
audience and its impact on their daily lives, will the nature of the relationship between power, pleasure and gender become clear.

In the next chapter, I turn to a consideration of the methods used throughout the project. Two of these - content and textual analyses - have been discussed in detail, while the theoretical framework for the others has been established.
Notes on Chapter Two

1 Research on polysemy and the active audience has occurred largely within the realm of television studies. Film has been excluded because it is seen to be a different viewing situation. Unlike television, it rarely has to compete for the viewers' attention (once they're inside the cinema), it caters for a single mode of watching (Fiske 1987). Fiske suggests that the cinema audience may be relatively more powerless than the television audience because the power of the text can be more clearly justified. Viewing television within the home is a completely different experience to viewing film within a large, impersonal and public cinema. Fiske writes, "[i]n going to the cinema we tend to submit to its terms, to become subject to its discourse, but television comes to us, enters our cultural space and becomes subject to our discourses" (p. 74). Little empirical research has been done on film audiences (Allen 1990) in the same way that it has occurred for television audiences and without this empirical evidence it is difficult to assess the extent of the differences.

As noted in the previous section, little research exists on actual film audience and much feminist film theory continues to rely on a psychoanalytic approach. Three exceptions can be found, first the work of Taylor noted above, Bobo's (1995) research on The Colour Purple with black women and Stacey's (1994) research on women film audiences and film stars.

Bobo (1995) used the encoding/decoding model to examine Black women's ability to create oppositional readings of the film The Color Purple. Her interviews with women determined that they found the central female character (Celie) a strong and admirable representative of Black women. Bobo explains that the dominant encoding of The Color Purple is as a Black storyline with a Black cast that has been directed by a white male for consumption on a mass scale by a white audience. She writes:

Not only is the difference in reception noteworthy but Black women's responses confront and challenge a prevalent method of media audience analysis which insists that viewers of mainstream works have no control or influence over a cultural product (p. 54).

Like much of the research listed earlier, Bobo was concerned to understand Black women's consumption and negotiation with the filmic text. She sought to validate the pleasures that the film provided for her audience.

Like Bobo, Stacey (1994) advocates the use of cultural studies approaches in film research in order to overcome the problems of universally theorised female spectatorship and its textual assumptions. One of her aims in her research is "to develop a notion of the spectator as an 'historical subject' in such a way that the cultural locations of the text-audience encounter are understood" (p. 47). While retaining some of the main features of psychoanalytic film theory (subjectivity, pleasure, fantasy, identification and desire) she suggests the use of cultural studies approaches to research in order to understand and locate the 'historical spectator' in Hollywood cinema.

In a similar way, Gledhill (1988) suggests the use of the term 'negotiation' in studying film audiences. "For the term 'negotiation' implies the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give-and-take" (p. 67) allowing the
researcher to consider issues of production, representation, 'cine-psychoanalysis' and consumption. Using this approach feminist film studies can move away from the traditional privileging of text over context (Kuhn 1984) and begin to consider the relationships between them and the social audience. As such "representations, contexts, audiences, and spectators would then be seen as a series of interconnected social discourses, certain discourses possessing greater constitutive authority at specific moments than others" (Kuhn 1984: 27).

Although other media researchers such as Lutz and Collins (1993) on National Geographic, Miller et al. (1998) on the media and AIDS, and Fenton et al. (1998) on the media and social science provide more detailed examples.

When discussing resistance, politics and pleasure, there is a tendency to assume that any evidence of acceptance of dominant understandings implies a lack of agency. Buying into dominant paradigms may not actually mean the women do not have agency, but simply that agency is being displayed in a way not recognised by feminism. For instance, Skegg's (1997) work on white working class women's investment in femininity suggests women can actively 'buy into' the status quo because they have too much to lose otherwise. Lovell (2000) commenting on the rejection of feminism by Skegg's participants writes: -

Investments in feminism threaten to place in jeopardy these hard-won gains which make life more tolerable in the restricted markets in which working class women must trade. They have more to lose, after all, than their chains" (p. 27).
3.0 Researching Heterosexuality: Feminist Cultural Politics, Multi-methods and Media Research

Pleasure and resistance have been important catalysts in examining both women's sexual practice within institutional heterosexuality, and their more specific interaction with the mass media where it is normalised and maintained. Absent from the literature are the voices of women critically interacting with heterosexuality both in their sexual practice and their media consumption. I suggested in chapter one that heterosexual feminists sit at the intersection of heterosexuality as practice and heterosexuality as institution and my interest arose from my own concern with both sexual practice and the structuring effects of institutionalised heterosexuality (in this instance, as represented in the media). As my interest and commitment to feminist politics developed, I became aware that my activities and awareness were constantly structured and contained. It jarred with my feminism and raised questions for me about my heterosexuality. I used my feminism to question my heterosexuality, in an attempt to understand its construction and dominance throughout my life. I did not have answers. I hoped that others might be able to help me, and that together in sharing our understandings we could begin to develop a feminist discourse of heterosexuality. We could proactively challenge heterosexuality's current construction, representation and structuring of women's lives. In coming to the project, I realised that simply talking to women about their sexual practice and experience of heterosexuality divorced it from a wider context and that in some way links must be made to its normalised context in order to understand its continuing contribution to power and inequality. From these concerns arose three aims for the research, each of which are discussed below.

3.1 Aims, Questions and Contributions

The research has three main aims. First, to contribute to the wider literature within feminism about heterosexuality and sexual practice. Second, to understand the role of the media in formulating feminist and heterosexual identities. Third, to consider the use and application of a range of different methods for a feminist cultural politics. Each of these aims contains within them a specific research question and wider contribution both to feminist theory and cultural studies.

Aim One – Feminism and Heterosexuality

As mentioned in chapter one, feminist heterosexuality remains a seriously under-theorised area, with few contributions being made by heterosexual women.
My personal and professional concerns with feminism and heterosexual pleasure have raised questions and issues about the representation of women and their heterosexuality in the media. Jackson (1999) writes that "there is clearly a space for approaches which pay attention to social structures, to the socially situated contexts of everyday sexual practice and experience, to the material conditions under which our sexualities are lived" (p. 2). It is important to recognise that sexuality itself is not inherently oppressive or liberating, but rather it is the material practices which have been developed around it which "entails divisions of labour, power and resources" (p. 4). "Viewing sexuality as fully social" (p. 5) allows interrogation of it both at the level of lived experience and as structuring oppression. My own desire to understand my heterosexuality, sexual practice and feminism has lead to a primary research question within this aim:

What are the experiences of women who identify as feminist and heterosexual?

These questions contribute directly to an area of ongoing theorising within feminism. Recent publications (e.g. Jackson 1999; Richardson 1996) have re-invigorated the debate about heterosexuality within feminism, and offer the opportunity for further contributions to feminist theory from the perspective of heterosexual feminists.

Aim Two – The Media, Feminism and Heterosexuality

Traditionally, sexuality has been seen to reside within the private domain, but since the 19th century, as both Foucault (1990) and Jeffreys (1990) note it has gained ground and influenced the public. MacDonald (1995) suggests that "while sexuality is primarily expressed in private, presentation of the body and fashion are increasingly recognised as public languages" (p. 164) and so become part of the meaning and pleasures which constitute our social and cultural practices (Fiske 1989a). In crossing the divide between public and private, and social and cultural, sexuality becomes "inherently political, it is centrally involved in the distribution and possible redistribution of various forms of social power" (Fiske 1989a: 1). Importantly, as McRobbie (1991) notes, the identities and sexualities being discussed refer to "real existing identities in the ethnographic sense" (p. 58) as well as their textual or discursive construction. Pulling together both of these approaches, the research examines the construction of heterosex in the media and its consumption by feminists who are actively working to resist and re-work these
images in their daily lives. As such, it provides the opportunity to examine 'pleasure' from a political position and raises the research question: -

What can an analysis of pleasure and resistance in media representations of heterosex contribute to feminist media theory, feminist theory of heterosexuality and feminism more generally?

The research recognises the constraining structures of inequality of the socio-economic and political world, while also accepting the varied realities and interpretations the participants bring to the research. The research contributes both to feminist theory and media studies through a deeper understanding of women's pleasure — both mediated and sexual. It considers more specifically an area that has been under-researched and under-theorised both within feminism and media studies through the examination of pleasure and resistance in terms of heterosexuality and heterosex.

**Aim Three - Holistic Media Research and Feminist Cultural Politics**

Alasuutari (1999) suggests that the 'new audience studies' must go beyond simply considering the consumption of media products by a particular audience. "A study may start out from such a research design, but the big picture one wants to shed light on, or the big question to pursue, is the cultural place of the media in the contemporary world" (p. 7). He goes on to say that the researcher may be concerned with issues of meaning or media use, "but it also includes questions about the frames within which we conceive of the media and their contents as reality and as representations — or distortions — of reality" (p. 7). The project adopts a broad approach to research on the media, not only asking women about their identities as heterosexual and feminist, but also interrogating the wider representation of institutionalised heterosexuality. It explores mediated images of heterosexuality, feminism, and heterosexual sex (heterosex). It considers the processes that produce media discourses of feminism and heterosexuality, and the eventual consumption of these mediated forms by women who identify as feminist and heterosexual. It raises a particular research question: -

What kind of answers do different methods of analysis provide for a feminist cultural politics, and what does this mean for a broader study of the media?
Through feminist theory and critical cultural theory, the research seeks to bridge the gap between political economy and a cultural studies approach. It contributes to the wider literature within cultural studies through an assessment of the different methods of data collection and analysis. For feminist media studies, it more particularly examines the continual encoding and re-inscription of an institutionalised heterosexuality that oppresses and constrains women, and their consumption by audience members. It extends the consideration of women's pleasure, beyond the boundaries of 'women's genres' to areas in which theories of spectatorship have dominated.

3.2 Employing Multi-Methods

Denzin (1991) suggests that feminist cultural studies "examines three interrelated problems: the production of gendered, ethnic, political cultural meanings, the textual analysis of these meanings, and the study of lived cultures and lived experiences and their connections to these worlds of representation" (p. 152). As such, the research demands a multi-layered approach that not only considers women's accounts of feminism and heterosexuality, but also examines their wider mediated construction. In employing a variety of methods of data collection and analysis, I attempt to use the best method to address the research questions. Brannen (1992) stresses the responsibility of researchers wishing to employ multi-methods, writing "at the very least the multi-method approach demands that the researcher specifies, as precisely as possible, the particular aims of each method, the nature of the data that is expected to result, and how the data relate to theory" (p. 17). Appendix A provides a table outlining chapters, data collection method, analysis and the aim to which they contribute.

Multi-method research generally refers to issues of triangulation (e.g. Erzberger & Prien 1997), the incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative methods within one research project (e.g. Brannen 1992; Bryman 1988, 1992; Murdock 1997; Rabinowitz & Weseen) or epistemological conflict (e.g. Reinharz 1983; Schröder 1999). While accepting that these are aspects of the use of multi-method research, within this project they are seen as a means to "situate these studies within a wider framework, linking constructions [...] to different levels of social organisation, and exploring the intersections between the 'local' and the 'global'" (Sporton 1999: 74). As mentioned earlier, some media research has incorporated multi-methods to understand the whole process of media construction.
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(e.g. Lutz & Collins 1993; Miller et al. 1998). For instance, Fenton et al.’s (1998) work *Mediating Social Science* contains a content analysis of the reporting on social science in the British mass media, semi-structured interviews with "senior managers and marketing personnel from key institutions in this communication environment" (p. 42), questionnaires to social scientists represented in the media, interviews with journalists, focus group interviews and a case study of the production of a news item. Working from Bryman’s (1992) distinction between qualitative and quantitative research (that qualitative is flexible and reflexive, while quantitative is pre-determined and finely-tuned) the research undertaken by Fenton et al. falls into both categories, with interviews, focus groups and the case study being qualitative, while content analysis and questionnaires are quantitative.

Epistemologically, multi-method research moves beyond simplistic qualitative and quantitative paradigms, asking whether “the use of a particular method inevitably means that a particular epistemological position has been adopted” (Brannen 1992: 15). Some proponents of multi-method research suggest that “the fundamental question is one about why social scientists (and others) conceive of different research methods as opposed in the first place” (Oakley 1999: 248). Quantitative and qualitative data simply become “two kinds of representations of phenomena. Both are part of the general methodological scheme of research. Neither is preferable to the other...” (Valsiner 2000: 100). Rather, it is the research problem that is seen to “guide the decision about whether to employ quantitative or qualitative research (and indeed which specific method of data collection should be used)” (Bryman 1992: 69). Instead of arguing for the importance of convergence and complementarity as triangulation does, multi-method researchers are frequently interested in dissonance (Erzberger & Prein 1997) that can be treated as “suggestive of new lines of enquiry” (Bryman 1992: 64) and recognises the complexity of problems that can be faced in research (Hammersley 1992: 52).

The use of multi-methods by feminist researchers is seen to be part of their “commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks. Multiple methods enable feminist researchers to link past and present, ‘data gathering’ and action, and individual behaviour with social frameworks” (Reinharz 1992: 197). Traditionally, feminist research has seen to be based on qualitative methods because of their ability to “document the social power relations affecting gender and sexuality, and epistemologically they can open up the gendered
construction of knowledge" (Lawson 1995: 450), but many more researchers are beginning to not only use quantitative methods, but also to employ a mixed method strategy. "Multiple methods are used by many feminist researchers" writes Reinharz (1992) "because of our recognition that the conditions of our lives are always simultaneously the product of personal and structural factors" (p. 204). Tolman and Szalacha (1999) claimed that the use of a multi-method strategy in their work with young women produced "a kind of feminist eclecticism that has at its heart the perspectives and experiences of these young women" (p. 11). A feminist epistemological position should not suggest allegiance to a particular methodology, but rather a political commitment to understand and combat oppression and patriarchy throughout women's lives (Brannen 1992).

McKendrick (1999: 46-48) warns that researchers wishing to employ multi-methods should carefully consider the epistemological and methodological ramifications. As well as warning about the different directions and approaches that multi-method studies can adopt, he questions the different stages at which it can be applied. Projects can be multi-method in incorporating different and discrete projects into one research question, through the use of multiple locations or sites of research, or through the application of different methods of analysis to data sets.

Briefly in the next section, I address the use of multi-methods in the current project, their choice and rationale, the levels at which multi-method research is occurring, and their epistemological importance to the current project.

3.2.1 Multi-Method Research in the Current Project

The methods employed within this project include a quantitative content analysis, qualitative textual analyses, questionnaires, participant diaries, focus group interviews and telephone interviews. In addition, the research can be seen to embrace a multi-method approach on two levels - first through the range of methods of data collection employed to consider both the mediated representation of the institution of heterosexuality and the more localised understanding of its practice, and second, through the use of different forms of analysis on the same data sets. For instance, results from the content analysis are not only subjected to a statistical analysis, but representative articles are analysed textually to consider their cultural construction. As well, the data generated by the focus groups is analysed thematically, discursively and narratively; with diary entries and questionnaire
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responses being used to highlight particular issues. The different methods are seen both as a means of triangulation through convergence and consistency, but also to highlight dissonance and work across the data for deeper understanding. For instance, results from the content and textual analysis seem to suggest that feminism is being obscured as an issue within the mainstream media. Responses to open-ended questionnaire items provide deeper and more complex understandings of the issue.

Multi-method research was employed for several reasons. First, as suggested above, different methods were seen to provide a broader picture or examine varying aspects of the research question, giving a more holistic approach to media research. Second, it provided the means to develop "a multifaceted picture that can be used to powerful effect" (Ussher 1999: 4). Third, the combination of both large-scale comparative data, and localised detailed data allows the researcher to "distinguish between personal experience and collective oppression" (Oakley 1999: 251) and to examine both structure and process (Bryman 1992). It was seen as the most efficient and revealing means to consider the intersection of heterosexuality as institution and as practice. Third, guided by a feminist epistemological position, in which understanding and deconstructing the discourses of patriarchy is central, multi-method research seemed most effective in allowing the testing of "hypotheses guided by feminist theory as well as [...] [enabling] women to speak for themselves" (Brannen 1992: 23). Fourth, multi-method research provided the means to look "as widely as possible in search for understanding critical issues in women's lives" (Reinharz 1992: 201), and to include both researchers' and subjects' perspectives (Bryman 1992). Finally, multi-methods were employed because in considering each research question, a particular method was deemed the most appropriate means of examination. It was seen as a means to "engage the political" by exploring the potential for interweaving methods" (Lawson 1995: 455).

3.2.2 A Word on Epistemology

Traditionally an epistemological stance is tied to the use of particular 'types' of data collection or analysis (e.g. the qualitative/quantitative divide). Within this project many different forms of data and analysis are included, and so epistemologically it is feminism that informs the project at all stages. It is the basis of the epistemology (Cook & Fonow 1990; Gelsthorpe 1992; Jaggar 1989; Smith
1987), and in moving "from the privatised local sphere of feminism to full-scale engagement in the public sphere" (McRobbie 1991: 68) it structures the methodology. Ang (1996) suggests that it is from "within the framework of a particular cultural politics that we can meaningfully decide which contexts we wish to foreground as particularly relevant" so that the stories we tell are "as compelling and persuasive as possible in the context of the specific problematics which arise from particular branches of cultural politics" (p. 78). In a similar way, Stanley and Wise (1988) write:

We're first, foremost, and last feminist; not feminist-phenomenologists, feminist-marxists or feminist hyphen anything else. Our interest and concern is with feminism and feminist revolution. And because of this we believe that feminism should borrow, steal, change, modify and use for its own purposes any and everything from anywhere that looks of interest and of use to it, but that we must do this critically (p. 202).

DeVault (1996) suggests "there is no single feminist method" (p. 29), and so to develop a full understanding of feminism and heterosexuality, both in its mediated form and in the personal practice of individual feminists, I do as Ang, and Stanley and Wise propose. I borrow different research tools from varied research traditions in order to more fully answer my questions and to consider their use for feminist cultural politics and media research.

At the same time, I acknowledge that these answers are only ever partial and are confined by the discourses and language that structure our interactions. Ang (1996) calls this "methodological situationalism" (p. 70) which underscores "the thoroughly situated, always context-bound ways in which people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think and talk about television and other media in everyday life." (p. 70-1). She writes that it is impossible for a researcher to be everywhere and to understand all. Our knowledge and understanding is always partial, and all results are partial and representational (Valsiner 2000). Although Ang writes particularly about media consumption, it is possible to apply her ideas across the process of media research:

Acknowledging the inevitably partial (in the sense of unfinished and incomplete) nature of our theorizing and research would arguably be a more enabling position from which to come to grips with the dynamic
complexity and complex dynamics of media consumption practices. In addition, a recognition of this sense of inexorable, epistemological partiality in the construction of knowledge would facilitate the foregrounding of the other, political meaning of being partial: the social and political importance of commitment and engagement in developing our understandings (p. 67).

While acknowledging Ang's request for reflexivity within media studies, it is her reference to the partiality of knowledge that is central. Using multi-method research may provide us with a wider or broader understanding of media construction, but these remain partial, both because we can never know all, and secondly because we re-tell and re-interpret the stories of our participants. As such, they are only ever partial recounts of our research findings and their research involvement.

Working from a broadly discursive or post-structuralist perspective, I see women's experience as meaningfully constituted by language (Weedon 1987). As such, I do not see their contributions in the research as windows to their 'true' beliefs (Potter & Wetherell 1987), but rather as contingent on socio-cultural resources (Potter 1996a). In looking in detail at the way that women talk (or not) about feminism and heterosexuality, I am particularly interested in the way that these have become institutionalised and to some extent emblematic, common sensical and impenetrable. I retain concepts of ideology and hegemony, seeing ideology in the ways our access to language and alternative understandings or representations is constrained (Winship 1992); and hegemony as providing the framework "within which any debate is contained" (Tolson 1996: 156).

3.3 Talking to Women about Feminism, Heterosexuality and the Media

The demands of a broad approach to media research require that an extensive range of data is collected and analysed. Rather than risk repetition, a brief overview of the methods employed in the study will be provided in the following sections. More detailed descriptions of their use within the project and the analysis undertaken is discussed in the appropriate chapters. Data collection and analysis occur at three levels. First, I examine the social creation of discourses of feminism and heterosexuality in the mainstream media. Second, I analyse these issues within the texts available for consumption. Third, I collect the experiences of women as
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audience, consuming these images and working them through in their lives. I attempt to investigate a: -

**wide range of artefacts interrogating relationships within the three dimensions of: (1) the production and political economy of culture; (2) textual analysis and critique of its artefacts; and (3) study of audience reception and the uses of media/cultural products (Kellner 1997: 34)**

In considering issues of feminist politics, the media and sexuality, women who identified as feminist and heterosexual were asked to keep a four week viewing diary in which they recorded and analysed instances of heterosex which they encountered in the media. Concurrent with the diary periods, a content analysis was conducted of eight mainstream British newspapers (four tabloid and four broadsheet), four women's magazines and one radio programme, providing a catalogue of articles in which women espousing feminist perspectives could be identified. 'Feminists' identified as sources in the articles were sent a questionnaire asking them about their interaction with the media in terms of the article under analysis, their more general experience with the media and their opinions of feminist and feminine representation.

After each four-week diary period, the research groups met together for a focus group discussion. Using the film clips that are analysed in chapter five as a catalyst for conversation, the participants discussed the representation of women, heterosexuality and heterosex from their own feminist perspective. After viewing the three scenes, the focus group conversations moved to a more detailed consideration of the participants' own sexual practice and the impact of the mainstream representations and their feminist politics. A year after the focus groups, participants were approached again for a follow-up telephone interview.

The project initially set out to collect women's experiences of being feminist and heterosexual, in light of their construction in the media, but in looking at the data returned in the questionnaires, diaries, focus groups and telephone interviews, it became apparent that talking about feminism and heterosexual practice was difficult. As a result the analysis undertook to examine the different ways in which women talked about feminism, heterosexuality and the media, as well as the ways in which they did not talk about their own sexual and political practice.
In the remainder of this chapter, I briefly outline each of the methods mentioned above, and consider their role in a feminist cultural politics.

3.3.1 What Counts and Who Counts? Content Analysis and the Questionnaire Study

Quantitative content and qualitative textual analysis are well-documented forms of feminist media research (see chapter two). Content analysis is helpful for providing an overview of a large area, while textual analysis considers the construction of individual representations in more detail. Together, these present an analysis of the media as the site in which heterosexuality as institution and practice is coded and re-presented to women.

As mentioned above, the content analysis conducted for this project, ran concurrently with the diary periods. Eight newspapers (The Observer, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, The Sunday Telegraph, The Express, The Daily Mail, The Sunday Express and The People) were chosen for their range of ideological positions (i.e. The Guardian was seen as a liberal or left paper, while The Daily Telegraph was considered more conservative) covering broadsheets and tabloids, weekend and daily papers. Four magazines (Cosmopolitan [monthly], Prima [bi-weekly], Woman and Woman’s Own [weekly]) were selected according to the highest circulation figures for each periodical, whereas the radio programme, Woman’s Hour, was chosen as a broadcast medium that directly targets a female audience.

A rolling sample covered 8th September to 21st December 1998 and 23rd May to 19th June 1999 (to coincide with the diary periods). Articles were included in the sample not simply because a woman in the article called herself feminist, raised feminism as an issue within a discussion or discussed an aspect of gender politics. Rather, the article qualified for inclusion if the researcher judged that a woman talked critically about gender politics and their impact on women’s lives. So for instance, an article in which a woman simply talked about differences between men and women would not be included. If she spoke about these differences in terms of the material impact it had on women’s lives, she would be. This process involves an undeniable degree of subjective judgement. However, as with all quantitative content analysis it is assumed that over time all judgements are consistent within a specified coding schedule. Three articles were then chosen and subjected to a
more rigorous textual analysis that looked at the construction of feminism, feminists and heterosexuality within each of the pieces. Articles included come from Woman's Own, The Express, and Woman's Hour. In addition, a textual analysis of three sex scenes from mainstream films was also included. The media was posited as a site in which heterosexuality was both maintained and re-inscribed, and sex scenes in mainstream films were a place in which this occurred most explicitly.

Although feminist research has in the past turned away from a quantitative research paradigm, rejecting its reliance on ‘science’ as patriarchal (Reinharz 1983), many feminist researchers are now utilising questionnaires as a means to survey large populations (e.g. Braun & Kitzinger, under submission; Kelly, Regan & Burton 1992; Koss 1988). Women who were identified as ‘feminist’ in the articles were sent a questionnaire, containing both closed and open-ended questions (see Appendix B), which asked them about their interaction with the media in terms of the article under analysis, their more general experience with the media and their opinions of feminist and feminine representation. Over 180 questionnaires were sent out. Approximately 45% of these were returned completed. Of the remaining 55%, about half (27% of the total) were not completed but the women to whom they were sent responded (by letter, telephone or email) to explain why they had not completed them. I have argued elsewhere (Finlay, 2000) that it is inappropriate to consider these as ‘non-responses’ as is traditionally done in survey research (e.g. Bradburn & Sudman 1979; Dillman 1991). The women have in fact responded and although they have not completed the questionnaires, some of the letters tell interesting stories of women’s interaction with the media - experiences which would be lost if they were simply categorised or explained away as ‘nonresponses’. The questionnaires and the content analysis data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was coded as nominal, and as such provided results through frequencies and cross-tabulations.

Employing content and textual analysis of the British mass media not only provided the context in which the research was being conducted and a record of the more general coverage that the participants would encounter during each research period, it also constructed a snapshot of the current construction of feminism and heterosexuality in the mainstream media. While the content analysis is useful in providing an overview, the more detailed textual analysis reveals the ways in which feminism and heterosexuality are encoded in the media. It allowed me to address
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aims two and three as listed above and answered questions about the construction of feminism, femininity and heterosexuality in factual and fictional media, as well as the use of different methods for a feminist cultural politics. The results of these three studies (quantitative content analysis, qualitative textual analysis, and questionnaire study) are reported and analysed in chapter four. The film clips are analysed in chapter five.

Although I make claims to an holistic approach to the media, one important aspect is not included within the research project. While the content and textual analysis provide an overview of media representation, and the questionnaires give details of the sources quoted throughout the media, I have not examined the detailed production of the media items through conversations with journalists, editors or producers. Future research should consider this aspect of media production.

3.3.2 Participant Research Group Sample

Research specifically about women who identify as feminist is rare, but does exist (e.g. Hamblin 1985; Klonis et al. 1997; Rowland & Thomas 1996; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 1993). Richardson (1996b) cautions that feminism "has many different meanings, and perhaps never more so than today" (p. 192). This research project sought to include women who self-identified as feminist and heterosexual. Beginning in April 1998, letters were sent to over 60 different organisations, associations and university departments introducing the research and offering to meet with anyone who might be interested. I also spoke in Canterbury, Birmingham and Coventry, to introduce the project and search for participants. Specifically I outlined that I was looking for women who identified as feminist and heterosexual. Realising the controversy around both of these terms (e.g. Griffin 1989; J. Katz 1996) I clarified my definitions and explained that by feminist I was looking for women who were concerned with issues of equality and oppression, particularly in terms of sexuality. By heterosexual, I explained that I was interested in talking to women who primarily identified as heterosexual or whose current or most recent relationship had been with a man. I informed interested participants of my desire to collect and share experiences of being heterosexual and feminist, to develop and extend a feminist theory of sexuality. Given that (as is discussed in chapter seven, but see Rosenblum 1994; Segal 1994, 1994a; Thomas 1994) past failures adequately to theorise heterosexuality have been explained as due to the
(purportedly hostile) involvement of lesbians, I informed the members that I was also heterosexual and shared their concerns.

Thirteen geographically diverse research groups were created (although subsequently one of these folded) in Canterbury, London, Birmingham, Coventry, Stoke-on-Trent, Leicester, Loughborough (5), and Edinburgh. Anonymised details of the participants’ and their contribution to the research project can be found in Appendix C. A total of 40 women between the ages of 19 and 68 participated in all aspects of the research project (diaries, focus groups and interviews). One woman identified as Black, one as Jewish, seven were Indian or Bangladeshi, and the remaining 31 identified as White. All participated in the focus groups, 24 provided diaries and 14 agreed to participate in follow-up interviews.

3.3.3 Diaries

Research using diaries is sometimes referred to as personal document research, and has been broadly defined by Breakwell and Wood (1995) as: -

Any data collection strategy which entails getting respondents to provide information linked to a temporal framework is essentially a diary technique [...] The diary techniques allow the medium of the record to be chosen so as to best suit the topic and the type of respondent studied (p. 293).

Many researchers have emphasised the personal nature of the document and the shared experience through which “the reader of the document comes to know the author and his views of events with which the document is concerned” (Redfield 1945: vii).

Diaries or journals have been considered from two perspectives - those that are historical or ‘naturally occurring’, and those that are solicited specifically for research purposes. Solicited research diaries: -

...provide first hand accounts of situations to which the researcher may not have direct access [...] They provide ‘insider’ accounts of situations. Finally, they provide further sampling of informants, of activities and of
The forms of diaries used in research range widely and are specifically tailored to particular research questions. They can be as simple as a variety of checklists that are completed at a prescribed time (e.g., Hightower 1998) or as elaborate as detailed textual analysis of particular media products (e.g., Buckham 1998). In addition, the instructions given can be precise, providing space for specific answers (e.g., Betz & Skowronski 1997), can be based on open-ended questions (e.g., Kooiker 1995) or can allow the participant to set their own recording agenda (e.g., Caplan 1992). The flexibility of diaries explains their popularity, allowing for the collection of a wide range of information in a variety of formats.

As a stand-alone method they are considered particularly useful as a chronological record providing repeated measures (Richardson et al. 1998), a record of change over time (Holbrook 1986), an understanding of temporal relationships (Richardson 1994) and as a means to understand the experience of time itself (Gershuny & Sullivan 1998). In addition, they have been praised for the high levels of reporting which occur (Richardson 1994; Verbrugge 1980), the rich, detailed data that are provided (Richardson 1994), and the spontaneity and exploration that can transpire (Breakwell & Wood 1995). They are considered to be a means of data collection that is familiar to individuals and as a result is a cost-effective means of sampling (Breakwell & Wood 1995). Social researchers have also praised their usefulness in researching the unknown by providing "privileged access [...] into a dimension of human reality which would be difficult to come to from other means" (Sheridan 1993:28) and by giving a voice to the disenfranchised (Holbrook 1995).

Diaries are often used in conjunction with other methods and are seen to provide good supplementary data (Kluckhorn 1945), to act as a good stimulus for discussion (Kember et al. 1996) and in the diary: diary-interview method as proposed by Zimmerman and Weider (1977) solicited diaries are used as a basis to build questions for an intensive interview.

A range of problems with diary methods have been identified, particularly for researchers working within a quantitative, objective or positivist paradigm where concerns arise over the conditioning, desensitisation and fatigue which may occur through repeatedly completing diaries (Breakwell & Wood 1995; Kooiker 1995;
Verbrugge 1980; Wheeler & Reis 1991); about the validity of data provided because of participants’ reluctance to be ‘honest’ (Verbrugge 1980; Wachter & Kelly 1998); and about the difficulty in assessing the validity or reliability of the responses (Breakwell & Wood 1995; Holbrook 1986).

For researchers working within a qualitative framework, written diaries assume literate participants, comfortable with expressing themselves in writing (Kluckhorn 1945). There is concern over possible expense (Richardson 1994; Verbrugge 1980), and also the commitment, both of time and personal involvement, that diaries require (Holbrook 1986; Kooiker 1995; Wheeler and Reis 1991), producing a fear of ‘drop-out’ (Breakwell & Wood 1995; Steptoe et al. 1998). In addition, for some researchers the wealth of data may be difficult to exploit adequately in analysis being especially ‘thick’ and self-referential (Kooiker 1995; Steptoe et al. 1998; Verbrugge 1980).

Feminist researchers have used diaries to research diverse areas such as household inequities (e.g. Berk 1985) or the development of a feminist consciousness (e.g. Bristow & Esper 1988). Few discuss their use in any detail or their contributions to feminist research, although some suggest that it is a method of data collection particularly suited to women (e.g. Wells 1992).

### 3.3.3.1 Diaries in the Current Project

To begin to understand the relationship between media consumption, feminist politics and sexual activity, participants were asked to complete a four week media consumption diary, in which instances of heterosex in the media were noted and analysed, before meeting for a focus group which addressed many of the questions raised in the diaries by the participants. Each participant was given a diary pack which included diary sheets for completion (Appendix D), a detailed explanation of how to fill in the sheets, guidance questions to assist them in their analysis and a final feedback form which allowed the participants to evaluate the process of diary-keeping. No definitions of what constituted heterosexual activity were provided and women analysed instances as diverse as a single kiss to more graphic depictions of sexual activity. I followed up by telephone with the participants on two occasions, a week after our first meeting and then two weeks following when the focus group was arranged.
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An important reason for choosing diaries as a method of data collection (and one that is frequently ignored) is the exciting synergy that is created between the aspects of time and reflection outlined above, and their benefits as both research and participant centred perspectives. Diaries, in their temporal and reflective aspects, offer a multi-dimensional experience for the participant and rich data for the researcher - both in breadth and in depth. It exists horizontally (see Figure 1) along a temporal continuum (the breadth of the project, the time period which it covers), while at the same time existing vertically in the rich detail that the participants can choose to include (or exclude as well, which is of equal interest). At the same time, the participant can work through the temporal continuum, returning to earlier entries and reflecting again on information that has been provided, allowing them to examine different perspectives and develop the ideas that are presented there. The diaries become a record of both the particular area being researched and of the participant's actual involvement in the project. It opens the researcher to new possibilities that might be suggested by the participants and does not close down the options of expression available to participants. "The journal can be used in three time dimensions: to capture the present, to reflect on one's history, and to create the future" (Walden 1995:19).

The intention in selecting diaries as a means of data collection was to examine all three of the aims listed above through both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The diaries provide a record of the range of heterosexual activities which were encountered in the media during each four week period as well as allowing the participants 'personal' space to assess these in detail and encouraging reflection on some of the central issues regarding representation and feminist politics in preparation for the focus groups. The data returned by the diaries provided a longitudinal cross-section of British media depictions of heterosex, rich and detailed.
analysis of these by the participants, and clear evidence of thoughtful reflection and reflexivity throughout the research process. In this project diaries were followed by focus group interviews in which issues raised in the diaries could be further probed and explored providing a means of closer examination of interesting, contradictory or unusual diary responses or, from a social constructionist perspective, allowing for the participants and researcher to together construct a different version of events (Wilkinson 1999).

3.3.4 Focus Groups

Unlike some areas of feminist research (e.g. feminist psychology [Wilkinson 1999]), feminist media research has made extensive use of focus group discussions (e.g. Heide 1995; Press 1991a; Radway 1984), with many including the shared viewing of a media product (e.g. Hallam & Marshment 1995; Lee & Cho 1990/1995; McKinley 1997). Lunt and Livingstone (1996) suggests that interest in the focus group method both in the social sciences and research on media communication, has seen resurgence recently.

J. Kitzinger (1994) suggests focus groups are "organized to explore a specific set of issues. The group is focused in the sense that it involves some kind of collective activity" (p. 159). Morgan (1997) considers its hallmark to be the "explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (p. 2). Groups of people (usually six to nine [Krueger 1993; Wilkinson 1999]) consisting either of strangers, or pre-existing clusters of people (e.g. Finlay 1997; J. Kitzinger 1994) are brought together specifically for research purposes to discuss a topic proposed by the organiser or moderator. The moderator is responsible for ensuring the interaction between the participants, and of "eliciting a wide range of opinions on that issue" (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 80). Focus groups are particularly distinctive for the type of data that they create. Participants interact with each other creating the opportunity for the observation of "social processes in action" (J. Kitzinger 1994).

Morgan (1997) outlines three types of focus groups - those that are self-contained and are the only method of data collection, those that are used as a supplementary method (perhaps to develop questionnaires), and those that are part of a multi-method study. He also offers a concise list of the advantages and disadvantages, and suggests that focus groups are helpful in providing the
"opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time, based on the researcher's ability to assemble and direct the focus group sessions" (p. 8). In addition, he mentions that focus groups provide the opportunity to explore areas which otherwise might not be socially observable, allow for the collection of material directly targeted to the research question and as such are relatively efficient. They offer the opportunity to observe people's opinions, experiences, insights and motivations. Finally, if time and agenda allow, focus groups can be useful in letting participants explore different facets of the research topic. He also points out that focus groups are unnatural situations, limited to verbal behaviour, and only allow observation of the group present (and therefore are difficult to generalise). Focus groups also require a skilled moderator and may provide data that is of less depth and detail than an interview.

Wilkinson (1999) suggests that some of these may address particular feminist critiques of traditional methods of data collection. She proposes that focus groups avoid artificiality and are "naturalistic" insofar as they mirror the processes of communication in everyday social interaction" (p. 227). Lunt and Livingstone (1996) also note their importance for simulating "routine but relatively inaccessible communicative contexts that can help us discover the processes by which meaning is socially constructed through everyday talk" (p. 85). For instance, Liebes and Katz (1990) stressed the importance of simulating everyday domestic viewing and conversation in their focus groups.

Second, Wilkinson (1999) suggests that focus groups as social contexts, avoid the decontextualization of meaning making. The method "offers the opportunity to observe the coconstruction of meaning and the elaboration of identities through interaction" (p. 229). My earlier research (Finlay 1997) used groups of friends to understand the creation of meaning in social contexts (Höijer 1990; Lindlof & Grodin 1990) and J. Kitzinger (1994) notes that: -

The focus group method is ideal for exploring social and communication issues and examining the cultural construction of experience. It taps into people's underlying assumptions and theoretical frameworks and draws out how and why they think" (p. 172).

Corner et al. (1990) suggest a word of caution around meaning making because the group nature of the interaction may also produce consensus around particular
issues. Lunt and Livingstone (1996) suggest that this critique comes from considering focus groups as simply extended individual interviews, and the interactive nature will mediate against consensus. This seems rather naive, and like Fenton et al. (1998), I think it is important to be vigilant for consensus and to:

...attempt to characterize the interpretative positions of the groups as a whole; to attend to the ways in which readings are collectively produced, involving the negotiation of meanings amongst group members; and also to note where individuals explicitly rejected the group consensus (p. 123)

Remarks from individual respondents should not be seen to represent the whole group (Fenton et al. 1998), or “to generalize to other categories (or other times or places)” (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 91). As well, the group nature of focus groups, and the intra-group power dynamics (Wilkinson 1998), can work to silence some participants. J. Kitzinger (1994) writes that “[t]he downside of such group dynamics is, of course, that the group may censor any deviation from group standards - inhibiting people from talking about certain things.” (p.110). It is necessary to consider the information that may remain unsaid (Denzin & Lincoln 1994) and to be aware that the group culture may “interfere with individual expression” (Fontana & Frey 1994: 365). However, Jordin and Brunt (1988) see the decoding of media messages as a group or social task that would make group interference meaningless.

Finally, Wilkinson (1999) suggests that focus groups have the potential to avoid exploitation of subjects. They are seen to “shift the balance of power and control toward the research participant, enabling them to assert their own interpretations and agendas” (p. 233). She notes that traditional writing on focus groups sees this as a disadvantage, with fears that the moderator will lose control of the session, but that for feminism, with concerns about the process of research (Maynard & Purvis 1994) focus groups offer space for the women to “determine their own agendas as much as possible” (Schlesinger et al. 1992: 29). Other researchers, assuming broader implications of power than those incurred through focus group interaction, caution against celebrating the equanimity of focus groups without considering other aspects. Although researchers may have less control during data collection, they have ultimate control in interpretation and production - “two of us have the final power with lots of negotiation to interpret the text of conversation co-created by we six” (Macpherson & Fine 1995: 181). Cunningham-
Burley et al. (1999) also note the power relationships between researchers and those bodies that provide funding, while Baker and Hinton (1999) in considering the participatory research process of focus groups suggest that they are not inherently participatory, but are forums for power and control.

Focus groups have been used successfully for the discussion of 'sensitive' topics (Crawford et al. 1995; Crawford et al. 1994; Frith 2000). Lee (1993) suggests that topics that are considered sensitive raise strong feelings or emotions, and in some way threaten those who are involved. Research that considers sexuality is usually considered sensitive (Farquhar 1999). Zeller (1993) suggests ways in which any difficulty sensitive topics may raise can be overcome. He proposes there are three places in the research design process in which researchers can encourage discussion of sensitive issues. First, the researcher should capitalise on reactivity\textsuperscript{vii}, turning it from a liability to an asset. Second, he advises the moderator to use an appropriate level of self-disclosure. Finally, he suggests that the moderator must ensure "legitimation of nonparticipation along with the desire for participation" (p. 178). The importance of the interaction between the moderator and participants, and between the participants themselves is stressed.

Farquhar (1999) notes the links between sensitivity and sexuality and suggests it is important to begin by considering the population under study. She cautions that defining a population by an activity or behaviour that might be stigmatised can limit conversation. As well, it is the topic of conversation that must be considered, suggests Farquhar (1999), particularly when women's pursuit of sexual pleasure is often seen as taboo (e.g. Segal 1994).

3.3.4.1 Focus Groups in the Current Project

Focus groups were used with all the research groups (12 in total) and usually lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. All focus groups were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Each group was based around an open-ended schedule of questions (Appendix E) that allowed space for the participants to pick up issues that were of interest to them, or refer back to earlier discussions. Conversations began\textsuperscript{viii} with an opportunity for the participants to reflect on wider issues of media representation of feminism, femininity and heterosexuality. Often the participants referred to their diaries, talked about entries within them, or raised questions that had occurred for them during the diary period. From my perspective, this became an important part
of the focus groups as it often illuminated entries in the diaries, providing more
details or highlighting problems and contradictions that the participants had
encountered during the research process (Finlay & Fenton 2000). After this general
discussion, the three film clips were watched and discussed individually, although
participants were told explicitly that they could refer across the clips or return to
other discussions. In the final part of the focus group, we moved to the wider
discussion of issues of feminism and heterosexuality, and their own practice of
heterosex in light of the mediated images viewed.

Conversations about heterosexuality, feminism and sexual activity are rarely
far from my discussions with my friends. Working from this basis, I hoped that other
heterosexual feminists would welcome the opportunity to talk through different
issues and work towards developing and understanding heterosexual pleasure.
Treating the focus groups as an opportunity to share experiences and work towards
understanding, they provided the opportunity to address the literature on feminism
and heterosexuality, as well as the role of the media in formulating feminist and
heterosexual identities. Disclosing my sexuality and feminist concerns, as well as
explaining my desire to collect women's experiences of feminism and
heterosexuality, placed me as an insider within the research process (Baker &
Hinton 1999). In most of the groups, conversations were lively and interactive. I
strove in each session not to present myself as an expert, but rather as someone
who was also concerned with exploring these issues and making links to wider
theorising around feminism and sexual practice. Because I was as concerned as
the participants to discuss the issues of feminism and heterosexuality, I did not
refrain from offering opinions or challenging them when I disagreed, while at the
same time recognising the implications of this kind of participation, particularly
around sensitive topics. Full participation is always constrained by the power
relationships of the research setting (I was both the moderator and interpreter of the
results).

Focus groups were chosen as a method because they seemed to offer the
opportunity to recreate the kinds of conversations I have had with my friends about
these issues. Fine & Gordon (1989) write:

If you really want to know either of us, do not put us in a laboratory, or
hand us a survey, or even interview us separately alone in our homes.
Watch me (MF) with women friends, my son, his father, my niece, or my mother and you will see what feels most authentic to me (p. 159).

In describing the focus groups this way, I include the strengths that Wilkinson (1999) has noted for feminist research, acknowledging their benefits in being 'relatively' naturalistic. I strove to use groups in which the women were at least acquaintances (if not friends), in hopes of reproducing the 'social event' (Holland & Ramazanoglu 1995) of the women's normal interaction. Like Wilkinson (1999), focus groups were seen to provide access to "the social nature of communication" (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 90) and to highlight "the extent to which what people say is actually constructed in specific social contexts" (Wilkinson 1998: 120). To write or speak is not, then, to express an interior world, but to borrow from the available things people write and say and to reproduce them for another audience* (Gergen 1988: 105), and as such, the focus groups offered the opportunity to understand how the participants (and myself) made sense of mediated images of heterosex, feminism and heterosexual practice*. As well, I acknowledged the shift in power balance outlined by Wilkinson and its importance in allowing "the researcher to access better, understand, and take account of the opinions and conceptual worlds of research participants" (p. 233). The interaction of focus groups also offered the opportunity for the members to negotiate meaning, and removed pressure from individual members (and the moderator), from responding when they may have felt uncomfortable (Fenton et al. 1998).

Focus groups were selected as method because of their emphasis on interaction. In addressing the three aims listed at the beginning of this chapter, focus groups were seen to facilitate the examination of each. They provided an opportunity for exploration of the key issues identified. They allowed for probing by the researcher, and the prospect for meaning-generation in relation to a feminist discourse of heterosexuality. Interaction between the participants and the moderator was also seen as a place in which participants could be observed drawing on cultural knowledge and using this during discussions of sexuality. In addition, focus groups were chosen as a complementary method to the diaries. Whereas diaries produce longitudinal data, raise the issues necessary for discussion and set the context, the focus groups provide a 'snapshot' of the process of media consumption and the ways that the participants relate this to their feminism and heterosexuality.
**3.3.4.2 Focus Group Analysis**

The focus groups were tape-recorded and transcribed orthographically. They were analysed using two different methods - thematic discourse analysis and conversation analysis. Broadly speaking "a theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis 1998: vii). Discourses are seen to "describe [...] aspects of the world in certain ways" (Parker 1997: 285) and "function in [...] relation to structures of power" (Gavey 1989: 466). Analysing discourse involves "a careful reading of texts [...] with a view to discerning discursive patterns of meaning, contradictions, and inconsistencies" (Gavey 1989: 467). Through close reading of the focus group transcripts (as well as the open-ended questionnaire responses and diary entries) I looked for themes, discourses and categories (Wilkinson 2000, in press) around which meaning was constructed. The analysis was theory-driven (Boyatzis 1998) reliant on feminist media studies and feminist theorising of heterosexuality. I began by reading the data to understand the ways in which the participants talked about the media in general, choosing representative extracts. Second, I began to look in more detail for evidence of audience activity in the participants' interactions. Finally, I returned the instances of activity to the wider perspective of the research project, interrogating the themes in terms of institutionalised and mediated heterosexuality. I focused on the talk and text "as social practices and on the resources that are drawn on to enable those practices" (Potter 1996: 129). I was concerned "with the ways in which these forms of language serve social, ideological, and political interests" (Parker 1997: 285).

