

Complicity in Contemporary Feminist Discourse

Giuliana Monteverde

BA (Hons) English Literature with Spanish, Faculty
of Arts, Ulster University

MRes, Complicity in Contemporary Feminist
Discourse, Faculty of Arts, Ulster University

Faculty of Arts, Ulster University

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Abstract

Feminism is no longer considered to be pro-woman on the basis of a homogenous female identity or experience. Where previous feminisms relied upon notions of sisterhood based on shared struggle, contemporary feminisms acknowledge the multiple subjectivities of a neoliberal postfeminist society. There have been various shifts across feminist discourse that necessitate research on complicity. Firstly, the continual move from various types of essentialism in feminism, to a broader understanding and incorporation of intersectionality, opens up space for the existence and articulation of a range of subject positions beyond 'man' and 'woman'. Secondly, the pervasiveness of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses and representations across contemporary culture require a nuanced unpicking of what various practices and incarnations of 'feminism' mean, or could mean. I suggest that paying attention to complicity – including our own – enables this. This work poses the question, 'Complicit with what?' and looks at a range of pop-culture case-studies in order to apply complicity as a theoretical tool - or way of seeing. Covering subjects like corporate feminism, cultural appropriation, beauty practices, and domesticity, this research considers our 'foldedness' with one another, and how we can lessen complicity by acknowledging its existence.

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Introduction

'Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!'

A conference I attended in the first year of my PhD confirmed that complicity can be a touchy subject. This is particularly true if complicity is invoked as a means of disapproval or judgement. The conference I attended was a feminist one, and a female professor gave a paper which critiqued the idea that women engage in particular practices for themselves, rather than for men, or in response to societal pressure. The speaker criticised the popular refrain “I’m doing it for myself”, particularly when used by women as a defence for their engagement with said practices. The practices she referred to have previously been seen as not feminist, or anti-feminist - a construction which is now widely rejected, or at least viewed with suspicion. This was an accusation of complicity. A feminist academic implied that other women aren’t feminist enough, or worse still, that these other women – “some women” - are complicit with their own oppression.

The paper was composed of several anecdotes which mentioned: waxing, appearing naked in a film, the mainstream acceptance of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, wearing a hijab, getting a facelift, and giving up a career. The speaker did say she had no problem with the practices she spoke of, but rather with the individualistic reasoning that women do these things for themselves. These are particularly controversial examples - especially for a young, internet literate, feminist audience – and the speaker did not give any background regarding feminist scholarship or opinion on these issues.

During this talk, I noticed the attendees sitting around me were becoming increasingly upset. They shifted in their seats, furrowed their brows, and turned around to roll their eyes or sigh audibly. Eventually, an audience member seated in front of me shouted out loudly and repeatedly – ‘Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!’ until the speaker stopped talking. During the post-panel question session, the audience member clarified that she was upset because the speaker had been ‘pathologizing’ groups of people. She asked, ‘What gives certain people a platform, or a right, to talk about other women’s choices?’

A back and forth ensued, and I saw a microcosm of contemporary feminism unfolding before me. Young women, queer women, and sex workers said that they felt shamed and judged. For them, the speaker was arrogantly deciding what is feminist and what isn’t, and suggesting *some* women are cultural dupes, or living with false consciousness. Older women in the audience invoked solidarity and sisterhood, lamenting that feminists used to all get along. In response to the speaker’s comments on the hijab, women of colour argued that they shouldn’t have to tolerate racism. They contended that solidarity can’t happen if it means silencing *some* women and not incorporating their perspective.

By the end of the panel, several of the attendees around me were in tears. Some had to take breaks, and others went for walks to clear their heads. The speaker was bemused and taken aback; she apologised for hurting people. Throughout the day I walked past older women complaining that students were so politically correct these days. I heard middle-aged academics explaining that online feminism is different, and that the audience probably had a shared investment in particular feminist beliefs and approaches.

As a first year PhD candidate researching complicity, I came away rather disturbed by the whole experience. I was afraid to tell anyone in the lunchtime discussion group, or at the reception afterwards, what my subject area was. Surely, I thought, this proved complicity was lurking beneath the surface of feminist discourse, and that it was a tense and slippery concept to begin to talk about. Several years after this experience, I continue to see complicity as difficult and muddled. Indeed, at a conference on complicity I attended in March 2015, the closing remarks were that complicity is complex and difficult to define; that complicity is related to something negative; that complicity as a lens must *always* be political; that humans are fundamentally interconnected and that our actions have consequences; that we are agents within social structures, but that we can also ‘do otherwise’ within these structures; that complicity has a relationship to power; and that academics have more privilege and responsibility to not be complicit than non-academics.¹ I would add that if a study of complicity isn’t handled deftly, particularly in a feminist context, it has the potential to be incredibly harmful, toxic, and offensive.

Complicit with What?

This thesis focuses on the outcomes of a mutation of essentialist second-wave feminist discourse – that women can be, and are, sexist (and racist, classist, ableist, and homophobic), and therefore help contribute to the social construction of sexism (and racism, classism, ableism, and homophobia).

Where second-wave feminists often worked from simplistic subject positions, and using an overarching understanding of patriarchy that positioned women as victims of men (without inclusion of the intersections of race, class and sexual

¹ Michael Neu, ‘Closing Statement’ (presented at Complicity Conference, Brighton University, 2015).

orientation), latter feminisms incorporate a variety of subject positions, using an understanding of intersectionality and kyriarchy – a white middle-class woman has race and class privilege over an immigrant man of colour, for example. This postmodern treatment of subjects and power relations has its roots in second-wave feminisms, but is a transformation of methodological and linguistic essentialisms into theory and practice that is firmly rooted in acknowledging the multiplicities of subjects, national contexts, and historical moments.

Gender, race, class and sexual orientation describe and relate to many understandings, practices, categories, and contexts; their meaning is changeable and complex even within one particular historical era, demographic group, or political environment. Within academia it is common to question the meaning of these terms - or perspectives -, to debate their parameters and influence, to accept a lack of shared answers and conclusions. As academics (and others involved in these conversations), we accept that we agree on many broad observations and analyses; we know that we disagree on others and that this disagreement causes rifts and splits. We believe there are no concrete truths, and that our field of study will always be evolving and mutating. This thesis therefore deals with the discourse of complicity, particularly relating to issues of gender, race, class and sexual orientation.

Movements advocating on the basis of gender, race, class or sexual orientation, or taking a perspective that focuses primarily on one or more of these, have a problem in that they acknowledge the social construction and systemic perpetuation of these categories, but are often perceived as being biologically determinist or only concerned with the identity groups they mainly address. For

example, contemporary feminism advocates for women, and takes a gender (and ideally a race, class, sexual orientation) approach, and so is often construed as being anti-male because of this approach, and because of the gender identity of the majority of those that support and advocate on behalf of it. In reality, contemporary feminisms are active in ways that cut across traditional categories of sex, gender and class: addressing issues pertaining to all sexes; challenging the relevance of biological sex; questioning whether they believe in or want gender; welcoming the participation of men; and seeking revolutionary global change (although this isn't to suggest that all feminists want these things or that all feminisms are closely engaged with them). There is then, some space between what feminism does and is, and what it is popularly perceived to do and be. The complexity of feminism does not lend itself well to simplistic narratives of womanhood and manhood, yet it is often discussed in these terms, both in the mainstream media and in traditional party politics.

Part of the argument of this thesis is that feminism is viewed simplistically by the wider public, as being solely for and about women. Even within feminist discourse, this notion isn't always clarified to include the reality that it is not *for* (as in, in favour of the actions of) every individual woman, and it is not *about* all women (which is the fault of more privileged feminists). Whilst I agree entirely that feminism should be *about* all women – in that it includes their experience, perspective and needs – I do not think that it can be *for* all women in that the actions of every woman can be explained by and legitimated by feminism. Later chapters will consider this idea that feminism is not, and should not be, for all women. By this I don't mean that all women shouldn't have access to it, or be able to call themselves feminists, but that feminism should not be distorted to

defend all women just because they are women. Feminism should not be for (as in, in favour of) Sheryl Sandberg, Miley Cyrus or Kate Middleton (or the practices and tropes I am using them to symbolise), just because they are women.

Ultimately, this thesis parses the questions: Why talk about complicity and feminism? Why are they relevant to one another? How do we go about discussing them? I suggest that reflecting upon complicity is a useful way of navigating postfeminist neoliberalism and the ways in which we are all interlocked with one another. Being open to recognising our own complicity (within an intersectional and structural understanding of power and oppression), then, can help us to see complicity more clearly.

The question that must permeate throughout feminist discussions of complicity is: “Complicit with what?” I would suggest that continually posing the question “complicit with what?” is perhaps more important than seeking any definitive answer on complicity, especially because of the multifaceted nature of feminism.

In a legal context, complicity refers to participation in wrongdoing (legal or moral) where someone knows about a crime but does not report it; being aware of wrongdoing makes a person responsible for doing something about it.

Complicity in this thesis refers to participation in actions, behaviour, or language that is harmful to others, from an intersectional feminist perspective.

Broadly I am referring to complicity with white supremacist, heteronormative capitalist patriarchy (to paraphrase bell hooks),² which is a way of describing interlocking and oppressive social systems of power. However, it remains

² bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 17.

hooks refers to ‘imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’, so I have added heteronormative to include an axis based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

pertinent that this means different things to different people – for example some feminists see sex work as inherently oppressive, and others do not. When claiming someone or something is complicit, then, there needs to be sufficient context and understanding of the myriad ways feminisms have approached certain topics.

It is important to stress that I do not consider any individual to be culpable for their own oppression; I refer to collusion within systems. Following Paul Reynolds, I propose using complicity as a political tool rather than as a concept with a stable definition. He says:

Complicity is of limited value in terms of terminological exactitude [...] Its value is in *political rhetoric*. The power of complicity lies in the construction of a political narrative able to highlight the blurred lines of culpability, liability and responsibility in dealing with often-complex events and social practices.³

Understanding complicity in this way enables us to critique white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchy from a variety of angles and perspectives, and to also acknowledge our participation and agency in reproducing these systems.

Feminism needs a discourse on complicity because inhabiting a particular identity position doesn't neatly map onto political outlook, or individual behaviour. This is not to say it never does, because this would remove the legitimacy of lived experience (understanding something in a certain way because it relates to your life as part of an identity group, like women and sexual harassment) and the important recognition of privilege when it relates to

³ Paul Reynolds, 'Complicity as Political Rhetoric: Some Ethical and Political Reflections', in *Exploring Complicity: Concept, Cases and Critique*, eds. Afxentis Afxentiou, Robin Dunford and Michael Neu (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 35.

identity position (being aware of race, class, able-bodied privilege). My argument is that identity position, political outlook and personal behaviour do not always go hand in hand, and that this leads to the possibility of complicity. Whereas many women have lived experience of sexual harassment, some women do not. Some women don't link experiences of sexual harassment with wider insights about gender politics, and some women may argue on popular radio phone-in programmes that catcalling is "flattering" or "not a big deal". It is possible then, and really quite likely, that some women are complicit with participating in a discourse that trivialises misogyny experienced through street harassment (for example).⁴

Furthermore, people whose identity position *does* go hand in hand with their political outlook (for example, a woman who is a feminist because of her experience and understanding of being a woman and how that relates to gender inequality) can be complicit with behaviours and discourses that harm women. This has been the case throughout feminist histories where privileged women have acted in ways that have been detrimental to women of colour, queer women, or working-class women. Moreover, a feminist woman who participates in intersectional feminist discourse or activism will also find herself saying or thinking things that she recognises as prejudicial.⁵ With an understanding of our de facto complicity with hierarchical and oppressive ideologies, we can "check ourselves", and be aware of how we move through the world and affect others.

⁴ 'YouGov | Catcalling: Never OK and Not a Compliment', *YouGov: What the World Thinks* </today.yougov.com/news/2014/08/15/catcalling/> [Accessed 22 April 2017].

⁵ Robin DiAngelo, *What Does it Mean To Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), works from the assumption that everyone is prejudiced because we all 'swim in the same cultural water' – one that is imbued with assumptions and representations relating to race, disability, class, and gender.

As mentioned already, my broader point here is that women can be sexist, racist, and homophobic, or hold any range of views. In this thesis I advocate for a feminist discourse on this complicity, but not just when it refers to women ‘over there’ or ‘some women’ as I have just phrased it, but also to less obvious cases of complicity, and to our own (feminist) complicity. The practice of this discourse of complicity would not simply be to say, “X is complicit”, but to have a contextual and intersectional conversation about what is being discussed, and the politics involved in invoking complicity. From what position is X complicit? According to whom? Can X practice be seen as positive *and* negative, as more than just good or bad? The discourse of complicity that I advocate then is not always about blame, and more about opening up spaces and advocating for nuance.⁶

Ultimately there is no blueprint for how to use complicity within a feminist context, but it is worth considering how feminist work on complicity can be interpreted and used by others in ways that are potentially disadvantageous or harmful. Do discussions of complicity encourage misogynistic proclamations, racist comments, or classist conclusions? If so, how can this be prevented?

Finally, it’s essential that whoever is writing about complicity is cognisant of their own potential complicity in reinforcing certain narratives about particular practices or groups of people. In my case, I am a white middle-class cisgendered straight woman, positioned within an academic institution, and so whilst I have endeavoured to reflect the experiences and concerns of others, it is likely that I am nonetheless complicit in privileging certain perspectives over others. It is essential that a feminist discourse of complicity takes place in a

⁶ This follows from Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

contextual, intersectional and respectful manner, with an acknowledgement that we all start from a position of complicity.

The remainder of this chapter will consist of a literature review, this work's contribution to knowledge, a theoretical framework, methodology, and chapter breakdown.

Exploring Complicity: Literature Review

Existing academic work on complicity appears across a range of academic disciplines and in relation to a number of subjects. Considering its use within legal parlance, it is unsurprising that complicity has been examined within the confines of law. In *Complicity and the Law of State Responsibility* (2011), Aust considers state complicity in relation to international law, in *A Modern Treatise on the Law of Criminal Complicity* (1991), Smith focuses on criminal law, and in *Law and Irresponsibility: On the Legitimation of Human Suffering* (2007) Veitch considers how the law itself is complicit in human rights violations, colonialism and environmental destruction. Kutz examines complicity in relation to philosophical moral theory in *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective* (2007) and Lepora and Goodin draw on both philosophy and law to consider complicity in relation to humanitarian aid and torture victims in *On Complicity and Compromise* (2013). These texts, as well as dealing with subject areas different from my own, focus less on structural analyses of complicity, and so are more individualistic due to the way complicity is understood within the law – that is, in relation to particular crimes or acts of overt wrongdoing.

Academic work on the Holocaust and complicity has some parallels with my own work, particularly because of its focus on everyday complicities – both from

common citizens, and from institutions. In *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (2012), Erickson explores how spiritual and intellectual leaders came to take on Nazi ideology, and ultimately argues that institutional complicity legitimised the complicity of the German population. Barnett points to the complicity of other nations in *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust* (2000) and importantly, sees complicity as possible within a framework of political and social factors. Research on the Holocaust and complicity is especially pertinent because of the global rise of fascism and the comparisons made between Trump's America and the Third Reich.

Furthermore, work on complicity and race is useful to this research because of its focus on white complicity (which is also significant to contemporary global politics). Such works include *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (2010) by Applebaum, and *The Scandal of White Complicity in US Hyper-incarceration: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance* (2013) by Mikulich, Cassidy, and Pfeil. Both Vincent Crapanzano and Mark Sanders have published work on complicity and apartheid era South Africa, looking at white people and intellectuals respectively. Crapanzano points out that 'To be dominant in a system is not to dominate a system',⁷ which is a pertinent observation for this work. Crapanzano's ethnographic work stresses that both the dominant and dominated are caught within the dominating system, though of course this isn't to say that they suffer a similar victimhood. Sanders' work figures complicity as

⁷ Crapanzano quoted in Mark McPhail, 'Complicity: The Theory of Negative Difference', in *African American Communication & Identities: Essential Readings*, ed. by Ronald L. Jackson (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2004), 30.

central to responsibility – for him, without an acknowledgement of complicity, personal and moral responsibility cannot happen. Sanders argues that opposing something is to be complicit with the language and parameters laid out by what you oppose, and that complicity is to do with ‘foldedness with the other’. This sense of interrelatedness is also central to my use of complicity; in this work, an acknowledgement of how acts and language affect others is a step towards a more compassionate feminist politic.

The immediate difference between works on complicity and historical atrocities, and my own, is the clear consensus that apartheid and the Holocaust are horrific crimes against humanity. The authors mentioned above write as opponents of apartheid, slavery and the Holocaust, and the reader is assumed to also be against racial segregation, genocide and enslavement. Whilst their work on complicity is nuanced and fascinating, they are able to better delineate victims and perpetrators – even though they are blurring these categories – because contemporary audiences broadly agree with an ethical, moral, and political opposition to brutal abuses of populations. In relation to my own research, feminists are famously divided on a whole range of subjects, and so claims of oppression, or on particular practices as oppressive, are debateable. Whereas some chapters in this thesis focus on complicity in neoliberal rationality, or complicity in cultural appropriation and white supremacy - issues a contemporary feminist readership will likely be opposed to – other chapters in this thesis are concerned with beauty practices and domesticity. These subjects have a troubled feminist history, and are claimed as both oppressive and subversive by various feminists and women. Beauty and domesticity are also both used as feminist tropes in mainstream representations of feminism;

magazine articles proclaim women can be feminist and wear lipstick, and radio programs pit housewives against “working mothers”. I cannot then comfortably say that women wearing makeup or choosing to not work are oppressed more or less so than other women, or say that they are complicit in their own oppression, and nor would I want to. An intersectional feminist undertaking of complicity then, must navigate multiple voices and perspectives, and continually readjust the ways in which complicity is invoked and discussed.

As mentioned, the similarities between this research, and works dealing with slavery, Apartheid, and the Holocaust, stem from the fact that both are concerned with little complicities and their ability to contribute to bigger, institutional or material complicities. By little complicities I refer to the complicity of little people – unknown people, everyday people -, of little acts, of silences, and of linguistic or discursive complicity. Likewise, work that focuses on complicity in relation to overt injustices (for example, work on complicity and war, torture, or incarceration), addresses readers as citizens, as everyday little people, and says “you are wrong, injustice is happening, and it is happening in your name”. Complicity is operationalised in order to foster better understanding and ultimately, collective political resistance. There are of course overlaps between the complicities addressed in other disciplines and the ones raised here, because many contemporary feminists are in political opposition to war, the prison industrial complex, and environmental destruction.

Closer to my own field of inquiry, there are several works on complicity that consider it in relation to cultural theory and contemporary politics. The contributors to *Commitment and Complicity in Cultural Theory and Practice*

(2009) suggest a rethinking of intellectual commitment in response to the appropriation of emancipatory ideas by conservative or neoliberal forces. Whilst this collection is mainly concerned with the reformulation of commitment as a concept, its feminist and antiracist approach is similar to my own, as is its attention to appropriation of ideas and language. Thomas Docherty's book *Complicity: Criticism Between Collaboration and Commitment* (2016) also considers commitment, and argues that political critique is always complicit with the discourses laid out by what it aims to undermine. This is also an argument made by Mark McPhail in his work on complicity, including 'Complicity: The theory of negative difference' (1991) and 'From Complicity to Coherence: Rereading the rhetoric of afrocentricity' (1998) (In the following chapter I will outline McPhail's complicity theory – which is grounded in communication studies – and discuss it in relation to a case-study. Through this I will address the applicability of McPhail's work to my own). Finally, *Exploring Complicity: Concept, Cases and Critique* (2016) is an interdisciplinary collection that explores the concept of complicity and case-studies across a range of contexts, including in Iraq, South Africa, the NHS, and in literature. This collection (which I feature in), has a structural and political framework that is closely aligned with my own approach, but has a wider purview than gender politics and contemporary feminisms.

The Personal is Political: Complicity in the Women's Liberation Movement

Complicity does exist as a latent discourse throughout feminist history, and particularly in the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) by women engaged in consciousness-raising (CR) groups. These groups created theories that related to their lives as discussed in feminist groups, and so were interested in the

conflicts within everyday life. The popular women's liberation slogan, 'The personal is political' attests to this.⁸ Importantly, the power dynamic inherent in consciousness-raising sessions – whether in terms of who attended, who was heard, and whose issues were foregrounded – meant that there are flaws in many of these second-wave theories (the following chapter uses the Redstockings Pro-Woman Line as an illustration of this).

'Sisterhood and After: The Women's Liberation Oral History Project', includes clips and transcripts of women involved in the WLM as they recall learning to interrogate their socialisation within a patriarchal society. This can be framed as women unlearning their complicity. Barbara Jones talks about being raised to view feminist women as threatening, and as 'witches',⁹ and Anne Oakley refers to tensions in CR groups because 'women are brought up not to like other women very much'.¹⁰ Working through the ways socialisation leads us to maintain oppression is paying attention to complicities, and second-wave feminists often had to consider their complicity with the existing system in their intimate personal lives. In a moving audio-clip, Beatrix Campbell describes just how difficult and 'life-changing' it was to engage with feminist literature and turn its analysis upon her own life. Speaking about the feminist pamphlet *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*, she says:

I remember reading that pamphlet and, throwing it across the room. I did, I threw it. Because it was so challenging. The story it

⁸ Carol Hanisch, *The Personal is Political: the Women's Liberation Movement Classic with a New Explanatory Introduction*, 2006 <<http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>> [Accessed July 3, 2016]

⁹ 'Barbara Jones Discusses Scary Feminist Women', *The British Library* <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/barbara-jones-scary-feminist-women>> [Accessed 22 April 2017].

¹⁰ 'Ann Oakley Discusses Competition in Women's Friendships', *The British Library* <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/ann-oakley-competition-in-womens-friendships>> [Accessed 22 April 2017].

was telling me about my sexual life, it detonated it, it was a detonator.¹¹

Whilst some second-wave feminisms were essentialist (which is elaborated upon in the following chapter), it is also the case that there was awareness of complicity – particularly in relation to individual lives – amongst women in the WLM. Whilst the movement was affected by hierarchies of power and privilege, groups were still interested in deconstructing their participation with systems they were increasingly theorising as problematic, such as the family, heterosexual relationships, and beauty standards.

Furthermore, black, queer and working-class women pointed out the complicity of white middle-class straight women in white supremacy, classism and homophobia. Dana Densmore, member of radical separatist feminist group Cell 16 condemned ‘successful women’¹² for identifying with the ruling class, and this criticism is still made by contemporary feminists with regards to many high-powered women (Chapter 2 will look at Sheryl Sandberg who faces this critique from feminists). These accusations were not always framed as complicity, or labelled openly as complicity, but certainly the underlying assumption is that some women were (and are) interested in gaining equality with men within the existing system, rather than working towards equality for all groups within a new system. This can also be traced back to the Suffrage movement where

¹¹ ‘Beatrix Campbell Discusses Consequences of Sexual Pleasure’, *The British Library* <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/beatrix-campbell-consequences-of-sexual-pleasure>> [Accessed 22 April 2017].

¹² ‘Evelyn Sell: The Literature of Women’s Liberation (January 1970)’ <<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isr/vol31/no01/sell.html>> [Accessed 22 April 2017].

many middle and upper-class women sought to gain the vote for themselves, but not for other disenfranchised groups.¹³

Moving away from a Complicit Feminist Subject: Research Trajectory

This research started in an undergraduate dissertation on Representations of Women in Contemporary Feminist Non-Fiction Literature, and developed in a Master's thesis that looked at complicity across various feminist schools – liberal, radical, and anti-capitalist.¹⁴ As a literature student, I was interested in the ways that feminist writers represented women in text; I naively thought that feminists would be most invested in portraying women in a positive light - whatever that may mean. As a feminist myself I was interested in my own relationship with practices I viewed as potentially problematic. This early research found that liberal feminist (or white feminist) literature tends to be journalistic and polemical, and often deals with issues like sex work, and 'sexualisation' that are prone to sensationalism. Looking at texts like *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* by Ariel Levy, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* by Natasha Walter, and *Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman's Guide to Why Feminism Matters* by Jessica Valenti, I found the representation of women in these books to be inconsistent, as some women were treated as tragic pawns in a sexist system (victims), and others were caricatured as raunchy villains (complicit). The women depicted as complicit in

¹³ For more on this, see: Barbara Arneil, *Politics and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 156-158;

Kathleen Cross, 'Racism and Feminism: White women, power and resistance' in *Women, Power and Resistance: An Introduction to Women's Studies*, eds. Alison Easton, Tess Cosslett and Penny Summerfield (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996);

Hazel Carby, 'White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood' in *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, ed. Heidi Safia Mirza (London: Routledge, 1997);

Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Some of this research is incorporated into the Chapter 1 section 'We must all make a conscious break with the system': Feminist Discourses of Complicity.

these books often presented in a 'sexualised' way, or performed a hegemonic feminine sexuality. The fact that the 'sexualised' women were depicted as complicit based on their perceived sexuality, or their gender performance, is indicative of the moral aspect of these books. 'Sexualised' women were constructed as complicit because of their interactions with a postfeminist 'raunch culture', which included wearing FCUK t-shirts, posing for *Nuts* magazine, or wearing the Playboy bunny logo. Whilst this aesthetic is now dated, it is still the case that women performing a particular sexual aesthetic are seen to be more complicit than women who don't – this thesis mentions the Kardashian siblings and rapper Nicki Minaj as examples of this. Conversely, women that don't perform a hypersexual femininity are seen as immediately more feminist (this has been the case with writer, director and actress Lena Dunham, despite her frequent missteps, and actress Emma Watson). There is of course a racial aspect to this too, where white women are considered more feminist because of their engagement with liberal or mainstream feminist issues such as wage equality, body-positivity, and representation of (white) women in media and politics, whereas women of colour are seen as self-interested when they publically address racism and its intersections with gender.

My previous research found that the 'enlightened' feminist writer in liberal populist feminist literature was juxtaposed with the naïve non-feminist, and often no suggestion was made in how to reconcile this. These books operate within a liberal framework, and so often requested more 'choices' for women within the current system, rather than any serious analysis of what leads to the availability of certain choices, how women use existing choices for resistance, or how to challenge and overcome the system itself. Where liberal feminists looked

too closely at, and ultimately blamed, individual women, anti-capitalist feminists took a structural approach and so weren't overly concerned with individual behaviours. Whilst the authors I looked at (Nina Power and Laurie Penny) did talk about famous women, it was from an analytical perspective, and didn't utilise direct speech, observation and interviews like the liberal texts did. Whilst a structural approach is favourable, it does sometimes portray individuals as having little agency within big systems, or suggest that people can't really be blamed for going along with dominant ideologies and social norms. A common thread within the anti-capitalist feminist works that I looked at is that the authors are happy to criticise women with significant privilege, power or platform, including Sarah Palin, Laura Bush, and Condoleezza Rice. Though it may seem obvious that feminism isn't in favour of the actions and beliefs of every woman, it is worth noting the ways in which feminists criticise other women, and whether this depends on their school of feminism, or the practice being discussed. For anti-capitalist feminists and indeed many others (myself included), it's highly relevant whether the woman being discussed is in a position of power.

In terms of radical feminism, I concluded that the authors I looked at – Sheila Jeffreys and Catharine MacKinnon – preserved a second-wave radical framework of oppressed woman versus oppressive man. Their treatment of different types of sex work as homogenous groups together a remarkably large body of women into one category, and so avoids listening to and incorporating experiences that don't fit with their abolitionist narrative. Talking about beauty practices, Jeffreys does acknowledge that women are involved in developing and encouraging them, but states this 'does not in any way contradict the notion that

such practices are harmful'.¹⁵ For Jeffreys then, complicity is extraneous, and shouldn't distract from the patriarchal conditions that create it. She states that 'bonding to swap survival tips under domination' may be necessary, but should be considered 'accommodation to oppression' rather than 'an example of women's agency and creativity that is worth celebrating'.¹⁶

In the process of undertaking this previous research, I came to understand that it is not helpful, practical or realistic to construct some women as complicit. Doing so tends to re-centre and reify existing hierarchies, and ultimately is too simplistic. Likewise, situating myself "away from" the women I discuss doesn't reveal the broader picture, and the ways in which we interact within various power dynamics.

This work attempts to be continually reflexive and adaptive, following Foucault's description of an ethical sensibility as 'a process of constant experimentation and reappraisal, in which new experiences are integrated, and reflection helps determine future actions'.¹⁷ My initial conception of complicity relied on a static complicit subject, which didn't give enough credence to human agency, nor to the multiple meanings inherent in various practices or representations. This work has attempted to acknowledge the complexities and variabilities of life, rather than to label various subjects "bad" or "not correct". Gill and Scharff state that a Foucauldian conception of agency and ethics does 'not appeal to absolute categories of good and evil or liberation and control, but

¹⁵ Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 111.

¹⁶ Jeffreys, 135.

¹⁷ Albury quoted in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 211.

take[s] account of context and circumstance.’¹⁸ This has been my goal. Equally, my current perception of complicity – this thesis – is also subject to significant change, both with time, and with other eyes and experiences brought to it.

In addition, this work is contemporary in that it draws upon recent scholarship and feminist histories in order to analyse pop-culture examples. This research incorporates intersectionality with a call for personal reflection. Whilst I critique Sandberg in Chapter 2 for her privileging of the internal over the structural, in this work I do suggest that attention should be paid to how we as individuals relate to one another, but through a structural understanding of power and oppression. This work doesn’t seek to ask “how can I fix racism?” or “how can I respond to sexism?” but rather, “how can my language affect the life of someone else who experiences racism?”, or “how do my views on certain practices privilege existing hierarchical narratives?” I attempt to negotiate liberal individualistic narratives, and anti-capitalist or radical structural views on feminist life.

I am interested in how thinking through complicity – and the interrelatedness or ‘foldedness’ that implies – can be a way of strengthening our ability to listen to one another. I am interested in collective political compassion, and the ongoing progression of intersectional feminism where feminists actually let their political beliefs ‘sink in’ and become lived praxis.¹⁹ This thesis seeks to think through, think around and think about the concept of complicity where it relates to contemporary feminisms, and will touch upon issues of subjectivity, lived experience, political consciousness, knowledge, and ignorance. As with all doctoral studies, this work is a snapshot, and one that invites further research.

¹⁸ Atwood in Gill and Scharff, 211.

¹⁹ Erinn Gilson, ‘Vulnerability, Ignorance, and Oppression’, *Hypatia*, 26.2 (2011), 325.

Defining Feminisms, Grappling with Power: Theoretical Framework

I understand feminism to be a historical, political and cultural movement that ultimately is oriented towards gender equality, though there are numerous feminist positions on what this would look like. For liberal feminists (more pejoratively referred to as white feminists), gender equality can be achieved in terms of representation, such as having more women in films, more female MPs, and more female CEOs. In the parlance of bell hooks, this is ‘reformist feminism’, or “add women and stir” feminism.²⁰ For other feminists, gender equality can be achieved by deconstructing, transforming and overthrowing existing systems. This is what hooks refers to as ‘revolutionary feminism’, and is understandably more difficult a matter than promoting more women to the boardroom. I am a proponent of the latter approach, and this work is inspired by hooks’ delineation of reformist versus revolutionary feminisms, as well as: her recognition of widespread everyday complicity as it relates to feminisms, her discussion of various popular cultural texts, and the frank language she uses in criticising white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.²¹

Feminism occurs in many ways, both organised and not, individual and not, and conscious and not. People or acts can be described as feminist even when the person undertaking that act may not identify as feminist, and conversely, people can identify as feminist but be considered quite the opposite by a body of feminists (we will see this with some of the celebrity women in later chapters).

²⁰ bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 4.

²¹ hooks discusses representations of race and ethnicity across various media in bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: South End Press, 1992, repr. New York: Routledge, 2014), and has commented on various contemporary films and television series, including *12 Years a Slave* and *Orange is the New Black*. A YouTube search for bell hooks and The New School yields various lectures where the author discusses various facets of contemporary feminism.

Feminism includes many strains - and so is better referred to as “feminisms” - including black, Chicana, Muslim, queer, eco, vegan, Marxist, and many others.

Anglo-American feminism is generally divided into three, and perhaps now four, distinct waves, from first-wave feminism which refers to the Suffrage movement, second-wave feminism which refers to the Women’s Liberation Movement, and third-wave feminism which refers to postmodern or punk feminisms. It has been suggested that the current period can be described as fourth-wave feminism, and that it is characterised by the advent and expansion of social media and technology, which has democratised platforms for groups that have historically been marginalised within feminist spaces.²² Whilst I do refer to waves in this thesis, along with many other feminists I am sceptical about the wave metaphor because it suggests chronological progression, and because it groups together women with highly diverse views and so flattens differences within waves, and similarities across waves.²³ Regardless, for the sake of pointing to general time periods and trends of feminist thought and activism, I will be utilising the wave metaphor throughout this work.

This thesis aims to work from an intersectional feminist approach.

“Intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a black legal scholar, in her 1989 article ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and

²² Prudence Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave: Affective Temporality* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

²³ For a critique of the wave metaphor in relation to feminist media-studies, see Lynn Spigel, ‘Theorizing the Bachelorette: “Waves” of Feminist Media Studies’, *Signs*, 30, 1 (2004), 1209-1221;

For a treatment of waves as diffractive, see Tisha DeJmanee, ‘Waves and popular feminist entanglements: diffraction as a feminist media methodology’, *Feminist Media Studies*, 16,4 (2016) 741-745;

Chamberlain (2017) suggests that feminists conceive of “the co-existence of multi-generational feminisms, all operating within the fourth-wave moment.” 22.

Antiracist Politics'.²⁴ Crenshaw criticised a 'single-axis framework' that saw gender and race as separate categories of experience and analysis,²⁵ arguing that this framework excluded black women from both feminist and anti-racist theory and discourse.²⁶ Importantly, Crenshaw argued that black women's experience was more than just that of race plus gender – it was not additive, but rather a distinct type of racialized sexism or sexualised racism. It follows then, that intersectional feminism is that which acknowledges multiple subjectivities, and so requires a class, race, disability, sexual orientation (and more) perspective alongside a gendered one. Furthermore, acknowledging the interplay of multiple identities means that the race and class of more privileged women can also be interrogated. Intersectional feminism decentres white women, so that women of colour, working-class women, and/or queer women aren't seen as different *types* of woman, where universal "woman" is white, middle-class, straight and cisgendered.²⁷

Following from Alison Jaggar, I see conversations about the meaning of feminism as central to its usefulness as a constantly evolving political movement; feminism 'cannot be reduced to a matter of personal ethics, choice, or style',²⁸ though I do discuss individualised acts throughout the thesis in several ways. Feminism, as I see it, is a historical and continuing collective political movement, even if individuals can act in ways that can be interpreted as feminist. Jaggar writes, 'Personal choices are important, but feminism is

²⁴ Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989) 139.

²⁵ Crenshaw, 139.

²⁶ Crenshaw, 140.

²⁷ Alison M. Jaggar, *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 194.

²⁸ Jaggar, viii.

more centrally concerned with transforming the social contexts within which such choices are made'. This is a distinction I unpack somewhat throughout this thesis. Chapter 2 looks in more detail at the binary presentation of the internal and the external, the macro and micro, the individual and personal, and the collective and political, and whilst I agree that feminism as a whole is about wide-scale transformation of social contexts, as Jaggar puts it, I also find it pertinent to note that individuals make up a collective, and individual acts constitute the starting points for transformative change, even if those acts are lobbying for change from much bigger and more powerful institutions.²⁹

My approach is, in many ways, a postmodern one, where I remain hesitant about generalisations and assumptions about groups of women or the meaning of particular practices. Whilst I have had more fixed views on issues such as sex work, beauty practices and marriage in the past, my approach is now rather fluid, in that I think it's important to recognise that what is empowering for one group mightn't be for another, and that historical, political or cultural context affects the manifestation of a practice or idea. For example, beauty practices operate in a wholly different terrain in the contemporary moment than when the second-wave critique of them originated. The capitalist beauty market is now more pervasive, but also we can be more optimistic about the varied ways different groups engage with makeup and fashion, and how that translates to visibility and representation.

It was my own complicity that initially interested me in this subject – and particularly through the prism of beauty practices and gender presentation –

²⁹ A similar point is made in Sara Ahmed, 'Feminist Hurt/Feminism Hurts', *Feministkilljoys*, 2014 <<http://feministkilljoys.com/2014/07/21/feminist-hurtfeminism-hurts/>> [Accessed 3 February 2016]

and it is because of this personal aspect that I no longer rush to condemn groups or behaviours as part of a wider more homogenising narrative of oppression. I am aware this may read as postmodernism gone awry, and of course I do advocate a postmodern position in terms of subjectivity and truth (in that there are multiple truths according to various subjectivities), but advocating for caution and compassion is not the same as fatalistically suggesting that nothing can have stable meaning. Whilst it would be ideal if gender wasn't a socially meaningful category, in our current world, it is, and so this thesis straddles these observations. We work within a vocabulary of gender even as we understand it to be performative. We work towards a point where gender, race and class won't exist as meaningful social categories, but for the present, these categories must be foregrounded and examined because they form the bases of our social and political lives. Crucially, Butler states:

If sexuality is culturally constructed within existing power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is 'before,' 'outside,' or 'beyond' power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself. This critical task presumes, of course, that to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination. It offers the possibility of a repetition of the law which is not its consolidation, but its displacement.³⁰

In other words, feminists must recognise subversive possibilities precisely because of pre-existing and ongoing power relations, and certain acts within oppressive frameworks are not themselves necessarily condoning the framework, but could be seen as working or surviving within it, or even resisting it. Butler's words in the above quotation could be read as denying complicity –

³⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 30.

of saying that working within a system isn't necessarily reproducing it. Whilst I agree that this isn't *necessarily* reproducing it, it also *can* be reproducing it based on context. So Sheryl Sandberg (who I discuss in chapter 2) can be said to be reproducing neoliberal rationality and capitalism as a system through her work and her privileged position within it, but other less powerful workers at Facebook may be enacting 'subversive possibilities', or ways of being within that system, that could be considered complicit, but not to the degree of that of Sandberg.

Contemporary feminisms, and this work particularly, are indebted intellectually to the concepts of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, particularly in terms of gender performativity, neoliberal governmentality, and agency. Following from Simone de Beauvoir's radical statement that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, woman',³¹ Butler states, 'Gender is always a doing'.³² This positioning of gender as fluid allows for both complicity and agency. That is, the variability of gender and embodied gendered experience means various subjects can inhabit various political and behavioural positions – for example, gay men can be homophobic, white women can be racist, working-class people can be transphobic. Likewise, it is this fluidity that allows for the possibility of recognising complicity, and moving beyond political or behavioural positions that harm others. In the words of Foucault, 'Everybody both acts and thinks'.³³ Importantly he also states that, 'To the same situation, people react in very different ways', and this observation is something I reiterate throughout this

³¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 2011) 330.

³² Butler, 25.

³³ *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. by Michel Foucault and others (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 14.

work.³⁴ Makeup use (for example) cannot be theorised monolithically when women are acting within unequal power relations, from varied subjectivities and identities, and in different ways.

I also follow Foucault's conceptualisation of power as 'constitutive of the subjects involved',³⁵ as Oksala describes:

Power cannot be conceived of as an external relation that takes place between pre-constituted subjects, but has to be understood as constituting the subjects themselves: their constitution only becomes possible in the shifting, contested and precarious field of power relations.³⁶

Chapter 2 will outline neoliberalism as it relates to feminism in more detail, but I want to make clear at the outset that I am using Foucault's concept of governmentality as discipline throughout this work. Lemke speaks of Foucault's neoliberal governmentality specifically, though his words can refer to governmentality as a concept more broadly. He says:

The real theoretical strength of the concept of governmentality consists of the fact that it construes neo-liberalism not just as ideological rhetoric or as a political economic reality, but above all as a political project that endeavors to create a social reality that it suggests already exists.³⁷

Governmentality describes a way of seeing that is influenced by a variety of factors (including the state, media organisations, academic institutions etc.) wherein hegemonic norms and values come to be taken on, internalised, and felt as our own. This isn't suggesting false consciousness in a Marxist sense, but that consciousness is structured by the convergence of a wide range of socio-

³⁴ Foucault, 14.

³⁵ Johanna Oksala, 'Feminism and Neoliberal Governmentality', *Foucault Studies* (2013) 40.

³⁶ Oksala, 40

³⁷ Thomas Lemke, 'The Birth of Bio-Politics': Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neoliberal Governmentality', *Economy and Society*, 30.2 (2001), 13.

political, historical and economic elements. The notion of governmentality encompasses some sense of self-surveillance or self-regulation, which necessitates a theoretical and political unpicking of various subjectivities, especially those that harm others. Additionally, Oksala emphasises Foucault's claim that neoliberal governmentality produces particular subjectivities, which underscores my assertion that the academic, the writer, or the cultural theorist is also implicated in the discourses she analyses.

There are several mentions of 'the gaze' throughout this work, which primarily refers to the male gaze, wherein feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey uses psychoanalytic theory to describe the ways in which women on screen are framed voyeuristically in terms of male, heterosexual pleasure.³⁸ This concept has been deployed by feminists to discuss many cultural objects, and I use it in this research to refer to the dominant way of looking - at times in reference to the male gaze, and at times in reference to the white gaze. Along the lines of Gill's theory of self-subjectification as opposed to objectification (which I discuss in relation to Miley Cyrus in Chapter 3), my conception of the gaze is one where subjects can look back, and thus within a text, subvert the dominant form of looking. In Chapter 3 I discuss Nicki Minaj's video 'Anaconda', and argue that the rapper reclaims black female sexuality, thus resisting or challenging the male, white gaze that frames her simply as a sex object.

Finally, I refer to "privilege" or "privileged" subjects frequently in this work, which is a term derived from anti-racist theory, and particularly Peggy McKintosh's article 'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack'³⁹ where the author lists fifty ways in which her whiteness is an advantage in daily life.

³⁸ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' *Screen*, 16.3 (1975) 6-18.

³⁹ Peggy McIntosh, 'White Privilege', *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology* (1998) 94-105.

Privilege as a term has become common internet parlance, and thus is frequently misused and misunderstood; it is seen as a buzzword rather than a theoretical concept or political tool. Many now view the operationalisation of the term as a way of dismissing the views of those they don't agree with. In 2014 Princeton student Tal Fortgang penned an article decrying the concept. The article, entitled 'Why I'll Never Apologize for My White Male Privilege'⁴⁰ went viral and contained many of the arguments used for discounting the term, including claims of reverse racism, conspiracy theories, and ignoring merits in favour of identity markers like race and gender. Needless to say, my use of the term adheres to its original use in anti-racist feminist theory, and indeed I consider it necessary to continue using the term despite attempts to rid it of its radical origins and uses.

Methodological Flights of Fancy, and Case-Studies as Dramatization

In this thesis, I talk about complicity and advocate an explicit feminist discourse on it. Rather than doing this entirely theoretically, I have chosen to use case-studies, so that each chapter will deal with a different facet of contemporary feminism and complicity.

This work is primarily a dramatization of everyday life, and is concerned with the circulation of ideas and images surrounding feminisms and complicity.

Drawing upon Deleuze and Guatarri, Porter and MacKenzie propose dramatization as a critical method. Describing this, they say:

⁴⁰ Tal Fortgang, 'Why I'll Never Apologize for My White Male Privilege', *Time* <<http://time.com/85933/why-ill-never-apologize-for-my-white-male-privilege/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

Critical methods are those that see an intrinsic link between knowledge and change such that one comes to know the (political) world through the act of changing it.⁴¹

This methodological approach aims ‘to provide a creative appreciation of the conditions that give concepts their force or their quality rather than to establish their essence’,⁴² and so, in this context, considers how complicity as a concept or set of relations manifests, rather than focusing on its essential nature. Porter and MacKenzie argue that in order to understand the force of a concept, one must stage it ‘within a series of conceptual, textual and performative relations’.⁴³ This is the role of the case-studies in this work – they serve as a series of relations within which to examine complicity, and to come to understand its force. I concur with Porter and MacKenzie’s assertion that:

It is more productive to work through the possible meanings they may contain in the process of bringing them to life as a series of relationships – that is, as a drama.⁴⁴

Following from this, I have chosen to use case-studies throughout this work because ultimately my argument is that complicity should be discussed in contextual, intersectional and respectful ways, and not in general, universal, or homogenising ways. Had I written a thesis that was entirely a theoretical explanation, justification and outline for complicity, it wouldn’t be particularly useful for discussing certain themes, people, or ideas. This thesis then is a model for talking about complicity when it comes to pop stars, reality TV and business

⁴¹ Iain MacKenzie and Robert Porter, *Dramatizing the Political: Deleuze and Guattari* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 52.

⁴² MacKenzie and Porter, 53.

⁴³ MacKenzie and Porter, 56.

⁴⁴ MacKenzie and Porter, 56.

books, but not necessarily for talking about sex work, domestic violence and refugees. I don't consider this a flaw, because complicity *can* be used as a theoretical tool for discussing these issues (and many others), but this isn't the route I have chosen for this particular piece of research. I am contented that I have not waded into areas that I don't have appropriate levels of knowledge to discuss with such a fraught term as complicity.

In addition to dramatization as a critical method, aspects of this work could be described as using visual analysis (most clearly in Chapters 3 and 4). In their consideration of cultural studies and visual analysis, Lister and Wells refer to the intertwining of images 'with the active social process of 'looking'', and an understanding of images as representations that can be considered 'as a language-like activity', where they 'convey meaning within a sign using community'.⁴⁵ The analysis I undertake throughout this thesis is mindful of varying ways of interpreting such signs (particularly in relation to race), and by no means considers its texts as fixed or immutable.

In this work I reject essentialist claims about an innate female way of knowing or looking, but follow from Patricia Hill Collins who frames a female perspective as a consequence of living life as someone understood to be female.⁴⁶

Knowledge then is produced by a combination of lived experience and political consciousness. To return to the example of sex work, whilst I am informed on the feminist debates around sex work, and have my own views (I support sex work as work and support the rights of sex workers to a safe and regulated

⁴⁵ Martin Lister and Liz Wells, 'Seeing Beyond Belief: Cultural Studies as an Approach to Analysing the Visual' in *The Handbook of Visual Analysis*, eds. Theo Van Leeuwen, and Carey Jewitt, (London: SAGE, 2001).

⁴⁶ Hill Collins frames blackness and femaleness like this in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000).

working environment), my ruminations on the industry won't contribute anything new or meaningful to the discussion. It is for this reason that I have chosen subject matter that I feel I can comment on, or that isn't *as* contentious for women's lives – beauty, domesticity, corporate feminism, and cultural appropriation. Using case-studies reiterates my contention that complicity should be discussed when we are talking about a specific phenomenon, person, or theme, and that we should provide considerable background information, an awareness of various approaches, and serious considerations of discursive and material outcomes. Complicity is not a tool for mainstream feminist think-pieces that don't attempt to understand feminism, never mind its numerous and impressive incarnations.