Conversation analysis (Antaki 1994; Edwards 1997; Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998; Potter 1996a; Schegloff 1997; ten Hare 1999) attends to the fine details of talk and emphasises its action orientation. Most interview-based feminist research deletes the presence of the interviewer and researchers present their own involvement as no more than amanuensis or conduit for participants' own experiences (see Frith & Kitzinger 1998). Extracts from talk are assumed to 'speak for themselves', but are decontextualised and interpreted as if they were produced in a neutral and disinterested way by participants concerned only to report on their lives as accurately as possible. From a discursive perspective talk is always occasioned and produced in a context, in interaction with others. Again, a close reading of the text highlighted the negotiation that was occurring between myself as
moderator (identified as SJ throughout the extracts) and the participants around understandings of feminism and heterosexuality. It became apparent that, firstly, the participants were resisting the definitions being used in the conversation, and secondly, that talking about feminism and heterosexuality in this way was difficult. Two conversation mechanisms, membership category devices and show concessions are considered in detail.

### 3.3.5 Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews are often treated as 'just like' face-to-face interviews, although requiring more preparation (Burnard 1994), but subtle differences exist. Two main areas of discussion occur, one considers the differences between telephone and face-to-face interviews, while another examines the quality of information they provide.

Because the interviews are over the telephone, they have reduced 'channel capacity' (Groves 1990) meaning that a reduced set of messages (notably the lack of visual information) can be transmitted. It inhibits some of the subtle non-verbal interaction that may occur, and opportunities to probe or seek clarification may be lost (Frey & Oishi Mertens 1995). In addition, some studies have found that respondents provide shorter answers over the telephone (Groves & Kahn 1979), although Sykes and Collins (1988) found no difference in quality between face-to-face and telephone interviews. They suggest that the lack of visual cues between the interviewer and interviewee may lessen anxiety and prevent evoking cultural norms and stereotypes that may influence opinions. A meta-analysis of 31 studies compared the quantity and quality of the data from telephone and face-to-face interviews (de Leeuw & van der Zouwen 1988). Only small differences were found between them in terms of accuracy, item response and the amount of information elicited. Importantly, these were seen to decrease from the earlier studies (perhaps as people became more comfortable with using telephones).

Many of these studies were based on structured questionnaires rather than more open-ended questions. More recent research [e.g. Carr (1999)] suggests that telephone interviews produced richer and deeper data than semi-structured interviews. It is suggested that this is because of anonymity, freedom from self-censorship and relaxed and open conversation dominated by the interviewee.

Tausig and Freeman (1988) note that the respondent feels "safe and intimate when
interviewed in the comfort of his or her own environment* (p. 420). Other researchers have found telephone interviews were time and cost-effective, and conducive to free-flowing conversation (Waterman et al. 1999, Worth & Tierney 1993, Ziebland et al. 1988). Marcus and Crane (1986) concluded that in situations where interviewer and interviewee had met originally, the response rate and quality of information gathered through telephone interviews were comparable to data collected by face-to-face interviews. This suggests that the use of telephone interviews is acceptable as being a pragmatic choice where circumstances make face-to-face interviewing difficult.

3.3.5.1 Telephone Interviews in the Current Project

Telephone interviews were not a central form of data collection throughout the project, and were used as a follow-up strategy. All the women who had been involved in the full research process were contacted and asked to participate in a follow-up interview a year after their initial involvement. 17 of the 40 women agreed to participate, and convenient times and dates were arranged for the interview². Interviews lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to almost an hour, and were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. They were based around an open-ended schedule (Appendix F) that the participants had received in advance of the conversation.

The decision to use follow-up interviews was a pragmatic one. More and more as I looked at my data, it became apparent that feminism as an issue was rarely addressed in the focus groups. As I became aware through thematic and discursive analysis of the hesitancy women displayed in talking about feminism and heterosex, I became anxious to add a dimension of biographical or narrative analysis that would allow me to retain the participant and her contribution to the research in a more coherent form. A follow-up offered the opportunity to speak to the women again, feedback to them some of the issues with which I was struggling, and develop insight through longitudinal contact.

Telephone interviews were chosen because of their efficiency in terms of time and cost. Because I had met all of the participants and had developed a habit of calling them throughout the research process to ensure they were comfortable with the diaries, there was an established rapport on the telephone. I hoped that the distance created by the telephone interviews would provide the participants with the
opportunity to critically reflect on the information they had provided during the focus groups. They were useful in answering questions about feminism and sexual practice, as well as the role of the media in formulating feminist and heterosexual identities. Through the use of narrative analysis (discussed below) a longitudinal understanding of the participants' struggles around feminism and heterosexuality returned the whole participant to the research project.

3.3.5.2 Narrative Analysis

Using the diaries, focus group contributions and telephone interviews, the final analysis chapter adopts a narrative or biographical approach to the data. Rather than working across the data identifying themes and discourses, or within, concentrating on the fine details of talk, narrative analysis traces an individual throughout the research process. Frequently lost in the use of thematic, discursive or conversation analytic approach is a sense of the individual.

Research that looks at the stories provided by the participants is usually referred to as narrative analysis (Reissman 1993), but has also been called biographical (Bury 1982), phenomenological (Colaizzi 1978) or case study analysis (Yin 1984). It differs from the other forms of analysis used here by being concerned with the individual (Wilkinson 2000, in press) and rather than suggesting that the stories people tell are transparent reflections of their true beliefs, "it is interpreted in the light of people's search for meaning and their attempt to make sense of their lives and identities" (p. 9). "Thus, the data one gathers when collecting self-narratives are viewed not as kernels of truth about a person's life, but as temporary constructions of what seems most appropriate from the perspective of the narrator at that time" (Gergen 1988:102).

"Story telling, to put the argument simply, is what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us" writes Reissman (1993). "The story metaphor emphasizes that we create order, construct texts in particular contexts" (p.1). In employing a narrative analysis the researcher is concerned to investigate the stories being told by the participants. For some, the methodological approach examines and analyses the way that a respondent puts together a story (e.g. Labov 1972; Sacks 1972, 1974) or the sociolinguistic factors involved in its construction (e.g. Schiffrin 1996). More often the researcher is concerned with the 'how' of a story rather than a concern with the 'what' - the plot or story (Gubrium & Holstein
These approaches to analysis assume that "it is through embedding one's actions within one or more of these forms [stories or narratives] that one's actions take on meaning; they belong to a person with a certain past, heading in a certain direction, and with a future that will represent an extension of this past" (Gergen 1988:96). Detailed examination of narrative reveals the way that our culturally and socially situated stories are turned into verbal performances (Schiffrin 1996).

The analysis drew on these different areas of study, seeing the construction of a narrative as a joint production between the interviewer and the researcher (Gubrium & Holstein 1997). Stories are not simply told by one person and heard by the interviewer, rather the right to talk is asymmetrical - "It is the interviewer who determines, initiates, sequences and closes topics" (Cortazzi 1993:55). And it is the researcher who re-tells and re-interprets the participants' stories (Reissman 1993). Narratives then are told (and re-told) as a social activity (Faircloth 1999:212). "We are continually locating and relocating ourselves, defining and redefining ourselves and our worlds" (Schiffrin 1996: 200). Clearly then, stories told within an interview setting are important. Each tale must be considered as partial, "contingent upon specific contexts and circumstances, slanted towards a particular 'audience' and put together as much with a view to future outcomes as to disinterested reportage of the past" (MacLure 1993:375)

Narrative analysis acts as an important adjunct to the three other forms of analysis that have been used on the focus group data. First, it provides the means to see how the ideological findings of thematic and discursive analysis are played out across an individual's contributions. Second, it is an important means of triangulating, and therefore contributes to an holistic process of research. Finally, while thematic analysis allows a summary of the data, and conversation analysis looks in detail at the participants' own words, biographical analysis gives a sense of the "variability and contradiction within the accounts of individual participants" (Wilkinson 2000: 23) and their struggle with identities of feminism and heterosexuality. Through these three points, narrative analysis is useful in answering questions about feminism and heterosexuality, as well as the methodological contribution to feminist theory and cultural studies.
3.4 Summary

In moving forward into the chapters that report the results of the different methods and analyses discussed here, it is important to re-state two aspects in relation to the initial aims around which the research is built. First, in understanding women's consumption of mediated representations of heterosex and their own feminist politics and heterosexual practice, it was deemed most appropriate to attempt a broad or holistic approach to media research (with the exception noted above). This not only provided the means to examine and understand institutional heterosexuality as represented in the media (aim two), but placed the context of the women's media consumption and feminist practice within a wider structural framework (aims one and three). It allowed me to address questions of the role of media in formulating feminist and heterosexual identities and to consider the contribution of feminism to sexual practice (aims one and two). Second, in approaching a broad study of the media, epistemological decisions were made on the basis of a feminist cultural politics as opposed to a paradigmatic position. This stance justified the use of a range of different means of data collection and analysis to provide a more complete picture, and offers the opportunity to assess the type of data produced and its contribution to a wider feminist politics (aim three).
Notes to Chapter Three

1 Tudor (1995) notes that content analysis (which he groups with media effects) and textual analysis has fluctuating and frequently unexplained epistemological positions in cultural studies and media research.

2 Three pilot studies were run. In the first participants kept a two-week viewing diary, and participated in a focus group. The second and third pilot studies were used to refine the questions used in the focus groups only. The questionnaire was also piloted twice.

3 Questionnaires were originally sent out with a cover letter and Freepost envelope. After approximately three weeks a reminder letter was sent. When another three weeks had passed, the women were sent another questionnaire.

4 Unsolicited mail surveys have a notoriously bad return rate (Dillman 1991).

5 Initially I sought to contact the UK based women who had contributed to *Heterosexuality: A Reader* (Wilkinson & Kitzinger 1993), but expanded this to include Women's Studies Departments and organisations listed in *The Women's Directory* (MacDonald 1991) and *The She Women's Directory* (Brown 1998).

6 All names have been changed and any identifying details have been excluded.

7 "Reactivity refers to the phenomenon that the very process of measurement can induce change in the phenomenon itself" (Zeller 1993: 168).

8 This was true for all groups except RG8. In this instance, because of time pressure and access to a video machine and television, the group watched the video clips first and then moved to another room to continue the discussion. As a result, discussion of the diaries did not occur until later on in the session.

9 Three of the groups were either strangers or passing acquaintances (groups 5, 8 and 13), the remaining groups (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12) were friends or workmates.

x Although it must be noted that the interpretation created in social interaction "may not usually be an instant product of media consumption but may be a microcosm of what normally occurs over time" (Fenton et al., 1998: 124). Like Fenton et al., I "have no way of checking this" (p. 124). See as well Höijer (1990) and Lindlof & Grodin (1990).

xx The small response here can be partially explained. Of the 23 women who did not respond two were on maternity leave, one was moving shortly after the research period and, like nine of the students, did not provide forwarding details.
4.0 Feminising Feminism: The Case of the British Mass Media

In this chapter, I provide the results of a content analysis conducted of the British mass media, textual analysis of selective articles and a questionnaire study. The intention in conducting these studies was twofold. First, to examine in detail the media's representation and encoding of feminism and feminists to understand their definitional role in the media. Second, it provided the context in which the research groups were set. Because it ran concurrently with the diary studies, it gave useful information on the mass media resources upon which the participants drew and gave a succinct summary of the context in which this occurred. In addition, the questionnaire study gave further illumination to the construction of issues in the media, and the discourses that prevailed. The concern in each case was to consider the way in which feminism and feminists were encoded in the media and their role in defining issues.

4.1 Mediated Feminisms

There is no doubt that the news media of the early 1970s played an absolutely central role in turning feminism into a dirty word, and stereotyping the feminist as a hairy-legged, karate-chopping commando with a chip on her shoulder the size of China, really bad clothes, and a complete inability to smile - let alone laugh (Douglas 1995: 165).

Much research to date indicates that feminists are represented in the media as “fanatics”, 'hysterical', 'frustrated', 'ugly', and 'anti-man' (van Zoonen 1992: 467). Since early in the second wave of the women's liberation movement feminists have been concerned about their representation in, and coverage by, the news media in particular (e.g. Hole & Levine 1971). This concern continues to the present with research mainly conducted in North America (e.g. Danner & Walsh 1999; Goddu 1999). In most of the research, the media has been seen to be a monolithic entity that has distorted the aims and principles of the women's movement, although some feminist researchers have acknowledged the impact feminism has had on the media (e.g. Douglas 1995; Rapping 1993; Rhode 1995; Stone 1993). This chapter addresses the issues involved in mediated feminism through quantitative and qualitative analysis of media content. I argue that although feminism is often positively represented, the heightened individualisation of feminist issues in the media and the justifiable concern and apprehension of feminists interacting with the
media, has led to a mainstreaming of feminist politics, representing a softer or 'feminised feminism'.

Critiques by media researchers of the treatment of feminism in the media can be seen to fall into three broad categories - neglect, characterisation, and personalisation (Rhode 1995). Frequently, the media has simply neglected to cover the women's movement or to acknowledge the gains feminism has made for women. By ignoring detailed coverage of feminist issues the media does not need to confront the issues that are being raised or tackle their political construction (i.e. Danner & Walsh 1999). Huddy (1997) found that the media often simply neglect to define feminism and that the reader has to learn about feminism from associations made in the article. In neglecting the wider construction of feminism, coverage of women's issues is pushed towards a narrow focus (Costain et al. 1997) or ideological purdah (Douglas 1995) where female 'experts' are only used to comment on a narrow range of issues.

Characterisation has worked to limit coverage of the women's movement in the media. Rakow and Kranich (1991) suggested that in order for a woman to speak for other women in the news, "she must signify as 'feminist', a particular and unusual kind of 'woman'" (p. 17). Feminists were frequently set up in opposition to other women (van Zoonen 1992), emphasised in the construction of news stories when 'ordinary women' were asked to comment on feminist protests (Douglas 1995). Another damaging characterisation that was noted in feminist research was the tendency to homogenise feminism as middle-class, liberal and white (Rakow & Kranich 1991; van Zoonen 1992). Researchers found that "mainstream journalists, most of whom were men, endorsed a narrow, white, upper-middle-class slice of liberal feminism and cast the rest off as irresponsible, misguided, and deviant" (Douglas 1995: 186). Stone (1993) also found the media reluctant to use sources outside of particular organisations, noting that "not all feminists were regarded by journalists as equally credible" (p. 397) and that those from particular groups were seen to be "taking positions consonant with dominant values and institutions" (p. 397).

The final way that researchers have found feminists and feminism to be covered in the media is through personalisation or individualisation. Some researchers (Douglas 1995; Goddu 1999; Huddy 1997) suggest that the movement is personalised or individualised when certain women are seen to act as the
mouthpiece for all feminists or women activists. It is claimed that the disproportionate interest in the details of their personal lives reduces the actual news to a secondary position (Danner & Walsh 1999; Freeman 1995; Goddu 1999). Political struggle is personalised which has been said to "diminish [...] women's credibility, [and] [...] marginalize their substantive message" (Rhode 1995: 697). This removes discussion of more far-reaching issues or links to wider structural oppression, in favour of "feminism as a lifestyle but not as a political commitment" (Rhode 1995: 703). Personalisation also occurs when issues are reduced to the experiences of one individual. In concentrating on "individual experiences and voices", the news media does not reflect that women are "caught up in a web of social structures [...] in which only certain paths are open" (Winship 1987: 81).

It is within these debates that this chapter is set. As explained in the previous chapter, the research that is presented here has used a quantitative content analysis and detailed qualitative textual analysis to identify articles that contain a feminist perspective and assess the themes and values around which they are constructed. In addition, sources presenting a feminist perspective within the identified articles were contacted to understand the dynamics of news creation in the interaction that took place between themselves and journalists, and their evaluation of the process. It is hoped that the use of quantitative and qualitative analysis will overcome the limitations of both methods, illuminating some of their more salient features, while also considering the 'public' face of feminism, its definitional power (Schlesinger 1990) and the role of its sources as 'advocates' (Deacon & Golding 1994).

Working from Rhode's (1995) categorisation of the media's treatment of feminism and feminists, the results of the content analysis will consider neglect and characterisation. Personalisation will be examined through the detailed textual analysis of three representative articles.

4.2 Neglect

I investigated whether the media simply neglect feminism or relegate it to an unimportant perspective, removed from the main areas of the media product. Over the 135 days of the study, 13 different media outlets (daily, weekly and monthly) were analysed. 175 articles were identified as containing a 'feminist' perspective. Most of the articles included in the survey were found on radio\textsuperscript{3} (43.5%), followed by
the broadsheet press, magazines and tabloid press (see Table 1). *Woman's Hour*,
the programme recorded on BBC Radio 4, has a clear 'feminist' agenda (Murray
1996) in comparison to the other media identified. It is a daily (Monday to Saturday)
one-hour programme and contains more articles identified as feminist than the two
daily and Sunday broadsheets combined. Jenni Murray, the current host of
*Woman's Hour* writes that for over fifty years the programme has “celebrated
women, it informed women, it educated women, it entertained women, it filled in the
gaps other programmes ignored” (Murray 1996: 9). Also of interest is the relatively
low figure assigned to *Cosmopolitan*. Under the editorship of Helen Gurley Brown,
*Cosmopolitan* was ‘revamped’ to offer “half a feminist message” (Harrington 1974,
quoted in McMahon 1990), and yet of the five issues examined, few articles were
found to fit the ‘feminist’ criteria or contain ‘feminist’ sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Woman's Hour</em> - Radio 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadsheet Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cosmopolitan</em> (monthly), Prima (bi-weekly), Woman and Woman's Own (weekly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabloid Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Express, The Daily Mail, The Sunday Express, The People</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=175

Further analysis of the position of the articles within the various media outlets
indicates that most are found in the hard news areas of the front page and main
section (61.3%). Not surprisingly, many of the articles are also found in the softer
news sections of the woman's page or the lifestyle category (27.5%).
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Generally, articles were considered newsworthy because of their relationship to current events (see Table 2). Most of the articles seem to be in reaction to particular events - the publication of a book, a television programme, the release of government figures. Few of the articles, only 19.4%, are in response to the release of reports or research undertaken from a feminist perspective. Feminist research results seem to be neglected by the media. This may of course be because the journalists never hear about them or because of the publications' own cautiousness around feminism (Winship 1987). Indeed, results to be considered in the next section show that few feminist advocates are proactive in seeking media attention regarding their research. So, although there were a relatively low number of articles identified over the analysis period, an examination of position, and distribution suggests that feminism when covered is given prominence and status in the media.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impetus</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current events</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release of a report</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book publication</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television programme</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=175

Feminism can also be neglected when it is not explicitly represented in articles that clearly pertain to a feminist agenda (see Table 3). Feminism mainly appeared as an underlying theme in most of the articles. Words, like patriarchy or politics, which might directly associate an issue with feminism, were noticeably absent but in many instances an undercurrent of feminist politics was apparent. It is unlikely many of the articles would have appeared if the woman's movement had not raised issues like domestic violence ("Sleeping with the enemy" Woman's Own, 23/11/98), equal pay ("How to lose pounds", Guardian 19/10/98) and sexual
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harassment ("Inappropriate behaviour by personal doctors" Woman's Hour, 7/12/98), and yet there was a tendency to avoid setting these within a wider political framework. This works to separate feminist issues from their wider societal and structural assessment, isolating and personalising the issue.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portrayal of Feminism</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying theme</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither positive or negative</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trivialised</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=175

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heterosexuality</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directly challenged</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiqued</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned unproblematically</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit Unstated</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=175

Much of second wave feminism has been concerned with issues of sexuality and particularly heterosexuality. Articles were also considered for their perspective and approach to heterosexuality. The results are displayed in Table 4. Clearly the more political aspects of feminist theorising on heterosexuality have had little impact on the way that it is reported in the media. In 21.6% of the articles it was mentioned unproblematically, through references to a woman's marital circumstances, even
when these were inconsequential to the story being reported. Unsurprisingly, in 67.8% of the articles heterosexuality was never stated, it was simply assumed. Only 1.8% of the articles can be seen to have provided any challenge to the construction of heterosexuality as normative. One of these has been included in the textual analysis ("Sleeping with the Enemy").

4.2.1 Summary

Although feminism appeared as an underlying theme within many of the articles, it was rarely considered to be a newsworthy aspect. In other words, feminism only qualified as news in its own right in 12.3% of the articles. Unlike many of the studies in North America and Europe mentioned earlier, I was unable to find an identifiable women's movement portrayed in the British press. As the more detailed textual analysis will indicate, women providing a feminist perspective were often individualised and seen to speak from their public position, rather than as a member of a coherent feminist movement. No incidents of protest or communal feminist campaigning were covered in the media during the analysis period, suggesting that any actions that did occur were not of interest to the selected media.

Feminism is not so much neglected by the media, as simply seen as one aspect of many around issues that affect women. It appears as an underlying theme, and in being implicit, rather than explicit, it is mainstreamed and its political possibilities are diluted. As a result, feminism is incorporated into a wider perspective pertaining to everything female with little power to challenge the status quo. Winship (1987) suggests that this cautiousness around feminism "leads at worst to a misrepresentation of the women's movement, at best to an enthusiasm about what women can achieve" (p. 93).

4.3 Characterisation

Three themes dominated the coverage: women and work, women and health, and women and relationships (see Table 5). Articles within the theme 'women and work' (35%) generally represented women's life in the public sphere, while those on 'health' and 'relationships' (44%) focused more precisely on the private sphere. Themes were represented across most media, although in some - Woman's Own, Woman, The People and The Sunday Mirror, stories containing a
feminist perspective were generally about women's relationships and health. This reflects the concentration on soft news in these media.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women and work</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and health</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and relationships</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women and politics/the law</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's leisure</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's rights</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's history</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=175

As Fenton et al. (1998) have noted, in the professional politics of journalism, what makes a story newsworthy defines its place in the news media (see Table 6). Most of the articles analysed were based on topical events (82.3%) that were current and relevant. This reflects the reactive nature of news coverage as articles are aligned to the coverage of stories already dominant in the media. For example, during the first analysis period, a lot of coverage was related to the Clinton-Lewinsky stories, providing sub-headings to articles like "Some young girls are amazingly creative and know more sex acts than President Clinton" ("Teenage Sex", Sunday Mirror, 25/10/98). Second, 46% of the articles were considered to have a wide appeal or be generalisable to many different women. This suggests that feminism is presented in such a diluted manner that it can be generalised to all women regardless of their feminist commitment. 40% of the articles were considered to contain material of a sensational nature that was meant to cause shock or excitement. Most frequently this can be found in the headlines (i.e. "Six out of 10 British women make love twice a week or more...So who needs Viagra" The Express, 21/9/98), but at other times it might be an interpretation of a particular issue that relied more heavily on its prurient possibilities or intimate details, rather than the news it was presenting. Articles were seen to contain aspects of negativity.
(35.5%) - either by reporting on 'bad' news or by choosing the least optimistic interpretation of an issue (e.g. "HRT problems are women's fault, says top doctor" Sunday Telegraph, 25/10/98). Finally, 30% of the articles contained personal stories. These acted to add a human-interest dimension, but could also be seen to marginalize the political possibilities of a feminist message (Rhode 1995).

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant News Value</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topical</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalisable to many</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensationalised</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalised through stories</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing narrative</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy or reference to sex</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to elite people</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=175

Feminist perspectives are considered newsworthy when they are topical, sensational, negative and personal. That is, when they conform to news agendas that are not of their own making, provide shock value, and present unfavourable conditions, all of which can be individualised to a lone example. Thus, although feminism may be implicitly apparent in coverage it ultimately has to conform to preconceived ideas of what makes news, news and is limited in its purview (Gans 1979; Golding & Elliott 1978; McNair 1994/1999; Schudson 1991).

4.3.1 Faces of Feminism Questionnaire

Not only feminism, but also feminists were characterised in the media. A total of 210 'feminists' were identified as sources in the 175 articles considered, of these 178 were sent questionnaires. Supporting Rakow and Kranich (1991), generally they were between the ages of 36 and 55 (66.3%), and white (94.7%).
93.5 per cent identified themselves as either feminist (62.3%) or sympathetic to feminist concerns (31.2%). The media contacted many at least once a week to comment on women’s issues (36.7%) and for most this was directly related to the public position that they held (57.3%). Most came from established organisations or groups (with women from the government and universities dominating, followed by organisations such as the Equal Opportunities Commission and Fawcett Society) and reflects the reliance of news professionals on institutional sources (Deacon et al. 1999).

In examining the ‘feminist’ sources that contributed to the articles, several different aspects were analysed to consider their framing. Generally, women were respectfully described, giving full details of their title, position and organisation (68.5%). They were usually shown to be in support of the main thrust of the argument (72.1%). They were rarely portrayed negatively or trivialised.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pundit/Expert</td>
<td>70.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Role</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author of book/research</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profiled</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference Organiser</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Feminist’ experts were not expected to challenge the mainstream interpretation of issues, but to reinforce it. This reactive position of the ‘feminist’ expert can be found in an examination of the role they play in each article (see Table 7). Overwhelmingly they participated in the article as a pundit or expert, being asked to comment on an event or situation external to them. In only 24.3% of cases can the ‘feminist’ be considered to be slightly less reactive, when she is either central to the issue being discussed or the author of the research. Figures from the questionnaires support these findings with 66.3% of the women reporting that they (or someone in their organisation) were contacted by the media directly. In only 10.4% of the cases did they report that they contacted the media (either themselves...
directly, via someone in the organisation or through a press release). These results seem to suggest that ‘feminists’ covered in the media were overwhelmingly institutional sources, rather than advocates of feminism with vested motives (Deacon & Golding 1994).

Characterisation of feminists continues to represent them as white, middle-aged, middle class professionals, but, unlike the research mentioned earlier, the women are apparently treated respectfully. Although this can be considered a more positive result than the earlier studies, it also highlights the depoliticising of feminism. The inclusion of feminist perspectives in the mainstream changes the discourse. The political possibilities of feminism and feminists are diluted, reinforcing the general thrust of the article and precluding feminism from having a more critical, interventionist role, linked to a wider structural analysis.

Some explanation of why feminists are represented in this manner can be found in the responses to the questionnaire on the interactions between the media and ‘feminists’. When asked whether they were satisfied with the media coverage that they had received, 73.6% of the women responded that they were either very or fairly satisfied with the presentation in the media and 93.5% said that they would probably or definitely co-operate in the future. They were asked if they had referred to feminism as an integral part of the issue under discussion, 26% replied that they had. In comparison, only 19.5% of the journalists actually referred to feminism as central to the issue. These figures do suggest that the women asked to speak in the media are raising feminism more frequently than it is being covered and are therefore unable to maintain or assert primary definition. Nonetheless, feminism is only being seen as integral to a quarter of the issues being discussed by the ‘feminists’ themselves. Many of them exist as issues because of the woman’s movement but have become normalised to the extent that they resist being defined as ‘feminist’ at all.

An examination of the more detailed responses some women provided in the comments section of the questionnaire, sheds some light on these apparently contradictory findings. First, in terms of being labelled feminist, some responded that the connotations with which the term had historically been used in the media, raised concerns about how the issues they were addressing would be understood:
I [...] am concerned that ‘feminist’ as a label has become pejorative. I still believe it is a needed term and accurate but many women, sadly, shun it.

Feminists/feminism has rather 'strident', 'fanatical' connotations perhaps a bit negative. As a result, I think people who are concerning themselves with women's issues/roles/development tend to disassociate themselves from feminism which has a very anti-male image.

Many feminist ideas are now part of a mainstream agenda and are therefore covered favourably (but often not labelled as feminist) others are still seen as suspect. The media tends to resist arguments from feminists and then adopt them, but still argue that feminism is not needed.

In order to ensure the coverage of their 'news' and to prevent alienating the mainstream media, the women quoted above were hesitant to appear too feminist or too political in their interactions with the media.

Second, some of the women commented on other ways in which their remarks were softened or depoliticised, losing them the advantage of primary definition. This occurred through editing, their position as commentator and through the provision of inadequate time or space to fully explain an issue: -

I am often rung by journalists hoping to give a thoughtful and thorough account of my views, but without sufficient space to develop them.

They tried to get me to say what they wanted to hear but I refused. They had to include some points they weren't so interested in because I tried to make it difficult for them to edit me.

Always frustrated because the agenda is set and that impedes the natural flow of the discussion - usually dividing an issue into black and white, where to explore the grey is often more fruitful! You can affect this slightly by setting your question as in - “that's interesting, but...”
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The coverage of women's issues becomes mainstreamed subject to the constraints of news production and limitations of time and space. Third, some respondents were dismayed to find that intricate issues were treated in a simplified and decontextualised manner.

'My voice' was presented as secondary to that of the male 'expert'. My story was oversimplified to reflect the oversimplified approach of the article.

Gender issues are continually oversimplified, which distorts the experiences of women in British society today. Feminists have generally been stereotyped negatively, alienating women from feminism, causing an overwhelming misunderstanding of feminism.

The respondents here reflect Bourdieu's (1998) concern that "human interest stories create a political vacuum. They depoliticise and reduce what goes on in the world to the level of anecdote or scandal" (p. 50).

Finally, other respondents were frustrated by their interactions with interviewers or journalists:

Dissatisfaction was with the interviewer who hadn't read the briefing materials, and directed questions at interviewees with no concern for their areas of interest.

Quotes were inaccurate. He clearly was looking for me to say certain things which would have fitted his perceived ideas about professional women - I didn't say them so he said them anyway. The slant of the article did not reflect our discussion.

Feminists interacting with the media face further difficulties created by the ignorance of the journalist about particular issues, their pre-conceived notions of what the story is and their need to fit the story into particular news value criteria.

The detailed comments provided by some of the respondents reflect the difficult and complex nature of the relationship between the media and feminists. Even with the concerns mentioned above and the examples of distortion,
simplification and editing provided, the women stress the importance of raising feminist issues in the media:

How else will issues get raised unless we all participate (and try to adapt the rules to suit us)?

There is no choice - we are campaigning to save women's lives.

Responses such as these suggest that the sources quoted in the media are not simply institutional voices speaking from independent motives, but rather that many remain advocates with vested interests in the ongoing coverage of women's issues and feminist politics. It becomes apparent, then, that even while resisting the usual construction of gender issues, sources speaking from feminist perspectives in the media strategically collude with its depoliticisation to ensure continued coverage of women's issues.

When questioned about the media more generally, women remained sceptical. They did not consider that any of the media (tabloids, broadsheets or broadcast) contained adequate cover of feminist issues. In addition, they felt that all media stereotyped feminists and treated them unfairly. When questioned about the media, feminists return to the traditional relationship between the media and feminism, which has tended to be one of suspicion, misrepresentation and distortion. At the same time, when questioned about their interaction with the media, they acknowledge that they are satisfied with the media coverage they have received (73.6%) and that they would probably co-operate in the future (93.5%)*. Their more detailed comments in the questionnaires explain this contradiction. McNair (1994/1999) notes that “in the contemporary world, public figures and organisations actively seek out the media, even if they cannot always guarantee that their coverage will be favourable” (p. 26). Because feminist sources are unsure of their reception in the media, they are pleased when they are treated fairly. In addition, they do not wish to alienate the media from coverage of issues important to feminism and so tailor their messages to suit the mainstream media.

4.3.1 Summary

In considering neglect and characterisation of feminism and feminists, several interesting and contradictory findings have been discussed. On the whole, feminism and feminists seem to be more positively represented across the media
spectrum although political possibility is removed through reducing feminism to an underlying perspective or theme in articles about issues central to the women's movement. This provides the illusion of an homogenised and depoliticised feminism through its continual support of established news agendas. It is not so much neglected as relegated to an unimportant role, unable to maintain or assert primary definition. Feminism is largely characterised as being about work, health and relationships. It is newsworthy only in its ability to connect with other current events, through its sensational and negative presentation and through personalisation (discussed in detail below). Finally, the commentaries provided by the respondents have illuminated the contradictory relationship between feminist sources and their coverage in the media that leads to the presentation of 'feminised' feminism.

4.4 Personalisation

Once the broad-brush strokes of coverage have been identified a deeper analysis can tell us more about the discursive constructions of feminism within news items. Here, I discuss the analysis in terms of personalisation and individualisation.

Three articles will be discussed, chosen for their representativeness across the media and the way in which they typify thematic categorisation. The articles are taken from the weekly woman's magazine Woman's Own, The Daily Express, a national tabloid newspaper, and the daily radio programme Woman's Hour. They cover women and relationships, women and health, and women and work respectively. It is argued that a close reading of the articles will provide further evidence for the contradictory relationship between feminism and the media. Although the overall presentation of feminism and feminists can be seen as positive, the individualised nature of its presentation and the internal contradictions contained in the articles' presentation create a 'feminised' feminism reliant on an acceptable, soft, feminine image rather than a harder, political perspective (Freeman 1995) and 'infotainment' rather than measured judgement (Franklin 1997: 4). The process of personalisation and individualisation can be seen to be occurring in four ways - through a concentration on intimate and personal details, through the separation of the individual from a broader context, through the use of personal experience as evidence and in solutions that are based on individual power and control.
4.4.1 Woman's Own, 23rd November 1998 - "Sleeping with the Enemy"

A threatening male figure (see Appendix G), silhouetted against the page, looms over a cowering woman. A large red headline is emblazoned across the top of the page- "Sleeping with the Enemy" - and three smaller purple headlines warn of the terror to come - "I wet myself because I couldn't break free", "He raped me after our son was born", "He was like a volcano waiting to blow". Women's fear, shame and pain of domestic violence are trumpeted from the pages of a woman's weekly magazine.

The article consists of personal stories of three women who have suffered, but escaped from, domestic violence. The fourth, and much smaller section of the article, provides information about the International Day of Action Against Violence Towards Women, and Womankind Worldwide's Dr Kate Young who is working with men to counsel them about domestic violence. The personal stories are clearly given precedence over the information on the political day of action.

4.4.1.1 Graphic Detail

Each of the headlines for the personal stories, quoted above, is the most provocative phrase within the brief accounts. It is not the actions of the men that are used to draw the reader into the stories, but the reactions, shame and fear of the women and each contains, if not an explicitly sexual reference, one that is tied to women's personal and intimate lives. The stories dwell on the sensational aspects of each woman's tale, personalising and isolating the women from a wider context. Little space is given to the women's success in leaving their abusive partners and each story is dominated by their experiences of violence through the use of graphic details, the first person, a story-telling style and emotional language - "I was shocked and scared, but too ashamed to tell anyone", "I didn't know anyone in Sunderland and felt totally alone" or "Two days after I was allowed home [from the hospital], he demanded sex. Sex! I was too weak to stand".

4.4.1.2 Separation from the wider context

Although each of the women escape from their situation, the emphasis is on the horrendous personal experiences they have suffered. There is no information given about the resources available to women to escape from abusive relationships. What little information is given in the final section once again emphasises the individualised nature of the stories and does little to explain them. Dr Kate Young is
quoted as saying “The major reason for violence hasn’t changed”, but the article does not go on to explain what this might be. The programme described is not about the shelters, refuges and counselling available for abused women, but talks instead about counselling for men. Although the three personal stories provide overwhelming evidence of the experience of domestic violence, no links are made between the three. The stories themselves are presented as isolated occurrences and as the personal episodes of the women interviewed.

4.4.1.3 Personal Experience as Evidence

Each story follows a pattern. Initially a shocking headline is used and the horrifying and graphic details of the women’s experience are relayed. The women are shown to come to a realisation and to develop a personal consciousness of the injustice of the abuse, before reaching a decisive moment and escaping from the relationship. Each of the women is at the mercy of the men’s abusing and controlling nature, which could offer possibilities for a wider critique, but instead the individualised and personalised aspect of each story is emphasised. Rather than drawing links to the similarity of the experiences, the experiences themselves are presented as the evidence of the injustice. In personalising the nature of the abuse and not linking the stories, the wider context in which the abuse occurs is excluded. Feminist consciousness-raising has always relied on women’s personal experience as evidence, but has then taken the step necessary to place this within a political perspective and move the onus away from individual responsibility to the context of women’s oppression. The reverse is true in this case.

4.4.1.4 Individual Power and Control

One theme that runs across the three stories is of women’s ability, though scarred physically and emotionally, to survive through horrible and horrifying situations. Although the negative details of each story are emphasised, they do emerge as empowered and strong individuals. The personal aspects of each story are emphasised and the issue becomes one of each woman gaining the empowerment necessary to leave the relationship, accepting responsibility for its failure and conferring blame. The solution for overcoming domestic violence becomes a matter of individual power and control, rather than a wider structural critique or communally based feminist action (i.e. Take Back the Night marches or the Zero Tolerance campaign in Scotland).
Feminism makes this article possible. In objecting to domestic violence and working to change both laws and attitudes, feminism has provided space for the voices of these women to be heard and as a result, feminist themes which challenge the public/private divide and women's oppression lurk under the surface of the article. Yet feminism is never made explicit nor is there any recognition of the work that has been done to expose this issue. The article appears to challenge hegemonic heterosexuality by suggesting that it can be isolating, dangerous or threatening, but by not offering some of the options that feminism has made for women, it remains limiting and restrictive. The stories do little to question the structures that sustain women's oppression in heterosexual relationships. Most worryingly for feminism, the personalisation of the issue creates a sense of unreality to the stories. It is worthy coverage because it is shocking but it is only shocking if the reader is not experiencing it herself. If she is, the message is 'get a grip and take responsibility'. There is no helpline offered or information provided for the reader who may share this experience.

4.4.2 The Express - 22nd October 1998 - "Don't Tell Me It's Fine I Can Feel It Isn't"

The article (Appendix H) is a special feature in the Life section on women and breast cancer. It describes the personal experience of one young woman in having her concerns about breast cancer taken seriously. It reports that the UK has the highest mortality rate in Europe for breast cancer, that treatment is a lottery and launches a campaign by The Express and the UK Breast Cancer Coalition (UKBCC) to improve women's health care.

4.4.2.1 Graphic and Intimate Details

The piece is reliant on a personal story, in this instance from a young Asian woman, Shan, who found her treatment for breast cancer a 'medical minefield'. She is displayed as being both vulnerable to the precarious nature of women's health treatment and as strong and empowered. She provides the details of her experience and the treatment that she has undergone. She talks about discovering the lumps in her breast on two occasions and the disbelief that she encountered from her doctor in both instances.
4.4.2.2 Separation from a Wider Context

The first part of the article sets up women's disadvantage under the healthcare system. It begins by explaining the current situation in which women are 'lucky' to receive good treatment with the Royal Society of Medicine admitting that even the quality of counselling can be a lottery. An all-party working group is expected to publish a report that supports these results. Through Shan's personal story we learn of her experience and the inadequate treatment she received. The theme is reinforced by statistics ("worst mortality rates"), a respectable body of experts ("the Royal Society of Medicine"), the government ("all-party working group") and a personal story, creating a convincing argument of the danger to women's health, but links are not made to any wider issues of women's health care, which has been a central concern to feminism.

4.4.2.3 Personal Experience as Evidence

The breast cancer debate is announced with the words 'don't tell me it's fine I can feel it isn't' - acknowledging a reliance on women's 'feelings' and 'experience' as evidence within the article. Shan's personal story becomes sufficient evidence to build a proactive campaign to improve women's breast cancer healthcare. She is supported by the voices of two experts, both representatives from the UKBCC, who also stress the importance of individual strength in achieving appropriate care. Nancy Roberts raises the issue of the vulnerability of women's health, but also supports women's own power in ensuring the best treatment. She says, again constructing experience as evidence, that if she was not as strong as she was, she may not have questioned her doctor's advice and sought further treatment. She offers a muted critique of the situation, saying, "It's hardly a time when you want to have to start becoming a medical expert", but little else is said to question the structures around the lottery of women's healthcare.

4.4.2.4 Individual Power and Control

An important theme within the article is of women's strength and resourcefulness in managing their healthcare. Shan's story concludes with details of a support group she has joined. The two experts, both from the UKBCC, weigh in to detail the importance of women taking control of their own healthcare. Continuing the theme of women's strength and determination for correct treatment, the article
Chapter 4: Feminising Feminism

ends with "a number of things that you can do for yourself", providing details of organisations which may be helpful.

Feminism is, once again, a strong theme underlying the article. Never explicitly mentioned, it is an important and inherent part of campaigns for better healthcare for women. Unlike the other articles, this offers an actual campaign and in looking for structural change to make things better for women, it is 'feminist', but its reliance on personal experience as evidence softens, simplifies and feminises a more complex issue.

4.4.3 Woman's Hour, 19th December 1998 - "Maternity Rights"

The story (see Appendix I), about a landmark ruling in the High Court on maternity rights, falls third in the radio programme. The segment consists of an introduction by the host Martha Carney, an interview of Marion Halfpenny by reporter Emma Jay Kirby, and a studio discussion. In the interview Marion Halfpenny tells the story of why she took her company to the High Court over maternity benefits and her right to return to employment. The discussion in the studio, managed by Martha Carney and including Claire Hockney from the Equal Opportunities Commission, Christine Goodridge from the Maternity Alliance and Stephen Alambritis from the Federation of Small Businesses, considers the implications of the ruling for women and companies.

In a manner similar to that in the first article discussed, the personal story on which this article is based is set apart from the wider 'feminist' discussion. Unlike the other stories, clear links are made between Marion Halfpenny's experience and a wider feminist perspective.

4.4.3.1 Graphic and Intimate Details

Less graphic or sensational than the other articles, the first section of the interview relies heavily on intimate details of Marion Halfpenny's pregnancy. She tells us of her illness and complications during pregnancy, the risks of miscarriage and her experience of post-natal depression. She explains that her livelihood was threatened as a result of her pregnancy and decision to have children, introducing a theme of women's vulnerability due to their biology that is raised again in the studio discussion.
4.4.3.2 Separation from a Wider Context

The theme of vulnerability due to biology contains clear links to women's oppression and should provide the opportunity to set the issue within a wider context. In introducing the studio segment[11], Martha Carney begins by asking - "...obviously good news for Marion but is it going to make a difference to other women as far as maternity leave goes?" Claire Hockney from the EOC replies that yes it will - and it appears that the opportunity for wider theorising has been accepted, but the conversation quickly returns to the experience of individual women ensuring their own job security. None of the discussants return to the point that is initially being made, and none consider it more widely. The story is one of an individual's success, and of the importance of women individually ensuring that they protect their jobs when they make the decision to have a baby.

4.4.3.3 Personal Experience as Evidence

The personal experience that is presented here has been good enough to win a court case! The case that Marion Halfpenny took to the Court of Appeal was based on her personal experience and it was the evidence used to show sexual discrimination.

One of the ways in which personal experience is emphasised throughout the discussion is in the continual references to women's responsibility to ensure they follow all the rules for maternity leave. Rather than suggesting that the difficulties and complexity of the law around maternity benefit could be a problem for women as a group, they are constantly reminded that they are individually responsible to their employers to arrange their maternity leave within the terms of the law.

4.4.3.4 Individual Power and Control

The story as it is presented is framed as one woman taking on the might of an organisation. Marion Halfpenny's role and personal experience are the main thrust of the story. When she learns that her company will not let her return to her job after extended maternity leave, she says, "so that's when I decided to take some action, because I couldn't find it justifiable a company would take that sort of stance really". Few details are provided on the process that would have been necessary for this case to come to trial. Clearly it was not just one woman against a corporation, and yet few details of the process are provided. Not only does this suggest that the only way to make change is through individual power and control, it separates the
story from the wider structures like the Equal Opportunity Commission that actually exist to assist women in their pursuit for fairness at work and who were actively involved in the case.

Feminism is clear throughout the piece in the work that is being done to actively challenge the structures that oppress women, but it appears as 'victim feminism'. By victim feminism, I mean the tendency to see women as the victims of oppressive structures, attitudes and actions, where things happen to women simply because they are women (Roiphe 1993). Rather than celebrating the benefits this ruling will bring to women, it tends to concentrate more on their individual vulnerability because of their childbearing capacity. Emphasis is placed on the importance of each woman following the 'rules' of maternity leave in order to benefit from the ruling.

4.4.4 Summary

Franklin (1997) suggests that:

Journalism's editorial priorities have changed. Entertainment has superseded the provision of information; human interest has supplanted the public interest; measured judgement has succumbed to sensationalism [...] Traditional news values have been undermined by new values (p. 4).

The four common themes that run through the textual analyses provided in the second part of this chapter reflect the changing priorities and contribute to the personalisation of feminist issues. First, in each instance there is a reliance on intimate details of an individuals' personal life. In the story from Woman's Own, the reader is presented with graphic details of the women's abusive relationships. Marion Halfpenny shares with the listener her pregnancy experiences, and Shan describes in detail the medical minefield she had to cross in receiving proper breast cancer treatment. Secondly, each issue is individualised and separated from a wider context. This may be most apparent in the domestic violence article when no work is done to link the personal stories to a wider context of abuse, but is also apparent in the individual work that women must undertake to ensure appropriate maternity benefits and suitable healthcare. Thirdly, personal experience is used as evidence. Feelings take up a central position and experience becomes the
evidence used to anchor the feelings. Emotions and experience are the proof, making it unnecessary for links to be made to wider structural oppression (something becomes wrong because it feels wrong not because oppressive structures exist). Finally, the solution is seen to be individual power and control. Taking charge of not only a situation, but also yourself, in order to alter it, becomes a process of empowerment. Again, in not suggesting a form of communal action or making clear connections between different women, a wider social critique becomes unnecessary. The process of change becomes personalised and the individual's responsibility.

4.5 Conclusion

Content and textual analyses provide different, yet complementary means to assess the current position of feminism in the British mass media. In re-examining the initial critiques of the media's treatment of feminism - neglect, characterisation and personalisation - content analysis was helpful in statistically analysing the existing status of neglect and characterisation. It highlighted that although feminism is apparently being represented more positively, its political aspects are being neglected or diluted and it is reduced to no more than another perspective on issues. Characterisation occurs through the confinement of feminism to issues on women's work, relationships and health. In addition, in order for an issue to be newsworthy it must be topical, of interest to many, negative, sensational and personalised. Feminists are characterised as an homogenous group - mainly white, middle-aged, professionals and appear themselves to contribute to this process through their role as social commentators, who provide 'sound-bites' conducive to the main thrust of media arguments. In addition, being placed as a reactive, rather than proactive presence leaves little room to explore feminist research. Yet, their personalised comments regarding their media interaction highlight their tenuous position and their strategic use of the media to ensure that a feminist voice continues to be heard.

Textual analysis provided a means to examine in detail the personalisation that occurred in a sample of articles. Evidence was found for personalisation through the use of graphic and intimate details, the separation of issues from a wider context, the use of personal experience as evidence and the resolution of problems through individual power and control.
Previous analysis of the media outside of the UK presented a picture of a media hostile to feminist opinions and perspectives. It may still be, but rather than being confrontational, manages to dilute the feminist message through personalisation and co-option. Feminist sources in ensuring that their message still appeals to the media, have unwittingly contributed to its mainstreaming. Whether this has occurred as a result of learning the language of the media, of the media's reliance on particular values and spokespeople or of feminists becoming more adept at ensuring their message, no matter how diluted, continues to appear in the media, the resulting softened or 'feminised' feminism has lost any sense of a wider political context.
Notes to Chapter Four

1 Usually dated to 1963 and the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*.

2 Radio 4 is a national talk based radio station covering news and current affairs, plays and entertainment programmes of a more ‘high brow’ nature. *Woman’s Hour* has been broadcast on Radio 4 since 7 October 1946 and is dedicated to the discussion of subjects relating to women (Murray 1996).

3 In the UK, the broadsheet and tabloid press represents distinct differences. Fenton et al. (1998:40) note that broadsheets and tabloids are different not only in size (tabloids are smaller and cheaper) but also differ in their image and character. The different types exhibit particular “verbal, rhetorical, visual and presentational codes”. The tabloids, or ‘popular’ press because of their large circulation, “prefer a linguistic style that is based on truncated syntax and vivid vocabulary; their presentation and format are short and highly visual.” In contrast, the broadsheets, or ‘quality’ press, “favour a style that is more elaborate and in-depth.”

4 According to Tuchman (1972) ‘hard news’ concerns “information people should have to be informed citizens”, whereas ‘soft news’ deals with “the texture of human life” (114, quoted in Fenton et al., 1998: 117).

5 See Fenton et al. (1998) for a full discussion of the media-social scientist interaction.

6 As a result of the way that women are described in the press, it was frequently difficult (although not impossible) to trace ‘ordinary’ feminists. Most of the women contacted came from established organisations or companies.

7 Women who resided outside of the UK were not sent a questionnaire.

8 The Fawcett Society campaigns for gender equality within the UK. It has recently been involved with issues of equal pay, proportional representation, the under-representation of women councillors and the compilation of women’s Millennium Priorities to be presented to the government.

9 Although some mentioned how pleased they were with the journalist or interviewer, commenting “The writer went to considerable efforts to take on board our concern and treat the issue with sensitivity”, and “the journalist who made the ...contact was clearly intelligently involved in feminism”.

10 Of course, this research has not undertaken an analysis of the news production process and therefore cannot make judgements on the role of the journalist in the construction of a story. The journalist is undoubtedly key to understanding the process however, news sources also play an important part as has been increasingly realised by recent research (Fenton et al., 1998; Deacon and Golding, 1994).

11 What should be noted is that this is one of the very few articles identified in the content analysis that actually provides a challenge to hegemonic heterosexuality. Not only does the issue of domestic violence highlight the danger of heterosexual relationships, but more importantly Jas states, “I feel free for the first time in my life – and I’ll never live with another man” (my emphasis), suggesting that there are alternatives for women beyond heterosexuality.
Unlike the other media under analysis, Woman's Hour frequently relies on studio
discussion amongst experts to 'flesh' out its coverage of a particular issue. This
made the identification of feminists easier as their perspectives were not filtered
through a journalist and many of the discussions were live and unedited.
Interestingly, even when given this opportunity, few of the 'feminists' appeared
anymore critical or political than those appearing in either magazines or
newspapers, and some of the women commenting in the questionnaires remarked
on the limited time available, the complications caused by technical problems or the
interference of other guests.
5.0 "If you've got a vagina and an attitude, that's a deadly combination" - Sex and Heterosexuality in *Body of Evidence, Basic Instinct* and *Disclosure*

The last chapter considered the nature of mediated feminism, and provided the context in which the research groups were conducted. In this chapter I turn to an examination of fictional representations of mediated heterosexuality, and again the purpose is twofold. First, it provides a detailed analysis of representative examples of filmic representations of heterosexuality and heterosex. Second, it presents the media texts that were used as catalyst for conversation in the focus group discussions.

5.1 Institutionalised Heterosexuality and Filmic Discourses

In order to investigate mediated representations of feminism and sex, it is necessary to consider both news and drama. Factual media analysis can sometimes be prioritised based on an assumption that it is consumed in a concentrated way, but fictional representations can be equally as influential and may "promote social integration within a 'model' of society" (Curran & Sparks 1991:231).

While women's viewing patterns may be distracted and interrupted (Brunsdon 1989), they frequently rearrange their schedules in order to facilitate more concentrated viewing of fictional dramas or soap operas (Hobson 1982). Heterosexuality is coded, normalised and re-presented to women through fictional discourses and popular culture is a site where heterosexuality as an institution is situated, constructed and maintained. Close reading of film texts provides evidence of the reinforcement of hegemonic heterosexuality and its role in policing and constraining women's sexual opportunities.

A large body of work exists on women's sexuality and its construction and misrepresentation in media texts (i.e. Mellen 1973; Rapping 1993; Singer 1990; Wittenberg & Gooding-Williams 1990; see chapter two) yet, little research analyses explicit sex scenes in mainstream film. Although there is a trend toward increasingly graphic sex scenes in mainstream films (Greenberg et al. 1993), textual analyses have generally been limited to the representations of the female characters and the ways in which their femininity is encoded as sexual, rather than with a more detailed examination of the images of this sexuality in action, most obviously within sex scenes. This chapter addresses these issues more specifically and argues that mediated representations of sex contribute to the maintenance of the institution of
heterosexuality through the construction and policing of the sexuality of the female protagonist. While working to both display and control her sexuality occasional opportunities are provided for the disruption of hegemonic heterosexuality. Three mainstream films, containing depictions of sexual activity that are "as explicit as possible" (Williams 1993: 105) have been analysed to consider the construction of the female character, and the contribution to the maintenance or disruption of heterosexuality. The chapter begins by considering the choice of the three films for analysis and their links to the 'new' *film noir*, before providing a detailed textual analysis of the central sex scenes in *Body of Evidence*, *Basic Instinct* and *Disclosure*.

### 5.2 Feminism and Film Noir

Within the research project, film was understood as a place in which the heterosexual institution was encoded and sustained, and the examples included here were used as catalyst for conversations within the focus groups. I viewed over 12 films (on video) that contained strong female characters and explicit sex scenes that were not simply gratuitous but actually contributed to the plot of the film. These two criteria lead to a particular type or genre of film. Sexual activity, within mainstream film, remains a site of regulation. Brabazon (1999) writes that in the media "sexual pleasure possesses contradictory social functions: it is not an end in itself, but linked to punishment or duty" (p. 495). De Lauretis (1990) has identified two main themes that run through films that contain sexually explicit activity. The first is the woman who is successful in her career, personal and social life. For the maintenance of the heterosexual institution, she must eventually be punished for her 'hubris' and brought to her proper place "by means of sexual subjugation by a man" (p. 18). The second is marked by the resurgence of *film noir* remakes and shows a more traditional stereotype of female sexuality as excessive and uncontrollable, which eventually leads to murder in order to secure the woman's unbounded sexual freedom. As de Lauretis points out:

> All of these are obviously antagonistic, anti-feminist attempts to devalue the gains that a very few women have made in social equality and, at a deeper level, to delegitimate the feminist demand for women's self-
definition and sexual independence from familial- or male-centered social relations” (p. 18).

It is within many of the films that are included in the film noir resurgence of the 1980's and 1990's that sexually explicit scenes can be found. Tasker (1998) suggests that “marketing a new release with reference to noir elements and antecedents now serves as industry shorthand for arthouse ‘quality’, often combined with eroticism” (p. 118).

In attempting to find films that contained strong female characters who may have been informed by feminism, it became increasingly clear that from a 'Hollywood' perspective that “feminist liberation was often equated with sexual liberation” (hooks 1996:229) and although informed by a clearly heterosexist bias, within film discourse a woman “asserting the right to be sexually desiring, to initiate sexual relationships, and to participate in casual sexual encounters with varied male partners” (229) was a feminist portrayal”. This particular categorisation of female film character was linked to the femme fatales of 1940’s film noir who were seen as "a powerfully impressive group" (Crowther 1990:115), “defined by [their] sexuality but also by the power that this generates" (Tasker 1998: 120), although current characters were rearticulated to reflect contemporary anxieties about sex, gender and feminism (Tasker 1998). Reichert and Melcher (1999) suggest that “whereas the femme fatale of the 1940s taunted the hero with her knowledge of information he was not privy to, [...] the 1990s’ femme fatale, also taunts the hero with the unknowable. However, her knowledge is of sexual experience” (p. 295). The desire for films that contained explicit sex scenes and strong female characters meant the films considered were drawn from the limited genre of the new film noir, and in fact, Tasker does suggest that all three selected films contain the aspects listed above.

5.2.1 A Word on Analysis

The analysis presented here draws not only on a feminist tradition of textual and psychoanalytic film analysis, but also on cultural studies, locating the production, construction and consumption of media images within a society characterised by heteropatriarchy and other forms of oppression. As part of the larger study the analysis is concerned with women's oppression and agency, and approaches the filmic text as situated within those structures which limit and control women. Textual analysis provides evidence of the construction and normalisation of
heterosexuality through the media. Each film was viewed in its entirety before shot by shot breakdowns were created of each sex scene giving camera shot, movement, *mise en scene*, dialogue and sound. The films were then viewed again, drawing links to the construction of the sex scene. Finally, a descriptive analysis was completed of each scene before they were incorporated into the chapter.

5.3 ‘There’s feminism and then there’s fucking’ - Feminism and Heterosexuality in the New Film Noir

I do not want to argue that any of these films are ‘feminist’ themselves, rather that their treatment of women’s sexuality in the sex scenes contributes to its hegemonic regulation, while also offering potential for resistive readings by the audience which rupture the hegemonic fabric. In each of the three films to be discussed, the sex scenes are used to construct and control the character of the female protagonist. Considering the films’ contribution to and maintenance of an institution of heterosexuality, it becomes apparent that controlling female sexuality is of more importance than restating heteronormativity. For the male, prior work is done to explain and justify their role in the sexual activities, removing them from a position of agency. Rather than re-stating an heterosexual institution based on male dominant and female submissive, the three films selected portray women as both agent and object of sexuality. In the first two films to be discussed Disclosure and Body of Evidence, the men’s role in the sexual activities is excused beforehand, the woman is the sexual agent, and in both cases, the attempts to control her sexuality disrupt hegemonic heterosexuality. *Basic Instinct* is slightly different - the male character is not provided with the same kind of excuses for his sexual involvement, the sex depicted is more mutual, and in the end the sexuality of the female character is not shutdown or controlled in quite the same way as the other films, rather it is hegemonic heterosexuality that is recuperated. I begin by discussing Disclosure, tracing the justifications given for male character’s involvement in the sex scene, the construction of female character and the possible disruption of heterosexual hegemony.

5.3.1 Disclosure

Terry and Schiappa (1999) in analysing the novel Disclosure, by Michael Crichton (1994), note his desire to frame the story as “an egalitarian feminist exploration of the power dynamics of sexual harassment” (Terry & Schiappa 1999:69), but they suggest it can also be “read ideologically as antifeminist backlash
characteristic of some mainstream popular culture" (69). I suggest that a detailed examination of the sex scene, reveals both its nod to feminism and its explicit misogyny. Whereas Body of Evidence and Basic Instinct rely on stereotyped (if contradictory) images of strong women, Disclosure reveals a much more insidious theme of woman hating. Tom Sanders (Michael Douglas), in charge of operations at a Seattle computer company, assumes that he will be receiving a promotion, but discovers that an old girlfriend, Meredith Johnson (Demi Moore) has been brought in and will be his boss. The first night that she is employed, she invites him to her office and attempts to seduce him. He resists and the next day when he discovers that she has complained about sexual harassment, he hires a lawyer and makes a counter-claim. He assumes that his job is secure once he wins the sexual harassment suit, but quickly realises that there is a conspiracy amongst the upper management to have him act as the scapegoat for production line errors (caused by Meredith, but unbeknownst to the others) that threaten the imminent and profitable merger of the company. Tom finds the information necessary to prove the conspiracy and embarrass Meredith, forcing her to leave the company.

On a superficial level there are some attempts to confront issues of feminism and the changing role of women in the work environment, but these only act as masks for a much deeper hatred and confusion about women's roles. Feminism is strongly stated and implied in two main ways - first through the character of Tom's wife, Susan. From the opening of the film the audience learns that Susan is a lawyer, working part-time, while caring for her children. She has chosen to keep her last name, and her career is clearly important to her. Second, when Bob Garvin (Donald Sutherland), the company president makes his introductory speech, appointing Meredith, he says: -

"Everytime I've wanted to promote a woman, to break the glass ceiling, it's always been the same story, baba, baba. I've thought about it often since my daughter's death that in today's climate, had she lived it would be extremely rare that she ever got to run a company. So it has special meaning for me when I tell you that this Friday when we announce the merger, we will also announce that the new Vice President for Advanced Operations and Planning here in Seattle will be Meredith Johnson."

Both of these occur very early in the movie, and having established a feminist context for the film, they are soon dropped and no other positive references are
made to them. In fact, when a feminist perspective is mentioned again, it occurs only briefly at a dinner party and is made to sound like an old and tired argument.

Misogyny is often hidden behind this quasi-feminist rhetoric. It appears most powerfully in the characterisation of Meredith. She is depicted as strong. When Tom first meets her, in Garvin's office, the shot is of her stiletto-heeled shoes. He is effectively excluded from the conversation between Meredith and Garvin. The audience is introduced to Meredith, represented by the fetishistic symbol of dominance, the stiletto heeled, black leather pump. She is shown to have a clear game-playing advantage over Tom. His frustration within the scene is later provided as one of the excuses for his involvement in the sex scene.

Meredith is most explicitly characterised during the sex scene between her and Tom. Throughout the scene she is seen to dominate Tom. She invites him to her office, she continually turns the conversation to sex, she comes onto him, and even when the scene changes and Tom becomes the aggressor, she encourages and taunts him. Some researchers have suggested that Meredith is a threat to Tom because she inverts the natural order where "ideologically [...] men's function is economic, women's function is biological" (Green 1998:92) or because when women do succeed at work, it is also assumed that they succeed sexually. Tasker (1998) writes:

The association between an aggressive sexuality, immorality and the working woman is central to Disclosure [...] Johnson exemplifies both the power and the limitations of an evolving hybrid stereotype produced from a femme fatale defined by sexual power and an independent woman defined largely by professional success (p. 131).

Both of these aspects - her success at work and her sexual prowess - are played out in the sex scene. In addition, part of the build up to the scene reinforces these roles and excuses Tom for his involvement and eventual aggression.

Meredith's apparent success at work and her supposed emasculation of Tom is used to excuse his violent reaction to her seduction. In the initial scenes, Tom is shown travelling to work by ferry with a sad older man who finds himself unemployed after many years, displaced by the "smaller, cheaper, faster, better" woman. Tom is put at a disadvantage in his first meeting with Meredith (recounted
above) and warned by his co-worker Stephanie Kaplan (Rosemary Forsyth) that his job may not be secure. At the beginning of the sex scene, Meredith tells Tom that she trusts him because he will not do anything to threaten his family or his job, and then raises their working relationship throughout her seduction. She says to him "Wouldn't you like to just lie back and let me take you [... ] I could have anybody and I picked you. Now you've got all the power [...]. You just lie back and let me be the boss". Tom is constantly being reminded of his vulnerability and feminisation, while Meredith is being characterised through the negative stereotype of a female executive. She becomes a new version of "the femme fatale which comes to situate her as a powerful woman whose threat quite overtly lies in the context of work" (Tasker 1998: 121).

Tom's reaction throughout the initial seduction is to struggle against her advances and to ask her, quite reasonably, to stop. She is persistent, ignoring all his requests to wait and is characterised as a woman of "insatiable sexuality [...] devouring, depraved, diseased. It conjures up an aggressively sexual female who both terrifies and titillates men" (Groneman 1994: 337), excusing Tom's eventual aggressive reaction. The text sets up Tom's only defence as 'becoming a man' and turning her sexual desire against her. In a scene reminiscent of Looking for Mr Goodbar, Tom turns on her, ripping off her bra and underwear, saying "You want to get fucked huh? Is that what you want, you want to get fucked?" Even this reaction is recuperated within the text of the film - it should not be read as aggressive or rape-like (regardless of its textual similarities to Goodbar), because it is excused in an earlier conversation. Shortly before he joins Meredith in her office, Tom is speaking to one of the heads of department (Marc Lewyn/Dennis Miller). Marc says "Oh come on, don't give me that, you have a sexual urge every 20 minutes it's a physiological certainty. You know it's hard-wired into your limbic brain. You can't fight it, why would you want to fight it, live a little." The text then begs forgiveness of Tom's reaction to being aroused during the sex scene - he was worried about losing his job and, physically, he had no other choice. Once aroused by Meredith he was biologically determined to complete the act of sexual intercourse. It is only through incredible strength of character that he is able to resist, leaving Meredith, now the desperate woman, begging him to continue and cursing him when he leaves. She is ultimately reliant on him to 'put it in' and 'do it', because, at least in this situation, women are shown as incapable of being the 'fuckers', only the 'fuckees'. She finally
does not have the strength and ‘value’ of a man because she must depend on him for penetration. The strength of the phallus is reasserted.

Tom’s activities, no matter how aggressive, have been excused. First he’s concerned about his job. He has been warned throughout the day of his possible emasculation by a woman and the chance that he might lose his job and put his family at risk. Meredith is constructed as a threat to both his masculinity, but also his sense of self, security and achievement. Second, he is given a biological excuse for his reaction - because he’s a man, he couldn’t help himself. He is only redeemed by his conscience which pulls him back from the violent act he was about to commit proving that ultimately he is the good guy in control and she is beholden to his sexuality.

Meredith, on the other hand, is characterised only briefly before the sex scene, it is within the scene that her ‘true’ nature is revealed. First, the scene suggests that women who are successful in business will be sexually successful and implies that they would have no qualms about sleeping their way to the top. In fact, Terry and Schiappa (1999) in analysing the novel mention that Meredith is shown as “physically beautiful but lacking in technical expertise/professional knowledge” (p. 73). Second, it suggests a complete lack of morals or value as she is willing to prostitute herself for the company. Third, only a woman could have taken this task. She is not treated as an equal or accorded the same level of respect as the other men, rather she is treated differently. The other men would not have been asked to use their sexuality for the company. Only a woman could be used to lure Tom into a ‘honey-trap’, so regardless of Garvin’s comments, her promotion is because of her sexuality. In the end, Meredith herself seems to realise this. She says “I’m only playing the game the way you guys set it up and I’m being punished for it.”

Finally, the development of Meredith’s character seems to show the deepest level of hatred. At first through her fetishistic representation, she is presented as confident and strong, both professionally and sexually. When Tom leaves her begging for sex, she becomes the desperate woman vowing revenge. Although remaining confident, she slowly begins to lose her grasp on the situation. As attempts are made to sort out the sexual harassment claims, Meredith’s role as victim becomes more and more difficult to sustain. When embarrassed by a tape-
recording of her seduction, she lashes out, providing a speech that shocks her lawyer and the mediator. She says: -

Sometimes no means that person wants to be overwhelmed, dominated, but we can't talk about that, the way we're supposed to have sex nowadays we'd need the UN to supervise it.

Any nod towards feminism is clearly erased in this small speech. This film is far more about chastising and caricaturing women who might have been uppity enough to succeed in a man's world by making one woman who has, give a stereotypical male answer. The reply by Tom's lawyer, "The only thing that you've proven is that a woman in power can be every bit as abusive as a man" confirms this argument.

Full explanations for why Meredith attempts to seduce/fuck Tom are difficult to understand. The reason given in the storyline is that it is part of the overall conspiracy to get rid of Tom, although no reason is ever given for why they want him out of the way. The inclusion of the sexual harassment twist, and the inability of the film to maintain a liberal feminist perspective reveals the thinly veiled misogyny which continues to exist in the film industry where "women, [...] while frequently powerful individuals who use their sexuality to attract men to their doom, are seen through misogynistic eyes (for the movies [...] still are a society controlled by men)" (Crowther 1990: 12). Attempts to include notions of feminism do nothing to recuperate the negative stereotype of female executives that is being perpetuated. Although Stephanie Kaplan is eventually promoted to replace Meredith, she has been characterised as rather insipid, the traditional woman who knows her role within the corporate structure, and in that sense works to continue hegemonic notions of women's proper place (Terry & Schiappa 1999). At the same time, it is not completely successful. The film works to control and condemn the active and agentic sexuality of Meredith, particularly in the characterisation built up during the sex scene. Yet, in the attempt to control female sexuality, small clues and openings are left that provide the space for alternative readings. Tom may not succeed until he 'acts like a man', but in the end, he is once again passed over for promotion, returning to his emasculated role. In an attempt to provide the film with a feminist perspective, Tom's wife is shown as being strong and independent. She expresses her difficulty with his role in the seduction, and space is provided to allow the interpretation of their relationship as different from the stereotypical heterosexual
couple generally presented. In the next film discussed, the rupture of hegemonic heterosexuality is even more explicit.

5.3.2 Body of Evidence

*Body of Evidence*, starring Madonna and Willem Dafoe, is a courtroom drama. Briefly, the story is about the murder of Andrew Marsh (Michael Forest), a wealthy businessman, who is found dead in his bed, surrounded by evidence of sado-masochistic practices. Rebecca Carlson (Madonna), his girlfriend and a successful gallery owner, is convicted of his murder. Frank Dulaney (Willem Dafoe), her lawyer, becomes intrigued by her sexual practices and begins an affair with her. All the evidence points to Rebecca's guilt, and Frank begins to think that he is a fool to have become involved, until Rebecca takes the stand in her own defence. She rebuts the evidence and the jury find her not guilty. As she leaves, she admits her guilt to Frank. He follows her to her boathouse, and confronts her. One of the witnesses, Dr Alan Paley (Jurgen Prochnow), realising that Rebecca has used him, kills her after a struggle with Frank.

Sex is a pervasive theme throughout the film. In only two of the 33 scenes, is sex not mentioned, implied or occurring, and attitudes towards women and sex are central to the depiction of Rebecca. The women fall into two character stereotypes, basically good (and insipid) and bad (and inspiring), but as in *Disclosure*, the attempt to both display and punish Rebecca's sexuality, disrupts the binary of good and evil, allowing for a possible critique of heterosexuality to be exposed.

There are two secondary female characters, Andrew Marsh's secretary Joanna Braslow (Anne Archer) and Frank Dulaney's wife, Sharon (Julianne Moore). The inclusion of Sharon, at first, seems unnecessary. The 'bad' character of Rebecca appears to be counter-balanced by the 'goodness' of the devoted secretary Joanna, but central to the twist in the plot is the destruction of her character through accusations of drug use, jealousy and conspiracy. Joanna's character is no longer able to sustain the role of the 'good' woman, and must be replaced by Frank's wife Sharon. Sharon also plays a central role in showing Frank's internal goodness that becomes compromised by his bad judgement in choosing to start an affair with Rebecca. Although Sharon is the 'good' to Rebecca's 'bad', she is shown as having flaws that help to explain away Frank's
attraction to Rebecca. Sharon is a strong and independent woman, she owns a restaurant and is concerned that it succeeds, sometimes to the expense of her family. In an early scene, Frank, Sharon and their son are eating at her restaurant. She has to leave partway through the meal to attend to a customer, and Frank appears annoyed that she has to spend so much time at the restaurant. Later, Frank and Sharon are shown making love. Unlike the suggestions of sexual violence that surround Rebecca, the sex here is gentle and loving. Immediately after their lovemaking, Sharon gets up to have a shower, leaving Frank in bed looking distinctly unhappy. Two important elements are established by the inclusion of two secondary female characters. First, they highlight the ‘badness’ of the Rebecca character by providing counter balances - Joanna, the loyal secretary, undone by drugs and excess, and Sharon the strong independent woman whose fastidious and clean role as wife, counters the ‘dirty’ sexual practices of Rebecca. Secondly, the construction of Sharon provides Frank both with the excuses to have an affair (she’s too involved with her job, she only likes ‘clean’ or bland sex), while at the same time redeeming his character and showing his ‘true’, internal goodness.

The final scene of the movie, in which Frank has confronted Rebecca, and seems at one point ready to leave with her, shows Sharon coming to find Frank after Rebecca’s death, returning him to his true role as family man and good lawyer.

Rebecca is introduced to the audience, long before she ever appears ‘in the flesh’. The opening scene of the movie shows a large house during a violent thunderstorm. The camera tracks through the house that is illuminated by the lightening (a frequent noirish element). As we climb the stairs to the first storey, we can hear the sounds of people making love. In the main bedroom, where Andrew Marsh lies dead, a video is playing showing Andrew and Rebecca having sex. When we next return to the bedroom it is with the detectives who are considering the murder scene. In the background throughout the scene can be heard, and occasionally glimpsed, further videos of Rebecca and Andrew. The room is littered with sexual paraphernalia - nipple clamps, handcuffs - and there is evidence that Andrew had been bound to the bed during sexual activities. Before we have even met Rebecca then, she has been shown as sexually voracious and interested in sado-masochism. When the audience is introduced to Rebecca, it is not in a sexual situation, but rather at Andrew’s funeral. As she does throughout the film, Rebecca’s first meeting with Frank is a mixture of sexuality and vulnerability. She says “I loved him, why is that so hard to believe? [...] A big part of my life has been taken away
from me and people think it was my fault. They've taken something good between two people in love and made it dirty, I didn't kill him". Rebecca is clearly linked with 'dirty' sexual practices, and this continues throughout the film, until she and Frank have sex, when these practices become explicit. Frank as well becomes tainted by Rebecca's sexuality. In agreeing to take on her case, he becomes "the metonymic champion of women's sexual freedom" (Ellis 1990:119), but a sexual freedom that is coded as 'dirty'.

The initial, and most detailed sex scene, occurs at Rebecca's boathouse. Frank's entrance is reminiscent of the initial movement through Andrew Marsh's house. Rather than thunder and lightening illuminating the scene, it is lit by the light reflected off the water (suggestive of the film noir classic, Sunset Boulevard). He moves through her house and we are provided with his perspective, searching quietly as the camera did originally for the site of sexual activity. From behind comes a whispered, 'Frank', and Rebecca, a true femme fatale, steps out of the shadows. Rather than the video images we had in the initial scene, this time we have Rebecca herself. She kisses him and they fall back on the stairs. Rebecca violently pushes him away and runs upstairs. The tempo of the scene changes, what has begun as Frank's desire to "make love" to Rebecca, becomes an opportunity for Rebecca to dominate Frank and use sex to convince him of her innocence.

Frank finds Rebecca in her bedroom lit by candles and with a fire burning. She insists that they are having sex 'her way', binds his arms together behind his back with his own belt and pushes him on to the bed. Straddling him she picks up a candle and pours the wax onto his chest. Unlike Meredith in Disclosure, Rebecca is able to have the phallus both symbolically (in the candle) and actually. The camera moves outside of the curtain again as we see Rebecca remove her underwear and mount Frank. The screams of Rebecca's orgasm mingle with the sound of Frank's alarm clock as he awakes in his own bed the next morning.

In this initial sex scene, Rebecca is shown indulging in some of the 'dirty' sexual practices that have only been hinted at or shown on a grainy video. The scene allows the audience to actually see what these entail, as well as reasserting the power of her character through voracious sexual activity. Visually we are presented with several clues about her duplicitous nature. Firstly, she emerges from the dark behind Frank, suggesting that her character contains a dark side that will,
perhaps, sneak up on Frank unawares. Second, she is unable to make love in the
tender fashion that Frank wishes. She will not let him kiss her and is the one to
introduce violent aspects, again suggesting that the vulnerable aspects of her
character may be no more than an act. Third, her power and strength is not due to
her wealth or her talent as an art gallery owner, but actually resides in her ability to
dominate men sexually and to insist that she is always in control. Fourth, Rebecca
wields the symbolic phallus throughout the sex scene (and is shown to have several
others available if the first one runs out when she replaces the candle amongst
many others). As well, her phallus, while symbolic, is also active in 'ejaculating' on
Frank's chest. This woman is a "real dick" (Manners 1999:26) and Frank should be
careful of not getting both burned and fucked. As with most femme fatales, she is
"the possessor of sexual power, autonomous, a devourer and a castrator of the
male" (Lloyd 1993:47). Fifth, the use of the curtain, while helpfully providing the
necessary modesty to the film, suggests that the sexual activity that is occurring is
perhaps being used to veil some other motive. It is not simply an act of love or
attraction but rather one that has other purposes. Finally, as Rebecca screams in
orgasm, her voice merges into the sound of Frank's alarm clock at home. Should
this not then be read as a warning, an alarm bell that perhaps something other than
what is being shown is occurring?

Through this sex scene, the audience is provided with indicators of
Rebecca's 'true' nature. Rather than a beautiful, successful art gallery owner,
vulnerable to the misunderstanding of a prudish public, she is actually a voracious
and controlling man killer who is cunningly using Frank to ensure her own
innocence. And, in fact, after this scene, protestations of her innocence and
vulnerability are lost and she is portrayed as sexually aggressive to Frank and
titillating to other male characters. For instance, after the trial the next day, she
gives Frank a handjob in the elevator, before 'fucking' him in the parking garage,
with little concern for who might see them. When a witness arrives, Jeffrey Roston
(Frank Langella), who corroborates the story built up by the prosecution (that
Rebecca used sex to kill her elderly boyfriends and inherit their money), Frank
confronts Rebecca. Rather than adopting her usual vulnerable attitude, she storms
out. Finally, when the District Attorney (Robert Garrett, played by Joe Mantegna)
questions her, she does not adopt the role of the grieving, misunderstood 'widow'.
Instead, she uses his discomfort with her sexual practices to taunt him and to titillate
the jury. At the end of the film, when Frank confronts her, all pretences are
dropped. She easily admits that she used Frank and Dr Paley, saying "I fucked you. I fucked Andrew. I fucked Frank. That's what I do, I fuck". She becomes too powerful sexually, and must ultimately (and stereotypically) be punished for it through death.

Manners (1999) sees Rebecca Carlson, not as the usual breed of psychotic female killers (like in Fatal Attraction or Jagged Edge) but as both a sexual succubus and a 'real dick' because of her "frightening, engulfing sexuality" and her "complete disregard of bitchy behavior in doing and getting what she wants" (26). Both Manners (1999) and Rapping (1993) tie this into the actress, Madonna, who plays Rebecca. Rapping suggests: -

Madonna pushes the limits of what is allowed, emotionally and sexually [...]. This is because the media are so much more ubiquitous and powerful today, and because one of their major agendas is setting the rules for sexual and emotional representation and behaviour (p. 54).

If we accept Rapping's statement (and the analysis of Disclosure certainly supports it), what does Madonna's playing of Rebecca suggest about emotional representation and behaviour? Unlike many of the optimistic statements that have been made about Madonna's own feminist stance (Rapping 1993) and her ability to play with sexual personas (Manners 1999) or to blur distinctions between sexual identities (i.e. Schwichtenberg 1993), the character of Rebecca Carlson re-asserts many of the hackneyed portrayals of women. Her strength lies in her sexuality, not in the achievements of her life. She is strong because she can manipulate men. Her voracious sexual appetite is a threat to the nuclear family and has the strength to turn 'rational' men into irrational sex slaves. In talking about the jury's opinion of her, she says "The women hate me, they think I'm a whore and the men see a cold heartless bitch they can pay back for every chick that's ever blown them off in a bar". Finally, there is no way to reconcile her character, except to punish its disruption by death.

Interestingly, the film does provide a slight twist to the usual depiction of relationships. Rapping (1993) says that in films like Body of Evidence, including Fatal Attraction, and Someone to Watch Over Me: -
...the nuclear family and old fashioned romantic love of the kind that leads to 'happily ever after' were presented as more or less unproblematic ideals. Independent women, for their part, were portrayed as seriously in trouble, in one way or another, for reasons that ranged from garden-variety Freudian female neurosis to downright psychopathic evil (p. 24).

Rebecca can be included as one of the independent women, although her motivation is greed, but the relationship between Frank and Sharon, does not easily fall into ideas of the nuclear family, old fashioned love or 'happily ever after'. In recuperating the character of Frank and giving him a reason for his affair (Sharon's dedication to her job and her fastidiousness) a rift appears in the hegemonic fabric of the film. Although he returns to Sharon at the end, and all appears to be forgiven, the difficulties highlighted in their relationship are not resolved, providing space to interpret her position in a slightly more powerful perspective. Like in Disclosure attempts to excuse the male protagonist's sexual response, while at the same time controlling the sexual agency of the female protagonist, heterosexual hegemony is not completely maintained or restored. Rather, in both instances, it becomes more important to curb women's sexuality and sexual opportunities, thereby ensuring the sexual access of all men to all women, rather than to restate a normative heterosexuality that insists on complementarity or one woman for one man.

5.3.3 Basic Instinct

Basic Instinct contains some similarities to Body of Evidence, but its differences are far more interesting. It is a convoluted police thriller. A brief synopsis follows.

Johnny Boz (Bill Cable), a former rock and roll star, has been found dead in his bed, stabbed by an ice pick. Nick Curran (Michael Douglas) and his partner Gus (George Dzundza) are put on the case. Nick has been undergoing psychiatric treatment with Dr Beth Gamer (Jeanne Tripplehorn) after he mistakenly shot some tourists the year before. Tension is still apparent between him and some of the other officers. Nick and Gus are sent to speak to Johnny's girlfriend, Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone), a wealthy novelist. Catherine is bisexual, lives with Roxy (Leilani Sarelle) and is modelling a character on Nick. He is convinced of Catherine's
guilt but, after being suspended from the police force on suspicion that he murdered another officer, he begins an affair with her. She gradually convinces him of her innocence and the guilt of his ex-girlfriend and psychologist, Dr Beth Garner. Catherine sets up Beth who is eventually killed by Nick. The film ends with Catherine and Nick in bed together, with the ice pick lying under the bed.

The film opens in a similar manner to *Body of Evidence*. As the camera comes into focus, the audience realises that they’re looking into a mirror on a bedroom ceiling, in which a couple making love is reflected. These initial images are quite important as they recur continuously throughout the film. "He lies passively beneath her while she controls the encounter by tying his hands to the bed, writhing and thrusting on top of him in pursuit of her own satisfaction" (Reichert & Melcher 1999: 292). She reaches under the covers and pulls out an ice pick which, as he orgasms, she drives repeatedly into his chest.

Unlike both *Body of Evidence* and *Disclosure* the sexual activity in *Basic Instinct* strongly re-asserts an hegemonic heterosexuality based on notions of love, romance and the heterosexual couple. I begin by examining each of the female characters, briefly, in turn, before looking in more detail at the primary male protagonist and his interaction with the women.

The film contains three main female characters - Catherine Tramell the primary character, her lover Roxy, and Nick Curran's psychologist and ex-girlfriend Beth Garner. Roxy is, in many ways, presented as a stereotypical, murdering dyke. As a young teenager, she killed her two brothers with a razor. She is beautiful, but dresses in a masculine way and adopts an aggressive, 'macho' manner. Her interactions with Nick are decidedly competitive. After he has sex with Catherine the first time, he meets Roxy in the toilet. He calls her Rocky and wants to speak 'man to man'. She says, "If you don't leave her alone, I'll kill you". Nick replies, "I think she's the fuck of the century" and Roxy says, "She likes me to watch". This clearly disconcerts Nick, and is used to suggest perverted aspects of Roxy's character. As well, it could be interpreted to mean that she is unable to act sexually and therefore watches, a theme that is returned to with Beth Garner and will be discussed in detail below. Eventually, she unsuccessfully tries to kill Nick (by running him down in Catherine's black Ferrari). He is more successful, eventually forcing her off the road.
Beth, Nick's psychologist and ex-girlfriend, is also characterised as a murderously impotent female - and Nick also has to kill off this threat to his masculinity. We are made aware of their relationship very early in the film, and the first sex scene is between her and Nick. After Nick has a confrontation at the bar with an officer from Internal Affairs, Beth arrives and the two of them leave to go to her flat, where he violently 'fucks' her. Afterwards she says, "You weren't making love to me". He asks, "Who was I making love to?" and she replies "You weren't making love". Later in the film we learn that Beth is unable to orgasm, an accusation Nick throws at Beth when she arrives to help him after he is suspended from the police force. She attacks him, then quickly pulls back and apologises. When Catherine convincingly frames her, the audience is to assume that this is her motivation for murder. Her impotence is further detailed by her inability to convince Nick of her innocence when Catherine frames her for the murder of Johnny and Gus. But there is a different interpretation for the seeming impotence of both Beth and Roxy and their eventual deaths - Nick has to kill both of these characters to ensure his own masculinity. Roxy is not only impotent by innuendo, but is also unobtainable to Nick because of her lesbianism. She threatens the potential heterosexual relationship that he hopes to develop with Catherine and is competition for him. Beth is an insult, as well as a threat, to Nick. Perhaps it is not her inability to orgasm, but rather his inability as a lover that causes her impotence. In addition, clues are given to Beth's possible lesbianism as well - she slept with Catherine while at university and when Nick investigates the murder of Beth's first husband he hears rumours that perhaps Beth had a girlfriend. In either case, both characters are threatening to his masculinity and ability to dominate and must be killed - Roxy by being run off the road and Beth shot by Nick.

Catherine Tramell is the principal female character and the film revolves around her sexuality. Like Rebecca Carlson, she is characterised as containing only two dimensions - on one hand she is a game-playing, sexually powerful bitch, and on the other a vulnerable woman in search of a relationship. One way that she is seen to be controlling, is her attempts to lead Nick away from the more temperate lifestyle he has developed for himself. When he initially visits Dr Garner he proudly says to her that he has not had a drink, any drugs or sex for three months and he has even quit smoking. The audience is to read this as symbolic of his recuperation - he's no longer the wild cop who mistakenly shot tourists, but is instead, a steady, sober man. Immediately upon meeting Catherine she begins to tempt him away
from this role. “We can’t be surprised when he succumbs again to three of his
addictions in quick succession, or that by succumbing to sex (with Catherine) he
finds himself with an obsession more addictive and dangerous than all of the others”
(Galvin 1994: 223).

Unlike Rebecca Carlson, the vulnerability causes problems for Catherine’s
characterisation. On one hand, it is used to suggest her manipulative personality,
but on the other, it is also used to reinforce a heterosexual prerogative. The usual
control of this character does not completely work, particularly the suggestion of
manipulative vulnerability that seems at times to get lost in a true vulnerability that
conflicts with the sexually controlling aspect. For instance, the morning after she
and Nick have sex, she leaves early and drives out to her beach house. Nick
follows later. When he arrives she is talking to Roxy, who seems particularly upset
by the relationship. He says to Catherine, “Roxy isn’t taking this very well huh?”
Catherine replies “She’s seen me fuck plenty of guys”. He replies, “Maybe she saw
something she’s never seen before”. She says, “She’s seen everything before”. His
reply, “Honey I thought I’d seen everything before”. Catherine asks, “Did you really
think it was so special?” He says, “I told her I thought it was the fuck of the century”.
She laughs. He says, “Well what do you think?” and she replies “I think it was a
pretty good beginning”. This is an interesting conversation for what it displays about
both of the characters. First, we see Catherine in her role as game player, taunting
Nick about his sexual ability (a dangerous thing to do as it gets both Beth and Roxy
killed). She says that it was nothing special, nothing different from what she has
done before. Nick clearly thinks he’s been pretty wonderful and is stung by her
remarks. He lashes out by saying it was “the fuck of the century”. When Catherine
laughs, he challenges her and rather than continue in her stronger, game-playing,
taunting role, she relents and recuperates the conversation back into a heterosexual
framework by suggesting that it was a good start, and as the audience we assume
she means of a relationship.

This is perhaps most convincingly portrayed in the sex scene between these
two characters. Nick follows Catherine to a nightclub and finds her and Roxy
dancing together. Nick looks uncomfortable in this location - it’s a trendy club with
an eclectic mix of people and his blue sweater and jeans do not look entirely
appropriate. He watches the two dancing together until Catherine dances over to
him and Roxy leaves in disgust. Catherine teases him, shimmying her bottom
against his groin, never quite getting close or truly dancing with him and always staring at Roxy. Eventually he grabs her and pulls her to him. They begin to kiss. Later we see them in Catherine's pristine white bedroom. At first the sex is gentle and tender. He kisses her breasts and legs before performing cunnilingus. They roll over, and in an echo of the first scene, Nick watches them in a mirror as she gives him a blowjob. They roll over again (thank goodness it's a big bed) and they begin having penetrative sex. As Nick is about to orgasm, Catherine digs her nails into his back, leaving long scratches across his shoulder blade. This succeeds in stopping his orgasm, and she climbs on top of him. As in the opening scene, she ties him up with a white silk scarf and leans back, thrusting her hips. The audience is shown a shot of her hand on his ankle as it moves towards the edge of the bed. Suddenly, she throws her body forward and rather than the stabbing that occurred at the beginning, she and Nick orgasm. She gently unties his hands and he sits up and embraces her. Over the top of her head, we see sadness in her expression.

The scene begins with Catherine the game player, taunting and teasing Nick with her dancing and her relationship with Roxy. When they return to her house, she becomes the mutual lover, accepting and giving physical pleasure. Suddenly, she changes again to the sexually powerful woman who just wants (or needs) a good fuck. Finally, she becomes the vulnerable girl, seeking the safety and normality of heterosexuality in Nick's arms. Heterosexual relationships are portrayed then as a game women play, as a source of mutual pleasure, as a situation in which men are at the mercy of sexually voracious women, and as the proper place for a woman to find sanctuary. None of these are particularly positive portrayals, but none of them are convincing either. There are too many options, too many possibilities are opened up.

Unlike Rebecca, Catherine is not punished in the end - she gets away with it. On one level, it appears that her sexual power is being re-stated. Although her lover has been killed, Catherine has not denied her bisexuality and continues her friendship with the lesbian Hazel Dobkins (Dorothy Malone). As well, in the final scene she and Nick are lying in bed together and he, rather boringly, is suggesting that they can stay together and have children. She does not seem particularly impressed by his placid outlook on the future, and although agreeing as long as there are no children, she still has the ice pick under the bed - the heterosexuality on offer appears to be all right as long as it is on her terms.

Many other critics, particularly gay and lesbian protest groups in the US, found the film insulting and dangerous. Kitzinger and Kitzinger (1993) write: -

But then, perhaps invisibility is preferable to the alternatives. As we write, lesbian and gay activists are picketing Paul Verhoeven's £40 million thriller, Basic Instinct. This film features a beautiful bisexual killer who dispatches her victims with an ice pick during sex. Such images draw on a long history of representing women who have sex with women as predatory, crazed, psychopathic sadists (10).

Another interpretation is possible. Rather than asserting Catherine's strength, it is important to follow the textual limits in which her sexual power is constructed. Although Catherine remains sexually free (because she is not punished for her agency), this nonetheless occurs within very rigid boundaries set up throughout the storyline. Yes, the film does kill off murderous dykes and represents them as psychotic and crazed (Reichert and Melcher 1999), while at the same time presenting an image of strong and frightening femininity that appears to have the upperhand in the end. But it is this appearance that is illusory. Nick must make every effort to maintain his masculine superiority and so Catherine's position is extremely precarious. Although she is allowed to live and appears to control her own sexuality, the moment she becomes a threat to Nick's hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, she will be destroyed. For survival, she must remain in the final embrace depicted in the sex scene\textsuperscript{11}. Unlike Disclosure and Body of Evidence where the coding of heterosexuality worked to close down female sexuality, and in so doing provided discrete ruptures to its hegemonic construction, in Basic Instinct, the female characters sexuality is allowed to remain open, rather heteronormativity is strongly enforced.
5.4 Conclusion

In offering female characters of strength and power, all three of these films appear to provide a disruption to the hegemonic norm, but even in these instances “[p]atriarchal structures have the capacity to silence alternative stories, enacting an active and passive subordination of women [...] All these oppressions are made possible by evading discussions of men’s power and domination” (Brabazon 1999: 495). In each instance, it is the stronger role and the apparently ‘feminist’ perspective which is stated and appears to critique hegemonic constructions of heterosexuality and femininity “only to be subverted by its opposite: not to produce a resolution at a higher level of understanding, but simply to stroke every sensibility that might be watching” (Green 1998: 80). Disclosure appears to offer a feminist (or at least post-feminist) perspective on sexual harassment. But in its parodic presentation of Meredith’s sexuality, it works only to restate and reinforce the division between public and private. Women who attempt to live and succeed in the public sphere are re-coded as manipulative, controlling and greedy. It suggests that “the dividing line between home and work still needs to be patrolled by armed guards” (Ellis 1990: 118). In both Disclosure and Body of Evidence, this strong and threatening female sexuality must be controlled and punished. Meredith loses her job and is moved on, Rebecca is shot and killed (although interestingly the necessary recuperation of Tom, like Dan in Fatal Attraction, does not allow him to kill her). The male characters are provided with justifications and excuses for their involvement in the sexual activities. In not being the agent of sexuality in either film, they are excused from punishment at the end. At the same time, they are not shown as particularly strong or successful in their masculinity. Tom is emasculated by still not being promoted, and in having a woman remain as his boss. Unable to kill the demon sexuality, Frank must eventually be recuperated by his wife, and since she has thrown him out, his strength is severely diminished. Both of these films then, offer the opportunity for a disruption of hegemonic heterosexuality. Neither provides convincing closures around the heterosexual matrix. In shutting down the possible interpretations of the female protagonist, neither film is particularly successful in ensuring the audiences’ interpretation of the heterosexual coupledom that remains. Recuperation, then, is not always complete, although retribution may be.

In Basic Instinct, the many conflicting meanings presented do appear to allow for different interpretations, although in the end, it must be contained within
acceptably defined limits of heterosexuality for Catherine to survive. "The world displayed is the world of those who attempt to control and direct desire into socially appropriate avenues and commodities through re-coding" (O'Brien Hallstein 1996:134). Yet in raising the many different options available to the audience in considering female sexuality and heterosexuality, space is provided for alternative readings. Interestingly, the film does not contain the redeeming wifely character that is available in both Disclosure and Body of Evidence. In the end this also becomes Catherine’s responsibility. She is not only the strong, independent, sexually experienced woman, but is also the one that Nick assumes will lead him back to goodness. His final request to her is that they can ‘fuck like minks, raise rugrats and live happily ever after’. Rather than the woman seeking the security of the heterosexual couple, it is instead the man (Reichert & Melcher 1999). Catherine has her escape at hand, but in order to survive must remain within Nick’s ideal of heterosexuality.