I have chosen to utilise a particular tone and style of writing in this thesis, as illustrated by the opening vignette describing my experience at a conference. I am a strong advocate of the personal 'I' in academic writing, and particularly, in feminist writing. This is both because of the feminist slogan 'The personal is political' – through which our personal lives can be understood as part of wider political issues – and because I consider the writer to be present, as someone who brings something to their work, and as someone with viewpoints and an agenda. This work, in the words of Meredith Jones, is 'utterly situated and never objective'.⁴⁷ The tone and style I employ are specifically to garner a particular mood in my writing, one that is both accessible and with a clear voice. I want this work to be understood, which isn't to say that I have simplified it, but that I have attempted to explain my ideas in language that isn't excessively dense or obtuse.

⁴⁷ Meredith Jones, *Skintight: An Anatomy of Cosmetic Surgery* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2008), 2.

This is of course a feminist piece of research, and because of the way I'm framing complicity, it is quite a personal interpretation of a slice of political and popular culture that I interact with daily. Living as a feminist means that my professional and personal life are interconnected, and so what is written in this thesis aims to be reflexive, self-conscious, and personal, as well as being connected to a wider history and culture of feminist thinking and activism. This methodological and stylistic approach, which began in the 1990s, understands that 'no research is undertaken from a neutral or timeless vantage point. Instead, research projects are undertaken for specific reasons by people who are historically and socially situated.'⁴⁸

This thesis looks at pop culture and celebrity, partly because I see value in paying serious attention to those things considered unserious, particularly because they can often be coded in gendered terms as feminine (as I will discuss more in chapter 4). Furthermore, pop culture and celebrity reach into our lives (and especially young women's lives) in ways that traditional party politics and news media do not. Many of us have an intimate and daily relationship with celebrity culture, whether that be through watching the Kardashians on Snapchat, scrolling through the Daily Mail celebrity section, or flicking through Miley Cyrus's photos on Instagram. The presence of these figures and images scattered so copiously amongst daily life demands a critical deconstruction of the material we might be least likely to view as significant.

Importantly, this PhD refers to many pop-culture examples (including popular books, music videos and performances, episodes of reality TV and tabloid uproars) but is not a thesis specifically *about* popular culture. Rather, I use pop-

⁴⁸ Jaggar, 196.

culture as a vehicle to discuss the contemporary circulation of ideas about gender, and associated relations of complicity. Of course, there is a well-established field of celebrity and pop-culture studies that, according to *Celebrity Studies*, undertakes a ‘critical exploration of celebrity, stardom and fame’, and their various historical and contemporary manifestations. In this work I don’t wish to make any claims about the field of celebrity and pop-culture studies, but rather take it as a worthy object of analysis, and turn my attention to feminist approaches and dealings with complicity. To use the parlance of Jack Halberstam, I take a ‘twisty, curvy’ journey through several years of pop-culture, and follow the concept of complicity around, seeing where it manifests.⁴⁹

Halberstam uses pop superstar Lady Gaga as a vehicle to examine and explore a ‘very particular arrangement of bodies, genders, desires, communication, race, affect, and flow’.⁵⁰ In their work, Gaga stands for ‘punk or wild feminism’, ‘hints at a future’, and ‘gestures toward new forms of revolt rather than patenting them’.⁵¹ Similarly, the women discussed in the following chapters are intended as vehicles to discuss various relations, themes and ideas, and are not presented as naturalistic depictions of their ‘real-life’ selves. For example, in Chapter 5 I use property presenter Kirstie Allsopp to discuss contemporary domesticities. Rather than simplistically suggesting that Allsopp is a ‘complicit woman’, my aim is to analyse and deconstruct what she stands for in contemporary culture: What discourses does she play into? What narratives does she personally further? And what narratives are furthered through and around her? When

⁴⁹ J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012) xxiii.

⁵⁰ Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, xii.

⁵¹ Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, xiii.

referring to Kate Middleton, it is as a site of meaning in the public and historical consciousness, rather than the 'real' woman herself.

An ongoing concern in the research process is that I am complicit in centring white privileged women in this thesis, and therefore reiterating the mainstream and feminist hierarchies I oppose. Whilst this is true to an extent, paradoxically, talking about complicity may be a situation in which this is understandable and necessary, since it is these highly privileged subjects that most require an analysis based on complicity. The famous women I write about here are in many ways highly complicit, and so of course a study of complicity would centre them, even though this does maintain existing hierarchies of visibility.

Furthermore, whilst this thesis does consider race, class and sexual orientation (though not in equal measure), it doesn't include an analysis that takes disability, age, religion or nationality into consideration. Though I have attempted to not treat dominant social categories (whiteness, middle-class-ness, and so on) as neutral or 'normal', there may be cases where my intersectional analysis appears to be additive. By writing about gender first, I frame it as the primary category of concern, whereas intersectional feminism teaches that no identity takes precedence over another. This is my whiteness manifest as I initially understood feminism as being primarily about gender because I hadn't had to interrogate my whiteness or middle-class-ness in response to systemic discrimination. This is something I am continually working to undo, but ultimately reiterates my contention that we are all complicit because of our lifelong socialisation within white-supremacist heteronormative capitalist patriarchy.

As alluded to already, I am mindful of the ways in which this research can be misinterpreted. Carolyn Pedwell and Simidele Dosekun both reflect on the potentially unintended effects or interpretations of their work. Pedwell's research on feminist uses of cross-cultural comparisons (including female genital mutilation, eating disorders, body modification and veil-wearing) argues that comparative methods can flatten differences and overstate the concept of "culture". Pedwell comments that she doesn't want people to assume that her research critiques feminist attempts to interrupt problematic binaries, because she actually critiques the methods by which they do this.⁵² Dosekun writes that her research on hyperfeminine Nigerian women was interpreted by others as mocking, judging and dismissing the women she studied. She also notes that her choice to focus on hyperfeminine women 're-cites' the notion that what women wear is the business of others.⁵³ My specific concern – which has been realised through interactions with colleagues and family – is the perspective that this research attempts to mock, shame, or discount the women I analyse. This then serves as a disclaimer that I do not at all intend to monolithically categorise the women in this work as "bad" women or "anti-feminist" women.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam celebrates the opportunity 'to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant', and advocates methodological 'flights of fancy'.⁵⁴ As someone straddling various disciplines and scholarly interests, I gladly repeat Halberstam's statement that 'the goal is to lose one's way',⁵⁵ and indeed have often anticipated that in trailing around after complicity, I do just

⁵² Carolyn Pedwell 'Gender, Embodiment and Cultural Practice: Towards a Relational Feminist Approach' (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2007).

⁵³ Simidele Dosekun, "Hey, You Stylized Woman There": an Uncomfortable Reflexive Account of Performative Practices in the Field,' *Qualitative Inquiry* 21 (2015): 438.

⁵⁴ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 6.

⁵⁵ Halberstam, 6.

that. Whilst perhaps a convenient way of wriggling out of traditional disciplinary norms, this research does indeed refuse ‘the form and content of traditional canons’, and may at times pose ‘more questions and fewer answers’.⁵⁶

What’s New? Original Contribution

This thesis is a feminist consideration of complicity in one place, explicitly. The original contribution to knowledge of this thesis are the claims that complicity exists across the feminist landscape, that it should be taken seriously by feminists (academic and activist), and that it’s a useful and vital prism for talking about political issues. Complicity is fundamental to the ways we live as humans in a highly technological, global, and consumerist culture. We are connected with each other in highly complex ways, both because of the internet, hand-held technologies, the digitisation of everyday life, and global capitalism. It is all but impossible to be a citizen in a Western nation and not encounter objects manufactured by people living thousands of miles away, working in conditions often unknown to the consumer. Complicity is one way of acknowledging this - of seeing humanity as connected. Complicity lets individuals situate themselves amongst a collective, and consider the effects of their language and behaviour on others within that collective.

Whilst complicity has been of interest to feminists throughout history, it has not been explicitly addressed or theorised; this work then takes the requisite space and depth required to explore complicity. Each chapter demonstrates a possible feminist approach to complicity: I lay out the context of a subject, look at case-studies, and undertake analysis in light of previous and present feminisms. This

⁵⁶ Halberstam, 10.

thesis aims to lay out *why* we should pay attention to complicities. My previous research looked at discourses of complicity in various genres of feminist writing, and this work takes a step back and considers complicity more broadly. I consider what I mean when I speak of complicity, what the point of studying complicity is, and the best ways to do this in relation to certain subjects.

Therefore, this thesis offers a unique view on the intertwining of pop-culture and feminism. It traces strands of complicity from various perspectives, from early feminist writing to contemporary pop culture. It talks about the potential use of complicity as a way of seeing, examines the ways it appears across popular culture, and looks at its relationship to particular political moments or sensibilities.

To conclude this section, a few points on what this work *doesn't* do. As stated, this thesis frames complicity as a way of looking, rather than something with a stable definition. For this reason, this work will not provide absolute conclusions on complicity and feminisms. This work will also not offer up a definitive fourth-wave feminist way of viewing a certain practice or a certain person – I am not delivering a feminist judgement on makeup use or the Kardashians for example.

Finally, I hope that this thesis is a tour of kinds around contemporary feminisms. This work is made up of fragments, stories, tweets, discussions, and arguments from several years of feminist discourse on Twitter, on blogs, at conferences, and of course, in print. The people and arguments mentioned in these chapters may have disappeared from the public eye, and may seem trivial or superficial, but the discussions that took place around Kim Kardashian's

nude selfie, Emma Watson's first #HeforShe speech, Nicki Minaj asking Miley Cyrus 'What's Good?' at the 2015 Video Music Awards (VMAs), and the introduction of the command 'Lean In' were truly significant feminist moments in the years between 2013 and 2017 when I was writing this thesis. This work then is a mosaic of a particular segment of feminist discourse, at a time when Beyoncé embraced Black Power and Forever 21 sold 'Feminist' sweatshirts.

Chapter breakdown

Chapter 1 is an extended introduction which explores the historical and contemporary contexts for this work. I begin by looking at essentialism in feminisms, and then consider how postfeminism and neoliberalism interact with complicity. I then examine several ways in which feminisms have approached complicity - in terms of politics, practice, and framework – and conclude by considering a case-study in order to illustrate the pertinence of language to research on feminism and complicity.

Chapter 2 is concerned with complicity and corporate feminism. I undertake a close textual analysis of Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's best-selling book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013), arguing that Sandberg is complicit with a move to incorporate and recuperate feminism within a corporate context. I make the case that *Lean In* is more than just a sporadic appropriation of feminism, but a comprehensive takeover.

Chapter 3 uses Robin D'Angelo's excellent book *What Does it Mean To Be White?* to analyse three celebrities and their response to accusations of racism and cultural appropriation. Looking at Miley Cyrus, Iggy Azalea, and Lily Allen, I consider whiteness, approaches to cultural appropriation, and the ways these

intersect with celebrity. This chapter finishes by exploring the relationship between complicity and ignorance, using the work of Erinn Gilson.

Chapter 4 is concerned with beauty, and uses the example of the Kardashian Jenner siblings to parse the thorny terrain of feminisms and physical appearance. This chapter begins by considering a range of feminist approaches to beauty, and considers the famous family in relation to femmephobia and gendered hierarchies of value. I argue that the Kardashians can be seen as complicit with furthering discourses about beauty as a means for individual self-improvement, but also that the siblings are frequently subject to sexism and femmephobia on the basis of their hyperfeminine, hypersexual gender presentation.

Chapter 5 builds on the previous chapter by looking at representations of the contemporary domestic. Here I look at feminist debate on class and fertility, and at racialized depictions of domesticity. To do this, I consider Kirstie Allsopp and Jack Monroe, and then move to Kate Middleton and Nadiya Hussain. These case-studies, as well as considering complicities related to the representation of class, point to media complicity with presenting feminism in flawed and reductive ways.

The conclusion clarifies the original contribution of this work, acknowledges limitations, and makes suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 1

‘Is woman smart to do sex work? Can college student prostitute? Is hooker businessperson?’: Navigating Feminist Histories and Contemporary Culture

The introduction to this thesis laid out the literature review, research trajectory, contribution to knowledge, theoretical framework, methodology, and chapter breakdown. This chapter is an extended introduction which justifies the need for feminist research on complicity by looking at past and present feminisms. I present some ways feminisms have already engaged with complicity – in terms of politics, practice, and framework – in order to provide examples of how the concept materialises across feminist writing. This chapter finishes with a case-study – Quvenzhané Wallis at the Oscars - in order to illustrate the pertinence of language to research on feminism and complicity. To demonstrate that feminisms have recurrently conceived of women in a fixed way, I begin by looking at some examples of feminist essentialism, ultimately arguing that the move away from this creates more space for a discourse on complicity. Black feminist critiques of white-centric second-wave feminisms were recognition of white women’s complicity with white supremacy, as were working-class critiques of middle-class privilege, and queer critiques of heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia within feminisms. The following section considers various incarnations of essentialism, and situates complicity in relation to feminist histories.

‘All men keep all women in a state of fear’: Previous Feminisms, Essentialism, and Complicity

The gradual move in feminism, from essentialism to contemporary feminisms that work from, or work towards an intersectional perspective, provides a

necessitating context for an exploration of complicity. Some feminisms have relied upon essentialist constructions of womanhood, and encouraged solidarity on the basis of an imagined sisterhood. These feminist theories and concurrent forms of activism were built on notions of a shared womanhood (sometimes in biologicistic terms, sometimes not) or a universalised female experience that often excluded women that weren't white, middle-class, able-bodied, cisgendered and/or straight. Feminists have articulated essential womanhood in a variety of ways. Some first-wave suffragettes argued that women had 'a natural disposition toward maternity and domesticity' and should be granted the vote because their moral superiority would improve society as a whole.⁵⁷ Whereas many second-wave feminists didn't subscribe to essentialism in theoretical terms, discursively and practically they related particular theories of oppression to an idea of what it was to be a woman.

Many second-wave radical feminists wrote about women's oppression in relation to their bodies. Shulamith Firestone refers to women as a 'sex class' in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), stating that the 'natural reproductive difference' between men and women means that women throughout history have been 'at the continual mercy of their biology'.⁵⁸ In *Against Our Will; Men, Women and Rape*, Susan Brownmiller refers to 'man's structural capacity to rape and woman's corresponding structural vulnerability', thus connecting anatomy with power relations, and eventually stating that 'all men keep all women in a state of fear'.⁵⁹ Whereas bodies still figure prominently in feminist theory, they are not

⁵⁷ Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen, *Gender Communication Theories and Analyses: From Silence to Performance* (London: Sage, 2006), 5.

⁵⁸ Shulamith Firestone, 'The Dialectic of Sex' in Barbara A. Crow, ed. *Radical Feminism: a Documentary Reader* (New York: New York, University Press, 2000), 93.

⁵⁹ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1975), 13.

presumptively assigned to categories of gender and biological sex based solely on anatomy. For Brownmiller, simply having a penis or vagina gives a person a particular fixed role when it comes to oppression or unequal power dynamics; she presents bodies as natural, rather than as having various meanings within a social system of ideas.⁶⁰ The move away from bodies with fixed meaning means complicity can be attributed to a variety of social actors.

Some feminist legal theorists relied upon an essential construction of women in order to criticise the male-centred legal system or advocate for laws that better served women. Writing in 1988, Robin West called for law based on ‘women’s true nature’, arguing that women were relational rather than autonomous, based on their experience of pregnancy, intercourse, and breast-feeding.⁶¹ Again, women are seen as inextricable from their physiology, with their oppression stemming from their biological female bodies. Catharine MacKinnon has been criticised for her construction of women as universal, not based on biology but on ‘social reality’ as she sees it. These criticisms say that MacKinnon should look to ‘relations *among* men and women, not just between them’.⁶²

In their work on *écriture féminine*, or “feminine writing”, French poststructuralist feminists also refer to the physical sexed body, whilst also purporting to acknowledge the differences in women’s lives. In *The Laugh of Medusa*, Hélène Cixous acknowledges that there is ‘no general woman, no one

⁶⁰ For further discussion on this see Jill Marsden, ‘A Short History of Nature: Feminism and Transcendental Physiology,’ in *Gender in Flux*, ed. Anne Boran and Bernadette Murphy (Chester: University of Chester Press, 2004), 99–116.

⁶¹ Jane Wong, ‘Anti-Essentialism v. Essentialism Debate in Feminist Legal Theory: The Debate and Beyond’, *William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 5 (1998), 277.

⁶² Wong, (1998) 282.

typical woman,' but still encourages women to 'write through their bodies'.⁶³ Luce Irigaray, speaking about 'female' sexuality, says 'Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking'.⁶⁴ Feminist essentialism, then, takes various forms, and doesn't necessarily refer to an overt assertion that womanhood is biologically inherent. Cressida Heyes refers to four types of essentialism, which Alison Stone summarises as:

(1) metaphysical essentialism, the belief in real essences (of the sexes) which exist independently of social construction; (2) biological essentialism, the belief in real essences which are biological in character; (3) linguistic essentialism, the belief that the term 'woman' has a fixed and invariant meaning; and (4) methodological essentialism, which encompasses approaches to studying women's (or men's) lives which presuppose the applicability of gender as a general category of social analysis.⁶⁵

Following from this, whilst many second-wave feminists didn't subscribe to metaphysical or biological essentialism, they did often utilise linguistic or methodological essentialism. They assumed "women" had a particular meaning, or wrote about women in a way that suggested this, and they invoked a shared female experience that was often actually a white, middle-class, straight, cisgendered, able-bodied experience.

In 1977, *The Combahee River Collective Statement* declared that 'no one before has ever examined the multilayered texture of Black women's lives.'⁶⁶ The collective, among other things, stated that separatism - as advocated by some radical lesbian feminists - was not an option for them, because they needed to

⁶³ Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *Signs*, 1.4 (1976), 876.

⁶⁴ Luce Irigaray, *This sex which is not one*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977, repr. New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 26.

⁶⁵ Alison Stone, 'Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Philosophy', *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 1 (2004), 137.

⁶⁶ Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement*, April 1977, Accessed June 29, 2016, <<http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>>

organise in solidarity with men of colour against racism. The statement explicitly rejects 'biological determinism', calling it 'a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic'. bell hooks, writing in 1984, said feminists must fight to end racism and classism as well as sexism. Her definition of feminism as 'a movement to end sexist oppression' acknowledges that all people – including women – can be sexist, and her work advocates that men take responsibility for sexism and ultimately become feminist allies.⁶⁷

These black feminist examples show the complexity of feminist subjectivity; black feminism demonstrates that the experience of womanhood presented by white feminists is not universal. As feminisms move from essentialism to intersectionality, more and more space emerges for differing, potentially conflicting subjectivities. Because feminism talks about people from different perspectives and with varying power relations in mind, we are able to recognise a woman oppressed in one sense and oppressor in another. It is this movement towards varying subjectivities and positionalities that enables a feminist turn towards complicity. It is possible and increasingly more important to face complicity as we continue to acknowledge our interlocking relations with one another in terms of power and privilege. Feminist work on intersectionality and kyriarchy (the former developed by critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, and the latter by feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza) acknowledges the ways that systems of oppression intersect to create varied experiences of power and powerlessness. Schüssler Fiorenza refers to 'the complex interstructuring of patriarchal dominations inscribed *within* women

⁶⁷ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press: 2000), 18.

and in [...] relationships of dominance and subordination *between* women'.⁶⁸ [Emphasis mine]. If we are able to acknowledge that we may be both oppressor and oppressed, or oppressed in differing ways according to situation, environment and identity position, feminist theories of complicity and conversations about complicity can build upon this acknowledgement to develop strategies to overcome it.

Universalised notions of female experience, and biologically essentialist constructions of women still exist, both in and outside of feminism. Trans-exclusionary radical feminists (commonly referred to as TERFS)⁶⁹ rely upon biological definitions to define womanhood, and liberal feminist discourses of 'having it all' often rely on a white cis middle-class conception of motherhood and work. Additionally, mainstream media outlets frequently represent feminism as being about 'women' in general, but focus on images and issues that most relate to the lives of more privileged women. These same outlets frequently suggest that being a successful woman is synonymous with being a feminist (this is often the case with female politicians and celebrities), and that feminisms are in favour of the actions of every woman. It is often considered "unfeminist" for women to criticise other women, despite a long feminist history of disagreement, uncomfortable analysis, and dissent.

At the beginning of 2017, the Prime Minister of the UK and the first ministers of Northern Ireland, and Scotland are all female.⁷⁰ Angela Merkel is German Chancellor, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote in the US election, and French

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), 123, emphasis added.

⁶⁹ Note that some radical feminists consider this term a slur

⁷⁰ Katrin Bennhold, "Glass Cliff,' Not Just Ceiling, Often Impedes Women Rising in Politics', *The New York Times*, 5 October 2016 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/05/world/europe/glass-cliff-uk-women-politics.html>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

National Front leader Marine Le Pen is a presidential candidate. The existence of these women in positions of political power doesn't mean that their parties have equal representation of women or that their policies could be described as feminist – of course there are stark political differences between Nicola Sturgeon's Scottish National Party and Arlene Foster's Democratic Unionist Party – but essentialist discourses still circulate about their ability to lead because of their sex. Speaking about *Women2Win*, an organisation founded by Theresa May that aims to elect more female Conservative MPs, Anne Milton, MP for Guildford and Deputy Chief Whip said of female politicians, 'We've got a different way of doing business'.⁷¹ In 2016, Conservative leadership candidate Andrea Leadsom said that her being a mother gave her an edge on fellow candidate Theresa May because Leadsom would have 'a very real stake' in the future of the UK. This operationalises reductive sexist stereotypes about women as mothers, as carers, as morally superior, and as relational. Leadsom's statement links motherhood with egalitarian leadership, and calls into question the womanliness, and moral standing of May, because she has no children. Biologically reductive essentialism is very much alive and well, despite feminist growth on issues of intersectionality.

Feminisms can still be essentialist (biologically and linguistically), and the categories 'woman' and 'feminist' are often combined in ways that don't particularly make sense in light of feminist histories. The move towards intersectionality then doesn't mean that all contemporary feminists with an understanding of it have completely 'decolonized' their minds or adjusted their practice, but that feminisms aren't conceived of by feminists as being simply

⁷¹ 'About Us', *Women2Win* <<https://www.women2win.com/about-us>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

pro-women and anti-men.⁷² Whereas many second-wave feminist texts did ask questions regarding complicity, often they discursively constructed all women as victims and all men as perpetrators of sexism. In doing this, men are presented as always dominant and women as always dominated, whereas this is not the case when we acknowledge factors such as race, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, ability and so on. For example, second-wave white feminists often didn't account for the class and/or race privilege white women have over men from marginalised communities.

Contemporary feminists speak in terms of systems of privilege, and refer to more complex subjectivities and positionalities. The subsequent complication, blurring, or emerging of categories is what facilitates a consideration of complicity. In other words, when feminism was constructed around more simplistic subject positions, complicity was less visible. For example, radical feminist group The Redstockings wrote in 1969 about the 'Pro-Woman Line', which was a theory that stated, 'Women as oppressed people act out of necessity (act dumb in the presence of men), not out of choice'.⁷³ Whilst this theory is open-minded and understanding of the fact that women are socialised within patriarchy, it doesn't account for the fact that privileged women can act in ways that are oppressive to less privileged women, or less privileged men, and it doesn't allow for women who actively work to limit other women's choices (I'm thinking in terms of reproductive rights but this can apply to any number of issues). The pro-woman line, and theories like it, obfuscates the possibility of

⁷² The notion of decolonising the mind comes from hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*.

⁷³ Hanisch, *The Personal is Political*, 2006;

This point was also made by pre-first-wave feminists Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (T. F. Unwin, 1891); and Mary Astell in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, ed. by Patricia Springborg (1668-1731; repr. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002).

complicity. They don't allow the possibility of women being complicit in upholding intersectional forms of oppression because they present women as always surviving within patriarchy, rather than as inhabiting different subject positions within kyriarchy.

The development of feminist discourse, theory, and politics, has opened up space for more perspectives, more vantage points, and so more complex feminisms that allow for some discussion of complicity. There has been a move from essentialism in feminist discourse, and the use of a white privileged subject to stand in for all women, to a more widespread understanding of intersectionality. Mary Maynard, writing about the changes between second and third-wave feminisms, says, 'the self is no longer conceived in rationalistic, monolithic and homogeneous terms' but as 'fragmented, pluralistic, eroticised and as continually changing'.⁷⁴ Because the self is seen as a culmination of contradictions and conflicts, it befits feminism to look towards complicity, not as a means of blame, but of further and more nuanced understanding.⁷⁵

This section looked at essentialism in previous feminisms as an example of how feminisms were constructed around more stable subject positions. Whilst acknowledging that contemporary feminisms still do this in some ways, I contend that the move away from this provides space to look at complicities within feminism. Black, working-class and queer feminists articulated critiques of white women's complicity with white supremacy, middle-class privilege, and heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia within feminisms. These critiques have transformed feminist understandings of power relations, building

⁷⁴ Mary Maynard, 'Beyond the 'Big Three': the Development of Feminist Theory into the 1990s,' *Women's History Review* 4 (1995): 269–70.

⁷⁵ Maynard, 270.

upon and expanding second-wave theories in order to decentre white, middle-class women. In the next section I will argue that the more recent political and cultural landscape also lends itself to a feminist study of complicity. I do this by examining postfeminist neoliberalism, and taking stock of the recent resurgence of feminism across popular culture.

‘Women are Strong’/‘No to Feminism’: Contemporary Feminisms, Postfeminist Neoliberalism, and Complicity

In *The Aftermath of Feminism*, Angela McRobbie describes postfeminism as an environment in which ‘elements of feminism have been taken into account’ but are simultaneously seen as irrelevant and a thing of the past.⁷⁶ The assimilation of postfeminist language and imagery into capitalist contexts, like those that utilise the language of “empowerment”, “independence” and “choice”, further complicate the subject categories of feminism. McRobbie suggests women and girls are offered certain kinds of empowerment - through consumption, certain performed sexualities, access to education and employment - as a substitute for ‘feminist politics and transformation’.⁷⁷ In their book on ‘New Femininities’, Gill and Scharff summarise several interpretations of postfeminism, indicating that it can have elements of retro-sexism, backlash, and a sense of the ‘pastness’ of feminism.⁷⁸ Most importantly however, they identify postfeminism as a ‘sensibility’, which includes:

The notion that femininity is increasingly figured as a bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification in the ways that (some) women are represented; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a

⁷⁶ Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: SAGE, 2008), 1.

⁷⁷ McRobbie, quoted in Gill and Scharff (2011), 4.

⁷⁸ Gill and Scharff, 4.

‘makeover paradigm’; a resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference; the marked ‘resexualization’ of women’s bodies; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference.⁷⁹

Many popular representations of gender operate from this postfeminist vantage point and so feminist ideas and language are often operationalised for commercial end. Because of this, there is an ongoing debate in popular and alternative media outlets about what is feminist, and what isn’t, and who is feminist and who isn’t. Complicity figures here because this debate relies upon simplistic assumptions about what feminism is and what a feminist looks like, as well as maintaining a binary of feminist and not, rather than a spectrum of feminism that might be more appropriate when describing female politicians or musicians. This debate tries to assign complicity but does so within a medium that is designed to attract clicks and sell advertising space, rather than one interested in what it means to be a feminist, and what it means to live as one. This overly simplistic influx of hot-takes doesn’t fit with feminist discourse itself, illustrated by the fact that many feminist tweets and memes mock it, for example: ‘Is [pop star] a feminist? Is MasterCard a queer ally? Is this TV show my friend?’⁸⁰ ‘Is woman smart to do sex work? Can college student prostitute? Is hooker businessperson?’⁸¹

McRobbie’s description of postfeminism, written in 2009, talked about *Sex and The City* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, both of which contained “girl power” or “strong woman” tropes. Today, many pop culture figures and texts actually use the word “feminist” and directly address what they perceive feminist issues to be. McRobbie acknowledges this in a 2015 article where she says, ‘feminism

⁷⁹ Gill and Scharff, 4.

⁸⁰ Tweet by @negaversace, July 3, 2015 (liked 10.7k times as of April, 2017).

⁸¹ Tweet by @merrittkopas, February 22, 2016 (liked 65 times as of April, 2017).

once again has a presence across the quality and popular media, and similarly in political culture and in civil society.’⁸² Where the Spice Girls had girl power and Destiny’s Child celebrated ‘independent women’, Beyoncé now performs in front of huge letters spelling out ‘feminist’,⁸³ and Miley Cyrus proclaims herself ‘one of the biggest feminists in the world’.⁸⁴ Harry Potter actress Emma Watson has a feminist book club, the Women’s Equality party is the fastest growing party in the UK,⁸⁵ and Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, describes her business book as ‘a feminist manifesto’.⁸⁶ This isn’t a value judgement on the feminist credentials of these examples (because there are significant differences between them), but rather an illustration of the current popularity of feminist imagery, language and ideas across mainstream pop culture.



⁸² Angela McRobbie, ‘Notes on the Perfect: Competitive Femininity in Neoliberal Times,’ *Australian Feminist Studies* 30 (2015), 4.

⁸³ Beyoncé performed a medley from her eponymous album at the 2014 Video Music Awards (VMAs) which included a rendition of ‘Flawless’ where the singer posed in front of a giant illuminated sign that read ‘Feminist’. See Jessica Bennet, ‘How to Reclaim the F-Word? Just Call Beyoncé’, *Time*, 26 August 2014 <<http://time.com/3181644/beyonce-reclaim-feminism-pop-star/>> [Accessed 7 January 2018];

This marked the beginning of Beyoncé openly embracing the term, and her 2016 album *Lemonade* was lauded as being about and for Southern black American women. The singer performed a medley from *Lemonade* at the 2016 VMAs, and closed the performance by standing with her dancers in the shape of a feminist symbol. See Jessica Goodman, ‘VMAs: Beyoncé closes performance with feminist symbol’, *Entertainment Weekly*, 28 August 2016 <<http://ew.com/article/2016/08/28/vmas-beyonce-feminist-symbol/>> [Accessed 7 January 2018].

⁸⁴ Katie Amey, ‘Miley Talks Feminism’, *Cosmopolitan*, 2013 <<http://www.cosmopolitan.co.uk/celebs/entertainment/miley-cyrus-feminist-quotes>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

⁸⁵ This is according to the party’s Facebook and Instagram accounts, as well as reporting by The Telegraph, The Independent and the BBC.

⁸⁶ Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (London: Random House, 2013), 10.

Feminism as fashionable is another reason to develop discourses of complicity; nuanced depictions of agency and subjectivity are an intervention into media narratives that restrict feminisms to the simplistic subject positions and narratives they have increasingly been moving away from. These discourses can counter media presentations of feminism as being about men ‘versus’ women, feminists ‘hating’ men, feminism as solely about gender or sex, and so on. Using a feminist language that incorporates complicity (in a respectful and contextual manner) can appreciate the importance and power of Beyoncé’s visual album ‘Lemonade’, especially for black women, and also understand bell hooks’ critique of it within the context of capitalism.⁸⁷ Complicity as a feminist tool lets us defend Miley Cyrus from slut-shaming, but criticise her vehemently for cultural appropriation; it enables us to see Sheryl Sandberg’s success as a businesswoman and to deconstruct her use of feminist language, imagery and ideas.

Whilst feminism is becoming *increasingly* fashionable (literally - as Forever 21, H&M, Topshop and Zara sell t-shirts and sweatshirts boasting feminist slogans, and Chanel’s 2014 catwalk show used imagery of feminist protest, complete with supermodels holding placards), it has been used to appeal to female customers for many years. The language and imagery of feminism is used to sell cosmetics, hygiene products, and sportswear. Sure deodorant says ‘Women are Strong’, Pantene tells women to #ShineStrong, and Dove’s ‘Campaign for Real Beauty’ includes a 2016 advertisement where women are asked to choose

⁸⁷ bell hooks, ‘Moving Beyond Pain’, *Bell Hooks Institute* <<http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain>> [Accessed 10 May 2016].

between two doors labelled 'beautiful' and 'average'.⁸⁸ This capitalist recuperation of feminism means it can be 'taken into account'⁸⁹ and recognised by the consuming audience, but remain isolated from its more radical and collective messages. This increased accessibility of diluted feminist ideas means feminism is available to more subjects, but often not politicised ones.



⁸⁸ Dove Choose Beautiful | Women all over the world make a choice
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DdM-4siaQw> [Accessed 29th November 2017].

⁸⁹ McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 1.

So feminism itself is more fashionable, and the language of feminism (or of postfeminism) is utilised in various settings in the service of profit and brand enhancement. This bolsters the need for a feminist language of complicity because feminism becomes increasingly merged with consumerist postfeminist culture, which many of us interact with via social media, through our affinity for particular celebrities and artists, and by means of television shows like *Girls*, *The Mindy Project*, and *Broad City*, which actively incorporate postfeminist themes and coy feminist awareness. As feminism rises to the surface of mainstream discourse and pop culture representations, feminisms should advocate for a multidimensional approach. We need to talk about complicity because feminism is getting more popular, but there is also something about the *type* of feminism being promulgated that relates to complicity. When Lena Dunham and Mindy Kaling are interacting with feminist themes (whether that be female independence, creativity and authorship, representations of bodies and nudity, or the depiction of women of colour on television), it's expedient to have a language of complicity that can accept and appreciate the favourable aspects of their work on some fronts, and also recognise their shortcomings, and their complicities with certain perspectives (both women have been criticised and praised from a feminist standpoint, and Kaling has commented on how being viewed in terms of her gender and race limits her as a female artist).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ For a summary of controversies involving Dunham, see Constance Grady, 'Lena Dunham accused a woman of lying about her rape. It fits her controversial past.' *Vox*, 21 November 2017 <<https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/11/21/16679078/lena-dunham-accused-woman-lying-rape-murray-miller-aurora-perrineau>> [Accessed 29 November 2017]; Kim Renfro, 'All the times Lena Dunham's problematic feminism has let us down and sparked controversy' *Insider*, 20 November 2017 <<http://www.thisisinsider.com/lena-dunham-hipster-racism-feminism-problems-2017-11>> [Accessed 29 November 2017]; For a defence of Dunham as a feminist, see Sarah Pike, 'Why Lena Dunham Is THE Voice of Our Generation', *The Huffington Post*, 14 July 2015 <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-pike/why-lena-dunham-is-the-vo_b_7770666.html> [Accessed 29 November 2017];

Neoliberalism also intersects with postfeminism and complicity; individualist gendered narratives encourage female success within existing capitalist paradigms, rather than collective political resistance to prevailing gender norms. Neoliberal rationality spills over, and often fits neatly into, discussions on and representations of feminism, particularly when it comes to representations of choice and power. Aspects of this neoliberal rationality, such as: self-as-project, self-branding, individualism, personal responsibility, and an economic rationale applied to all aspects of public and private life, lead to an understanding of feminism as being solely about ‘choice’, or as being a tool for individual power and advancement by means of savvy self-management. With a feminist language of complicity, feminists can respond to the neoliberalisation of feminist discourse, particularly to those privileged women who take up the mantle of gender equality to advance themselves.

Roxane Gay, ‘Lena Dunham: A Generation's Gutsy, Ambitious Voice’, *Time*, 24 September 2014 <<http://time.com/3425759/lena-dunham-a-generations-gutsy-ambitious-voice/>> [Accessed 29 November 2017];

For feminist criticisms of Kaling, see ‘The Unending Heartbreak of Great Expectations: Why I Can’t Watch The Mindy Project Anymore’ *The Crunk Feminist Collective*, 16 May 2013 <<http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2013/05/16/the-unending-heartbreak-of-great-expectations-why-i-cant-watch-the-mindy-project-anymore/>> [Accessed 29 November 2017];

Navi Lamba ‘Why I’m Disappointed in Mindy Kaling’, *Vice*, 15 May 2015 <https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/9b88k8/why-i-hate-mindy-kaling-283> [Accessed 29 November 2017];

For feminist praise of Kaling, see Evelyn Chapman, ‘Mindy Kaling Is Quickly Becoming Our Feminist Hero—And Here's Why’ *Bust* <<http://bust.com/entertainment/13819-mindy-kaling-is-quickly-becoming-our-feminist-hero-and-here-s-why.html>> [Accessed 29 November 2017]; Courtney Lindley, ‘Reasons ‘The Mindy Project’ Is Actually A Feminist Masterpiece To Get You Ready For Season 4’, *Bustle*, 15 September 2015 <<https://www.bustle.com/articles/110543-reasons-the-mindy-project-is-actually-a-feminist-masterpiece-to-get-you-ready-for-season-4>> [Accessed 29 November 2017];

For Kaling commenting on the limitations of being judged based on her gender and race, see ‘Mindy Kaling Loves Rom Coms (And Being The Boss)’ *NPR*, 25 September 2012 <<https://www.npr.org/2012/09/25/161745528/mindy-kaling-loves-rom-coms-and-being-the-boss>> [Accessed 29 November 2017];

Jason Bailey, “I’m a Fucking Indian Woman Who Has Her Own Fucking Show”: Mindy Kaling Fires Back at “Insulting” Diversity Complaints’ *Flavorwire*, 10 March 2014

<http://flavorwire.com/444418/im-a-fucking-indian-woman-who-has-her-own-fucking-show-mindy-kaling-fires-back-at-insulting-diversity-complaints> [Accessed 29 November 2017].

Postfeminist neoliberalism also interacts with consumerist discourses, so that consumption becomes a method for creating and disciplining the self. In *Technologies of Sexiness*, Adrienne Evans and Sarah Riley discuss the ways in which subjectivities are formed through disciplinary neoliberal governance, whilst appearing to be ‘freely’ chosen:

A range of subject positions are created, where people are able to draw on a series of discourses about the self in order to create the self. These subject positions hail us in some way, so that through various processes of internalization we take them up and make them our own...Taking up the various articulations of neoliberal subjectivity may thus feel ‘choiceful,’ but they reiterate neoliberal constructions of ideal subjectivity, so that neoliberal subjectivity becomes a taken-for-granted understanding⁹¹

An awareness of the pervasiveness of neoliberal rationality is necessary to understand the ways it affects our sense of choice and agency. It’s important that many feminisms are actively hostile to or seriously critical of neoliberalism, partly due to its increasing reach into feminism - exemplified by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg who tells women to ‘Lean In’ to their careers, or Hillary Clinton who refers to women as ‘the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world’.⁹²

Neoliberal postfeminism provides a contested and subjective viewpoint from which to read gender. Groups like No to Feminism,⁹³ Conservative Women,⁹⁴ and Meninists⁹⁵ are visible on social media. Celebrity women speak out for or against what they perceive feminism to be - this is an ever growing list that includes Taylor Swift, Meryl Streep, and Jennifer Lawrence. There are feminists

⁹¹ Adrienne Evans and Sarah Riley, *Technologies of Sexiness: Sex, Identity, and Consumer Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

⁹² Rachael Combe, ‘Dreaming of Hillary’, *ELLE*, 2012 <<http://www.elle.com/life-love/society-career/at-the-pinnacle-of-hillary-clintons-career-654140>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

⁹³ Twitter account @NoToFeminism has over 177k followers as of April, 2017.

⁹⁴ Conservative Women’s Organization Twitter account @cwowomen has over 2.5k followers as of April, 2017.

⁹⁵ Twitter account @MininistTweet has over 1.3 million followers as of June 16, 2016. This account claims to be ‘sarcasm’ and ‘parody’ but is anti-feminist and openly misogynistic.

who disagree on grassroots campaigns like No More Page 3,⁹⁶ or the 2015 Amnesty decision to support the decriminalisation of sex work. There are feminists who don't recognise other feminists as feminists, for example, separatist radical feminist Sheila Jeffreys says there was never a third-wave, only backlash.⁹⁷ Conversely, many intersectional feminists see trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) or sex worker exclusionary radical feminists (SWERFs) as bigots and bullies.

A feminist position on complicity then is necessary in light of changing feminist discourses from the second to the third and fourth-wave, but also because of the current cultural landscape. If feminism changed between the second and third-waves - in terms of issues seen as important, the women involved in feminist conversations, the medium of those conversations, changes in how power relations are conceived, and changes in what is studied and in what light - the current political and cultural landscape provides a particularly complex and messy terrain in terms of gender politics, representations, feminist consensus and dissent. It is in light of this particular feminist landscape that I ask where complicity fits and how it might be approached. I reiterate that a feminist discourse of complicity must also point us towards recognising our own actions as potentially complicit, whether that includes foregrounding some issues over others, offering opinion on experiences we are uninformed about, or actively behaving in discriminatory or ignorant ways.

⁹⁶ See blog post 'Why I Never Signed the No More Page 3 Petition', *Another Angry Woman*, 2013 <<https://stavvers.wordpress.com/2013/02/13/why-i-never-signed-the-no-more-page-3-petition/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]. Note the author of this blog has over 18k followers on Twitter.

⁹⁷ 'Where Have All the Radicals Gone? When Feminism Gets Moderate.', *Feminist Current*, 2011 <<http://www.feministcurrent.com/2011/04/18/where-have-all-the-radicals-gone-when-feminism-gets-moderate/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

This section has presented contemporary neoliberal postfeminism as being conducive to conversations on complicity, both because feminism is more fashionable, and because the individualised, ‘choice’ heavy rhetoric of neoliberal postfeminism presents feminist language and imagery to an often apolitical audience. I will now look at how feminists have already pointed to complicity, and make some comment on the different ways they do this.

‘We must all make a conscious break with the system’: Feminist Discourses of Complicities

There is a latent discourse of complicity in feminist discourse, wherein feminists invoke complicity in a number of ways. I have divided feminist dealings with complicity into three broad categories – politics, practices, and feminist framework - though as expected there are significant overlaps from one category into another.⁹⁸

To begin with, we can consider complicity with political systems. Feminists that mention complicity in terms of politics tend to be referring to women’s interactions with capitalism, consumerism and neoliberalism. Because of this there can be a crossover with practices. For example, Maria Mies in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a Global Scale* points to white women’s complicity with the exploitation of women of colour in the global south. She uses complicity to refer to political systems – neo-colonialism, capitalism, and consumerism – but also to the practice of shopping. She says:

Women are not only victims of capitalist patriarchy, they are also, in varying degrees and qualitatively different forms, collaborators

⁹⁸ I refer to a fairly small number of texts in this section, so it is by no means a comprehensive survey of all the ways in which feminists invoke complicity. My previous research has looked at how different strands of feminism (liberal, anti-capitalist, radical) represent certain women as complicit based on their overall feminist approach.

with this system. This is particularly true for middle-class women worldwide, and for the white women in industrialized countries.⁹⁹

For Mies, whilst privileged white women are oppressed in myriad and differing ways, they are also complicit in the oppression of less privileged women. This is also true of white women when it comes to cultural appropriation and micro-aggressions, as well as in other forms of prejudicial behaviour relating to class, race, and so on. Criticisms of other feminists, or pointing to feminist complicity, is also usually done in relation to politics, and directed towards feminists who have not decentred or decolonized their perspective. Ongoing criticisms of white feminism and white feminists are claims of feminist complicity – white women take up a feminist identity but one that often fails to be intersectional, or to look beyond reformist liberal feminist politics.

Nina Power also sees complicity in relation to political systems or ideologies.

She points out the inevitability of complicity within capitalism, and points to the affective labour often undertaken by women in service industries:

In many ways it is impossible NOT to be complicit in some sense with capitalism and capitalist culture: almost everyone has to seek employment in order to pay for rent, food etc. The way in which employment demands a certain kind of ‘worker’ means that people are forced to play roles they might not want to play - the smiling receptionist, for example.¹⁰⁰

For Power, political complicities and the emotional and linguistic behaviours that go along with them are almost impossible to avoid. Similarly, Thomas Docherty refers to political complicities in the context of academic freedom, and the difficulties and limits of stepping away from that which you don’t agree with.

⁹⁹ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 224.

¹⁰⁰ Nina Power, e-mail message to author, 2013.

Docherty critiques ‘managerialist fundamentalism’ within UK universities, describing it as the ‘dominant language of the tribe’.¹⁰¹ In order to be employable, a left-wing feminist academic (for example) has to take on the voice and message of marketers, and make a CV by structuring her life experiences according to the very neoliberal logic she rails against. In choosing to not do this, to not be complicit, she would be outside the institution of the university and thus have less opportunity to write and teach about strategies for resisting, critiquing and deconstructing neoliberal rationalities. In this context, it’s difficult to avoid complicity, and advantageous to be strategically complicit in the short-term.

Invocations of feminist complicity also happen between various strands of feminism, with some feminists seeing liberal feminism as complicit with corporatism (as articulated in criticisms of Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In*, particularly Dawn Foster’s 2016 book *Lean Out*),¹⁰² radical feminism as complicit with gender essentialism (trans-exclusionary radical feminists often see trans people as reifying traditional gender roles, but many feminists see radical feminists themselves as being biologically essentialist because of their focus on ‘women born women’),¹⁰³ intersectional feminism as complicit with the

¹⁰¹ Thomas Docherty in *Exploring Complicity* (See Reynolds, above), 26.

¹⁰² Other feminist criticisms of *Lean In* include Linda Burnham, ‘Lean In’ and One Percent Feminism,’ *Truth-Out*, March 30, 2013 <<http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/15426-lean-in-and-one-percent-feminism>> [Accessed July 3, 2017];

bell hooks, ‘Dig Deep: Beyond Lean In,’ *The Feminist Wire*, October 28, 2013, <<http://www.thefeministwire.com/2013/10/17973/>> [Accessed July 3, 2017];

Susan Faludi, ‘Facebook Feminism, Like It or Not,’ *The Baffler* 23 (2013),

<<http://thebaffler.com/salvos/facebook-feminism-like-it-or-not>> [Accessed July 3, 2017];

Kate Losse, ‘Feminism’s Tipping Point: Who Wins from Leaning in?’ *Dissent Magazine*, March 26, 2013, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/feminisms-tipping-point-who-wins-from-leaning-in> [Accessed July 3, 2016].