Finally, in analysing in detail the sex scenes presented in each of these films, a deeper understanding of the female character is created, and through that different interpretations and representations of normative heterosexuality. The sex scenes are used to create the female character and to construct her sexuality. Because the male characters are central, it is aspects of the female character that are revealed in the sex scene. It is here that the mask of femininity slips revealing not only her character, but his weakness and with it the weaknesses of hegemonic heterosexuality. Green (1998) notes that many of the films in this contemporary genre contain ‘weak’ male characters - Tom is emasculated at work, Frank is easily lead by sexual promiscuity, and Nick is manipulated by sexual obsession, whereas the women dominate the films both “thematically and iconographically” (p. 204). How then does the recuperation of the dominant ideology occur? I would suggest that in attempting to control female sexuality, space is frequently left for the disruption of heterosexuality. This is evident in the textual analyses provided of both Body of Evidence and Disclosure. It is interesting to note that in a film where female sexuality is less controlled and not completely shut down, ambiguities about heterosexuality may exist, but the final resolution is to restate heterosexual hegemony. The films remain firmly within the structures of the heterosexual institution. Although appearing to push or bend the borders of hegemonic representation (Gauntlett 1996), all three scenes provide bounded and confined codings of female sexuality. Analysis of these ‘film noir’ clips, re-asserts the current
limits on heterosexuality and conforms to critiques made by feminists. As well as the necessity of considering sex scenes across genres in relation to the encoding and depiction of heterosexuality and women's sexuality, the inclusion of an aspect of audience research is necessary to understand if the hegemonic fabric is always so neatly restored. Perhaps the disruptions that have been identified provide space for audiences' own interpretation to challenge the posited heteropatriarchal perspective and begin to develop a different discourse of women's.

In the next chapter, then, we turn to the participant's response to these films and their conversations that surround them. Employing thematic analysis, I consider the ways in which women talk about the media and its representation of heterosexuality first, before looking in more detail for evidence of audience activity and resistance as described in chapter two.
Notes to Chapter Five

1 Sharon Stone cited in Francke (1992:2).

2 In film noir of the 1940's and 50's the femme fatale was seen as the "excess of femininity" and was regarded "by men as evil incarnate" (Doane 1982/1992: 235). She gained her strength in being seen as a mystery, an "inexplicable enigma" (Johnston 1990: 70), which demanded a solution (Kaplan 1978). She was a threat, because behind her mask of sexuality lurked the male protagonist's sexual lack or fear of castration (Johnston 1990). "Woman is mysterious, sexually alluring, and manipulative" (Macdonald 1995: 116).

3 Including films like The Last Seduction, The Lover, Thelma & Louise, Sliver, Jagged Edge, Angel Heart, and Black Widow.

4 Faludi (1991) suggests that films of the late 80's and early 90's, particularly of the 'new' film noir genre like Fatal Attraction, were part of a "backlash against women's independence" (p. 145). She suggests that it created a "feedback loop" as the press declared the movie a trend and set out to find women with whom to illustrate it. "Magazine articles applauded the movie for starting a monogamy trend; the film was supposedly reinvigorating marriages, slowing the adultery rate and encouraging more 'responsible' behaviour from singles" (p. 145).

* hooks is referring here to She's Gotta Have It

5 Maryse Holder (Actresses name), A Winter Tan

6 Reichert and Melcher (1999) suggest that "the film also perpetuates the stereotype that nonheterosexuals merely need to be 'cured' through heterosexual sex, just as, ultimately, Catherine is cured by Nick" (p. 296).
6.0 Discourses of Pleasure and Resistance - An Active Audience Perspective.

The last two chapters established the context in which the research was carried out and gave evidence of the form of mediated feminism and heterosexuality. The focus now changes, moving away from the analysis of the representation of heterosexuality, to the consumption of these images by the audience. Active audience theory (as described in 2.2.1) suggests that media consumers are not passive victims of a totalising media, but rather active in their engagement with media texts. Working from the assumption made in chapter one, that heterosexual feminists sit at the intersection of an institutionalised form of heterosexuality and its daily practice, offers an opportunity to consider active audience theory. One facet of audience reception has been to acknowledge the media's possible influence, but also to look for moments of resistance in media consumption. Using the framework initially established in chapter one, I begin by considering the participants' analysis of mediated heterosexuality. Through an examination both of the media text and the structures within which it is produced and transmitted, the participants provide a thorough analysis of the mediated representation of heterosexuality and heterosex. Next, I consider the interaction of the institution and practice of heterosexuality, through an analysis of the responses given by the participants about their heterosexual practice in light of the representation in the media. I argue that in analysing the sex scenes the women recognise the role of these representations in maintaining heterosexuality as an institution, but that ultimately the resistance remains contained by the normative framework maintained by institutionalised heterosexuality.

6.1 The Media and Institutionalised Heterosexuality – Resisting Discourses of Dominance

Clear in the responses provided by many of the women who participated in all segments of the research process, was recognition of the media's role in maintaining and supporting institutionalised heterosexuality. First, they critiqued the media's role in stereotyping women and providing only limited depictions of their sexuality. Second, they reflected on the role of media industries in the continuing regulation of women's sexuality.
Chapter 6: Discourses of Pleasure and Resistance

6.1.1 ‘...too staged, too self-conscious, too sanitised’

Previous chapters have established the ways in which the media stereotypes women’s sexuality and reinforces hegemonic heterosexuality. Women’s sexuality is usually constructed along binaries of innocence or danger (Mellen, 1973; Singer 1990; Rapping 1993) that work to reclaim and revalidate heterosexuality (Epstein & Steinberg 1996, 1995; Harding 1994; Mayne 1997; Squires 1994; Stein 1994). As such, the options for women to be and act sexually in the media are restricted by a framework that, while appearing to occasionally challenge an institutionalised heterosexuality, works towards its maintenance and continuation by offering only narrow opportunities for its expression. Women responding both to the questionnaires, in the diaries and within the focus groups identified many of the different ways that the media encoded women’s sexuality and reinscribed heterosexuality.

In general, the respondents to both the questionnaire, and the diary and focus group study chastised the media for its representation of women and their sexuality, finding them distorted, stereotyped and unreal.

Media portrayals tend to objectify women and invite us into a voyeuristic position. Real bodies are not like that and real sex happens between people who have a relationship - there’s humour, love, anger, care, insecurity - these multiple positions are not portrayed in films.

Questionnaire respondent from Cosmopolitan.

...it [the newspaper article] adheres to persistent stereotypes of male/female sexuality - i.e. men as rampaging sexual predators and women as hunted.

Karen commenting on “Compulsive Fornicators Don’t Have Much Fun” (The Guardian)

General portrayals in the media as well may show women enjoying sex, but they also do show the underlying things that there’s very few woman portrayed as like single or [...] they’ll be enjoying sex but they’re still relying on the man for other things as well.

Liz commenting on the media in general during the focus group.
The women reported that scenes of heterosex in the media were glamorised and sanitised, with "no humour, language or sweat" (Guardian respondent).

The longitudinal research participants used the space in the diary to note exceptions to the stereotyped depictions that were frequently mentioned by other respondents. Some noted instances in which the images of heterosex depicted in the media resisted a stereotypical construction or could be seen as real.

Tom was massaging Lori's back. She said that he used to do it a lot when they were first together. He said that was when it would probably lead to intercourse. She looked sulky [...] she thought he did it because he liked to massage her back. He said she made him feel like a caveman who didn't know the Cosmopolitan A-Z of foreplay. She said 'A to B would be a start!'. I found this very believable and also it made me laugh out loud.
Janet commenting on Undercover Heart (TV drama).

What was good about it was that it resisted stereotypes [...] There is a sexual frisson between them from the start which is entirely mutual [...] She is an independent pro-active woman and there is no hint of a suggestion that subordination has been eroticized (for either of them) - it simply isn't an issue.
Hilary commenting on Out of Sight (film).

Kissing white/black OAPs!! Long term (20 years) sexual relationship - she single - him married with family. Mutual enjoyment/affectionate. Unique to show older people enjoying sex - usually the reserve of the young and beautiful. Good because it challenges the stereotypes [...] Enjoyed the storyline because it was cocking a snoop at convention.
Sue commenting on Casualty (TV drama).

The more detailed comments in the diaries provide the opportunity for respondents to note the instances when exceptions to the more general portrayal of women are found in the media.

In their more general analysis of the media, women's responses reflect those of feminist researchers. Mediated images of heterosex are seen to portray women's sexuality in limited and oppressive ways, largely as subordinate to men and mainly
constructed for a male audience. Interestingly, while critiquing the more general representation of women, few of the respondents address or challenge the heterosexual nature of the depictions. While accepting that the participants were directed to consider instances of heterosex, it is nonetheless remarkable that no one commented on the heterosexist construction of these images. Representations of women acting sexually and the discourses that they sustain do not appear to have challenged a normative understanding of women's sexuality. They remain confined within an institutional heterosexuality. Although some of the women in the study were able to identify anomalies within media representation, it is interesting to consider these in more detail. Two important points seem to be raised by their inclusion. First, although the roles being shown move outside of the dichotomy of innocence and predation, (by displaying mutual sexual pleasure and resisting dominant stereotypes), the options they provide are not particularly resistant or necessarily far from the usual binary construction of women's sexuality within heterosexuality. Instead of offering either a reified or vilified image of women's sexuality (as in, for example, film noir), the exceptions in the media noted by the respondents present women's sexuality as normalised and contained within the limits of the heterosexual institution. Second, it is important to note the participants' reactions to these variations. Janet mentions that she laughed out loud, Hilary notes the 'sexual frisson', while Sue talks about 'cocking a snoop'. Clearly, these scenes provide the women with pleasure. They enjoy consuming images of sexuality that move beyond the stereotyped depictions, although how far beyond normative structures, and how much resistance this pleasure contains, will be discussed later in this chapter.

6.1.2 Deconstructing Dominance: The Media Industry

Research participants' perspectives on the media's portrayal of women and their sexuality, generally provided support for the feminist media research that has been conducted previously. Another approach to this critique investigates the processes of production involved in these images, examining not only their political economy, but also the technical aspects of their creation. This section considers the participants' impressions of the Hollywood film industry and their understanding of its role in the representation of women, heterosexuality and heterosex in mainstream film. Beginning with their critique of the Hollywood industry, it then turns to the impact of these institutionalised processes on the filmic conventions employed in the creation of the sex scenes that were viewed.
Chapter 6: Discourses of Pleasure and Resistance

6.1.2.1 Crass Commercialism

One way in which the participants engaged with the media institution was to display their scepticism about the process of production. Rather than appearing passive, their conversations presented them as critical of the film industry and savvy about its impact on the images presented. This was demonstrated in two ways, first through conversation about the exploitation of Hollywood films, and second in talk about increasing audiences through the inclusion of a risqué sex scene.

Some of the women claimed that they were unable to enjoy films like the ones viewed in the focus groups because of the relationship to Hollywood commercialism. Sarah made an explicit connection between commercialism, feminist theory and women's continuing oppression. She said:

Sarah Well, even, for me even wider then that because I can't see something like Basic Instinct without being very aware that it's a Hollywood, malestream, big time, making some money type of film.

Sj" Umm hmm.

Sarah And, it just feels like, in sort of like going to watch it I'm colluding in my own economic exploitation.

RG11 commenting on Basic Instinct

Sarah (and others) critiques the role of the media in sustaining the institution of heterosexuality from a perspective of political economy. That is, she directly links the "different ways of financing and organizing cultural production [...] [to] the range of discourses and representations in the public domain and [...] audiences' access to them" (Golding & Murdock 1991: 15).

Not only can the structuring of the media industry be linked to a political economic critique, but so can the actual inclusion of sex scenes within the films viewed. Participants frequently constructed sex scenes as a necessary part of films of a particular type of genre. All three of these films were seen to cater to an audience who would expect a relatively graphic sex scene to occur. In addition, the sex scenes were identified as necessary to advance plot lines, either through the development of the characters or to act as representation of the depth of a relationship. Barb and Vicky had the following conversation:
Chapter 6: Discourses of Pleasure and Resistance

Barb  I think a lot of times in films there just, it seems like they just have to get it in there. Somehow, even though it's not relevant to the story, it's just like oh yeah just get the sex scene over and done with so that they've got it in there, that kind of thing.

Vicky  Yeah, and it is kind of unusual, some films you get to the end of and you think, oh, no sex scene and something's missing there because somebody, they want to get, you know...

RG12, talking about films in general

Sex scenes are recognised as a necessary part of 'some films' and if they do not occur are 'missed' at the end. Jo suggests they are expected, but also sees them as a plot device to show depth of relationships or to support a moral cause:

Jo  Um, it's either, I reckon it's one of two things, it's either to show the depth of the relationship in like thirty seconds and so they don't have to do lots of other things to show how deep a relationships got, they just show them shagging and then, and then we must know they're intimate, um. Or, the other thing, is that they just think that they should put it in there so that the audience get a kick out of it, or, or, I don't know.

[...]

Jo  Or moralistic causes, you know, or because, because a film based about certain issues might not be a proper film without sex, or they think it wouldn't be so they put it in, but a couple of things that I watched I couldn't see the significance of having the sex in there, other then to show it as kind of depth of relationship.

SJ  Ummhmm, ummhmm.

Jo  Because it is a quick shorthand way of doing it really.

RG11 commenting on films in general

In their analysis, sex scenes occur in movies because they are an expected part of a genre of film, because they work to move the plot forward or symbolise depth in a relationship or because they simply have to 'get it in'.
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The cynicism portrayed in the reasons given for the inclusion of sex scenes in films spilled over to a criticism about the film industry in general. Many assumed that sex scenes were included simply to sell a film: -

Sue I thought it was commercialism at its best really.

SJ Yeah?

Sheila Yes, yes.

SJ Taking advantage of some of these kind of feminist ideas?

Sue Well, you know what can we do to make this film sell.

SJ Yeah.

Jilly Yeah, and it's no longer entirely acceptable just to have women as like passive victims and all this and.

Sue They cater for this, the niche market, yeah.

RG8 discussing Body of Evidence

Other participants suggested that any attempts films made to examine a controversial issue (like sexual harassment in Disclosure) were often lost in its packaging as a commercial product.

Vicky Particularly with the sexual harassment in the workplace sort of idea, I think. Which if that was really the point of the film it is not a bad point to be making.

SJ Yeah, no, I agree with you, I agree with you. I think it was an interesting twist on it.

Vicky But also I think it was a bit too much of a commercial venture to actually be the point that really came out in the film.

RG12 discussing Disclosure

In offering a critical political economy critique of the media in general, and Hollywood films more specifically, the participants accomplish two things. First, they present themselves as media-savvy consumers who are not duped by the unreality of the images or their constructed nature. Second, it offers a critical examination of
the institution of heterosexuality as supported by the media industries and acknowledges the media’s role in its continual reproduction and re-inscription.

6.1.2.2 The Male Gaze and Misogyny

Another way in which the participants displayed their awareness of the contribution of the media images to maintaining normative heterosexuality, was in their analysis of the filmic conventions used and the resulting misogyny.

Participants expressed real annoyance at the contrivance of the camera angles. Mary says: -

I, I think, I’ve thought about this a lot, not in the context of this film, but in most films that I can’t bear to watch and that a lot of it is the male gaze thing. I, I really get very irritated by the women as the object of the gaze all the time and it is compounded in that clip because she was young and had a good body and he was older and had a bad body and I think he is a dog anyway.

Mary (RG11) discussing Basic Instinct

In shooting the women, camera angles were accused of showing too much, whereas when filming the men, they showed too little: -

...but it's just that um the shots are filmed in such a way that she is completely exposed really and he is in a pos, he is put in that position where you never see anything more than his torso, you know, there's no thigh or buttocks or anything of his, he's, he's protected from our gaze whereas she isn't.

Hilary (RG7) discussing Body of Evidence

The participants were highly conscious of the different camera angles and critical of their contrived use to heighten the gaze on the female body, whilst ignoring or exorcising the male body. Other participants, more familiar with film theory, actively applied their knowledge of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975/1992) to their analysis of the sex scenes viewed.

Mulvey (1975/1992) suggested that women in film were defined by "to-be-looked-at-ness" (p. 27) and bear the full burden of the gaze in three forms - by the
audience, by the male lead and by the camera. Participants in the focus groups were critical of all three of these aspects. As expressed above, they critiqued the contrived and unrealistic use of camera angles that concentrated solely on the woman's body. As well, they were conscious of their role in gazing at the female body, although more hesitant to speak of it. Charlotte, in the following extract, reacts against attempts by the film to place her within the scopophilic pleasures of the male gaze: -

Charlotte: And I felt that all the images that were presented to us were a very kind of to hit a male...

Fi: Yeah.

Charlotte: ...audience, for kind of like the male eyes, the male viewers as it was very much like, dress, the way she was dressed, the way they shot in on certain parts of her body, the way he touched her, you know, the way, you know you didn't get she's sort of, you didn't get to see all of her breasts you just got to see these kind of breasts encased in very nice lace black underwear.

RG3 commenting on Disclosure

Charlotte resisted the power of the male gaze by finding the construction slightly ridiculous.

Other participants were aware of the gaze of the male protagonist on the female characters. In particular they mentioned a scene from Basic Instinct in which Nick is lying on the bed, gazing up into the mirror on the ceiling, watching Catherine give him a blowjob.

Sally: But you know the man got something out of the mirror and it was his gaze that did the mirror.

Rachel: Oh interesting.

Sally: It wasn't hers.

RG2 commenting on Basic Instinct
In analysing the different sex scenes presented to them, the focus group participants clearly demonstrated their active consumption of the images. They were aware of and expressed scepticism at the contrived nature of the camera shots. As well, they acknowledged and applied feminist theorising around the male gaze, not simply in terms of the camera work, but more critically in terms of their positioning by the film and the construction of the female character. Again in deconstructing the films in this manner, the participants present themselves as aware and critical viewers, whose analysis recognises the different techniques used in the production of these media images, and their role in maintaining a form of heterosexuality in which woman is the object and bearer of the gaze. Another way in which the participants express this is in their objections to the open misogyny apparent in the films.

Although Crichton claims Disclosure as a feminist exploration of sexual harassment, many participants complained about the anti-feminist nature of the film. Their most frequent objection was that the film seemed to indicate a misunderstanding of feminism and feminist gains, that it suggested that once women gained employment status, they would behave like the oppressor and use their new-found power in the same way as men:

Janice: No again because I've seen this film to me it's against feminism because it sets up this woman as being evil and having you know using him and manipulat, manipulating him in that way so to me that's not a good thing anyway, so that's the whole thing in itself so you can't really, you know whilst that scene means that to me, so you can't think.

SJ: Yeah.

Marion: Do you know what it means to me, but I've only thought about it since Janice said that, it's almost like they're saying if you have a woman boss be prepared for this to happen, that's why women shouldn't be bosses, women shouldn't run companies because the control and the power and...

Janice: All goes to their head.
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My feeling is, as a feminist watching that, it is anti-feminist because they take a, they take some of the advances that women have been able to make, as in being moved into positions of power in employment etc. and necessarily therefore assume that women will abuse it and take the simplest route which is by saying that well men in the past have abused their greater power over women, or their secretaries etc. all sorts of clichés you can come up with, so let's just see if a woman did that. And, in a way, therefore as a feminist, I'm perhaps even [...] less likely to think of it as a kind of positive role model for me of sex I think.

Rachel (RG2) discussing Disclosure

Disclosure was not the only film to be criticised for its misunderstanding and misrepresentation of feminism. In the following extract, Emma and Gill are complaining about Body of Evidence as well.

Emma Yeah, yeah. So like, and, I suppose it's what the extreme, no not extreme, people who don't understand feminism might see it as. A woman being dominant. I mean those who fear feminism, will see feminism as being, where women want total control and want to dominate. And for those people who see it in that sense, they will say, oh yes, that's very feminist.

[...] 

Emma So in those who misunderstand what feminism is about, they would say look that's why we don't want women to do x, y, and z because this is what they would turn out to be like. So it actually fulfils those stereotypes of the misconstrued understanding of feminism.

SJ Yes, you're right. Yeah, yeah, that's true. I hadn't thought about it before

Gill And those arguments, those kinds of things are used by men who are scared shitless of women being equal competitors.

Emma I think something very interesting as well, a lot of men today and a lot of women feel that we are equal and don't recognise
that yet still within the workplace, still within the education system, women and girls are still not on an equal plane, they’re not on equal salaries, they’re not in equal positions with the men. And the whole things watered down because people feel that and maybe some of that is they’re saying well the women have got so far, that’s where we should keep them too...

RG13 discussing *Body of Evidence*

In this final extract, Emma and Gill provide a concise summary of the misogyny and misrepresentation that was identified particularly in *Disclosure*, but also in *Basic Instinct* and *Body of Evidence*. In addition, Emma makes clear links between the continuing misrepresentation of women and feminism in the media and the continuing inequality of women within society that assists in the maintenance of institutionalised heterosexuality.

Like existing feminist research, the respondents found the images of women in the media to be limiting, oppressive and stereotyped. Their analysis of the media industries revealed the impact of commercialism and political economy on the images that were produced. Finally the participants considered filmic conventions and their contribution to a misogynistic portrayal of women. Clearly these women can be seen as an 'active audience', working through the discourses of heterosexuality and linking them to a wider structural analysis and critique. It must be noted that some of the women expressed their displeasure at 'these types of films'. Mary, for instance, said that she wouldn’t ordinarily watch this kind of film, if it weren’t for the research. Jo, in her diary, complains about being asked to pay detailed attention to instances of heterosex, and thereby giving them more weight than she normally would. While exhibiting their prowess at deconstruction, little evidence is found of the resistive pleasure that Fiske (1989a, 1989b) claims is an important way to subvert oppressive discourses. In the last part of this section, I consider the way in which the women discussed the sex scenes viewed, finding evidence within their pleasure of resistance to the images as presented.

6.1.3 Subverting Institutional Heterosexuality – Laughter, Pleasure and Resistance

As outlined in chapter two, attempts to reclaim women’s pleasure has been important to feminist media studies and researchers have considered the pleasure created for women in their media consumption and the possibilities provided for
resistance to hegemonic patriarchy. Fiske in particular was concerned to consider the subversive possibilities of pleasure through popular culture consumption (e.g. 1989a, 1989b). In this section, I examine the conversations of the focus group participants for evidence of the creation of subversive pleasure and consider its political potential.

Many of the criticisms made by the participants about the film clips viewed during the focus groups reflect the kind of responses they gave about the media more generally. They stated that the portrayals were constructed as a male fantasy where 'women in their fantasies do the things they want to happen' (Karen - *Body of Evidence*) or are portrayed as simply 'tits and bums' (Sally - *Disclosure*), or in the case of *Basic Instinct* providing the excitement of watching lesbian sex, with the assurance that he 'gets to fuck you afterwards' (Mary).

The participants also found the portrayals stereotyped along the binaries of good and evil with 'the virgin, the whore, the mother' (Sally) or the creation of a new stereotype of the successful and powerful woman who uses her sexuality for a particular end. The participants suggest that the sex scenes do work to invert the assumption of a passive woman and active man, but only by reinforcing another stereotype.

Perhaps the area discussed most widely by the participants was the unreality of the sex scenes that were viewed. When the women discuss the unreal aspects of the scene, they do so with obvious pleasure. Delivering their analysis in ironical and satirical tones, they highlight their enjoyment in critiquing the representations being presented to them. Fiske (1989b) proposes that popular pleasures (as opposed to hegemonic ones, and these are clearly working against the heterosexual hegemony within the scenes) can be resistive. He writes that:

Popular pleasures arise from the social allegiances formed by subordinated people, they are bottom-up and thus must exist in some relationship of opposition to power (social, moral, textual, aesthetic, and so on) that attempts to discipline and control them (p. 49).

Together, the women critique the scenes viewed, working both to form 'allegiances' as well as to resist the power of the filmic text.
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The women were disparaging of the unreality in the films, picking particularly on the use of clothes ripping, sexual movement, penetration and the noises that the characters emitted during sex. In the following extract, we find the group laughing at the idea of a sexual partner ripping off their clothes, and of the awareness of this as a film technique:

Marion I'd go mad. I'm sorry, it's over.

Janice It's like

Marion Forget it, forget. No really...

Janice You've upset me, now I just don't want to anymore.

Marion Yeah, yeah. Because that kind of thing is very Hollywood very kind of like, you know...

Janice Yeah.

Marion Wardrobe!

SJ Yeah, yeah, that they can waste the money.

Janice That's a common one in a sex scene isn't it, ripping their clothes.

RG6 commenting on Body of Evidence

Marion and Janice place themselves in the situation of the woman whose dress is being ripped. In humorous tones they suggest that for most women that would be the end of the relationship, but because this is Hollywood, the actresses can simply call on the wardrobe mistress to have their dress replaced.

Similarly, Gill and Emma suggest that Frank must be punished by having hot wax poured on his chest because he ripped Rebecca's dress:

Gill He ripped her bloody dress, that's what he did, that's his contribution to the whole thing.

Emma That's why he had wax poured on him because she was...

Gill She was pissed off, that was it.
In both of these extracts, the participants make fun of the clothes ripping that occurs in the scenes viewed, while at the same time, expressing their knowledge of this as a filmic convention used to represent passion.

The participants were also quite sceptical of the range of movements undertaken by the actors during the sex scene. Again, we see them treating their analysis with irony.

Sue Very athletic.

SJ Very athletic?

Sue Yes. Mobile.

Jilly They didn't seem to worry when they crashed into things and stuff like that.

Sheila No.

Jilly Yeah, like nobody looked behind them to see...

RG8, discussing Disclosure

Gill It always looks very unrealistic to me, they get into bed, they roll around, over and over and they have huge beds that they roll from one side to the other of and back again, and then that's it.

SJ Yeah, yeah.

Gill That's what comes to mind.

Emma Yeah, it's diving in and then you see smiley faces at the end.

RG13, discussing sex scenes in general

One can imagine the tone of Gill's voice and the rolling of her eyes as she parodies the sex scene, remarking that “they get into bed, they roll around, over and over”.

Like the movement of the characters, the participants were sceptical about the unrealistic noises, both when they were provided and when they were not.
Barb  It's always, always perfect. There's never, oh no, I've got a problem with condom or, you know or anything like that, but

Vicky  Never any squelching noises or

Barb  ... you know, its all going perfectly and...

Vicky  Yes, its all a bit sort of, it's obviously very well choreographed.

RG12 talking about film in general

Vicky  Mmm. It was a bit over-dramatic, especially towards the end with all the music, and you know, is she, isn't she?

Barb  She was very noisy.

Vicky  Yes.

Barb  Very noisy, very quickly because from my experience [laughter]. You know it doesn't, it's two seconds and it's like whoa ah...

Vicky  It's like oh, I've forgotten to make some noise better make some noise now.

Barb  Yeah, yeah.

RG12 discussing Basic Instinct

In the following extracts, the participants again critique the unreality presented in the sex scenes, ironically dismissing both the ability of a woman to obtain orgasm through penetration, but also the position in which the sex occurred.

Hilary  But it's quite interesting I mean to, to, just to go back to this business about perhaps men generally or it's more widely felt amongst men then women that it's penetration that is sex, um, but also it is exactly why so much heterosex is not ah satisfying to women because that is seen as real sex and so forget about all the rest and get to the real...

Mel  The real bits
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Hilary  Yes, yes, get to the real bits.

Mel    Get to the point.

Kim    Instinct

SJ     But isn't it interesting how often in movies real, penetrative sex is shown as real sex and the women love it, you know they're all having orgasms and it's kind of like...

Hilary I know, yes, yes.

Mel    It's incredible, they're thrown on the bed.

SJ     No foreplay.

Mel    Two, two minutes flat and it's all over and it was wonderful. I don't know what they're taking.

RG7 - commenting on Disclosure

SJ     Yeah, god, um, what about the sex?

Gill   Did not like it at all.

Emma  Well the actual act of intercourse wasn't realistic either, her body movement wasn't realistic, she was not penetrated there. If she moved like that, he'd have come out [laughs].

RG13 discussing Body of Evidence

Mary  ... we were saying earlier on what is sex and I think there is this idea that with heterosexual sex the ultimate point, no pun intended, is that it, it becomes penetrative sex and that is the important part of heterosexual sex, the penetration.

Linda The penultimate thing.

Mary  Yes, the bit before the orgasm and it ah it only stopped after orgasm which has come after penetrative sex.
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SJ    Umm hmm.

Sarah And also it's again, it's this sort of like the one, two, three this sort of focus, kiss the mouth, kiss the tits, kiss the, you know it's like...

Mary Fanny

Sarah ...that, that's like well aren't there any other bits?

Mary And then insert member and she goes wow.

Linda And the way, what I mean, that she was depicted or portrayed or seen to be getting much more pleasure, groaning, moaning much more loudly from penetration or intercourse then from oral sex, which is...

SJ A load of bollocks. Laughter.

Linda Highly unlikely. Laughter.

RG11 commenting on Basic Instinct

The women laugh and giggle throughout these critiques, offering bemused summations - 'I don't know what they're taking' (Mel), graphic illustrations - 'if she moved like that, he'd have come out' (Emma), and the suggestion that men have no idea about women's sexual pleasure.

Why all this laughter around the unrealistic nature of sex scenes? As Fiske suggests, the women can be seen to be forging social allegiances between themselves and against the determining nature of the film text. Detailed analysis of the use of laughter in conversation shows that laughing together is a valued occurrence (Jefferson 1984) where a speaker invites others to join (Jefferson 1979), affiliates to them (Schenkein 1972; O'Donnell-Trujillo & Adams 1983) or creates a sense of intimacy (Jefferson, Sacks & Schegloff 1987). In some instances, it can be seen to bring a sense of liberation through the creation of consensus across a brief space of time (Croser 1959) and Fiske (1989a) suggests that "parody can be an effective device for interrogating the dominant ideology" (p. 145). In these extracts, the shared laughter could demonstrate the women's attempts to create "a social identity that is separate from and oppositional to the one preferred by social discipline" (Fiske 1989b: 53). In talking about the unrealistic nature of the sex
scenes in this way the women exercise "semiotic resistance" (Fiske 1989a: 179) and "exert control over the meanings of their lives, a control that is typically denied them in their material social conditions" (Fiske 1989a: 10). They appear to create their own community or membership category that is in opposition to their perception of the film text's attempts to position them. It suggests 'insider knowledge' that is not available to those who have produced the films and displays a "productive exploitation of the gap between the ideology of patriarchy and the everyday experience of women" (Fiske 1989b: 60). In a sense they make fun of the men involved in the production processes who, from their perspective, seem to have no understanding of women's sexuality. Relying on the expertise of their own experience they contrast it with the filmic representation and find the gulf between reality and representation laughable - and it is 'them' as the producers, writers, actors and directors - at whom the women laugh. Fiske (1989b) "would call this an example of the progressive potential of popular culture. Its progressiveness lies both in its recognition of the differences between patriarchal power and the everyday experiences of women and in the validation of their tactical resistance to it" (p. 61). In laughing at the unreal nature of the sex scenes, the women are resisting the heterosexual construction of their sexuality and the contrast to their own sexual experience.

Fiske (1989b) also notes though, that resistance created in this way is "one of refusal, not of semiotic insurgence" (p. 53). Although it creates clear evidence of the activity of the audience and suggests the possibility of empowerment, it is difficult to ascertain the results. Fiske acknowledges that:

Pleasure and relevance are not necessarily associated with empowerment, but they often are, and this empowerment does not always result in action within the social world, but it sometimes does, and always creates the possibility for, and increases the probability of, such action (p. 68).

The participants play with and laugh at the film text, creating allegiances and presenting themselves as 'experts' on women's sexuality, but it is impossible to project the possibility of this activity becoming empowerment. Resistance simply to the positioning of a film text does not necessarily mean feminist empowerment or activity, it simply provides evidence, in this example, of the women's ability to deconstruct and negotiate the encoding and continual reinscription of women's
sexuality and heteropatriarchy as represented in the media. Roscoe et al. (1995) suggest that:

the audience should be seen as 'active', but that they are 'active' within certain parameters set by the text. In doing so, we can acknowledge the relative power of the audience to take a variety of meanings from a given text without losing sight of the powerful role that the media plays in shaping public understandings" (p. 107).

And it is the powerful role of the media that is often forgotten in celebrations about the active audience. Eldridge et al. (1997) ask "what is the relationship between 'oppositional' cultural consumption and political change? If people wrest 'pleasure' or positive meaning from a text which might otherwise be alienating or offensive, is this necessarily 'liberating'? And if audiences read texts 'in their own way', does this mean that the media are powerless to convey ideology?" (p. 156). Media consumers cannot be divorced from material socio-economic structures that frame their lives nor can they be removed from wider media influence as "identity and personal experience are not media-free zones" (J. Kitzinger 1998: 192).

Feminists have always been adept at analysing heterosexuality in its institutionalised form (see chapter one) but heterosexual feminists have been less active in applying this analysis to their own lives. While the participants can be seen to be resisting institutional heterosexuality in this particular mediated form, their analysis provides few details of their own interaction with heterosexuality as both institution and practice. Building from the analysis provided in this section, I suggest in the next that the participants recognise the nature of filmic construction, its manipulation of women's sexuality and contribution to the maintenance of an institution of heterosexuality, but that they struggle to deconstruct sexuality at a deeper normative level.

6.2 Discourses of Desire: Heterosexual Practice and Media Representation

Moving from a consideration of institutionalised heterosexuality as represented in the media, this section looks at the women's analysis of the sex scenes and their own heterosexual practice. I consider the ways in which the women's talk connects the mediated discourses of sexual representation with their own construction of feminism and heterosexuality. Making wider structural links, the
analysis moves outside of the limitations of an active audience approach to analyse
the wider discursive presentations of feminism and heterosexuality made by the
women. I argue that evidence of their appropriation of the sexual discourses made
available in the sex scenes to reconfirm their own sexual identity and activities is
provided but that this occurs within a very narrow and limited framework. I examine
both the participants' analysis of the actual sex occurring in the sex scenes and the
way that they talk about their own sexual activities in light of their feminism. First, I
consider the way that the respondents talk about the sexual activities depicted and
the relationship to the practice of heterosexuality. Particularly in relation to the
extremes of sexual activity - pleasure and pain - the participants place the practice
of heterosexuality within a normative framework. Second, I examine the women's
conversations about feminism and sexual activity and their construction in the
media, to understand their relationship and the possibilities of a discourse of
heterosexual feminism. As it becomes clear that the participants struggle to locate
their sexual practice within feminist politics, I turn to the discourses that the
participants did use to discuss their heterosexual practice.

6.2.1 The Extremes of Sexual Activity:
Orgasmic Pleasure and Sado-masochistic Pain

In considering the sexual activities depicted in the film clips viewed two topics
received the most attention from the participants. Many of them talked about sexual
pleasure and its representation in the film. While their conversations about pleasure
were generally positive, those that considered the pain or sado-masochistic activities
contained in the clips were negative. The women drew distinct links between their
own sexual practice and the inappropriateness of that shown in the clips. Each of
these areas will be discussed.

6.2.1.1 Discourses of Pleasure

Pleasure was considered in two contrasting ways. Some of the participants
talked about the excitement (both mental and sexual) created in the passionate and
anonymous sexual encounters that were depicted in the clips. In other instances,
they referred more specifically to the sexual pleasure in the form of orgasm.
Interestingly, their constructions of these as pleasurable sexual experiences
differed. Talk about 'one-night-stands' or casual sexual encounters suggested an
opportunity by the participants to appropriate the sexual discourse as represented in
the clips, to lose one's identity and to escape from the societal mores that structure
heterosexual relationships. Conversations about sexual pleasure in terms of
orgasm, relied on constructions of relationships as mutual and equal.

One interesting way that many of the participants constructed the sex
occurring in the scenes was as casual sexual encounters or 'one-night-stands'. The
participants talked about the excitement of this kind of sex and constructed it as
lacking in their relationships.

Sheila It is pure sex isn't it?
Sue Yeah.
Sheila It's not a relationship...
Sue No.
Sheila ...of any description that I can think of.
Sue It was a lustful intent.
Sheila Possibly the only one between them sort of thing.

RG8 commenting on Body of Evidence

Marg ... if I just sort of run it through my mind quickly, the sort of
the wild and crazy sex doesn't seem to be portrayed within a
stable partnership, it's with say you know some sort of illicit
relationship perhaps, it's someone who's being paid for sex
or or whatever that is where the exciting...

Sally Or it's the lustful beginnings of a relationship.
Marg Yeah, that's where the the exciting sex occurs...

The participants read the casual nature of the sexual encounters as exciting and
different from their own relationships. For Sheila it's 'pure sex', based on 'lustful
intent', for Marg, it is only at the beginning of a relationship where exciting sex
occurs, while others suggested it is something that happens occasionally, but is not
part of a regular relationship.
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The women's reaction to the 'type' of sex shown in the films clips, suggests a discourse of sexual freedom, in which normative constraints are removed. In contrast to this, the women's conversation around non-monogamy suggests carefully policed limits in which this 'freedom' can occur. Feminist theorising around possible ways to break patriarchal structuring of sexual relationships suggests the disruptive possibility of non-monogamy (see chapter one, section 1.3.4). In the focus groups, I suggested this to the participants as a way that some feminists have considered combining feminism and heterosexuality, and implicitly drawing connections to the sexual activity that had just been viewed. Reactions from the groups were largely negative, represented by comments such as: -

Joanna: Well I, personally I think that ah, non-monogamy and non-penetrative sex I think, you know I think that's nonsense.

SJ: Mmm. Why are they nonsense?

Joanna: Well, I couldn't live like that. Ah, basically and I can't see why it could be feminist to have lots of relationships.

RG5

Marion: Generally I think it would be great, but then things like health and things like emotions and things like responsibilities come into it.

Lara: It's not really that feasible, I know what I'm like, I know that I, I do get really attached to one person, I mean I can't just have random sex with one off's kind of thing.

RG6

For others it was 'misguided' (Fi) or anthropologically 'unnatural' (Carol). Non-monogamy is constructed as inappropriate and is largely rejected by the women. They employ a discourse of sexual limitation, reinforcing a normative framework of complementarity. The contradictions apparent in these two different ways of speaking about non-monogamy or 'pure', 'lustful' sex draw on Matza's (1964) notions of subterranean values. He suggests that what is normatively coded as deviant is often "publicly denounced by authorized spokesmen" (p. 64). However, in other situations, the traditions or activities being denounced as deviant are treated "with ambivalence in the privacy of contemplation and in intimate publics by most conventional citizens." (p. 64). In this case it is the publicly accepted discourse of
sexual freedom that is rejected for a more traditional construction of sexual relationships. In describing the sex portrayed in the scenes as exciting they buy into a openly acknowledged discourse of sexual freedom. When discussing ideas of sexual freedom in their own relationships they reject the publicly accepted liberal discourse, and, like Skegg's (1997) participants choose a more traditional or normative role for their own sexual activity. This is strongly reinforced in conversations around sexual pleasure, in which the women use a discourse of male active and female passive in their discussions of mediated sex, but are quick to assert the importance of pleasure in their own relationships.

In general, men's pleasure in the sex scenes was constructed as unproblematic. While the women's pleasure was displayed through smiles, noises, mutuality and the attention of the male character to her pleasure, male pleasure did not require the same kind of evidence for its existence.

The women across the groups used similar visual and aural clues to determine whether the characters were experiencing pleasure. These included simple indications like noises, smiles and the appearance of orgasm.

She was smiling as well when she was looking up at him, although she was looking up which made her look quite sort of doe-eyed, she was smiling...

Cathy, RG6 commenting on Body of Evidence

SJ  ... do you think that she was experiencing pleasure?
Mary  Thank you, um well she came.
Jo  Yeah, yeah.
Mary  Does that mean it's pleasurable?
Linda  What about those deep groans of delight (laughter).

RG11 discussing Basic Instinct

The woman's pleasure was also apparent when her partner could be seen to be actively ensuring it. This was particularly apparent in relation to Nick from Basic Instinct who gives Catherine cunnilingus:
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He was obviously interested in her pleasure. I mean he looked at her as he gave her pleasure, as he went to the breast, as he went to the ah clitoris. So he was obviously looking and looking for her response, it wasn't just his own pleasure.

Emma (RG13)

In an interesting contrast, the female characters were often constructed as having to exert power to ensure their own pleasure in the film clips viewed. Barb and Vicky made this comment about Rebecca in Body of Evidence: -

Barb I think she liked the way, doing it, you know she was doing what she wanted first all the time like she said you know, my way, you know and so on.

Vicky Taking control, taking charge.

RG12

Amanda made a similar comment: -

I think she enjoyed the power and he enjoyed the submission, and um, I think sexually it was also balanced on both sides. I think they enjoyed it.

RG3

For the male characters, the attainment of pleasure through power was constructed in different ways. First, the participants assumed he was experiencing pleasure because he chose to stay: -

SJ And um how do you think, what made you think he was enjoying it?

Marion Well he didn't leave did he?

[...]

Marion Unlike Michael [Douglas in Disclosure] he wasn't saying no.

SJ No that's true.
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Lara And the fact that he stayed because he could have, he could have gotten undone from the belt.

Marion I'm your lawyer, yeah.

Lara Easily, yeah. And he stayed and I'm sure he was enjoying it.

RG6 discussing Body of Evidence

Few people found the sex scene in Disclosure pleasurable for either of the characters (particularly not for Meredith who was considered to be using sex as a tool), but some suggested that the male character, Tom, may have finally enjoyed his power to deny Meredith pleasure:

I think he did an awful lot of protesting and I don't think it was pleasurable until, I mean, I think physically it was from the beginning, but, um, I think he really needed his male ego involved to, and I think for him it became really 100% pleasurable when he was allowed to take over, or when he took over. Um, yeah.

Amanda RG4

But in a way, he's almost, he almost seemed to enjoy it more once he was in control and enjoyed her body and having control over that. And even in a way when he stops it, he's still the one that has control over it even though she's the one that started it out.

Vicky RG12

Men's pleasure in the sex scene is constructed as unproblematic. Jensen and Dines (1998) have noted that in pornographic depictions of sex "women were constantly orgasmic, while men typically showed little reaction to sex" (p. 77). Little evidence of the men's pleasure actually exists in the same vocal and visible way that it does for the women characters. The women are seen to be experiencing pleasure through smiles and noises – the 'insignia' of orgasm (DeNora 1997) - or when the sexual activities are about mutual pleasure. The women's character can only attain pleasure, even when she asserts power, through the agreement or consent of the men. First, it is assumed that the woman's pleasure is dependent on his participation. Second, although the women are constructed as sexually powerful, it is the men who appear to have the power to simply walk away. Finally
allow though they do very little, the male characters are still seen to assert power because the sexual pleasure for the female characters remains contingent on his participation. Crawford et al. (1994) suggest that when men and women do not have access to other discourses, they return to those that prevail. "These, in general, privilege the male understanding of sexuality and heterosexual relations, and the female voice is barely heard" (p. 579).

Turning to the way that the participants talked about their own sexual activities in relation to these constructions of pleasure, we find elements of activity and passivity. In their discourses around sexual pleasure, it is apparent that they are struggling more keenly with the issues mentioned above. They work to remove themselves from prevailing discourses, attempt to create a discourse of "women as active, desiring and sexually assertive subjects, not necessarily centred around the erect penis" (Crawford et al. 1994: 585). Many of the participants quite explicitly reject the normative construction of sex requiring penetration, and therefore being dependent on the man's participation: -

...I think it's even things like, you know, ah, one of the first things that I started doing was like only having sex if I really wanted it. Dammit, you know. Feeling at first excessive amounts of guilt, but, who cares, you know.

Linda RG11

Hilary I think choice in sex, that is choice to have it or not to have it.

[...]

Hilary Um, and also you know what that entails, I mean as we were saying earlier, you know, the general view is that penetration is sex, that's what you have to work towards and if it doesn't, if you don't get there then you haven't had sex um and I guess I might have kind of had that somewhere lurking in the back of my mind.

SJ Yeah.

Hilary Um for a long time and in a sense it is choice about having it or not having it on any particular occasion and it's choice about what is, what constitutes sex.
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Sarah ... it's about being able to articulate and what, what it is that you want from a sex life and be able to say yes today I do want to have penetrative sex or actually I'd just like to be held, and, and that, that was the really that was kind of a breakthrough for me. But knowing the difference.

SJ And being able to ask.

Sarah Yeah. And not being afraid, and not feeling inadequate by saying I just, I want the being held and I want the stroking and I, I'd just like the lovely lovely bits and...

Jo Yeah, I can do that.

Sarah I'm sure you can Jo. You know, but, it was, I don't know it seemed to be quite important make the, to be able to make those, to identify those differences in my head.

It is clear that this is a difficult choice and that asserting power in this way causes guilt or feelings of inadequacy and a need to overcome the usual construction of sex as penetration. Crawford et al. (1994) note that “the shared meaning of the sexual encounter is partial” (p. 580). It appears then that sexual pleasure and power is also dependent on the man to accept this construction of sex and sexual pleasure in order to ensure the mutuality and equality of sex that the participants indicate is important.

Hollway (1984) considered women’s power in heterosexual relationships and found that it was constructed around two main discourses - the male sexual drive which sees men as sexual agents, and a ‘have/hold’ discourse which, while usually linked to women’s sexuality, still contains heterosexist assumptions about power and subjectivity. Many of the participants decried the use of a male sex drive discourse in Disclosure, Janet, for instance, comments: -

And there’s a notion that once he’s gotten an erection he’s going to, she’s going to have, you know, he’s going to have to let her do something or otherwise he’ll be dreadfully uncomfortable and something horrible will
happen to him...

And yet their continual construction of male sexual pleasure as active and female sexual pleasure as receptive even entered discussions of their own relationships. Gill and Emma have the following conversation:

Gill And the other thing I suppose as well that I do is that, well no it's not that I don't allow him, because that's sound incredibly domineering and horrible and I don't think I am, but I always like to make sure that I've got my orgasm in first, because if he has his orgasm before me he flakes.

SJ Yeah.

Emma With me, it's like I have my orgasm, whoa, yeah, let's go for it, so yeah I always like to make sure that I'm sorted first.

Gill and Emma seem to be relying on a discourse in which men give and women take sexual pleasure (Hollway 1984; Crawford et al. 1994), constructing their sexuality as passive in relation to the more active male role. This is mirrored in their conversations around the passive display of the male characters in the sex scene who are still regarded as active in giving or allowing the female characters to obtain pleasure.

As well, in talking about pleasure in their own relationships the participants felt that important elements were missing from the film clips, and here we find aspects of Hollway's 'have/hold' discourse. They suggested the importance of affection, fun, laughter, love and romance:

Sarah Um, well and this pleasure thing.

Linda I'd want a little bit of, a little bit of affection.

SJ And this pleasure thing, what do you mean by that?

Sarah Well, I would like some more signs of actual sort of like it being good fun...
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Mary Yeah.

SJ What would those be?

Sarah A little bit of a laugh.

Mary Bit of a laugh, it's allowed.

Sarah And not necessarily because things are going wrong.

Sue ... it was lust rather than, than love and romance.

SJ Mmm hmm.

Sue It was just sex.

SJ And what would make the difference between lust and love and romance?

Sue There was no communication.

Sheila Mmm

Sue There was no talking, no caressing, no gentleness, no, I don't know.

Sheila And actually no finding out either, no exploring, really.

Sue No there was no, there was no foreplay was there?

RG8 commenting on *Body of Evidence*

The 'have/hold' discourse relies on a "traditionally dominant discourse concerning sexuality [...] associated with Christian values; the idea that sex is part of a loving commitment between a man and a woman and should lead to bringing up a family" (Hollway 1984: 65). It reinforces the importance of equality and mutuality in the women's conversations of sexual pleasure and safely acts within heterosexist assumptions of women's desire for relationships.

Why do women employ discourses of activity and passivity in this way? First, the participants have been invited to the focus group to talk about heterosex from a feminist perspective. It is clear than that they will be applying their knowledge of feminist theorising around sex to the way that they talk about the sex
they are viewing. This might account for some of the contradictions, where for instance, they talk about the casualness of the sexual encounters as something exciting and lustful, while at the same time asserting the importance of mutuality, equality and respect in their sexual practice - drawing both on the sexual repression discourse as well as that of sexual oppression (see Chapter Two) or subterranean values (Matza 1964). Second, normative influences work across the conversations. In many ways, the participants seem to distance themselves from the categories of sexual activity that are depicted, while still retaining aspects of the male sex drive and have/hold discourses (Hollway 1984). Whether they engage in the activities depicted or the ones they talk about is not important. Rather it is that they are only willing to talk about them, in this setting, in this way. This becomes very interesting when we return to the first point. Although talking about sexual pleasure from a feminist perspective, the constructions of the men's pleasure offered by the participants is one of activity and ultimate power. Therefore I would suggest that within this setting, it is these normative discourses that more strongly influence the construction of conversation, rather than a feminist analysis. These become more apparent when we turn to an examination of the depiction of pain, or sado-masochism, within the film clips.

6.2.1.2 Discourses of Normativity - Pain and Sado-masochism

Like the previous section, the women's conversation around instances of sado-masochism and aggression that occur in all three of the films are framed by feminist discourses of sexual repression and oppression, and normative discourses, particularly Hollway's (1984) have/hold. In discussing their reactions to the light bondage that occurs in Body of Evidence and Basic Instinct, and the aggression of the sex in Disclosure, the women frequently compare it to their own experiences. The women construct a discourse of heterosexual sex based on a 'normal' trajectory of sexual relations that are not frightening or threatening, but rather mutual and shared. They must not contain elements of which one must feel ashamed and therefore must not transgress the boundaries of normative sexual practice. In this way, they explicitly comply with the media framework that uses sexual activity to label the women as evil and transgressive of 'normal' heterosexuality.

Many participants noted the inclusion of bondage as a possible device to titillate the audience, but in so doing, also drew interesting distinctions between the sex that was occurring in the film and their own sex lives. Some saw it as playful, while others considered it pornographic: -
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Lara Very strange foreplay.

SJ Yeah.

Janice Sort of cuddly S&M sort of thing wasn't it? Like cuddly sort of S&M.

RG6 commenting on Body of Evidence

Yeah, I mean I think that the portrayal of the, to me it sort of seems to me like we’re moving to torture, I mean, I go along with you my, my experience of sex must be really limited because it seems like the grooving, I mean I’m sure that you know pornography is probably revolting, but I mean that probably isn't pornography but as soon as you move into that area of inflicting that degree of what seemed to me pain, then the lines cross for me.

Wendy (RG7) commenting on Body of Evidence

Like Wendy, all of the participants distanced their own sexual experiences from those being shown. Hilary, Mel and Wendy would find any kind of aggression or force frightening:

Hilary Yes because I, I just personally, I mean this is a very personal thing, I find it really amazing, that anybody, man or woman should be turned on by any kind of aggression or force so, you know.

Mel So do I.

Hilary Yeah.

Wendy Yeah the fear response is just a killer to, to enjoyment.

Hilary Yes, yes.

Wendy And if, if you know you’re to me if you’re, this is a personal, but if you know, to enjoy sex the last thing you want is any degree of fear. Well that’s me.

RG7 discussing Disclosure
Jilly and Sue express similar sorts of sentiments, but for Sue it would also include shame that she had become involved with someone who was interested in pain.

Jilly: I think, I think if I was in a situation with somebody and it was like getting on that edge of being quite aggressive I wouldn't, I, that would be, I just wouldn't find that acceptable. And if it

Sue: I would be angry if I got myself into that situation. I would want to walk away. Say forget it.

[Jilly]

Sue: I'd be ashamed afterwards.

Jilly: Yeah. I would also, I would also just, I wouldn't like that person.

Sue: Mmm.

Jilly: That just wouldn't be a good person.

Sue: I'd be ashamed of myself if I got to such a state, I would hope that I'd be able to walk away and not get that far.

RG8 discussing *Disclosure*

For Vicky, sadism is not part of a 'normal' heterosexual relationship:

Vicky: Well in a way bring the sadisticism [sic] side isn't, isn't necessarily comparable with you know normal standard heterosexual sex.

SJ: Yeah that's true.

Vicky: Doesn't mean people don't do it.

SJ: Mmm

Vicky: But it's not the, the norm so to speak.

RG12 commenting on *Body of Evidence*
For Hilary and Wendy, aggression and force cause fear. Jilly and Sue would not find it acceptable, suggest that it is nasty or they would be ashamed to be involved in that kind of relationship and Vicky finds it abnormal.

In talking about their sexual relationships the women stress the importance of equality and shared pleasure to their sexual experience. Components of mutuality and equality were raised over and over again by the women. Fi talks about the importance of 'equal pleasure' because the "discourse [...] around about 'oh women just like cuddling and it really doesn't matter if they have an orgasm or not', I think is really, you know, shit". Lara suggests that you shouldn't only be interested in your own pleasure, that it is important to "fulfil your partner as well", and for Amanda, being a feminist means "complete equality in everything", so that "we don't do what we don't want, it's, you know, there are compromises, but it's, both sides are equally satisfied, so it's, you know, it's just about equality and um, yeah, and maybe there are compromises but it's balanced." Finally, Mary makes it clear that ensuring her pleasure (along with her partner's) was also an important part of her feminist approach to sex. She says, "there was an issue that, you know that, well OK, you know, I'm not always doing what you want doing to you so that you get pleasure and we forget my pleasure in this". LeMoncheck (1997) suggests that speaking of sexual relations in this way is part of a larger attempt by 'cultural' feminism to create a sexual ethic, which covers issues of "equality of power, equality of attention, and equality of affection," (p. 87, her emphasis.) Equality of power means that "each partner has both the capacity and the opportunity to participate in the decisions that determine the nature and purpose of the sex act" (p. 87) and in which roles of dominance and submission are eradicated. Equality of attention and affection refers to sharing and reciprocating intimacy. According to this view:

...sex between equals means that no one person is attending to the sexual needs of her partner without also getting their own needs met. Reciprocity of affection means that each partner values emotional intimacy, rather than one partner desiring affection while the other cares for nothing other than physical performance* (p.89).

While acknowledging the feminism implicit within the women's statements, constructing sex within these narrow frameworks does accept the media's encoding of women's sexuality.
In constructing the sex (and therefore the female protagonist - see chapter five) in the films as bad and abnormal because it contains aspects of power and control, the participants accept the normative discourse, and therefore the hegemonic heterosexuality, within which the film is set. Mutuality and equality, the importance of which they have stressed, can therefore only mean gentle sex and nothing else - it is all 'lovely, lovely' (Linda) or 'slow and gentle and reciprocal' (Carol). Shame and fear occur when boundaries are transgressed, when attempts are made to understand women's sexuality outside of a normative framework.

The participants speak of the excitement of casual sex and non-monogamy, and the importance of sexual pleasure and the transgressive potential of women's sexual power is recognised. Yet, these are continually framed by wider cultural meanings. Hermes (1999) suggests that:

...identity construction needs to be understood as a process of meaning making whereby individual identities are formed as a result of social interaction based on or making use of cultural sources of meaning production. The availability of cultural sources of meaning is structured by societal power relations, as are the rules for using them (p. 71, my emphasis).

It must also be recognised that "these presentations help to constitute the image-environment within which our adult identities - and our own ability to represent - are developed" (Press 1991: 6). Suggestions by some media researchers (e.g. Fiske 1989a; McRobbie 1994) that the post-modern disarray and pastiche of identities which the media offers provide the opportunity for resistance to hegemonic norms, leave behind that we are "subject to the dominant meanings in the larger culture" (Heide 1995: 21). Rather than being concerned about the individual's singular interaction with these film clips, the ways in which they talk about their heterosexuality in relation to the mediated sex highlights the hegemonic influence of the wider discourses structuring heterosexuality and ultimately returns power to the media framework.

In the next section, I consider in more detail the participants' conversations around feminism and sexual activity, both in terms of the film clips and their own lives, moving to a more detailed examination of heterosex. Like their discussions in this section, it becomes apparent that heterosex that is acceptable has clearly...
defined boundaries that stay firmly within the norm, excluding ideas of strength, fantasy or pain. It suggests that although the women clearly act with and recognise the different sexual discourses used within the clips, most often the construction of women’s sexuality in the media is accepted and used to reconfirm their own sexual identity. In addition, it makes clear the struggle women have discussing sexual practice in light of feminist theory.

6.2.2 Discourses of Power - Problems and Pleasures

The participants express confusion about what images of mediated feminist sex would be, and at the same time, reflect this in the discussions of their own relationships. The discursive analysis presented reveals the difficulty women have in discussing sex and feminism. I had assumed that in collecting women’s experiences I would merely be able to catalogue the various ways in which they spoke about their sexual relations. As it became apparent that this would not be possible, I became more and more interested in the ways in which the women were able to speak about their sexual activity. Here, I turn to an examination of the different facets of the sex scenes that were identified as being, in some way feminist. While the women identify position, power and pleasure, these are not what they themselves find important in their own relationships. When speaking about the impact of feminism on their sexual activity they develop discourses of consent and choice. Evidence points to the continual recuperation of their sexual relationships within a normative framework supported and maintained by the media discourses.

6.2.2.1 Feminist Sex - What is it?

In each of the focus groups and after each film clip, the participants were asked to assess the sex they had viewed in terms of feminism and relate it to their own lives. Many of the women found this difficult, frequently questioning how ‘feminist’ sex could be represented. This mirrored some of the women's responses to questions about how they are feminist in their personal lives.

When asked about the film clips, women responded as follows: -

SJ What about you guys, do you think that it fits in with your ideas around feminism?

Cathy Yeah. Generally.
Chapter 6: Discourses of Pleasure and Resistance

SJ  Generally?

Cathy  Yeah

SJ  Are there reasons you would think it isn't?

Cathy  I don't know because maybe I'm not quite sure exactly what the definition of that is anyway.

RG6

Sally  I don't know it's really difficult to define what feminist ideas are about sex because I think you've got a bit of a um spectrum on that.

SJ  Mmm hmm.

Marg  That's right.

RG2

Their difficulty in analysing the sex that was occurring from a feminist perspective became most apparent when they were asked to reconstruct the scenes to make them conform to their feminist perspectives. Many of the women simply refused to comply or struggled with how to change or recreate the scene. In the following extract, I have asked the women how they would recreate the sex scene in Disclosure:

Jilly  I'm fascinated by my lack of imagination.

Sheila  I know, this is really stunning me.

Sheila  It shows how difficult it is to imagine that it.

Jilly  Yeah.

Sheila  I mean people say it's utopian to imagine a different way, but it isn't, we're, you're only asking us to reconstruct a scene from a film for goodness sake.

Jilly  A tiny thing.
Chapter 6: Discourses of Pleasure and Resistance

Sheila Yeah?

SJ Yeah, I think that is probably

Sheila It's just really problematic.

Not only do the participants say that they find it difficult, but that trying to imagine feminist images or representations of heterosex is 'problematic'.

In this sequence, Carol and Joanna are discussing Disclosure (and complaining about Michael Douglas). SJ asks them what they'd like to change and when they do not respond prompts them for a further explanation. When they provide only limited response (and Carol's very negative assessment), she drops the question.

SJ What would you change to it to make it more feminist? Other than changing Michael Douglas.

Joanna Um

SJ What's it lacking?

Joanna Sensuality, it's lacking a relationship.

Carol Well they're not individual people. I just thought it was awful.

In other instances, the participants simply refused to engage with the question: -

SJ Yeah, um, how would you change what happened in that scene to sort of make it more feminist? What would you change about it?

Meredith I think just the scene, oh I don't know, forget it.

Some of the participants also struggled to talk about their sexual activities in feminist terms. They expressed sentiments which seemed to suggest that feminism just naturally infiltrated many of the aspects of their lives, and that its influence over
their sexual activities was not something they thought through but rather something that 'just happened' as a natural part of the evolution of feminist politics. Consider for example, the first two extracts where both Sarah and Mary, and then Fi seem to suggest that the progression was 'inevitable' or 'automatic':

SJ  Do you think it is important for feminists ah, or women who might call themselves feminist to (laughs) to consider these kind of issues within their sex lives, to in a sense politicise their sex lives.

Sarah  I think it just becomes inevitable.

Mary  Yeah.

Sarah  I think, ahh, I tried to get away from it for a long time (laughs) you know because, you know that I just think that inevitably it kind of catches up with you.

Fi  Yes, but I think it would happen anyway, I don't think it's like they'd be sort of having sex in a really kind of traditional way and then thinking oh dear, I must be a bit more feminist about this.

SJ  Yeah.

Fi  I think you just like, if you are a feminist, you're automatically just cued into thinking about things in such a different way and the whole relationship would probably be completely set up on different terms.

Both of these extracts suggest that assessing your heterosexual practise through your feminist politics is something that happens as a natural outcome of feminism. It raises the question of whether the sexual activities become adjusted to the politics or whether the politics become adjusted to the sexual activities.

Amanda suggests the inevitability of feminism for sexual practice but also denies its importance.

You know and then I think its just another aspect of everything else, I don't
think a woman who's, who's in, I don't know that I, that I see it really as separate, um, you know, if I'm in a relationship with a dominant man, I think he's also going to be dominant in bed. If I'm in a, in a, in an equal relationship, that's going to be the same in bed. Um, that's why I think, you know, its, I don't see the value of talking of sexuality so much in relationship to gaining equality in general.

Amanda RG4

Similarly, Mary and Joanna construct it as another household task.

I think the idea of you know whether your sex life is political, or whether it becomes politicised, I think it was inevitable for me that it did, not necessarily because other people were challenging me to um justify my heterosexuality, although that has happened subsequently, um, but because this, it was another of the gender roles and it, it sort of became like who cleans the toilet and what do we do in bed, you know, seemed to me to bear some sort of relationship.

Mary RG11

Joanna I think that my relationship with my husband, at least sexually, put it that way, is is very equal. There are other bits, I end up picking up my daughter more often then he does and end up doing the cooking and the what's it. But, but you know, but, sexually I think it is equal and I think it is important, I couldn't have it any other way.

SJ Did you, did you, did that just sort of happen or is that something that you actually set out and talked about and decided?

Joanna No, it's happened.

SJ It just happened.

Joanna That's why I mean it's nothing I have thought about.

RG5

Both assert that ensuring sexual equality is important to them, but it is not something that they deliberately work at, it just happens. All of these extracts create
discourses in which sexuality and sexual practice is sidelined within feminism and relegated to an unimportant role.

It would be unfair to give the impression that the participants were entirely unable to come up with ways to change the scenes that they had watched or to provide an analysis of their sexual activity in feminist terms. In each of the next two extracts, we find the participants struggling with applying their feminism both to the construction and representation of feminist sex and their own personal lives. In the following extract Jilly, Sue and Sheila come up with some options for *Body of Evidence* that would make the sex 'more feminist' from their perspective.

Jilly I'd make Madonna wear clothes, I'd make her put a top on.

Sue You don't like her boobs then.

Jilly Ah no, no, it's just, it's just, it always, it's one, I don't know it's just a little thing that always really gets to you, it's like no matter what's happening in a film there's always a reason why there's a woman with no top on. It's like um, police, detective things on telly, always have to go to a strip club while there's somebody rehearsing during the day, it's always like.

Sue In the background, in the background.

Jilly Ah well, have to go and investigate in a strip club. You know it's like, consistently, three times a week. So yeah, I would just do that.

SJ OK, so she's got her shirt on, what would you change? Anything else?

[...]

Sue I'd drop the strap thing I think.

Jilly I wouldn't, I wouldn't, if I, I wouldn't be in that position, I wouldn't put myself in that position.

SJ Yeah, you wouldn't have that scene at all.
Although ultimately Jilly resists the question, she does offer a fairly coherent feminist analysis and challenges the continuing representation of women in sex scenes (she wants Madonna to keep her clothes on to counter the constant topless representation of women). In the end she cannot take her analysis any further because she cannot imagine the sorts of images she could create.

Similarly, Hilary in the following extract appears to be suggesting that combining feminism and sexual activity comes naturally, but when other members of the group seem to agree and provide answers that are similar to the less-than-critical responses given earlier, she withdraws her remarks and provides a more carefully thought through answer:

Hilary I would have to say yes, I would answer personally in saying once you have the politics you can't ever separate it from anything else again I think.

Wendy So you don't need to consider it, I mean, if you consider it then it's you know it's because part of you know what I've been, part of your...

Hilary Yeah

Wendy ...you know the way you operate your life, so it's not a considered thing.

[...]

Hilary Yeah, actually, I'd, yes perhaps that's what it sounded like, I've, I think I probably identified as feminist for a quite a long while before I actually began to put every aspect of my life under the microscope and, and sex was probably one of the last things that, that, so, so I think it doesn't happen quite as naturally.

SJ Right.

Hilary ...but I think it's, you grow into your politics permeating the whole of your life.
Hilary’s correction seems to suggest that coming to understand one’s sexual relationships in terms of feminism is actually a long and difficult process. In putting her life under the microscope she has had to think through the impact of feminist issues and politics, and that in leaving her sexual relations until the end, has saved the ‘worst’ for last.

If, as Hollway (1995) suggests, and the evidence provided in this chapter (as well as Chapters 9 and 10), there is no current discourse of feminist heterosexuality that allows for the expression of heterosexual pleasure, it is not surprising that these women are unable to concretely assess and redesign the representations as presented or provide a thorough analysis of their sexual relationships. Hollway writes that:

...the lack of an emancipatory discourse of women’s heterosex means that it is very difficult to communicate the experience of pleasurable, egalitarian heterosex, both at the level of simply talking about it, and also at a theoretical level of conceptualizing women’s heterosexual desire as consistent with feminist politics (p. 87).

She stresses that this does not mean that there is not available a “practice of egalitarian and pleasurable heterosex” (p. 86) but rather that heterosexual feminists do not currently have the ability to articulate. In this next section, we turn to instances when the women, first, identified aspects of ‘feminism’ within the mediated sex with which they were presented, and second, “de-privatized the actual in [...] their] lives [...] to articulate the possible” (p. 87).

6.2.2.2 Discourses of Feminist Sex - Power and Pleasure

Different aspects of the sex scenes were assessed as being ‘open to feminist interpretations’ (Mary). Largely these concerned issues of power, pleasure and position. For instance, in the following extract, Lara and Cathy are talking about Rebecca in Body of Evidence:

SJ
What would, what would you say was feminist about it?

Lara
Um the domineering aspect of the woman again. Um she’s not the passive, stereotypical, subservient woman. She is dominant, she’s planned it, she knows what she wants to do and she’s going to get what she wants.
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Rebecca's activities are read as feminist because she is domineering, 'not the passive, stereotypical, subservient woman', 'she's making the decisions', and 'getting pleasure out of it'. Fi and Charlotte agree that placing the woman in the sexually dominant position (as in Body of Evidence where Rebecca is on top of Frank) shows her as being in control: -

Charlotte I mean, you know she was sort of in a more of a dominant position and it wasn't kind of sex in the missionary position so in the end you know...

Fi She was kind of taking some control.

Some of the women talked about these kinds of aspects in their sexual relationship. In the following extract, Emma is talking about the importance for her of having power in penetrative sex by controlling the penetration through assuming a more dominant position: -

Emma I don't always necessarily see penetrative sex as being the dominant, you can, you can still control the penetrative sex, that doesn't have to be that they dominate it.

SJ No.

Emma You can still take control, like you saw them sitting on top and other aspects like that.
Chapter 6: Discourses of Pleasure and Resistance

[...]

Emma I mean if you take the penis and you put the penis to your vagina and you put it in, you’re taking control. Yeah, I must admit, I don’t...

Gill I’m the one pretty much taking control.

SJ Yeah, yeah.

Emma I’ve not found very many men who fumble around and can’t find the bloody hole anyway. I mean easier, far easier and less likely to get damaged and painful if you take control at that point, you know, and if you don’t want it you say no and if they respect if you even, you know say slowly or steadily or that hurts, and they respect that. iv

RG12

Vicky struggles with understanding her desire for control within her sexual relationships and its connection to a feminism that she sees as being about equality:

... It’s hard in a way to be feminist, when you take it out of context almost, it is hard to be a feminist and being a passive woman in sex or being, even a dominant woman in sex because its, it depends, because my understanding of feminism is striving towards an equality between the sexes, yet there are times when you’re having sex, I mean I class myself as a feminist, but there are times when I’d say I do enjoy being the one in control. And that isn’t getting back at men for men being in control of women, I just think generally its because I’m bossy and outspoken and I enjoy, I enjoy being the one in control, but at the same time I would never seek for a society that wasn’t equal.

Vicky RG12

Likewise, Joanna talks about the sharing of dominant positions in her relationship:

You know, it’s similar in that I take the lead sometimes, you know, my husband other times, I’m on top sometimes, you know...
Joanna (RG5) after watching *Body of Evidence*

Carol, in the same conversation, provides the following comment a little later: -

Yeah, I would say um, without going into all the details, no I mean I think sometimes the woman is more active and sometimes the man, and sometimes the woman decides it'll be tonight and sometimes the man.

Carol (RG5) after watching *Body of Evidence*

With Emma's initial comment we can see the issues of power that she is working with and the way that she tries to establish her equality in the sexual relationships by attempting to control penetrative sex. Vicky also wrestles with being able to maintain some kind of power and control in her sexual relationship, while at the same time striving for equality in other aspects of her life. Joanna and Carol struggle as well to try to explain the mechanics of their sexual relationships without having them fall into assumed roles of domination and submission. Hollway (1995) suggests that it is difficult to conceive of heterosexual relationships outside of that which "signifies as dominance and submission" (p. 93) and is concerned that when feminists speak openly about relationships of reciprocity and mutuality they are dismissed as individualised and simplified. But conversations like these and discourses of power and control were limited - highlighting the difficulty of framing sexual relationships outside of 'taken-for-granted' constructions of heterosexuality.

In fact, discourses of equality, consent, and choice were paramount in the participants' conversations. Equality was implied in many of the statements made by the participants (as was apparent earlier), while others stressed the importance of consent in their lives and suggested that learning how to say 'no' to sexual demands was an important and empowering process: -

SJ  Um, so what about your actual sexual relations makes them OK with your feminist beliefs. What are you actually doing that is OK?

Gill  Consent.

SJ  Consent? Yeah. Other things?

Gill  Not consenting, saying no, and that being all right. That was
quite a big one for me.

Fi

Um, I think by just an emphasis on consent and that doesn't mean that you can't play different roles and be different people at different times, but it's consent.

Charlotte Consent is very important

Learning to say no for Gill was 'a big one', a process she found difficult. For Fi consenting is tied up with equal pleasure. She feels women's right to pleasure should be recognised and they should be consenting and equal partners within that.

Emma stresses the importance for her of choice in relationship:

Emma And there is nothing wrong in being submissive if that's what you're wanting. This issue that you've always got to be dominant, always got to be on top, isn't necessarily the case.

SJ No, it's a stereotype.

Emma That's not what feminism is about either. It's about women having, the way they, the right to choose rather than to be told how to.

Hollway (1995) notes that choice can be "a rare - and brave - term in relation to feminist heterosexuality" (p. 89) particularly in a climate where choice "is often regarded as an illusory discursive product" (p. 89). Emma resists the construction of men and women engaging in sexual relationships as necessarily being about dominance and subordination, reasserting the importance of equality and mutuality.

When pressed to assess the possible feminist aspects within the film clips viewed the participants linked it explicitly to sexual position and the apparent control of the woman, yet when asked about their own sexual activities it is not issues of power and control which are stressed but rather those of equality, mutuality and choice.
The women identified and discussed the different subject positions opened up by the discourses of sexual practice, but ultimately, in their discussions of their own activities they rejected the identities on offer and instead framed their responses within normative categories of equality and mutuality. The possibility offered for resistance was lost and its rejection re-confirmed their own sexual identity through the discourse of the film clips. Like Press (1991), I conclude that the media "is both a source of resistance to the status quo for different groups of women and a reinforcer for the patriarchal and capitalist values that characterize the status quo" (p. 177). Fiske (1989b) suggests that it is at the point that these pleasures become most excessive - particularly those pleasures aligned with the body - which constitute "a threat to the body politic" (p. 75). As a result no matter how productive readers may be of a text "they cannot make any meanings out of a text, nor will they choose to read any text thrust before them. They will choose to engage with only those texts that offer reasonable chances of success for the guerrillas in evading hegemonic capture" (p. 137).

Second, Lewis (1994) suggests that "the televisual message is so extravagantly coded that it is amazing any two people should respond to it in the same way. That people do is a testimony to our tightly controlled cultural horizons" (p. 25-6). In instances where this occurs, he proposes that it is important to "trace the social roots of commonality" (p. 26). Certainly the response by many of the women to the mediated representation of heterosex and their difficulty in analysing and discussing it provides evidence of a similar response. Further, their ongoing struggle to talk about their sexual relations in terms of their feminism compounds the need to understand "the social roots of commonality". One of these common roots is certainly the dominant discourses on heterosexuality which "provide subject positions for women which are relatively passive and which prescribe compliance with and submission to male initiatives or demands irrespective of women's desire" (Gavey 1996: 54, see also Gavey 1992). Hollway (1995) would suggest that it is because there is no current discourse of feminist heterosexuality, and while there is clearly evidence for that other critiques of the discourses employed can be made. First, many of the women stress the importance of mutuality and equality within their relationships. In so doing they "have sought to decentre penetration, to reconceptualize it in ways which do not position us as passive objects, and to change the ways in which we engage in sex with men" (Jackson 1995a: 132). Of course, the easiest critique to offer here is to suggest that women living within
heteropatriarchy can have no idea of what equality or mutuality means (Felmlee 1994), but Jackson (1995a) suggests that:

The current ordering of gender relations certainly constrains the meaning that can be applied to physical acts and impose limits on our resistance, but there is some room for manoeuvre within these constraints (p. 133).

Denying this denies women any agency and “sees us as doomed to submit to men’s desires whether as unwilling victims or misguided dupes” (p. 133). Rather, I would critique this not in terms of the way that it changes the practice of heterosex (because clearly it is different from the stereotyped “male thrusting activity and female writhing passivity” [p. 133]), but because it does little to challenge an institutionalised form of heterosexuality which assumes the complementarity of one man for one woman, or is based on the assumptions of nurturance and care-giving which are structured into heterosexual relationships.

In the same way, I would critique a discourse of consent and choice. Although recognising its obvious importance in disrupting normative roles of dominance and submission, I would suggest that it does little to “help us to develop an alternative language which might enhance our critical understanding of both pleasure and displeasure in heterosex” (Jackson 1995a: 133). Again, the easiest way to critique this is to suggest that there is no notion of choice within oppression, but that serves to disempower women who struggle to understand and “assert their right to pleasure” (Jackson 1995a: 133). Instead my critique of this discourse is to examine its individualistic nature. Consent and choice for an individual within a relationship does little to work across women’s heterosexual experience or to draw links from their sexual practice to the wider practice of heterosexuality. Developing strategies of consent and choice to resist a patriarchal imperative does not recognise the luxury of that consent and choice. Not all women have access to the power implicit in those statements, nor does it challenge an institutionalised practice of heterosexuality that strictly limits and confines the choices that women who do not identify as heterosexual are able to make.

In the next chapter, I turn to a consideration of these ‘micro-politics’ through an examination of the fine details of talk. Through an application of conversation analysis, I consider the ways in which the participants and I struggle over the terms
being used throughout our conversations and highlight the ongoing difficulty of these kinds of conversations for women who identify as feminist and heterosexual.

Notes to Chapter 6

1 In order to ensure anonymity no details for questionnaire respondents are provided with the exception of the media in which they were identified. Research group participants are noted by the name they have been given to hide their identity. Where possible (i.e. in excerpts from the diary or specific instances in the focus group) the item which they are discussing is specified.

2 SJ is the moderator and is shorthand for my own name (Sara-Jane).

3 Crawford et al. (1994) have questioned what ‘naturalness’ means particularly in terms of sexual relations. They suggest that discourses of ‘naturalness’ in terms of sexual activity means that assumptions can be created about women’s willingness to be involved. As such it “privileges the male understanding of sexuality and heterosexual relations, and the female voice is barely heard” (p. 579).

4 Although this is one of the few excerpts where the women talk explicitly about their sexual practice, it makes me extremely uncomfortable. I understand that Emma is explaining the way that she asserts her power, but I am distressed by the fact that she would be consenting to sexual activities that could be damaging or painful. On one hand, I understand what she says and accept her construction of this as powerful, but on another, I would like to challenge her continuing involvement in practices that can be physically damaging.

5 I critique from a discursive perspective to avoid criticising the individual women.
7.0 Let's Talk About Sex: Delicate Situations, Robust Show Concessions, and Feminist Heterosexuality

Turning from the broader discursive approaches used in the last two chapters, this chapter examines the details of talk-in-interaction to consider the way in which the participants, and myself as moderator (SJ), talked about feminism and heterosexuality. I examine two conversational devices - membership categories and the 'show concession' - and their use by the participants to resist the research questions. I briefly introduce the theoretical background for conversation analysis, and then turn to a more detailed examination of the conversational devices in the focus group data. I argue throughout that a close examination of the details of talk reveals the ongoing difficulty of these conversations and the continued resistance by the participants to suggestions that their feminism and their sexuality are linked. In addition, in examining the use of the show concession I contribute to the literature of conversation analysis by highlighting its ongoing robustness when placed within context.

7.1 The Research Context

Chapter One noted that conversations about feminism and heterosexuality have been seen as 'painful', 'divisive', 'hostile', 'condescending', 'impolite', and 'defensive'. It is a controversial topic within feminist theorising. As the data which follows will illustrate, the participants attended to the difficult nature of the topics raised, repeatedly sought to close down discussions and frequently prevented SJ from challenging the depoliticised positions the participants assumed.

In analysing the focus group data, my initial intention was to explore the range and variety of ways in which contemporary heterosexual feminists discuss, theorise and develop the practice of heterosexual feminist sex. Although this was clearly specified in advance as the topic for the focus group discussion, many of the participants resisted discussing the practice of heterosexual sex from a feminist perspective. Despite the best efforts of the heterosexual moderator, these discussions of heterosexual feminism seemed in many ways to mirror the earlier delicate and defensive discussions prompted by lesbian theorists. In analysing my data and trying to understand the resistance and defensiveness of the participants I found it particularly helpful to draw on Sacks' (1992) 'membership categorisation device' and, Antaki and Wetherell's (1999) concept of the 'show concession'. Given recent debates about the possibility or otherwise of feminism and critical
conversation analysis (Billig 1999; Schegloff 1998, 1997; Wetherell 1998) my use of this approach offers an important contribution to the debate.

The chapter has three aims: first, to consider the resistance by participants to the categories of feminism and heterosexuality as employed by the moderator; second, to explore the interaction between heterosexual feminists by an examination of variants to the 'show concession' that were employed by the participants in managing conversation on controversial topics; finally, I consider the use of conversation analysis for a feminist cultural politics.

7.2 Discursive Psychology, Membership Categorisation and the 'Show Concession'

In this chapter, the analysis of heterosexual feminist talk is located within a broadly discursive framework and draws upon a conversation analytic perspective (Antaki 1994; Edwards 1997; Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998; Potter 1996a; Schegloff 1997; ten Hare 1999) which emphasises the action-orientation of talk. It explores people's ability to accomplish localised understanding through talk. Arising from the field of ethnomethodology, and based on the work of Harvey Sacks (1992), it is interested in the elaborate and complex way in which speakers construct and understand conversation. From a discursive perspective talk is always occasioned and produced in a context, in interaction with others.

Despite some feminist accusations that conversation analysis is fundamentally incompatible with politically engaged analysis (e.g. Billig 1999; Schegloff 1998, 1997; Wetherell 1998), there has been for some time considerable feminist interest in using discursive and conversation analytic approaches (Hepburn 2000; Speer 1999; Kitzinger, in press). Recent work has explored key feminist issues such as gender and talk (Stokoe 1999), gender and employment (Wetherell et al 1987), 'emotion work' in heterosexual relationships (Frith & Kitzinger 1998), heterosexist talk (Speer & Potter, in press), sexual refusal and date rape (Kitzinger & Frith 1999), women's resistance to psychobabble (Kitzinger, 2000), masculine identity (Wetherell & Edley 1999; Speer, 2000, in press) and talk about bullying by lesbian and gay parents (Clarke, Kitzinger & Potter, in preparation). Here I apply this same approach to understanding heterosexual feminists' resistance to discussing politics in relation to their sexual activities, illustrating the analysis with a look at membership categorisation, before focusing specifically on their use of the 'show
concession'. The data was transcribed orthographically and once extracts had been selected, they were transcribed in more detail.

7.2.1 Identity in Conversation Analysis

Identities within conversation analysis are not an explanatory 'resource' that is applied by the analyst, but a topic or category that the speakers may employ (Antaki & Widdicombe 1998). Treating the status of identities as a participant's concern, the analyst does not have to try and "find objective and essential criteria which define particular categories" (Widdicombe 1998a, p. 195), these are worked up by the participants.

One way of looking at identity in conversation analysis is through Harvey Sacks' work on membership categorisation. He found that in conversation, people organise their talk around categories of which particular identities can be included or excluded as a member (Sacks 1992). For instance, the word sister, meaning relation is part of the broader category family, whereas the word sister in terms of feminism, would be excluded from this broader category. Identity and membership categories can be closely linked particularly in conversations.

What follows is an extract from one of the focus group conversations. At first glance it appears that Tina is not only refusing a feminist identity but refusing any political identity at all. If we re-examine the extract considering membership categorisation, what emerges is not a dupe of patriarchy, but instead a woman actively constructing a feminist identity, in opposition to the one being proposed by the interviewer (SJ). Conversation analysis suggests that identities are raised, managed and specified in particular ways in talk; and that their management is a concern of the participants (in this case SJ and Tina) and not just the analyst. I propose that a detailed examination of data such as this provide the means to understand and challenge some of the 'taken-for-granted' experiences, that in other instances Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1997) argue might be ignored or reinterpreted.

The extract can be broken down into two different areas. Lines 1 to 18 show Tina refusing the feminist identity that SJ has suggested, while lines 19 to 52 show her reconstruction of this identity as extreme and illogical and contrasted by the more individual perspective she offers.
Extract 1 - Tina (SJF; RG4 29.10.98)

1. SJ  But you would you would you
2. consider those those feminist
3. because (. . .) you are feminist engaging in doing ↑that or because
4. you would see it
5. as a political way of doing it?
6. Tina (0.2) I would see it (. . .) just because it happens so.
7. SJ  Right=
8. Tina =I wouldn't conceptualise it
9. SJ  Right.
10. Tina "Would you?"
11. Amanda (.) "No"
12. Tina Um (. . .) because like <you know>
13. like ah . hhh i-it seems to me that
14. you-you're asking the questions
15. out of the presumption that . hhh
16. you identify as a feminist (0.2)
17. you act (0.2) uh out of this premise,
18. it becomes the premise for you=
19. SJ  =Yup
20. Tina It does not become "a premise for m:e:::
21. SJ  Right, [no]=
22. Tina [i-it]
23. SJ =that that's what I'm interested in=
24. Tina Well [this is]
25. SJ  [It's not] that I'm assuming that it (. . .)
26. that you're acting from the premise initially (. . .) I'm
27. interested to know whether
28. you are acting from that premise=
29. Tina =No I am not (. . .)
30. I'm not and (0.2)
31. there are moments:: when
32. if I have hesitation about something (0.6)
33. like I may bring
34. feminist (. . .) considerations into it (0.2)
35. >"like you know into my consideration"<
36. SJ  Umm hmm=
37. Tina =but if I would have (. . .)
38. a-a relationship with somebody (. . .)
39. I usu- >if I wanted to have sex with somebody
40. I would never stop beforehand< (. . .)
41. to think if this is=
42. SJ  =Right
43. Tina =politically correct
44. fr-from a feminist point of view=
45. SJ  =Right=
46. Tina =I don't think (. . .) many people do this=
47. SJ  =Right
48. Tina = unless they are some fanatical feminist (.6)
49. Like Naomi Wolf
50. pro(h)b(h)ably thinks twice
51. I don't=
52. SJ  ="yeah (. . .) yeah."
7.2.1.1 The Refusal

In his work on ethnic identity, Day (1998) has found that individuals in conversation frequently refuse or resist being placed into identity categories. He suggests different conversational ways that people can refuse categories, and in this initial extract, Tina uses three of these - the refusal of category membership, a dismissal of the relevance of the category and a reconceptualisation of the category.

In lines 1 to 5, SJ offers two categories of feminist identity - one that is pleasure centred, and one that is politically centred. Tina responds by refusing the more political category (Widdicombe & Woofitt 1995; Day 1998; Widdicombe 1998) suggesting in lines 6 and 8 that for her being non-monogamous 'just...happens' and is not conceptualised as political. Her assertion that it just happens makes her activities seem ordinary and works to undermine the political category offered by SJ. She turns to Amanda to receive corroboration and consensus in her dismissal of its relevance in line 10, although the quiet tone in which it is asked suggests that she is aware of possible disagreement.

The pause and Amanda's quiet 'no' (line 11) is heard as a weak agreement by Tina, and she responds with a classic disagreement structure. In conversation, people do not simply disagree with each other, they attend to the difficulty that this can cause in conversation and manage it by things like pauses, hedges and palliative remarks (Pomerantz 1984/1996). Her disagreement is signalled by the pause in line 12, Tina's hedge with 'um' and then her provision of the general palliative 'like you know'. The footing of Tina's next remark 'it seems to me' sets up her ultimate refusal of SJ's category of political feminism (in lines 18 to 20) and begins the contrastive work necessary to rebuild that category, the one SJ has been using, as extreme.

7.2.1.2 Redefining Category Membership

Like Day (1998), Widdicombe's and Woofitt's (1995) research on youth subcultures found that people resist being categorised, and for their participants it was because it implied a loss of individuality or the perceived imposition of a determined identity. Widdicombe (1998) notes that resisting a category can make conversation difficult, and that, as in this instance, "the talk is designed to emphasize the difference between the two participants" (p. 65).
Tina’s response (line 29) ‘No I am not, I’m not’ reiterates her refusal of category membership. Her use of ambiguous language - ‘moments’ (line 31), ‘something’ (line 32), ‘considerations’ (line 34) - illustrates that while feminism is important to her, she is an individual who can choose that category (or resist it) as she requires - (lines 33 to 34) ‘like I may bring feminist considerations into it’. In asserting her individuality she begins the process of distancing herself from the category of feminism proposed by SJ. In line 32 she begins to say ‘when’, but corrects herself to ‘if’ and again in line 40 she begins to say ‘usually’ and changes this to ‘if’. In conversation analysis these changes are known as repairs. They alter the situations from appearing to be regularly occurring occasions where feminism is involved, to a range of possible things that just might happen. It blurs the distinction between what is actually occurring and what hypothetically could occur (Potter 1996).

Tina can clearly be heard to reject SJ’s suggested feminist category and to begin to build one based on her own individuality in which feminism becomes a personal choice. To finally reject SJ’s category, she begins to construct it as abnormal or illogical. Her use of the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz 1986) in line 40 - ‘I would never stop beforehand’ is an effective means to begin to re-define SJ’s category of feminism as peculiar because she is reasonable and ordinary. In addition, by moving the context of the conversation from the wider political field to the personal space of relationships in line 38 she changes the perspective of the original question.

Tina continues to contrast and reconstruct the category feminist through her use of ‘politically correct’ (line 43). Language and perspectives that are considered politically correct have come to be seen to be slightly irrational, too correct and too particular and Tina links this to a political category of feminism (Stark 1997).

Through an effective use of footing which acts to shift responsibility, she says ‘I don’t think many people do this’ (line 46), and appeals to the common senseness and rationality of her individual perspective, against the other, by now the realm of ‘Naomi Wolf’ (line 49). Continuing to distance herself from SJ, she contrasts her argument as more rational - ‘I don’t think many people do this’ (line 46) unlike those ‘fanatical feminists’ (line 48).
A detailed analysis of this extract highlights the contrasting categories of feminist and heterosexual that SJ and Tina are using. One of the important features of the analysis is that it allows Tina to speak for herself. In considering in detail their conversation, we are able to understand the intricate work that Tina undertakes to resist and refuse the categories being offered by SJ. In the next section, I consider the resistance to conversations around feminism and heterosexuality through a detailed examination of the use of show concessions throughout the data.

7.3 Conversation Analysis and the Show Concession

Concessions in conversation have usually been understood as a participant's acknowledging as true or correct an argument with which s/he has previously been in disagreement. According to Antaki and Wetherell (1999), show concessions, are "hearably in the speaker's own interest" (p. 7). They are defined by a three-part 'proposition-concession-reprise' structure which consists of "(i) saying something vulnerable to challenge; (ii) conceding something to that challenge, then (iii) qualifying that concession and reasserting what one first said" (p. 8-9). I will look at an extract from the data in order to illustrate the definition.

**The Proposition**


5 SJ but .hh you know (. ) what-what makes your sex life (. ) compatible with your feminism?
6 Meredith I think what y-I think you do it and you don't actually think about (. )
7 >a bit< like oh I am a feminist so
8 10 I will have to do this

In the first part of this structure, the speaker says something that could reasonably be cast as being a challengeable proposition, or as having disputable implications. When asked by SJ what makes her sex life compatible with her feminism, Meredith begins by proposing that being feminist is not something she thinks about in regards to her sex life, being feminist is just something that happens. In terms of feminist theorising, this is precisely what has been challenged - the unthinkable nature of heterosexuality has meant that women who identify as feminist and heterosexual never need to acknowledge their part in heteropatriarchy or analyse the activities in which they engage. SJ could easily question Meredith on this basis. While virtually anything is potentially challengeable (and therefore could become a proposition in a show concession), only some statements are oriented to by the speakers themselves as challengeable. The use of a show concession is
evidence that speakers themselves are treating their prior statements as potentially open to challenge.

The Concession

Extract 2b: Meredith (SJF:RG6 9.12.98)
17 Meredith =like that's not me being
18 well maybe it is
19 som- like somebody would maybe analyse that as
20 oh well that's her feminist perspective on life

Concessionary markers such as 'okay', 'allright', 'well', 'of course', 'I mean', 'you know', 'fair enough', or a modal verb conceding in the sense of figuratively granting permission ('you can...') or citing possibility ('you can have...') retrospectively cast what has gone before as being in some way 'disputable' while introducing what is to come immediately next as being material offered as counter-evidence to (what it has just cast as) the proposition. Meredith recognises that her proposition is disputable, particularly within the context of the discussion (feminist heterosexuals considering the interaction of their feminism and heterosexuality) and marks her concession with 'well maybe it is' offering evidence that others might find her feminist.

The Reprise

Extract 2c: Meredith (SJF:RG6 9.12.98)
21 Meredith but that's just me being me and if
22 °I happen to be a feminist then°
23 that's the way it is you know what I mean?

Meredith continues 'but that's just me being me' and others may see that as being feminist. Some recognisable version of the original proposition is produced, preceded by a contrastive conjunction like 'but', nevertheless', 'whereas', which signals that the concessionary material is over, and heralds that what is to come is in opposition to what has gone before. Meredith has begun by proposing that being feminist about her sexual activities is just something that she does, it is part of herself. Her reprise in this extract returns to that idea suggesting that it is all just part of who she is, rather than something that takes consideration.

The 'show concession', then concedes very little: rather it is a robust structure routinely used to defend the speaker's own position and to dismiss rival claims. In offering a proposition and making a show of conceding, speakers
inoculate themselves against the challengeable nature of their original statement, allowing them to robustly reassert this same proposition. As we will see, it is concessions which, although containing variations on the idealised version, were often produced by heterosexual feminists in the focus group discussions in order to 'resist' the suggestion (repeatedly made by SJ) that they should work together to develop a feminist political analysis of heterosex.

Antaki and Wetherell claim that show concessions are 'robust' and that their use has the effect of "proving the speaker against complaint" (p. 25). Whether or not this is true is an empirical question that can be answered by looking at co-conversationalists' responses to show concessions. Antaki and Wetherell's quoted data extracts are cut immediately after delivery of the reprise (because their primary interest was in establishing the existence of the structure) and do not explore its set up and reception. In addition, the data set presented here illustrates their use in conversation around controversial topics, in which the 'normative' structure of the device may be muted or varied, but it is still being managed interactionally, and its robust effect continues to have the same impact.