¹⁰³ The arguments surrounding this are outlined in Michelle Goldberg ‘What is a Woman?’ *The New Yorker*, August 4, 2014 <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/04/woman-2>> [Accessed July 3, 2016].

normalisation of the sex industry,¹⁰⁴ Twitter feminism as complicit with policing discourse (Michelle Goldberg's article 'Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars' in *The Nation* made this criticism, which has been supported and decried by many other writers),¹⁰⁵ and so on. This raises an important point about complicity when it relates to feminist discourse – it is highly debateable what can be considered feminist or not, and therefore whether someone is complicit or not. As I have reiterated thus far, this very difficulty makes it necessary to always be contextual and thorough when invoking complicity and to be clear about the feminist position one is working from.¹⁰⁶

When talking about complicity with regard to practices, the distinction between what can be considered feminist and what can't is pertinent. Feminists may suggest that some women are complicit because of their interaction with a particular practice. This is most often the case in liberal feminism with sensationalist topics such as pole dancing, overtly sexual self-presentation, or cosmetic surgery. Other feminist work complicates a simple relationship between complicity and practices by pointing to the agency of women who choose to engage in a particular practice, the multiple contexts in which women may undertake a practice, or the changing meaning of practices themselves. Evans, Riley and Shankar try to balance an acceptance of women's enjoyment of certain practices, and maintaining a feminist critique of them – in their case through a study of how women make sense of and come to take on the

¹⁰⁴ Jess Martin, '#FTF: Millennials Co-Opting Intersectionality – The New Way to Say 'My Feminism is Better Than Yours'', *Feminist Current*, July 24, 2015 <<http://www.feministcurrent.com/2015/07/24/ftf-millennials-co-opting-intersectionality-the-new-way-to-say-my-feminism-is-better-than-yours/>> [Accessed July 3, 2016].

¹⁰⁵ Michelle Goldberg, 'Feminism's Toxic Twitter Wars,' *The Nation*, February 17, 2014 <<http://www.thenation.com/article/femisms-toxic-twitter-wars/>> [Accessed July 3, 2016]

¹⁰⁶ This isn't to say one must formally subscribe to a certain school of feminism to engage in a conversation about feminism – 'I am a radical feminist', 'I am a postmodern feminist' – but that, in a discussion about marriage and complicity for example, one is able to say 'I am approaching marriage as X' or 'with this issue I tend to see marriage from X perspective'.

sensibilities of postfeminism, neoliberalism and consumerism when it comes to sexuality.¹⁰⁷ Work like this presents a more nuanced picture of complicity, one where it may be considered unreasonable or unhelpful to call an individual complicit because of their interaction with a practice seen as ‘not feminist’.

Feminist discussions of complicity relating to practices have the potential to be judgemental or moralistic, and are complicated by the fact that practices can be read in a variety of ways. It is often the case that white women’s experiences or histories of a particular practice come to stand in for the experiences of other women. For example, feminists of colour have reiterated the different sexual stereotypes facing women of colour, and queer feminists have pointed out the ways queer people may use beauty practices as a subversion of existing gender hierarchies. It’s important then to situate a practice before going on to condemn it as bad for women, whatever that might mean.

As I have made clear, feminism is an amorphous, ever evolving, multifaceted political position that is taken up and expressed by people from a multitude of positions (and this is by no means a negative trait). A whole host of practices and beliefs have been described as the epitome of freedom, empowerment or resistance, and as the worst kind of oppressive misogyny. As stated in the introduction, the question that must permeate throughout feminist discussions of complicity is: ‘Complicit with what?’ Continually posing the question ‘Complicit with what?’ is a productive line of inquiry because it roots the topic at hand in context. If each interaction with questions of complicity and feminism comes from a situated position, from a specified framework, with a certain set of

¹⁰⁷ Adrienne Evans, Sarah Riley, and Avi Shankar, ‘Technologies of Sexiness: Theorizing Women’s Engagement in the Sexualization of Culture,’ *Feminism & Psychology* 20 (2010), 114–31.

laid out assumptions, with context and understanding of a practice or belief, then accusations or invocations of complicity can be tied to whatever discussion is at hand, rather than to all people who undertake a particular practice.

The final category where feminists invoke or address complicity is in their formulation of feminism itself. These feminists mention complicity in their definitions of feminism, or when they set out their framework. In *Feminism without Women*, Tania Modleski stresses that through our socialisation within ideology, everyone can be seen as a victim, and also as complicit. She says:

Today, we are in danger of forgetting the crucial fact that like the rest of the world even the cultural analyst may sometimes be a 'cultural dupe' - which is, after all, only an ugly way of saying that we exist inside ideology, that we are all victims, down to the very depths of our psyches, of political and cultural domination (even though we are never only victims).¹⁰⁸

Similarly, bell hooks says 'we have all (irrespective of race, sex, or class) acted in complicity with the existing oppressive system. We must all make a conscious break with the system.'¹⁰⁹ Both writers understand complicity as a starting point for feminist writing, research or politics, and through this understanding place themselves alongside the women they write about. I have taken on this use of complicity throughout this thesis by incorporating awareness of my de-facto complicity into my feminist approach.

Having touched upon the ways feminists can invoke complicity, I want to summarise some considerations that have been raised in this section. When considering complicity and feminisms, it is firstly important to work from an understanding of feminism as multiple, as approaches with various histories, as

¹⁰⁸Tania Modleski, *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age* (London: Routledge, 2014), 45.

¹⁰⁹ hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 164.

an evolving and non-hierarchical movement, and as a self-reflexive discourse that is always in conversation with itself. Following from this, when talking about practices, and whether someone is 'complicit' because of their interaction with a practice, there must be a context offered for that practice, and an appreciation that humans are agentic subjects within certain ideological parameters and political systems, inhabiting rationalities but with the capacity to impinge on each other's ability to live life in certain ways, and with the power to resist and subvert. A practice such as makeup use can be described as creative, resistant, subversive, and conformist, depending on the context and approach used. This doesn't make complicity a useless theoretical tool for feminism, but a flexible one.

It is also important to be aware that particular practices are linked with particular groups, and focusing on a practice may serve to further police people that are already marginalised. To take the example of makeup use again, condemning its users as complicit with patriarchy, or with a sexist beauty system, places further scrutiny on women who are often already considered superficial and vacuous because of their particular gender performance. Talking about makeup use as if it's a practice only undertaken by cisgendered heterosexual white women obscures the ways queer women, women of colour, men, and gender non-conforming people use makeup. It is important then to frame discussions of complicity in such a way that totalising narratives about certain practices aren't applied unduly. This would have sinister effects on already marginalised women if the practice discussed was sex work, for example.

The case studies in this thesis look at complicity in terms of politics *and* practice. In other words, I look at complicity with political systems or rationalities (neoliberalism, capitalism, postfeminism); at complicity with particular practices (cultural appropriation, co-opting feminist language); and I incorporate complicity into my feminist approach. Like hooks, Power, and Mies, I see everyone as complicit with the various social systems they live within. As people living in particular societies, we must fulfil certain roles to be a good employee, a member of a social group, a romantic partner, a daughter, and so on. It is not possible to act always in total accord with one's political beliefs, and for many people, this isn't ever a consideration. With this in mind, I recognise it is impossible to never be complicit with patriarchy, heteronormativity, white supremacy or capitalism, and that individual or group interactions within culture are a process of negotiation and navigation. Significantly, being part of a particular identity group does not exempt you from being complicit in the oppression or discrimination of someone from that group, or someone in another group. However, being part of an identity group can mean that you are more likely to understand a particular lived experience of that group (even though the group is by no means homogenous), and through informed political consciousness, be able to speak as a member of that group.¹¹⁰

The latter half of this chapter considers the role of feminist language in research on complicity and contemporary feminisms. Using McPhail's complicity theory I consider the role of language in contemporary feminisms, and use Quvenzhané Wallis at the Oscars as a case-study. I consider the feminist use of terms 'black' and 'white', arguing that such binary language doesn't reflect the nuances of

¹¹⁰ Derived from Hill Collins.

contemporary feminist knowledge, but ultimately is required to draw attention to dominant social positions.

Negative Difference and Decolonized Feminism: Feminist Language and Complicity

Mark McPhail's complicity theory posits that Western modes of language are based upon essentialist ontology – the idea that processes or things exist in and of themselves - which leads to the material reality of oppression in society.

Essentialist speech, according to McPhail, legitimates argumentative (oppositional) discourse because such discourse is aimed at the discovery of essential truths.¹¹¹ McPhail refers to essentialist language as 'the language of negative difference' - negative difference being the way language negates one thing by pairing it with another that is in opposition to it (such as man/woman, black/white, coloniser/colonised, and so on).

Our language of negative difference enables and (re)produces phallogentric, Eurocentric, and essentialist discourses. Radical critical theory challenges this with feminist, Afrocentric, and rhetorical discourses (among others). McPhail states that this adherence to the dominant discourse – by interacting with its predetermined binary poles, or simply reversing them - makes critical theory complicit in hegemony. This is problematized in contemporary feminism as much feminist work seeks to displace binaries by acknowledging a variance of sexes and genders and recognises that the two do not correlate in simplistic ways. Some feminist positions do however use the classic hegemonic binary more often – particularly radical feminism, which is very much focused on woman as subject, and opposed to trans politics, and liberal feminism, which seeks to slot women into an androcentric world, thus reducing the disparity

¹¹¹ McPhail, 'Negative Difference', 30.

between terms of the binary rather than abolishing it. McPhail's theory is a useful starting point for this study of complicity as it considers language itself to be involved in the framing of discourse, the creation of meaning, and the ways in which we interact with others. A focus on the language of feminism itself avoids the assumption that it is a neutral position from which to critique.

An important facet of essentialist thinking is the prominence of binary opposites. The existence of a binary pair 'implies that each binary concept requires its opposite for the construction of its meaning.'¹¹² Importantly, radical critical theorists challenge these binaries 'because they imply hierarchies.'¹¹³ Michael Awkward highlights the problem with reversing the binary, or trying to make women equal to men within the binary:

To simply reverse the binary opposition man/woman, when we are painfully aware of its phallogocentric origins, is to suggest complicity with the male-authored fiction of history. No feminist should be comfortable with such a suggestion, despite the potential institutional gains.¹¹⁴

According to McPhail, complicity is unavoidable, but he points out that using the language of the dominant discourse is 'adherence to the problematical ideological assumptions of position and privilege inherent in critical discourse'.¹¹⁵ This position is particularly applicable to liberal mainstream feminism that seeks reform within the current system. Increased power for white, middle-class women doesn't improve the situation of people from more marginalised groups. Seeking this power without questioning the dynamics and consequences of power does not transcend the current unequal situation, it

¹¹² Betty Moss, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. by Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace (London: Routledge, 2010), 63.

¹¹³ Moss, 63.

¹¹⁴ Awkward in McPhail, 'Negative Difference' 33.

¹¹⁵ McPhail, 'Negative Difference' 32.

merely replicates it. Speaking about the Women's Liberation Movement, hooks harshly critiques feminism that was 'concerned with getting women the right to be like men', saying it became a route for class mobility, where some women could be equal to men in the workplace, and 'could maximise their freedom within the existing system'. She says:

And they could count on there being a lower class of exploited subordinated women to do the dirty work they were refusing to do. By accepting and indeed colluding with the subordination of working-class and poor women, they not only ally themselves with the existing patriarchy and its concomitant sexism, they give themselves the right to lead a double life, one where they are the equals of men in the workforce and at home when they want to be.¹¹⁶

More contemporary examples of feminist work reiterate this problem articulated by hooks. In *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (2005), Ariel Levy both centralises the Western white woman's experience, and advocates a reformist feminism that is moralistic and stigmatising toward individual women, but doesn't call for any radical structural change. Speaking about 'raunch culture', she says:

Without a doubt there are some women who feel their most sexual with their vaginas waxed, their labia trimmed, their breasts enlarged, and their garments flossy and scant. I am happy for them. I wish them many blissful and lubricious loops around the pole. But there are many other women (and, yes, men) who feel constrained in this environment.¹¹⁷

This is a classic liberal feminist solution of working within the current system rather than overhauling it. Levy calls for more choice, rather than an understanding of why women make certain choices, and an examination of

¹¹⁶ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 5.

¹¹⁷ Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 198.

structural factors that lead to the prevalence of various choices. *Female Chauvinist Pigs* provides an example of how feminists can be, and often are, complicit in marginalisation (by excluding certain perspectives) or stigmatisation of other women (in this case, women engaged in a particular performance of female sexuality) – and by extension, in the social construction of sexism.

Using the terminology of Laclau and Mouffe from *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, McPhail suggests radical movements move beyond a ‘strategy of opposition’ to a ‘strategy of construction of a new order’.¹¹⁸ His theory of coherence is a way of thinking that sees difference as complementary rather than negative; all points of view are contingent upon and inseparable from each other.¹¹⁹ McPhail says scholars should seek a coherent, rather than oppositional, language that acknowledges the ways in which ideas are implicated in one another. Extending this, coherent language or expression includes and acknowledges paradoxes and contradictions, which of course are abundant when considering complicity.

Along these lines, hooks advocates a ‘decolonized’ feminism that does not ‘re-inscribe Western imperialism’. What hooks calls ‘decolonized’ is an intersectional position that doesn’t just claim to be aware of difference, but thinks and functions differently.¹²⁰ hooks recognises that white women are often not talked about in terms of culture - it is assumed that they are operating *outside* culture, that their actions are not raced or classed in ways those of other groups are. hooks’ decolonized feminism is implicature and coherence in

¹¹⁸ Mark McPhail, '(Re)Constructing the Color Line: Complicity and Black Conservatism', *Communication Theory*, 7 (1997), 166.

¹¹⁹ McPhail, 'Negative Difference', p. 36.

¹²⁰ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 46.

McPhail's terms. It doesn't position white Western women as opposite to, or more enlightened than women from non-Western countries – rather it understands patriarchy and examines the differing ways it affects women of different races, nationalities, ages, classes, and so on. It is also worth pointing out that hooks speaks of both black and white Western women, which contests the essentialist conception of the West as white (though she doesn't convey the actual diversity of race in the USA, which is much more than just black and white).

Conversely, *Female Chauvinist Pigs* does not handle difference in a decolonized, or coherent manner. Angelique Bletsas says of Levy:

Her approach ultimately occludes 'difference' as a meaningful political and conceptual thematic [...] [T]hough Levy acknowledges differences among women, the model she forwards for understanding this 'difference' is one which aims to recuperate a common or shared identity.¹²¹

In McPhail's terms, Levy takes an oppositional approach, one where she sees 'female chauvinist pigs' as being oppositional to the category 'woman', and thus oppositional to the category 'feminist'. This is partly done by referencing second-wave narratives of sisterhood and solidarity. Speaking about 'powerful, unrepentant' women who identify with men, Levy quips that 'not everyone cares that this doesn't do much for the sisterhood.'¹²² Bletsas critiques this formulation of – or lack of formulation of – difference, saying that Levy's promotion of white, Western women as the universal subject 'woman' creates a narrow and privileged analysis, rather than a 'coherent' one that would acknowledge other identity positions and subjectivities. Levy is 'oppositional' in

¹²¹ Angelique Bletsas, 'Sex and the Feminist Subject: Negating/engaging 'difference' in 'raunch Culture'.', *Outskirts Online Journal*, 25 (2011).

¹²² Levy, 95.

two ways: firstly, she places herself outside of her analysis and thus creates the false binary of enlightened feminist and complicit woman, and secondly, her subject matter and methodological approach focus mainly on one demographic of women, which is then positioned as signifying all women.

Bletsas points out that Levy shows an awareness of difference but doesn't do anything to counter the hegemonic discourse of sameness, or white-centricity in her text. She says:

Despite this awareness of the political importance of difference, the terms of the existing debate on sexualisation seem to render it a secondary concern: difference sits on the margins of a literature which repeatedly invokes it only to then evade it.¹²³

Contemporary white (or liberal, reformist, mainstream) feminists may be aware of difference, but this doesn't mean that they meaningfully engage with what that difference in experience may mean. Many white feminists still speak for themselves, they just make sure to show awareness of their privilege beforehand. They talk about difference, but when talking about beauty or sexualisation (and other topics such as work and domesticity) they continue to speak for 'women', but often in a way that ignores the intersections of race, class, and sexual orientation.

By looking at a brief case-study I will now traverse some of the issues raised by McPhail, in a contemporary feminist context. This case-study, and the discourse surrounding it, is a fairly obscure pop culture example. I have chosen to look at this case, rather than a more famous one, precisely because it did not

¹²³ Bletsas.

receive much traction in mainstream media outlets and within white cultural consciousness.

Quvenzhané Wallis at the Oscars

Quvenzhané Wallis is an African-American child actress who played the lead character in fantasy drama *Beasts of the Southern Wild* when she was six years old. She was nine years old when she walked the red carpet of the 2013 Academy Awards as the youngest person ever to be nominated for Best Actress, the first person nominated for an Academy Award to have been born in the twenty-first century, and the first African-American child actor to earn an Oscar nomination. Quvenzhané faced problems on the red carpet when a reporter told her she would just call her ‘Annie’ (she played the titular character in the 2014 remake) because she couldn’t pronounce her name. This issue emerged again when it was revealed that a member of the Academy didn’t vote for the actress because *he* couldn’t pronounce her name. Both of these issues were considered to have had racial undertones, both because her name is recognised as African-American, and because of other racist reactions to young black actresses playing characters that were envisioned as white.¹²⁴

Quvenzhané flexed her arms when the cameras at the Academy Awards were on her, and cheered for herself when her name was called in the Best Actress category. Presumably in relation to this, model Chrissy Teigen tweeted during

¹²⁴ Jamelle Bouie, ‘Are Black Names ‘Weird,’ or Are You Just Racist?’, *The Daily Beast*, 2013 <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/13/are-blacks-names-weird-or-are-you-just-racist.html>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]; Dodai Stewart, ‘Racist Hunger Games Fans Are Very Disappointed’, *Jezebel* <<http://jezebel.com/5896408/racist-hunger-games-fans-dont-care-how-much-money-the-movie-made>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]; “Why Wasn’t The Hunger Games Cast as I Imagined in My Racist Reading?!” , *The Guardian*, 28 March 2012, section Opinion <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/mar/28/hunger-games-cast-racist-imagined>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]

the ceremony that 9 year old Quvenzhané was ‘cocky’ and a ‘brat’.¹²⁵ This too was seen as racialized, and related to the representation of young black women as sassy and aggressive compared to their supposedly more pure and angelic white counterparts.¹²⁶

The 2013 Academy Awards were hosted by Seth MacFarlane (creator of adult cartoon Family Guy), whose brand of comedy relies heavily on shock tactics, alongside sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, and ableism. MacFarlane opened the ceremony with a jaunty song entitled ‘We Saw Your Boobs’ in which he reminded female actresses in the audience that he had seen them topless in a variety of films.¹²⁷ Several of the scenes mentioned were rape scenes; one of them – Boys Don’t Cry, with Hilary Swank – depicted the rape and murder of a transgender character which was based on the real life rape and murder of Brandon Teena. McFarlane went on to make light of domestic violence in a joke comparing Django to Chris Brown’s assault on Rihanna, and then made a joke about Quvenzhané Wallis being almost old enough to date George Clooney.

The 2013 Academy Awards then, already had a sexist ‘frat-boy’ atmosphere,¹²⁸ when satirical fake news site The Onion wrote a tweet calling Quvenzhané Wallis a c***. The tweet was taken down after an hour, but the incident initiated heated debates between black and white feminists, including ‘Where Were

¹²⁵ christine teigen, ‘I Am Forced to like Quvenzhané Wallis Because She Is a Child Right? Okay Fine.’, @chrissyteigen, 2013 <<https://twitter.com/chrissyteigen/status/305832953269862401?lang=en>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹²⁶ For more on representations of black girlhood see Ruth Nicole Brown, *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

¹²⁷ Seth MacFarlane We Saw Your Boobs Performance - Oscars 2013 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93r469s72mY>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]

¹²⁸ Sarah Hughes, ‘What Was Seth MacFarlane Thinking with His Oscars Boob?’, *The Guardian*, 25 February 2013, section Life and style <<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martinson/2013/feb/25/seth-macfarlane-oscars-opening-boob>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

White Feminists Speaking Out For Quvenzhané Wallis?’ by Kirsten West Savali in *Clutch* magazine. West Savali’s article condemns white feminists for their ambivalence following the incident, saying that white feminists are ‘disengaged from and apathetic to’ racism, which means the conversation on race and feminism ‘never progresses because many white feminists feign ignorance of their privilege.’ West Savali identifies some feminist issues as being particularly white, and therefore worthy of outraged think-pieces. She says:

We can all take the outcry over Rush Limbaugh calling Sandra Fluke a ‘slut’ all the way to the White House, but a 9-year-old Black girl can’t even get the support of white feminists in 140 characters or less.¹²⁹

Here, Savali West refers to the widely discussed Sandra Fluke incident wherein Fluke – a law student at the time – spoke at a committee in front of US House Democrats (having been rejected from the first panel made up entirely of male clergy or theologians) regarding new legislation that would require religious organisations (hospitals, universities and so on) to cover contraception in their health insurance plans. Right-wing shock jock Rush Limbaugh called Fluke a ‘slut’ and a ‘prostitute’ on his radio show – saying that she expected people to pay for her sex life and therefore owed the public videos of her having sex- and the ensuing controversy led to President Obama personally phoning Fluke to apologise for the way she had been treated.

Savali West points out that when the target of misogyny is middle-class white women, the feminist community – and many non-feminists also – are rightly outraged, but when the target is a young black female, many feminists remain

¹²⁹ Kirsten West Savali, ‘Where Were White Feminists Speaking Out For Quvenzhané Wallis?’, *Clutch Magazine* <<http://www.clutchmagonline.com/2013/02/quvenzhané-wallis-white-feminism/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

silent, either because they don't recognise racialised sexism, or because they don't see it as their problem. Interestingly, Fluke herself did not comment on the Quvenzhané fiasco until probed by feminists online. Her response encapsulates what many black feminists see as a classic white reaction:

Apology was 1st I saw of it. Thought my reaction obvious, but should have shown solidarity.

— Sandra Fluke (@SandraFluke) February 28, 2013¹³⁰

The Quvenzhané case is a useful introductory case-study for a number of reasons. It is an episode that highlights the differences between white and black feminism, and one that shows how a relatively small incident can trigger hurt, anger, frustration and defensiveness within feminist spaces. In this case we can see a microcosm of black and white feminist tension, and the normalisation of a white perspective both in the mainstream and within feminism itself.

To many white people, the incident seemed trivial and unworthy of attention or analysis – and perhaps still does. There was a disparity in reactions from the black and white feminist communities, with many white women not commenting at all, and others writing pieces on free speech, satire, or the history of the word in question.¹³¹ Feminists pointed out that had this happened to a young Miley Cyrus, Dakota Fanning or Abigail Breslin, there would have

¹³⁰ West Savali.

¹³¹ Katie J. M. Baker, "Cunt' Should Not Be a Bad Word", *Jezebel* <<http://jezebel.com/5987317/cunt-should-not-be-a-bad-word>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]; 'A Feminist Film Critic Defends the Onion's Quvenzhané Wallis Tweet', *FlickFilosopher.com*, 2013 <<http://www.flickfilosopher.com/2013/02/a-feminist-film-critic-defends-the-onions-quvenzhané-wallis-tweet.html>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]; 'Freedom of Speech - Even For The Awful Things | SheKnows' <<http://www.sheknows.com/community/entertainment/freedom-speech-even-awful-things>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

been much more outrage from mainstream feminists.¹³² Many feminists of colour argued that they are expected (rightly) to be outraged at sexist acts that happen to white women, but receive no solidarity when it comes to incidents involving women of colour.¹³³ Some black feminists commented that they had identified strongly with Quvenzhané – either because they had children of a similar age, or because they were happy to see a young black girl succeed in a male-dominated, often racist industry – and so were particularly infuriated by what happened.¹³⁴ There was a general lack of understanding and awareness by the wider community, of the historical dehumanization and sexualisation of black women and girls in America.¹³⁵

This incident showed, yet again, that the white feminist community, with all its referencing of intersectionality, did not understand the black feminist position, the issues that matter to it, and the need to either listen, or defend little black girls against ‘satire’ as much as they defend Miley Cyrus’s right to wear a nude body suit. Indeed, the infamous Miley Cyrus VMAs performance (discussed in detail in Chapter 3) is another example where black feminists needed to point out racism. White feminists wrote about sexuality, without noting that Cyrus’s expression of it was at the expense of her objectified and racialized black female dancers, and the ‘black’ sound she had requested from producers.

¹³² Lily Bolourian, ‘Quvenzhané Wallis Onion Tweet Sign Of Society’s Shameful Treatment Of Black Girls’, 2013 <<https://mic.com/articles/28324/quvenzhane-wallis-onion-tweet-sign-of-society-s-shameful-treatment-of-black-girls>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹³³ West Savali;

Tressie McMillan Cottom, ‘Did White Feminists Ignore Attacks on Quvenzhané Wallis? That’s An Empirical Question’, *Tressiemc*, 2013 <<https://tressiemc.com/uncategorized/did-white-feminists-ignore-attacks-on-quvenzhane-wallis-thats-an-empirical-question/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹³⁴ ‘Let Me Explain Why The Onion’s Quvenzhané Wallis Tweet Was so Hurtful.’, *Bitch Media* <<https://bitchmedia.org/post/let-me-explain-why-the-onions-quvenzhane-wallis-tweet-was-so-hurtful>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹³⁵ Hill Collins, 83.

These viewpoints have been expressed before, and are frequently expressed in online feminist spaces, but it's worth raising them as part of a general critique of complicity across contemporary culture. White mainstream feminists still act largely in their own interests and from their own standpoint, and are thus complicit in furthering white supremacy and hierarchies within feminism that reflect those of hegemonic ideologies. I look at Miley Cyrus in much more detail in Chapter 3, considering her racial appropriation as a means to transcend her Disney star persona, and how this plays out in feminist discourse in relation to racism and complicity.

I have outlined the ways in which white feminists are complicit in the perpetuation of racism, and will now, using the same article, discuss the ways feminist discourse can be complicit in reiterating essentialist binaries. This issue raises a number of important questions regarding the content of feminist thought versus the perception of it. I would like to raise the question of whether feminism should actively change its language to facilitate the understanding – and potential ‘conversion’ – of non-feminists, or whether it should continue with terms understood only by those familiar with its discourse. So far I have talked about race, and specifically the terms black/white - this itself reiterating a binary and obscuring other races, ethnicities and mixed race people. By doing this I point out the linguistic complicity inherent in using binary terminology, and the ways this can unfold in a feminist context.

West Savali says ‘white feminists’ many times in her article. She does not mean that every feminist who is white holds the view that the comment in question was not racist. She does not mean that whiteness is an essential or innate trait that causes a particular worldview. She does not mean that all black women

share her perspective, or that all black women are more likely to defend Quvenzhane Wallis based on their or her blackness, more so than other groups. Her words are shorthand, and they are understood by a lot of feminists – of all colours, but mainly non-white feminists – to mean that whiteness has been historically and contemporarily privileged and so many white people – but not all – are less aware or unaware of racialization, microaggressions, and the particular oppression and representation of people of colour, and subsequently don't recognise and condemn it. As stated in the introduction, identity position and political belief do not necessarily cohere into a predictable viewpoint – for example, black women are not all black feminists, or feminists at all, or politically left-wing.

West Savali is also referring to the common response of some racially privileged feminists - generally white - to automatically defend their ignorance of racial oppression, and argue that feminists of colour are being hypersensitive, encouraging infighting, and pandering to the patriarchy. The author recognises the racial hierarchy of feminist issues, but many white feminists do not. She mentions several feminist issues at the Academy Awards that she recognises as 'white', including Seth McFarlane's opening song, and the lack of female winners. Again she does not mean that all white feminists prioritise these issues, just that the feminist traditions that do (radical and liberal feminism) have historically been white.

Clearly, this explanation is much more complex than simply saying 'white' and 'black' to describe particular standpoints; the racial signifiers are shorthand for positions generally held by white and black feminists. However, using these terms allows the continuation of the idea that whiteness and blackness have an

inherent standpoint based on racial essentialism. I don't suggest feminists subscribe to this biological determinism, but that the continuation of this language in a feminist sphere lets the concept live on. However, these terms are crucially needed to draw attention to how whiteness and blackness (and indeed other racial positions) can relate to ways of experiencing and seeing the world.

Feminist readers largely understand that many white feminists completely agree with the sentiments expressed in the article by West Savali. They understand that this is not 'reverse racism', and that the author writes from a non-essentialist feminist standpoint that stresses the necessity of race-based analysis as a fundamental part of feminist discourse. The fact that this is not clear for the majority of people – people that aren't familiar with feminist thought – leads to a misrepresentation of feminism, and a derailing of these important discussions due to a fixation on the binary terms 'black' and 'white'.¹³⁶

As noted previously, McPhail states that political movements based on identity are complicit in furthering racism and/or sexism (and homophobia, classism, and ableism) because of their reliance upon and upholding of the dichotomous distinction between black/white, male/female (and others), through a variety of means (he talks about unifying discourses in Afrocentrism and Black Neo-Nationalism).¹³⁷ In using the terms 'black' and 'white', West Savali is employing the terms outlined by dominant culture but does so as a critique of what is held as the dominant side of the binary - whiteness. She may be reiterating the

¹³⁶ An example of this kind of derailing due to lack of familiarity with feminist discourses – though in terms of gendered terms rather than racial ones – is that of Bahar Mustafa, Welfare and Diversity Officer at Goldsmiths University, who was heavily criticised for tweeting #KillAllWhiteMen, which was interpreted as discrimination on the basis of race and gender. For a summary of this case, see Amanda Hess, 'Ironic Misandry Claims Its First Victim', *Slate*, 22 May 2015

<http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/users/2015/05/bahar_mustafa_at_goldsmiths_university_ironic_misandry_claims_its_first.html> [Accessed 29th November].

¹³⁷ McPhail, 'Negative Difference', 32.

binary, as well as ideas of what blackness and whiteness are – harking back to essentialism, without actually being essentialist – but she is also drawing attention to whiteness as a construct and a privileged standpoint. Her use of the binary then, is subversive. Problematically, this may not be immediately obvious to those not familiar with feminist context, literature, language or themes.

So, not only does language used in feminism not necessarily match the understanding of feminist readers and writers, but people not intimately involved with feminism often totally misunderstand these terms, which leads to a derailment of the topic at hand, and a prolonged argument between two sides that become increasingly entrenched in their own position. This argumentative discourse is what McPhail refers to in his theory of negative difference. It is argument that doesn't seek to see the other side in itself, but seeks to overcome the other view and reveal essential truth.¹³⁸

The use of the terms black/white (and I mean in the context of this case study, not all uses of these terms) or man/woman make it harder for feminism to be taken seriously in mainstream media. This occurs due to a variety of reasons – not just the terms. It is no secret that feminism has been represented negatively and incoherently in media forms since its beginnings, and this plays a large part in the stereotypical views the general public have of it. Suffragettes were portrayed as being 'uncontrollable hysterics, fanatics, repressed spinsters, or 'masculine' women';¹³⁹ and stereotypes of women's liberationists include the 'hairy legged, 'man-hating lesbian,' the PC-spouting 'feminazi,' and the

¹³⁸ McPhail, 'Negative Difference, 30.

¹³⁹ Ewa Płonowska Ziarek, *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 37.

castrating, childless ‘career woman.’¹⁴⁰ In a 2013 article in *The New Statesman*, feminist author and columnist Laurie Penny says feminism ‘is still stereotyped as an aggressive movement, full of madwomen dedicated to the destruction of the male sex’.¹⁴¹

When these stereotypes and preconceptions are coupled with defensiveness over racial or gendered terms, many people don’t pay attention to the content of discussions, but become obsessed with arguing over ideas of whiteness and blackness, or maleness and femaleness. There is also a general impatience with what are seen as academic obsessions with semantics, symbols, and language, or as the position is more generally referred to in online spaces, with “looking too much into things”. I am interested in asking whether feminisms should tailor themselves to being more understood, especially considering the imperfection of the terms already used, or whether to continue speaking in languages only understood within feminist circles, as a means of not pandering to the mainstream and its imperfect forms. I assume, in line with feminist tradition, that both options are viable.

The question then, is as follows: is it necessary to use these binary terms because white feminists (for example) should be criticised and held to account for their complicity in marginalisation? Or, should these terms be replaced with something more accurate such as ‘some white feminists’, ‘reformist feminists’, ‘liberal feminists’ that more closely describes the groups most to blame for this particular approach – or lack of – towards racism. Whilst I am inclined to

¹⁴⁰ Rory Cooke Dicker and Alison Piepmeier, *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 313.

¹⁴¹ ‘Laurie Penny on the F-Word in Modern Britain: Feminism’ <<http://www.newstatesman.com/society/2013/03/laurie-penny-f-word-modern-britain-feminism>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

suggest new, non-racialized terms – because non-feminists are derailed and distracted by them, and because they describe what they don't actually refer to – I understand that this might look like excusing (some) white feminists and allowing all white feminists to ignore the racialized aspect of their outlook. White feminists, or white-passing feminists, who aren't reformist or liberal feminists, could excuse themselves from racism by pointing in other directions. The term 'white feminists' mightn't mean all white feminists, but it does refer to whiteness as a perspective, which is something all white feminists (and white people) are implicated in, and so must work to unearth and make visible.

It's worth considering whether people involved in political debates should be concerned by how outsiders understand them. As I have said, most feminists know that 'white feminist' isn't synonymous with 'all feminists who are white', but people outside of feminist spaces often take this to be the case. Should we use the term 'white' to highlight whiteness as an ideology – but only have this understood by ourselves – or change it so outsiders are more likely to listen to the content of our arguments, perhaps be convinced by them, and become feminists themselves?

Conclusion

The latter part of this chapter has outlined a problem with the language of feminism, and with the behaviour of some white feminists regarding their reactions to racial issues. I suggest that by subscribing to the binary terms male/female, black/white, masculine/feminine, straight/gay, and working-class /middle-class , feminists are further entrenching these categories, even as their theory articulates the dubiousness of them. In saying this, these categories will be necessary within feminism as long as more privileged feminists resist truly

intersectional analyses. On a wider scale, this is also true of feminism, which ideally should not need to exist within a truly equal society.

Taking this chapter as an example of problematic essentialist language, my suggestion that white feminists acknowledge their complicity in the perpetuation of inequality reiterates the racial categories that lead to the original problem I am critiquing. It aligns whiteness with racial insensitivity, which isn't entirely untrue, but isn't entirely true either. In discussing these issues, I myself have not changed my terminology, or really concluded that it's necessary to do so. Working from McPhail, white feminists must recognise how the black feminist position is implicated in their own and make changes that work towards an inclusive feminism. These categories exist now out of necessity. Black feminism exists because mainstream feminism is white and doesn't address the issues that are most pertinent to feminists of colour. When mainstream feminism actually starts to incorporate other perspectives (moving from complicity to implicature and coherence), then the terms black/white feminism will no longer be needed.

I have presented questions relating to the theme of complicity in relation to race and gender and have done so in order to reveal the complicity of feminism as a discourse and the complicity of privileged feminists in reproducing hegemonic hierarchies. As I have said, this writing, in considering and challenging the use of essentialist terms, does use them and thus participates in the practice it potentially critiques. I am complicit in the language I believe to be problematic. The language used throughout this thesis does not adequately reflect people of colour that are not black, people that do not identify as straight, or people from different socio-economic or geographical backgrounds. This underscores my

argument that we do not have the language required to reflect the multiplicity of our identity, to articulate what our theory is saying, and to represent everyone. Western modes of language are essentialist, and the white-centric origins of certain strains of some feminisms (liberal and radical Anglo-American feminisms in particular) - alongside the media interest in and later appropriation of them - mean we have radical movements still using language that doesn't reflect their nuanced and multidimensional theories.

There are no easy solutions to these problems. Whilst I state that essentialist terms are reinscribing hierarchies, I also understand that some groups need to use them, and that the terms can call attention to behaviours associated with dominant groups, because of historical and contemporary privilege rather than biological determinism. Having considered the complicity of white feminists and the language of feminist movement, I have laid the groundwork for looking at other complicities. The questions raised in this work are not best considered in isolation from one another, so I will refer back to problems raised in this chapter and discuss overarching themes throughout.

The following chapter undertakes a close textual analysis of *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* (2013), and focuses on the relationship between neoliberalism and feminisms. Framing *Lean In* as complicit with a move to incorporate and recuperate feminism within a corporate context, I consider the neoliberalisation of the workplace, and examine the language and logics used in the book.

Chapter 2

Internalizing the Revolution: Sheryl Sandberg, Neoliberal Feminism and Complicity

This chapter will discuss complicity in relation to capitalism and neoliberalism. Specifically, I undertake a close textual analysis of Sheryl Sandberg's bestselling business book *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* (2013), in order to argue that Sandberg is complicit with a move to incorporate and recuperate feminism within a corporate context. Sandberg frames her book as feminist, and *Lean In's* complicity inheres in being blind to the tensions between its treatment of work and capitalism, and of historical and contemporary feminisms. Whilst feminism is increasingly appropriated in postfeminist, neoliberal, and capitalist contexts (particularly in advertising and fashion), Sandberg actively claims a feminist identity for herself and her book, and so situates herself *within* feminism rather than simply making references to it. Sandberg's attempt to situate herself within feminism is compromised by her positioning feminism itself as an accessory to capitalist individualism. The overall conclusion of this chapter is that *Lean In* is more than just a sporadic appropriation of feminism, but a comprehensive takeover.

A close textual analysis of *Lean In* will unearth various rhetorical, stylistic, and managerial strategies, including Sandberg's appropriately feminine self-presentation, the application of neoliberal logics and language to areas outside of the corporate sphere, and an incorporation of elements of liberal feminism. I begin by introducing *Lean In* and its author, and go on to discuss its controversial decision to focus on internal rather than external barriers to female success in the workplace. I then address Sandberg herself, and consider

her alongside Eisenstein's theory of sexual decoys. I do this by analysing Sandberg's Everywoman persona, the undercurrents of essentialism in *Lean In*, and what I term strategic complicity. I then provide context of liberalism and feminism, and neoliberalism and feminism, and incorporate a socialist feminist critique of capitalism and a post-Marxist analysis of the contemporary neoliberal workplace and the demands it makes on its workers. Having considered the ethos of the neoliberal workplace, and the necessary complicity of those who work within it, I look at managerial language in the book. Finally, I consider Sandberg's frequent use of disclaimers and defences throughout the text, arguing that they function as lip-service to potential critiques, rather than serious considerations of them. Overall, I argue that Sandberg's complicity comes about through a combination of position, platform, framework, and advice, which I will detail throughout this chapter. By looking closely at both the context and content of *Lean In*, I examine Sandberg's complicity, and use this to present neoliberal ideologies of work as dangerous for contemporary feminist politics.

'I'm a pom-pom girl for feminism': Introducing Sheryl Sandberg and *Lean In*

Sheryl Sandberg is the Chief Operating Officer for Facebook, was Vice President of Global Online Sales and Operations at Google, and served as chief of staff for the United States Secretary of the Treasury. She is one of the richest, most powerful women in the world, and is reportedly worth over \$1.5 billion.¹⁴² In 2010 she gave a TED talk entitled 'Why we have too few women leaders', which is the basis for what became the 2013 book *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will*

¹⁴² 'Sheryl Sandberg', *Forbes* <<https://www.forbes.com/profile/sheryl-sandberg/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

to *Lead*.¹⁴³ *Lean In* – best described as a business or self-development manual aimed at women – is about the role of women in the Western, white-collar workplace. The rights to *Lean In* were purchased by Sony Pictures, and Sandberg released an updated version of the book with added chapters for graduates in 2014. Additionally, *Lean In* is a foundation that provides resources relating to the book, and shares positive news stories about women in business or politics.

The *Lean In* foundation encourages women to join *Lean In* circles where they can share positive stories, network, and gain inspiration from other women. Notably, women in *Lean In* circles are encouraged to follow a curriculum and not give advice, and so the groups function in a fundamentally different way to radical feminist consciousness-raising (CR) groups from the 1960s and 1970s, despite superficial similarities. The ethos of CR groups was to take anger and bitterness, and transform, politicise, and theorise them in order to collectively enact change. In contrast, *Lean In* circles are intended to be business-centred and structured, and aren't always focused on sexism or politics.

Sandberg states that *Lean In* isn't a memoir, a self-help book, or a career management book, though she admits it does have aspects of all three of these (p. 9). Acknowledging the book's genre fluidity allows Sandberg to shape, manage, and deny aspects of the narrative that appear around *Lean In* in popular and feminist discourse.

Lean In was at the cusp of the very recent postfeminist re-rendering of feminism as acceptable, fashionable and even admirable. Sandberg frames herself and her

¹⁴³ Sheryl Sandberg, *Why We Have Too Few Women Leaders* <https://www.ted.com/talks/sheryl_sandberg_why_we_have_too_few_women_leaders> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

family as progressive throughout the book by expressing a lifelong interest in social issues (p. 55, p. 56), and whilst she admits she wouldn't have called herself a feminist in the past (p. 142), and that feminism was taboo when she was in college (p. 143), she does call *Lean In* 'sort of a feminist manifesto' (p. 10) and proudly declares herself a feminist at the time of writing (p. 159).

Sandberg's thesis in *Lean In* is that women hold themselves back in the workplace. Her goal is to encourage women to reach the top levels of government and business, and she advises women to undertake a number of changes in order to do this. Recognising the struggles women face in competitive work environments, she offers, among other things, negotiation tips, guidance on getting a mentor, and relationship advice. In line with neoliberal individualisation, and postfeminist makeover narratives, women are encouraged to change what they are most often implored to change – *themselves*. There are clear tensions then, between this approach, and that of contemporary feminisms.

Lean In was criticised and discussed extensively before it was even released - this owing to the novelty of a female billionaire writing a book about gender, and its controversial choice to address internal barriers to success rather than focus on external, or structural factors. Sandberg is unusual in her willingness to implicate women in their own relative failure, and this partly explains why *Lean In* caused so much friction in the feminist community. Complicity then, or the suggestion of complicit women, played a large part in the feminist interest and response to this work.¹⁴⁴ The female subjects in *Lean In* are not

¹⁴⁴ Some liberal feminists were defensive of Sandberg, including: Jill Filipovic, 'Sheryl Sandberg Is More of a Feminist Crusader than People Give Her Credit for', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2013

straightforwardly blamed however, and Sandberg's figuration of herself as Everywoman works to somewhat soften her indirect accusations.

Sandberg presents external and internal barriers to success as separate and unrelated entities, and this manifests itself in her construction of women as complicit. She claims that external barriers are discussed much more than internal ones (p. 9), which strengthens *Lean In's* overall message that individual women should manage themselves into promotions. The self is figured as something to work on - as a project that should be undertaken as if it were a job. Sandberg is dismissive of potential criticisms of this approach, and tries to dispense with them early on in the book. Framing the problem as a chicken/egg dilemma, she says, 'rather than engage in philosophical arguments over which comes first, let's agree to wage battle on both fronts' (p. 8/9). Her use of 'philosophical' here - which is used to mean abstract and pointless - is an attempt to portray potential critics as pedantic and narrow-minded.

Looking at internal barriers to success (the ways women may hold *themselves* back) isn't an innately non-feminist approach, but *Lean In* doesn't work within a framework that gives credence and prominence to structural and historical

<<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/01/sheryl-sandberg-lean-in-has-feminist-ideals>> [Accessed 26 April 2017];
 Rebecca Traister, 'Sheryl Sandberg's 'Lean In' offers a feminist view from the top', *Los Angeles Times*, 7 March 2013 <<http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/07/entertainment/la-ca-jc-sheryl-sandberg-20130310/2>> [Accessed 26 April 2017];
 Jessica Valenti, 'Sheryl Sandberg Isn't the Perfect Feminist. So What?', *The Washington Post*, 1 March 2013 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/dear-fellow-feminists-ripping-apart-sheryl-sandbergs-book-is-counterproductive/2013/03/01/fc71b984-81c0-11e2-a350-49866afab584_story.html?utm_term=.669ee11b0954> [Accessed 26 April 2017].
 Others, including prominent second-wave feminists bell hooks, Susan Faludi and Zillah Eisenstein were highly critical.
 bell hooks, 'Dig Deep: Beyond Lean In';
 Susan Faludi, 'Facebook Feminism, Like It or Not';
 Kate Losse, 'Feminism's Tipping Point: Who Wins from Leaning In?';
 Zillah Eisenstein, "Leaning In' in Iraq: Women's Rights and War? - Al Jazeera English"
 <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/03/2013323141149557391.html>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

reasons for inequality. It is of course significant that Sandberg is a very successful, influential and well-connected corporate executive who chooses to look at internal rather than external barriers to female leadership. It is relevant that it suits her worldview and position to provide apolitical, individualistic business tips, rather than to question the motives of big business, or to implore huge corporations to make changes. Sandberg refers to internal barriers as something ‘under our own control’ (p. 9), which positions external barriers as out of reach, and thus secondary. Sandberg’s financial situation, platform, and job, put her in a highly privileged position where external barriers could be somewhat under her control if she decided to lobby companies or government, or run campaigns with explicit political messages and aims. Separating out internal and external factors, and specifically choosing to focus on internal ones, enables Sandberg to construct women as complicit with their lack of success, and to shift attention from institution to individual.

Sandberg as Sexual Decoy: Essentialism & The Everywoman

According to Zillah Eisenstein’s theory of sexual and racialized decoys, Sandberg operates as a sexual decoy. That is, as a high-powered woman in a male-dominated industry, Sandberg is able to represent equality, progressiveness and civility, but really acts in the interests of corporate America, or capitalist patriarchy. As a woman, and especially because of her position as a white,¹⁴⁵ well-educated, Western, wealthy woman, she can be offered as an example of how the West is advanced and socially just, and of how Facebook is supposedly immune to sexism because of its young and modish aesthetic. *Lean*

¹⁴⁵ Sandberg is Jewish, and so it is debatable whether she is ‘white’ or not. For the purposes of this thesis, I am referring to her as white because she is white-passing, and because *Lean In* is considered to be emblematic of white feminism. However, I do acknowledge the intricacies of Jewish ethnic identity and the importance of fighting anti-Semitism, particularly in Trump-era USA.

In (and not just the book, but its various incarnations) makes it possible to see a woman in power, and subsequently to assume that all women are free to be in power but just aren't trying hard enough. These optics justify the rationale of 'post-feminism', where the pastness of feminism is alluded to through an increased visibility of women in powerful positions.

Eisenstein discusses this increased visibility, and is concerned with the fluidity of gender and race, and the subsequent fluidity of meanings they carry across a variety of contexts. She reiterates that there is a 'multiplicity of patriarchies and therefore feminisms',¹⁴⁶ and that 'Global capitalism requires a rearticulation and regendering of patriarchy.'¹⁴⁷ Talking about former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, and former First Lady Laura Bush, Eisenstein points to the operationalisation of race and gender in conservative discourses, such as the invocation of women's rights rhetoric to justify the invasion of Afghanistan. For Eisenstein, powerful women and people of colour function as decoys to keep the existing sexual and racial hierarchy in place, and so Rice speaks for imperial democracy rather than for the rights of women and people of colour.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Sandberg speaks for American corporatism, which also uses 'racial diversity and gender fluidity to disguise itself'.¹⁴⁹ Sandberg advises women to 'internalize the revolution', which protects the sexual hierarchy of the capitalist West. Having a higher percentage of women in business and government is not meaningful in feminist terms if those women emulate and enact the same white supremacist masculinism that reigns there now. bell hooks' assertion that

¹⁴⁶ Zillah Eisenstein, *Sexual Decoys: Gender, Race and War in Imperial Democracy* (London: Zed Books, 2007), xiii.