In considering the use of the show concession to resist SJ's requests to talk about the possibilities of feminism and heterosexuality, I have identified two resources used by the participants. First, participants take advantage of the robust nature of the show concession to shut down further talk and parody the categories used by the moderator. Second, the participants attend to the controversial nature of the talk by employing muted variations of the show concessions. In both cases, we find participants' management of and attendance to, topics which have been controversial for feminism. As we will see, muting the structure leaves them open to challenge and vulnerable to misinterpretation.

Initially, I sought to find instances in which SJ and the participants were talking about feminism and heterosexuality, in order to catalogue the various ways that women reported combining these identities. As I became more and more aware of resistance to these topics, I began to look for areas where the co-conversants were managing and orienting to the controversy in feminism. I have chosen six examples that provide a sample of the range of uses of the show concession across the data. In addition, one unsuccessful case has also been included.
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7.3.1 Show Concessions, Robustness and Parody

I briefly return to the extract from Meredith above (2a-c). This is part of a longer extract, which for ease of understanding is reproduced below.

Extract 3: Meredith (SJF:RG6 9.12.98)

1. SJ <how do you think you go about in your actual sex lives being feminist>?
2. Kind of a we(h)ir(h)d qu(h)estion
3. >i'm not sure if i phrased that properly<
4. but .hh you know (. ) what - what makes your sex life (. ) compatible with your feminism?
5. Meredith I think what y-I think you do it and you don't actually think about (. )
6. >a bit< like oh I am a feminist so
7. I will have to do this
8. like you know [i-if]=
9. Lara ['yeah]
10. Meredith =my boyfriend wants to have sex and i don't
11. i say (. ) go away
12. [>like you know what i mean]<=
13. Cathy [ha ha ha ha ha ]
14. Meredith =like that's not me being
15. well maybe it is
16. som- like somebody would maybe analyse that as
17. oh well that's her feminist perspective on life
18. but that's just me being me and if
19. °i happen to be a feminist then°
20. that's the way it is you know what i mean?
21. so [so]
22. SJ [Yeah] yeah=
23. Meredith °so in that way ° so i suppose
24. °yeah you could say that (. )
25. feminist it does have (. )
26. that sort of um you know that sort of sex but °
27. hh to me it's not just it's not me
28. saying right I'm going to be a feminist
29. so i'll have to do this
30. and i'll have to do that=*
31. Cathy [mm]
32. Lara [mm]
33. Meredith =and i'll have to do the other=*
34. SJ [Mmm ]
35. Meredith [it's] just me being (. )
36. that's what I do that's what i'm like
37. so therefore i'm a feminist=*
38. SJ =right
39. Meredith =it's the other way around maybe (. )
40. that's the way i look at it anyway
41. SJ =right right °yeah i understand what you mean°

Once placed in context, this show concession displays some interesting variations from the standard form, and highlights the difficulty for heterosexual
feminists in discussing heterosexuality and feminism. SJ begins by asking a fairly direct question, 'how do you think you go about in your actual sex lives being feminist?' (line 1 to 2) and then when there is no response, begins to laugh nervously and hedge. She is attending to the lack of uptake on this occasion by these feminists, and both displays and manages the troublesome nature of the question. She reformulates and softens her question at the end. No longer is the question one of how Meredith (or the group) is actually feminist in their sexual practice, but rather how their sex life is compatible with their feminism (line 5 to 6). SJ moves away from eliding sex and politics so directly and phrases the question as one of compatibility. SJ's initial difficulty in asking the question, and her response to the uptake, frame it as controversial for women who identify as feminist and heterosexual. She frees Meredith from managing these topics and allows her to produce a show concession of such rhetorical strength that she can move to a parody of the question SJ has asked.

As noted above, Meredith proposes that being feminist in her sex life is not something she thinks about. Interestingly, she does not finish her turn in line 8, rather she self-interrupts, preventing the opening of a transition point, and providing evidence that she is orienting to the challengeable nature of her statement. To support her initial proposition, she gives an example of saying no to her boyfriend when he wants to have sex (lines 13 to 15), conceding that others may see this as feminist, but she's just being herself (line 21). Her reprise is not an exact reformulation of the proposition, but a corollary of it which manages to do the same work as a standard show concession. The structure is robust enough to deflect any challenge SJ would have made (and she agrees with a quiet 'yeah, yeah' in line 25). In resisting SJ's attempts to understand feminist heterosexuality, Meredith distances her personal life from a political analysis, placing the onus of understanding her actions as feminist on 'somebody' who might analyse it as being feminist. So strong in fact is the structure, that Meredith feels free to present a parody of the kind of dogmatic feminist that would be concerned with combining their sexuality and feminism. Using a three part list, she provides a caricature - someone who will 'have to do this and have to do that and have to do the other' (lines 32 to 38) before concluding that if that's what she's doing then she's a feminist, but that she's not doing it because she's a feminist (lines 42 to 43). Feminism becomes about moralising and obeying rules, rather than about agency and choice. In this extract, the show concession is so robust that Meredith can resist SJ's request for political
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analysis by providing a caricature of a feminist for whom this would be a concern, with little disguise or hedging.

If we return to Extract 1, with Tina, we find a similar process occurring. This example is more explicitly conflictual and it is SJ, not the research participant, Tina, who is on the defensive. At the beginning of the extract (lines 1 to 5), SJ asks Tina whether non-monogamy is simply a personal choice, or whether it can be a feminist choice (as argued by some heterosexual feminists, e.g. Robinson 1997). Tina responds by challenging the question itself - in particular, the notion that a feminist would make decisions about her sex life based on her feminist principles (lines 12-18). When SJ affirms that this is indeed how she herself behaves (line 19), Tina produces two proposition-concession-reprise structures, in quick succession.

Tina begins her proposition in line 20 'It does not become a premise for me'. SJ orients to the possible conflict being raised in the conversation and rather than challenging this proposition, attempts, as with Meredith, to defuse the possible disruption to the conversation (lines 25 to 28). It appears though, that once started, show concession structures are difficult to stop. Tina reiterates her proposition, in lines 29 and 30, restating that she is not acting from a feminist premise in making decisions about her sex life. She concedes (lines 31 to 35) that if she had hesitations, she might bring feminist considerations into her thinking, and then reprises (lines 40 to 44) that if she wanted sex she 'would never stop beforehand to think if this is politically correct from a feminist point of view'. A couple of variations from a standard show concession arise in this initial structure. First, her strongly stated proposition (No I am not I am not - line 20 to 30) is latched to and follows on from SJ’s confusing attempts to defuse the controversy her initial assertion of a feminist political analysis of sex has made. Second, there is no clearly stated concessionary marker like ‘and, OK’ or ‘but’ or ‘OK, yeah’, rather it is marked by ‘and’, followed by a brief (0.2) pause (line 30). She reiterates that she would never stop beforehand to consider feminism. Her reprise is a much stronger reformulation of her proposition and SJ does not challenge its robustness. Once again, SJ’s attempts to defuse the politics inherent in her question (and response) and her inability to challenge the strength of the show concession structure, opens the way for Tina’s next show concession containing a ‘Trojan horse’ or parody of feminist heterosexuality.
Tina's second show concession justifies and defends the argument of the proposition and reprise in her first show concession. Her proposition is 'I don't think many people do this' (e.g. stop before sex to consider its political implications) (line 46) and, as her reprise, she (again) makes explicit that she is one of these people who does not ('I don't', line 51). The concession is that 'fanatical feminists' (line 48) probably think twice (the laughter tokens indicating the ludicrousness of so doing), and although Tina gives Naomi Wolf (line 49) as an example of a fanatical feminist who thinks twice about the politics of sex, SJ has already confirmed that she is someone whose sexual decisions are made from a feminist premise. Like Meredith's earlier parody of feminists as people 'who have to do this and have to do that', Tina's show concession is a 'Trojan horse' which smuggles in a caricature description of the opposition (feminists who make decisions about sex based on feminist premises) as 'fanatics', thereby dismissing them as merely absurd (Antaki & Wetherell 1999:19). The 'robustness' of these two show concessions are again confirmed: SJ does not attempt to argue with Tina.

In this second extract, Tina illustrates how important show concessions are in conversation around controversial topics. Tina's initial concession is not challenged by SJ, in fact it is accepted. SJ could have perhaps responded by saying 'What do you mean it's not a premise for you?' or 'How can you call yourself a feminist if you're not going to act like one?' Rather, she accepts Tina's statement and seems to acknowledge that perhaps her suggestion could have been heard as critical and judgmental, allowing Tina to continue with her show concession not once, but twice! As well, the structure's robustness, like Meredith's earlier example, allows Tina to employ a 'Trojan horse' or caricature of feminists as 'fanatical', which SJ accepts with a quiet 'yeah, yeah'.

In the next extract, we find Vicky and SJ attending to the delicate nature of the subject under discussion. Both are trying to manage its disruptive possibilities, but at the same time Vicky's use of the show concession, again allows her to smuggle in an implicit critique of a dogmatic feminist attention to sex and politics.

Extract 4: Vicky (SJF:PSB 20.5.98)

33 SJ 
I-is there is there s::ome other (.)
aspect within::n the (.)
relationship (0.4)
in the w::ay you construct >your relationship<
I guess (0.2)

36 Vicky
Yeah (0.2) I think that it's (.) >I dunno<

224
for me it's more (0.4)
it's more about feeling safe with the person (0.2)
and enjoying (.) being with them
that intimately (1.0)
*than necessarily about power° .
SJ [mm]
Vicky [or] anything political.
SJ Mmm (0.4) °mmm°
Vicky It see- it seems as if it's a really strong (0.4) thing in feminist (. ) feminism to bring (.6)
identity into sex (0.6) and like (. )
how the sex you have defines who you are (. )
I mean it's the same in a way with the lesbianism<
because (. )
>because you sleep with a woman that means you're lesbian and then< .hhh
the whole politics thing comes on top (0.2)
and maybe that's why it's hard to join (0.2)
the hetero(. )sex (.4)
with feminism (. ) because (. )
you're making sex political when: (.)
maybe it shouldn't be at all°

SJ and Vicky have been discussing the sex scene from Basic Instinct and SJ has asked how it could be made more feminist. Vicky's response has been to question what is meant by feminist sex and to suggest that perhaps it is to do with equality. SJ's rather woolly attempts to explain what she might mean provides the space for Vicky's show concession. Here again, we see SJ attending to the possibly delicate nature of her question by her tentative framing and hesitation - 'I guess' (lines 33 to 37). Vicky's proposition is that for her a relationship is 'more about feeling safe with the person and enjoying being with them that intimately than necessarily about power or anything political' (lines 39 to 45). Again, this could be hearably problematic within the context of the conversation in which she was invited to discuss sex from a feminist political perspective, and its problematic nature is evident from the care with which she prefaces it: 'I think' (line 38) and 'for me' (line 39) signals the view as (merely) her personal opinion and also works to show she recognises that there are a range of perspectives on this topic. 'I dunno' (line 38) is commonly used to inoculate speakers against too much commitment to the views expressed (Potter 1997). The reprise, in lines 58 to 60, essentially restates her main point: that 'you're making sex political when maybe it shouldn't be at all'. In both proposition and reprise, orienting to the delicacy of the topics under discussion, Vicky avoids sounding dogmatic with the inclusion of softeners: relationships are not 'necessarily' political (line 43) and 'maybe' (line 56) shouldn't be political. She works to make her initial proposition a personal statement, but is able in her reprise to use
a more generalised and confrontational restatement, without sounding like a
dogmatic feminist who might insist sex is always necessarily and inescapably
political.

SJ's rather long pause on line 46, and use of continuers like 'mm' (Jefferson
1984a) pushes Vicky into producing a concession and recognising that her
statement is challengeable. Her concession acknowledges that in feminism sex is
political ('it's a really strong thing in feminism to bring identity into sex and like how
the sex you have defines who you are', lines 47 to 50). Once again she takes a
great deal of care to avoid suggesting that feminists are both agents and victims of
a dogmatic ideology by depersonalising her statement ('in feminism', rather than
'feminist'). She doesn't actually explain what is wrong with this politicisation of sex,
but seems to suggest that politics and sex (or identity and practice) should not be
linked so explicitly, using lesbianism as an illustration (line 53-54). Rather than
bluntly suggesting that sex and politics should be kept separate, she is opposing the
linking of the two categories by using an 'identity politics' argument - just because
you sleep with a woman doesn't mean you are lesbian.

While dealing with the delicacy of the topics being raised and orienting to
their conflictual history, Vicky's management of several different aspects of feminism
and heterosexual politics in her show concession relies on implicit understandings.
For instance, she says 'and maybe that's why it's hard to join the heterosex with
feminism' (line 56). The referent of 'that' is unclear - it seems to be intended to be
heard as referring to whatever is wrong with defining yourself in relation to your
sexual politics, although just what it is that is wrong has never really been spelled
out, and is treated as self-evident. Watson (1983) in examining police interviews
with murder suspects found that the varying degrees of implicitness or explicitness
used by the offender, made different motives available for the offence. The effect,
then, of this show concession is to make the reprise (that maybe sex should not be
political) sound more considered, while at the same time producing 'no greater
elaboration or sophistication [...] than that which is perceivedly adequate' (Watson
1983: 35). She has displayed her awareness of the views and experiences of other
(heterosexual) feminists and lesbians for whom politicising sex is 'a really strong
thing' by making a show of conceding, and holds to her initial opinion (that sex
shouldn't be political) despite that awareness, thereby painting herself as
reasonable and others as slightly dogmatic.
The extracts analysed in this section, although variants on the ideal, can still be considered show concessions, because in each instance the speaker is attending to the disputable nature of their initial proposition and making a show of conceding. Two interesting aspects of the show concession are highlighted. First, SJ's attendance to the controversial nature of topics under discussion bolsters the robustness of the concessionary structure, while also allowing the other speakers to 'smuggle' in a parodic or caricatured representation of the very issues SJ is trying to manage. Second, the strength of the structure works to defend or resist against the attempts by the moderator to talk about feminism and heterosexuality. Meredith, Tina and Vicky all use the process of conceding to argue for a separation of sex from a political analysis. So robust is its strength that SJ is left little opportunity to challenge the rhetorical move the participants have made. In the next section I examine instances in which the show concession is muted or muffled by the speaker's attendance to the controversial nature of the conversation.

7.3.2 Muted Show Concessions and Contested Meanings

Not all of the examples found in the data fit neatly into the structures outlined by Antaki and Wetherell, but they nonetheless manage to conduct similar interactional business. In the following extract SJ begins by asking Amanda whether it is important for a feminist to consider her sexual activities in terms of her feminism.

Extract 5: Amanda (SJF; RG4 29.10.98)

```
1  SJ                "Is that an important thing for a feminist to do?"
   (3.0)
3  Amanda           A:;h th-the only (1.0)        ←P aspect of sex that I think i-is important for (0.8) um
   >for feminists to address<
5  Amanda           is (. ) when it when it turns into ↑power (0.8)
6  Amanda           an extension of ↑power like ↓rape (. )  ←C
7  SJ                Umm hmm.
9  Amanda           Um (. ) but other than that
10 Amanda           I think i-it's (0.8)
11 Amanda           I don't see it as-as important  ←R
```

Amanda's long silence in line 2 heralds what conversation analysts call a 'dispreferred' - that is, it signals an upcoming disagreement and will be the beginning of her show concession, but the subject causes interactional difficulty. Amanda could respond by saying, 'no, I don't see it as important' but she then can be accused of not being a very good feminist, instead she needs to soften and cloak
her disagreement with SJ's question. One way in which she does this is to affiliate with SJ's question in line 1 by using similar language (line 1 and lines 3 to 5). When she does respond, she produces a dispreferred structure. She begins with an hedge ('ah the only') and a pause. The pragmatic effect of her pauses and hedging is that by line 3 co-conversants would understand her answer as a negative response, but Amanda does not provide such a blunt proposition, instead hedging it with extreme case formulations - 'the only aspect of sex' (lines 3 and 4) - suggesting that feminists shouldn't be concerned with sex. Her concession is that it is important for feminists to address power abuses, like rape (lines 4-7) and then she reprises with 'I don't see it as important' (line 11). In conversation around a less delicate subject, Amanda may have been able to offer a clearer show concession, perhaps by proposing that she does not think feminists should be concerned with sex, well, perhaps in cases of rape or violence, but other than that it is not important. Regardless that Amanda has had to tailor the structure to manage the discussion of sensitive subjects in feminism, its robustness remains the same. SJ does not contest Amanda's proposition. She begins her next turn by saying 'I wanted to ask you two further questions...' neither responding to Amanda's claim or challenging her.

Variations are apparent here in the show concession which highlight the way that Amanda is attending to the possibly disruptive nature of this conversation. First, her proposition is not clearly stated and its negative framing appears implicit. Only in the reprise does she state more strongly the explicit meaning of her proposition - 'I don't see it as important'. Like in the more traditional show concessions, this variant seems to develop strength through conceding so that Amanda is able to offer a stronger reprise of her original implicit statement. Second, in someway, lines 3 to 17 almost sound much more like a concession as a whole. It becomes then a diluted variant of the show concession with the proposition and concession being merged into one and heard as 'concessive'.

In the next extract, we return to Vicky, who produces four show concessions in a two minute segment! Like Meredith, Vicky is attending to the controversial topics that are being raised and uses the show concession to 'do delicacy'. This conversation falls just before extract 4 and in it we find Vicky responding to SJ's question about how to make the sex scene from Basic Instinct more feminist - this is a question she has asked repeatedly after showing each of the film clips. On this occasion, Vicky does not even attempt to answer the question. Instead, after a
short pause, her response is to side-step the question, by querying the assumptions on which it is based: she raises the issue of whether there is such a thing as feminist sex.

Extract 6: Vicky (SJFSB 20.5.98)

1. SJ Um (0.2) how do you think the scene could have been made more feminist (0.2)
2. *What would have made it more feminist?*
3. (2.0)
4. Vicky It d- it really does (.)
5. everytime y-you've asked the question (.)
6. does the raise (.) raise the issue of: (.)
7. what is it (.)
8. what is feminist ↓sex. (1.0)
9. Is there such a thing as feminist sex? (1.4) ← P
10. Because >I mean<
11. we talked about how the equality idea (0.4) ← C
12. *you know* makes it more feminist makes it more balanced=
13. SJ =*um hmm<
14. (0.2)
15. Vicky >But then also saying at the same time these oth- these occasions occur where you do want to be in control (.)
16. so one wonders whether ← R
17. the two actually equate at all<

When Vicky raises the question ‘is there such a thing as feminist sex?’, she is doing something hearably problematic and orienting to its disputable character in framing it as a question. She was recruited for, and has agreed to take part in, SJ's research as a heterosexual feminist. She and SJ have now been discussing heterosexual sex from a feminist perspective for more than an hour, in relation to three different film clips, and SJ's question 'what would have made [the sex scene] more feminist' (which she has already asked twice before in relation to two earlier sex scenes) takes for granted the idea that sex can be evaluated in feminist terms, and that Vicky, by virtue of having identified herself to the researcher as a 'heterosexual feminist' might reasonably be expected to be able to articulate feminist opinions about sex. Vicky orient s to this assumption with her reference to 'everytime y-you've asked the question' and then asks her own question which raises a potential challenge to the assumptions upon which SJ's research and focus group questions are based: that there is such a thing as feminist sex, and that self-identified 'heterosexual feminists' would be able to assess heterosexual sex scenes in relation to that ideal. It is possible for participants explicitly to challenge these assumptions, but as we have seen, conversation about feminism and
heterosexuality is a delicate and conflictual topic and to avoid an adversarial context, Vicky phrases her challenge as a question.

The danger, nonetheless, is that SJ is liable to retort, 'well, what have we been talking about for the last hour then?' and it is this that Vicky moves to deflect. In her muted concession, she both makes a show of conceding, while at the same time, elaborating and clarifying her original proposition. She begins with 'I mean' (line 11), which is a common concessionary marker according to Antaki and Wetherell (1999), and concedes that 'we talked about the equality idea' (line 12) and than elaborates what she means, that a concern of feminism is to make sex more balanced or equal. This casts her earlier question ('is there such a thing as feminist sex?') as being in some way disputable, in need of elaboration and indicates that she herself is aware of this and about to attend to its disputable quality. She then points out (the 'but' is the reprise marker, signalling an upcoming contrast) that participants were 'saying at the same time...these occasions occur where you do want to be in control' (lines 18-19). Vicky's gist formulation of the preceding discussion highlights a contradiction between 'equality' and the need for control as a desirable feminist goal and the fact that 'these occasions occur' (nicely phased as independent of anyone's volition, leaving no one responsible for their occurrence) 'where you do want to be in control'. In constructing her show concession Vicky neatly uses the prior expression of a range of different views about feminist sex to bolster her claim that there may not be any (consensual) concept of feminist sex at all. Finally, she offers a reprise of her original 'question' - phrased here as a 'wonder', that in fact 'feminist sex' might not be a coherent concept, that 'feminism' and 'sex' might not 'actually equate at all' (line 20-21). Her use of 'one' and 'wonder' again attends to the delicate nature of the conversation, both explicitly work to avoid being heard as a definitive reprise of her proposition by depersonalising and distancing it.

In sum, Vicky recognises the potential danger of her original question 'is there such a thing as feminist sex?', possibly because of its close relationship to the tense history of theorising around feminism and heterosexuality (many of the criticisms of heterosexuality have been read by heterosexual feminists to mean that it is impossible to combine these identities, and therefore that a heterosexual feminist sex would be impossible). In order to ensure that SJ does not hear this statement as aligning with this historical association, Vicky concedes that feminist
sex is something they have been discussing for the last hour, and elaborates upon her proposition in order to remove the chance that it can be heard as unsupportive of feminist heterosexuality. Regardless of the work carried out in the concession, she nonetheless reprises her original proposition, recognising the alternative perspectives she has provided. Like Meredith's earlier example, Vicky orients to the delicate conversational topic and mutes the possibly confrontational nature of her show concession, whilst still retaining its robust structure. She could for instance have said, 'I have to question whether there is such a thing as feminist sex, I mean I know we've talked about different options for an hour, but I'm really no clearer on whether there is such a thing'. That she doesn't use the structure in this direct and clear form, highlights the delicacy with which the topic is being handled - it is hearably less direct than the example offered above. The effect of her show concession is that she avoids having to give an answer to SJ's question about what would make heterosexual sex more feminist. At the same time she works very hard not to undermine the validity of this question, perhaps to resist SJ's presuppositions (that feminists should politicise their sexual relations).

Like Amanda, Vicky can be seen to be 'doing delicacy' in the use of the show concession. First, orienting to the problematic nature of her proposition, she phrases it as a question. Second, her concessive statement, while heralded by 'I mean' offers both a concession in terms of equality and also exhibits her awareness of a range of other characteristics which might be considered as components of 'feminist sex', perhaps to clarify her proposition. Finally, her reprise is not a literal repetition of her initial proposition (and part of this may be the difficulty caused by its framing as a question) but, like Amanda, offers an implicit restatement. She works to distance herself from it through the use of 'one' and 'wonders' (lines 20 and 21), and then talks about 'the two' (line 21), removing the explicit reference to feminism and sex. Interestingly, in muffling and muting some of the components of the show concession, it loses some of its robustness. If we briefly look at SJ's response, we find that she is not put off of her line of questioning as she has been in other situations: -

Extract 7: Vicky (SJF:PSB 20.5.98)

22 Vicky I mean (.2) hhhh
23 SJ Or is there something else?
24 (0.8)
25 Vicky °What do you mean (. ) what do you mean?°
26 (0.2)
At the beginning of this extract (which follows on directly from the one quoted above), SJ disaffiliates from Vicky's reprise (in which she wonders whether feminism and sex actually equate at all) by simply not responding. Conversation analysts (Pomerantz 1984/1996) have shown that the withholding of a response for only two-tenths of a second is enough to signal an upcoming disagreement and here SJ is silent for a full second (line 22). The proposition, concession, reprise structure makes apparent that Vicky has reached a possible completion point, so SJ's failure to respond here is noticeable - is, indeed, noticed by Vicky. 'I mean' (line 23), she says, as if further to justify her position to SJ (indicating that SJ's silence is heard, by Vicky, as signalling disagreement or requiring more clarification). In her next turn, SJ ignores Vicky's challenge to the whole idea of feminist heterosex, and continues to question Vicky as to what might constitute its component parts: if 'equality' and 'control' are not relevant, then 'is there something else?' (line 24). In other words, SJ seizes upon the 'concession' embedded in the proposition-concession-reprise structure (lines 12-14 of Extract 6), and asks Vicky to expand upon it (with examples of other criteria for feminist heterosex) and she fails to acknowledge the broader challenge which Vicky has raised (in the proposition and reprise) to the very notion of feminist heterosex. Vicky's 'what do you mean?' holds SJ accountable for what could be constructed as a non-sequiteur (why ask for further examples of something the very existence of which has been queried) and her vague attempts to re-ask her question are analysed in more detail in Extract 4.

At least in this example, Vicky's orientation to and management of the possibly controversial topics of conversation through the use of show concessions fails. It does not retain the rhetorical strength that is apparent in the other five examples that are offered here. In the final section, we offer an example of a show concession that fails to avoid challenge.

7.3.3 The No-Show Concession

Shortly before this extract, SJ has asked whether it is necessary to be a lesbian in order to be feminist. Most of the group has disagreed with this, but Kim in
particular, is annoyed by the way lesbian feminists 'use' their sexuality to assert their politics.

Extract 8: Kim (SJF:RG7:15.12.98)

1 Kim I agree but they were .hh
2 they were saying the fact that (.)
3 if you're a lesbian >like not<
4 if you were feminist through and through (.)
5 >you would< now these were radicals= <-P
6 Hilary =mmm=
7 Kim =obviously and >this is in combination of like<
8 °the stuff that I read°
9 it came out .hh (.) for a while there that
10 in order to be a >true true< feminist <-R
11 you couldn't (.) have
12 [a heterosexual relationship]
13 Hilary [Some sort of no ]
14 Kim =because there [was
15 Mel [But's some sort of , not ]
16 SJ [But did that make you question] <-
17 Kim it yourself?
18 Kim It ma- that's what I'm saying like it ma-
19 with all the stuff I read it made me really question so I
20 determined the fact that (.)
21 obviously I ^wasn't a feminist in the:: ir
22 regards because .h I believe in the fact that a feminist is
23 believing that people should have the rights to do what they
24 ^want .hh
25 but >in that regards< and
26 >that's 1998 and I know there's<
27 a lot of people also believe that in order to be a true
28 ^feminist you have to be (.)
29 >a lesbian<
30 so I don't think it is a 1970 definition I think it's
31 (.hh it's truly )=
32 Donna [Provisionally true]
33 Kim =believed in 1998
34 Mel It's not logical though is it?
35 Because you're having a relat-a relationship
36 with a man doesn't mean that you're going to go home
37 and cook his dinner and lie on your back
38 if you want to or not u(h)m=
39 Jane Well you [might]
40 Kim [No ]
41 Jane =do on occasions=
42 Kim I might yeah

Kim's response to SJ's question in lines 1 to 8 is that she has read books by 'radical' feminists which suggests that this is the case and that to be a 'true true' feminist (line 10) you could not engage in an heterosexual relationship. Kim begins her proposition on line 4 proposing that, in the opinion of some books she's read, to be a real feminist you must be a lesbian. She realises the problematic nature of her statement and bolsters it with a concession in line 5, saying that of course these
books were by 'radical' feminists, before reprising her initial proposition that you
cannot be a feminist and be heterosexual (lines 10 to 12). The challengeable nature
of her proposition and reprise is hearable not only by SJ, Hilary and Mel who object
to Kim's statement (lines 13 and 15), but Kim herself recognises its challengeable
nature. She makes it clear that these arguments belong to someone else (lines 2
'they were saying' and 5 'these were radicals'). The use of reported speech of
absent others protects the speaker against challenge. The fact that her show
concession fails in this extract and she can provide overt resistance to arguments
around heterosexuality and feminism is perhaps made possible, as Kitzinger (2000)
argues, by the ventriloquism of another. Kim is "protected against the potentially
negative implications of her challenge by not appearing to argue with somebody
actually present [...] so relieving some potential interactional difficulties" (p. 145).
She has made a show of conceding, but it is not heard as an 'appropriate'
concession by her co-conversants. SJ's is the challenge (lines 24 to 25) that is
responded to and she asks whether this made Kim personally question the situation.
Because SJ has challenged her proposition-concession-reprise, Kim must make a
further concession, subsuming SJ's query into her concession so that she has been
left questioning the viability of her feminism (lines 19 to 21). Nonetheless, she goes
onto reprise her proposition again in lines 29 to 33. Even this show of conceding
does not work and Mel challenges Kim as well, disputing the validity of the argument
she's presented as 'not logical' (line 34). In this instance, Kim's concessions are not
successful. The structure does not carry the robustness of those used by Vicky,
Meredith, Tina and Amanda, and both SJ and Mel feel happy to challenge Kim.

7.4 Summary and Conclusions

Ruth Frankenberg (1993) conducted research on white women talking about
whiteness and race. She suggests that in making both herself and her participants
responsible for their dialogue on racism, she was able to ascertain the different
discourses that appeared in her data. In a similar manner, the application of
conversation analytic techniques to portions of data in which tension arose between
the moderator and the participants, highlighted the difficulty of conversations around
feminism and heterosexuality and revealed the ongoing resistance to its public
discussion.

First, a consideration of membership categories revealed Tina's work to
effectively distance herself from the original political possibilities of SJ's question,
contrast her perspective with that of SJ's and then finally make SJ's position look irrational and slightly fanatical. Tina can be seen to be building up a 'post-feminist' identity, based on a politics of choice (Probyn 1988/1997) rather than the radical politics that SJ is suggesting. As well by ridiculing the more political position being offered by SJ, Tina effectively moves to limit any further discussion and closes down the opportunity of creating a discourse of feminist heterosexuality (also apparent in the 'Trojan horses' found in the show concessions).

Second, I considered the show concession and its variations in conversation on controversial topics. It became apparent that the structure was used in two distinct manners. One was to rely on its robustness to allow the parody or caricature of the moderator's interests. As the moderator oriented to and managed the possibly disruptive nature of the topics under discussion; space was provided for the participants to ignore the delicacy of the discussion and to use the show concessions' strength to provide a platform for a critique of the moderator's political perspective. As well, the show concession provided a means for both the participants and moderator to 'do delicacy', attending to and managing the problematic nature of the subject of conversation.

By placing the show concession within longer stretches of data, its contextual use within a conversation became more apparent, and at least in the conversation with Vicky, showed that it could be used to both 'do robustness' and 'do delicacy' within a short time span. On the whole, variations in the show concession structure do not affect its strength and continue to make it sound as though it has been proofed against criticism and thereby 'fortifies the speaker's position against misunderstanding and attack' (Antaki & Wetherell 1999:23). I have shown that (as Antaki & Wetherell claim but do not demonstrate) it is a robust structure - i.e. SJ does not challenge - and that this robustness is apparent even in show concessions that contained propositions supported with stories or evidence (Meredith and Vicky in Extract 6), unclear propositions (Amanda), concessions which are masked (Tina), mismatched reprises (Meredith and Tina), explicitly conflictual exchanges (Tina), and extracts where both speakers are 'doing delicacy' (Vicky in Extract 6 and Amanda). As well, it showed the contribution of the other speakers to the success or failure of the structure, and in only two instances can it be seen to fail. First when Vicky muffled her show concession it did not retain the strength necessary to
withstand a challenge; and second, when the concessions offered were not heard by fellow speakers as strong enough to bolster the proposition and reprise.

Longer stretches of data also provided the context to show that "the structure can - also - be exploited not simply to defend the speaker's own position [...], but actually to strike a positive blow against the opposition" (Antaki & Wetherell 1999:17). Meredith, Amanda and Vicky take advantage of the robust strength of the structure and SJ's preoccupation with managing the possible difficulties of the topics under discussion, to highlight that this management is her concern and not theirs. Their use of the show concession as a means to smuggle in parodies or caricatures of the dogmatic feminist displays to SJ their disconcert with the investment she has made in managing any possible conflict. Most importantly, it works. She does not go on to challenge their concessions or to force her concerns further in that particular line of questioning.

Finally, in the extracts from Vicky and Amanda, we can see the use of the show concession, although muted, in doing delicacy. In both instances they are able to make clear their desire to separate sex and politics, while attending to the possibly controversial nature of these statements within a discussion purposely designed to discuss sex and politics. Once muted, the structure does not carry the same rhetorical weight, and with Vicky, SJ is willing to challenge her show concession. Interestingly, this challenge is not direct, it goes on to look at other aspects of her statement, without confronting the show concession head on. The same occurs with Amanda. Although SJ does not directly confront Amanda's proposition and reprise, she says that she'd like to ask two further questions. These do not confront the concessionary structure but do ask Amanda about her sexual politics.

Although often seen to be problematic for feminism (Gill 1995), analysis such as that presented provides an example of the illumination of the data that the application of conversation analysis techniques can provide for the researcher. In terms of a feminist cultural politics, the analysis reveals that heterosexual feminists talking about their sexual identity and politics in a research setting orient to and manage the controversial nature of the topics. Both analysis of the membership category and the show concession were helpful in this process, highlighting the
controversy over terms and the participants' ability to deal with the issues both robustly and delicately.

Further, from a feminist perspective, I would like to critique some of the responses provided here and revealed by the analysis. Not in order to suggest that the participants are in someway falsely conscious, deluded by patriarchy, or to reinterpret their words (see Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1997 for a full discussion), but rather to consider the particular version or perspective offered, which I, as a feminist researcher may disagree. In so doing, I am able to challenge some of the taken-for-granted experiences or perspectives so as to "move beyond the dominant categories constructed under (hetero)patriarchy" (p. 573). Rather than suggesting that the 'poor women don't know what they're saying', I can admire the skill and complexity with which they have resisted attempts to discuss heterosexual feminism. The evidence presented here suggests that, despite the protests of heterosexual feminists and the critiques by radical and lesbian feminists, little theorising around heterosexual sex has occurred and that heterosexual feminists continue to resist its public discussion.
Notes to Chapter Seven

1 Transcription Devices

(.) Shortest hearable pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds.

(0.6) Timed pauses

.hhh An in-breath

wo(h)rd Laughter within the word

usu- The dash indicates a sharp cut-off of a word or sound

m::e The colons show the place that the speaker has stretched out the preceding sound

run= The equal signs indicates that the speech is linked and runs on

=on

femînîst An up (or down) arrow indicates a rising or falling intonation

you Underlined words or syllables show emphasis

? A rising intonation at the end of a line

°no° Speech enclosed by degree sounds is noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk.

[no] The square brackets enclose the sounds that overlap with the next speaker

[it]

>fast< Speech enclosed by these symbols is spoken either more quickly or slowly than the surrounding talk depending on their direction.

<slow>

ii Although fluent in English, it is not Tina's first language.

iii Jefferson (1989) has suggested that the maximum allowable gap in a conversation is one second. Three seconds is an extraordinarily long time to wait for a response.

iv Note, too, the strategic omission of the other possible inequality, occasions when you might want him to be in control.
8.0 On Being Feminist and Heterosexual

In reporting the research undertaken, I began by examining one representative aspect of the institution of heterosexuality, considering the way that women, and in particular feminists, were covered in the media. I then turned to a more detailed examination of the representation and institutionalisation of heterosexuality through an analysis of film clips. Although both of these studies provided clear evidence for the construction of feminism and heterosexuality (and its continual reinscription in the media), it provided little evidence of the audiences' reaction to its encoding. Moving to an examination of the interface between the institution of heterosexuality (as symbolised by the media) and the practice of heterosexuality, the next study considered the consumption of these images by women identifying as feminist and heterosexual. Evidence was provided both for their agency and resistance as media consumers, as well as their inability to move beyond these narrow representations. Finally, in the last chapter, I considered, through a micro examination of the fine details of talk, the continuing difficulty and resistance that the women displayed in considering issues of heterosexuality and feminism. In considering the audience, I have worked across the data, pulling out themes and conversational devices to compare and contrast responses. Lost from this analysis was the sense of the participants as individuals and their own particular struggles with feminism and heterosexuality. In this final study, I examine in more detail the responses given by three of the participants in their diaries, focus group discussion and follow-up interview, to consider their biography and the stories they tell as heterosexual feminists.

8.1 Method and Analysis

Sheila But, but, the difficulty of asking a question like this and us sitting here and answering it now is that we give you an answer from the context in which we’re living now, but as you’re saying, we’ve done, you’ve done all these different things, I haven’t done enough, but um, you get a different answer because you might gain...

Sue That from a different age group or a different stage in your life.

Sheila Yeah a different age group, a different stage, different actual situation.
Sue and Sheila are right. The questions that I asked received different answers from different women, dependent on all different types of contextual factors. As well, these were the answers that were given at this particular time and in this particular research setting. If the context was different, the stories the participants tell, or how they tell them might vary. In section 3.3.5.2 of Chapter Three I reviewed the literature on biographical analysis and its interest in the narratives that participants construct. Drawing on these areas, the results presented trace an individual through their diary entries, focus group participation and follow up interviews, considering the participants' orientation to the terms and identities under examination. In addition to considering what they say, Macherey (1990) suggests that it is also important to consider the things that are not being said. He writes that "the work is revealed to itself and to others on two different levels: it makes visible, and it makes invisible. Not because something has to be hidden in order to show something else; but because attention is diverted from the very thing which is shown" (p. 219). He writes that to know a work the analyst must move outside of it, to a point where its incompleteness can be considered.

In providing the next stage of interpretation of the participant's stories, I examine the different ways that the major themes of the research (feminism, heterosexuality and heterosex) gain different subjective meanings (Faircloth 1999). I use a broad understanding of narrative, whereby the participants' contributions are seen as bringing "meaning to human experience" (Kirkman 1999: 33) within the context of the research process. Rather than assuming, as a thematic analysis does, that different themes will be re-told within each narrative, the analysis presented here examines the individuals' interpretation of and explanation for, their heterosexuality and feminism. The participants' narratives then are "both categorically formed and communicatively contingent, creating a space that is worked through in a manner both general and peculiar to the teller" (Faircloth 1999: 211). Basing my analysis within a framework that recognised the individual's contribution to the research, their subjective experience of the research process, its contextual impact, and the issues which remain unaddressed, lead me to closely read the data produced by three participants to begin to understand their orientation to the themes under discussion.
8.2 The Participants

Three of the participants are taken as the unit of analysis. Working this way, through the data that each of them has provided, gives a deeper understanding of the ways that they have individually defined the different topics and terms within their contributions. It also suggests the range of ways in which the participants have accounted for their feminism and heterosexuality across the data. Rather than being restricted by the definitions imposed by the researcher, a detailed examination of the diaries, focus group conversations and telephone interviews of three of the respondents, opens up the range of ways that women involved in the study construct and understand feminism, heterosexuality and the media. This chapter introduces the reader to Lara, Sheila and Carol. They are all able-bodied and their first language is English. These women were chosen because of their range of ages and occupations, because they participated in all three aspects of the research, and because their responses cover the continuum of discourses employed throughout the study. In analysing their accounts, I began by returning to their diaries and considering the issues that they raised in their entries. Turning to the focus groups and interviews, I traced these issues through their individual contributions and considered their construction and development throughout the study. Each approached the issues of heterosexuality and feminism from slightly different perspectives and offered evidence of the ranges of ways in which women combine these identities in their personal lives. Lara spoke of heterosexuality solely as sexual activity, while Carol's stories considered heterosexuality as an institutionalised practice. Sheila's narratives are placed at the intersection of heterosexuality as practice and as institution, both critiquing its wider construction and drawing links to her own life.

8.2.1 Lara - '...It's just a mentality I think I've always had'

Lara is an undergraduate student in the Midlands. At the time of the initial research meeting, she was 19 years old and single. She is white. Lara provided six diary entries, ranging from television dramas, film and magazines. She participated in a focus group with three other students, and responded enthusiastically to my request for a follow-up interview.

Lara's descriptions of the good and bad aspects of heterosex, as outlined in her diaries (and later in the focus groups), emphasised two important themes that arose throughout her discussions. Like many of the participants, she characterised
good sex as being about equality, physical attraction, love, warmth, tenderness, and naturalness. She talks about the importance of equality so that ‘it doesn't necessarily have to involve the woman being totally domineering and the man totally subservient, I mean I think there should be some kind of equality there’. Importance is placed on naturalness, represented by nudity 'I think that was more natural and more easier to relate to [...] They were just naked anyway, weren't they?' or 'I think because it is more kind of natural sex and it's more what does actually happen [...] yeah it is more realistic'. Bad sex, on the other hand, included instances of power and exploitation, impersonality, lust, jealousy and unhappiness.

Lara spoke of her feminism using much of the same kind of language she used to describe what made 'good' sex. She says 'I don't think you have to actually think about it and make it an actual thing you do, [...] I think it is something that if you are it will come naturally'. Feminism is a natural part of being a woman. In summarising her feminism, Lara says: -

Um well for me, I think being a feminist is something that um, happened to me ages ago and I mean it's part of me now and I think it's not something I have to think about, it's just the way I am...

Later, in the telephone interview, I again asked her about her feminism, and she replied: -

Lara Ri-um, right, I wouldn't say that I'm actively sort of feminist, but it's just a mentality I think I've always had. Um, it's not something I sort of think about, oh gosh, regarding to feminist theory I shouldn't be doing this. I think it's just something that's always there at the back of my mind.

SJ Right

Lara I want to sort of protect my own equal rights and in that respect, I think it's been there as long as I can remember really.

SJ Right, right

Lara Yeah, not necessarily completely active but it's just something there in my mind.
Lara describes her feminism as 'natural', 'part of her', 'a mentality', and 'there in her mind'. It is not surprising then to find that she talks about her sexual activities in relation to feminism in much the same way.

Lara declares that because she is a feminist, this will naturally inform her sexual relations. In concluding her summary of feminism provided above, she said:

...when I have relationships or whatever that comes through in a relationship, yeah it should be equal and as long as both sides of the relationship are happy and I'm not being dominated and I've still got complete free will to do whatever I please then that to me is being a feminist and having heterosex.

In the focus group, when asked whether it was important for feminists to consider their sexual activities in light of their feminism, she replies that '...it's such a natural activity, it's not something that's premeditated, it's not something you think oh my gosh I've got to be feminist about this, it just comes naturally [...] and I think because it is so natural then enjoyment also comes naturally for both sides [...] It'll be loving'. Lara suggests that being feminist, like being heterosexual, is natural, and that being feminist in terms of one's sexual activity will occur simply as a result of considering oneself a feminist.

Although appearing quite categorical in her diary and the focus group about her assessment of the scenes and the role of feminism in sex, she seemed uncertain in applying this to an analysis of the sex scenes. Lara hedged her replies, appearing undecided and tenuous. As with all the focus groups, I asked the women if they could find anything feminist in the scenes that were viewed. Lara's replies included - 'I don't really know. What is a feminist idea toward sex really?' or 'I suppose that is kind of a feminist notion of sex then that, that she has that dominance initially' or 'She would be equally kind of upfront and I think her actions were kind of as feminist as it could go I suppose', and finally, 'the domineering aspect of the woman again [...] she's not the passive, stereotypical, subservient woman [...] I suppose that's, that's a feminist aspect of it'. Lara framed her feminism strictly within her own experience and appeared to find it difficult to move outside of that to a wider application of her politics. Many of the ingredients of the sex scenes that she identifies as feminist, are actually closer to the qualities she had
listed as indicating 'bad' sex, particularly domination. Her uncertainty about what makes sex feminist indicates her reliance on her own experience and her orientation to heterosex as just a practice divorced from the wider workings of heterosexuality or heteropatriarchy. Missing or absent from Lara's contributions is any sense of wider understandings of the workings of heterosexuality, of the links between her personal practice, a normative construction of heterosexuality (as natural) and its wider institutionalisation which actively works to limit and oppress women. Like others in the research, Lara struggled with talking about feminism and sexual practice. Many of the women suggested that their sexual activities would be feminist, simply because they were feminist. This kind of talk is suggestive of a 'post-feminist' discourse promulgated by the media (Brunsdon 1997) and highlights the ongoing difficulty of these conversations within feminism. Naturalising feminism and heterosexuality in this way removes the onus on the individual to engage in any self-examination, rather it is for others to recognise the activities as feminist. Simply tying feminism to the practice of heterosexuality in terms of sexual relations loses a wider understanding of its importance in context. Feminism becomes simply about ensuring one's own personal equality, pleasure and success. Finally, using language that naturalises feminism and sexual activity, masks and obscures their social construction within an institutionally structured heterosexuality.

8.2.2 Carol - 'Well, remember, I'm very old'

Carol was 68 at the time of our first meeting. She is Jewish, has been married for almost 50 years and lives in Scotland. Like many of the participants in this study, she is an academic. In contrast to the narrow horizons in which Lara framed her conversation, Carol's are very broad. Her conversations are continually linked to heterosexuality as an institution and the narratives she provides contextualise and historicise her experience. Where Lara only considered heterosex and feminism from her experience, Carol seems to consider its institutionalised form. It is far more difficult to trace Carol's thoughts on feminism and heterosexuality, unlike Lara, they are not neatly divided but frequently overlap and intertwine within her narratives. Carol also works from slightly different definitions. Where Lara personalised the terms, relating them directly to her sexual experience and her personal life, Carol uses a much broader basis upon which to construct her analysis. Sex for Lara simply refers to heterosexual sexual activities, for Carol it refers to a much broader 'sex system' or institutional heterosexuality which structures women's lives and sexual relationships. When she refers to her
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feminism, it is within the context of a full and rich life. Defining the terms in these ways means that, while the reader learns a great deal about Carol's biography, we learn very little about her lived experience of combining heterosexuality and feminism.

Carol, in her four diary entries - two newspaper articles and two films - and focus group conversations, rarely spoke of the actual sexual activities that were viewed, with the exception of the following comment:

Well, I don't think, I think aggressive sex, aggressive anything, I mean I'm a pacifist, I think aggressive anything is horrible and is wrong, and is an imbalance and is the use of power with least control, and so, I think anything that smacks of aggressive sex is horrible, because the whole point about sex is that it's intimate and not saying for the rest of your life, but it is a loving relationship and it's, therefore must be slow and gentle and reciprocal and all those things, not that sort of thing.

Although she defers giving any details of her own life - 'I lead a fairly sheltered life' - she acknowledges that in relationships, power must be shared - 'I think sometimes the woman is more active and sometimes the man, and sometimes the woman decides it'll be tonight and sometimes the man [...] without the couple making a big deal of it'. Carol is not very forthcoming with details of her own sexual activities or of her perspective on the sex depicted in the films.

Rather, Carol analyses her diary entries and the films in terms of heterosexuality as a system of sexuality, and one that she has experienced at many different levels. In her analysis of the two newspaper pieces, she discusses heterosexuality and its implications in structuring women's lives. In one she considers an article about Arthur Koestler and his life as 'an inveterate womaniser'. She writes that 'the attitudes and behaviour of intellectual men (let's keep it to them) towards women was not what I would like. However, most of the time, I can only think that women were pleased and flattered that someone as clever and famous and exciting as Arthur Koestler was taking an interest in them'. In considering the 'heterosexuality' of the article, she criticises a sex system in which women are seen to be subordinate to men, allowing them to take advantage of women. She then
moves to relate this to her own life and experience, providing examples of the way in which she was taught to be both cautious and ensure her own self-worth.

I was brought up to know that one had to be careful of men, that they would say 'anything'. You couldn't possibly believe them and you had to make up your own mind about whether you wanted to have an 'intimate relationship' or not. But on no account must you get pregnant. They would not marry you. You must never break up a marriage. They will not leave their wife for you anyway. Although this was so long ago - it doesn't seem a bad basis now.

Carol contextualises and critiques the 'sex system' by relating it to her own past, by setting it within her own experience.

Carol can again be seen evaluating heterosexuality in an institutionalised form when she writes about an article on Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles. She describes the story of them being on a cruise with friends and writes:

On the one hand we are supposed to know that he has spent more time with her. On the other, it is all very private and informal in context. In the same report we are assured that the opinion polls show that more and more people are agreeable to some sort of union between them and for that reason the information can appear in the Press. This really amazes me. We are supposed in some sense 'to know' what is going on. However, it is all 'private'.

And then there is no solid reasoning, let alone principle involved, only opinion polls decide how the Prince is conducting his life. That is, he reveals what is happening not because he is unashamed, but because he knows fewer of us would find it all in bad taste. This seems as bad as, if not worse than, the way the Government run their policy decisions.

Carol's critique makes a sharp analysis of the way notions of private and public are being used in order to both disclose information, and to appear to protect propriety. Heterosexuality, in the institutionalised distinction between public and private, becomes normalised and the 'yardstick' against which individual activities are measured and judged. She highlights the insidious nature of the institutionalised
form of heterosexuality which can, in this case through opinion polls, control decisions and activities.

Although reticent to speak of her personal experience of heterosex, Carol provides compelling and detailed stories that combine both evidence of her feminism with a continuing analysis of heterosexuality as a structuring system designed to limit women's lives and opportunities. The narratives she tells are detailed and vivid and weave together her experience of feminism and her critiques of the sex system. Following is the story she tells during the focus group of becoming a feminist and of its impact on her marriage:

I went to a girl's school where we were great feminists, taught by spinster ladies [...] You know, who were all Oxbridge and um, brought us up to be ah both proper but intellectuals and strong and you know, no fooling about [...] I never for a moment thought I wouldn't get married, or rather I feared I might not, but I mean it was taken for granted that one would marry, and um, at school we used to talk about what kind of a man we would marry and what kind of a relationship we would have and there was a divide between the girls who wanted to marry somebody who would look after them and then we who wanted to have a nice man who would be very educated and we decided in the end we would marry architects, because they were sort of artistic we thought but they could earn money and we'd be all right. And so in fact I did marry an architect, [...] and, you know for a long time we had our different domains, ah where we both worked but he worked full-time and I didn't work full-time and I did have responsibility for the children [...] I could go out to work and all these sort of things, um and ah, in our private, in our sex lives, as I've tried to say it's very equal, always has been. And um, at one point I got fed up because I thought I had too many responsibilities, but, that was a phase and um, um, I think I've been married for nearly 50 years and um, you know it's worked out remarkably well, we're not the same but, we have much in common...

Although Carol's many stories do not give specific details of her current life or the ways she has actively worked to combine her feminism and heterosexuality, they
provide the context to understand a life in which she has struggled to be feminist against a sexual system which has historically denied women full status.

In our later conversations around feminism, Carol continued to provide narratives that combined her experience with a political commitment and which continually worked to critique the system of heterosexuality as an institution. During the telephone interview I asked her about the issues within feminism that were important to her, and she talked about her interest and involvement with campaigns for sex workers:

Carol But, um certainly I quite soon saw as it were my allegiance or loyalty to sex workers and the idea that they weren't dreadful women or trying to get money for very little work, or rather no work at all, for very little effort, but that it really was a dreadful career and, you know, it was hard work for 90% of them.

SJ Yeah

Carol And I have certainly discussed this with other quasi-feminist women friends who did think that sex workers were trying to get a living without what they called working.

SJ Right

Carol But, and tried to persuade them that it was really rather dreadful work, and very hard work and very dangerous. And I have convinced one or two.

Feminism and heterosexuality are here linked through Carol's concern for issues where these two intersect. It is not through her personal life that Carol connects her heterosexuality and her feminism, but through the issues that she has worked to understand historically throughout her life.

Carol provides many narratives that encapsulate her definitions of feminism and heterosexuality. In them she identifies the sex system, relates feminism to it and then provides a critique of it. In Carol's stories the reader is provided with a contextual analysis of her experiences of feminism and heterosexuality. By using the past to understand the present, she makes links between a feminist politics and an institutionalised form of heterosexuality. Although at a remove from her actual
practice, Carol constructs her stories within a context that highlights the impact of heterosexuality on her life and her feminist struggles within it.

8.2.3 Sheila - 'It's all enmeshed isn't it really? There's nothing sort of a straightforward yes or no answer here'

Sheila is a 39 year old, married, housewife. When the research project began, she was studying towards a Masters in Women's Studies in the West Midlands, but due to family demands had had to give this up by the time the study ended. In Sheila's stories we can see a combination of Lara's and Carol's perspectives. Sheila provides an interesting narrative that continually links both her personal experience with the wider structuring of women's agency through institutionalised heterosexuality, and describes her struggles to bring feminism into her own practice of heterosexuality.

Sheila's diary provided four separate entries, including newspaper articles, advertisements and television drama. As well, she wrote me a letter to further explain some of the issues that she raised in her diary. The focus group in which Sheila participated contained two other members, and although it was disrupted in the middle, it lasted over two hours. Similarly, our telephone conversations lasted almost an hour, and it required two separate interviews to complete the questions. Sheila was very forthcoming throughout the project and expressed an active interest in her involvement.

In talking about the sex that she analysed in her diary, and the film excerpts viewed as a group, Sheila, like Lara and Carol, was very clear about the distinctions between what she considered good and bad sex, but within them we can also find links being made to a wider analysis. So for instance, writing about an article in The Guardian, she says: -

I consider this to be a good portrayal [...] because it is part of a campaign to explore (and develop) attitudes to heterosex in Britain [...] . I found this article very interesting - it appeals to my interest in changing the construction of heterosex in the media and in society from masculine-focused heterosex to a shared female heterosex. I find the present portrayal of heterosex to be frustrating because it doesn't include me.
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Unlike Carol and Lara, it is not the actual ingredients of the sexual activity which necessarily determine whether the heterosex she is analysing is good or bad, rather it is linked to her assessment of it to challenge accepted norms and stereotypes. Again, when she discusses an advertisement for Peugeot, she writes:

I saw this as a good portrayal of heterosex, because the woman is seen to be assertive, but I wonder about the ending of this scene when the man leaves to attend to the child. Is this supposed to be a role reversal? The caring man and the predatory woman?

She acknowledges what she approves of in this scene (the woman being assertive) but also questions its constructions and the possible implications of the way that it will be viewed. Further, drawing clear distinctions between her experience and her struggle to combine heterosexuality with her feminism, she continues:

I'm not too sure, but do realise that sexual activity does have to be negotiated around childcare. This is different from my experience because my children do not stay in bed in the mornings and the patterns of behaviour in my marriage do not allow me to assert myself - this is all very complicated. I do know that outside of this relationship I can assert myself.

The brief story provided by Sheila in her analysis of the Peugeot clip and the newspaper article helps to highlight the definitions of the terms with which she is working. Heterosexuality for her is clearly both a system within which one's life is contextualised, and a practice with which one must struggle on many levels, including sexual. Feminism is a complicated mix of freedom, exploration and assertion, that conflicts with her heterosexual relationship. These definitions are developed in her contributions throughout the focus group and the telephone interview.

In discussing the sex scenes that were viewed during the focus group, we find Sheila, like Carol and Lara, disapproving of the scenes in which the sex is constructed as 'aggressive [...] controlling. Not very nice really', 'almost a bit vampireish', obsessive, or 'pure sex'. She said that if the scenes had included more
exploring and communication, then that would 'make it more realistic [...] and something I perhaps would connect with.'

When Sheila talks about her feminism and her heterosexuality, we begin to understand the ways in which she struggles to work through these two identities in her own life. As with all the clips, I had asked the group if they found any similarities between the sex they had just viewed and their own lives. Sheila responded:

No, I think if a man's done some of this other work that we were talking about earlier and knows himself to be whatever, the same as possibly women [...] And, ah, I've been married for far too many years to be able to answer this question, um, but I do think that it's just got to be different hasn't it from this, you know trying to assert yourself, it wouldn't be noticed, I know it wouldn't be noticed in my house.

Sheila emphasises the importance that in her experience, for feminism to impact on a heterosexual relationship, it is necessary for both parties - men and women - to work at challenging accepted norms. She then offers that for her this is difficult, although she tries to assert this perspective, it goes unnoticed.

In the next extract from the focus group, Sheila appears to be denying that she considers her sexuality in terms of her feminism, and yet as she explains herself further, it becomes clear that it is this very issue which is a cause of conflict within her marriage.

Sheila Isn't, for me personally, the answer would be that there is a political feminism and then there's a sexual

Sue Yeah

Sheila Sexuality, yeah? And they can be separate, they don't have to be but they can be. And for some of us they are. And it's what, for me feminism is more of an awareness, more of um a way of seeing things, than having to live it in a sexual way.

SJ Right. So would you say that you keep you're sexual life separate from your feminism
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Sheila Well given that I've been married for so many years, to a certain extent it has to be.

SJ Yes.

Sheila [...] Yeah, it depends what comes first, for me. And where the power the lies. So as a non-earning woman for however many years that's been, far too many, and studying something that's so completely conflictual within the marital relationship.

Feminism and her growing awareness of it (through her Women's Studies courses) has been a cause of conflict in her relationship. As a 'non-earning' woman she is dependent on her husband for support, and as such, has had to keep her feminism separate from her sexuality. In her explanation of why she has separated the two, she displays an awareness of the day to day practice of heterosexuality impacting on feminism.

Although apparently denying the importance of her feminism to her sexuality, Sheila constantly makes links between the two in her contributions to the focus group. At one point the group is discussing the possibility of non-monogamy as a means to subvert heteropatriarchy. Where the others have been discussing the sexual implications, Sheila immediately draws links to the wider heterosexual institution and the strictures that control women's sexual activity, before returning to her own experience:

Sheila Doesn't it depend upon the outcomes of the sex? For younger, if it's a woman who becomes a single parent, yeah? The whole, you get, the lot comes down on you.

Jilly You get punished.

Sheila ...[Having] children by different fathers and the same mother is surely evidence to some extent that a woman is deciding, potentially, deciding [to act sexually], yeah? But then heck, you know they can really seriously be judged you know. And social policy is configured around judging her.
SJ It is.

Jilly Definitely. Yeah definitely

Sheila Because, it's, you know, it's not built for that kind of scenario. I think it would be and it's difficult for me personally to ah, to ah, I think, like you say, it's a generational thing um to place myself in these situations. There's a, there's a, there's a level at which I can imagine it in my head but the actual physicality of it I can't quite move along to.

Sheila's comments are placed at the intersection of the politics of the institution of heterosexuality and the politics of the practice of heterosexuality and heterosex. Moving from a discussion of sex, she relates this to the wider implications of the heterosexual institution, before moving back to her own experience and practice where she wrestles with acting sexually.

Sheila continues to make these links throughout the telephone interview as well. When asked about the issues in feminism which are important to her she talks about the economy and its power to shape her own life, 'the structuring of childcare/family care as personal and familial and therefore women's work', the 'systems of sexuality'. One issue that she talks about grappling with is her place within this system and its controlling factors. She said:

I personally find it, have found it and continue to find it difficult that the practice of sexuality is always linked, and in fact, based within, it's not just linked to it, within the system of family and the system of economy and you know women become sexual commodities, and obviously in some societies that's more overtly obvious than others. But you know like, if you look right at here and now for example, um, you know women don't have any right to their husbands, any part of their husband's pensions.

She moves from these broader examples to an explicit consideration of heterosexuality as part of this structuring system and feminism's work to challenge it:
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Sheila Um, so yes, I am deeply concerned with this linking of sexuality with, and maybe controlling it would be another word and another way of ah system of analysing that [...] Um, I feel that they're right to reveal the 'dangers' [...] of heterosexuality, for example, there is no such thing as safe birth, whoever you are and wherever you are in the world, yeah?

SJ Umm hmm.

Sheila I can remember reading um the figures about if you had three successful live births that is your lot, that is your safe lot, whoever you are, whatever level of wealth in the world, wherever you are, whatever level of technology is available to you.

SJ Yeah.

Sheila Yeah? And that's, that quite interested me.

SJ Yeah.

Sheila ...Um, but, I also think that they, the concern that they have is problematic, for example, um, um, women's pleasure within heterosexuality is not of a central concern to feminism...

Sheila appreciates feminism's work to reveal heterosexuality's structuring and damaging role in women's lives, but she is concerned by its disregard for women's pleasure. After discussing the importance of the feminist critique of heterosexuality in terms of the meaning of marriage as being not 'just about two people, it's about which two people and how that is seen and how you can practice that within the public sphere', Sheila explains how she has acted to overcome the confines of heterosexuality and the conflict of feminism in her relationship: -

Sheila Um, I um, I have found marriage to be stifling.

SJ Oh right.

Sheila Um, and I have had, for a number of years, what might be termed another partner. It might be seen out there as an affair.
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SJ Right, right.

Sheila However you want to look at that. Um, it wasn't actually as a conscious um, how can I put it?

SJ You didn't do it intentionally?

Sheila I didn't do it intentionally, no, I didn't do it intentionally, I didn't do it, I didn't set out to do it, I didn't, I didn't do it to be the rebel.

SJ Right.

Sheila Um, but, it's about my own female heterosexuality and its lack of placement within my, it sounds completely contradictory considering that I'm living here and I've got a family, you know what I mean, and my timetable is around their activities and all the things, but, beyond that, more deeply than that, it's around my own heterosexuality.

SJ Yeah, I mean I think that you, that what you're saying is very much a part of what feminists have said for a long time, which is that the family doesn't necessarily provide everything for a woman.

Sheila No, I mean I actually don't think that anybody should have ever expected it to.

Sheila goes on to explain that in considering heterosexuality perhaps 'we haven't asked the right questions of the right people to actually find out about the practice of heterosexuality'. She suggests that struggles against it are occurring in many different relationships, at many different levels, which may not actually be recognised throughout the wider structures. She tells the story of her grandmother who had had a second partner, what she describes as 'an alternative way'.

Not only does Sheila make clear links in her conversation between the institution of heterosexuality and the practice of heterosex, she also provides numerous examples of this from her own life. Her narratives construct a feminist woman who is struggling with the structures imposed on her life by heteropatriarchy, and attempting, with great difficulty, to make her feminism come alive in her
personal life. The stories she tells place her at the centre of the institution of heterosexuality and reveals her difficulties within it. She relates her life and her experiences to the inequality that she identifies and firmly places herself within the heterosexual matrix.

The discourse Sheila creates through her narratives is one of struggle and complication. Like some of the other women, Sheila tells stories of working at the intersection of institution and practice and she seems to be considering a feminist discourse of heterosexuality. Her analysis synthesises the perspectives of both Lara and Carol, and displays more understanding of the workings of heterosexuality at all levels.

8.3 Discussion

Examining the stories told by the three women analysed here, provides a means to find some interesting similarities across their discursive construction, and opens the possibility for a critical feminist assessment. There are two interesting similarities in the stories told by Carol, Lara and Sheila - first, their construction of ‘feminist sex’, and, second, the lack of actual talk about heterosex that occurs within their narratives.

8.3.1 Discursive Similarities

All three women, and many throughout the study, employed very similar terms in their discussions of the mediated images of heterosex and their evaluation of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sexual relations. As well, Lara, Carol and Sheila, like the other participants, avoided a discussion of their actual sexual practices.

8.3.1.1 Equality and Non-aggression

The language used by the participants describing what they considered to be ‘good’ or feminist sex is surprisingly similar. All three insist that it must be equal, that there must be elements of communication and exploring, or tenderness and mutuality. Carol’s statement constructs a very ‘feminine’ image of sexual relations in which they are intimate, loving, slow, gentle and reciprocal (see for instance the description of the terms ‘intimate’ and ‘gentle’ in Sisley & Harris 1977). The sex being described as ‘good’ or appropriate feminist sex draws on a discourse of ‘vanilla’ sex. Arising from lesbian theorising around sexual relations, it refers to sex which disavows any form of sado-masochism, and strives for equality and mutuality.
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(Caster 1993). Jackson (1995a) argues that constructing heterosexuality as always about domination and submission denies women agency in their sexual activities. It is an appealing way for heterosexual feminists to construct sexual relations because of its importance in defining a woman-centred sexuality, and it displays the awareness of the participants of concerns about submission and dominance and their struggles to overcome this construction. Transferred to heterosexual relationships though, it could be seen as problematic. First, applying a means of acting sexually (striving for equality, recognising each other's pleasure, de-centring penetration) ignores the historical and cultural links made between sexual activity and social structures. Segal (1994) writes:

...however we look at it, the task of breaking the codes linking active sexuality to hierarchical and phallic polarities of gender won't be a simple matter. Women are continuously held back from affirming active sexual desire, as women, both by language and culture, and by the existing politics of gender (p. 239).

While acknowledging the importance of the women's struggles around feminism and heterosexuality, and their agency in redefining their sexual activities, it is necessary to continue to make the links between sexual practice and wider heterosexual structures. Second, it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine women 'freely choosing' their sexual activities or pleasures and constructing their own equality within sexual relations - "the more we are unfree, the less choice we have" (Cartledge 1985: 178). The hierarchical codes that bind sexual relations and gender are not so easily broken. "Such rhetoric represses the extent of men's sexual violence towards women, and is wilfully blind to the chronic cultural and interpersonal misogyny so frighteningly apparent with the merest scratch on the liberal facade of sexual equality" (Segal 1994: 239). If heterosexuality is coercion rather than a choice (Rich 1980/1986), then it is difficult to understand how heterosexual sexual practice can ever be a freely made choice (Gavey et al. 1999).

8.3.1.2 Let's Not Talk About Sex

The detailed narrative analysis of the women's contributions across the research project reveals the dearth of talk from the women about their actual sexual activities. They speak quite easily about heterosexuality as an institution, struggle more to understand it as a practice, but provide little or no reflection on their own
sexual activities. Lara talks of their need to be natural and equal, Sheila constructs them as a struggle, while Carol glosses over them saying 'in our private, in our sex lives, as I've tried to say it's very equal, always has been'. It is not just these three who are quiet about their sexual activities, all of the women engaged in the study provided few details of their own sexual activities. Three possible reasons for this silence seem apparent in the narratives provided by the three women - first, there could be an inability to talk about sexual activities outside of constructions of equality and mutuality. Second, talking about feminism and sexual activity, within a research setting, could be difficult for the women. Third, rather than the setting within which the discussions occurred, perhaps it is the actual topics which inhibit frank discussions of sexual activities.

Some researchers, considering young women's negotiation of sexual activity have noted their inability to recognise and identify their own pleasure and desire (Fine, 1988; Gavey 1996; Holland et al. 1996). They have found that women struggle to understand their sexual desire and negotiate for sexual activities that they want. Perhaps this is part of the difficulty for Lara, Sheila and Carol in presenting their sexual stories, they have not got the necessary discourses of desire to explain themselves. The problem here is that other research has suggested that telling sexual stories is an important way to set boundaries and establish identities (Plummer 1995), while others have found women discuss their sexual relations with relative ease, if not relief (Chang & Groves 2000; Friday 1973; Frith 2000; Hite 1977; Loehr et al. 1997; Meadows 1997; O'Connor 1995; Okumiya 2000; Roberts et al. 1996; Roberts et al. 1995).

A second reason could be the actual research setting. Perhaps women are hesitant to discuss their sexual activities within a focus group. Again, research seems to suggest that focus groups, rather than inhibiting conversation, actually encourage disclosure. Vaughn et al. (1996) suggest that focus groups provide an environment where people can talk openly, and that the group interaction which occurs encourages them to form and share opinions. As well, in groups where the women know each other (which was the case in two of the three focus groups examined in this chapter - Lara and Sheila), J. Kitzinger (1994) reports that the conversation can be dynamic, natural and that the group members may raise unexpected issues. Others (Jarrett 1993; J. Kitzinger 1994; Plaut et al. 1993; Zeller 1993) have found that focus group participants often talk about sensitive information.
in detail and some researchers (e.g. Roberts et al. 1996; Roberts et al. 1995) have successfully used focus groups to talk about sexual practices like oral sex and faking orgasm. The women also had the opportunity to talk about their sexual activities in the follow-up interview, and again, although Sheila provided more information (by disclosing an extra-marital affair), none of the other women talked about their sex lives in any detail. Perhaps it would be expected that the intimacy of the one-to-one interview would encourage this sort of disclosure, but, Green (1999) noted that based on any criteria, "even a highly biased observer would have had to conclude that the focus group methodology won" (p. 36). Unlike interviews, Green found that focus groups generate ideas, create consensus and allow the exchange of different perspectives.

The final reason that talk about sex may have been difficult could be because of the combination of topics. Perhaps it is asking women to talk about their sexual activities in terms of their feminism that leads to the difficulty. The previous chapter does suggest that not only is the discussion of feminism and heterosexuality a historic problem for the women's movement, but that participants in the focus groups actively resisted being questioned about their sexual behaviour. Further in discussing sex in relation to feminism, there appears to be a lack of language of sexual pleasure. The participants speak easily about sexual displeasure, but struggle to discuss the positive aspects of their sexual relations. It is interesting to place this difficulty in the context of the methodological procedures that were undertaken to overcome this very problem. All of the women were recruited as heterosexual feminists who were concerned about issues of sexuality, they were given a full description of the project and introduced to the issues to be discussed through the diary-keeping period. In order to overcome some of the earlier difficulties of research around heterosexuality and feminism (Finlay & Kitzinger, under submission), the moderator of the focus group presented herself as a heterosexual feminist who was herself struggling with these issues. And yet, even with these considerations, the women remained hesitant to talk about their sexual activities or sexual pleasure. It does appear that "there is no currently available way of conceptualizing women's pleasure and sexual desire (active sexual wants) in heterosexual sex which is regarded as consistent with principles of women's liberation" (Hollway 1995:86). Hollway (1995) notes that the feminist discourse around heterosexual activity has been one of displeasure and that: -
...the lack of an emancipatory discourse of women's heterosex means that it is very difficult to communicate the experience of pleasurable, egalitarian heterosex, both at the level of simply talking about it, and also at a theoretical level of conceptualizing women's heterosexual desire as consistent with a feminist politics (p. 87).

Simply suggesting, as I did earlier, that women do not have the discursive resources to discuss their sexual activities, is too simplistic. Clearly women can talk enthusiastically about the kind of sex that they like, want or need. Where there is a struggle is in understanding their desires and pleasure in terms of their feminism.

8.3.1.3 Revealing the Power of Heteropatriarchy

Lara, Carol and Sheila employ different discourses around heterosexuality and feminism in the narratives they have shared, and while wanting to understand them as a continuum of the perspectives offered, they provide space for a more critical assessment of issues of feminism and heterosexuality. In this section, through a detailed consideration of Lara's contributions, I suggest the power of heteropatriarchy to individualise women and remove their agency.

Lara, Carol and Sheila's stories highlight the many different discourses used by women who identify as feminist and heterosexual as they struggle with these identities across their lives and in their sexual activities. Importantly, they reveal the singular nature of these struggles and the individualised understandings that each develops, hindered by the difficulty of feminist conversations around heterosexuality. In particular, it exposes the way in which these struggles have become singularised and reveals the powerful individualising discourses of heteropatriarchy.

Because it was a widely used construction of feminism and heterosexuality across the data, a more detailed look at Lara's suggestion that feminist heterosex is a 'natural' outcome of feminist politics is necessary. This construction reduces the influence of feminism to a simple insistence by women on consenting to the sex that they want. If sex and feminism are somehow 'naturally' compatible, then wider links to sexism and the institutionalised oppression of women's sexuality are lost. The struggle to understand these terms becomes situated only within personalised sexual activities and does not work across a woman's life to broader contexts. From this perspective, women who have 'bad' sex are simply not being feminist enough.
In the telephone interview, when I asked Lara about feminism's concern with sexuality, she began to talk about rape. Rather than making a connection to the patterns of dominance and submission inherent in heterosexuality, she individualises her explanation suggesting that men are able to rape women because of their physical strength, that's why 'he's got the dominance over the female'. Gone are any suggestions of a wider structural analysis, and Lara suggests that this is not an issue for her because 'I wouldn't do anything that I wasn't happy doing basically'. She ignores those instances when there may be no choice. Indeed, she takes her example further and suggests the 'issue of sort of date rape', which she constructs as an excuse for women who engage in sex they are uncomfortable with afterwards. My rather panicked response to the troubling ideas Lara was presenting highlights the distinctly anti-feminist analysis at which she is hinting and changes the direction of the conversation.

Lara: Although there's always that issue of sort of date rape and is she just crying wolf or what happened? Did she say yes? Did she want the sex? Yeah?

SJ: I think, my perspective on that is that you get such, you get, it's so awful to bring a case about rape that I can't imagine any woman faking it to be, you know, the press and everything else.

Lara: No, unless of course they were, yeah, yeah or [had a] complete ulterior motive. Wanting to get back at the guy and take revenge or something, but I can't believe that somebody would do that because it's such a serious allegation, isn't it really?

SJ: Yeah, in many ways you ruin your own life.

Lara: Exactly, yeah.

When initially asked about the relationship between heterosexuality and feminism, Lara raises the pertinent issue of rape. Rape has been seen as a direct result of an institutionalised form of heterosexuality in which women are considered subordinate (MacKinnon 1982), but through this discourse, it becomes a means of avoiding being involved in sexual activities in which you do not want to partake. Her further suggestion that one must be wary of women who charge men with date rape, proposes that women who are raped have in some way let men do something that
the women have not wanted. Not only does it avoid making links to a wider analysis, it removes any analysis of a woman's sexual experience from a broader feminist perspective. In addition, making the link between feminism and heterosex as one that occurs naturally, individualises the struggle to understand these terms more broadly. Feminism becomes a personal attribute or approach to life that sanctions any form of heterosexual sexual activity, rather than an issues-based politics that demands collective action.

The solutions provided by the three women for understanding how these two identities work both in their sexual activities and across their lives, exposes the invasiveness of institutionalised heterosexuality, and exhibits its role in both the public and private spheres of women's lives. Links between women are broken down and space for wider and shared understandings of oppression, or their complicity with heterosexism, is removed.

8.4 Summary and Conclusion

Narrative analysis approaches the data in a different way to that of thematic, discursive or conversation analysis. It works through the data, following individual participants across the research process. Each narrative provided slightly different perspectives on the research questions. Lara discussed the naturalness of her sexual activity and struggled to understand the role of her feminist politics within them. Carol offered a wider analysis that linked her feminism and institutionalised heterosexuality, and offered a critique of its structuring presence in women's lives. Sheila made connections between her personal life, sexual experience, heterosexual practice and the wider institutionalised forms of heterosexuality.

Detailed consideration of the similarities and differences across the discourses highlighted the ongoing difficulty of these topics for feminism. It revealed the importance for all of the women to construct their sexual relations as equal, drawing on discourses of mutuality, and asserting their agency in overcoming the deterministic nature of theorising which suggests sexual relationships are always, and necessarily, about dominance and submission. It also made apparent the problems of understanding choice and agency, when sexuality, gender and oppression are so closely linked.
It appears that it is the topics under discussion creating the difficulty. When triangulated with results presented in previous chapters, further evidence is provided for the difficulty of discussing pleasurable and egalitarian heterosex in terms compatible with feminism (Hollway 1995). A close examination of the women's stories also revealed the finer workings of heteropatriarchy in the individualised nature of their stories. A detailed examination of the construction of sex and feminism as offered by Lara (and several of the other women), exposed the singularised nature of the women's struggles to understand their feminism and heterosexuality.
9.0 Pleasure or Resistance: Contributions, Considerations and Conclusions

I began chapter three by showing how the research had arisen from my own concerns about heterosexuality and feminism, and I begin this final chapter by discussing my expectations and education throughout the research process. I expected (and anticipated) the kinds of conversations that I have with my friends (both lesbian and heterosexual) in which we discuss sexual practice, challenging each other on our perspectives and interrogating them from a feminist position.

Throughout the research process, I learned how difficult these discussions can be. At the same time, the research process made me confront and reflect on my own sexual practice and feminism in far more detail than I had, even with my friends.

I said that part of the impetus in starting the research was the search for answers for the issues with which I had struggled. I didn’t have the answers then, and I don’t have them now. I’m not sure if I ever will because, while interrogating these identities, I still remain within them and am therefore continually confined by their wider definition and my own understanding, but the research process has helped me to bring the issues into focus. I suggested once in a conversation with a friend that I thought my struggles to understand my heterosexual practice in light of feminist politics, actually strengthened my feminism. She looked askance and at the time I struggled to justify that statement. I think I’m a little closer to it now (although I’m sure she won’t agree!). Throughout the research process I attempted to understand my heterosexuality at all levels, from my sexual activities, through my daily interactions to my wider concerns about institutionalised oppression, I continue to find myself constantly challenging issues with which I’m confronted and in which I may be complicit. The analysis of these particular situations works outwards from my own experience to a wider situation, but is at all times guided by my feminist politics. Sometimes, sometimes it gives me a deeper and more thorough understanding of the politics in which I am entwined, enmeshed and frequently blinded by, and it is at these points that I gain a deeper understanding of both my own heterosexual identity and my feminist politics.

Let me give you an example. Throughout the research I struggled with the women’s reliance on discourses of mutuality and equality in discussing their sexual relationships. It was raised so frequently that I began to wonder how they actually ever had sexual relationships with their partner since I imagined them stuck at the
door politely saying, "After you", "No, after you", "No, I insist". I realised that this discourse was being used to avoid confronting issues of domination and subordination as inherent in heterosexual relationships (if it's equal how can there be inequality), while refraining from talking about the pleasure that these inequalities created. In my own sexual practice, we have attempted to confront the repressive roots of heterosex through understanding each other's pleasure, sharing our experiences of being dominant and dominated, and celebrating the times when we reach a deeper level of understanding. I became aware of how important it was to recognise these, to name them and to not consider each sexual encounter as an encapsulated whole, but rather as a continuum of sexual experience. This awareness then worked through my sexual relationships, to my heterosexual practice, as I became able to name wider instances in which subordination and domination were shaping my life along a larger continuum and to share this with others. Minor annoyances in which I was treated unfairly became part of a more structured form of oppression, and the nuances of subordination and domination became more apparent. In the process of naming and sharing these experiences, I began to develop a discourse of resistance to the structuring power of heterosexuality. These understandings, and the research process, reinforced for me the importance of the three aims initially stated in Chapter three.

Chapters one and two provided a review of the literature on feminism and heterosexuality, and feminist media research on women's sexuality, and identified some areas that had been under-considered in each. In chapter one I suggested that feminist explorations of heterosexuality had critiqued it either as an institution that oppressed women or as a practice which liberated women. The conflict between intrinsic and extrinsic concerns, and repression and derepression hypotheses, frequently excluded the voices of women existing at the intersection of these approaches. Chapter two argued that the mass media with its power and influence worked as an important facet of institutionalised heterosexuality. I proposed that an analysis of the media, and in particular the unexamined heterosex scenes in mainstream film, traced through women's consumption of these images to their daily practice, provided an opportunity to examine the mediated and lived reality of women who identified as feminist and heterosexual.

In Chapter three I argued that this thesis had three main aims and would make contributions to feminist research: (i) by including the voices of women who
identified as feminist and heterosexual it would expand current theorising on feminism and heterosexuality; (ii) by contributing to media theory on the role and power of the media in forming identity; and (iii) by contributing to epistemological and methodological debates on holistic media research. In this final chapter, I reflect on the contributions made to these different areas and their attendant research questions. I conclude by considering the strengths and limitations of the research and suggesting ways in which research on feminism and heterosexuality can be taken forward.

9.1 Aim One – Feminism and Heterosexuality

The research question aligned with this aim asks “what are the experiences of women who identify as feminist and heterosexual?” The review of available literature in chapter one identified that frequently the voices of women identifying as feminist and heterosexual were not included in the theorising that had occurred or that they had separated out their own experience to address it strictly from a theoretical perspective. As a result, the daily struggles had been largely excluded from a wider understanding of heterosexuality.

I noted that women identifying as feminist and heterosexual had made few contributions to the literature around heterosexuality within feminism. A major contribution of this study to feminist theory is to add the voices of heterosexual feminists to the debate. In so doing, the way that they talked about their heterosexuality and feminism was seen to serve a particular function in their constructions of both heterosexuality as an institution and their own heterosexual practice. Although not always agreeing with their perspective, I do not suggest that they are falsely conscious, but rather that their conversations accomplish particular aims. Their struggles to understand feminism and heterosexuality can be heard in their confusion about the terms, their recourse to a discourse of sexual morality, their resistance to the categories of feminism and heterosexuality as proposed by the moderator, and a rejection of the political position she was offering. Most importantly, the consistency with which this is accomplished suggests the ‘ordinariness’ of this conversation for heterosexual feminists and shows the normalisation of heterosexuality. The experiences they shared were bounded and confined by hegemonic discourses of appropriate sexual activity for women, and for feminists. Women raised issues of consent, equality, choice and mutuality, continually stressing the importance of these within their relationships and their
struggles over them. In terms of the results that Hamblin (1985) received, the data presented here is far more hopeful. The women indicated that they had some choice and power in their relationships, that they were willing to compromise, but not to concede. Jackson (1999) suggests that we must not see a construction of heterosexuality as monolithic because it denies women's agency to act for their own pleasure. I agree that this is the case, but was frustrated by the women's inability to engage with institutionalised structures of dominance and oppression through discourses of consent, choice and mutuality.

Few women spoke of the privilege of heterosexuality and even less made links to a wider structuring or institutionalised heterosexuality. Sexual activity remained within a personal sphere and was not actively engaged with through their feminist politics. For many it was kept separate from their feminism, while for others, it was just 'naturally' politicised by their feminist identity. These discourses work to mask and distort the nature of women's freedom of 'choice' within heteropatriarchy. They individualise the experience, returning each woman to her own relationship, without making links to other women or wider oppressive structures. They disguise men's involvement in women's oppression by having a 'good man' in a relationship make everything better. They remove the necessity for any form of self-examination that would consider the nature of pleasure within structured oppression and hegemonic gender roles. Hollway (1995) is right. There is no discourse of heterosexuality within feminism that allows women to discuss their pleasure — and if these results are accurate little intention of creating one. I encourage these conversations to continue so that we are not simply creating: -

a politics of resistance and transgression, but [...] a politics of radical transformation [...] Holding on to utopian ideals may be more than a little crazy when there seems little prospect of their ever being realized. Yet I believe that it is crucially important, both politically and analytically, that we are at least able to imagine social relations being radically other than they are. If we cannot do this we lose the impetus even to think critically about the world in which we live (Jackson 1999:182).

Significantly, in adding in the experiences of heterosexual feminists to the literature on feminism and heterosexuality, the research confirms some of the ongoing concerns and develops the current understanding. First, it reveals that women identifying as feminist and heterosexual do sit at the intersection of practice
and institution and makes clear the ongoing struggle that exists in occupying this position. Second, it highlights that this is a comfortable place to be, one that requires little analysis and is supported, affirmed and rewarded by institutional heterosexuality. Third, by letting the women's conversations speak for themselves, the research does not place them as passive victims of a monolithic heteropatriarchy, but suggests that they are accomplishing particular aims. Finally, approaching these conversations from different analytical perspectives confirmed the increasing difficulty of these interactions. Supported by the publicly individualised, neo-liberal nature of current feminism (as revealed by the analysis in chapter four), discussions of sexual practice and politics were conducted on an individual basis, with few wider links made to institutionalised heterosexuality and little evidence of resistance. What resistance did appear was carefully confined through discourses of sexual morality, the opposition to politically informed feminist identities and the normalisation of heterosexual practice - bending hegemony, but never threatening it (Gauntlett 1996).

9.2 Aim Two – The Media, Feminism and Heterosexuality

Chapter two suggested that the media's role in coding and re-coding an institutionalised heterosexuality was powerful, influential and worthy of more explicit analysis and attention than previous research had provided. Examinations of heterosex and heterosexuality were noticeably absent from earlier studies, while little research had considered the consumption of these images, their role in identity formation and their contribution to the maintenance of institutionalised heterosexuality. As a result, feminism and heterosexuality and their relationship to the media were the driving themes of the research. Employing a content analysis, textual analysis and integral to the focus group discussions, the research presented several different findings on mediated feminism and heterosexuality in response to the research question - "how can an analysis of pleasure and resistance in media representations of heterosex contribute to feminist media theory, feminist theory of heterosexuality and feminism more generally?" Each study independently contributed to either feminist media theory, feminist theory of heterosexuality or feminism more generally, while some contributed more explicitly to all three.

The research showed that feminism itself was rarely covered in the media (chapter four), usually appearing as an underlying theme, even in articles which explicitly address issues raised by the women's movement. Women speaking from
a feminist perspective were generally shown to be in support of the main thrust of articles and usually reacted to news items which were not of their own making. Actual research or studies undertaken from a feminist perspective were rarely covered in the media. A more detailed examination of representative articles showed that women's issues were personalised, illustrated with graphic details, reliant on personal experience as evidence and individualised. Unsurprisingly, heterosexuality was generally implicit or unstated, with only rare articles challenging its dominant position. This broad study of the media gave a much fuller understanding of the encoding of feminism and heterosexuality. It made clear that women adopting feminist perspectives in the media strategically colluded with its mainstreaming and individualisation, in order to ensure the ongoing coverage of feminist and women's issues.

A detailed examination of film clips (chapter five) in which sexual activities appear to be occurring suggests that the scenes are used to construct the female protagonist more than the male. Sexual activity is used to encode her monstrous femininity, frame her sexual power as evil, and titillate the audience with apparent threats to hegemonic heterosexuality. Films like Body of Evidence and Disclosure, which work actively to close down the possibilities of women's sexuality (through death or dismissal), often leave discreet spaces where a disruption of heterosexual hegemony can be read. Basic Instinct, on the other hand, which 'appears' to leave the female sexuality unpunished (by not killing her — although her lover is killed\(^5\)) reasserts heterosexuality, coding it as the only place in which it can 'freely' survive. The possibility for these readings exists, but it is only through a consideration of the audience that they attain any resistive or disruptive ability.

An examination of the audiences' responses to mediated heterosexuality and heterosex suggests that resistance is often contained. Their consumption of the media was considered from different perspectives, reflecting the different opportunities for agency that can be available in consumption. Responses were studied using thematic discourse analysis, conversation and narrative analysis. From each perspective women demonstrated their capacity for resistance, their struggle with understandings of feminism and heterosexuality, but ultimately returned the power to the media as arbitrator of appropriate heterosex and heterosexuality.
Chapter six engaged with active audience theory and the possibilities for pleasure and resistance in the consumption of mediated images of heterosex. I concluded that women were able to resist the dominant encoding of the media text, reading it as a parody of their own sexual activities and to laugh at it. Further evidence of resistance through pleasure was difficult to ascertain, and a more detailed analysis of themes raised in discussions about heterosexuality and heterosex suggested their continuing orientation to a morality codified by institutionalised heterosexuality. I identified the ways that the women located and discussed the different subject positions which the mediated images offered, showing how these were ultimately rejected as their discussions of their own sexual activities were normatively framed. It revealed the commonality of struggle for the women in understanding the combination of their heterosexual activity with their feminist identity. While not wanting to deny the agency of the individual women, I suggested that the discourses offered remained firmly within hegemonic structures, with little ability to disrupt normative gender roles.

Although not specifically on the media, chapters seven and eight highlighted the structuring influence of the media in the ways in which the women struggled to discuss their feminism and heterosexual practice. The discursive analysis of chapter seven presented their resistance to the topics under discussion. While contributing to the conversation analysis literature through a detailed examination of the 'show concession', I suggested that it also indicated the ongoing resistance to conversation around feminism and sexuality, and offered space for a critique about the continuing alienation of these topics within mainstream feminism. Chapter eight returned some of the pleasure and resistance to the study. A narrative analysis provided a fuller picture of the women in the study and the discourses that they used in struggling to work through their feminist politics in their personal lives. I suggested that this approach not only offered a means to see the women more fully, but that it also revealed some of the ways that their struggles were framed by heteropatriarchy.

An analysis of pleasure and resistance through research on the media provides contributions to feminist media theory. Detailed consideration suggests the ongoing power of the media to structure our understanding of terms like feminism and heterosexuality. It highlights the continual coding and re-inscription of an institutionalised form of heterosexuality, while making clear the constant
Chapter 9: Pleasure or Resistance?

recovery to a hegemonic heterosexuality of both media texts and media consumption. Analysing pleasure and resistance shows the many different levels in which power is enacted, both in the ability of the media to contain resistance, and in the process of consumption. Finally, it allows for the examination of institutionalised heterosexuality in the form of media texts, with the heterosexual practice of a consuming audience.

Importantly, the thesis addresses some of the difficulties of current research raised in chapter two, while also further developing feminist media studies. First, the media analysis indicates that the role of the media in individualising and depoliticising feminism is only a small part of a broader politics of neo-liberalism where all political or potentially political acts are individualised and seen as no more than personal acts of consumption. Feminism itself, particularly in its public representation, becomes incorporated into this framework, encouraged by institutional heterosexuality. Second, the research recognises that the encoding of heterosexuality does not occur simply within fictional representations or factual coverage. Traditional media research has separated these genres and the inclusion of a detailed examination of both areas recognises that life experience and practice are not just formed by news and current affairs, or fictional popular culture. Third, the research develops earlier work on the representation of feminism and feminists in the media, counteracting the traditionally suspicious relationship, and suggesting a more positive, albeit depoliticised, role for feminism within the media. Fourth, the textual analysis presented in chapter five explicitly addresses an area long ignored within feminist media studies. Although the relationship between women's sexuality and the media has been well documented, no work has provided a detailed examination of scenes of heterosex. Finally, the research has not ended with the analysis of the sex scenes, but has traced them through consumption to identity formation and political activity.

9.3 Aim Three – Media Research and Feminist Cultural Politics

One of the major concerns of the research has been to consider issues of power and knowledge in relation to the media, asking "whose definition prevail(s)? In other words, who holds the balance of power?" (Fenton et al. 1998: 162). As Fenton et al. note, "this issue can be most productively tackled in theoretical and empirical terms by recourse to an holistic approach to the study of the process of mass communication" (p. 162). This included different approaches to consider the
process of definition — through a content analysis of the mass media, detailed analysis of items in the media and contact with those who act as sources — and different forms of analysis of empirical data to consider the nature of power and definition. It raised the question: "what kinds of answers do different methods of analysis provide for a feminist cultural politics and what does this mean for a broader study of the media?"

Unlike many of the studies reviewed in chapter two that only consider the text, or focus most specifically on the audience, the research presented in this thesis concentrates on both aspects. Central to the research project were attempts to gain a holistic understanding of the encoding of mediated institutionalised heterosexuality and its consumption through the application of the most appropriate methods of data collection and analysis.

9.3.1 Data Collection

Data was collected in four primary ways: (i) analysis of the British mass media; (ii) questionnaires; (iii) diaries; and (iv) focus groups. Each of these provided different ‘types’ of data, and taken as a whole provide interesting results for a broad study of the media.

The analysis of the British mass media included three different forms of data collection - content analysis, textual analysis of the representative articles and detailed analysis of sex scenes from mainstream movies. While content analysis was extremely useful in providing a broad overview of the current state of feminism in the British mass media, it also supplied the context within which the research was occurring. It established the major discourses of feminism that appeared in the mass media and displayed the kind of perspectives to which the participants had access. When combined with a textual analysis of three representative articles, it highlighted the way in which feminism becomes depoliticised and softened, resulting in a feminised feminism. The analysis of the sex scenes carried this through into fictional representation, making the bridge between the two frequently separated genres of fact and fiction. In taking into account that audience members would have access to both news and current affairs reporting, and fictional entertainments, the three forms of data collection provided a much wider analysis of the British mass media than most current studies. For feminist cultural politics, the results provided by these three analyses were useful for highlighting the current state of mediated
feminism and heterosexuality; revealing the ways in which feminism is encoded and heterosexuality is normalised and rewarded; and for contextualising the research within institutional heterosexuality.

Questionnaires sent to sources providing a feminist perspective in the articles included in the analysis of the British mass media provided two different types of data. Quantitative data gave an overview of the source's role in each article, their experience of being covered by the media and their perspectives on feminist and feminine representation. Space was included for the respondents to provide more detailed answers and these frequently acted to flesh out or bring to life their numerical responses. Synthesising these responses, the results of the questionnaire study provided a broad overview of the role of feminists in informing news coverage, while also revealing more personal aspects. Significant for a feminist cultural politics, the combination of qualitative and quantitative responses illuminated seemingly contradictory results, making clear that the process of media representation is complex and complicated. As well, it raised issues about the use of questionnaires particularly in terms of more traditional understandings of non-response. As I mentioned in chapter three (and have covered more extensively in Finlay 2000) instances where women have not completed the questionnaire, but have responded in letters, cannot be counted as non-response, particularly when it would exclude areas pertinent to the research project. The sources have in fact responded and some of the letters tell interesting stories of women's interaction with the media - experiences that would be lost if they were simply categorised or explained away as 'nonresponses'. They provide a singular opportunity to understand the reasons and explanations for nonresponse that may not always be available (and have certainly never been discussed in the literature). But just looking for a reason for nonresponse may ignore some aspects of the research that are not covered by the questionnaire. The letters themselves should be considered an integral part of the data and an essential part of the story being told.