¹⁴⁷ Eisenstein, 27.

¹⁴⁸ Eisenstein, 17.

¹⁴⁹ Eisenstein, 17.

‘patriarchy has no gender’¹⁵⁰ affirms Eisenstein’s decoy theory by framing patriarchy as something that can be enacted by anyone.

As mentioned previously, Sandberg doesn’t explicitly blame women, rather her overarching argument and the way it is expressed constructs a complicit female subject. This is helped by the representation of Sandberg as Everywoman, which is achieved by aligning Sandberg with the audience through anecdotes and personal content where she makes mistakes, encounters sexism and struggles to always implement her own advice. In addition, informal language is dispersed throughout the book, which balances an otherwise intimidating roster of Sandberg’s work and life experience at Harvard, the US Treasury, Google, and Facebook. Various stylistic strategies are employed throughout *Lean In* to foster a light-hearted and friendly tone. Sandberg combines words - ‘Ohmigod’ (p. 108.), italicises others, and uses colloquial terms like ‘Cringe’ (p. 20) and ‘Busted’ (p. 98) to bolster her Everywoman image, which hooks describes as, ‘a lovable younger sister who just wants to play on the big brother’s team’.¹⁵¹

The opening line of *Lean In* reads:

I got pregnant with my first child in the summer of 2004. At the time, I was running the online sales and operations groups at Google (p. 3).

The first line is both personal and gendered. It centres the author’s womanhood and motherhood, and could be the opening line of a memoir or parenting book. The following line, in contrast, emphasises her status and skill - it positions her as a wealthy and high-flying professional. This mix of personal and professional runs throughout the book, and is the basis of brand Sandberg. She is both

¹⁵⁰ hooks, ‘Dig Deep’.

¹⁵¹ hooks, ‘Dig Deep’.

family woman and executive, and she successfully inhabits Everywoman and role-model positions simultaneously. Her unusual mix of sisterly, soft spoken charm, with billionaire status, makes Sandberg-as-feminist function perfectly within neoliberal American narratives. Her use of an Everywoman persona increases her likeability, and enables her to be received in mainstream spaces. It also allows her to leave points unexplained, or to get by on providing disclaimers (which I will discuss in more detail at the end of this chapter).

Part of Sandberg's Everywoman persona is her gender performance, and this also relates to her complicity. As is well documented in feminist academic work, in comparison to masculinity, femininity has traditionally been disparaged as it is seen as emotional, frivolous, superficial and unintelligent.¹⁵² Sandberg works as a sexual decoy because (her) femininity is non-threatening. If she was more performatively masculine, she would be perceived by mainstream culture as more of a threat. She is listened to *because* she is feminine, perversely because femininity isn't seen as serious or important; Sandberg's respectable and appropriate femininity enables her to speak on gender and be heard.

Mainstream audiences respect her high-powered position (which imparts authority and legitimacy) and unassuming corporate femininity, and liberal feminist audiences are loath to criticise her because she's a woman talking about gender.¹⁵³ Her lack of radicalism combined with her professional yet informal speaking voice and presentation style, make her persuasions more effective.

¹⁵² Butler;

Ulrika Dahl, 'Turning like a Femme: Figuring Critical Femininity Studies', *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 20.1 (2012), 57–64;

Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2009).

¹⁵³ As mentioned in a previous footnote, Sandberg was defended by Valenti, Filipovic, and Traister.

This appropriate femininity also works for Emma Watson and her #HeforShe campaign; the cultural inferiority of femininity means that a traditionally feminine (and attractive) woman is allowed to speak and be taken seriously on political matters – as long as the ideas expressed aren't too radical.¹⁵⁴ This isn't to say that all feminine women are complicit in upholding restrictive gender norms, but that Sandberg's performance of femininity, alongside her appropriation of feminism in service of corporate needs, makes her more likely to be heard. Sandberg's whiteness, class privilege, and field of work also play into her appropriate femininity, as many celebrity women (and particularly the Kardashians who I discuss in Chapter 4) are dismissed on the basis of their hypersexual and supposedly inappropriate femininity.

The Everywoman persona allows Sandberg to successfully function as a sexual decoy, and so does her strategic embrace of essentialist discourses. *Lean In* is complicit with playing into essentialist assumptions that are based in some second-wave feminisms, and are unfortunately still prevalent in public understandings of feminism – namely, that women are good for women because they're women. As laid out in the introduction and first chapter of this thesis, many feminists acknowledge that women are not inherently better than men, and most feminisms have moved beyond essentialist understandings of sex and gender, yet Sandberg's trickle-down model - that women in power will be better

¹⁵⁴ Emma Watson was criticised by the mainstream press in March 2017 for posing in a revealing outfit on the cover of *Vanity Fair*. It is significant that Watson stars as protagonist Belle in the remake of *Beauty and the Beast*, and is famous for playing female heroine Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* series. Watson's appropriate femininity (tied into fairy-tale and fantasy worlds) was checked and policed, and her feminism was questioned because of it. For a summary of the furore, see Cherry Wilson, 'Is Emma Watson anti-feminist for exposing her breasts?' *BBC News*, 6 March 2017 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-39177510>> [Accessed 29 November 2017].

for all women – works upon the premise that *any* woman in power is a progressive step.

Ideally, collectivism in feminism is concerned with listening to and then articulating and theorising experiences, and working together for positive change for everyone. It doesn't assume everyone has the same experience, or that women should work together because of a homogenous identity. *Lean In* misses this, and distant echoes of sisterhood underlie the assertion that women will always help women. Sandberg's argument works upon the archaic and vague assumption that feminism is about women in boardrooms opening doors for other women to be in boardrooms. This simplistic and uninterrogated assumption drives *Lean In*, and ignores the realities that a successful professional woman has no inherent vested interest in helping other women get promotions; that she may be unengaged with gender politics; that she might be averse to gender politics; or that she mightn't wish to draw attention to her sex in the workplace.

Sandberg hopes her 'manifesto' (a word with radical connotations), 'inspires men as much as it inspires women', and whilst it's fairly common within some feminisms to reach out to men, or to incorporate an analysis of masculinities, the effect of this appeal in *Lean In* is that Sandberg is able to set herself apart from more radical feminisms. By addressing men as a potential audience, she quashes any associations with feminism and 'man-hating'.

It is pertinent that *Lean in* draws upon feminism but removes necessary layers of complexity; it encourages simple categories where women benefit women just by existing as women in positions of power. Men are otherwise; there is no

mention of male sexism, despite Sandberg's mentor Larry Summers being embroiled in a scandal when he stated that there may be less women in science and engineering because of a 'different availability of aptitude at the high end'.¹⁵⁵ Complicity is relevant to contemporary feminism because feminisms aren't defined by simple categories. Not all women are feminists, and not all men are misogynists. Not all women conceive of themselves as oppressed, and some men identify as feminists. However, overarching systems of patriarchy and privilege still shape social, economic, and political conditions.

'A woman needs to combine niceness with insistence': Strategic Complicity in *Lean In*

In *Lean In* (and its associated media), Sandberg encourages belief systems and tactics that keep capitalist patriarchy in place, and does so using appropriated feminist language and imagery. This popularises and makes acceptable a distorted version of feminism, which ultimately dilutes, obscures, marginalises, and papers over more politicised, radical, and dissenting feminisms. Sandberg takes her success and influence, and uses it as a platform from which to teach other women how to curate a performance of appropriate femininity. This shifts focus from institutions onto individual female employees. Sandberg is claiming the end result traditionally sought by feminist discourses, with the caveat that it can only be won individually rather than collectively.

As stated, because Sandberg's focus on internal barriers to success forms the central thesis of *Lean In*, women in the book are constructed as complicit subjects. The title itself, with its invitation, or command, to "lean in", suggests

¹⁵⁵ Suzanne Goldenberg, 'Why Women Are Poor at Science, by Harvard President', *The Guardian*, 18 January 2005, section Science
<<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2005/jan/18/educationsgendergap.genderissues>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

women need to pay attention, listen and learn. The subtitle – ‘Women, Work, and the *Will* to Lead’ [emphasis mine] – implies that on some level, women don’t want to lead, and need to be taught to desire power, ambition and higher levels of success. Likewise, the Chapter 1 title, ‘The Leadership Ambition Gap’ - which is a linguistic reworking of ‘the pay gap’ - suggests that a dearth of female executives is due to a difference in ambition when compared with men.

According to Sandberg, women in the workplace are complicit because they lack self-confidence, don’t raise their hands, pull back rather than lean in, internalize negativity, have lower expectations, don’t aspire to senior positions, and compromise on their career (p. 8).

At the beginning of *Lean In*, Sandberg tells the story of how she secured pregnancy parking when she worked at Google (p. 3). She argues that because she is a woman, she was able to highlight the need for pregnancy parking at her place of work, and consequently all female employees can now enjoy this. The resolution of the story presents Google founder Sergey Brin as a benevolent yet hapless leader, who claimed to have never considered the issue before. This is underscored by Sandberg’s description of Brin’s office as strewn with ‘toys and gadgets’ (p. 4), and her account of him being in a yoga position when she enters the room. This scenario puts the onus on individual women to solve company problems and cater to particular group needs, and also obfuscates the power dynamics involved in making such requests. Sandberg reflects on all the other pregnant employees before her who didn’t request pregnancy parking. She says they ‘must have suffered in silence, not wanting to ask for special treatment’, which figures them as meek and subdued, but she then recognises, ‘maybe they lacked the seniority to demand that the problem be fixed’ (p. 4). Whilst

Sandberg acknowledges the status required to ask Sergey Brin for pregnancy parking, in the context of *Lean In*'s message it can be inferred that she wants or expects female employees to have more confidence and make themselves heard. Importantly, the attention is focused on the female employees themselves, and not on the company to be informed about such policies and implement them without being asked. Sandberg's argument is that female managers would automatically know about these issues from experience, but Sandberg herself admits that she also hadn't considered pregnancy parking until she herself was pregnant.

Furthermore, Sandberg's configuration of the US as progressive and civilised presents gender equality in the workplace as the last hurdle for feminism, thus indicting Western women for not overcoming their comparatively gentle inequality. She makes several comments about women in other countries, positioning those outside the West as oppressed in more primitive and grave ways. She says, 'We are centuries ahead of the unacceptable treatment of women in these countries' (p. 5), and 'I recognise the sheer luck of being born into my family in the United States' (p. 38). Moreover, Sandberg is unable to conceptualize the possibility that oppression might increase or become more complex over time. Because of this characterisation of the US, and subsequently the places designated Other, Sandberg implies Western women should be grateful enough to reach out and grab what they deserve - that women just need to step up, appreciate what they have, and be more confident. What's more, *Lean In* doesn't mention any inequality women in the West face that doesn't relate to the workplace. The US is cast as benevolent and progressive because there is no mention of reproductive rights, homophobia, racism or sexual

violence. This representation of the US means Sandberg can more easily suggest that individual women are complicit because the reader isn't presented with details about any widespread systemic discrimination that Western citizens face.

Although Sandberg does occasionally recognise external barriers that affect women, she encourages female employees to be complicit with sexist stereotypes and assumptions. In Chapter 3, 'Success and Likeability', she cites Professor Hannah Riley Bowles, who studies gender and negotiations at Harvard. Sandberg summarises Riley Bowles' research, saying, 'Women must come across as being nice, concerned about others, and 'appropriately female'' (p. 47). Sandberg encourages female employees negotiating their salary to mention that women are paid less, so that they are seen as connected to a group and so seem communal and nurturing (p. 47). For the same reason, she reiterates that 'pronouns matter' and encourages women to use 'we' rather than 'I' (p. 47). Riley Bowles advises that women must 'provide a legitimate explanation for the negotiation' (p. 47) by saying a senior manager advised it, again so they don't appear to be self-interested. Sandberg warns that women should be careful not to be seen as *too* nice, because then it will be assumed that they will sacrifice higher wages in order to be liked. Women should be both nice and insistent which the president of the University of Michigan refers to as being 'relentlessly pleasant' (p. 48). Sandberg teaches the reader how to achieve this performance:

This method requires smiling frequently, expressing appreciation and concern, invoking common interests, emphasizing larger goals, and approaching the negotiation as solving a problem as opposed to taking a critical stance (p. 48).

Whereas Sandberg opened the book by informing the reader of inequalities in how men and women are treated, with the inference that this is unacceptable, in subsequent chapters she presents advice as if women just need tricks and tips to navigate institutional inequality. Her advice is to work with, and manipulate negative stereotypes, rather than to challenge or overcome them. This type of advice could be thought of as strategic complicity, where we can acknowledge complicity as practical and efficacious within the current unequal system. In this case, women work with existing sexist assumptions about them in order to advance in the workplace. However, acknowledging the necessity or existence of strategic complicity is different than advocating it as a first or only response. Furthermore, the stereotypes of women as communal and pleasant form the foundation of a hegemonic white femininity, and so further exclude women that are already disadvantaged by their race, class or sexual orientation.

The outcome of this advised strategic complicity is that many male employees and employers are able to act as they would 'naturally', which is often in a confident, assertive, non-self-conscious, risk-taking manner, and to succeed by doing this.¹⁵⁶ Conversely, women are advised to consciously perform a manipulated gender stereotype that dupes others into taking them seriously, which capitalises on already existing, socially reaffirmed sexism. In general terms, and as I have stated, women (and indeed all people) cannot avoid working within a flawed and sexist system, and cannot always avoid embodying stereotypes. The issue with this advice in the context of this book is that *Lean In* focuses on the internal at the expense of the external, and situates itself within

¹⁵⁶ I don't mean to homogenise men here, particularly because of the problems faced by men of colour/queer men/working-class men in the workplace, but to say that advising women to change their behaviour means the oppressed have to fit within the oppressive system, whilst the dominant class is unaware of this, and doesn't have to change their own behaviour.

the feminist tradition. Acknowledging strategic complicity is practical, but pursuing it as a feminist tactic without addressing serious issues within companies is to be complicit with workplace inequality.

Sandberg follows her own advice to be ‘relentlessly pleasant’, which can be seen in her use of communal language and on the book’s front cover. In the cover image she leans on her hand, appearing informal and engaged, and a head shot shows her full smiling face. She is dressed in white – with its non-threatening connotations of purity and cleanliness - and appears friendly and approachable. As I have stated, Sandberg’s persona is central to her success with *Lean In*, and continues to play a major role in the media campaigns and appearances that have followed.



LEAN IN

WOMEN, WORK, AND
THE WILL TO LEAD

SHERYL SANDBERG
COO of FACEBOOK

"The business manual of the year" *The Times*

Regarding mentorship, Sandberg gives similar advice, saying, ‘mentees should avoid complaining excessively’ (p. 71), ‘it’s better to focus on specific problems with real solutions’ (p. 71), and, ‘everyone involved has to make sure to behave professionally’ (p. 73). Again, the focus on individual behaviour means that bigger picture factors like sexual harassment or gender bias are not mentioned, and so responsibility is placed on women to conduct themselves in such a way that they fall into a mentor/mentee relationship because of their contrived behaviour, rather than because of skill. Women are criticised by Sandberg, and portrayed as complicit, because they aren’t finding mentors in appropriate ways.

Not all female leaders favour or help other women, and in the penultimate and final chapters of the book, Sandberg recognizes this unfortunate truth. This acknowledgement undermines *Lean In’s* trickle-down model by pointing out that women in power do not automatically improve conditions for fellow female employees, and in fact can sometimes make them worse. Sandberg says that women perpetuate bias (p. 155) and that ‘in the days of tokenism’ (which is framed as definitively in the past), female employees viewed one another as competition (p. 164). She discusses ‘queen bee’ behaviour in the 1970s:

The term ‘queen bee’ was used to describe a woman who flourished in a leadership role, especially in male-dominated industries, and who used her position to keep other female ‘worker bees’ down. For some, it was simple self-preservation. For others, it reflected their coming of age in a society that believed men were superior to women. (p. 164)

Regrettably, the inclusion of queen bees in the text exists as a disclaimer to the criticism that women don’t always help women. Furthermore, this late inclusion of female sexism is used as an essentialist call to sisterhood, whereby women are admonished for not sticking together in the name of feminism - ‘When women

voice gender bias, they legitimize it' (p. 165). Sandberg goes on to call for a final wave of feminism, implying that women's cattiness towards one another is a significant hurdle in achieving this. Sandberg portrays female critics as a homogeneous group of petty troublemakers who comprehensively don't support other women. Speaking about Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, Sandberg says the majority of criticisms came from other women. She refers to these as 'cat-fight[s]', 'attacks' and 'she said/she said' disagreements (p. 163), and concludes that female 'attacks' on women distract from 'the real issues'. This is a longstanding tactic from privileged groups, where dissenters are silenced by being constructed as complainers who distract from more important collective goals. In a gross simplification of feminist history, Sandberg says that second-wave feminists Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem could have achieved so much more had they resolved their issues and worked together (p. 163.). This ignores the serious political and ideological differences between the two women, and wedges a complex part of feminist history into a narrative where gender inequality wouldn't exist if women just got along and stayed focused.

As with her use of managerial, and specifically neoliberal, language and reasoning (which I will detail later in this chapter), Sandberg's use of feminist language is a substantial part of *Lean In*'s success. The appropriation of feminist language, and references to liberal feminists (Steinem and Friedan), makes the *Lean In* brand appear altruistic and thus harder to criticise. It is through the use of feminism that Sandberg positions herself as a gender equality pioneer, despite the capitalist framework of her book. She says:

If the thing I was most focused on was making sure everyone agreed with every single word I said, you don't give TED talks or write books on issues of women in the workplace and equality.¹⁵⁷

Arguing that women shouldn't 'attack' other women gives Sandberg the ability to impart her message, situate it within a particular feminist canon, and have no-one critique it. By surrounding herself with gendered rhetoric, she can simplistically state that members of her group (women) should support her vision of feminism so they can all advance. This masks the fact that Sandberg only alludes to one identity group (sex) and doesn't speak about race, class, sexual orientation, and so on. Additionally, signing up to Sandberg's vision of female advancement would be subscribing to the framework and interests of the most privileged.

As stated by Catherine Rottenberg, Sandberg situates herself as a feminist subject rather than a female one; *Lean In* needs discourses of gender and equality to look progressive.¹⁵⁸ In this contemporary moment, where certain manifestations of feminism have gained some cultural capital and popularity, Sandberg is more likely to be criticised as a non-feminist woman talking about gender, than as a feminist one, and so she strategically puts on feminism, but not in the service of all women, and not within the theoretical workings of contemporary feminist thinking.

Sandberg herself represents the woman in power who uses a feminist framework in order to undermine radical feminist politics and maintain the structures of capitalist patriarchy. She functions as a decoy, but in a slightly more insidious way than Eisenstein describes. Eisenstein refers to conservative

¹⁵⁷ Anna North, 'Sheryl Sandberg: 'I Am Not Saying Women Can Do It All Themselves'', *BuzzFeed* <<https://www.buzzfeed.com/annanorth/sheryl-sandberg-welcomes-the-controversy>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹⁵⁸ Catherine Rottenberg, 'The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism', *Cultural Studies*, 28.3 (2014), 418.

women (Laura Bush, Condoleeza Rice) who signify progressiveness whilst enacting anti-woman, imperialist policies. Like these women, Sandberg uses social justice language, but importantly she directly places herself and her ideology within a social justice movement.

Having addressed and illustrated Sandberg's Everywoman persona, use of essentialist discourses, and strategically complicit advice, I will now politically situate *Lean In* by looking at liberalism and liberal feminism, and neoliberalism and neoliberal feminism. *Lean In* can be seen as a paradigmatic neoliberal feminist text wherein Sandberg undertakes a number of strategies that ultimately serve to appropriate feminist ideas, language and imagery in the service of big business. The following sections will present relevant facets of liberalism and neoliberalism, describe their relationship to feminisms, and illustrate with textual examples from *Lean In*, the neoliberal logics that operate in the book.

‘When women fulfil their potential, everyone benefits’: Liberalism and Liberal Feminism

Liberalism is a political philosophy that began to take shape in England and Europe in the wake of the Protestant Reformation,¹⁵⁹ and that centres on the individual's right to liberty and equality. Garrett Sheldon identifies the distinctive features of modern liberalism as:

Individualism, materialism, an emphasis on natural rights, liberty and freedom, equality limited for some by social contract, private property, separation of religion and politics (or church and state), and republican democracy.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Garrett Ward Sheldon, *Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (New York: InfoBase Publishing, 2001), 18.

¹⁶⁰ Sheldon, 18.

A central aspect of liberalism is its emphasis on consent and contract. Injustice is thought to be impossible where there is consent, and social life is based on a contractual foundation. In *The Sexual Contract*, (a feminist reinterpretation of Rousseau's *The Social Contract*) Pateman addresses "The exclusion of women from the central category 'the individual'"¹⁶¹ by pointing out the ways in which liberal contract theory is explicitly gendered. Though not in gendered terms, modern liberalism does acknowledge the difficulties of unequal social contracts:

In many instances, such as in numerous employment relations, the parties to contractual agreements typically are unequal with respect to bargaining power and information. Where this is true, contractual relations may protect rather than abolish relations of domination and dependency.¹⁶²

Rosemarie Tong writes that liberals give priority to the 'right' over the 'good', and believe that individuals should be able to choose their own goods provided they don't deprive others of theirs.¹⁶³ Liberals define reason either by stressing its moral or practical aspects; Tong states that when reason is defended in moral terms, then individual autonomy is stressed, and when reason is defended in practical terms, then self-fulfilment is stressed.¹⁶⁴ Individual autonomy and self-fulfilment, in slightly different forms, are also important aspects of neoliberalism, and central facets of *Lean In's* ideology. It is important to stress that liberalism, though a formal political philosophy in its own right, can also be conceived of as a mode of governmentality – that is, as a way of thinking or ruling that regulates the 'conduct of conduct'.¹⁶⁵ This theorisation of

¹⁶¹ Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 6.

¹⁶² Mark Bevir, *Encyclopedia of Political Theory: A - E* (London: SAGE, 2010), 799.

¹⁶³ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989, repr. New York: Routledge, 2013), 11-2.

¹⁶⁴ Tong, 11.

¹⁶⁵ Rottenberg, 420.

government, originated by Foucault, acknowledges institutional forms of power, as well as indirect forms of governing ‘at a distance’.¹⁶⁶

Feminism’s first-wave arose from eighteenth-century liberalism. Mary Wollstonecraft’s formative work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written in 1792, argued that girls deserved the same education as boys, so that they were given an equal chance to ‘develop their rational and moral capacities so they can achieve full personhood’.¹⁶⁷ In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor wrote that the way to maximise happiness was to allow people to pursue their desires, as long as they didn’t hinder others by doing so.¹⁶⁸ Mill and Taylor departed from Wollstonecraft in saying that women must also have political and economic rights, not just access to the same education as men.¹⁶⁹

In a classic liberal approach, which anticipates that later taken up by Sandberg, Taylor looked for solutions within existing gender relations, rather than questioning wider societal assumptions about gender. She accepted existing gendered stereotypes of women as more caring, and so cautioned women to have a small number of children to avoid a heavy domestic workload.¹⁷⁰ Taylor claimed that married women couldn’t be equals unless they had ‘the confidence and sense of entitlement’ gained from working outside of the home.¹⁷¹ Also similar to Sandberg, Taylor had a middle-class outlook. She recommended that women working outside the home hire servants to help with their domestic work and childcare, and so offered solutions to privileged women at the expense

¹⁶⁶ Keith Dowding, *Encyclopedia of Power* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2011), 289.

¹⁶⁷ Tong, 15.

¹⁶⁸ Tong, 16.

¹⁶⁹ Tong, 16.

¹⁷⁰ Tong, 17.

¹⁷¹ Tong, 18.

of poor women.¹⁷² *Lean In* follows in this tradition of elitist feminism; Tong comments that, ‘Taylor was fundamentally a reformist, not a revolutionary’,¹⁷³ and the same can be said for Sandberg.

White-centrism and focus on the middle-class also existed in the Suffrage movement; the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 didn’t address problems faced by mill and factory workers,¹⁷⁴ and also ‘rendered black women nearly invisible’,¹⁷⁵ despite the participation of many working-class white and black women in the suffrage movement.¹⁷⁶

In the twentieth century, some feminists ‘pushed a reformist, liberal agenda, whereas others forwarded a more revolutionary, radical program of action’.¹⁷⁷ This division still exists in contemporary feminisms. Liberal feminist organisations – known as women’s rights groups - like the National Organisation for Women (NOW) sought to improve women’s status by exerting legal, social and other pressures upon institutions,¹⁷⁸ whereas radical groups – or women’s liberation groups – like the Redstockings, aimed ‘to increase women’s consciousness about women’s oppression’.¹⁷⁹ Liberal groups sought equality for women within the law, including equal access to employment and education. NOW’s 1967 Bill of Rights for Women did not mention radical feminist concerns like domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment,

¹⁷² Tong, 18.

¹⁷³ Tong, 20.

¹⁷⁴ Tong, 22.

¹⁷⁵ Tong, 22.

¹⁷⁶ The 2015 film *Suffragette* replicated this historical inequality as it featured no characters of colour (though it did depict working-class suffragettes), and was subject to criticism when its advertising campaign was accused of being racist. See Ana Stevenson, ‘The suffragettes were rebels, certainly, but not slaves’, *The Conversation*, 8 October 2015 <<http://theconversation.com/the-suffragettes-were-rebels-certainly-but-not-slaves-48673>> [Accessed 19 January 2018].

¹⁷⁷ Tong, 23.

¹⁷⁸ Tong, 24.

¹⁷⁹ Tong, 24.

pornography, or issues that affect what is now known as the LGBTQ community.¹⁸⁰

UK political party The Women's Equality Party (WE), founded in 2015, follows in the liberal feminist tradition. WE's motions include calls for non-transferable parental leave, affordable childcare, and the implementation of anti-racist, anti-homophobic and anti-sexist education,¹⁸¹ but ultimately their remit is for more female representation in politics and the workplace, and the party is non-partisan. Their website says:

When women fulfil their potential, everyone benefits. Equality means better politics, a more vibrant economy, a workforce that draws on the talents of the whole population and a society at ease with itself.¹⁸²

This is rhetorically very similar to language in *Lean In*, which treats women as a 'resource' to be 'tapped', and situates the need for equality within a capitalist framework that requires more workers.

Liberal feminism is often critiqued for its suggestion that women want to be, or should be, like men, and is the strain of feminism most criticised for being elitist, white-centric, heteronormative and middle-class. Better known in online spaces as 'white feminism', liberal feminism is often upbraided for privileging the individual over any sense of community or collective. Sandberg's 'feminism' has aspects of liberal feminism,

¹⁸⁰ Tong, 26.

¹⁸¹ 'Conference Resolutions', 2015

<https://d3n8a8pro7vhnmx.cloudfront.net/womensequality/pages/1753/attachments/original/1481019661/WE_2016_Conference_resolutions.pdf?1481019661> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹⁸² 'Women's Equality', *Women's Equality* <<http://www.womensequality.org.uk/about>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

including its presentation of the US as more civilised than other nations, its heteronormative approach to relationships and home life, its elitism, and its desire for power and equality within existing power dynamics.

Retaining the aspects of feminism that have been most criticised by feminists shows the gap between *Lean In* and many contemporary feminisms. Sandberg's regular references to Gloria Steinem lend her some feminist credence, which enables her to retain her position while laying out a framework that doesn't actually benefit most women. Her alignment with liberal feminism then, and her intensification of the negative qualities of it, works in favour of her campaign and reputation.

Anti-capitalist feminist Maria Mies refers to the nuclear family as a 'social factory' that is 'organized and protected by the state',¹⁸³ but *Lean In* gives no suggestion that 'the family' is a construct related to capitalist patriarchy. There are two mentions of same-sex couples in the book - one is a throwaway line about whether the reader might prefer 'a guy' or 'gal' (p. 116) and the other is about distribution of household tasks. Sandberg's examples are always in reference to a nuclear family, or people striving to become part of a nuclear family. She talks about having children, getting childcare, and breastfeeding, thus depicting a conservative American family life that that doesn't consider same sex couples, families without children, single parents, divorced parents, or anything other than a two unit cisgendered mixed sex arrangement (p. 98). In Chapter 9, Sandberg tells an anecdote about a female executive who is unmarried with no children. Speaking on a panel, the executive tells the

¹⁸³ Mies, 31.

audience that she's sick of having to work longer hours to cover for women with families:

My coworkers should understand that I need to go to a party tonight – and this is just as legitimate as their kids' soccer game – because going to a party is the only way I might actually meet someone and start a family so I can have a soccer game to go to one day! (p. 133)

The reasoning behind this anecdote is not that the executive's time, as a childless single woman, is as valuable as that of a woman with children, but that the executive should be granted the time to seek out a nuclear family of her own (p. 133). The mention of a 'soccer game' depicts the rosy suburban American family life that the book sells to its readers, alongside top executive positions.

Elitism is another signifier of (neo)liberal feminism in *Lean In*, and one of the biggest sticking points for feminist critics and reviewers. Liberal feminists have been accused of elitism for foregrounding their own experiences and priorities, or focusing on representation in government and business at the expense of other issues. For this reason, Sandberg fits within a tradition of liberal feminist elitism. However, the neoliberal ideology that permeates the text, with its focus on individualism and personal responsibility also promotes elitism because it assumes that those in power are most deserving of it. In other words, it promotes meritocracy - though this may seem democratic, it actually naturalises the existing social hierarchy. Several anecdotes in the text reveal Sandberg's lifestyle and class, both of which are highly relevant considering the political framework of the book. In applying neoliberal logics to feminism, and popularising neoliberal feminism as a product, Sandberg advocates for her own group (employers, CEOs, billionaires). Sandberg's wealth in and of itself doesn't make her elitist, but her wealth in addition to her individualistic, employer-centric advice does. *Lean In* does not

advocate for unions, grassroots feminism, strikes, protests, or any form of collective activism. Instead it compels women – a group Sandberg concedes is disadvantaged in the workplace – to enact change one by one, starting from within themselves.

Talking about her own relationship, Sandberg describes how her husband initially flew home every weekend because the couple worked in different cities, before eventually flying back multiple times a week (p. 106). Clearly this is not an option for most people, and highlights the resources available to the super-rich. Furthermore, when this arrangement became untenable, Sandberg remarks that her husband was able to relocate his company headquarters so he could live in Los Angeles with her (p. 111). This totally obscures the existence and lives of the workers in his company, and avoids considering how this move would have affected *their* home and work lives. Additionally, this is an example of the ways *Lean In* ignores the historical and political links between many feminisms and environmentalism.

In Chapter 9, Sandberg recalls an occasion when her daughter got lice on the EBay private jet (p. 125), and remembers when other working mothers told her ‘to prepare for the day that [her] son would cry for his nanny’ (p. 138). These examples clearly show Sandberg’s unusual economic situation, and subsequently that her view is from the top and therefore not attuned to the needs of those at the bottom. I do not suggest that all writers that identify as feminist must write about the situations of all women, but *Lean In* and its turn to the individual puts pressure on less privileged women to solve their own problems.

Lean In draws from second-wave liberal feminist texts more than contemporary ones and Sandberg's many references to Gloria Steinem attest to this (p. 108, p. 120, p. 124, p. 141). Steinem has endorsed *Lean In* on her personal Facebook page, on the official *Lean In* website, and wrote the synopsis on Sandberg in *Time's* '100 Most Powerful People' list.¹⁸⁴ A further second-wave text which invites comparisons with *Lean In* is *The Feminine Mystique* - Lisa M. Fine and Kirsten Fermaglich write in *Ms Magazine* of the books that, 'both in their own ways that reflected the times in which they wrote, proposed an individual solution to a collective problem.'¹⁸⁵ Friedan suggested that women reject the feminine mystique, and Sandberg suggests women demand more of their partners and take on more in the workplace. Nevertheless, Friedan challenged women's colleges, magazines and advertising agencies, whereas Sandberg doesn't question 'the fundamental assumptions of corporate capitalism',¹⁸⁶ and so is better described as a neoliberal, rather than a liberal feminist.

Spawning a New Feminist Subject: Neoliberalism and Neoliberal Feminism

Neoliberalism has been described as 'an intricately structured long-term philosophical and political project',¹⁸⁷ and is in the first case associated with a variety of economic and cultural concepts, including:

¹⁸⁴ 'Gloria Steinem' <<https://www.facebook.com/GloriaSteinem/posts/10151257762202854>> [Accessed 26 April 2017];

'Looking Back on Leaning In', *Lean In* <<https://leanin.org/discussions/2877/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017];

Gloria Steinem, 'The 2013 TIME 100', *Time* <<http://time100.time.com/2013/04/18/time-100/slide/sheryl-sandberg/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹⁸⁵ Lisa M. Fine and Kirsten Fermaglich, 'Surprising Similarities: Sandberg's 'Lean In' and Friedan's 'Feminine Mystique'', *Ms. Magazine Blog*, 2013 <<http://msmagazine.com/blog/2013/06/06/surprising-similarities-sandbergs-lean-in-and-friedans-feminine-mystique/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

¹⁸⁶ Fine and Fermaglich.

¹⁸⁷ Mirowski and Plehwe, 426.

a radically free market: maximized competition and free trade achieved through economic deregulation, elimination of tariffs, and a range of monetary and social policies favorable to business and indifferent toward poverty, social deracination, cultural decimation, long-term resource depletion, and environmental destruction¹⁸⁸

Wendy Brown stresses that neoliberalism does not just describe economic policies, but also extends and disseminates market values to other areas of life.¹⁸⁹ Describing this, she says that the political sphere, ‘along with every other dimension of contemporary existence, is submitted to an economic rationality’; that political discourse is framed in entrepreneurial terms; and that ‘the health and growth of the economy is the basis of state legitimacy’.¹⁹⁰

As outlined in the introduction, understanding neoliberalism as governmentality means it is conceptualised as ‘a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one that produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social’.¹⁹¹ Neoliberalism constructs itself into existence by becoming the hegemonic way of seeing and understanding, and thus neoliberal modes of thought are so pervasive that they are frequently invisible and taken as common-sense. In the contemporary moment, to favour ‘growth’, ‘choice’, ‘taking responsibility’, or ‘being productive’ is a reasonable assumption for many, and this language both creates and protects a logic that fuses the human condition with overtly capitalist aims.

¹⁸⁸ Wendy Brown, ‘Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy’, *Theory & Event*, 7.1 (2003) 37-8.

¹⁸⁹ Brown, 40.

¹⁹⁰ Brown, 40-42.

¹⁹¹ Brown, 37.

Neoliberal governmentality then, extends classical liberalism's focus on the individual, and applies market logic to notions of the self. Brown says:

It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care'—the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions.¹⁹²

For this reason, concepts such as individualism, self-as-project, and personal responsibility are stressed in neoliberal discourses. Cotoi describes a Foucauldian understanding of neoliberalism not as a set of policies, or the process of free-market exchange, but as 'regulatory and ordering actions on the conditions of existence'.¹⁹³ Importantly for this work, neoliberalism as a pervasive rationality produces particular subjectivities – those that are entrepreneurial, responsible, informed, apolitical, self-making, and self-directed.¹⁹⁴ *Lean In* encourages female 'self-making' by encouraging women to be the managers of their own lives, to package and sell themselves in ways that are suitable to the workplace, and to take full responsibility for their societal and workplace status.

Many contemporary feminists undertake a strong critique of neoliberalism, seeing its focus on individualism and responsibility as antithetical to collective and politicised anti-capitalist feminisms. Catherine Rottenberg's article, 'The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism' warns that 'The husk of liberalism is being mobilized to spawn a neoliberal feminism as well as a new feminist subject.'¹⁹⁵ Rottenberg sees this as 'yet another domain neoliberalism has colonized by

¹⁹² Brown, 42.

¹⁹³ Călin Cotoi, 'Neoliberalism: A Foucauldian Perspective', *International Review of Social Research*, 1 (2011), 113.

¹⁹⁴ For an in-depth consideration of neoliberalism as it relates to subjectivities, see Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Free Association Books, 1999).

¹⁹⁵ Rottenberg, 419.

producing its own variant',¹⁹⁶ but asserts that its undermining of mainstream liberal feminism is part of a wider entrenchment of 'neoliberal rationality and imperialist logic' in place of classical liberal notions of democracy and equality.¹⁹⁷

Rottenberg states that neoliberal feminism's new feminist subject is one that:

Disavows the social, cultural and economic forces producing [...] inequality, but also [...] accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work–family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus.¹⁹⁸

For Rottenberg, this individualised subject atomises revolutionary agents and so moves political energy from the public arena to the individual psyche.¹⁹⁹ She warns that this neoliberal feminism is 'displacing' liberal feminism, pointing out that although liberal feminism had its problems, it still attempted to undertake a critique of classical liberalism and show the failings of liberal democracy in including equal numbers of women in the public sphere.²⁰⁰ Conversely, neoliberal feminism does not undertake a critique of neoliberalism. The following section considers neoliberalism in the workplace, and offers textual examples where *Lean In* applies market-driven logics and encourages a blurring of work and leisure.

The Dominant Language of the Tribe: *Lean In* and the Neoliberal Workplace

Lean In very much operates within the capitalist patriarchal system, and a neoliberal postfeminist rationality, and thus there are immediate tensions

¹⁹⁶ Rottenberg, 418.

¹⁹⁷ Rottenberg, 418.

¹⁹⁸ Rottenberg, 420.

¹⁹⁹ Rottenberg, 426.

²⁰⁰ Rottenberg, 419.

between feminist theories of capitalism, and the best-selling, woman-centred corporate manual.

Mies asserts that capitalism functions because of the historical and ongoing exploitation of women, nature, and developing countries. According to Mies, a classical Marxist analysis of labour obscures the fact that wage labour is supported and enabled by hidden non-wage labour, such as housework, affective labour, slavery and colonialism (carried out by, or at the expense of, women, nature, and workers in developing countries). Mies aims to theorise a feminist conception of labour, and states that capitalism could not exist without patriarchy. She says:

Within a patriarchal system ‘equality’ for women can only mean that women become like those patriarchal men. Most women who call themselves feminists are not attracted by this prospect.²⁰¹

Mies’ work focuses on the relationship between more and less privileged women within capitalism, and implores Western women to recognise their ‘allegiance to and...complicity with this system.’²⁰² Sandberg does not recognise her allegiance to and complicity with capitalism, and indeed doesn’t mention capitalism or its troubled history with feminism.

Writing in 1986, Mies lamented that women had to weigh and label their fruit and vegetables in supermarkets, and surmised that citizens of the future would be forced to use credit cards or have a home computer. Today’s customers do all manner of unpaid work in their day to day lives: customers in the fast food industry now routinely serve their own drinks, take their food to their own table and clear the packaging when they have finished eating. These duties,

²⁰¹ Mies, 38.

²⁰² Mies, 224.

previously undertaken by paid staff, are now performed for free. In the digital age, prosumers (so named by Ritzer and Jurgenson, to denote a hybrid of producer and consumer)²⁰³ use their lives as content on Facebook, which they do not profit from; write articles for Wikipedia for no fee; do the research for products and write reviews on Amazon; create the market on eBay; and upload content to YouTube.

In terms of complicity, prosumerism is notable in that many prosumers enjoy their interaction with Web 2.0 and don't feel exploited, or even like customers, when they interact with TV shows on Twitter, tag their location on Facebook or edit photos on Instagram. Similar to women and the beauty industry, prosumers freely participate with, and treat as leisure, the increasingly socially necessary online world. Also comparable with women and the beauty industry, Ritzer and Jurgenson suggest that prosumers may feel 'empowered' when they order their food on touch-screens in McDonalds, or are able to control their image on Facebook. The authors point out that individual prosumers (and individual is key) can profit from their prosumption, in that bloggers may have an opportunity to write for money as a paid journalist, or photographers may gain exposure. Interestingly they note that 'a Marxist might argue that this is all just a modern version of 'false consciousness'', but conclude that, 'it is probably more likely that prosumers really do like doing these things and they are not simply being manipulated into such feelings by the capitalist'.²⁰⁴ In light of this, it's easy to conclude that modern consumers and workers can't be anything but complicit in the many ways capitalism shapes us, as workers and prosumers.

²⁰³ George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, 'Production, Consumption, Prosumption The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital 'prosumer'', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10.1 (2010), 13–36.

²⁰⁴ Ritzer and Jurgenson, 25.

Thomas Docherty states that compliance with institutional norms is regarded by management as essential to the day-to-day operations of the workplace.²⁰⁵ He points to the necessary complicity most of us face within capitalist workplaces, and his words are particularly salient considering his suspension from his own institution:

To exert a material influence, one has to speak the dominant language of the tribe – one has to echo ‘the word’, as it were: the language of ‘one of us’, the language of the ‘war on terror’, the language of ‘business, entrepreneurship, leadership, best practice, targets, benchmarks, excellence, world leading, content providers, vision statements, strategies’ and all the rest of our contemporary jargon of management and of performance and improvement [...] managerialist fundamentalism now determines what can be said and thought; and the logic is that, if one’s voice is to be heard – if one’s vote is to count – then one has to be the monkey channelling the voice and realizing the will of the boss or monkey grinder²⁰⁶

As both workers and users of the service economy, our behaviours and expectations are shaped by the structure and ideology of workplaces, so that we take on gendered, classed and raced roles in the ways we perform our jobs and receive service. This affects women, and particularly women of colour, working-class, and/or queer women, in disproportionate ways.²⁰⁷

Already existing edicts of behaviour are altered to suit the needs of an ever changing corporate landscape. In the merging of product and person, Web 2.0 plays a central part in facilitating a neoliberal process whereby any citizen can fashion themselves into a sellable item. Indeed many job hunters are encouraged to set up Linked In profiles and keep their social media accounts

²⁰⁵ Docherty in *Exploring Complicity*, 20.

²⁰⁶ Docherty in *Exploring Complicity*, 26.

²⁰⁷ Elaborated upon by Tressie McMillan Cottom in ‘Lean In Litmus Test: Is This For Women Who Can Cry At Work?’, *Tressiemc*, 2013 <<https://tressiemc.com/uncategorized/lean-in-litmus-test-is-this-for-women-who-can-cry-at-work/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

sanitised, and secondary school students are taught from a young age to craft a CV, and fashion a hobby-filled lifestyle to advertise on it.

Of course, it is salient that Sheryl Sandberg is the COO of Facebook, which is at the forefront of the restructuring of daily life through technological innovation. The self-as-project narrative flourishes in a contemporary landscape where technology allows consumers to be the masters of their own personal brand, complete with Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Tumblr, and YouTube accounts. What often goes unseen is the fact that new media has a function analogous to old media: it ostensibly exists to disseminate information to individuals, but its main function is to sell advertising space to corporations. The individual consumer is a conduit for the exchange between corporations, despite surface appearances that technology is all about individuality, sharing and contact. As with traditional media, the audience is the commodity, except contemporary audiences don't just passively consume advertisements - they offer up extensive personal information so they can be targeted by ever more sophisticated advertising. It is notable that Sheryl Sandberg became successful working at Google and Facebook, and still works within this rapidly developing industry.

It is highly significant that Sandberg asks women to look at, and change themselves, in order that they fit in with and are better able to navigate the American corporate workplace. Women are encouraged to update themselves, to make themselves the best corporate product they can be, and worryingly, feminism, or rather neoliberal postfeminism, is drawn upon in the process. Sandberg encourages women to be complicit with stereotypes about women, and to be complicit with the image and behaviour of the ideal worker.

Workplace requirements upon employee behaviour are discussed in Virno and Henninger's essay, 'Post-Fordist Semblance'. Virno offers the example of the wage as a semblance, saying that it appears to be money in return for labour, but is actually a way for the capitalist to purchase 'the worker's pure psychosomatic capacity to produce'.²⁰⁸ In other words, the wage functions in such a way that citizens aren't just being paid to work, but to reward their capacity for, and willingness to work. This naturalizes work. Wage doesn't simply give money for work done, but to encourage a mind-set of working. Virno points out the business skills needed to just look for a job - 'initiative, open-mindedness, calculation, a sense of compatibility, and even some rudimentary analysis of 'market tendencies''²⁰⁹. He refers to a socialisation process whereby workers find different types of work acceptable.²¹⁰ Employees in retail, hospitality and healthcare are expected to be permanently on call to 'pick up shifts' at a moment's notice, and subsequently may feel guilty if their life stands in the way of their ability to work.

Of particular relevance to Sandberg and *Lean In* is 'professionalism', which Virno contrasts with 'specialization'. Specialization requires a certain level of expertise, attained by either academic study or an apprenticeship,²¹¹ whereas professionalism refers to mannerisms, behaviours, and a general way of being that is appropriate to and desirable for companies. Professionalism is what is tested in job interviews, and what is increasingly considered essential in all areas of life, not just in the workplace. *Lean In* deals specifically with women's

²⁰⁸ Paolo Virno and Max Henninger, 'Post-Fordist Semblance', *SubStance*, 36.1 (2007), 43.

²⁰⁹ Virno and Henninger, 43.

²¹⁰ Virno and Henninger, 43.

²¹¹ Virno and Henninger, 44.

professionalism in the workplace, and thus places them under greater pressure to enact a particular gendered role in order to succeed.

Business-centred inventions like professionalism are increasingly expected in spaces outside the workplace because work and leisure have become blurred. In *One Dimensional Man* (1964), Herbert Marcuse conceives of leisure as work, in comparison to free time. He says:

‘Free’ time, not ‘leisure’ time. The latter thrives in advanced industrial society, but it is unfree to the extent to which it is administered by business and politics.²¹²

This conception of leisure as work is related to consumerism and what has since become known as neoliberalism, where leisure is tied up with consumption, and work is done anywhere at any time, and enabled by technology. Consumption is the main economic and cultural activity of Western contemporary life.

Participation in pop culture depends on owning a smart phone, tablet, laptop or TV, many government services including taxes and benefits are administered and accessed online, academics and journalists require online profiles, and applying to university or for a job is next to impossible without an internet connection.

Technology companies are particularly implicated in the blurring of work and leisure, especially in terms of workspace. Silicon Valley workplaces, which are often parodied in popular media, are open plan, have numerous screens mounted on walls, have unlimited free food and drink, and have ‘play’ areas

²¹² Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) footnote 46,45.

with games consoles, pool tables and soft seating areas.²¹³ Ex-Facebook employee Kate Losse maintains that the often relaxed or playful atmosphere of technology companies isn't actually to promote recreation, but to encourage work in all kinds of places. Invoking Baudrillard, Losse asks what the endgame of this 'almost Disneyland vision of perpetual labour' is.²¹⁴ Such perpetual labour is visible throughout *Lean In* through the blanket use of a business paradigm, even when referring to non-workplace issues.

There are many incidences in the book where it is assumed that humans are made for the market, rather than the other way around. Sandberg talks about classroom studies that show that girls aren't encouraged or rewarded for being assertive, and whilst this is important, *Lean In* ties it to the workplace and so perpetuates the logic that children should be taught the characteristics desired by the market. The corporate world is assumed to be the only place outside of the classroom and the only place occupied during adulthood; this is reiterated by the fact that all the relationship and home advice in *Lean In* is also career-centric. There is no space for adults as citizens outside the corporate sphere; we don't hear about or imagine adults as members of communities, social circles, or as being creative and compassionate rather than driven by power or money.

People are seen as perpetual employees, undertaking a constant management of their life in the persona that companies require. Sandberg's assumption is

²¹³ Sitcom *Parks and Recreation* parodies such workplaces with its Google stand-in 'Gryzzl'. In Season 7, the huge corporation opens an office in small town Pawnee, and the show explores tech-related issues such as gentrification and data-mining. Poking fun at the supposedly egalitarian but ultimately baseless ideals touted in such companies, a wall at the Gryzzl office is emblazoned with the question, 'Wouldn't It Be Tight if Everyone Was Chill To Eachother?'. Likewise, in Season 3, Episode 4 of *Veep*, Selina Meyer visits the office of fictional tech company Clovis, and mistakes toys strewn around the office as evidence of on-site childcare. Of course, HBO comedy *Silicon Valley*, which is based in the eponymous tech enclave, also features ongoing parodies of the modern tech workplace.

²¹⁴ Kate Losse, 'What Facebook's Office Design Tells Us about the Future of Work', *Aeon* <<https://aeon.co/essays/what-facebook-s-office-design-tells-us-about-the-future-of-work>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

essentially that the personal and the political are both ultimately commercial. Sandberg is the perfect worker, and teaches others how to be the same. Compelling employees to behave in a particular proscribed manner based on what's best for business, denies them personhood, and creates an education system that encourages particular qualities and interests in children from a young age. This applies even more so in the service sector – one that's populated largely by women – with receptionists, air hostesses, waitresses, and hotel and retail staff having to take on a particular open, welcoming, perpetually friendly, 'relentlessly pleasant' demeanour in order to get and keep work.

Sandberg and *Lean In* take the blurring of life and leisure a step further, advocating that women 'run' their lives like their career, and manage their daily lives using business principles and techniques. This is another example of the self-as-project narrative, whereby individuals take on responsibility for the outcomes of their lives, thus privileging individual effort over structural and systemic considerations. The rise in popularity of productivity apps, fit-bits, and sleep monitoring devices allows technologically enabled self-surveillance that aligns with this neoliberal framing of life as project. Increasingly, the good life peddled to young women is that disseminated by Instagram, BuzzFeed and Pinterest - it is wedding boards, listicles and yoga poses. Within this mediated neoliberal rationality, we are responsible for being our best selves, for undertaking the discipline and surveillance necessary to do the plank challenge every day, to incorporate more kale into our meals, to try ten new braided hairstyles, to download the best app to monitor our sleep. Self-help itself is presented as a duty to be undertaken by responsible actors rather than as a

response to life within white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchy.

Sandberg's life and career are often inextricable. She admits, 'During my first four years at Google, I was in the office from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. every day at a minimum' (p. 127). She is quick to point out that no-one 'demanded' she work those hours, foregrounding her personal choice to commit to the workplace, and the supposed laid-back nature of tech companies. She also says 'I was back on e-mail from my hospital room the day after giving birth (p. 128), and admits 'I started checking e-mails around 5:00 a.m.' (p. 129) before the baby was awake. She recounts waiting in the lobby of Facebook 'to find a colleague-free moment' (p. 129) so she could run to her car without anyone noticing she was leaving the office at 5:00pm to feed her son and continue working from home. She says, 'The days when I even think of unplugging for a weekend or a vacation are long gone' (p. 135). Sandberg mentions that she has made spreadsheets of potential job offers to see which is best (p. 57), that she files documents in coloured folders (p. 60), and that she obsessively organises her wardrobe (p. 60). These skills and characteristics probably contribute significantly to her success as an executive, and it makes sense that this is also how she would approach social or political issues.

As well as Sandberg herself, Rottenberg's neoliberal feminist subject is visible in the career-minded women discussed throughout the book. Talking about Caroline O'Connor, who wanted to continue working and be a mother, Sandberg says, 'O'Connor gathered data from dozens of mothers about their experiences [...] She did field work on sleep deprivation' (p. 96-7). Talking about a childhood friend during pregnancy she says, 'She has never felt so productive' (p. 97).

Managerial language – ‘data’, ‘field work’, ‘productive’ - is used to describe activities not traditionally connected to the workplace. Regardless of the advice or sentiment trying to be passed on, this phrasing extends market logic and practice into home and social life, as well as advocating that women take rigorous self-care into their own hands.²¹⁵

Not only can motherhood and pregnancy benefit from business-derived tips, but also can dating and marriage. Sandberg says, ‘I truly believe that the single most important *career decision* that a woman makes is whether she will have a life partner and who that partner is’ (p. 110) [emphasis mine]. Other phrases referring to relationships include ‘allocate[ing] the resource of time’, references to the ‘scarcity of this resource’, and making ‘trade-offs’ (p. 122). *Lean In* tells us of a female CFO who cancelled dates with potential suitors to see how they would handle it. This same woman invited her dates to Sao Paolo, Brazil to see if they would fit their schedule around hers (p. 116). Hard-line, manipulative business tactics are employed to test future partners’ willingness to enter into a lifestyle entirely oriented around work. In a rather stunning example of the logic of life as career, relayed through business jargon, Sandberg quotes economics professor Sharon Poczter as saying, ‘All of us are dealing with the constrained optimization that is life, attempting to maximise our utility based on parameters like career, kids, relationships etc.’ (p. 122).

Capitalism is never questioned, or even named in *Lean In*, and the corporate sphere is seen as natural and inevitable. Sandberg advises women to continue working even if their salaries only cover their childcare costs (p. 102-3), arguing

²¹⁵ Note that many women do have to take self-care into their own hands. In this case I mean that the neoliberal framework *further* individualises self-care. See Sara Ahmed, ‘Selfcare as Warfare’, *Feministkilljoys*, 2014 <<https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

that they will have higher salaries in the future, which she frames as an investment. She doesn't push for lower childcare costs, state-funded childcare, or free childcare in the workplace. The career advice given in *Lean In* contradicts its supposed feminist basis and goals. Sandberg frequently sympathises with corporations or management, and never suggests unionising or striking for better conditions.

Sandberg tells a story of when she worked for a consulting firm, and a manager noticed that a large amount of employees were quitting due to exhaustion (p. 147). The manager remarked to the workforce that many people had quit without having taken their designated holidays. He then told the employees that it was their responsibility to say no, and that they should set their own personal limits and stick to them. Sandberg tells this in a way that respects and reveres the manager - calling him someone she 'deeply admired' (p. 147) - and takes as inevitable the company's relentless push for growth and profit at the expense of its employees. She says, 'He said [the company] would never stop making demands on our time, so it was up to us to decide what we were willing to do.' (p. 127). The individual workers are expected to set boundaries and evaluate their wellbeing, whilst the company continues unabated. There is also no consideration of why the employees were so keen to work and not take holidays. Yet again, this shifting of attention and responsibility to individuals rather than institutions reflects a neoliberal logic that ignores or obscures power dynamics. In fact, power itself is considered a *de facto* goal. Sandberg says, 'Getting rid of the internal barriers is critical to gaining power' (p. 8), and in *Lean In*, power is won by individuals first, who will supposedly pass it on indirectly through the outcomes of their actions.

‘Our Collective Performance Would Improve’: Managerial Language in *Lean In*

I have already pointed to the market-driven logics of *Lean In*, a text which purports to be ‘sort of a feminist manifesto’, and will now look at specific examples of managerial language in the book. On the inside blurb, *Lean In* is described as ‘an inspiring call to action and a blueprint for individual growth’. Here we can see revolutionary or feminist language, alongside business and self-help language. This combination of registers epitomises the book’s ethos: it invokes feminism in order to give individualistic advice that is intended to help individual women succeed in their careers. Combining business and feminist language dilutes the radical roots of many feminisms, and renders revolutionary language mundane. Sandberg talks about ‘pulling back when we should be leaning in’ (p. 8), which suggests that leaning in is about paying attention, trying, and staying engaged with your career. Several pages later she says, ‘This book makes the case for leaning in, for being ambitious in any pursuit’ (p. 10), which seemingly makes leaning in analogous with ambition. There are totally different connotations to ‘Lean In’ versus ‘Ambition’ - one being that ambition is a word not commonly associated with women (a point made by Sandberg herself in the book p. 17). The name ‘Lean In’ confirms the ethos behind the book - one that targets one recipient, and tells them to do the leaning.

There are other examples of slogan-like lexis throughout *Lean In*, including several of the chapter titles such as Chapter 7 ‘Don’t Leave Before You Leave (p. 92), and Chapter 8 ‘Make Your Partner a Real Partner’ (p. 104), which also plays on the double meaning of partner. As well as this, there is a scattering of self-help language throughout the book, which ties in with an individualistic mode of thinking. On the back cover, a quotation from singer Alicia Keys reads, ‘We can

reach *within ourselves* to achieve greatness' [emphasis mine]. The Chapter 6 title 'Speak and Seek your Truth' (p. 77) utilises a quasi-religious yet personalised piece of guidance. The use of both business and self-help language is particularly insidious in a book marketed to be, and celebrated for being, a 'feminist' text.²¹⁶ It's telling that the individualised language of self-help, and the often dehumanised jargon of business, are employed in a book that asks readers to turn to themselves for the answers to systemic and longstanding problems. Incorporating self-help language into a feminist discourse already diluted with business jargon, serves to further lessen the political and collectivised nature of radical feminisms.

Sandberg uses collective pronouns (as she recommends women do to seem communal and selfless), saying '*our* revolution has stalled' [emphasis mine]. She uses politicised, collective feminist language such as: 'reignite the revolution', 'a more equal world', 'the larger goal of true equality' (p. 11), 'The Myth of Doing It All' (a play on 'having it all'), and 'Working Together Towards Equality', and co-opts this broadly sketched revolution by mere virtue of being a woman. Sandberg says, 'A truly equal world would be one where women ran half our countries and companies and men ran half our homes' (p. 7). There is no insinuation that a 'truly equal world' wouldn't prominently feature business, or be modelled on business, and the use of the word 'ran' invokes neoliberal

²¹⁶ For a feminist philosophical critique of the imperative to be happy, and of the happiness industry (which includes self-help writing), see Ahmed, 2010; For feminist critique of self-help language in populist feminist books, see: Helen Lewis, 'Hot Feminist by Polly Vernon Review – Reducing a Revolution to Sloppy Self-Help', *The Guardian*, 27 May 2015, section Books <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/27/hot-feminist-by-polly-vernon-reducing-revolution-to-sloppy-self-help>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]; 'Naomi Wolf's Book *Vagina: Self-Help Marketed as Feminism*', *The Guardian*, 5 September 2012, section Opinion <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/sep/05/naomi-wolf-book-vagina-feminism>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

reasoning that treats both homes and countries like corporations. Kate Losse cites Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg as saying ‘companies over countries’ in meetings at Facebook, and points out that Facebook often describes itself in national terms by comparing user figures in relation to countries’ populations.²¹⁷ Indeed, Zuckerberg is rumoured to be running for US President in 2020,²¹⁸ and during the 2016 US Presidential campaign, Donald Trump claimed he would run the country like his businesses - ‘ahead-of-schedule, under-budget’.²¹⁹ Business becomes the blueprint for other areas of social, political, and cultural life.

Sandberg continues, ‘If we tapped the entire pool of human resources and talent, our collective performance would improve’ (p. 7). Far from the language of canonical feminist texts, this use of ‘tapped’, ‘resources’ and ‘performance’ is objectifying and market-oriented. Additionally, this language suggests an exploitation of natural resources that would be antithetical to traditional alignments between feminism and environmentalism. *Lean In*’s vision of feminism is improvement, equality and diversity (in terms of sex, not necessarily race, class and sexual orientation) for the sake of business outcomes - for profit and growth. This implies that Google and Facebook can and will change the world, if women would only have more confidence to climb the corporate ladder. *Lean In* leaves out the other end of the business model as it doesn’t draw attention to the fact that not everyone can be promoted, and that

²¹⁷ Losse, ‘Feminism’s Tipping Point’;

Facebook as country also discussed in ‘The New Country of Facebook’, *Financial Times* <<https://www.ft.com/content/e4feefe8-5eea-11e4-be0b-00144feabdco>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²¹⁸ Annie Karni, ‘Zuckerberg hires former Clinton pollster Joel Benenson’, *Politico*, 2 August 2017 <<https://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/02/zuckerberg-hires-former-clinton-pollster-joel-benenson-241265>> [Accessed 29 November 2017].

²¹⁹ Jeremy Diamond, ‘Kushner to lead ‘American Innovation’ office at White House’, *CNN*, 27 March 2017 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2017/03/26/politics/kushner-american-innovation-white-house/index.html>> [Accessed 29 November 2017].

constant growth comes at the expense of the environment and low paid workers of colour in developing countries. Mies states that ‘this never-ending growth model’ assumes ‘the character of cancer, which is progressively destructive’.²²⁰ *Lean In*’s pro-capitalist interest in gender completely papers over decades of feminist resistance to capitalist norms. Capitalist patriarchal structures are treated as a beneficial permanent presence, or at least as an inevitability. The strategies provided by Sandberg in the text do not offer possibilities for changing or even challenging capitalist patriarchy.

The preface title, ‘Internalizing the Revolution’, is a rather blatant example of *Lean In*’s individualisation of radical politics. Revolutions are collective, and Sandberg’s command to internalize them isn’t a suggestion that individuals ruminate deeply on revolutionary struggles, but that they should take personally the responsibility of overcoming any barrier they may face. ‘Internalizing the Revolution’ is a distortion of the second-wave feminist slogan, ‘The Personal is Political’.²²¹ This radical feminist statement relates the private sphere (including housework, sex, or domestic violence) to a global imbalance in the distribution of power, agency and resources that is unavoidably political. Personal problems were theorised as being part of a wider political issue relating to material and historical factors that should be addressed collectively. The neoliberal slant on this sentiment takes it to mean that politics are a personal matter, and that individuals should take responsibility in solving their own problems.

‘Internalizing the Revolution’ encourages women to take on the ideas of the revolution as presented by *Lean In* and to implement them themselves, one by one. Sandberg says:

²²⁰ Mies, 39.

²²¹ Hanisch, ‘The Personal is Political’.

We can reignite the revolution by internalizing the revolution. The shift to a more equal world will happen person by person. We move closer to the larger goal of true equality with each woman who leans in (p. 11).

This position doesn't advocate a collective discussion of issues (consciousness-raising, social media, grassroots activism) and privileges positivity over negativity – which are falsely constructed categories in this case. This same stance is promoted in the official documents regarding *Lean In* circles. They say, 'We recommend against joining a Circle with anyone who might be directly competitive, such as someone who could be up for the same job',²²² and mention several times that 'a key protocol for Circles is reserving judgement and not offering advice'.²²³

'Far from blaming the victim': Disclaimers in *Lean In*

One of the most fascinating aspects of *Lean In* is its use of disclaimers and defences. Many of the quotations and examples I have given throughout this chapter are immediately followed in the text itself by an acknowledgement that the view expressed is controversial. The disclaimers and pre-emptive explanations in *Lean In*, alongside Sandberg's persona, mingling of business and feminist language, and adoption of liberal feminist characteristics, are strategic because they make the book more difficult to criticise. The combination of these factors make Sandberg and *Lean In* appear less threatening, and allow for the appropriation of feminist ideas and language in service of a highly neoliberal, profit-oriented, individualistic career book.

²²² 'Sheryl Sandberg's 'Lean In' Foundation and Movement' <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/02/22/us/22sandberg-lean-in-documents.html?ref=politics&_r=0> [Accessed 26 April 2017], 6.

²²³ 'Sheryl Sandberg's 'Lean In' Foundation and Movement', 8.

Looking at *Lean In*'s disclaimers and defences separately from other facets of the book better exposes them as a rhetorical tactic. Including them throughout the chapter would have allowed them to function as they do in the book – to soften and diffuse Sandberg's argument, increase her likeability, and increase the perceived legitimacy of the book's 'feminism'. Looking at *Lean In*'s ethos without the multiple disclaimers (as we have done) reveals more clearly its neoliberalism, elitism, and attempts to portray Sandberg as kind, understanding and well-intentioned (which she may well be). Incorporating an awareness of disclaimers as rhetorical strategy works particularly well in an exploration of complicity; the text assimilates and recuperates opposing viewpoints in order to pay lip service to them, before summarily dismissing them. *Lean In* is highly sophisticated at positioning itself as egalitarian; it hides its complicity beneath reasonably-presented defences, though does nothing to address counter-positions in any detail. By many accounts Sandberg is a well-intentioned businesswoman using her position to draw attention to inequalities in the workplace, but this doesn't detract from *Lean In*'s complicity with the very systems many contemporary feminisms work against.

Sandberg demonstrates a great deal of awareness that her approach in *Lean In* may be considered offensive, or that counter-arguments may challenge her approach and conclusions. When talking about the amount of female CEOs, or women with board or congressional seats, she says, 'the gap is even worse for women of colour' (p. 5). Whilst it's positive that this is mentioned, Sandberg is still talking about very high-powered positions, and this is the only time race is ever spoken about in the original book. However, ever the savvy capitalist, Sandberg did listen to criticisms from feminists of colour and subsequently

published *Lean In For Graduates* (2014) which includes a chapter on women of colour in business. This is a further extension of the disclaimer technique, and an example of the adaptive and recuperative power of contemporary capitalism; women of colour are brought in to the existing *Lean In* framework, but capitalism or white supremacy aren't questioned or deconstructed.

The largest of Sandberg's defences and acknowledgements is when she brings up the controversial internal versus external debate at the very beginning of the book. This is noteworthy because she could have chosen to pursue what she sees as most important (internal barriers to success) without including any justification for it, or bringing up the opposing viewpoint. Ordinarily it is good practice to raise opposing views to an argument, but Sandberg's inclusion of competing views serves to incorporate and readily dismiss them. Whilst *Lean In's* overall approach is to focus on internal barriers, Sandberg does occasionally write about external barriers to female success in the workplace. She mentions sexism, lack of childcare, and unpaid parental leave in the US, but quickly moves on to say that 'women are hindered by barriers that exist within ourselves' (p. 8). Note that she uses the collective pronoun, thus following her own advice about women presenting themselves as communal. She aligns herself with women in the persona of the Everywoman so her own fallibility hides the deft switch from attention to external barriers, to internal ones.

Sandberg also acknowledges that there isn't one definition of success, and so she pre-empts any criticisms that she's only speaking to women in the corporate world. She acknowledges that not all women want careers or children or both; that many people don't desire power; and that 'the vast majority of women' are struggling to make ends meet (p. 10). This isn't included to actually legitimise or

understand these perspectives, but to show that these prospective criticisms have been taken into account. Acknowledging different desires and ways of living is presented in highly individualistic terms, using self-help rhetoric to propose a self-defining and self-directed life trajectory – ‘We each have to chart our own unique course and define which goals fit our lives, values, and dreams’ (p. 10). She says parts of the book are more relevant to well-off women, but that other parts can apply to ‘*any* woman who wants to increase her chances of making it to the top of her field or pursue *any* goal vigorously’ [emphasis mine] and that it applies to ‘situations that women face in every workplace, within every community, and in every home’ (p. 10). Referring to ‘any’ and ‘every’ woman and situation here, particularly considering the overall tenor of the book, does frame the text as applicable to all women.

Presenting an alternative to a career, Sandberg writes ‘some of the most important contributions to our world are made by caring for one person at a time’ (p. 10), which offers a rather limited worldview of those not invested in climbing the corporate ladder. While Sandberg mentions women in other situations, and that not all women prioritise work in the way *Lean In* does, she paternalistically frames her own actions and advice as beneficial for all women – ‘If we can succeed in adding more female voices at the highest levels, we will expand opportunities and extend fairer treatment to all’ (p. 10). This view, which derives from the ‘trickle-down’ economic model espoused by neoliberal politicians in the 1980s, asserts that encouraging smart ambitious white women to break through the glass ceiling will improve conditions for cleaners, domestic workers, and other less privileged women. Again she uses a collective pronoun,

and purports to be acting in favour of all women, but is actually addressing an extremely narrow demographic in very individualistic terms.

More surprising is that Sandberg acknowledges criticisms that she's 'letting institutions off the hook', or 'blaming the victim'. Again, incorporating a shrewd awareness of the potential holes in *Lean In* means the book can appear to be addressing issues, when really it's namechecking them. In terms of victim blaming, *Lean In* either totally misunderstands it, or adeptly directs attention away from the criticism. She says, 'Far from blaming the victim, I believe that female leaders are key to the solution' (p. 11). This sidesteps the accusation of victim blaming, which is understood as blaming women for the oppression they face (the term is most commonly used in relation to cases of sexual assault, where women are blamed for wearing provocative clothing, being intoxicated, or walking home alone). Expressing a desire for female leaders is not mutually exclusive with blaming women for their lack of assertive and strategic behaviour in the workplace.

Moreover, it can't be denied that *Lean In* lets institutions off the hook. The book's presentation of business as benevolent counteracts any mention of unpaid parental leave or lack of childcare, and when external factors are mentioned there is never a specific company name or government policy offered. Sandberg's vision of 'true equality' is within a context of businesses as caring, listening entities that are concerned with discrimination and employee wellbeing. This works particularly well for technology companies because they don't look like traditional or formal workplaces, are involved in cutting edge technology, and are viewed as social and thus community centred. Sandberg says she wanted to work for Google to join 'its mission to provide the world with

access to information' (p. 58). This constructs Google as being chiefly concerned with bringing information to people, rather than with growth and profit. This evades the reality that Google sells user information in order to maximise profits from advertising revenue. Portraying business as benevolent makes Sandberg look altruistic by association, and thus paves the way for her 'social movement'. This representation of the technology sector enables *Lean In* to not ask anything of it, as it's already portrayed as being revolutionary and caring in ways that traditional institutions aren't. Susan Faludi quips that 'Never before have so many corporations joined a revolution. Virtually nothing is required of them—not even a financial contribution.'²²⁴ Companies that sign up to the *Lean In* foundation benefit from looking socially conscious, but don't have to commit to changing or enforcing workplace policies.

At times Sandberg is critical, saying:

If society truly valued the work of caring for children, companies and institutions would find ways to reduce these steep penalties and help parents combine career and family responsibilities (p. 102).

It is unclear why *Lean In* doesn't push for this. Sandberg is a billionaire who appears regularly on the Forbes Most Powerful Women list.²²⁵ Why doesn't the *Lean In* foundation foreground childcare policy or parental leave? Why doesn't it insist that the companies signed up to the *Lean In* foundation at least promise to review these issues?

In the section about negotiation where Sandberg encourages women to appear communal in order to be perceived in a certain way that will benefit them

²²⁴ Faludi, 'Facebook Feminism, Like It or Not'.

²²⁵ In 2013, the year *Lean In* was published, Sandberg was #6 on Forbes Most Powerful Women list. The following year she was #8, in 2015 she remained at #8, and in 2016 she was #7.

financially, she does show awareness that encouraging women to enact stereotypes makes them complicit with them. She says, 'I understand the paradox of advising women to change the world by adhering to biased rules and expectations' (p. 48). Utilising the Everywoman persona she then says, 'It is not a perfect answer but a means to a desirable end', and ultimately justifies this approach (and the whole *Lean In* approach) by saying that it's useful for women to know the way the system works so at least they can use this advice to 'strengthen their position' (p. 48). As I have stated, this strategic complicity is a valid tactic for women living in white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchy, but *Lean In* presents it as the first and only tactic. The book is much more interested in individual success for some privileged women than collective action, solidarity for marginalised women, or a challenge to the existing flawed system. This disclaimer acknowledges the flaws of Sandberg's advice but goes on to ignore them; it operates by sidestepping criticism, whilst also appearing to take it into consideration.

Often, Sandberg gives advice that reflects a feminist perspective, but then immediately tempers it with a business-oriented add-on. She says, 'Men at the top are often unaware of the benefits they enjoy simply because they're men' (p. 151) but in the next paragraph says women mustn't 'inject gender into every discussion'. She also tells women not to keep quiet and be obsessed with fitting in (p. 147), but this contradicts her previous lessons about being 'relentlessly pleasant'. Many feminist principles are directly in conflict with those forwarded in the corporate world, which is why Sandberg's feminism is so dramatically diluted.

Sandberg presents gender roles as being caused by socialisation (in line with feminist thinking), and yet invokes biological determinism several times. Employing managerial tact, she appeals and speaks to numerous audiences with various beliefs, despite the fact that this is ultimately contradictory. It is particularly likely that readers of *Lean In* would believe in biological sex difference because the book is aimed at women who aren't necessarily feminists already, and at male employers. When biologicistic arguments are invoked, Sandberg moves on quickly and is tongue-in-cheek. She says there may be biological differences between men and women - that men may be inherently more assertive and women more nurturing - but that in modern society 'our desire for leadership is largely a culturally created and reinforced trait.' (p. 19)

In other cases she says we should try to overcome any potential differences between the sexes, countering this perspective with a quick slogan-esque response - 'Even if 'mother knows best' is rooted in biology, it need not be written in stone' (p. 108). Talking about socially reaffirmed gender roles in the workplace, she rightly says, 'We need institutions and individuals to notice and correct for this behaviour' (p. 36). Whilst this is true, the rhetoric and overall thesis of the book places institutions and individuals on equal footing, when in reality the former have much more power, resources and influence than the latter.

Some of Sandberg's language, whilst probably derived from her corporate experience, echoes second-wave feminist language, and reflects a more general metonymy whereby 'feminism' is popularly identified with certain isolated features of this period in the movement's history. This is heightened because of the book's marketing and Sandberg's description of it as 'sort of a feminist

manifesto'. She says, 'Talking can transform minds, which can transform behaviors, which can transform institutions' (p. 149), and, 'Personal choices are not always as personal as they appear.' (p. 100). Whilst it is within a feminist tradition to state that talking can be transformative, and that change can come from the bottom up, in the context of *Lean In*, which is heavily individualised, this asks women to change institutions by changing themselves. Additionally, the acknowledgement that personal choices aren't always personal is contrary to liberal capitalist views on free markets and choice. The proclamation that we are all influenced by external factors doesn't feed into the book's overall focus on internal ones. There are a number of frustratingly feminist observations throughout the book, but none of them are incorporated into the overall strategy. This is because feminism is used as a style - as a broad concept of female empowerment and strength which ultimately feminises and sanitises the corporate world depicted in the book.

Lean In's use of a hybrid feminist-managerial language allows Sandberg to straddle activist and corporate spheres. *Lean In* isn't the first to do this – as stated previously, companies advertising to women frequently employ the language of 'empowerment', 'strength' and 'success'²²⁶ - but unlike other companies that draw upon (post)feminism, *Lean In* explicitly describes itself, and situates itself, within feminism. *Lean In* is complicit in the repackaging of feminism; it makes feminist ideas acceptable and mainstream in a conservative and business-oriented format. Sandberg's language isn't a simple co-optation or appropriation; it doesn't just take language and use it for spurious ends - it claims those ends *are* feminism, and this constitutes Sandberg's complicity. By

²²⁶ Examples of such companies include Dove, Always, Sure, Nike, and Pantene.

positioning her work as ‘sort of a feminist manifesto’, Sandberg is complicit in colonising feminism, and using neoliberal logics and language to repackage feminist ideas. The following section considers the multiple factors outlined throughout this chapter, and concludes that Sandberg’s complicity is a specific combination of her position, her advice, her framework and her use of feminism.

Conclusion

A lot of feminist works contain a message similar to that of *Lean In* – that revolution is to some extent a personal or psychological endeavour – although they do so alongside a serious acknowledgement of systemic sexism, racism, classism and heterosexism. *Lean In* could have drawn attention to internalized sexism and imposter syndrome, and promoted collective, encouraging and empowering solutions within the narrow constraints of existing power dynamics. The idea of looking at how women behave isn’t necessarily counter to feminist praxis, but the business-centric structure and presentation of the issues, and the neoliberal ideology espoused overshadows any feminist message within the text.

If Sandberg had instead launched a brand cum movement that sought to change policy, or at least draw attention to it, then women wouldn’t have to learn to negotiate for higher salaries, or at least women could do those things alongside effecting change that meant they wouldn’t have to do it in the future. Through *Lean In*, women in business are expected to become experts at succeeding in a biased system. They are implored to gradually learn to speak up and reach out, only to get higher in a system that continues to create the same conditions, meaning younger women will also have to learn strategic complicity. What is the

end goal of this? *Lean In* suggests that somehow, the women at the top won't be ruthless, profit-oriented executives, but altruistic and generous bosses who somehow improve things for other women just by being successful women themselves. This reeks of gender essentialism.

This thesis looks at complicity as an underexplored facet of contemporary feminisms. The categories and language of feminism are complicated, positional, always shifting and layered; patriarchy has no gender, women can be sexist, and men can be feminist. None of this is visible in *Lean In*, as it uses vague notions of sisterhood and ambition to encourage more female participation in capitalist patriarchy.

I don't suggest that Sandberg explicitly set out to fulfil what I describe as the results of her complicity, but that *Lean In* functions in the ways outlined, and that this has effects that Sandberg is complicit in. Sandberg is figured as complicit in this thesis because of a combination of interrelated factors - her appropriation of feminism, her appropriately feminine Everywoman persona, her neoliberal framework, and her use of disclaimers. It is this combination that makes her a notable figure of faux-feminist complicity or a feminist decoy.

Sandberg is complicit because of her position, her advice, her framework and her use of feminism. Each of these has been outlined in this chapter, showing that together, they undermine politicised radical feminisms.

Sandberg's position – her wealth, influence, power and platform – mean that her particular message reaches a wider audience and receives traction with media outlets. This is not the case for more explicitly political and radical feminisms. Her advice specifically focuses on the internal at the expense of the

external, and thus constructs a complicit female subject at the expense of a structural analysis of power and oppression. Women are encouraged to be complicit with sexist stereotypes, and are encouraged to be perpetual workers. Additionally, corporate modes of thinking are extended to areas outside the workplace, encouraging women to manage their lives, including relationships and parenting, as they would a career. *Lean In*'s framework is individualistic and uncritically capitalist, and so proposes equality for the sake of corporate goals. An essentialist conception of women is operationalised to advocate for trickle-down feminism – the book submits that women are good for women because they're women. Finally, Sandberg's appropriation of feminism is a key facet of her complicity because it legitimises her 'manifesto' by aligning it with equality. Feminism is simplified and homogenised so the messy history of feminist theory and activism, and the intersections of race, class and sexual orientation, are erased. The language of feminism is commandeered and put to work in service of corporate outcomes, and the negative and maligned aspects of liberal feminism (individualism and elitism) are put forward to contribute to imperialist narratives of a civilised West.

Any of these factors taken separately lessen Sandberg's overall complicity. Without her power and privilege she wouldn't have the platform and influence to affect feminism or the perception of it in any great way. Without the advice to look to internal barriers, the book wouldn't necessarily be so problematic. Without the neoliberal pro-business framework, the individualistic advice may operate as a strategy for the day-to-day survival of women within capitalist patriarchy, or it at least wouldn't be in the service of profit and growth. Finally, without the colonisation of feminism, *Lean In* would just be another career

manual. It is in the very specific combination of position, advice, framework and feminism that Sandberg's complicity lies, and why her narrative of gender equality within corporate contexts should be approached with caution.

The upcoming chapter also examines discourses of individualism, but in relation to complicity with cultural appropriation and racism. By looking at Miley Cyrus, Iggy Azalea, and Lily Allen's responses to accusations of racism, I examine the rhetorical patterns used by the celebrities, and link this to theories of whiteness. The chapter ends by considering ignorance, and questions the extent to which subjects are wilfully ignorant in their refusal to engage with opposing perspectives.

Chapter 3

‘We can’t stop, and we won’t stop: Complicity, Cultural Appropriation, and White Celebrity

A denial of vulnerability [...] underlies other types of ignorance, such as the ignorance of one’s complicity in racial oppression, because to admit such complicity is to open oneself to features of one’s social world and one’s way of inhabiting that world that are discomfiting and thus to make oneself vulnerable.²²⁷

In the previous chapter I presented Sheryl Sandberg as complicit with a move to incorporate and recuperate feminism within a corporate context, from a position of great power, wealth and influence. This chapter looks at other women with great power, wealth and influence, and argues that their reluctance to listen, understand and adapt when it comes to accusations of racism illustrates a broader complicity in maintaining white supremacy. Using Robin DiAngelo’s book *What Does It Mean to Be White? Developing White Racial Literacy* (2012), I examine cases where white female pop stars have been accused of racism, and discuss their responses, as well as their links with a feminist identity, and how this relates to complicity. Overall, my argument is that these highly visible and influential artists are complicit in white supremacy through their consistent appropriation of raced cultural signifiers, and that this is linked to a wider ignorance or dismissiveness of racial politics on the part of white people in general. Using Erinn Gilson’s work on ignorance and vulnerability, I relate defensive attitudes to accusations of racism with a reluctance to appear vulnerable, ultimately arguing that recognising complicity

²²⁷ Gilson, 319.

requires a sense of interrelatedness with others, which necessitates vulnerability.

This chapter argues that Miley Cyrus, Lily Allen, and Iggy Azalea are complicit with racism because of several interlocking factors. Firstly, they are complicit in cultural appropriation wherein white artists experiment with, refer to, or fully immerse themselves in signifiers of black culture in order to appear edgy, relevant, or counter-cultural. Related to this, the artists discussed here are complicit in adopting a feminist identity or utilising feminist language because discourses of empowerment, choice and power are fashionable and therefore profitable. Finally, considering their interactions with racial imagery and culture (including fashion, dancing styles and accent), and their alignment with aspects of contemporary (post)feminism, these artists are complicit in their lack of solidarity with black women when it comes to issues that primarily affect people of colour, such as police brutality or racial profiling. Complicity in this chapter is constituted by the singers' willingness to benefit from *some* feminist discourses – particularly those relating to sexual empowerment, body positivity, and media sexism – whilst ignoring those that don't factor into their brand. This is compounded by their cultural appropriation, and subsequently by their responses to accusations of racism.

Crucially, this chapter is situated against a backdrop of increased racial tensions in the USA (and elsewhere) in a period that has seen the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement and widespread protests against police brutality. Celebrities have engaged with these themes in varying ways, some with more

acclaim than others.²²⁸ Notably, Beyoncé released her single ‘Formation’ during Black History Month and close to the birthdays of murdered African Americans Trayvon Martin and Sandra Bland. The ‘Formation’ video includes imagery of Hurricane Katrina, including several shots of Beyoncé sitting atop a sinking police car. New Orleans icons Messy Mya and Big Freedia are sampled in their regional patois, and Beyoncé sings of her love for ‘baby hair and afros’, and ‘Jackson Five nostrils’.²²⁹ A young black boy dressed in a hoodie dances in front of a line of armed police, and the camera pans over the words ‘stop shooting us’ sprayed on a wall nearby. Beyoncé’s performance of ‘Formation’ at the 2016 Superbowl halftime show featured black female dancers with natural hair wearing berets reminiscent of the Black Panthers. In a nod to Malcolm X, Beyoncé and her dancers stood in an X formation, and the singer wore an outfit that paid tribute to Michael Jackson. The performance drew immediate condemnation across the US, and was interpreted as anti-police and anti-white.²³⁰



²²⁸ A Pepsi advert released in April 2017 featuring Kendall Jenner was swiftly pulled after accusations that it appropriated the Black Lives Matter movement.

²²⁹ Beyoncé - Formation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDZJPJV__bQ> [Accessed 26 April 2017]

²³⁰ For example, see Jerome Hudson, ‘Beyoncé Has Spent Years Stoking Anti-Police Sentiment’, *Breitbart*, 2016 <<http://www.breitbart.com/big-hollywood/2016/07/08/texas-bama-beyonce-spent-years-stoking-anti-police-sentiment/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].



The conversations about cultural appropriation discussed in this chapter occurred in a period when racial tensions in the USA were simmering, and the release of Beyoncé's full album 'Lemonade' in 2016, with its Southern black gothic aesthetic caused a further explosion of discourse in relation to pop music, (celebrity) feminism, and race.²³¹ The pop-culture examples and cultural contexts discussed in this chapter occurred prior to the 2016 US presidential campaign and the subsequent election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States. The prominence of discourses and representations of race across pop-culture and in online spaces in recent years attests to ongoing and unresolved racial hostilities in the US that are being more explicitly realised in Trump's America.

The actions of the three celebrities discussed in this chapter are in contrast to black artists who have commented on prominent issues that affect communities of colour in the US. Rapper Nicki Minaj spoke out in 2015 about the lack of recognition for black women in the music industry, and Beyoncé foregrounded race in her aforementioned album, including a sample of a Malcolm X speech, which said:

The most disrespected person in America is the black woman.
The most unprotected person in America is the black woman.
The most neglected person in America is the black woman.²³²

²³¹ For examples, see MTV News Staff, 'Lemonade: A Beyoncé Reaction Roundtable', *MTV News* <<http://www.mtv.com/news/2872361/beyonce-lemonade-album-reaction/>> [Accessed 27 April 2016];

'A Black Feminist Roundtable on Bell Hooks, Beyoncé, and 'Moving Beyond Pain'', *Feministing* <<http://feministing.com/2016/05/11/a-feminist-roundtable-on-bell-hooks-beyonce-and-moving-beyond-pain/>> [Accessed 12 May 2016];

'Beyoncé, Black Feminist Art, And This Oshun Bidness', *Genius* <<http://genius.com/a/beyonce-black-feminist-art-and-this-oshun-bidness>> [Accessed 8 May 2016]; hooks, 'Moving Beyond Pain'.

²³² 'Don't Hurt Yourself' *Lemonade* (Parkwood Entertainment, 2016).

As with discourses of feminism, discourses of race are prominent across the contemporary music scene. Kendrick Lamar performed at the 2016 Grammys with a group of black men wearing prison uniforms and manacles, rapping ‘You hate me don't you? You hate my people, your plan is to terminate my culture’.²³³ Amongst many of the references to African-American culture in her 2016 album, Beyoncé featured the mothers of slain teenagers Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown and 43 year old Eric Garner in her HBO film for ‘Lemonade’.

The entertainment industry more broadly has also been dealing with race issues; the 2016 Academy Awards were subject to criticism for their lack of diversity (spawning the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite), and ‘Grey’s Anatomy’ actor Jessie Williams gave an impassioned speech at the Black Entertainment Television (BET) Awards, saying:

Now, what we've been doing is looking at the data and we know that police somehow manage to deescalate, disarm and not kill white people every day. So what's going to happen is we are going to have equal rights and justice in our own country or we will restructure their function and ours.²³⁴

Since the inauguration of Donald Trump as US President, there has been an increased politicisation of celebrity. Actress Meryl Streep spoke against the President at the 2017 Golden Globe awards, and entertainers including Jennifer Lawrence, Jennifer Lopez, Judd Apatow and Ellen DeGeneres expressed their disapproval of Trump’s ‘Muslim Ban’.²³⁵ Whilst there have always been

²³³ Kendrick Lamar - The Blacker The Berry Grammy Awards 2016
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGGCx-RrKg8>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]

²³⁴ Megan Lasher, ‘Read The Full Transcript of Jesse Williams’s BET Speech’, *Time*
<<http://time.com/4383516/jesse-williams-bet-speech-transcript/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²³⁵ Daniel Victor and Giovanni Russonello, ‘Meryl Streep’s Golden Globes Speech’, *The New York Times*, 8 January 2017 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/08/arts/television/meryl-streep-golden-globes-speech.html>> [Accessed 26 April 2017];
Selection of Tweets available at ‘We Can Now Add Heartless and Evil to His Repertoire’: Celebrities React to Trump’s Refugee Ban’, *PEOPLE.com*, 2017

politically active or politically literate celebrities, the contemporary moment is one in which celebrities are *expected* to comment on current affairs; in the early months of Trump's America it wasn't uncommon to see famous faces participating in or organising protests.²³⁶

Contemporary feminisms rely heavily on black feminist analyses of interlocking oppression and power, so much so that Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality is foundational to almost all contemporary incarnations of feminism (theoretically at least, if not always in practice). As outlined in the introduction to this work, Crenshaw's theory states that subjects do not inhabit their various identities separately, and so oppression is not experienced individually through the prism of gender, race, disability and so on, but in combinations of various subject positions. A Trinidadian born American woman's experience of racism is not the same as that of a Muslim British man, and her experience of sexism is not the same as that of a white woman from Tennessee (and these examples don't include class position, sexual orientation and so on). Furthermore, one Trinidadian born American woman's oppression is not necessarily experienced in the same way as another Trinidadian born American woman's. Intersectionality is foundational to this thesis, as I argue that discussions of complicity can only exist against a backdrop of emerging subjectivities and identities - those that have always existed, but have not always had a language and theory to articulate them, or the space to be heard.

<<http://people.com/celebrity/celebrities-react-trumps-muslim-ban/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²³⁶ Actor Shia LaBeouf staged an anti-Trump performance-art project called 'He Will Not Divide Us', and a host of celebrities marched in the 2017 Women's March: '53 Stars Who Protested Trump at Women's March', *TheWrap*, 2017 <<http://www.thewrap.com/women-march-protest-trump-madonna-scarlett-johansson/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

With the unstoppable encroachment of the internet, social media and handheld technologies into everyday life, many more people – and particularly young people – have access to conversations and viewpoints that they would previously have been unlikely to encounter. Many young people, through Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook and Reddit, are able to hear voices, listen to conversations, ask questions, and express their own experiences in ways that were hitherto impossible. Through these media, young people learn about intersectionality, radical fat activism, and slut-shaming, and are able to mobilise and organise around the issues that affect them, and develop critical thinking skills in regards to media and political issues. It's relevant then that so-called Black Twitter is hailed as 'one of the most important tools of modern sociopolitical activism'²³⁷ and that 'African Americans as a demographic have become the fastest growing adopters of mobile devices'.²³⁸ Black feminism is at the forefront of online feminisms, which is arguably central to contemporary feminist theory and activism.

What Does It Mean To Be White? Individualism, Colour-blindness and White Celebrity

I approach race from a critical race perspective that sees it as 'a socially constructed category with absolutely no basis in biology'.²³⁹ That is, race has been made to be a socially meaningful category, but biologically, what we refer to as 'race' has no effect on human behaviour. This is not to say that people of various racial groups (as humans have categorised them) do not *experience* the

²³⁷ Feminista Jones, 'Is Twitter the Underground Railroad of Activism?', *Salon* <http://www.salon.com/2013/07/17/how_twitter_fuels_black_activism/> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²³⁸ Stokely Baksh quoted in Kyra D. Gaunt, 'YouTube, Twerking & You: Context Collapse and the Handheld Co-Presence of Black Girls and Miley Cyrus', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 27.3 (2015), 246.

²³⁹ Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism, and History* (London: Verso Books, 2015), xviii.

world differently because of the various meanings we have attributed to physical characteristics, ancestry or geographical birthplace, and so we must pay attention to race, whilst acknowledging that in other versions of human life it may not be a socially meaningful category.

Ware defines racism as a term encompassing ‘all the various relations of power that have arisen from the domination of one racial group over another’,²⁴⁰ and so this includes microaggressions and cultural appropriation as well as structural and more overt interpersonal racist acts. Pitcher presents race as ‘a medium through which we live our lives’ and as something that is constantly produced and reproduced.²⁴¹ Using the language of Judith Butler, he says ‘Race is not something we 'have', it is always something we 'do',²⁴² and thus positions it as a ‘site of meaning’²⁴³ rather than as a separate concept attached to physical bodies. If biological race has no inherent meaning, and if race is a constantly negotiated set of meanings attributed to various bodies, then, as Dyer says, ‘Racial *imagery* is central to the organisation of the modern world’ [emphasis mine].²⁴⁴ Talking about race then must take into consideration the minutiae of daily life – ‘The myriad minute decisions that constitute the practices of the world’²⁴⁵ – including the seemingly trivial and ephemeral behaviours of celebrities.

This chapter deals with white celebrities and white rhetorical strategies when faced with racism. Whiteness is conceived of as a historical and socio-political

²⁴⁰ Ware, xviii.

²⁴¹ Ben Pitcher, *Consuming Race* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2.

²⁴² Pitcher, 4.

²⁴³ Pitcher, 4.

²⁴⁴ Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997, repr. New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

²⁴⁵ Dyer, 1.

perspective; as stated in Chapter 1, this does not mean that *all* observations about ‘white people’ relate to *all* white people, but that all white people are implicated in the effects of racism because white people are the beneficiaries of uninterrogated racial inequalities. In the words of Daniel Conway, ‘White people are, by their race, to a degree complicit in inequality, prejudice and exploitation.’²⁴⁶

Critical attention has been paid to whiteness in order to frame it as a racial position; this is in response to its positioning of itself as neutral, invisible and objective. When race is talked about by white people in relation to *other* bodies, other groups, other places, and other cultures, whiteness functions as the human norm, and avoids interrogation.²⁴⁷ The consequence of this racial invisibility is that white people can ‘claim to speak for the commonality of humanity’,²⁴⁸ whereas people of colour are seen to only speak for their racial group. This ability to represent the norm of humanity is a central facet of white privilege,²⁴⁹ and aligns whiteness with the neutral subject position ‘human’, while positioning non-white racial groups as Other, as ‘something else’.²⁵⁰

Representationally, whiteness is ‘asserted hegemonically’ (despite the complex and varying identities of ethnic groups referred to as White) and other cultural identities are measured against it.²⁵¹ Whiteness is seen everywhere, and is positioned as neutral – it is central but has no centre - and so is able to be ‘an

²⁴⁶ Daniel Conway in *Exploring Complicity*, 122.

²⁴⁷ Dyer, 3.

²⁴⁸ Dyer, 2.

²⁴⁹ McIntosh, ‘White Privilege’

²⁵⁰ Dyer, 2. Of course, this privilege depends on identity group, as working-class men, or white women are also variously positioned as Other. Whiteness claims objectivity, but cisgendered straight white middle-class maleness is at the centre of that privileged subject position.