Diaries were chosen as a means of data collection because they provided both longitudinal information on media representation and consumption, and, more importantly, for the exciting synergy described in chapter three between the elements of time and reflection. As I discuss in Finlay and Fenton (under submission), by taking advantage of the temporal aspect of diaries, it allowed me to follow the participants' development and to understand how they come to some of
the conclusions that they make. It not only provides insight into each participant, but also into the topics under consideration. Their analysis gives information on the consumption of media images of heterosex and highlights some of feminism’s ongoing difficulty in assessing these representations. In the entries, the participants reflect on the items under consideration and the issues raised, as well as reflexively beginning to understand their place within the research process and providing me with evidence of their insight and the issues with which they struggle. Taken together with the broader media analysis provided by the news review and film analyses, the diary responses can be set within their wider framework and compared and contrasted to the dominant discourses. As such, they offer an opportunity to place resistance within context, highlighting both the times in which hegemonic heterosexuality is evaded and recuperated. More particular to this project, diaries used in conjunction with focus groups (i) provide the means to ‘flesh out’ the focused discussion (ii) set-up the context of the focus group; and (iii) introduce the main theme of the research.

Unlike the longitudinal aspects of diaries, focus groups provide a snapshot of a particular moment of conversation. As discussed in chapter three, focus groups have been widely used in media research and for discussions on sensitive topics. Their use within the research project was crucial to an understanding of the ways in which heterosexuality is normalised and privileged. A central reason for choosing focus groups is the interaction that occurs both between the different participants, and between the participants and the moderator (Morgan 1997). These aspects of the conversations were vital in building an understanding of the women’s experience of being feminist and heterosexual, and in the ways that they talked about them. Others have argued for the ‘feminist’ nature of focus groups (Wilkinson 1999; 2000) or for their use in ‘sex’ research (Frith 2000), but for a feminist cultural politics it is the interaction between the participants which is central for what it reveals about the topics under analysis. Unlike most research, I did not choose to exclude the exchanges, simply picking out individual sentences to confirm the analysis, but instead placed these within their interactional context. Several aspects of this are of importance to both a feminist cultural politics and the project itself. We saw in chapter six how the interaction between the participants shows how agreement is built up on what constitutes appropriate feminist representation (see Janice and Marion’s conversation in section 6.1.2.2) or sexual activity (Sheila and Sue in 6.2.1.1). The interactions included within this chapter also show how resistance can
be created through sharing a joke or poking fun at a particular sexual display (see section 6.1.3). The focus groups were also central to revealing the way in which women struggled with feminism and heterosexuality with conversations revealing their own difficulty with the terms (see Lara in chapter eight), or the misunderstandings that discussions of these identities can bring (see Hilary, section 6.2.2.1) or their efforts to apply their feminism to their sexual activities (see Jo and Sarah, section 6.2.1.1). Finally, centralising the interaction that occurs in focus groups, also revealed the way in which the participants resisted conversations around feminism and heterosexuality. In section 6.2.2.1, Joanna and Carol close down the discussion, refusing to engage with the topics presented. In chapter seven, Tina makes very clear her refusal of the terms under consideration, whilst Meredith, Amanda and Vicky employ show concessions to subvert my attempts to talk about feminism and heterosexuality. Only through centralising the talk of the participants and their interaction within the focus group, are these important aspects to an understanding of feminist heterosexuality revealed.

9.3.2 Data Analysis

In chapter three I noted that multi-method research could occur either at the time of data collection, or at the point of analysis (McKendrick 1999). Within this project, it occurred at both levels. Different forms of analysis were used on the same data - in particular the focus groups - in order to centralise the participants' conversations and the meaning built up during their interactions. While thematic analysis (chapter six) was helpful to understand the broad categories that the participants discussed, it also highlighted the areas that were avoided. As the framing power of the media became more apparent, discursive analysis (chapter seven) identified the patterns of meaning which were linked to structured power relations. The language the participants were using became central to the analysis and I became aware that they were hesitant to discuss their own sexual practice. I began to consider the wider links that were structuring the conversation.

For feminist cultural politics thematic discourse analysis is useful for providing an overview of the topics of conversation, breaking them down into understandable categories and looking for the similarities and differences both within and across the themes. Its particular strength is in summarising a large body of data and prioritising particular themes. At the same time, these can create problems. Thematic analysis can often seem to be reductionist, removing
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conversations from their context and losing sight of the larger framework. Thematic discourse analysis within feminist media research must be used with rigorous attention to the finer details of the conversations being conducted to prevent the lose of important information. In particular, I would like to address the use of conversation analysis and narrative analysis, which, while not producing the same kind of data, offers support for the major themes identified. Neither form of analysis has been widely used within feminist media research, and it is a particular strength of this project to use these three in combination to build a larger argument.

Conversation analysis provided the means for me to admire the ability of the participants to resist topics offered for discussion, while at the same time providing an opportunity to critique the resistance, without criticising the individual women. As noted in chapter seven, recent discussions have considered whether conversation analysis is ‘appropriate’ for feminism (Speer 1999) or whether the two are incompatible (Hepburn 2000). I do not intend to confront that debate, but instead suggest the use of conversation analysis as a means to respect the participants’ opinions, achieve a reflexive distance from the data and open up dense and confusing areas for analysis.

Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1997) have written:

Feminist social scientists apparently feel an overwhelming obligation to be [...] ‘nice’ to research participants: and saying, particularly in print, that we disagree with them is not seen as ‘nice’ (p. 572).

Research on women who identify as feminist conducted by feminist researchers has been notoriously difficult because of the degrees of sameness and difference which enter into all interactions (see for example, Bailey 1997; Griffin 1989; Hurd & McIntyre 1996; Kitzinger et al. 1996; Percy & Kremer 1995; Rhodebeck 1996). The researcher shares with the participants an identity as a feminist but definitions of feminism and the extent of commitment to it may vary widely. These differences in definition may create a disagreement between the researcher and her participants either during the data collection phase or in later analysis. Often, because of the ‘researcher’ role, we do not challenge our participants’ views, even when we disagree with them during focus groups or interview which can cause conflict when we wish to criticise them in print afterwards. As I became more involved with the data, I realised that I did not agree with some of
the things that my participants were saying. While I wanted to recognise the
dynamics of sameness and difference in the data, I did not want to swaddle the
arguments in sisterliness or false consciousness to cover my disagreement.

Conversation analysis provided the means to move beyond simple
conclusions of false consciousness or essential feminism, to consider the intricate
and complex way in which the women interacted in the focus groups. Rather than
dupes of patriarchy, the analysis provides rich details of the ways in which women
were actively constructing a feminist identity in contrast to the one being offered by
the moderator.

Narrative or biographical analysis also deserves more attention within
feminist media studies. It offers particular advantages that the other forms of
analysis exclude. Thematic and discursive analysis work broadly across the data,
organising the participants' contributions into themes, categories and discourses,
irrespective of the contributor. Conversation analysis is concerned with the small
details of talk and the devices employed by the conversants. Again, it works across
the data and is more concerned with interaction than the individual's contributions.
Biographical analysis provides the means to return the person to the research.
Within this particular project it has been useful in three ways. First, taking the
individual as the unit of analysis gives a much fuller picture of the women involved in
the research project. It allows them to speak for themselves much more than either
the thematic approach or discursive analysis taken earlier. Like a thematic
approach, the biographical analysis began by considering the major themes of the
research - feminism, media and heterosex - but tracing these through the individual
provided a much fuller picture of their use within the different data sets. As well, in a
similar manner to the discursive analysis, the detailed look at each woman's
narratives and stories allowed their perspectives to emerge and present themselves.

Second, working across the data ignored the ways in which the women
individually struggled with the topics under consideration throughout the research
process. While the other methods used provided evidence of the difficulty of these
topics for consideration, they revealed nothing about the individual participants'
 attempts to talk about them throughout their involvement in the research. Where the
other forms of analysis left me disappointed in the lack of confrontation over issues
of feminism and heterosexuality, the narrative analysis returned to me my sense of
the wider project and of the importance of continuing to raise these issues within feminism.

Narrative analysis provides a unique opportunity for feminist cultural studies to re-present the individual as an integral part of the ethnography. A fuller picture is provided of the negotiations that take place, both at the level of their interaction with media texts, and with their own understanding of identity, sexual activity and politics. It illuminates "the various forces bearing on the construction of meaning [...] not only between the institutional production of meaning and the audience's production of meaning, but also within each of these 'moments' (van Zoonen 1994: 148). In chapter two, I noted that often heterosexual women had been reluctant to contribute to the debate around feminism and heterosexuality. Narrative analysis provides a unique way to redress this inadequacy. Not only are the voices of heterosexual feminists returned to the discussion, but they are presented in a fully contextualised way that shows the deeper and longer struggle that they have encountered in working through the meanings of these two identities.

9.3.4 Multi-methods and Holistic Media Research

Working through the text and the encoding of heterosexuality and feminism, to the consumption of media items by a particular audience, I have begun the process of holistic media research. Rather than positing one aspect with more defining power and agency than another, I attempted to account for the different structures of power that met across the media spectrum. Adopting a feminist cultural studies approach to this, and placing it both within Alasuutari's (1999) third generation of media studies, and Ang's (1996) consideration of radical contextualism, epistemological difficulties became secondary. Rather what became centralised was the cultural political perspective from which the work is approached and the wider connections to structure and discourse which can be made. In chapter two I noted that few feminist media research projects (with the exception of Hobson 1982; Radway 1984; Taylor 1989) had made the links to a political economy analysis of the media.

A broad approach to the media provides a feminist cultural politics with the means to analyse the "(meta-)discourses within which both media consumption and media scholarship itself are constituted" (Morley 1999: 204). Second, it reveals that power and agency are not absolutes within the media text or its consumption.
Neither the nature of consumption, nor the meaning of text are fully defined and delimited. Both are open to influence or alternative readings and the power they hold is highly contingent. Although the initial results from the questionnaire study and content analysis suggested that feminists unwittingly colluded with the mainstreaming of a feminist agenda, the more detailed questionnaire responses revealed the techniques they employed to ensure their issue was covered. The audience also asserted power in its consumption of the images, either outrightly rejecting them or parodying them and creating a subversive sense of community. Power was ultimately returned to a media framework through hegemonic discourses of women's sexuality, but agency continued to exist. The detailed examination of the women's conversations showed the different ways that they resisted these constructions and asserted their feminism within their own relationships.

Finally, a multi-layered and multi-methodological approach to the media made it possible to trace issues from their encoding, to their consumption by individuals. It provided the means to assess the mediated representation of heterosexuality and the structuring of institutionalised heterosexuality in the media. At the same time, it was possible to move to the intersection of institutionalised and mediated images, with the practice of consumption and lived experience.

For feminist theory, holistic media research, employing different methods of data collection and analysis, provides a means to overcome some of the criticisms raised in chapters one and two. In addition, it develops the work both within feminist theory of heterosexuality and heterosex, and feminist cultural studies. A broader approach to the media which recognises the importance of both fact and fiction, their encoding and consumption, bridges the divide between heterosexuality as institution and as lived experience. It works with heterosexual feminists at the intersection of these two and brings to light their pleasure and resistance in their personal lives. Second, it suggests that any theorising by heterosexual feminists is sharply contained by hegemonic and institutionalised heterosexuality. Finally, it makes clear the ongoing difficulty of these topics for discussion and suggests the need for further and different approaches for development.

9.4 Limitations, Contributions and Future Considerations

When I began this research, I was eager to challenge the idea within feminism that heterosexual women had not offered a political analysis of their
heterosexuality or sexual practice. I naively thought that it would be a matter of listing different approaches, and using these to fill the gaps in current analyses of heterosexuality. It quickly became apparent though, not only that women were hesitant or resistant to speak about their heterosexual practice in political terms, but that my own ideas were extremely limited and bounded by heterosexist understandings. At the same time, I want to emphasis the radical learning process that has occurred throughout this project and the pleasure I obtained in having conversations with these different women. Although they were at times resistant to the topics I suggested their enthusiasm and commitment reveals the importance of these issues to women identifying as feminist and heterosexual.

Several limitations to the project provide opportunities for ongoing research. Missing from this thesis is a thorough analysis of the process of media production. Although the media analysis was approached in a multi-layered and multi-method format, the area of production was largely ignored. In future studies I think it is crucial that the production of media items by journalists and media corporations is conducted, in order to more fully understand the process of encoding feminism and heterosexuality. I would suggest that future research investigates the history of media items addressing these issues to consider the contribution of the journalist and the structures of power that both inhibit and frame the creation of mediated feminism and heterosexuality.

The research is also limited to a fairly small and relatively homogenous group of women. Although geographically diverse, covering a wide age range, many of the women within the thesis are students, schoolteachers or academics, all are able-bodied and most are white. Such homogeneity could have obscured or precluded conversations about particular aspects of heterosexual practice. The very dominance of heterosexuality may have left unexamined crucial areas of sexual practice simply because of its greater social power. Why, for instance, were the women hesitant to speak about their sexual practice or to engage in self-referential politics? Although enthusiastically addressing and analysing institutionalised heterosexuality, many of the women were silent about their own sexual relations. Several factors may be pertinent to these silences. As Hollway suggests (1995), they may not have access to a discourse which allows them to discuss their sexual activities from a feminist perspective; or perhaps they shied away from discussing their sexual relationships in front of friends and acquaintances who knew their
partners, or perhaps heterosexual feminists are reluctant to contribute to the debate. Only further research which recognises the diverse nature of feminism (i.e. the challenges raised by black feminists [hooks 1981]), could consider the range of other subject positions available (ethnicity, class, sexuality) and how these discourses intersect with gender and heterosexuality in different (and perhaps contradictory) ways.

I have suggested that the different forms of analysis used on the focus group data in particular not only works as a means of triangulation, but also provides a fuller and richer picture of the participants. It would be misleading to suggest that this provides a complete analysis or that I have determined the 'correct' answer. First, the data is presented in extract form - transcribed verbatim - but nonetheless missing the character and nature of the conversation. The voices presented are flat, losing any sense of the excitement and commitment with which the discussions were conducted. Second, the data displayed is only representative of the fuller corpus and is removed from its original context. Third, the interpretation of the analysis that is provided is mine. It has not been returned to the participants to receive their comments denying them input to the final results. Future research seeking to develop a discourse, which allows the discussion of heterosexual practice within feminism, should attempt a collaborative approach, allowing the researcher and participant to discuss their differences and disagreements, and providing for ongoing reflexivity within the research process.

Despite these limitations, the thesis contains many strengths and makes important contributions to feminist cultural politics. It centralised the experiences and perspectives of heterosexual feminists within the debates of heterosexuality and feminism, highlighting their struggles with these identities within a society characterised by heteropatriarchy. Rather than seeing the data as representative of a transparent reality, the thesis suggested that the way the women talked about heterosexuality and feminism served a particular purpose within the discussion. Its strength lies in centralising the interaction between the participants, and the participants and the moderator, and using this to consider the topics under analysis. The process highlighted the normalisation of heterosexuality and the way in which the women's experiences were confined by hegemonic discourses of heteronormativity.
The thesis moved the current research on feminism and heterosexuality forward. Drawing on the earlier work of Hamblin (1985) and Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1993) with heterosexual feminists, the thesis considered their sexual practice and their interactions with an institutionalised heterosexuality in the form of the media. It considers their position at the intersection of the practice and politics of heterosexuality, and reveals both the possible complacency of this position and the struggles that it entails. Feminism and heterosexuality warrants further investigation, perhaps in the collaborative way suggested above, or by a more detailed examination of particular aspects of heterosexuality. Research on marriage and feminism is noticeably absent from the literature and could provide insight to the powerful role of heterosexuality. Why do women who identify as feminist marry?

The thesis makes important contributions to feminist media studies, particularly in the areas of research it opens up. An important strength of the thesis lies in its analysis of mediated representations of heterosex. Long ignored within media studies, these images are open and available for analysis. Future research could consider a wider study of these mediated representations, moving beyond the narrow genre of neo-film noir to a wider study of sex scenes. In addition, research should not only consider heterosex scenes, but also lesbian and gay sexual representations. A particular area to pursue could consider whether lesbian and gay sex scenes within mainstream media are constructed within a heterosexual framework, or whether their encoding escapes from this dominant discourse.

Bridging the research between fictional and factual reporting is another strength of the thesis. Recognising that the audience’s media experience is not formed in isolation places the research within the wider construction of heterosexuality. Importantly, it highlights the neo-liberal framework that is reproduced through the media and into the women’s individualised sexual politics. Further research could consider the ongoing interplay between these two areas of media production and representation, working through themes raised in one area and reproduced in another. One genre in which this could be useful would be in further research on the docu-drama and its status as fact and fiction.

Finally, the research has identified the importance of a multi-layered, multi-methodological approach to the media. I do not suggest that one aspect has more power to define meaning than another, but rather that looking at different levels of media encoding and decoding can account for the different power structures that
exist across the spectrum of the media. It reveals the changing relationship between feminism and the public sphere, placing the thesis within a broader framework and giving it a depth of richness and detail.

As I conclude the thesis, I feel both relieved and excited. Relieved because it is the culmination of many hours of work, but excited because I have made a significant contribution to the literature and have learned and developed my own understandings along the way. I am left with a firm commitment to understanding and deconstructing heterosexuality and sexual practice, to making the links between practice and institution that will allow for resistance and trying to build this towards activism. I am most aware that these conversations must continue. I believe that what happens between the sheets, is connected to who washes them (and in fact who owns and manufactures them). Importantly, conversations around these activities, and their links to a wider structural form of heterosexuality, help to reveal the way in which "male domination is colluded with and resisted and the many other means by which women's subordination is perpetuated and challenged" (Jackson 1995a: 134). The conversation must begin at the most basic level of our sexual activity, as all feminist conversations have. In the way that consciousness-raising was essential to the links made by feminists between the personal and political, so must our conversation start with the micro-politics of our sexual activities and work out to the wider structures of oppression, both our own and those in which we are complicit. They must recognise the currently individualised nature of our sexual politics and the role of the media in constructing an ideology of heterosexuality.
Notes to Chapter 9

1 I did actually use a group of friends for one of the pilot study conversations. Although different in some ways from the other groups, the discussion shared similarities with the focus groups.

2 Although having to spend the rest of your life with Michael Douglas is probably the worst punishment.
Appendix A

Chart of Aims, Methods and Analysis
To consider the use and application of a range of different methods for a feminist cultural politics.

To understand the role of the media in formulating feminist and heterosexual identities.

To contribute to the wider literature within Feminism about heterosexuality and sexual practices.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIMS</th>
<th>AIM 1, 2, 3</th>
<th>AIM 1, 2, 3</th>
<th>AIM 1, 2, 3</th>
<th>AIM 1, 2, 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANALYSIS</td>
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<td>Qualitative analysis</td>
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<td>Quantitative analysis</td>
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<td>Statistical analysis</td>
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<td>Telephone interviews</td>
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<td>Focus Groups</td>
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<td>Heterosexual</td>
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<td>On Being Feminist and</td>
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<td>Chapter 8</td>
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<td>Resistance</td>
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<td>Let's Talk About Sex</td>
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<td>Chapter 7</td>
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<td>Pleasure and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourses of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heterosexuality in Film</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex and</td>
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<td>Chapter 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feminising Feminism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Appendix A
Appendix B

Faces of Feminism Questionnaire
LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY

FACES OF FEMINISM IN THE BRITISH MASS MEDIA

This questionnaire investigates representations of feminism and feminists in selected British mass media and the use of the media by feminists. You have been sent this questionnaire as a result of a particular instance of media coverage you recently received. All questions are straightforward and most require you to respond by simply ticking boxes or circling answers. The questionnaire is divided into several subject areas.

Please answer all questions that apply to you and return the questionnaire within TWO WEEKS in the stamped, addressed envelope provided.

The questionnaire is entirely the responsibility of Loughborough University Social Sciences Department and is funded by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council. All information will be treated in the strictest confidence. Your answers will not be identifiable in the report.

If you have any queries or comments please use the space provided at the end of the questionnaire or contact Sara-Jane Finlay (01509 228351).

Thank you for your help.

This identification number is used for administrative purposes only.
To prevent us reapproaching you unnecessarily, please do not remove.
SECTION ONE

This section asks you about the media coverage you recently received which is referred to in the accompanying letter. PLEASE NOTE: for all the questions in this section answer only for the particular instance of media coverage mentioned in the letter.

1. Were you aware you received this particular instance of media coverage? (Please tick ONE only)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but I have NOT seen this particular article</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, and I have seen this article</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How did this particular contact with the media come about? (Please tick ONE only)

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I contacted the media directly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone else responsible for media relations within my organisation contacted the media.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The media contacted me directly without any prompting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The media contacted someone else who is responsible for media relations within my organisation without any prompting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was no personal contact with the media as far as I know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. For this particular report how did you speak to the media? Main refers to the central interview or conversation. Secondary refers to any initial or follow-up contact. (Please tick ONE in the MAIN column and as many as necessary in the SECONDARY column)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MAIN</th>
<th>SECONDARY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the telephone</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to face</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not speak to them but sent them some material</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I decided not to respond to them at all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. Referring to your MAIN contact above, who did you speak to in the media? (Tick ONE only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A journalist from the national or local press/radio/TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A freelance journalist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A journalist from a news agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A researcher for national or local television/radio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. For this particular instance of media coverage, did any of the following occur in either the interview or the article? (Tick ALL that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you refer to yourself as a feminist?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the journalist refer to you as a feminist?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you refer to feminism as an integral part of the issue?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the journalist refer to feminism as an integral part of the issue?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feminism was not raised as part of the issue.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feminism was not relevant to the issue discussed.</td>
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</table>

6. For this particular instance, were you satisfied with the coverage you received? (Tick ONE only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments?

__________________________
7. In relation to this particular instance of media coverage, in your opinion were each of the following accurate or inaccurate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Accurate</th>
<th>Inaccurate</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of the issue</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>General interpretation of the</td>
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<tr>
<td>issue by the reporter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of quotations or clips from</td>
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<tr>
<td>a pre-recorded interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description of your title or</td>
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<tr>
<td>position</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of technical terms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representation of feminism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representation of feminists</td>
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</table>

8. Do you think anything essential was omitted from this particular instance of media coverage? (Tick ONE only)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, the most important elements of the issue were</td>
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<tr>
<td>omitted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, it omitted a good deal, but included the most</td>
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<tr>
<td>important elements of the issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, it left out some important elements but they</td>
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<tr>
<td>were not relevant to the media report.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No nothing essential was omitted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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9. Would you be willing to co-operate with the media in the future? (Tick ONE only)

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<tr>
<td>Definitely</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probably</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probably not</td>
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<tr>
<td>Definitely not</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
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SECTION TWO

This section asks you more generally about your interaction with the media and your opinion on the representation of feminists and feminist issues.

10. On average, how often are you approached for comment by the media? (Tick ONE only)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
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<td>Once a fortnight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twice a year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
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<tr>
<td>This is the first time</td>
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</table>

11. Generally, when you are asked to speak in the media, are you:- (Tick ONE only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always asked to speak about women's issues that are related to your work/research/position?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mostly asked to speak about women's issues that are related to your work/research/position?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes asked to speak about an area of women's issues that is not related to your work/research/position?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently asked to speak about women's issues that are not related to your work/research/position?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always asked to speak about women's issues, regardless of whether you have expertise on the particular topic?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Never asked to speak about women's issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</table>

12. Generally, when you are asked to speak in the media, are you labelled as a feminist?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. If yes, are you happy with this label?

| Yes, I am happy to be called a feminist |  |
| I don't mind if I am or not |  |
| No, I don't like being called a feminist |  |

14. Feminist media researchers have made some statements about the representation of feminist and women's issues in the media. Please indicate for each media type whether, in general, you agree or disagree with each one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Tabloid Press</th>
<th>Broadsheet Press</th>
<th>Television and Radio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The media doesn't have enough coverage about issues relating to everyday women&quot;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The media provides adequate cover of feminist issues&quot;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Stories about women in the media are frequently distorted and one dimensional&quot;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Feminists are stereotyped in the media&quot;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The media gives out incorrect information about women and their role in today's society&quot;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Feminists are treated unfairly in the media&quot;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The media has given feminism a bad name&quot;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The media ignores feminist issues&quot;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The media recognises the gains that feminism has made for women&quot;</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
SECTION THREE

In this section we ask you about yourself and your job. This information is used to contextualise the research.

15. What is your age? (Please circle ONE only):

| 25 or younger | 26 to 35 | 36 to 45 | 46 to 55 | 56 to 65 | 66 or over |

16. How would you describe your ethnicity? (Please circle ONE only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black Caribbean</th>
<th>Black African</th>
<th>Black Other</th>
<th>Asian Other</th>
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<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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16b. What is your nationality?

17. Are you: (Please circle ONE only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Separated</th>
<th>Cohabiting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never Married</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</table>

18. Please choose the statement that most closely resembles your personal identity in relation to feminism.

I am a feminist

I am sympathetic to feminist issues, but do not call myself a feminist

I am not a feminist

Other (please specify)
SECTION FOUR

This section asks questions about the core issues of this research project, and should only be completed if you consider yourself a heterosexual feminist according to the definitions given in the introductory letter. The first part asks you to consider depictions of sexual activity on television and in films, and is followed by questions which ask for you to comment from your own experience. Please consider these questions optional. There is space at the end of every question for extra comments.

19. Do you find scenes of heterosexual sex in films and on television:— (Tick ONE only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally I find scenes of heterosexual sex believable and similar to experiences in real life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It varies, sometimes I find them believable and like real life, other times I find them completely fictional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally I find scenes of heterosexual sex unbelievable and not similar to real life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

20. Are these media portrayals of heterosexual sex like your own sexual activities? (Tick ONE only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly, yes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly, no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. Please explain why your sexual activities are similar to or different from the media portrayals.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
22. Do you think that it is important for heterosexual feminists to consider their feminist politics in regard to their sexual activities? (Circle ONE only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comments?

23. Do you consider your sexual relations to be: - (Tick ONE only)

- Mostly feminist (please go to question 24a)
- Mostly not feminist (please go to question 24b)
- Mostly separate from your feminism (please go to question 24c)
- Not sure

24a. How is the sex you have feminist?

24b. How is the sex you have not feminist?

24c. How do you keep your sex life separate from your feminism?
Thank you for the time and care you have taken in completing this questionnaire. Please use the space below for any comments you would like to make - either about the questionnaire or the research topic itself.

To save us having to trouble you further, please return your completed questionnaire within **TWO WEEKS** in the postage-paid, addressed envelope.

If you would like to include any samples of media coverage of your research or work they would be gratefully received.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP
Appendix C

Participant Details
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Diary</th>
<th>Interview</th>
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<td>RG-1</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Lecturer</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>RG-10</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>Separated</td>
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Appendix D

Media Consumption Diary Sheets
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Title:</th>
<th>Type:</th>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Book</th>
<th>TV Programme</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Date of viewing/reading: - | Time of viewing/reading: - |

If necessary, please continue on either a new sheet or the back of this sheet.
Appendix E

Focus Group Schedule
Focus Group Schedule - Revised

- What do you think of the media's portrayal of heterosexual sex?
- What do you think of the media's portrayal of female characters engaging in heterosexual sex?
- What do you think of the media's portrayal of feminist characters engaging in heterosexual sex?
- How is the media portrayal like or unlike your sexual activities? What do you do that is different/similar? Why do you think it is different/similar?

Disclosure Clip

1) Have you seen this movie? What do you remember about it? Did you remember the sex scenes?
2) What did you think of the lead female character?
3) What did you think of the lead male character?
4) What did you think about the sex? What did you think about what she did to him? What did you think about what he did to her?
5) Was the sex pleasurable for her/him? In what ways was it or was it not pleasurable? Why do you think it was or was it not pleasurable?
6) Do you see the sex as being consistent with feminist ideas? Why/why not?
7) How would you change the scene to make it feminist?
8) Do you think that they are resisting any stereotypes of heterosexuality? How are they doing this? What would you change in order to have this happen?
9) Do you see the sex in the clip as being like/unlike your own sexual activities? In what ways?

Basic Instinct Clip (repeat questions 1 to 9)

Body of Evidence Clip (repeat questions 1 to )

10) Do you think it is important for heterosexual feminists to politicise their sexual relations? Why or why not?
   • what makes your sex feminist/not feminist/separate from your feminism? How does this happen? What do you do?
   • if you see them as separate, how are they separate? Why are they separate?
   • can you think of ways in which your sexual actions can be feminist? How? What would you do?

11) How do you combine your feminism with your sex life?
12) What do you think of options like non-monogamy, non-penetrative sex, negotiation, claiming heterosexuality, raising children, choosing a partner because they are 'different' from you (racially, by class etc.) etc.
Appendix F

Telephone Interview Schedule
Feminism, Heterosex and the Media
A Follow-up

I would be happy for you to contact me by telephone to discuss the issues listed below.

I would prefer you didn't contact me.

Issues for discussion

- When or how did you first become aware of feminism?
- When did you decide you were a feminist?
- What issues within feminism were and are important to you?
- Feminism has always made an issue of sexuality, what do you think of this?
- What do you think about feminism's concern with heterosexuality?
- How have you been aware of this in your own life?
- What concerns do you have about feminism's interest in heterosexuality?
- Do you think you'll always be a feminist?
- Do you think feminism will always be necessary?

- Have you had any thoughts about the project over the year?
- Have you been more aware of heterosexual sex scenes in the media?

The best time to contact me is:

The best day to contact me is:

The best number to reach me on is:
Appendix G

Woman's Own

Sleeping with the Enemy
He raped me after our son was born

My sister's violent marriage put me off men and I had never heard of the S Jimmy community. When I met my husband, I thought 'I'll have to marry someone so why not?'

We went to Sunderland to work in his family's shop and live in the flat upstairs with his parents. Two days after the wedding, he dragged me by my hair into our flat and slammed his fist into my face.

I was sick of my identical room and my husband. I was sick of my identical life. I was sick of being a housewife. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of living in Sunderland and being the same.

I was in hospital for four months with high blood pressure before my first son was born. Two days after he was born, I was already pregnant. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of being a housewife. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of living in Sunderland and being the same.

When I visited my family, I broke down and my parents agreed to let me up. I was about to start work, but my parents got a lot of help from my mother-in-law. She turned her home into a temporary shelter for me.

In the end, I got out and never lived with another man. I was a financial success and the only good thing that came out of it is my beautiful son.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - THE WAY FORWARD

Sister's violent marriage put me off men and I had never heard of the Jimmy community. When I met my husband, I thought 'I'll have to marry someone so why not?'

We went to Sunderland to work in his family's shop and live in the flat upstairs with his parents. Two days after the wedding, he dragged me by my hair into our flat and slammed his fist into my face.

I was sick of my identical room and my husband. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of living in Sunderland and being the same.

I was in hospital for four months with high blood pressure before my first son was born. Two days after he was born, I was already pregnant. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of being a housewife. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of living in Sunderland and being the same.

When I visited my family, I broke down and my parents agreed to let me up. I was about to start work, but my parents got a lot of help from my mother-in-law. She turned her home into a temporary shelter for me.

In the end, I got out and never lived with another man. I was a financial success and the only good thing that came out of it is my beautiful son.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - THE WAY FORWARD

Sister's violent marriage put me off men and I had never heard of the Jimmy community. When I met my husband, I thought 'I'll have to marry someone so why not?'

We went to Sunderland to work in his family's shop and live in the flat upstairs with his parents. Two days after the wedding, he dragged me by my hair into our flat and slammed his fist into my face.

I was sick of my identical room and my husband. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of living in Sunderland and being the same.

I was in hospital for four months with high blood pressure before my first son was born. Two days after he was born, I was already pregnant. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of being a housewife. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of living in Sunderland and being the same.

When I visited my family, I broke down and my parents agreed to let me up. I was about to start work, but my parents got a lot of help from my mother-in-law. She turned her home into a temporary shelter for me.

In the end, I got out and never lived with another man. I was a financial success and the only good thing that came out of it is my beautiful son.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - THE WAY FORWARD

Sister's violent marriage put me off men and I had never heard of the Jimmy community. When I met my husband, I thought 'I'll have to marry someone so why not?'

We went to Sunderland to work in his family's shop and live in the flat upstairs with his parents. Two days after the wedding, he dragged me by my hair into our flat and slammed his fist into my face.

I was sick of my identical room and my husband. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of living in Sunderland and being the same.

I was in hospital for four months with high blood pressure before my first son was born. Two days after he was born, I was already pregnant. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of being a housewife. I was sick of having a child. I was sick of living in Sunderland and being the same.

When I visited my family, I broke down and my parents agreed to let me up. I was about to start work, but my parents got a lot of help from my mother-in-law. She turned her home into a temporary shelter for me.

In the end, I got out and never lived with another man. I was a financial success and the only good thing that came out of it is my beautiful son.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - THE WAY FORWARD

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Appendix H

The Express

Don't Tell Me It's Fine,
I Can Feel It Isn't.
The breast cancer debate

Don’t tell me it’s fine:
I can feel it isn’t

Shan Li tells ELEANOR BAILEY how she crossed the medical minefield

It is well known that the UK has one of the worst mortality rates for breast cancer in the world. One of the reasons is that the standards of treatment across the country varies enormously. Women lucky enough to be in an area with a large specialist breast cancer unit, with experienced consultants are seen sooner, diagnosed sooner and treated sooner. They have a much better chance of recovery. But there are many areas where treatment is not up to standard. The Royal Society Of Medicine revealed that even the quality of counselling a woman receives is a lottery.

Next Tuesday an all-party working group will publish the results of its investigation into standards. The results will reveal where breast cancer treatment is falling on a national basis – but there will be no naming and shaming and a woman still won’t know how good her local service is. However, we will know where more money needs to be invested.

In the meantime, a woman can take steps to look after her own health. That’s what the UK BBC campaign is all about. Breast cancer nurse consultant at Breast Cancer Care, answers the most asked questions.

1. Can breast cancer be caused by a knock or a fall?
There is no evidence to suggest this.

2. Is it RRT a cause?
For women who are post-menopausal, there is a small increased risk following 10 years of HRT. The positive benefits of reduced risk of heart disease should be weighed against this. For women who have artificially induced menopause, HRT doesn’t seem to carry any higher risk.

3. What about genetics?
Only a small number of women (10 per cent) are hereditary. If you have a family history your GP can refer you to a family history clinic.

4. Why doesn’t screening start at 35?
Breast cancer is uncommon in younger women – only 30 per cent occurs in pre-menopausal women. In the UK the effectiveness of screening for younger women has not been examined. Lives actually saved are not thought to be gained by screening. Therefore women should not be afraid to ask their GP to consider breast changes, including lumps, in their GP’s surgery. They should feel the lump until if appropriate.

5. Why did my GP tell me “If I had a pound for every lump I see that’s benign, I’d be a rich man”?
This alludes to the fact that nine out of 10 lumps are benign. Therefore women should not be afraid to report any breast changes, including lumps, in their GP’s surgery. They should feel the lump until if appropriate.

Join the Express campaign to end
the breast cancer lottery of care

TWO YEARS ago, a series of NHS recommendations was issued to health trusts outlining how breast cancer services should be run. But that’s all they were — guidelines. The Express has launched a campaign with UK Breast Cancer Coalition for every woman to have the best possible treatment.

THE NHS GUIDELINES
We are campaigning for these to be implemented throughout the country.

○ Specialist breast-care team. Every patient should be seen by a specialist team, including designated breast surgeons, breast care nurse, pathologist, radiologist and nurse who deal with at least 100 new patients a year.

○ Information. At every stage, patients should be offered clear, objective, full and prompt information.

○ Triple-assessment diagnosis. For a reliable diagnosis, you should receive an examination by a doctor, a needle biopsy of the area, and a mammogram (X-ray) of the breast. When the three tests give consistent results, a positive or negative diagnosis can be given in most cases.

○ Psycho-social support. Should be available at every stage for patients and families.

○ Hormone receptor tests. After surgery, the pathologist should give a detailed report on the tumour to help formulate an individual treatment plan.

○ Mammography. To be carried out annually during the first five years after surgery, every two years thereafter.

○ Written care plan. Patient and specialist should agree on all steps possible treatment.

○ To register your support, please send the coupon below into Life, The Express, 245 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 9SV.

○ The UKBBC information helpline, sponsored by Cable & Wireless and First Direct, can refer you to local nurses and volunteers. Call cost be a minute

0870 900 2299

The UKBBC/Express website is http://campaigns.express.co.uk/UKBBC

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UK Breast Cancer Coalition

Campaign

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I believe that all women are entitled to the highest standard of care as outlined in the NHS guidelines for purchasers. I support the Express/UKBBC campaign to end the breast cancer lottery

THE EXPRESS THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25

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Appendix I

Woman's Hour

Maternity Rights
Before the news at 10am
In a couple of minutes a landmark ruling in the High Court for women who take maternity leave.

At the start of Woman's Hour
Hello, today Juliet Stevenson on Cider with Rose. How one woman's battle for maternity rights could affect thousands of others. "After I had given birth to my little girl Elizabeth I had postnatal depression afterwards. I sought to try and extend my leave slightly but um the company decided no I'd had some sick leave during my maternity leave so they decided that was where my job came to an end. Plus a wake up call from Victorian times ...

Preceding programme
Juliet Stevenson on her role in Cider with Rose - quite serious story, covers.
Reading from Juliet Stevenson from Nana
MC Just four days ago came a landmark ruling which could affect maternity rights for thousands of women. On Friday the Court of Appeal ruled that a Cheshire medical company had sexually discriminated against one of its employees by refusing to take her back to work following maternity leave. Marion Halfpenny spoke to our reporter Emma Jane Kirby after Friday's ruling and explained how her problems had begun.

MH Unfortunately for me it was a complicated pregnancy with unfortunate side effects. I could have miscarried, so I did actually have a time off work through the complications. But after I had given birth to my little girl Elizabeth, I had post-natal depression afterwards. I sought to try and extend my leave slightly because of the actual illness but the company decided, no I'd had some sick leave during my maternity leave so they decided that was the end of the road for me. And decided that um that's where my job came to an end.

EJK How did you feel that day when you were told that your employment had been terminated?

MH Well I was really devastated because not only was I ill but actually reconciling the fact that my job had gone, I sought, I did my best to try and keep my job open by being in contact with the company and trying to see if they would, in these exceptional circumstances, whether or not they would actually sort of be a bit more lenient. But they weren't prepared to do so, so that's when I decided to take some action, because I couldn't find it justifiable a company would take that sort of stance really.

EJK Let's look at it from your employer's point of view, they were obviously paying you to do a job which you were unable to do, but which they needed somebody to do.

MH Yes.

EJK Can you not see from their point of view that they have to put business interests above the needs of one individual.

MH Yes, I can see that point, and I have no problem with that, but where it sort of broke down with me is the fact that there was a man who worked for the same organisation in the same office as myself and he had oh a much longer period of time off sick through a back illness basically, but the company through that time they decided to review his progress and sought medical advice etc on how he might be able to return to his job and they bent over backwards to, to help him, assist him, but with me, unfortunately because mine was pregnancy related decided that was enough.

EJK Now your case is being, already it's being labelled as a landmark case in sexual discrimination law, how do you feel about it? Do you think it will help other women?

MH Very much so, many women sort of aren't actually aware of their rights in fact, and it's a very, very complicated area of law. I hope it just makes the law a little bit more clear because there's many companies themselves aren't sure of the law and many ladies themselves who similarly get ill at the end of pregnancy, um, up until now there's been a lot of uncertainty so at least, hopefully this will clear up many uncertainties that have previously existed.

MC Marion Halfpenny talking to Emma Jane Kirby. So what are the implications of the ruling? Christine Goodridge is director of the campaign group Maternity Alliance. Stephen Allainbreis is head of parliamentary affairs at the Federation of Small Businesses and Claire Hockney from the Equal Opportunities Commission was Marion's lawyer. Claire obviously good news for Marion but is it going to make a difference to other women as far as maternity leave goes.

CH Yes it will because up until last year if a woman was on the long maternity leave, extended maternity leave, or was unable to physically return due to illness, then she lost her right to return, lost her job. And what this case has clarified is that if an employer does this, doesn't allow a woman to return to work, then she will be able to claim sex discrimination and provided she will be able to show that there is a man um at work that was given preferable treatment, as there was in this case, then she will be able to claim successfully sex discrimination. Because Christine that first day back used to be vital.

CG Yes we used to have to advise women to, if they were sick, get carried into work if only for an hour on the first day back after maternity leave and not get run over by a bus, because it used to be the case that if you were run over by a bus on your way back to work after maternity leave, you lost your job, and an easy comparison of showing how unfair it is, if you looked at a man who was off on a skiing holiday and he broke his leg, no one would dream of saying you can't, you can't have your job back because you can't return to work on the first day
after the end of your holiday. So this was so unfair but does make an awful lot of difference, it clarifies things, but it's not the way we ought to be clarifying things really.

MC How do you think employers are likely to react?

SA I think employers will look at the decision ah with interest, we already know that there may be an appeal to the House of Lords. This is a large firm involved in this and one of their defenses is that they didn't know the law, that the law was very complex, that they intended to do the right thing. And as the report showed that employers do need to look at the whole perspective of the business, but what it breeds in it is unpredictability, is lack of clarity and this just calls into question statutory maternity pay, the whole legislation, very, very complex, highly complex. What we provide for our members is a free legal advice line on all employment matters so they get it right from day one. Employers go up before industrial tribunals and they're just as traumatised by the whole experience as as people, like, like Marion.

MC What are you saying employers attitudes or um it's very difficult to generalise, but do you think oh my goodness we've got women here they're off taking maternity leave, now they're going to come back, they're sick, you know it, do you think it could ultimately result in employers being reluctant to take on women?

SA Legislation Martha in cases like this can lead to some employers and no one condones these saying right if I'm about to recruit I'll try not to employ women of childbearing age. That is illegal, that is wholly wrong, now that may be the unintended consequences of a landmark ruling which means that ministers must grapple with this on maternity and sick leave, that's another big problem and try and bring clarity and predictability so that employees aren't encouraged into that sort of bad behaviour.

MC So what sort of clarity is needed Claire?

CH Well, what we need is we need a simpler um law, at the moment, women's rights are contained in the Employment Rights Act which is their unfair dismissal and also in the Sex Discrimination Act and it's very confusing for women and for employers, so what we need is one act that's simple and we need simple rules so that women don't have complicated rules that they have to follow in order to get their job back because in this case if Marion Halfpenny hadn't given her proper notification provisions that she had to give under statute then the position would have been lot less clear and it may have been a lot less difficult for her to actually have claimed unfair dismissal and sex discrimination.

MC Because Christine there are a whole range of problems that women face when it comes to maternity leave, aren't there?

CG Yes, the law is extraordinarily complex. One of the judges in the Marion Halfpenny case said he needed a wet towel around his head when looking at this area of law.

MC And this is a judge, not some poor woman at work.

CG And it is like that. And the way we've seen improvements happen in the last few years isn't the right way, we've had to take cases, we've got a case at the moment that is challenging the fact that women who earn less than £54 don't get any money when they're on maternity leave because they're excluded from statutory maternity pay. Taking that case involves one woman being very brave and an organisation that's prepared to support her and give a great deal of resources to doing that. We also I think need a change in attitudes because we have an attitude in this country that is just so out of step with reality. And if you do go to Europe and go to countries there you see an entirely different attitude to the fact that people work and have children. The majority of people work, the majority of people are parents. The law hasn't caught up with that and I think in many ways the law ought to be ahead of the demography because there is a very important symbolic value in law saying women work and have babies and we support them doing that. And it should also be saying men work and are fathers and we should be supporting them in doing that. Unfortunately men in this country get no time at all to care for their children and that says that's ok. I think a law that gives men time for their children says men should be having time looking after their children so I think there's a symbolic value in law in changing attitudes as well.

MC Well we are going to be seeing some big changes in the law aren't we with the governments fairness at work White Paper.

CH Yes we are. We will be seeing changes and hopefully that will come in soon. The problem is that in the meantime women have got to grapple with the very difficult and so have employers, they've got to grapple with a very difficult set of rules and all I would say to women is to make sure that they do serve their proper notices and that they, they follow everything in the correct way so that if they can't go back to work because they are ill they make sure that they give in a medical certificate, that they are covered and they keep in touch with their employers.

MC And just explain for clarity again, what giving, serving notice really means, what women need to do there.

CH What they have to do is they have to give in written notice before they go back to work. They have to give it 21 days before they go back and they have to serve that properly on their employer and they also, in the case of Marion Halfpenny, if they want to be able to claim unfair dismissal, if they're not able to go back and eventually need to claim unfair dismissal, sex discrimination or breach of contract, they must have ensured that they keep their employer informed and send in a medical certificate so they're acting just as they would if they were any other employee.
Well as we were saying Stephen, the government's fairness at work proposals are likely to make radical changes to employment law in this country. How have your members been reacting to those proposals?

Small employers in particular are concerned about any new regulations or costs on employers, now parental leave for father's for three months unpaid will provide a competitive disadvantage for small firms. If the large companies provided, and actually pay up, make it paid, so there is an argument about the government stepping in. There has to be a balance struck between rights for workers and employers needing to ensure that jobs are there, that wages can be paid, that profits are there so that the two can be matched. What we're calling for is rights for employers as well wherever possible, and clarity in the law in the legislation, keeping it simple and keeping it quite tight and what we've called for is one equality commission so that we merge the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the new Disability Rights Commission which is about to come on board so that it helps employers about their obligations and rights as well as workers.

So everybody might be clear about what they're position is.

Everyone will be clearer yes, um, I still think there are changes needed. I think we also underestimate how important it is in terms of good employer-employee relations to have good maternity rights and parental rights. The, all the evidence shows that women return if there's good provision and employers retain good staff if there's good provision. And with small employers in particular I think we underestimate how they know they're staff. They're quite likely to know their staff's children, so they'll, if little Billy is ill they'll understand that someone has to take time off work to look after little Billy or whoever.

Let's say the law is changed, there is greater clarity, how is it best implemented. I mean Marion's own case illustrates just how difficult it is in terms of taking things through the industrial tribunal system.

Well, it would be best if we had one law and a simplified system so that everyone knew what they were doing and there wasn't this complex system of notification, and complex rules for women who are only entitled to a small amount of maternity leave, others that are entitled to a longer maternity leave, because that just causes confusion for all parties.

Claire Hockney, Stephen Allenbretis, and Christine Goodridge, thank you all very much. And if you'd like more information about any of the maternity leave rights that we've been discussing you can call the BBC Action Line on 0800 044 044.
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