²⁵¹ Lindsay R. Calhoun, “Will the Real Slim Shady Please Stand Up?”: Masking Whiteness, Encoding Hegemonic Masculinity in Eminem’s Marshall Mathers LP’, *Howard Journal of Communications*, 16.4 (2005), 272.

endless contradictory, shapeshifting cultural entity'.²⁵² It is for this reason that I centre whiteness in this chapter (and variously throughout this thesis); paradoxically, being complicit in continuing to centre dominant discursive and representational identities allows for a critical deconstruction of positions that can often operate unseen (this critical attention to dominant groups is the intended outcome of the language analysed at the end of Chapter 1).

Analysing white *women* within a feminist context allows this privileged group to be called into question for their racism, rather than allowing them to be subsumed in discourses of gender. Being white and female 'is to occupy a social category that is inescapably racialized as well as gendered'²⁵³ and yet white women engaging with feminist discourses are often framed solely in relation to their gender, which allows problematic racist behaviours to flourish. Whiteness is constructed as invisible, and white women in feminism are also constructed as invisible – as the normative subject position on which the movement is founded and operates. Prominent black feminist Mikki Kendall (who initiated the extremely popular hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen on *Twitter*) writes that feminist solidarity can only happen when white women account for their complicity in oppressing less privileged groups. She says:

Much of the organizing being done in intersectional feminism is from the perspective of the marginalized, and while it certainly challenges the status quo that singularly addresses the success and safety of white middle-class women, it is not necessarily the kind of work that enables white mainstream feminist leaders to interrogate their own complicity. White women who are fighting oppression may struggle to understand that they too can be oppressive because of their privileged position.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Nakayama & Krizek quoted in Calhoun, 297.

²⁵³ Ware, xviii.

²⁵⁴ Mikki Kendall in Ware, xi.

Kendall argues that dismantling racist frameworks is the responsibility of white women, because they benefit from – and so are complicit in – ‘patriarchal ideals of femininity to the exclusion of women of colour’.²⁵⁵

Furthermore, race, gender and celebrity intersect because whiteness as the dominant subject position requires ‘a high degree of cultural and material visibility’, as well as ‘an extraordinary, idealized subject position’.²⁵⁶ Redmond identifies stardom as the place in which this is realised – where whiteness ‘is transmitted, negotiated and inflected’ and attached to the cultural figures most visible and most deified in contemporary society.²⁵⁷ Miley Cyrus, Lily Allen, and Iggy Azalea are noteworthy incarnations of white celebrity, as they flaunt signs of blackness but enjoy the high visibility and presumed innocence of whiteness.

Analysis in this chapter is guided by DiAngelo’s *What Does It Mean To Be White?* and this section will outline some of her positions as they relate to complicity with white supremacy. DiAngelo works from the assumption that we are all complicit in racism (and sexism, classism and heterosexism) because we have all been socialised within these structures (this is also the position I take throughout this thesis). She refers to internalised dominance and internalised oppression, which state that to some degree, and in differing ways according to various identity positions, people internalise the dominant messages related to their identity groups. DiAngelo refers to the ‘racist=bad/not racist=good’ binary, which describes how racism is framed and understood in mainstream

²⁵⁵ Kendall in Ware, xi.

²⁵⁶ Sean Redmond in *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, ed. by Sean Redmond and Su Holmes (London: SAGE, 2007), 266.

²⁵⁷ Redmond, 266.

terms. From the logic of this binary, racism is seen as ‘over there’, perpetuated by ‘bad’ individuals who use racial slurs and actively hate people of colour.

Because racism is societally figured as a negative and unacceptable position, it is highly offensive to be considered racist, which precipitates defensive and heated responses to such accusations. I suggest that understanding racism as something we are all complicit in would dissipate this binary somewhat.

According to DiAngelo, individualism is ‘one of the primary barriers to well-meaning (and other) white people understanding racism’.²⁵⁸ This is related to the ‘racist=bad/not racist=good’ binary because as long as subjects don’t see themselves as individually racist, they cannot conceive of structural or institutional racism. Because whiteness as a subject position and perspective is so normalised in Western society, and in exported global media, DiAngelo asserts that many white people don’t see race as important because they have not considered their own race as significant in the way they experience the world.²⁵⁹ Individualism denies the significance of race to life outcome (including in health, education, interaction with the criminal justice system, income and wealth)²⁶⁰ and the daily advantages of moving through the world as a white person. It also denies the social and historical context of race, including that of colonialism, slavery and genocide of indigenous peoples. Individualism allows us to see ourselves as separate from history, and to deny the hegemonic belief systems we have accrued from living in a society deeply segregated by race. This in turn prevents a macro analysis of the ‘institutional and structural dimensions of social life’ wherein white people can exempt themselves personally, without

²⁵⁸ DiAngelo, 168.

²⁵⁹ DiAngelo, 170.

²⁶⁰ DiAngelo, 170.

looking at the broader system they operate within. When we see ourselves as ‘unique and original’, as outside of or above socialisation, we deny the norms we have internalised from the media, our families, educational institutions, religious institutions and so on. This is even more pertinent when we recognise that many of these institutions also transmit messages of individualism; this solidifies our notions of ourselves as individuals, and plays upon our desires to be unique and original.²⁶¹

DiAngelo identifies particular dynamics of individualism that apply to Cyrus, Allen and Azalea. Colour-blindness is one such dynamic, wherein subjects claim that they ‘don’t see race’. Whilst this proclamation often arises from a well-meaning intent to view everyone equally, colour-blindness ignores cultural heritage, and the differing ways that people of colour move through and experience the world. Pitcher argues that race, and the negative associations with racism, are thought of as something ‘we can overcome, get around or see beyond’,²⁶² and thus race becomes taboo, and is pushed away from the individual self onto negative racist Others.

Colour-blindness enables the ideology of meritocracy – the idea that those in positions of power should be the most talented or able. Again, whilst well-meaning, discourses of meritocracy without concern for structural inequalities suggest that those in positions of power are there because they deserve to be, and subsequently those at the bottom of the social pecking order are there because of their own individual deficiencies. If we live in a society where those in positions of power are mainly white, and we maintain that we are all individuals who must take responsibility for our own life trajectories, it follows

²⁶¹ DiAngelo, 173.

²⁶² Pitcher, 2.

that we think white people are the hardest workers, the smartest, and the best, which clearly is problematic. If we then incorporate the reality that celebrity is a prominent site of whiteness, then ‘stars perpetuate the myth of individualism, on the one hand, by functioning as exemplary (‘extraordinary’) individuals whose success is down to the ‘something special’ they possess’.²⁶³ Meritocratic and colour-blind rebuttals of racism are racially encoded because they lend credence to the celebrity ‘success myth’; the dominance of white celebrities ‘articulates or gives ‘truth’ to the imagined representational differences or ‘qualities’ that exist between racial groups’.²⁶⁴

This critique of individualism relates closely to complicity, because it argues that denying complicity perpetuates racism. In other words, individualism precludes a consideration of how our actions and words affect others; individualism as an ideology makes collective action difficult, because subjects are encouraged to conceive of themselves as discrete units, and this impedes responsibility for how we may impact others. Only when we acknowledge our part within oppressive systems and ideologies – our complicity - can we significantly challenge those systems. This foregrounding of socialisation and hegemony doesn’t suggest that we as subjects have *no* agency, but rather *gives* us agency in admitting that we are limited somewhat by the systems we live within, but are also capable of transcending or subverting those systems when we recognise the complex ways in which we are affected by them. Through recognition of complicity we can try to be less complicit.

It’s important to extend this critique of individualism to theorists, feminists, and academics in general. To be exact, theorists should not consider themselves

²⁶³ Redmond, 264.

²⁶⁴ Redmond, 264.

outside of culture just because they have a more in-depth or theoretical understanding of it than the next person. Feminists are complicit in perpetuating racism, sexism, heterosexism and so on, despite the fact they often speak the language of intersectionality. Relatedly, in this analysis I don't mean to set up a binary between myself and the celebrities I discuss, or to suggest that I too, especially as a white person, am not complicit in what I am discussing.

'I'm not, like, making fun of a culture': Cultural Appropriation and Complicity

Cultural appropriation in this context refers to white people taking on the hairstyles, fashion, ways of speaking, and music and dance styles that are associated with communities of colour – in these cases, of African-Americans.²⁶⁵ bell hooks summarises the issues with cultural appropriation when she says, 'Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.'²⁶⁶ In 'trying on' or 'borrowing' styles from a cultural group that is not their own, white people are often perceived as edgy, relevant, or counter-cultural. Within the context of late capitalist consumer culture, white people playing with racial signifiers can benefit them financially or in terms of cultural capital, when the same signifiers on people of colour lead to prejudicial behaviour. Furthermore, the use of often caricatured aspects of non-white cultures by white people can actually essentialise said aspects, leading to an over-relation between black women and twerking for example. Utilising signifiers of a cultural group 'while ignoring all

²⁶⁵ Cultural appropriation can also refer to appropriation of land, archaeological artefacts, medicines, stories, and music. For more on this, see *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, ed. by Bruce H. Ziff and Pratima V. Rao (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

²⁶⁶ hooks, *Black Looks*, 21

of what it means to be non-white in a culture that privileges whiteness'²⁶⁷ means those already in dominant societal positions obscure the realities of living as a person of colour in the US.

People of colour that wear items associated with their cultural group, or embrace particular styles of dance and dress, are regularly dismissed, insulted, and marginalised on the basis of this. Dreadlocks on a white person are often coded as edgy or subcultural, whereas a black person with locs may struggle to find employment because the style is seen as unprofessional. When eighteen year old black actress Zendaya wore dreadlocks to the 2015 Oscars, E! presenter Giuliana Rancic said, 'I feel like she smells like patchouli oil. Or weed' whereas white reality star Kylie Jenner's locs were referred to as 'a cool new do' by *Cosmopolitan* UK.²⁶⁸ Other salient examples include white women wearing bindis, dressing as 'Pocahontas' or in Native American headdresses, and posing for selfies in hijabs. Samara Linton describes cultural appropriation as 'renaming and then celebrating cultural items that are ridiculed in the culture of their origin',²⁶⁹ which reiterates that the cultural appropriation debate is often largely to do with the relative power of different racial and ethnic groups. In other words, offense is taken not simply because of cultural borrowing or mixing, but because of the treatment of different groups based on their use of the same styles or racial markers, and the privilege of more powerful groups in

²⁶⁷ Maeve Eberhardt and Kara Freeman, "First Things First, I'm the Realest': Linguistic Appropriation, White Privilege, and the Hip-Hop Persona of Iggy Azalea', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 19.3 (2015), 321.

²⁶⁸ Allie Jones, 'Giuliana Rancic Says Zendaya's Hair Must Smell Like Oils and 'Weed'', *Gawker* <<http://defamer.gawker.com/giuliana-rancic-says-zendayas-hair-must-smell-like-oils-1687678763>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]; Zara Kenyon, 'Kylie Jenner Rocks Dreadlocks in a New Instagram Snap', *Cosmopolitan*, 2015 <<http://www.cosmopolitan.co.uk/beauty-hair/celebrity-hair-makeup/news/a33292/kylie-jenner-dreadlocks-hair-instagram/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²⁶⁹ Samara Linton, 'Cultural Appropriation, Locs And The Homogenisation Of Black Cultures', *Black Ballad*, 2016 <<http://www.blackballad.co.uk/cultural-appropriation-locs-and-the-homogenisation-of-black-cultures/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

being able to shed these styles when it suits them. Cooper reiterates the difference between appropriation and code-switching (members of minoritized groups adjusting their behaviour, speech patterns, mode of dress to assimilate with dominant culture), highlighting the links between certain styles and the group experience that has produced them:

Appropriation is taking something that doesn't belong to you and wasn't made for you, that is not endemic to your experience, that is not necessary for your survival and using it to sound cool and make money. Code-switching is a tool for navigating a world hostile to Blackness and all things non-white. It allows one to move at will through all kinds of communities with as minimal damage as possible.²⁷⁰

White celebrities regularly partake in cultural appropriation, often in short lived ways in order to bring a certain 'exotic' or 'ethnic' aesthetic to a performance or music video. In the video for 'This is How We Do', Katy Perry wears cornrows, a braided ponytail, gelled down baby-hairs, and eats a watermelon – all of which signify what are perceived to be aspects of African-American culture. After Perry's performance of 'Unconditionally' at the 2013 American Music Awards, she was heavily criticised for yellowface, orientalism, and exoticising Western stereotypes of submissive Asian women.²⁷¹ Taylor Swift has been criticised for juxtaposing her supposedly innocent and bemused whiteness with hypersexual black twerking bodies in the video for 'Shake it Off', and for staging a 'colonial fantasy' in her video for 'Wildest Dreams'.²⁷² Khloé Kardashian has posed in

²⁷⁰ Brittney Cooper, 'Iggy Azalea's Post-Racial Mess: America's Oldest Race Tale, Remixed', *Salon* <http://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/iggy_azaleas_post_racial_mess_americas_oldest_race_tale_remixed/> [Accessed 16 February 2016].

²⁷¹ '5 Reasons Katy Perry Is Pop Music's Worst Cultural Appropriator' <<https://mic.com/articles/95444/5-reasons-katy-perry-is-pop-music-s-worst-cultural-appropriator>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²⁷² Nico Lang, 'Taylor Swift's Colonial Fantasy: The Dubious Racial Politics of "Wildest Dreams"', *Salon*

both a niqab and a Native American headdress, and her half-sister Kendall Jenner's cornrows caused a Twitter storm when magazine Marie Claire tweeted that she took 'bold braids to a new epic level'.²⁷³ Notably, in these cases white women are celebrated for 'new trends' or 'cool new looks' that have actually been circulating for years within communities of colour. People magazine reported that black model Blac Chyna was wearing a 'cool new hairstyle, reminiscent of Bjork' when really she was wearing Bantu knots, a popular style for African Americans that originated in West Africa.²⁷⁴ Likewise, many black women are excluded from normative white beauty standards while white reality star Kylie Jenner has made millions selling lip kits because of the popularity of her surgically enhanced lips, which factor hugely in her racialized aesthetic.

The discourse of cultural appropriation does have its detractors, as some argue that it's racially essentialist to assume that members of racial groups share certain physiological features or wear specific hairstyles. Whilst the cultural appropriation argument may make more sense in relation to religious or traditional items such as headdresses, bindis, and hijabs, it perhaps reifies

<http://www.salon.com/2015/09/02/taylor_swifts_colonial_fantasy_the_dubious_racial_politics_of_wildest_dreams_partner/> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²⁷³ Marie Claire, 'Kendall Jenner Takes Bold Braids to a New Epic Level:

<http://marie.cl/60199BHv> pic.twitter.com/Cgp7X8CfNg', @marieclaire, 2014

<<https://twitter.com/marieclaire/status/451403750960562176?lang=en>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²⁷⁴ The website has since changed the article in response to criticism, see 'Blac Chyna Rocks a 'Cool New Crazy' Hairstyle — See Her Bantu Knots!', *PEOPLE.com*, 2016

<<http://people.com/style/blac-chyna-rocks-a-cool-new-crazy-hairstyle-see-her-bantu-knots/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017];

'We See You, Vol. 17: People Magazine Credits Bjork For Blac Chyna's Bantu Knots', *Bossip*, 2016 <<https://bossip.com/1301329/we-see-you-vol-17-people-magazine-credits-bjork-for-blac-chynas-bantu-knots/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017];

Fashion house Valentino was criticised for their use of mainly white models in Bantu knots for their pre fall collection, and *Vogue* in reporting it referred to the buns as 'inspired by Bjork', see 'Let's Discuss The Hair At Valentino — Again', *Fashionista*

<<http://fashionista.com/2016/01/bantu-knot-valentino-pre-fall-2016>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

socially-constructed categories of race to suggest that certain ethnic groups have shared physical characteristics. Renato Rosaldo comments that:

The view of an authentic culture as an autonomous internally coherent universe no longer seems tenable in a postcolonial world. Neither 'we' nor 'they' are as self-contained and homogeneous as we/they once appeared. All of us inhabit an interdependent late 20th century world, which is at once marked by borrowing and lending across porous cultural boundaries, and saturated with inequality, power, and domination.²⁷⁵

Crucially, cultural appropriation does not happen ahistorically, but rather the debate exists *because of* already existing unequal power dynamics caused by slavery, colonialism, genocide, and segregation. Cultural appropriation, then, maintains already existing inequalities, and so people partaking in cultural appropriation are complicit in upholding white supremacy, even if they deny that their actions or intentions are racist.

Cultural appropriation may be a common discourse of complicity because of its visibility in the shape of styles and objects. Defensive responses to critiques of cultural appropriation show an unwillingness to admit to benefiting from the effects of systematic racism, and an unwillingness to listen to those that have historically, and are contemporaneously marginalised and vilified. Cultural appropriation - regardless of whether one considers it a valid or helpful discourse - causes such consternation because it is frequently dismissed as trivial or harmless to use certain words, wear particular hairstyles, or dance like your favourite celebrities. By looking at *responses* from white celebrities, I wish to highlight how these seemingly trivial incidences are linked to broader racial politics. A white person may not conceive of themselves as racist or actively

²⁷⁵ Renato Rosaldo quoted in Françoise Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 15.

hostile to people of colour in their daily lives, but their frequent dismissal of something as seemingly inconsequential as wearing henna or going to belly dancing class shows an unwillingness to make minor lifestyle changes or entertain criticisms. The cultural appropriation debate can be viewed as a microcosm of white responses to larger accusations of complicity with racist hierarchies. In undertaking an analysis of Miley Cyrus, Lily Allen, and Iggy Azalea, I don't discount the role of management teams and record labels in the production of celebrity personas. However, in looking at the singers' responses to accusations of racism I am interested in the rhetorical strategies employed to dismiss such accusations. As stated in the introduction, this thesis is a dramatization of pop-culture as it relates to various complicities, and the analysis in latter sections of this chapter includes some aspects of visual analysis.

'It's our party we can say what we want': Miley, Lily, Iggy and Feminism

Pop-stars Miley Cyrus and Lily Allen, and rapper Iggy Azalea, have all faced accusations of racism because of performances and videos, comments in interviews or on social media, and from their justifications and denials of these incidences. I have selected these artists not just because they have been accused of being racist, but because of the nature of their responses, and because of their broad identification with (post)feminist discourses. Looking at complicity with racism in relation to engagement with feminist ideals and imagery illustrates the recent popularity of certain feminist causes which are often taken up without wider context, structural understanding of power and privilege, and active anti-racism. In other words, if these singers want to benefit commercially and increase their brand worth based on feminist logics, or are appropriating

feminist imagery, language and ideals because feminism has become more fashionable, then they should be held to account when it comes to their interactions with racialized imagery and styles. My aim is to draw attention to how white people's *responses* to accusations of racism make them complicit with something they ultimately profess to be against – racism.

Feminism is a personal and political trajectory – no-one arrives as a fully formed feminist – or, to use my language, everyone is complicit. Utilising the theoretical concept of complicity frames all people as complicit, as members of society that have been socialised within white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchy. By understanding ourselves as complicit, we can more easily acknowledge that we all say or do things that are harmful to others, and can consequently listen to criticisms, address them, and move on in the hope of being less harmful in the future. In their responses to accusations of racism, the celebrities discussed here are complicit in a white discourse of race that is uninformed, defensive, and harmful to others.

The 'feminism' Miley Cyrus, Lily Allen and Iggy Azalea embrace or are aligned with, centres on vague and general notions of woman power, empowerment, and sex-positivity; this could be better categorised as postfeminism, though the resurgence of feminism in mainstream culture means these women position themselves as feminist. As articulated in more detail in the following chapter, postfeminism is most often discussed in relation to young, white, slim bodies and McRobbie states that the 'taken into accountness' of feminism by contemporary mainstream culture means that it can be dismantled and discredited, leaving a landscape devoid of collective political feminism but rife

with imagery of so-called female empowerment.²⁷⁶ Postfeminist discourses assume that the aims of previous feminisms have been met and so both discounts feminism, and trades upon its language and imagery.²⁷⁷ Because feminism has become fashionable, Cyrus, Allen and Azalea are more overt in their ownership of what they call feminism, but continue to embody the norms and beliefs of postfeminism.

Rosalind Gill's work on the move from objectification to self-subjectification is also applicable in relation to complicity. In words that could easily be applied to Miley Cyrus, she says:

What is novel and striking about contemporary sexualised representations of women in popular culture is that they do not (as in the past) depict women as passive objects but as knowing, active and desiring sexual subjects.²⁷⁸

Gill's work resonates with Ariel Levy's popular feminist book, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, which argues that 'raunch culture', or the increasing 'sexualisation' of society – generally taken to mean the increase in sexual imagery and the normalisation of aspects of sex work, rather than an increase in sex – is largely undertaken and embraced by women themselves. Indeed Levy controversially states that, 'it no longer makes sense to blame men'.²⁷⁹ Other works have spoken to these theories, reasserting the need to consider young women as agentic, and to recognise the ways in

²⁷⁶ McRobbie, *Aftermath of Feminism*, 12.

²⁷⁷ McRobbie, *Aftermath of Feminism*, 12.

²⁷⁸ Rosalind Gill, 'From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualisation of Women's Bodies in the Media', *MR Online*, 2009 <<https://mronline.org/2009/05/23/from-sexual-objectification-to-sexual-subjectification-the-resexualisation-of-womens-bodies-in-the-media/>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

²⁷⁹ Levy, 35.

which they bargain with the patriarchy, or show resistance and creativity within current systems.

Former child star Miley Cyrus (aged 24 at the time of writing) has been the subject of many heated feminist arguments, largely stemming from her interactions with racialized imagery and styles (which I detail later), but also because of her overtly sexual self-presentation. After Cyrus's controversial 2013 Video Music Awards (VMAs) performance where she debuted a more sexual and 'urban' aesthetic, mainstream media coverage (in publications like *The New Statesman*, *XOJane*, and *The Huffington Post*) focused on criticisms of Cyrus's sexualised persona and defended her from slut-shaming.²⁸⁰ Cyrus has increasingly become aligned in the public imaginary with provocative clothing; she wears revealing, colourful outfits made with unusual and tactile fabrics. When she presented the 2015 VMA awards, Cyrus wore blonde dreadlocks in a ponytail, silver platforms, and a rubber top with inflatable lips across the chest. In an appearance on Jimmy Kimmel in 2015 she wore blonde dreadlocks in a ponytail, an embellished cape, a headpiece, and a bare chest with heart shaped nipple pasties. This aesthetic is a significant departure from the pre-VMAs Cyrus who was more often seen in plaid-shirts, jeans and cowboy boots; this

²⁸⁰ Tamara Shayne Kagel, 'In Defense Of Miley Cyrus' VMAs Performance', *Huffington Post*, 2013 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tamara-shayne-kagel/defense-of-miley-cyrus-vm-as_b_3824923.html> [Accessed 26 April 2017];

'Yes, Miley Cyrus' VMAs Performance Was Problematic, But the Body-Snarking and Slut-Shaming Is, Too', *xoJane: Women's Lifestyle & Community Site - xoJane*, 2013

<<http://www.xojane.com/entertainment/we-know-miley-cyrus-vm-as-performance-was-crazy-but-the-body-snarking-needs-to-stop>> [Accessed 26 April 2017];

Clinton Yates, 'Miley Cyrus and the Issues of Slut-Shaming and Racial Condescension', *The Washington Post*, 26 August 2013

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/miley-cyrus-and-the-issues-of-slut-shaming-and-racial-condescension/2013/08/26/f3aee436-0e68-11e3-bdf6-e4fc677d94a1_story.html?utm_term=.4421d285bba3> [Accessed 26 April 2017];

'Memo to Miley: Twerking Is Not a Feminist Statement'

<<http://www.newstatesman.com/music-and-performance/2013/08/memo-miley-twerking-not-feminist-statement>> [Accessed 26 April 2017].

uniform of rural white America, and of country music, represents a heritage for Cyrus – one linked to her past, and to her father – that she went on to reject.²⁸¹



²⁸¹ However, Cyrus does still perform the Dolly Parton song ‘Jolene’ at concerts (Parton is Cyrus’s godmother) with a strong Southern accent, and has ‘back-yard sessions’ that are a hybrid of her country and ‘urban’ aesthetic. See Miley Cyrus - Jolene (Live from London) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1drpTAGnIXg>> [Accessed 26 April 2017]; For her 2017 album *Younger Now*, Cyrus has returned to a pared back aesthetic; she remains alternative, but isn’t as outlandish as during the period in which this analysis occurred.

Because of her appearance, Cyrus could be aligned with contemporary feminist discourses on sexuality, sex-positivity and nudity, and indeed Cyrus is associated with the ‘Free the Nipple’ campaign because of her affinity for posting topless photos on social media or wearing pasties at media events.²⁸² Cyrus has stated that she doesn’t feel comfortable identifying with a gender,²⁸³ and that not all of her relationships have been heterosexual, and in 2015 she set up the Happy Hippie Foundation which supports LGBTQ, homeless and at-risk youth. Elle magazine refers to Cyrus as ‘a true activist for the Insta generation’, a ‘gender activist’, and ‘an influential, politically engaged young woman’.²⁸⁴ Because of this popular framing of Cyrus as a gender-fluid, boundary-breaking, gender activist, it is necessary to examine Cyrus’s responses to criticisms of racism. I don’t argue that all celebrities who identify with feminist issues must speak on behalf of *all* feminist issues, but rather that Cyrus’s particular foray into the imagery and language of progressive politics should be viewed with some suspicion.

As well as being styled by Elle as a ‘gender activist’, Cyrus sees *herself* as an inspiration when it comes to her image and her work with at-risk youth. Referring to herself as ‘one of the biggest feminists in the world’, she explained in 2013 that she tells women ‘to not be scared of anything’.²⁸⁵ Cyrus explicitly embraces feminism – saying in 2015, ‘I am a feminist’²⁸⁶ – but has been continually dismissive in dealing with criticisms that her performances and

²⁸² Free The Nipple is a gender-equality campaign that argues against the double standard of toplessness for men and women, where women’s nipples are seen as sexualised and obscene.

²⁸³ There is debate about whether this makes her genderqueer, non-binary or neither – Cyrus herself hasn’t identified as any of these.

²⁸⁴ Lena de Casparis, ‘Miley Cyrus On Sexuality, The New Frontier’, *ELLE UK*, 2015 <<http://www.elleuk.com/life-and-culture/news/a27520/miley-cyrus-interview-october-2015/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

²⁸⁵ Katie Amey, ‘Miley Talks Feminism’.

²⁸⁶ De Casparis, ‘Miley on Sexuality’.

cultural appropriation are culturally insensitive. Cyrus recognises her powerful platform and links her stardom with a wider obligation to her fans - 'I have so much influence as a pop star, it's important I use it'. She says:

I've just got to make sure that I'm the voice of my generation. I think that I'm allowing girls to be really free with their sexuality.²⁸⁷

Lily Allen, like Cyrus, is a second generation celebrity with a father who embodies normative masculinities, and her interactions with feminism are based on her image as cheeky pop outsider and satirist. Like all female celebrities, Allen has been scrutinised and insulted by the press for her body shape and weight, and *unlike* most other female celebrities she has been outspoken in her criticisms of the media. In her 2009 single 'The Fear', she satirises celebrity culture and the dominant messages of late capitalist society, saying:

I want to be rich and I want lots of money
I don't care about clever I don't care about funny
I want loads of clothes and fuckloads of diamonds
I heard people die while they are trying to find them²⁸⁸

In describing her motivations for writing the song, Allen refers to seeing a young girl wearing hotpants and a crop-top, and so ties her motivations with concerns about sexualisation. Allen does situate herself within the culture she takes aim at, saying, 'I'm very aware that I am a part of that culture'. She also hints at complicity in 'The Fear' when she sings:

And I am a weapon of massive consumption
And it's not my fault it's how I'm programmed to function.

²⁸⁷ Tavi Gevinson, 'Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman: The Two Sides of Miley Cyrus', *ELLE*, 2014 <<http://www.elle.com/pop-culture/cover-shoots/miley-cyrus-may-cover-story>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

²⁸⁸ 'The Fear', *It's Not Me, It's You* (Regal Recordings, 2009).

Allen has flirted with feminism in her sexually explicit lyrics that criticise heterosexual male sexual performance. In 'It's Not Fair' (2009), she complains about an unsatisfying sexual relationship with an otherwise perfect man, and in 'Fuck You' (2008) she directs her ire at George W. Bush who is described as 'small minded', 'racist', and 'hateful'. Allen's lyrics are unusually candid for mainstream pop music, and it's not surprising that the singer's offering after a prolonged hiatus was 'Hard Out Here' (2013) which is more explicitly feminist than her previous work, and includes a sly reference to the controversial Robin Thicke song 'Blurred Lines'.²⁸⁹ Whilst Allen said in 2014 that feminism 'shouldn't even be a thing anymore' and that 'women are the enemy...it's more of a competitive thing,'²⁹⁰ she later stated 'of course I'm a feminist', and in 2016 acknowledged both that she 'definitely wanted to make a feminist statement' in Hard Out Here and that she was guilty of cultural appropriation in the video.²⁹¹ Like Miley Cyrus (who Allen supported on tour and referred to as a 'hero'), Allen views her celebrity as an obligation to talk about things she views as important:

What's the point if you don't speak your mind? [...] You can't on the one hand put somebody like me up on a pedestal and say, 'You're a role model for my children' and then expect me not to talk about things like that.²⁹²

²⁸⁹ 'Blurred Lines' was banned by several Students Unions across the country and instigated discussions on consent. Lyrics such as 'I know you want it' have been interpreted as condoning rape culture, and the video includes fully dressed male singers and topless female dancers. Thicke's video has balloons that spell out 'Robin Thicke has a big dick' and Allen's video has the same style balloons spelling out 'Lily Allen has a baggy pussy'. 'Blurred Lines' was the song performed by Thicke and Cyrus at the 2013 VMAs.

²⁹⁰ David Renshaw, 'Lily Allen: 'Feminism Shouldn't Even Be a Thing Anymore'', *NME*, 2014 <<http://www.nme.com/news/music/lily-allen-72-1227701>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

²⁹¹ David Renshaw, 'Lily Allen Concedes She Was "Guilty Of Appropriating" With "Hard Out Here" Video', *The Fader*, 3 November 2016 <<http://www.thefader.com/2016/11/03/lily-allen-appropriation-honey-g>> [Accessed 11 December 2017].

²⁹² David Renshaw, 'Lily Allen: 'Of Course I'm a Feminist'', *NME*, 2014 <<http://www.nme.com/news/music/lily-allen-69-1246875>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

Finally, Iggy Azalea is often depicted in feminist terms because she is a woman in a male dominated genre, and because she has spoken out about sexual assault and beauty standards. When rapper Eminem included a lyric about raping Azalea in his song ‘Vegas’ she tweeted:

im [sic] bored of the old men threatening young women as entertainment trend and much more interested in the young women getting \$ trend²⁹³

In a radio interview Azalea talked about being sexually assaulted by fans when she crowd-surfs, and she tweeted in 2014 that female musicians have ‘bigger balls’ because of the harassment and criticism they receive.²⁹⁴ Following tabloid pictures of the rapper wearing no makeup, Azalea tweeted that the media encourages women to ‘ridicule’ one another ‘over an unattainable standard of beauty’.²⁹⁵ As with Cyrus and Allen, when Azalea is discussed in feminist terms, there is little to no mention of the problematic racial dynamic of her artistry, which perpetuates the idea that feminism is mainly concerned with body image and sexuality, and not with race and cultural appropriation.

‘It’s our party we can do what we want’: Miley, Lily, Iggy and Racism

Having looked at the three artists in relation to their associations with feminist discourses, I now detail why white artists Miley Cyrus, Lily Allen, and Iggy Azalea, were accused of cultural appropriation. To reiterate, my argument is firstly that cultural appropriation is a form of complicity, and secondly, that

²⁹³ IGGY AZALEA, ‘Im Bored of the Old Men Threatening Young Women as Entertainment Trend and Much More Interested in the Young Women Getting \$ Trend. Zzzz’, @iggyazalea, 2014 <<https://twitter.com/iggyazalea/status/535496982618320897?lang=en>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

²⁹⁴ IGGY AZALEA, ‘Women in Music Have the Bigger Balls Anyhow We Endure Much More Harassment and Critic. Good Morninnggggg!!!! Off to Camera Block for AMAs!’, @iggyazalea, 2014 <<https://twitter.com/iggyazalea/status/535499236779884544>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

²⁹⁵ IGGY AZALEA, ‘It’s Basically Promoting Women to Ridicule Eachother over an Unattainable Standard If Beauty That Media Creates for Us...’, @iggyazalea, 2014 <<https://twitter.com/iggyazalea/status/463713292192870400>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

using complicity as a way of seeing draws attention to human interrelatedness in ways that could facilitate more positive dialogues on race and racism.

Former Disney star and pop-country singer Miley Cyrus came under widespread media scrutiny when she unveiled her new sonic and visual aesthetic in the video for ‘We Can’t Stop’, and in an infamous performance with Robin Thicke at the 2013 VMAs.²⁹⁶ Cyrus requested a ‘black sound’ for her new album, and ‘We Can’t Stop’ was originally intended for Barbadian singer Rihanna.²⁹⁷ The LA Bakers twerk team – a trio of black female dancers who specialise in twerking – began appearing in performances with Cyrus, as well as 6ft 7 black burlesque dancer Amazon Ashley, and several little people dancers (one of whom wrote a blog post about how she found the experience dehumanising).²⁹⁸ Cyrus was heavily criticised by black feminists for co-opting twerking and for using black women as props – especially because her dancers wore teddy bear costumes and Cyrus slapped their backsides in the VMAs performance.

In the video for ‘We Can’t Stop’, Cyrus wears white leggings and a white crop-top, and is seen sticking her tongue out and bending over to ‘twerk’ with three black women. Cyrus has short cropped blonde hair (in stark contrast to her Disney-era long brunette locks), a skinny frame, and frequently snarls and exposes her teeth. In other shots she wears long gold nails, several gold teeth, and grabs the backsides of her black dancers. In this video, Cyrus appropriates a

²⁹⁶ Miley Cyrus-We Can't Stop(VMA 2013 MTV)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FEBwwhc4IM>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

²⁹⁷ ‘Miley Cyrus Asked For A ‘Black’ Sound For Single, Says Songwriters Rock City’, *Vibe*, 2013 <<http://www.vibe.com/2013/06/miley-cyrus-asked-black-sound-single-says-songwriters-rock-city/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

²⁹⁸ ‘On Being a Little Person’, *A Bunch of Dumb Show*, 2013

<<https://holliseum.wordpress.com/2013/10/09/on-being-a-little-person/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

generalised “ratchet”²⁹⁹ aesthetic (something she admits to in an interview discussed later in the chapter) in order to position herself as ‘cool’ and edgy. Despite positioning herself in these terms, her white skin, outfit, and blonde hair delineates her as the pop-star, as opposed to her dancers, who contribute to the cultivated aesthetic of the video. Importantly, Cyrus can shed her “ratchet” image, whereas women of colour who face racism based on this aesthetic and the stereotypes associated with it, cannot.



²⁹⁹ “Ratchet” is more or less synonymous with “hood” or “ghetto”, and can be used as a racist insult, or to describe an urban African-American aesthetic.





According to Gaunt, ‘popular music and dance have served as a primary means of cultural definition and explanation within black culture’³⁰⁰. She traces twerking to ‘a network of contemporary dances [...] throughout the African continent and its diaspora’³⁰¹ and to the New Orleans bounce scene.³⁰² Twerking is often read as a highly sexual style of dance but Gaunt positions it as self-subjectification – as a presentation of sexuality that doesn’t require the male gaze.³⁰³

This is particularly salient for black artists such as Nicki Minaj and Rihanna, for whom twerking can be read as a re-centring of black female sexuality by a group that have historically been objectified and dehumanised. For example, Minaj’s 2014 song ‘Anaconda’ reworks Sir Mix-A-Lot’s famed ‘Baby Got Back’, and gives voice to the woman with the big butt; the video for ‘Anaconda’ features a host of twerking black women, and revels in its explicitness (Minaj cackles near the end of the song).³⁰⁴ Anaconda samples the well-known opening of Baby got Back, where two white women exclaim: ‘Oh my God, Look at her butt!’, but can be read as a celebration of a body part that is often fetishized on black women. In one scene, Minaj wears a French maid outfit (a highly sexualised costume), and stands in a kitchen (a feminine, domestic space) simulating oral sex on a banana (a common phallic symbol). This scene could be read as highly conformist, in the sense that Minaj sets herself up both as a sex object and a wifely carer, though the rapper takes a knife to the banana, slices it with vigour, snarls into the camera and tosses it away. ‘Anaconda’ can be presented then as a playful

³⁰⁰ Gaunt, 246.

³⁰¹ Gaunt, 245.

³⁰² Gaunt, 247.

³⁰³ Gaunt, 249;

³⁰⁴ Nicki Minaj – Anaconda <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDZX4ooRsWs>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

recentre-ing of a marginalised and fetishized group, that draws upon fetishistic tropes only to upend them. As well as the kitchen scene, the video opens on a jungle scene, incorporates aerobics moves and gym-wear (which calls to mind Eric Prydz's video for 'Call On Me'), and ends with a strip scene.

Similarly, Rihanna twerks in the video for 'Pour It Up' (2012), and revels in her financial power, singing 'I still got my money'. The video, co-directed by the Barbadian singer, shows her draped in furs, and features black women pole-dancing, and the singer reclining on a throne.³⁰⁵ As with 'Anaconda', Rihanna's video celebrates and centres black women as sexual, and as skilled dancers.

Additionally, both Minaj and Rihanna place themselves alongside the women in their videos, and by being black women themselves, are implicated in the highly sexualised video landscapes, rather than merely visiting or staging them.

Furthermore, the only man who appears in either of these videos is Canadian rapper Drake, who receives a lap-dance from Minaj after she has sliced up the banana; he is dominated by Minaj in this sequence, and when he goes to touch her, she slaps his hand and walks away (another subversion of the role of black women in music videos).

As stated, Cyrus's use of twerking in her video for 'We Can't Stop' features three black women dancing around the singer who wears white. Gaunt writes that 'The three actors-for-hire seem to symbolize a generalized and authentic black female identity of girlfriend'.³⁰⁶ Cyrus is a tourist in her vision of blackness, and uses twerking 'as an ethnic marker to transform her brand identity'.³⁰⁷ As a white woman, Cyrus is able to shed this aesthetic and its associations, and thus

³⁰⁵ Rihanna - Pour It Up (Explicit) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehcVomMexkY>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁰⁶ Gaunt, 256.

³⁰⁷ Gaunt, 245.

her twerking can be positioned as a youthful experiment, rather than an indicator of her own sexuality. As black women, Minaj and Rihanna cannot, and do not, shed their blackness, and so are more susceptible to being positioned as inherently hypersexual and threatening. Thus, Cyrus enjoys the associated coolness of twerking, without experiencing the racial stereotypes attributed to black women (indeed, Cyrus utilises these very stereotypes against Minaj, which will be discussed later).



Cyrus has appropriated styles that have traditionally been worn within the African-American community, and persisted in brushing off accusations of racism. She wore dreadlocks when she presented the VMA awards in 2015, used the racially loaded word ‘mammy’, and became embroiled in an onstage altercation with Nicki Minaj regarding the rapper’s comments on racism in the music industry. In her transition from Disney star and country pop singer to outlandish hippy stoner, Cyrus has been accused of using ‘ratchet’ culture to make herself seem provocative, without considering the race and class implications of doing so.

Lily Allen was accused of racism and embodying white feminism when she released the video for her satirical song ‘Hard Out Here’ (2013).³⁰⁸ ‘Hard Out here’ (the title itself a nod to the Three 6 Mafia song ‘Hard Out Here for a Pimp’) lyrically and visually includes many nods to feminism, including the opening scenes which show Allen in an operating theatre having liposuction while talking to her white male manager. The lyrics include:

I suppose I should tell you
 What this bitch is thinking
 You'll find me in the studio
 And not in the kitchen
 I won't be bragging 'bout my cars
 Or talking 'bout my chains
 Don't need to shake my ass for you
 Cause I've got a brain

The song was supposedly feminist satire, but the video lampoons hip-hop tropes (cars, chains and shaking asses) by including scantily-clad dancers that are mainly women of colour who twerk and pour champagne over one another. The

³⁰⁸ Lily Allen - Hard Out Here (Official Video)
 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoCazRHBoso>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

above lyrics contrast intelligence with dancing sexually for money, and juxtapose Allen as a white woman with her sexualised dancers. The racialized binary is heightened in the video as Allen wears long sleeves and full length leggings whilst her dancers wear a combination of crop-tops, leotards, hotpants, and briefs. The singer acts bemused as she half-heartedly attempts to twerk, and is eventually joined by a middle-aged white man in a suit and tie (a stark contrast to the dancers' outfits) who attempts to join in; the two are positioned as tourists in a hyper-sexualised 'urban' video landscape. In various scenes, Allen wears hip-hop apparel such as chains and furs, but is always visually separate from her dancers, either because of her more conservative outfit, or because she is white. In attempting to lampoon a sexist music industry, 'Hard Out Here' perpetuates a racist hierarchy, where Allen is positioned as outside of ideology – as enlightened - but her dancers are fully immersed in the language of the 'music video hoe'.





Ellie Mae O'Hagan in *The Guardian* wrote that Allen shouldn't have to shoulder 'perfect feminist politics' and represent everything to all women.³⁰⁹ This ignores the particular class and race privilege Allen has, and the ways in which she is complicit in perpetuating racism through what she decides to talk about and how she illustrates that. It's convenient to say that women shouldn't have to represent *all* women when this is an excuse for privileged white women to keep ignoring the ways they benefit from their complicity in unequal power structures. As stated previously, these celebrities' complicity is directly related to the fact that they have flirted with feminism in some way. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it shouldn't be the responsibility of every high profile businesswoman to embody perfect feminist politics (and again, these don't exist), but Sheryl Sandberg explicitly utilises feminism to sell her corporate self-help books. Allen does the same in order to bolster her edgy outsider image. Though it's highly promising that celebrities wish to align themselves with feminisms – because this certainly wasn't always the case – it is nevertheless necessary to highlight white women's appropriation of black culture in service of their brand personality.

White Australian rapper Iggy Azalea also has a tempestuous relationship with race, partly because of her position as a white artist in a predominantly black genre, and because of comments she has made regarding this. Azalea has been accused of 'linguistic minstrelsy' or 'figurative blackface',³¹⁰ specifically because of her 'blaccent'. Despite hailing from a rural Australian town, Azalea raps with an accent from the southern USA, and also consistently uses African American

³⁰⁹ 'Lily Allen Does Not Represent All Feminism – and nor Should She', *The Guardian*, 13 November 2013, section Opinion
<<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/13/lily-allen-video-represent-feminism-feminist-woman>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³¹⁰ Eberhardt and Freeman, 304.

English (AAE) in her songs.³¹¹ Azalea’s performance of blackness is heightened by the fact that she doesn’t use AAE in spoken interviews,³¹² and that her AAE style is ‘recognized as specifically southern’ and therefore ‘highly practiced’.³¹³ Eberhardt and Freeman argue that unlike other white rappers, Azalea doesn’t use linguistic features that mark her as white and so she uses blackness to highlight her own whiteness.³¹⁴ For example, in her video for ‘Fancy’, the rapper is dressed as protagonist Cher from nineties comedy *Clueless* (the epitome of suburban white femininity), wearing a mustard plaid skirt suit and white knee socks.³¹⁵ Azalea ‘reifies the ideologies of essentialized blackness’ by utilising the tropes that Lily Allen lampoons in ‘Hard Out Here’, including hypersexuality, displays of wealth, and drug use.³¹⁶ In the video for ‘Work’ she poses in a strip-club, and in the video for ‘Pu\$\$y’ she appears against a backdrop of black women.



³¹¹ Eberhardt and Freeman, 310.

³¹² Eberhardt and Freeman, 315.

³¹³ Eberhardt and Freeman, 310.

³¹⁴ Eberhardt and Freeman, 318.

³¹⁵ *Clueless* also provides in black best-friend Dion, a source for the ‘generalized and authentic black female identity of girlfriend’ described by Gaunt, 256. This black girlfriend figure can be seen in Cyrus’s ‘We Can’t Stop’ video, and is implied by the posse of dancers in Allen’s ‘Hard out Here’ video.

³¹⁶ Eberhardt and Freeman, 318.



Many white singers undertake cultural and musical mixing, though in the case of Iggy Azalea and those like her, the original influencers, and the experiences from which they arose are often erased; Azalea enacts a caricature of black culture which is ultimately sold to white consumers via predominantly white record labels. The gimmick of a white female rapper means Azalea is more likely to be recognised than black female rappers; her postfeminist racial hybridity is highly commercial.

There is space in rap for differing identities – indeed rappers Kanye West, and Chance the Rapper speak from their own positions of black middle-class privilege. Amy Zimmerman points out that Azalea is not embodying a different authenticity, or a new and unarticulated subjectivity in rap, but is ‘passing’. Her ‘passing’ and code-switching isn’t done for survival, as in the case of people from marginalised communities, but in order to capitalise from a racial identity she does not inhabit.³¹⁷

As well as criticisms based on the complicated aspects of Azalea’s positionality within rap, she has been at the centre of racism debates because of comments she tweeted before she was famous. In the tweets, Azalea made racist and stereotypical comments about black men, Asian women, lesbians, and Latinas. Additionally, in a lyric in her 2011 song D.R.U.G.S. the rapper referred to herself as a ‘runaway slave master’, which she later claimed was a reference to rapper Kendrick Lamar’s song ‘Look Out for Detox’ where he calls himself a ‘runaway slave’. As a white woman who is frequently criticised by black artists for her use of a heavy Southern USA black accent, referring to her whiteness in terms of

³¹⁷ Amy Zimmerman, ‘The Cultural Crimes of Iggy Azalea’, *The Daily Beast*, 2014 <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/12/29/the-cultural-crimes-of-iggy-azalea.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

being a 'slave master' was seen as insensitive to the African-American community, who deal with the contemporary repercussions of slavery.

Having introduced the three celebrities' links with feminism and with race and racial imagery or styles, I will now consider their *responses* to accusations of racism. This serves as an illustration of how these white female pop stars are complicit in white supremacy, both financially and discursively, in a way that filters down to 'everyday' attitudes to race and racism. Exploring the rhetorical strategies at play in defending racism allows for some reflection on how this can be avoided. Cyrus, Allen and Azalea are complicit in racist narratives but don't consider themselves to be, and so I suggest that understanding their behaviour through the prism of complicity opens up opportunities for white racial literacy.

The following sections refer to several categories laid out by DiAngelo in her chapters 'Common Patterns of Well-intentioned White People', and 'Popular White Narratives that Deny Racism', as well as Jennifer Trainor's categories of 'White Talk'. Some of the following categories include the collective pronouns 'we' and 'our' because DiAngelo is a white educator addressing white readers; I have kept her original wording but do not presume my readers are white. For ease of reading I have not underlined, italicised or emboldened the categories when I mention them, but the following analyses are structured around and guided by them.

The categories mentioned throughout the following sections are:

Feeling indignant/unfairly accused; Rushing to Prove Ourselves;
Assuming People of Color Have the Same Experience We Do;

Explaining Away/Justifying/Minimizing/Comforting; Focusing on Delivery; Dismissing What We Don't Understand³¹⁸

'I know people of color, so I am not racist'; 'People of colour complain too much and play the race card'; 'I am all for equality but I don't want anyone to have *special* rights. Now there is reverse racism'; 'Race is nothing to do with it'; 'It's racist to talk about race'; 'How dare you accuse me of racism! I am a good person!'³¹⁹

Portrayals of Whites as victims; Negative stereotyping of people of color; Assertions of cultural or historical stasis; Individualism; Assertions of White Innocence; Colorblindness.³²⁰

'I don't give a shit. I'm not Disney': Miley Cyrus's Response to Accusations of Racism

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, whiteness is normalised and thus made invisible, despite Western society being deeply affected by race. Because white people are so used to their own perspective - because it is reflected back at them from all manner of cultural institutions – it is assumed that a white perspective is universal, and that any invocation of race is 'playing the race card' or being overly sensitive. White celebrities then (and non-celebrities), can easily assume that people of colour have the same experiences as they do. For Miley Cyrus, wearing dreadlocks or embracing twerking may seem completely innocuous, and this partly explains her ignorance when faced with accusations of cultural appropriation. Rather than acknowledge that she views the world from a white privileged perspective, Cyrus goes to great lengths to portray her critics as out of touch with contemporary youth culture. Because she views the world as multicultural and doesn't personally experience or witness racism, Cyrus is able to paint her detractors as old-fashioned, rather than as people with

³¹⁸ DiAngelo, 199.

³¹⁹ DiAngelo, 221.

³²⁰ Jennifer Trainor, 'White Talk' Figure 33, in DiAngelo, 241-2.

a perspective on issues that affect them. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* she says:

Look at any 20-year-old white girl right now – that's what they're listening to at the club. It's 2013. The gays are getting married, we're all collaborating [...] Times are changing. I think there's a generation or two left, and then it's gonna be a whole new world.³²¹

Twenty year old American writer Tavi Gevinson attempted to undermine this reasoning when she interviewed Cyrus for *Elle Magazine*. She suggested that Cyrus had been criticised because of lived experience rather than as a result of age difference. Cyrus answered:

We actually stepped away from 'ratchetness' for that reason. For us, it was meant to describe an aesthetic, like ratchet nails or ratchet whatever. I'm not, like, making fun of a culture. You just do it 'cause that's just a weird title, it's like selfie. That was just a word that was popular last year...I just think old people—I feel bad that I call them old, 'cause they're probably in their thirties or forties—but they just don't understand it.³²²

Cyrus frequently attempts to explain away, justify or minimise accusations of racism, which assumes that racism has not occurred, or that it can be taken away if the accused could just explain how people *should* have responded.

Cyrus depicts a colour-blind, queer world where young people come together to borrow and swap fashion, genres and styles; in her framing of this world, 'old people' just don't understand. The singer whitewashes the USA by claiming that what is described as 'black culture' is 'just culture in general', and waves away criticisms by referring to her critics as 'pissed-off moms on the Internet'.³²³

³²¹ 'Miley Cyrus: Confessions of Pop's Wildest Child', *Rolling Stone* <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/miley-cyrus-confessions-of-pops-wildest-child-20130924>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³²² Gevinson.

³²³ Gevinson.

Cyrus's framing of this issue as generational completely minimises her actions whilst also attempting to justify them.

In claiming that black culture is 'general' culture, Cyrus utilises the language of colour-blindness. Colour-blindness absolves subjects of racism because it insists that the way they treat others, or view the world, is unrelated to race. In regard to her dancers, Cyrus says, 'I would never think about the color of my dancers, like, 'Ooh, that might be controversial''.³²⁴ Cyrus frames her use of black dancers as completely incidental, when it clearly contributes to her re-branded 'urban' aesthetic. It is not a coincidence that Cyrus has black dancers twerking in her videos or that she wears grills and dreadlocks; she is cultivating a particular aesthetic – one that she identifies as 'cool', and therefore one that is highly commodified and profitable. Elsewhere, Cyrus asserts that she hired her dancers because they weren't 'white skinny girls',³²⁵ so she sets herself up as championing more marginalised body types (which she refers to as 'healthy-looking girls'). In doing this she recognises that she hired her dancers at least somewhat because of their race (which she relates directly to their bodies), whereas on other occasions she asserts that their race is insignificant.

Cyrus refers to her past as a Disney child star, saying that all races had to be represented. When asked about racism in her performances she said:

I don't give a shit. I'm not Disney, where they have, like, an Asian girl, a black girl, and a white girl, to be politically correct, and, like, everyone has bright-colored T-shirts.³²⁶

³²⁴ David Renshaw, 'Miley Cyrus on VMA performance: 'I wasn't trying to be sexy'', *NME*, 25 September 2013 <<http://www.nme.com/news/music/miley-cyrus-116-1248950>> [Accessed 11 December 2017].

³²⁵ Gevinson.

³²⁶ Ronan Farrow, 'My Oh Miley!', *W Magazine* <<http://www.wmagazine.com/story/miley-cyrus-ronan-farrow>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

In referring to bright coloured T-shirts, she reiterates the binary of idealistic, clean-cut and managed productions, and the more provocative ‘real-life’ image she transitioned to. She uses black women and aspects of black culture to give her work a ‘gritty’ or ‘authentic’ feeling, and also embraces surreal graphics and allusions to drug culture as a way of distancing herself from her more wholesome past. Cyrus employs a familiar conservative attitude by invoking the idea that racial equality (or ‘political correctness’) isn’t realistic in the ‘real world’. This reasoning suggests that it would be pointless to challenge existing racial disparities and so presents racial inequality as inevitable, while portraying anti-racist efforts as idealistic or utopian.

In 2015, Trinidadian-born American rapper Nicki Minaj wrote a series of tweets criticising the music industry for favouring the style, genre and aesthetic of white women over that of women of colour. She argued that her *Anaconda* video - despite breaking the VEVO record for most views in 24hours - wasn’t nominated for the VMAs Video of the Year because it didn’t celebrate the bodies of slim white women.³²⁷ Instead, Minaj was relegated to the categories of Best Female Video and Best Hip Hop Video, reiterating her position as gendered, racialized Other. When asked about this in an interview with the *New York Times*, Cyrus focused on the way Minaj expressed herself, rather than on the issues Minaj raised. Cyrus made comments on Minaj’s way of expressing herself, which is referred to as ‘tone-policing’ or focusing on delivery.³²⁸ Tone-policing refers to situations in which white people focus on the method of

³²⁷ For a summary, see ‘Nicki Minaj Has Something Serious to Say about Race. We Should Listen to Her’, *The Guardian*, 31 August 2015, section Opinion <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/31/nicki-minaj-confront-racism-catfight>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³²⁸ DiAngelo, 213.

For an explanation of tone-policing as it relates to gender, see Bailey Poland, *Haters: Harassment, Abuse, and Violence Online* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 2016) 46-47.

delivery rather than the content of the message and what they themselves have said or done. This limits people of colour from expressing valid anger as they can only be heard if they express themselves in a way seen as respectable by white people.³²⁹ Cyrus said:

People forget that the choices that they make and how they treat people in life affect you in a really big way. If you do things with an open heart and you come at things with love, you would be heard and I would respect your statement. But I don't respect your statement because of the anger that came with it.

What I read sounded very Nicki Minaj, which, if you know Nicki Minaj is not too kind. It's not very polite. I think there's a way you speak to people with openness and love.³³⁰

This was met by Minaj with the very type of expression Cyrus was criticising. On stage at the 2015 VMAs, Minaj referred to Cyrus as 'that bitch who had a lot to say about me in the press', and antagonistically asked: 'Miley, What's good?' Cyrus's focus on Minaj's delivery and expression overshadowed the very relevant issues Minaj raised about her experience as a black artist. In this case, acting in a 'not very polite' manner is seen to be worse than being racist. Furthermore, in her representation of Minaj as an 'angry black woman', Cyrus drew upon already circulating negative stereotypes of black women.³³¹ By characterising Minaj as 'not too kind', Cyrus attributes tension and misunderstanding to Minaj's manner, rather than to her own position. Minaj has spoken about how she is presented as a 'bitch' rather than a 'boss' (in

³²⁹ Referred to as respectability politics, this is when members of a marginalised group are expected to adhere to the norms and expectations of dominant culture – in this case, white culture. See E. Francis White, *Dark Continent Of Our Bodies: Black Feminism & Politics Of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 2001).

³³⁰ Joe Coscarelli, 'Miley Cyrus on Nicki Minaj and Hosting a 'Raw' MTV Video Music Awards', *The New York Times*, 27 August 2015
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/28/arts/music/miley-cyrus-2015-mtv-vm-as.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³³¹ The "angry black woman" is a recurring racist and sexist stereotype for black women, outlined in detail by Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought*.

comparison to male rappers), and in making the issue of representation in the music industry about Minaj's tone, Cyrus perpetuates this stereotype.³³²

'I'm not going to apologise because I think that would imply that I'm guilty of something': Lily Allen's Response to Accusations of Racism

In a series of tweets responding to criticisms of her 'Hard Out Here' video, Lily Allen attempts to explain away any interpretation of the video that she disagrees with. She says:

I do strive to provoke thought and conversation. The video is meant to be a lighthearted satirical video that deals with objectification of women within modern pop culture.³³³

By focusing on intent rather than impact ('I strive to provoke', 'meant to be'), Allen tells the audience what they are *supposed* to see, and ignores what a segment of the audience actually sees. The singer doesn't recognise that criticisms of her video are grounded in structural understandings of racism, and so she is dismissive based on her *intent* to be satirical. Critics are positioned as complainers, rather than as people with different experiences and perspectives. The singer imagines that people have made a mistake in interpreting her work, but does not consider it may be *her* who lacks understanding on this issue.³³⁴

By using the tropes of hip-hop videos (expensive cars, scantily clad dancers, sexual dancing, gold oversized jewellery), rather than say country, pop, or rock, Allen's video placed all the excesses and sexual imagery of the contemporary music landscape at a genre that's overwhelmingly black, and one that was

³³² Nicki Minaj - Bossing Up <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzGZamtlRPO>> [Accessed 11 27 April 2017].

³³³ Tweets available at 'TwitLonger — When You Talk Too Much for Twitter' <http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n_1rrk3og> [Accessed 5 May 2016].

³³⁴ Follows from DiAngelo, 216.

originally (and still is in some ways) a resistance movement against systemic marginalisation and oppression.³³⁵

In her series of tweets Allen says that everyone deserves a chance to do what they want regardless of colour:

If anyone thinks that after asking the girls to audition, I was going to send any of them away because of the colour of their skin, they're wrong.

Whilst this is an admirable sentiment (what progressive person would disagree that everyone deserves equal opportunity regardless of colour?), it conveniently erases racial power disparities. Allen, like Cyrus, interprets criticisms as being to do with representation – with the races of each individual dancer – and not with the overall tropes of the video, and lyrics that juxtapose brains and sexuality. Allen inverts and operationalises the language of anti-racism here as she implicitly accuses her detractors of being racist because they mentioned race.

In her rather indignant response to criticisms of ‘Hard Out Here’, Allen trades on the narrative of white innocence. Wekker notes that innocence speaks of ‘soft, harmless, childlike qualities’ but is also ‘connected to privilege, entitlement, and violence that are deeply disavowed’.³³⁶ In claiming innocence, Allen is able to dissociate herself from racist narratives, particularly in relation to the hypersexualisation of black female bodies by non-white people. According to Wekker, ‘There is denial and disavowal of the continuities between colonial sexuality and contemporary sexual modalities.’ Like Cyrus, Allen locates the

³³⁵ It is relevant that the excesses depicted in hip-hop videos can be read as linking ‘black pleasure with materialism’ in order to depict the ‘black good life’. See, *That’s the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. by Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 168.

³³⁶ Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) 18.

negative response to her video in the individual races of her dancers and makes the discussion about colour-blindness, which argues that ‘race has nothing to do with it.’ In saying she wouldn’t send dancers away because of their skin colour, Allen positions herself as the non-racist (and therefore the ‘good’ person in the ‘racist=bad/not racist=good’ binary) who refuses to see colour and picks the best dancers irrespective of their race (thus tapping into meritocratic discourses). Allen’s video is an explicit attempt at satirising hip-hop videos, which is evidence that the race of the dancers isn’t incidental.

Because Allen, as a white woman, has not had to think along racial lines, or in racial terms, she insists that there is no racial content or intent in her art. She continues with her indignant assertions of white innocence and paints herself as the victim when she says:

I would not only be surprised but deeply saddened if I thought anyone came away from that video feeling taken advantage of, or [sic] compromised in any way.

Allen conflates ‘feeling taken advantage of’ with utilising caricatured representations of hip-hop culture. In this tweet, she makes the issue about her feelings by saying she would be ‘deeply saddened’ if her dancers felt exploited – a criticism that was never made. This functions as a silencing mechanism that accuses potential critics of being harmful if they voice their opinions. She also constructs the criticisms as outlandish by saying she’d be ‘surprised’ if anyone had been offended through the making of the video. Marilyn Frye refers to being white in society as ‘whiteness’, and argues that ‘whiteness entails an unwillingness to be challenged that is protected by perceived white moral

goodness.’³³⁷ This whiteness is evident in all three of the celebrity case-studies in this chapter.

‘I’m pro-people. Period!’: Iggy Azalea’s Response to Accusations of Racism

Cyrus, Allen and Azalea all rushed to prove themselves, which is related to the racist=bad/not racist=good binary wherein those accused of racism want to quickly explain how they aren’t racist, rather than listen to or consider the possibility that they inadvertently have been. Again, I suggest that understanding racism through the prism of complicity would somewhat address this.

Iggy Azalea has rushed to prove herself by referencing Asian people in her family; this defence assumes that being related to people of colour prevents one from being racist.³³⁸ Like Cyrus and Allen, Azalea is dismissive of criticisms because she interprets them as personal attacks rather than comments on her complicity in structural racism; this strategy overlaps with assuming a white experience is the same as that of people of colour. When rapper Q-Tip explained to Azalea via Twitter why people get so frustrated with her particular cultural appropriation, she responded flippantly, saying:

i [sic] find it patronizing to assume i [sic] have no knowledge of something I'm influenced by

im [sic] also not going to sit on twitter & play hip hop squares with strangers to somehow prove i [sic] deserve to be a fan of or influenced by hiphop³³⁹

³³⁷ Marilyn Frye quoted in Conway, 122.

³³⁸ Azalea made this claim in a tweet that she has since deleted. It read, ‘Haha, yeah also I have 3 aunts and 7 cousins who are like my little bothers [sic] and ASIAN. So I guess I hate my own family too.’ It can still be found on various online message boards.

³³⁹ Tweets available at ‘Iggy Azalea Sounds Off on Twitter (Again) After Will.i.am and Lupe Fiasco Defend the Rapper—See the Tweets!’, *E! News*

Speaking to *Elle*, Azalea explains that she sings in a southern American accent because she listened to rap as a child growing up in Australia and sang along in the accent of American rappers. Whilst the globalization of American pop culture may be a valid explanation (and indeed one that those with American privilege may not consider), in conjunction with her other techniques of ignoring accusations of racism, it minimises the issues surrounding the particular American accent she uses. In an interview with *The Guardian*, the rapper says, ‘I love the fact that I don't rap the way I talk – I think it's completely hilarious and ironic and cool.’³⁴⁰

Speaking to *Complex* magazine in 2013, Azalea suggests that black people who are angry with her should make a mixtape and try to be successful themselves. She also suggests that black artists should sing country music and attempt to break into traditionally white genres. She comments, ‘This is the entertainment industry. It's not politics’, which figures politics as something that only happens in formal political environments rather than in daily interactions and representations.³⁴¹ In these responses, Azalea is intimating that black people are ‘playing the race card’ or ‘making it about race’, as opposed to her view that the entertainment industry should be race-less. This is paradoxical considering Azalea’s choice to sing in an accent and within a genre that is historically black.

To be clear, this isn't to say that there can be no white rappers, but that there must be some acknowledgement of the racial aspects of hip-hop, and of white

<<http://www.eonline.com/uk/news/608856/iggy-azalea-sounds-off-on-twitter-again-after-will-i-am-and-lupe-fiasco-defend-the-rapper-see-the-tweets>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁴⁰ Kate Mossman, ‘Iggy Azalea Interview: ‘I Have Never Had Any Musicians Tell Me That I Wasn't Authentic’’, *The Guardian*, 28 June 2014, section Music <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/28/iggy-azalea-interview-rap-talk-ironic-cool>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁴¹ ‘Iggy Azalea: ‘The Low End Theory’ (2013 Cover Story)’, *Complex UK* <<http://www.complex.com/music/2013/09/iggy-azalea-interview-complex-cover-story>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

rappers' privileged position within the genre. White rapper Macklemore did this in his songs 'White Privilege' (2005) and 'White Privilege 2' (2016), saying:

Hip-hop started off on a block that I've never been to
To counteract a struggle that I've never even been through³⁴²

You're Miley, you're Elvis, you're Iggy Azalea

It seems like we're more concerned with being called racist
Than we actually are with racism³⁴³

Macklemore has been outspoken in his support for Black Lives Matter, and in his belief that white rappers need to 'take some level of accountability', 'acknowledge where the art came from' and recognise how white artists can benefit within hip-hop.³⁴⁴ Fellow white rapper Eminem says 'if I was black, I woulda sold half' in 2002 song 'White America' and made reference to the practice of white appropriation of traditionally black music genres in 'Without Me' (2002):

Though I'm not the first king of controversy
I am the worst thing since Elvis Presley
To do black music so selfishly
And use it to get myself wealthy³⁴⁵

In interpreting criticisms as 'playing the race card', Azalea doesn't acknowledge her privilege as a white rapper, or the financial rewards she reaps for inhabiting an identity she hasn't personally experienced. Eberhardt and Freeman state that:

³⁴² 'White Privilege', *The Language of My World* (NWXMusic, 2005).

³⁴³ 'White Privilege II', *This Unruly Mess I've Made* (Macklemore LLC: 2016).

³⁴⁴ 'On the Cover: Thrift Shop Superstar Macklemore', *Rolling Stone* <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/on-the-cover-thrift-shop-superstar-macklemore-20130814>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁴⁵ 'Without Me', *The Eminem Show* (Aftermath: 2002).

She [Azalea] is met with material rewards of blackness far beyond what African Americans reap, and at the same time, reinforces standards of beauty, desirability, and acceptability - all linked to whiteness - already affirmed in popular culture³⁴⁶

DiAngelo stresses that the race card narrative is particularly insidious because it implies people of colour are ‘cheating’ and using their race to their advantage - a dangerous distortion considering their oppression within a white supremacist society.³⁴⁷ Furthermore, the race card narrative suggests that white people are the arbitrators of racism and can reasonably comment on what is racist and what isn’t.³⁴⁸ This reiterates whiteness as a non-raced position - as ‘objective’ and ‘normal’ – and marginalises the views of those that actually experience racism.

Black American rapper Azealia Banks spoke emotionally about her feelings on cultural appropriation on a radio show in 2014. Banks said:

When they give those awards out — because the Grammys are supposed to be accolades of artistic excellence, you know what I mean? Iggy Azalea is not excellent. [...] When they give these Grammys out, all it says to white kids is: ‘Oh yeah, you’re great, you’re amazing, you can do whatever you put your mind to.’ And it says to black kids: ‘You don’t have shit. You don’t own shit, not even the shit you created for yourself,’ and it makes me upset.

At the very fucking least, you owe me the right to my fucking identity. And to not exploit that shit. That’s all we’re holding on to with hip-hop and rap.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Eberhardt and Freeman, 321.

³⁴⁷ DiAngelo, 227.

³⁴⁸ DiAngelo, 277.

³⁴⁹ Jeff Chang, ‘Azealia Banks, Iggy Azalea and Hip-Hop’s Appropriation Problem’, *The Guardian*, 26 December 2014, section Music <<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/dec/24/iggy-azalea-azealia-banks-hip-hop-appropriation-problem>> [Accessed 28 April 2016].

Banks herself was accused of racism in 2016 because of her homophobic and Islamophobic comments about ex-One Direction member Zayn Malik. At the time of the above comments, her views on Iggy Azalea were sympathetic to many feminists.

In response, Azalea tweeted that many black people are successful across genres and that Banks wasn't successful because of her 'piss poor attitude'.³⁵⁰ Using the logic of meritocracy and individualism (related to the project of the self that I discussed in the previous chapter), this implies that individual black artists who haven't reached meteoric heights are in a situation of their own causing. By suggesting she doesn't want anyone to have 'special rights', Azalea draws upon a liberal notion of equal opportunity, where everyone allegedly has the same chances, and thus outcomes are down to individual work ethic. By using this to obscure the racial inequality in the entertainment industry, Azalea is able to ignore her own complicity in discursively and representationally contributing to the racial status-quo. Similar to Cyrus's description of Nicki Minaj as 'not very nice', Azalea relies upon negative stereotypes of women of colour when she calls Azealia Banks 'miserable', 'poisonous' and an 'angry human being'.³⁵¹ She also refers to Azealia Banks as a 'bigot', which implies reverse racism.³⁵²

Like Lily Allen, Iggy Azalea turns the language of social justice against itself and positions herself as a victim because she has been called racist. When asked about the comments made by Azealia Banks she said:

Getting the word racist put on me sucked. And it's hurtful for other people to have to hear it (she nods in the direction of her boyfriend) [...] And it is hurtful for other people's families to have

³⁵⁰ IGGY AZALEA, 'Special Msg for Banks: There Are Many Black Artists Succeeding in All Genres. The Reason You Haven't Is because of Your Piss Poor Attitude.', @iggyazalea, 2014 <<https://twitter.com/iggyazalea/status/545862816851582976?lang=en>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁵¹ Tweets available at Tanya Chen, 'A History Of Iggy Azalea And Azealia Banks' Rivalry', *BuzzFeed* <<https://www.buzzfeed.com/tanyachen/azealia-azalea>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁵² From an understanding of structural racism, reverse racism does not exist as racism requires cultural, institutional and economic dominance. Refusal to serve a white person in a Chinese restaurant would be prejudicial, but it would not be racist. From this perspective, racism towards white people does not exist.

to hear it. I think people seriously need to rethink that word. We are very liberal in flinging it around and it is pretty f-ing heavy.³⁵³

From this perspective, those accusing others of racism are the ones who should be mindful of the effects of their thoughts, words and actions, rather than those that are racist. Continuing with this strategy, Azalea expresses hurt and offense that she has been called racist because of her reference to herself as a ‘runaway slave master’ in D.R.U.G.S. She says:

Im [sic] writing you today to address a lyric I said a few months ago in one of my songs that I feel has been used to unfairly slander my character and paint me as a racist person.³⁵⁴

Again the rapper insinuates that it’s worse to call someone racist than to actually be racist, or at least that it’s worse to call someone racist for something they didn’t intend than it is to be on the receiving end of those intentions. To take this even further, Iggy Azalea positions *herself* as a victim because of her whiteness, again hinting at reverse racism. She says:

It is unfair to say other races who also grew up listening to rap don’t get a place too. We have a place and the Azaleans and myself are evidence of that fact. All people have a voice and equal right to use it.³⁵⁵

The above is excerpted from Azalea’s 2012 apology letter, which works harder to excuse and explain than to apologise for her reference to slave-masters. She writes that young people are ‘being misled’ to believe she is racist, and that in reality she is for ‘unity and equality’. In an apology meant to quash fears that she is racist, Azalea reverts to defending her position as a white rapper, saying ‘People should get a fair shot at whatever they want to do no matter what color

³⁵³ Mossman.

³⁵⁴ For Iggy Azalea Apology Letter in full, see ‘Iggy Azalea Apologizes For Controversial ‘Runaway Slave Master’ Line’, *HipHopDX*, 2012 <<http://hiphopdx.com/news/id.18983/title.iggy-azalea-apologizes-for-controversial-runaway-slave-master-line>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁵⁵ Azalea Apology Letter.

they are'. Eberhardt and Freeman view this assertion as further evidence of Azalea's entitlement, as well as 'a rejection of the notion that hip-hop remains an African American cultural art form'.³⁵⁶ Azalea ends the letter by framing her lyric as a 'poor choice of words', whilst vehemently positioning herself as definitely not racist.

In a 2016 interview with *Elle*, Azalea seems to have come to terms with some of the criticisms levelled against her.³⁵⁷ She says her personal issue with Azealia Banks led her to address the criticisms personally rather than demonstrating that she was aware of the Black Lives Matter movement. She also commented that she had seen racism as a thing of the past, but recognises that it's a 'fraught issue' for Americans and that people are still hurt by it. This still puts emphasis on people being hurt rather than those doing the hurting, but it does demonstrate some acknowledgement and growth on the issue.

I would tentatively suggest that the prominence of Black Lives Matter, and more explicit discourses on race across popular culture, facilitated this acknowledgement from Azalea. Accusations of cultural appropriation - which I'm framing as accusations of complicity – alter public discourse, and bring discourses of complicity closer to the surface. The fact that many of these accusations are posed and then addressed via social media (or on online news outlets) means that many more people are drawn into such conversations, and as such, awareness of such complicities increases.

³⁵⁶ Eberhardt and Freeman, 317.

³⁵⁷ Aliyah Shamsher, 'EXCLUSIVE: Iggy Azalea as You've Never Heard Her before', *Elle Canada* <<http://www.ellecanada.com/culture/celebrity/article/exclusive-iggy-azalea-as-you-ve-never-heard-her-before>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

Presenting these pop-culture examples offers insight to the ways in which subjects are frequently complicit with racism, both in our actions, and in our refusal to seriously consider criticisms. As a result of this, I argue that viewing ourselves as always already complicit can interrupt defensive patterns and dismissive reactions to accusations of racism. To reiterate, I argue in this chapter that Cyrus, Allen and Azalea are complicit with racism, and that this is problematized by their interactions with aspects of a feminist identity – one that is postfeminist in nature, but claimed as feminist because of the recent popularity of the term. Turning to Erinn Gilson’s work on vulnerability, ignorance and oppression, I maintain that these artists’ actions are imbued with a certain amount of wilful ignorance, or lack of willingness to understand opposing points of view. Though there isn’t space to explore it here, it’s also worth considering to what extent people are responsible for *not* being ignorant, especially in the context of highly accessible digital technologies.

‘Why is it such a big deal?’: Vulnerability, Ignorance and Oppression

Gilson argues that contemporary Western society favours ‘invulnerability’ as opposed to vulnerability. Connotations of vulnerability include weakness, exposure, and sensitivity. Subjects are encouraged to be strong, to not admit fears and weaknesses, to not speak up when feeling hurt or slighted, to power on, to get over it, and so on.³⁵⁸ For Gilson our cultural tendency towards invulnerability is a required discourse that allows for various types of ignorance. Oppression continues because of an ignorance that is carefully cultivated, and that ignorance is built upon remaining unaware of, or ignoring, the vulnerability of others (and ourselves). Similar to my uses for complicity as a theoretical tool,

³⁵⁸ This is structured by class, race, and gender – for example, many modes of masculinity still rely on the proverb that ‘boys don’t cry’, and white women are constructed as more fragile and innocent than women of other races.

Gilson says, ‘Vulnerability is a condition of openness, openness to being affected and affecting in turn.’³⁵⁹

If we look at our own vulnerability, and the vulnerability of others – especially those that are vulnerable at least in part because of us, we are forced to recognise our complicity. Western consumers are implicated in the appalling working conditions of textile workers in many developing countries, and UK taxpayers are implicated in acts carried out by the British army; recognising the vulnerability of others – seeing them as human – means acknowledging our role (even if it’s not a direct role) in acts we would otherwise condemn. Gilson argues that the reductionist logic of late capitalist society necessitates a pool of consumers that always feel the need for a new product (and *feel* is important here, this need for newness is embodied and taken on). Widespread cultural invulnerability facilitates consumerist capitalism, and also commodified cultural appropriation, both in the music industry, and in the fashion industry.

By viewing actions as linked to consequences felt by others, subjects open themselves up to feelings of responsibility or guilt. Gilson stresses that we should see vulnerability as potential – as something we all could face, and as something we all do face in varied ways. Western society currently frames vulnerability as weakness – women are vulnerable to sexual assault, people below the poverty line are vulnerable to disease.³⁶⁰ This puts vulnerability in a category away from us - it puts it onto others - and this often maps onto already existing raced and classed divisions, especially because race and class are already put away from sight, onto other bodies and locations.

³⁵⁹ Gilson, 310.

³⁶⁰ Gilson, 311.

Wilful ignorance is carefully cultivated and works to maintain the privileges and world-view of those in power;³⁶¹ Conway describes ignorance as ‘an ongoing collective social process’.³⁶² Where dominant groups may be tempted to repeatedly give the benefit of the doubt when people are racist (and sexist and classist and so on), it’s important to recognise that ignorance can be cultivated wilfully simply because it’s inconvenient to think about your actions in any kind of critical way. Gilson quotes Tuana:

Willful ignorance is a systematic process of self-deception, a willful embrace of ignorance that infects those who are in positions of privilege, an active ignoring of the oppression of others and one’s role in that exploitation.³⁶³

From this vantage point, ignorance is advantageous for those in positions of privilege, and in terms of complicity, we are able to remain complicit if we remain ignorant. Whilst it may be the case that not everyone is engaged in politics, or consuming the same information on the internet, we live in a time when we have more information literally at our fingertips than ever before. How does this factor into the responsibility to not be ignorant? Speaking about South Africa, Conway quotes Applebaum, who says:

While not only whites are susceptible to white ignorance, whites are particularly susceptible because they have the most to gain from remaining ignorant³⁶⁴

Further, Conway stresses that white ‘denial of complicity becomes a characterizing feature of white ignorance’.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ Gilson, 313.

³⁶² Conway, 124.

³⁶³ Tuana, quoted in Gilson, 313-314.

³⁶⁴ Applebaum quoted in Conway, 123.

On the one hand, one could simply dismiss those we don't agree with as ignorant; it would be easy to paint people we see as complicit as merely uninformed. I have tried to specifically avoid this, both because of my narrow and privileged subjectivity, and because of the myriad ways one can approach a subject as expansive as feminism and race. On the other hand, my attempts to avoid painting people as simply ignorant may give them the benefit of the doubt to a degree that's unreasonable to those harmed by their ignorance. Feminists can and do portray women they don't agree with as being ignorant - for example some liberal feminists present glamour models as being naïve, and some radical feminists present sex work advocates as being duped by the patriarchy.³⁶⁶ Ignorance relates specifically to the case-studies in this chapter because of the nature of the ignorance in question, and the limits to which you can reasonably defend a position when those involved refuse to try to understand the criticisms levelled against them. That is to say, how long can you defend a privileged white person against perhaps inadvertent racism – but racism all the same – when they have all the available resources to engage in the wider conversation and at least try to understand the criticisms? At what point is their ignorance wilful? And more importantly, to what extent does it suit their own needs?

In the case-studies outlined above, the three singers have been wilfully ignorant, especially because of the power and privilege they enjoy. Iggy Azalea's debut

³⁶⁵ Conway, 123.

³⁶⁶ Liberal feminist texts that construct some women as naïve include:

Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London, Hachette UK, 2010);

Kat Banyard, *The Equality Illusion: The Truth about Women and Men Today* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010);

Levy;

Radical feminist writing that constructs sex workers and supporters of sex-work as dupes include:

Jeffreys;

The Feminist Current <<http://www.feministcurrent.com/>> [Accessed April 27 2017].

mixtape is entitled 'Ignorant Art' and in an interview with mentor TI this exchange occurred:

Iggy: Ignorant yet artistic.

TI: There you go. Ignorant, artistic belligerence set to music.

Iggy: Purposeful ignorance.

TI: And you know what, we're going to make millions upon millions until billions of dollars off of it.³⁶⁷

I do not argue that those in power are responsible for everything, or deserve to be blamed for social ills just because they're wealthy. Rather, those in positions of cultural or financial power have a significant platform, and it's pertinent that the three celebrities addressed here are willing to accept the mantle of (post)feminism when it serves their brand identity. Cryus and Allen have both framed their celebrity as an opportunity to do good, and Azalea's co-optation of social justice language and inclusivity plays into this characterisation of celebrities as role-models or pioneers. Considering their (post)feminist identity, and their use of racial styles, there should also be some responsibility to be receptive to accusations of racism that are borne out of contemporary intersectional feminisms.

Gilson's understanding of vulnerability as 'a resource for ethical response and political resistance to oppression' is parallel to my argument that acknowledgement of complicity can lead to attempts to successfully lessen that complicity.³⁶⁸ By not seeing themselves as 'culture makers as well as culture consumers', Cyrus, Allen and Azalea are not required to think of the

³⁶⁷ Studio Life: T.I. interviews Iggy Azalea!
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orh8Vt9RIAU>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁶⁸ Gilson, 324.

consequences of their interactions with various cultures or practices.³⁶⁹ By not considering her actions as contributing to wider narratives about race, Azalea frames herself as a consumer of rap culture, but not as making various cultural statements herself. Cyrus, in referring to black culture as ‘general culture’ or framing it as youth culture, positions herself as enjoying and representing already existing cultures, without thought for the effects of that representation. Gilson states that we ‘perpetuate oppressive ideals by denying our complicity in doing so’.³⁷⁰ By distancing themselves from the effects of their actions – voiced by members of communities affected by those actions – the singers absolve themselves of any responsibility.

Gilson offers some strategies for coming to terms with vulnerability (and thus complicity). She stresses the importance of ‘being open to not knowing’ and to being wrong, describing this as ‘the precondition of learning’.³⁷¹ DiAngelo speaks of ‘white silence’, where white people detach from conversations about uncomfortable subjects because they fear they will say something offensive.³⁷² DiAngelo argues that white people need to participate in dialogue in a thoughtful manner in order to overcome this issue of ‘carefulness’.³⁷³ Along these lines, Gilson says, “To refrain from interaction, to abstain from dialogue because one fears that one does not know is simply another way of closing oneself off”.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁹ Bordo in Gilson, 324.

³⁷⁰ Gilson, 324.

³⁷¹ Gilson, 325.

³⁷² DiAngelo, 243.

³⁷³ DiAngelo, 217.

³⁷⁴ Cite Gilson

Most importantly, to this subject in particular, and to this thesis as a whole, it is imperative that subjects move beyond simply ‘knowing’ about race and intersectionality, and actually begin to take this knowledge on and enact it in daily life. In Gilson’s terms we must:

Have it sink into our bodies, into our emotional responses, into our more basic interpretation of the world and ourselves and not just to incorporate it into a set of beliefs we hold.³⁷⁵

Black feminist Heidi Mirza notes the rise in discourses of intersectionality amongst contemporary feminists, but comments that the concept has become a ‘buzzword’ for white feminists. Mirza differentiates between paying lip service to intersectionality, and fundamentally changing the ways more privileged groups think.³⁷⁶ Having looked at complicity in cultural appropriation in the cases of Miley Cyrus, Lily Allen and Iggy Azalea, the following section will address some potential tensions in this chapter.

Conclusion

There are two potential tensions in this chapter. Firstly, it may seem that I am simultaneously railing against individualism while also encouraging individual reflection on racism. And secondly, I am warning against stereotypes based on racial essentialism, while defining cultural appropriation in those terms. In this final section I clarify my position, and mention several black artists as a point of contrast with the case-studies discussed thus far.

³⁷⁵ Gilson, 325.

³⁷⁶ Heidi Safia Mirza, ‘Feminist Futures, Feminist Pasts: An Intersectional Reflection on Where We Are Now’, *Diffractions*, 6 (2016) 2.

In the case of individualism, my argument in this chapter is that rationalisations of racism, or excuses for racism, often operate within the ideological rationale of liberal individualism - that is, individualist reasoning that frames subjects as separate and unique entities who are not affected by pre-existing and pre-circulating messages about race. Individualism as a mode of thinking leads to assertions of colour-blindness and meritocracy, and to narratives that 'race doesn't matter' or 'it's not about race', which allow for white indignation, ignorance and claims of innocence. In the previous chapter I critiqued the individualistic rationale that says women should be responsible for their own career trajectories and successes in the workplace. When I advocate for acknowledging our own complicities, this is within an intersectional understanding of white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchy, and thus from a position where subjects are aware of their relative privileges and powers within this framework. Thus, I am advocating for some awareness of our position within particular identity groups, whilst also recognising that there is substantial difference within these groups. Being responsible for, and aware of, our own complicities is not *the* solution for ending white supremacy; it is not the only intervention. As with the previous chapter I believe that institutions, corporations and those with most power and privilege should listen to marginalised groups and enact changes that would achieve more widespread equality. In dealing with complicity I am suggesting that paying attention to our role within these oppressive systems, and being cognisant of the ways we may have privilege over others, may be helpful. I also argue throughout this thesis that thinking in terms of complicity may help to displace the binaries that so often rule our thinking - good and bad, right and wrong, racist and not racist, sexist and not sexist. Sara Ahmed reminds us that structures are made up of

individuals and so individuals must be called to account when they are implicated in the oppressive outcomes of structures.³⁷⁷

With regard to the potential contradiction in my dealings with racialized essentialism, I acknowledge that it is problematic to assume that certain body types (in particular, curves, hair-styles and facial features) are always and only associated with particular racial groups. As stated, I understand race from a critical race perspective that sees it as a social construction; the over-relation between physical characteristics and race stems from racist and toxic histories that tried to use science to justify colonialism, slavery and genocide. I acknowledge that members of certain racial groups do not all share physical characteristics, cultures or histories. Feminist discourses of cultural appropriation are also aware of this, and refer more to the socio-historical traditions of particular dances and styles and their associations with certain racial groups. Further, acts of cultural appropriation reinforce ‘essentialized ideological linkages’ by caricaturing aspects of a community and presenting them as innate to that group.³⁷⁸

Many mainstream artists wear saris, bindis and feature Bollywood dancing in their videos – indeed Iggy Azalea did this in the video for ‘Bounce’ (2013) – and their explanation for doing so is that it gives a sense of exoticism, fantasy or escapism.³⁷⁹ Likewise, Native American headdresses have spiritual, political, and historical significance, especially because of the genocide and displacement

³⁷⁷ Ahmed, ‘Feminist Hurt/Feminism Hurts’.

³⁷⁸ Eberhardt and Freeman, 321-322.

³⁷⁹ For Azalea speaking about fantasy and music videos, see ‘Iggy Azalea Talks Bounce, India, Self-Sabotage, Nicki Minaj Comparisons’, *HARD KNOCK TV*, 2013 <<http://hardknock.tv/iggy-azalea-talks-bounce-india-self-sabotage-nicki-minaj-comparisons/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

of millions of indigenous peoples in North America.³⁸⁰ When celebrities like Khloé Kardashian wear Native American headdresses at music festivals, birthday parties or for selfies, this disregards the meaning of these objects and detaches them from any wider cultural significance they may have. Therefore, I do not suggest that all Indians wear saris and dance in Bollywood routines, or that all Native Americans wear headdresses or have a particular spiritual relationship with them, but that white appropriation of these objects reduces people of colour to recognisable and often stereotypical objects. Not all African-Americans like hip-hop, wear grills and say ‘homies’, but Miley Cyrus’s incorporation of this imagery into her music reiterates that stereotype, allows her to benefit from perceived ‘coolness’, and perpetuates miscommunication and misunderstanding across racial communities. As stated earlier in the chapter, people from minoritized groups are frequently discriminated against for wearing these same styles.



³⁸⁰ For a discussion on representations of the headdress, see Kathryn W. Shanley, “‘Writing Indian’: American Indian Literature and the Future of Native American Studies’ in *Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Russell Thornton (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) p140.

It's important to contextualise the situation of Miley Cyrus, Lily Allen and Iggy Azalea with that of black artists who identify with a feminist identity. Nicki Minaj is also a woman in a male dominated industry, and has spoken about racism in the music industry, representations of her as a 'bitch', and the representational dichotomy between female sexuality and intelligence or skill.³⁸¹ Beyoncé Knowles has sung about female financial independence since her days in pop group Destiny's Child and in recent years has fully embraced black feminism. In '***Flawless' (2013) Knowles samples Nigerian feminist author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk 'We should all be feminists', and the singer has artistically explored representations of black women and sexuality in albums 'Beyoncé' and 'Lemonade'.

In 2015 Minaj and Knowles collaborated on 'Feelin' Myself' which celebrates their position as black women at the top of their respective genres. Despite their ongoing engagement with feminist themes, including their overt contributions to discussions on race and representation, Minaj and Knowles are frequently criticised for not being feminist enough, or are dismissed as not feminist at all.³⁸² Writers have argued that Beyoncé co-opts feminism for financial gain,

³⁸¹ For Minaj talking about being a woman in hip-hop, see Nicki Minaj - Bossing Up <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzGZamtlRPO&t=1s>> [Accessed 27 April].

³⁸² Anecdotally, those not involved with feminist politics or discussion are astounded at the idea that Knowles or Minaj could be considered feminists. For examples of this in print, see 'Nicki Minaj and 'Anaconda' Are NOT Feminist', *The Awkward Agent's Archive*, 2014 <<https://awkwardagent.com/2014/09/09/nicki-minaj-and-anaconda-are-not-feminist/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017]; 'Frisky Rant: The Real Problem With Nicki Minaj's 'Anaconda' Cover Art & Her 'Black Jezebel' Brand', *The Frisky* <<http://www.thefrisky.com/2014-07-28/frisky-rant-the-real-problem-with-nicki-minajs-anaconda-cover-art-her-black-jezebel-brand/>> [Accessed 24 November 2015]; 'Nicki Minaj: Little More Than a Big Butt?', *The Huffington Post UK* <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/gail-dines/nicki-minaj_b_5629232.html> [Accessed 16 February 2016]; Cherise Smith, 'Why I'm Not Buying Beyoncé's Brand of Feminism', *Women's eNews* <<http://womensenews.org/2014/10/why-im-not-buying-beyonces-brand-of-feminism/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017];

and that Minaj's hypersexual aesthetic precludes her from being a feminist. I acknowledge the argument that Beyoncé is a neoliberal, corporate and individualistic figure – as articulated by bell hooks in her critique of 'Lemonade' – but ultimately reject this in light of the singer's ongoing support for, and artistic representation of issues relating to feminism and racism. Whilst I don't consider Beyoncé or her work beyond criticism by any means, I see the importance it has for women of colour, and in this work, prefer to avoid a discussion of her complicity. The point I wish to make here, is that Knowles and Minaj are dismissed based on feminist credentialism, when Cyrus, Azalea and Allen are hailed as activists, genre pioneers and satirists (the same is true for Sheryl Sandberg, and white actresses Lena Dunham and Emma Watson). In short, the standards for 'feminist' and 'not feminist' are affected by the white gaze.

As stated throughout this thesis, I argue that it would be conducive to positive political transformation if subjects were able to accept complicity and make thoughtful changes, rather than immediately denying any wrongdoing, especially if this wrongdoing is 'everyday' or seen as trivial. As stated, because of the 'racist=bad/not racist=good' binary, many do not want to associate themselves with any type of racism. This binary is part of a wider problem wherein representations of complex social systems like racism and sexism are reduced to two options - one good, and one bad. When the media presents feminism as being about women versus men, and racism as bad people versus

'Why Beyoncé Shouldn't Inspire Feminists, despite Her VMAs Performance', *The Independent*, 2014 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/why-beyonc-shouldnt-inspire-feminists-despite-her-vm-as-performance-9689938.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

good people, it becomes less likely for individuals to interrogate their own part in perpetuating these systems – it obfuscates complicity.

This chapter has addressed complicity with racism within the context of contemporary feminism, using the case-studies of three white pop stars. In choosing complicity with racism, as in the other chapters I have tried to discuss complicities that I am involved in, and complicities wherein a critique will be aimed at those with more power. I don't wish to point fingers or undertake analyses of complicity that will further stigmatise groups that are already marginalised. Furthermore, the narratives and rhetorical strategies employed by Cyrus, Allen and Azalea are indicative of the complicity of white people more broadly. By speaking about these strategies, I draw attention to the narratives and excuses DiAngelo identifies.

Gilson's work on vulnerability and ignorance argues that a cultural tendency towards invulnerability closes us off from being aware of our impact on others and thus prevents us from recognising complicity. If Cyrus, Allen and Azalea were able to acknowledge that they are privileged and don't have the experience or information to comment reasonably on race – that they are vulnerable – then there may have been a generally more positive and mutually beneficial experience.

In the upcoming chapter I use the Kardashian Jenner sisters as a case-study to discuss beauty practices and hegemonic femininities. I start by giving an overview of feminist approaches to beauty, and argue that we should take a contextual approach when it comes to this issue to avoid further stigmatisation of feminine presenting women. I defend the Kardashians against femmephobic

and sexist comments and also critique their part in postfeminist neoliberal discourses that sell beauty as a tool for overall self-improvement. Again I have chosen complicity with a particular topic, and addressed it from a perspective that hopefully does not stigmatise those that use beauty as a mode of resistance or subversion.

Chapter 4

Kardashian Komplicity: Performing Postfeminist Beauty

This chapter explores complicity by way of beauty, postfeminist neoliberalism, and the Kardashian Jenner family. The first part of the chapter is devoted to analysing the fractious relationship between feminism and beauty. My major concern is to address the unresolved complex of beauty and the tendency of second-wave and contemporary radical feminist approaches to dominate and distort public perceptions of feminist approaches to beauty. By approaching beauty from multiple feminist perspectives, I analyse an episode of *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* and traverse the complicities represented by the family. In doing so, I critique the family for their perpetuation of postfeminist neoliberal discourses about beauty, self-improvement and self-management, which they achieve through self-branding, endorsements, and various other commercial endeavours. Alongside this, I defend the family from dismissals based on their supposed vulgarity, which stem from sexist and femmophobic interpretations of their hypersexual, hyperfeminine gender performances. I argue then that the Kardashian Jenners should be both defended *and* critiqued, or rather that they should be approached from a feminist perspective, with appropriate nuance and reflexivity. Acknowledgement of complicity (theirs and mine) provides the space to do this.

Beauty has been, and continues to be a contentious issue within feminism. It overlaps with discourses of sexuality and raises pertinent questions regarding agency and ideology. It is often the case that popular media represents feminism as being oppositional to beauty practices (the stereotypical hairy-

legged dungaree-clad second-waver is an example of this), and many newspapers and women's magazines contain editorial where female writers insist they can be both feminist, and feminine.³⁸³ Polly Vernon's 2015 book *Hot Feminist* attempts to explode this falsely constructed dichotomy, and yet relies upon it in order to make the argument that she, as a fashion forward woman, stands in opposition to 'classic feminism' (as if such a thing exists).³⁸⁴ Whilst it is the case that for many second-wave feminists, the identity 'feminist', was 'predicated on a rejection of femininity',³⁸⁵ for many contemporary feminists, a woman's appearance or gender performance is not considered a signifier of her politics or feminist credentials.

Using complicity as a feminist theoretical tool encourages an approach that looks at an issue from a situated position, from a range of perspectives. I aim to show that the Kardashians can be considered complicit in a decades old beauty system that has been vehemently criticised by feminists, and *also* that this beauty system is more complicated than it is sometimes presented to be. Beauty should be discussed in relation to discourses around it – in this case postfeminist neoliberal ones – and not simply as a set of practices. The Kardashian-Jenners present themselves as being worthy of being looked at, and to say that this is automatically complicitous in a simplistic sense – woman objectifies herself and is thus complicit with patriarchy – negates the ways that different groups look at women like the Kardashian-Jenners.

³⁸³ For examples of this, see Hadley Freeman, 'Can a Feminist Wear High Heels?', *The Guardian*, 28 January 2013, section Fashion <<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2013/jan/28/can-feminist-wear-high-heels>> [Accessed 27 April 2017];

Alya Mooro, 'Sexism Now And The 'Post-Pink Era' - What We Learned When #Grazia10 Tackled Feminism', *Grazia*, 2015 <<http://lifestyle.one/grazia/fashion/industry/grazia10-things-loved-feminism-now-tomorrow-talk/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁸⁴ Polly Vernon, *Hot Feminist* (London: Hachette UK, 2015).

³⁸⁵ Joanne Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 2.

Furthermore, by focusing on beauty, which is perceived to be a feminine pursuit, I am complicit in, and contributing to, the societal norm of scrutinizing and policing femininity more than masculinity. Despite scholarly attention on masculinity, practices relating to masculinity are rarely dissected and politically deconstructed in mainstream media to the same extent feminine practices are. Hypermasculine men also spend significant amounts of time and money on their physical appearance, and profit from this (in the case of bodybuilders, male models and personal trainers), and yet they are not subject to the same level of public analysis. By focusing on women who engage in traditionally and consciously feminine beauty practices, I am complicit in upholding the sexist view that women who pose naked or undergo plastic surgery are operating under some form of false consciousness. Looking at the Kardashians' interactions with beauty as reinforcing neo-liberal rationality, rather than as inherently oppressive or superficial, will somewhat temper this.

**‘They represent everything that is wrong with the Western world’:
Keeping Up With the Kardashians**

In November 2015 I presented a paper at ‘Kimposium!’ - the world’s first conference on all things Kardashian - at Brunel University in London. Several days before the event I received an email informing presenters that the conference had been covered by numerous media outlets, and was now sold out with a waiting list of eighty people. Panicking, I scrolled through the attached list of links and saw that Kimposium! was in the Daily Mail, the Huffington Post, the Independent, on BBC Radio Scotland and BBC Radio Ulster, and reported on by numerous student unions across the country. Masochistically I scrolled

through the comments on the *Daily Mail*. The Kimposium was declared proof of the ‘dumbing down’ and devaluation of education; attendees were accused of ‘ruining the world of science’ and wasting money. One Daily Mail commenter declared that all academics attending the conference should have their ‘obviously worthless’ academic qualifications removed. Brunel University was criticised, with commenters exclaiming that ‘Our poor kids are being stuck with £9000 a year of tuition fees so that these eccentric fools can live in fantasy land!’ and ‘Now you know why the unis here are falling in the league table’. One reader simply stated, ‘I have lost all hope for humanity’.³⁸⁶

Of course the Daily Mail comment section is a relatively extreme space, but the comments found there aren’t *that* far away from comments made by fellow academics or by my friends and family. Beneath an article about Kimposium! by organiser Meredith Jones, a commenter on academic news site *The Conversation* said:

Perhaps the problem with Kardashians is that they are vain, shallow, vacuous, narcissists., [sic] obsessed with themselves, their money and possessions. As such they represent everything that is wrong with the Western world, everything that is producing record amounts of mental illness and large numbers of children who are borderline aphasic.³⁸⁷

The coverage about Kimposium, the response from the public, and the numerous bemused, amused and dismissive reactions from friends, family and colleagues, reveal the symbolic and emotional power of the Kardashians. It’s

³⁸⁶ See comment section, ‘British Colleges Study Kim Kardashian’s Rear’, *Mail Online*, 2015 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3318091/Rear-ly-British-university-invites-world-s-finest-minds-discuss-theories-Kardashians-called-Kimpodium.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁸⁷ See comment section, Meredith Jones, ‘Why We All Need to Keep up with the Kardashians’, *The Conversation* <<http://theconversation.com/why-we-all-need-to-keep-up-with-the-kardashians-50948>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

important to note however, that many people were thrilled to hear that such an event existed, and the fact the event rapidly sold out is a testament to this.

Weeks after the event had happened, Kimposium! appeared in the Guardian Saturday quiz, and got a full page write-up in Heat magazine. Not just a famous family, the Kardashian Jenners embody multiple cultural anxieties and aggressions, and for many people, symbolise *something* about contemporary culture, even if they can't articulate exactly what.

The Kardashians are a suitable case-study for this thesis because of their relevance to beauty and postfeminism, but the existence of this event, and the substantial public response to it shows just how culturally significant the Kardashians are. Hundreds of millions of people are exposed to the Kardashian Jenners; they have a huge media reach across numerous platforms, and they embody and transmit messages that have been hugely culturally resonant. The Kardashians occupy a space in the public imagination onto which many people project tensions and desires that are representative of many aspects of today's media saturated, social-mediated, sexualised, hypervisible culture. The family are pioneering in many aspects of this, including their role in one of the most popular reality TV shows of all time,³⁸⁸ their spearheading of selfies, their various flirtations with nudity (Kim's sex tape, numerous full frontal shoots, belfies, naked pregnancy shoots and selfies), their heavy use of Snapchat and Instagram, and the fact that several family members have gotten married, divorced and given birth on camera. Additionally, the family are a useful case study because of the way they can be looked at as complicit with various troubling discourses. They are blamed and hated perhaps disproportionately,

³⁸⁸ On the IMDB list of 'Most Popular Reality TV' shows, *KUWTK* is number 1, and on *Complex's* list of 'Best Reality TV of all time', *KUWTK* is number 2.

but they are also extremely problematic from various feminist perspectives that I will outline throughout this chapter.

Throughout this thesis, I am interested in complicity as a way of looking at, or as a way of interpreting and responding to practices within a particular political context. For my purposes in this chapter, complicity is participation in something that can be seen as negative or oppressive for people outside or within the identity group of the person in question. My intention then is not to encourage a construction of ‘some’ women as always complicit because of their interactions with certain fixed practices, but to think about the ways in which we affect others, and to consider what that might mean discursively and politically.

Feminist scholarship has recognized that many women freely choose practices that have been previously seen as patriarchal (sex work, personal adornment), and my approach attempts to acknowledge this reality whilst also maintaining a critique of the contemporary discourses surrounding beauty. The messages conveyed by the Kardashian-Jenners in their beauty work make them complicit with a beauty regime that can be both oppressive and not, in a variety of scenarios. The argument that I propose, in the context of feminist approaches to beauty and complicity, is that interactions with beauty are not necessarily evidence of patriarchal victimhood.

‘I will don all the glamour, the glitter, that I want’: Feminisms, Beauty and Complicity

There are numerous feminist theories of beauty; here I present a variety, but am not able to give space and time to every feminist intervention. In doing so, I create a narrative of feminist approaches to beauty, and potentially a hierarchy of views. I have given significant space to second-wave and contemporary

radical feminist theories because beauty is an important facet of these feminisms.

Many second-wave feminists saw beauty standards, and subsequently beauty practices, as oppressive to women. Famously, a group of feminists protested the 1968 Miss America Pageant and threw items they saw as oppressive (bras, girdles, curlers, high-heels) into a ‘freedom trash can’, birthing the ‘bra-burning’ moniker that continues to be misapplied today. In an essay reflecting on the protest, radical feminist Carol Hanisch clarifies that the protest wished to convey that ‘all women are hurt by beauty competition’,³⁸⁹ and not just women who adhere to the hegemonic norm, like contestants in the Miss America pageant. Hanisch laments that some aspects of the protest had elements of ‘anti-womanism’, saying, ‘Miss America and all beautiful women came off as our enemy instead of as our sisters who suffer with us’.

This radical feminist opposition to beauty practices can be found in the work of numerous second-wave writers, and often contains a critique of the capitalist beauty industry and of objectification in advertising and print media. For second-wave radical feminist Andrea Dworkin, women’s freedom is related precisely to their relationship to their own body; if women are seen as never physically good enough, they are limited psychologically, intellectually and creatively.³⁹⁰ She says, ‘Not one part of a woman’s body is left untouched, unaltered. No feature or extremity is spared the art, or pain, of improvement.’³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ Carol Hanisch, ‘Feminist Document: Critique of the 1968 Miss America Protest by Carol Hanisch of the Women’s Liberation Movement’

<<http://carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/MissACritique.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁹⁰ Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: Plume, 1974), 113.

³⁹¹ Dworkin (1974), 113.

Dworkin lists the various alterations women are expected to carry out on their bodies, and her book includes a diagram that points to the various body parts women are expected to augment. Notably, many of the practices listed by Dworkin are still completely commonplace ('eyebrows plucked', 'hair tinted', 'mouth lipsticked'), and many more that she doesn't mention have become de rigueur since (fake tan, hair extensions, false eyelashes).³⁹² Likewise, in *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer laments that 'the more clothes women are allowed to take off, the more hair they must take off'.³⁹³ Over forty years later, intimate waxing is commonplace,³⁹⁴ vajazzles are widely available,³⁹⁵ labiaplasty is an increasingly popular elective surgery,³⁹⁶ Gwyneth Paltrow recommends vaginal steaming on her lifestyle website,³⁹⁷ and Khloé Kardashian recommends 'vajacials'.³⁹⁸

Radical second-wave feminists saw beauty as inseparable from an overarching complex of oppression in which restrictive gender roles, the capitalist beauty

³⁹² Dworkin (1974) 116.

³⁹³ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972) 28.

³⁹⁴ A YouGov survey for *Cosmopolitan* magazine reports that 'When asked which bikini line style is preferable for women, the most popular option among women and men under 30 is the 'hollywood' - all hair completely removed.' See Will Dahlgreen, 'Generation smooth: today's young people are taking private grooming further than ever', *YouGov*, 26 March 2016 <<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/03/26/trimming/>> [Accessed 9 January 2018].

³⁹⁵ Vajazzling – the act of embellishing the waxed mons pubis with decorative crystals – was brought into popular consciousness by American actress Jennifer Love Hewitt, and British reality show *The Only Way is Essex*. Vajazzle kits are available to purchase on Amazon.com and available at a range of beauty salons.

³⁹⁶ According to Sean Runacres and Paul L.Wood in 'Cosmetic Labiaplasty in an Adolescent Population', *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology*, 29, 3 (2016) 218-222, 'Labiaplasty (defined as the surgical reduction of the labia minora) is the most common procedure under the umbrella of female genital cosmetic surgery with the prevalence increasing over the past 10-15 years.'

³⁹⁷ 'Infrared Saunas, Detox Spas, and the Best Spots for Colonics - LA', *Goop* <<http://goop.com/city-guide/infrared-saunas-detox-spas-and-the-best-spots-for-colonics/los-angeles/los-angeles>> [Accessed 27 April 2017];

'The Ridiculous (But Awesome) Gift Guide', *Goop* <<http://goop.com/the-ridiculous-but-awesome-gift-guide/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

³⁹⁸ Kelsey Castañon, 'Khloé Kardashian Has An 8-Step Skin Routine – For Her Vagina', *Refinery* 29, 10 March 2017 <<http://www.refinery29.uk/2017/03/144943/khloe-kardashian-vagina-facial-beauty-routine>> [Accessed 9 January 2018].

industry, objectification, and the feeling that women were compelled to adhere to an unattainable physical standard, were interlinked. Many contemporary radical feminists maintain their critique of beauty practices (and also of objectification and the beauty industry), despite many other feminists not seeing it as a pressing issue, or the *most* pressing issue. Sheila Jeffreys' 2005 book, *Beauty and Misogyny* argues that Western beauty practices should be classified as 'harmful cultural practices' alongside female circumcision under UN law. Using visceral language, Jeffreys refers to the 'brutality' of beauty practices, and argues that 'the breaking of skin, spilling of blood and rearrangement or amputation of body parts'³⁹⁹ is worse than when the feminist critique of beauty culture began. This radical feminist critique of beauty practices has also been taken up by mainstream liberal feminists,⁴⁰⁰ and is linked to the public image of feminism as being unequivocally against, or in contrast to beauty practices.

Radical feminists then, tend to accept that many women engage with beauty practices, and see this as an understandable method of survival in a patriarchal culture, but refuse to see these practices as feminist or empowering in any way.⁴⁰¹ Hanisch says:

I think it's true that all of us have to play the game to some degree to even survive in the world, and we have to be careful about condemning each other for doing that, but to take the trappings of

³⁹⁹ Jeffreys, 1.

⁴⁰⁰ Peggy Orenstein, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011); Banyard; Walters.

⁴⁰¹ Hanisch; Jeffreys.

our oppression and try to redefine them as liberating I think is really reactionary.⁴⁰²

This sentiment is central to radical feminist critiques of third and fourth-wave feminisms. Radical feminists are wary of certain behaviours being classed as feminist, liberating or empowering - particularly beauty practices that have already been subjected to a rigorous second-wave critique, but also practices linked to 'sexualisation' or the sex industry like pole-dancing and pornography. For these feminists, women would be liberated by not having to engage with beauty practices at all, whereas liberal feminists would consider women liberated if they weren't *judged* on their non-engagement with beauty practices. Indeed this is the position taken up by Naomi Wolf in the conclusion to *The Beauty Myth*.

Decades after second-wave feminists originated their critique of beauty practices, Naomi Wolf was one of the first authors credited with using the term 'third-wave feminism'. Wolf's 1991 book *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* is considered a foundational text of third-wave feminism and one of the most incisive feminist critiques of beauty culture. Wolf argues that as women have gained increased legal rights and access to the public sphere, expectations of an idealised female beauty have also increased and intensified. She argues that these expectations psychologically damage women. Her book traverses eating disorders, cosmetic surgery, and Western society's obsession with youthfulness, saying that women suffer from self-hatred, physical obsession, terror of aging and a dread of lost control, due to the proliferation of millions of images of the idealised woman.

⁴⁰² Hanisch, 'Miss America Protest'.

The Beauty Myth's wide-reaching critique of the beauty industry, and of companies who hire and fire women based on their appearance, was an intervention into an era that positioned cosmetic surgery as a positive and apolitical action done by women 'for themselves'. Wolf appeared on Oprah Winfrey's eponymous TV show to discuss the book and advocated for a critical stance on beauty practices and consumerism to a room of women who were actively hostile to her position.⁴⁰³ Other panel members (including a female plastic surgeon) and the majority of the audience misunderstood and took great offense at Wolf's suggestion that women are obliged to be beautiful and aren't given enough information by plastic surgeons. At one point the audience boos and hisses when she tries to speak.

Markedly, *The Beauty Myth* doesn't refer to different standards of beauty based on race, class and sexual orientation. Wolf doesn't mention that images of ideal femininity are most often that of cis, straight, middle-class white women. In *The Black Beauty Myth* (2002), Sirena J. Riley outlines the different experiences black women have when it comes to imposed cultural beauty standards. She points out that American culture has an ideal black beauty (she mentions Tyra Banks, Destiny's Child, and Iman) that is as difficult to live up to as idealised white beauty.⁴⁰⁴ She also makes clear that black women don't necessarily want to look like white women, (thus removing, or displacing the white gaze) but have

⁴⁰³ The Beauty Myth - Oprah Winfrey - Dr. Helen Colen
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIKMFOFojNM>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁴⁰⁴ Sirena J. Riley, 'The Black Beauty Myth' in *Colonize This!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*, ed. by Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2002, repr. London: Hachette UK, 2010), 364.

standards imposed on them by their own communities,⁴⁰⁵ as well as by racist and colourist hierarchies of beauty. This is also stated by Shirley Tate, who disrupts the suggestion that black women aim for white beauty, and presents black beauty as performative, and as ‘an ongoing negotiation of aesthetics, stylization and politics’.⁴⁰⁶

In the same year that Wolf published *The Beauty Myth*, Judith Butler changed feminism with her seminal book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler introduced the idea of ‘gender performativity’, which argued that people perform their gender in line with their subconsciously learned cultural understandings of it. This idea of gender as socially constructed reiterated that gender is something we *do* rather than something we *are*, but Butler states that this ‘doing’ isn’t necessarily purposeful.⁴⁰⁷ Whilst not a theory specifically relating to beauty, Butler’s theory of performativity drastically changed feminist conceptions of gender so that we can now understand the Kardashians as performing a particular hegemonic culturally situated version of femininity, rather than genetically inheriting or biologically inhabiting it.

Third-wave and queer approaches to beauty focus on agency, gender performativity and creativity. For Baumgartner and Richards, embracing ‘girly’ culture, including makeup and stereotypically feminine interests can be a nod to a ‘joyous youth’ and a way of celebrating non-white male heterosexual

⁴⁰⁵ Riley, 364.

⁴⁰⁶ Shirley Anne Tate, *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2016) 1.

⁴⁰⁷ Butler, 33.

cultures.⁴⁰⁸ They comment that makeup can be ‘sexy, campy, ironic, or simply decorating ourselves’.⁴⁰⁹ Relatedly, The Riot Grrrl Manifesto, whilst not specifically about beauty, centres on a reclamation of the word and identity ‘girl’, and is a significant voice of this third-wave feminist attitude. The manifesto displaces white heterosexual male culture through celebration of music, community, books and politics that encourage women to support one another and develop themselves according to their own wishes.⁴¹⁰

Returning to beauty, in conversation with bell hooks, trans women of colour Laverne Cox and Janet Mock both defend their interactions with beauty culture, in opposition to hooks who maintains a stringent critique of hegemonic consumerist beauty practices. Cox points out that it’s important for her as a trans woman to be seen. She says, ‘I’ve sort of constructed myself in a way so that I don’t want to disappear’.⁴¹¹ For both of these women, visibility is part of their decision to present in a stylised feminine manner. Mock says:

For me to, pretty much, dress myself up in whatever way I want to, to don a hot purple lip, and to wear these heels and walk out and to claim my body...to prettify the way that I want to prettify it...there’s power in claiming that space. This little space that I have in this world. It’s mine. And so I feel, especially in a world that tells me that I shouldn’t exist, that I should remain silent, that I’m not attractive, that this little white woman’s skinny body

⁴⁰⁸ Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta [10th Anniversary Edition]: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Macmillan, 2010), 135-6.

⁴⁰⁹ Baumgardner and Richards, 136.

⁴¹⁰ Riot Grrrl Manifesto (1991) <http://onewarart.org/riot_grrrl_manifesto.htm> [Accessed 9 January 2018].

⁴¹¹ ‘Laverne Cox and Bell Hooks Had a Discussion About Gender and Pop Culture’, *Bitch Media* <<https://bitchmedia.org/post/laverne-cox-and-bell-hooks-had-a-discussion-about-gender-and-pop-culture>> [Accessed 30 October 2015].

is the ideal...I think that I will. I will don all the glamour, the glitter, that I want.⁴¹²

Zeba Blay asks why trans women should be expected to ‘subvert gender norms’ and ‘defy deep-seated standards of beauty’ more so than cis women;⁴¹³ indeed it’s worth considering whether any woman should be individually responsible for this. If we say women *shouldn’t* be individually responsible for defying beauty standards, does this exempt us from our complicity in a problematic system? If we say women *should* be responsible for subversion of ideal beauty, do we apply a blanket judgement on women from wildly different backgrounds and privileges? White cis privileged women may be in a safer position to challenge commodified beauty norms whereas queer women may be safer presenting as (hyper)feminine as they are at less danger of violence if they ‘pass’.⁴¹⁴ Furthermore, white cis privileged women may appropriate the styles and aesthetic cultures of non-white and/or queer women in their attempts to subvert beauty norms. Indeed, the Kardashian Jenners in their potential subversion of a white Eurocentric beauty norm have offensively donned hijabs, cornrows and dreadlocks, participated in blackface style photo shoots, posed in a wheelchair, and been celebrated for enhanced lips and large behinds in a way

⁴¹² The New School, *Bell Hooks - Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body* | Eugene Lang College <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJkohNROvzs>> [Accessed 23 October 2015].

⁴¹³ Zeba Blay, ‘The Impossible Expectations We Place On Celebrity Trans Women’, The Huffington Post <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/02/laverne-cox-caitlyn-jenner_n_7495364.html> [Accessed 31 October 2015]

⁴¹⁴ Jules Tamás Fütty in ‘Challenges Posed by Transgender - Passing within Ambiguities and Interrelations’, *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, 7 (2010) critiques the notion that trans people “choose” to pass, saying, ‘Most of the time, passing is not a ‘choice’ or a strategic positioning, but a precarious movement and often a question of survival.’ 67; Julia Serano, in *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007) argues that ‘passing’ is a “highly problematic term” as it is only used to apply to trans people, and assumes some sort of fraud or trickery. 176.

that has been seen as culturally appropriative.⁴¹⁵ It is because of these differences in female experience that a monolithic feminist approach to beauty (and indeed most things) is not sufficient.

Julia Serano argues that femininity is denigrated regardless of whether it is performed by ciswomen, transwomen or men. Serano argues that human characteristics are categorized by gender, and that this system is used to ‘undermine people who are feminine’.⁴¹⁶ Serano critiques the negative cultural connotations attached to feminine presentation, rather than feminine presentation itself. Extending this to beauty practices, judgements arise because of perceptions of make-up use, rather than the practice itself. Judith Butler, in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, says she wrote the book partly as a critique of tendencies in feminism to adhere to particular gender hierarchies. Almost twenty years before Serano defended femininity in *Whipping Girl* (2007), Butler stated that certain gendered expressions are seen as ‘false or derivative, and others, true and original’.⁴¹⁷

In agreement with Serano, Ulrika Dahl argues that femininity should not be theorized in relation to the male gaze, or as something imposed, superficial and secondary to masculinity.⁴¹⁸ She argues that femininity should not just be considered in terms of surface, as relating to white, respectable, middle-class

⁴¹⁵ An episode of a short-lived reality TV show called *Haters* – which pairs celebrities with people that hate them - features a black woman telling Kim Kardashian that she is unfairly praised for a body type that many women of colour are shamed for. Episode available on YouTube at ‘Kim Kardashian AMBUSHES Hater!!’ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8ph3cTjopE>> [Accessed 12 December 2017].

⁴¹⁶ Julia Serano, ‘Empowering Femininity’, *Ms Magazine*, 2014 <<http://msmagazine.com/blog/2014/07/28/empowering-femininity/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁴¹⁷ 1999 Preface available in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011) viii.

⁴¹⁸ Dahl, 61.

womanhood, or as solely to do with oppression. These queer theorists do not wish to uphold the gender binary, but rather express that all behaviours that are categorized as gendered can be taken up by anyone. For them, femininity should not only be about ciswomen, and should not only be understood in contrast to a binary masculinity.

Since this thesis figures complicity as a way of looking, I find it most pragmatic to both consider beauty practices as problematic (because of the industry and the narratives around beauty) and to wish to avoid constructing women who engage with and enjoy beauty practices as patriarchal dupes. I support various feminist critiques of beauty culture, and yet think beauty practices can tie into subversion of gender binaries, and reclamation of aspects of those binaries. Because individual beauty practices do not have inherent meaning, carrying out a particular practice does not make someone complicit in upholding the problematic aspects of the beauty system. Wearing make-up can be seen as conforming to traditional notions of femininity, which could be because of a belief in gender binaries (conscious, subconscious or unconscious), or in resistance to the dismissal of femininity. Make-up worn in resistance to the dismissal of femininity does not necessarily reflect that person's belief in innate femininity, or that they desire a continuation of a gender system predicated on labelling styles and behaviours as masculine or feminine. In short, people engage in beauty practices for numerous layered reasons.

This chapter does not condemn beauty practices in and of themselves. However, it does critique the justification of beauty practices through a postfeminist neoliberal rationality that encourages women to constantly fashion themselves

into culturally imposed ideals as a means of overall self-improvement. This rationality draws upon a culturally situated female beauty ideal that is fuelled by the capitalist needs of various industries, including advertising, fast fashion retailers, women's magazines, the beauty industry and cosmetic surgeons. Whilst I am not the first to undertake this critique, I attempt here to simultaneously view the Kardashians' beauty work as potentially positive and negative (though these terms are too dualistic). I use the Kardashian Jenners as a case study to exemplify and articulate this critique.

The Kardashians as Kommodity: Celebrity and Konsumption

Robert Kardashian, the now deceased patriarch of the Kardashian clan, was the great-grandchild of Armenian immigrants who arrived in the United States after fleeing the Armenian genocide. Robert became a lawyer and ultimately a wealthy business man, frequently socializing with celebrities and the elite of Los Angeles, where he got married and raised his family. Robert Kardashian became infamous when he renewed his legal licence in order to defend his friend and previous business partner O. J. Simpson, who was accused of murdering his wife Nicole Brown Simpson (who was close friends with Kris Jenner, then ex-wife of Robert). Robert Kardashian rose to notoriety within a discourse of complicity, and various members of his family have been inculcated in discourses of complicity throughout their careers. Most notably, Kim Kardashian is considered to be complicit with profiting from her sex tape –

potentially by releasing it herself – and Kris Jenner is considered complicit in profiting from her children, starting with the aforementioned sex tape.⁴¹⁹

The first season of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (KUWTK) in 2007 (E! Entertainment, 2007–) had Kim at the forefront (capitalizing on her tabloid traction at the time), and the first episode was centred on a Tyra Banks interview that discussed Kim’s sex tape. The rest of the family became famous from the flagship reality show, and from subsequent spin-offs, products and endorsements, all overseen by matriarch and manager Kris Jenner - referred to as the momager (a term Jenner trademarked in 2015). This continued steadily, and Season 13 (2017) focuses on all members of the family, as well as their partners, children, friends and employees. Whereas Kim was the first famous sibling, each of the family members is now branded and marketable in their own right. This is exemplified in their separate lifestyle apps, which capitalize on their individual aesthetics and interests. Postrel’s ‘aesthetic pluralism’ applies here, where there is not ‘a single standard of beauty’ but ‘increased claims of pleasure and self-expression’.⁴²⁰ For boho fashion, health tips and interior design, fans can download Kourtney’s app; for make-up tutorials and tips on organic dog food, they can download Kylie’s.

At the time of writing, the ‘blended family’ consists of momager Kris Jenner who is the mother of Kourtney, Kim, Khloé and Robert Jr (with ex-husband Robert Kardashian). Kris’s second ex-partner is Caitlyn Jenner, Olympic gold athlete

⁴¹⁹ Here I refer to the complicity of three members of the family, and am using the word in a slightly different sense for each of them, and in a way that’s different from other uses throughout the thesis. I have mentioned this complicity to demonstrate the way these family members are understood by the general public. The family have come to prominence amongst various discourses of complicity, and this contributes to their reputation as untrustworthy, cunning, or blameworthy.

⁴²⁰ Postrel in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* ed. by Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 7.

and parent to Kylie and Kendall. Eldest daughter Kourtney is separated from her long-term partner Scott Disick, who fathered her three children – Mason, Penelope and Reign. Kourtney gave birth on KUWTK twice and has appeared in every season as well as in several spin-offs. Kim got married on KUWTK and was divorced 72 days later. At the time of writing she is married to rapper Kanye West, has three children - North and Saint, and an as-yet unnamed daughter. Kim has been in every season of the flagship show, as well as in various spin-offs. Khloé is the third Kardashian daughter and is separated from her husband Lamar Odom, to whom she was married on KUWTK and starred with in their own spin-off about married life, *Khloé and Lamar* (2011-2012). Khloé is dating Canadian basketball player Tristan Thompson and announced her first pregnancy on Instagram in December 2017. Robert Jr is the only Kardashian son and has recently reappeared in KUWTK after a prolonged absence due to mental illness. He is now father to daughter Dream, his child with model Blac Chyna; Rob and Chyna featured in their own eponymous spin-off series (2016), and separated acrimoniously and publically before Dream was born. Chyna also has a child with youngest Jenner sibling Kylie's ex-boyfriend, rapper Tyga.

The youngest two siblings, Kylie and Kendall Jenner, were 10 and 12 years old when the first season of KUWTK aired, and are quickly catching up with their older siblings when it comes to fame and net worth. Kendall has modelled for many high fashion houses (including Chanel, Givenchy, Balmain and Marc Jacobs), and has been on the cover of *Vogue* multiple times. Kylie has a burgeoning make-up empire – Kylie Cosmetics – which regularly sells out in minutes, and she has drawn intense media interest as a result of her lip enhancement and changing body shape. In August 2017 Kylie's spin-off show

'Life of Kylie' premiered, and at the time of writing the star is rumoured to be pregnant. It is worth noting the tangled web of familial connections here, which lends itself to both binge-watching and occasional viewing in the same way soap operas traditionally do.

Between them, the family star in a host of reality TV shows; have clothing, beauty, hair extension and skincare lines; have their own perfumes and tanning products; star in lifestyle and game apps; write cookbooks; compile selfie books; and endorse a multitude of products, from teeth whiteners to breast enhancement creams to waist trainers. At the time of writing the family are estimated to be worth over \$480 million combined and dominate numerous media platforms;⁴²¹ they have a combined Instagram following of over 450 million followers, with both Kim and Kendall having had the most liked picture on Instagram ever, and Khloe's pregnancy announcement making the current Top 10.⁴²² Indeed, in light of Kanye West's announcement that he intends to run for president in 2020, it isn't totally inconceivable that the 15th series of *Keeping Up with The Kardashians* will be set in the White House and that Kim Kardashian will be First Lady of the United States.⁴²³

In terms of contemporary feminism, the sisters embody various contradictions and conflicts. They are overtly sexual and hyperfeminine, monetize their appearance and lifestyle in numerous ways, undergo intimate family moments on camera, and are excessive and materialistic. Simultaneously, the Kardashian-

⁴²¹ Combined net worth of Kris, Kourtney, Kim, Khloé, Rob, Caitlin, Kendall and Kylie calculated using Celebritynetworth.com in January 2018.

⁴²² Combined followers of Kris, Kourtney, Kim, Khloé, Caitlin, Kendall and Kylie (Rob's account was unverified at the time of calculating) in January 2018.

⁴²³ This seems increasingly more possible, considering the election of reality star Donald Trump to US President and former-model Melania Trump as First Lady, as well as Oprah Winfrey and Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson having expressed interest in running.

Jenners are financially and culturally powerful women who exude strength, and while this may not be politically feminist, it could be seen as symbolically or representationally feminist. That is to say, being rich and business-savvy does not make the siblings ideologically in tune with feminist politics, but the mere existence and presence of the family across such a huge swathe of media may be symbolically influential or empowering for some groups (I say this with reference to their hypersexual, hyperfeminine presentation).

Amanda Scheiner McClain describes Kardashian celebrity as ‘a brand unto itself’, stating that ‘they are not simply a family but a commodity’⁴²⁴ (even the family’s names – all beginning with the letter ‘K’, except for Rob and Caitlyn – operate as a branding technique). Scheiner McClain, following Turner, characterises Kardashian Jenner fame as being dependent upon, and functioning through, media discourse. In other words, the sisters’ fame is not based upon traditional celebrity talents (acting, singing, dancing, presenting) but on maintaining their brand and media presence. Scheiner McClain argues that celebrities reinforce hegemonic norms and standards, and that this combined with their role in identity construction ‘links individual identity to celebrity and consumerism’.⁴²⁵ Perhaps more so than other celebrities, and certainly in a different way than other celebrities, the Kardashians are intimately linked with capitalism; the Kardashian Jenner model is predicated on consumption and excess. Furthermore, many of the discourses surrounding the family encourage neoliberal rationality in a postfeminist context.

⁴²⁴ Amanda Scheiner McClain, *Keeping Up the Kardashian Brand: Celebrity, Materialism, and Sexuality* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013) 50.

⁴²⁵ Scheiner McClain, 42.

‘You are responsible for your own happiness’: Class and Race in Postfeminist Neoliberalism

Elizabeth Nathanson describes postfeminism as ‘a group of common attributes that coalesce in constructions of femininity in the period after second-wave feminism.’⁴²⁶ As stated in Chapter 1, these constructions of femininity include a conception of the body as property, a shift towards subjectification in representations of some women, a makeover paradigm, and an emphasis on self-surveillance.⁴²⁷ In *Interrogating Postfeminism* (2007), Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra stress that post-feminism ‘works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer’⁴²⁸ and ‘perpetuates woman as pinup’,⁴²⁹ both of which can be seen in the Kardashian brand. Significantly, Tasker and Negra say that post-feminism has ‘offered new rationales for guilt-free consumerism’, has ‘substantially’ re-energized beauty culture and has led to ‘an aggressive mainstreaming of elaborate and expensive beauty treatments to the middle-class’.⁴³⁰

Interrogating Postfeminism was published in 2007, and the introduction to the book states that feminism is ‘unspeakable within contemporary popular culture’.⁴³¹ Ten years later, shoppers can buy a sweatshirt with “Feminist” emblazoned across it in a range of high-street shops, or buy an embroidered “Feminist and Proud” hoop on Etsy. In a 2015 article, McRobbie acknowledges that the current cultural landscape is much more embracing of feminism,⁴³² but she also points to ‘a heightened form of self-regulation’, particularly for young

⁴²⁶ Elizabeth Nathanson, *Television and Postfeminist Housekeeping: No Time for Mother* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7.

⁴²⁷ Gill and Scharff, 4.

⁴²⁸ Tasker and Negra, 2.

⁴²⁹ Tasker and Negra, 3.

⁴³⁰ Tasker and Negra, 3.

⁴³¹ Tasker and Negra, 3.

⁴³² McRobbie ‘Notes on the Perfect’, 3.

women.⁴³³ Writing in 2016, Rosalind Gill gives ten reasons why post-feminism is still salient, despite the current popularity of more visible feminisms. She states that:

New cultural trends do not simply displace older or existing ones. A momentarily visible resurgence of interest in feminism should not lead us to the false conclusion that anti-feminist or post-feminist ideas no longer exist.⁴³⁴

Kim Kardashian is asked frequently whether she identifies as a feminist and replies ambiguously, often stating that she does not like labels.⁴³⁵ Her embrace of certain post-feminist characteristics (sexual empowerment and agency, identity through consumption, perpetual youth) and her simultaneous disavowal of feminism – with the suggestion that feminism is too extreme – is distinctly post-feminist, despite the current popularity of feminism across celebrity culture.

Gill describes post-feminism as ‘a patterned yet contradictory sensibility connected to other dominant formations such as neo-liberalism’,⁴³⁶ and indeed neo-liberalism is highly significant to the Kardashian approach to success. Neo-liberalism refers to a political rationality that, following Foucauldian notions of governmentality, is best understood as ‘[a] mode of governance encompassing

⁴³³ McRobbie ‘Notes on the Perfect’, 9.

⁴³⁴ Rosalind Gill, ‘Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism’, *Diffractions*, 6 (2016), 2.

⁴³⁵ For examples, see ‘All the Times Kim Kardashian Said She’s Not a Feminist (and the One Time She Said She Is)’, *E! News* <<http://www.eonline.com/uk/news/787923/all-the-times-kim-kardashian-said-she-s-not-a-feminist-and-the-one-time-she-said-she-is>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁴³⁶ Gill, ‘Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism’, 1-2.

but not limited to the state, and one that produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social'.⁴³⁷

The Kardashian Jenners have been described as 'almost a caricature of femininity and the female form'⁴³⁸ because of their hourglass figures, preference for tight designer clothing, heavy makeup and use of hair extensions and fake tan. This is commodified in their numerous endorsement deals, Instagram pictures, makeup tutorials, and magazine spreads; the sisters use social media and their reality shows as a means of publicity and self-branding. Whilst this commodification of their gender performance is undeniably entrepreneurial – a central tenet of capitalist individualism - it also perpetuates the neoliberal idea that the self itself can be commodified and monetised. Neoliberal governmentality extends economic rationale from the financial and political spheres into the cultural and personal ones. Individuals undertake surveillance and self-discipline in order to model themselves into the perfect prosumers. Khloé's 2015 book *Strong Looks Better Naked* expresses many sentiments of this nature. Via sloganesque statements in her book, Khloé focuses on the individual as the source and site for life improvement, saying: 'Remember the only person you need to be better than is the you of yesterday',⁴³⁹ 'You are responsible for your own happiness',⁴⁴⁰ and 'Believe in yourself and the dreams will come true.'⁴⁴¹ Khloé's fitness makeover show *Revenge Body* (E! Entertainment, 2017-) also relies upon highly individualised transformative

⁴³⁷ Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, repr. 2009), 37.

⁴³⁸ Scheiner McClain, 51.

⁴³⁹ Khloé Kardashian, *Strong Looks Better Naked* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 35.

⁴⁴⁰ Kardashian, 117.

⁴⁴¹ Kardashian, 130.

journeys, facilitated by Kardashian contacts and advice, but achieved via individual hard work and motivation.

Additionally, with the release of their lifestyle apps in 2015, the sisters more explicitly monetise their beauty-work as they charge a monthly fee for access to makeup tutorials, workouts and style tips. Kim's extremely popular game 'Kim Kardashian Hollywood' monetises glamour labour by encouraging players to win stars by changing outfits regularly, attending parties, and networking,⁴⁴² Kylie oversees a makeup empire that E! reports as being worth \$420 million,⁴⁴³ and Kim launched makeup line KKW Beauty in 2017. Whilst the sisters acknowledge their glam teams of makeup artists, hairdressers, and stylists, their worked-at beauty reifies postfeminist neoliberal narratives of self-improvement through physical appearance and sexiness. That is, the fact they are constantly seen in curated fashion and makeup looks, and are engaged in multiple beauty and fashion projects (their own, or endorsements and modelling for other brands) reinforces the notion that wealth and success is inextricably tied up with a particular physical appearance that is achievable through consumption.

It is of course highly significant that the sisters embody hegemonic ideals of femininity, and also crucial that they themselves have contributed to the hegemonic ideal of femininity for other women. The siblings' (Kim, Kourtney, Khloé, Kylie) endorsement of Waist Gang waist trainers (thick latex corsets designed to compress the waist, 'detoxify' and lessen food intake) encourages

⁴⁴² In 2016 *Fortune* reported that the game has made \$100 million since its launch in 2014. See Leena Rao, 'Here's How Much Kim Kardashian's Hit Game Has Made' *Fortune*, 19 February 2016 <<http://fortune.com/2016/02/19/kardashian-game-revenue/>> [Accessed 18 December 2017].

⁴⁴³ Corrine Heller, 'Kylie Jenner's Cosmetics Company Is Worth \$420 Million, Kris Jenner Says', *E Online*, 9 August 2017 <<http://www.eonline.com/uk/news/872446/kylie-jenner-s-cosmetics-company-is-worth-420-million-kris-jenner-says>> [Accessed 10 January 2018].

the body shape they have popularized, and the consumption and discipline associated with it. By promoting this product, they sustain a consumerist beauty myth that is intimately tied up with industries that profit from women's self-doubt. Through this endorsement, the sisters are complicit in perpetuating culturally imposed ideals of female beauty, even if they have also slightly changed the aesthetic of that ideal.⁴⁴⁴ Postfeminist neoliberalism interacts with consumerist discourses so that consumption becomes a method for creating and disciplining the self. The Kardashian Jenners don't just do this themselves, but through their endorsement of beauty-related products make money from encouraging bodily self-discipline in others. Additionally, in *KUWTK*, the sisters reinforce the link between bodily self-improvement and confidence, happiness and success.

Additionally, the sisters are able to reach a huge audience because of their ability to slip between categories of race, class and sexuality. Because of the four elder siblings' Armenian heritage, the family are often framed as exotic, and inhabit a white/non-white identity.⁴⁴⁵ In a *Time* op-ed in 2015 Kim wrote about the importance and centrality of her ethnic heritage during her childhood, where her father would speak passionately about Armenian history and culture,

⁴⁴⁴ As short, curvy women (particularly Kim and Kourtney), the Kardashians represent a body type quite different than that popularised by Kim's old friend Paris Hilton, and other noughties celebrities such as Nicole Richie.

⁴⁴⁵ Sesali B argues that Kim Kardashian is marketed to black women, and that she profits from a body type that black women have been traditionally shamed for. See Sesali B, 'Kim Kardashian: A one-sided analysis of the not black girl we love and hate', *Feministing*, 27 February 2013 <<http://feministing.com/2013/02/27/kim-kardashian-a-one-sided-analysis-of-the-not-black-girl-we-love-and-hate/>> [Accessed 18 December 2017]; In various photo shoots and personal photographs, as well as in their business ventures, the siblings profit from a cultivated ethnic aesthetic. This is most commonly African-American, but also Chola/Chicana.

and urge his children never to change their name.⁴⁴⁶ Kim's notorious #BreakTheInternet shoot for *Paper* magazine spurred many op-eds and blog posts about the racist aspects of the images.⁴⁴⁷ The photographer, Jean-Paul Goude, is known for taking dehumanising and fetishizing images of black women, and the photo on which Kim's shoot was based depicted a squatting naked black woman and was featured in a book entitled 'Jungle Fever'. Goude also took photos of then girlfriend Grace Jones, including one of her naked in a cage with raw meat. Furthermore, critics pointed out similarities between Kim's #BreakTheInternet shoot and the images and story of South African woman Saartjie Baartman, who was paraded as a freak in Victorian England because of her large buttocks. In articles about these images, some writers referred to Kim as a woman of colour, and others did not. Notably, writers question whether her racial self-identification matters when her body is read as non-white.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ Kim Kardashian West, 'Kim Kardashian West: Armenian Genocide Victims 'Should Never Be Forgotten'', *Time*, 24 April 2015 <<http://time.com/3835074/kim-kardashian-west-armenian-genocide/>> [Accessed 18 December 2017].

⁴⁴⁷ See Kat George, 'Kim Kardashian's Paper Magazine Shoot Has An Insanely Troubling Racial Problem That You Probably Have No Idea About' <<https://www.bustle.com/articles/49066-kim-kardashians-paper-magazine-shoot-has-an-insanely-troubling-racial-problem-that-you-probably-have-no>> [Accessed 27 April 2017];

Blue Telusma, 'Kim Kardashian Doesn't Realize She's the Butt of an Old Racial Joke', *The Griot*, <<http://thegriot.com/2014/11/12/kim-kardashian-butt/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017];

'The Big Problem With Kim Kardashian's Butt Photos Nobody Is Talking About' <<https://mic.com/articles/104188/the-big-problem-with-kim-kardashian-s-photos-nobody-is-talking-about>> [Accessed 27 April 2017];

Christina Montford, '5 Things That Are Wrong with Kim Kardashian's 'Break the Internet' Photos', *Atlanta Black Star*, 2014 <<http://atlantablackstar.com/2014/11/18/5-things-that-are-wrong-with-kim-kardashians-break-the-internet-photos/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁴⁴⁸ For examples of this, see 'What the Debate over Kim Kardashian Says about the Changing Face of Race in America', *The Daily Dot*, 2015 <<https://www.dailydot.com/via/kim-kardashian-race-changing-america/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].



Speaking about Kim, Alexandra Sastre says:

The portrayal of Kardashian's body imbricates her sexuality, her Armenian heritage and her visibility on reality television's platform, and Kardashian herself consistently flattens the interplay between race, class and sexuality in her image in order to position herself as both an accessible and unique commodity in the marketplace of personality.⁴⁴⁹

In terms of class, the family can be read as being part of both high and low culture. Their associations with reality TV, which is seen as the ultimate in low culture, renders them 'trashy' in the eyes of many (Daily Mail commenters refer to the family as the KarTRASHians), especially combined with their perceived hypersexuality, Kim's sex tape, their use of plastic surgery, and Kim's short marriage with then NBA player Kris Humphries. Conversely, the family were wealthy before they were famous, and the children were educated at expensive private schools and raised in L.A mansions. On the one hand they are seen as

⁴⁴⁹ Alexandra Sastre, 'Hottentot in the Age of Reality TV: Sexuality, Race, and Kim Kardashian's Visible Body', *Celebrity Studies*, 5.1-2 (2014), 124.

opportunists who don't deserve their fame, and on the other they wear custom-made high fashion on a daily business, attend the MET Gala, and travel by private jet. This ability to be seen as both high and low culture, and as white and non-white extends the Kardashian's target audience and enables them to inhabit multiple marketplaces. Whilst the Kardashians certainly weren't the first to embrace neoliberal discourses of self-improvement via self-branding and beauty-work, their intense media presence, and plastic class and race, contribute significantly to the normalization of self-commodification in a postfeminist context. Their ability to reach an enormous audience, as well as the intimacy garnered via reality TV and social media, glamorises the logics they draw upon to justify their beauty-work. I outline these logics in the episode analysis later in the chapter, but first consider the significance of the siblings' hyperfemininity and how it plays into public perceptions of them.

The Kardashian Curse: Hyperfemininity, Femmephobia, and Gendered Hierarchies

Rather than simply being recipients of the male gaze, the Kardashian-Jenner sisters elicit the gaze of anyone who will look. They are the living, breathing embodiments of post-feminist sensibility – 'knowing, active and desiring sexual subjects', rather than passive objects.⁴⁵⁰ They are beautiful, trade primarily on this beauty under the family brand, and have creative control of these representations as producers of their TV shows and decision makers in their branded merchandise, lifestyle products and social media. This self-subjectification is epitomized by Kim's selfie book, made entirely of selfies taken over several decades. The book includes a collection of naked pictures that Kim had not intended to share, but included after the pictures were leaked online;

⁴⁵⁰ Gill, 'From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification'.

Kim incorporates unforeseen exposure and re-releases it for her own profit (something she may also have done in the past with her sex tape).

Self-subjectification, referred to more pejoratively as self-objectification, is often portrayed as the ultimate female complicity – as women sexualising themselves in ways that were heavily critiqued by second-wave feminists. This position obscures the potential of subversion or resistance. If women are traditionally portrayed in sexual terms, does this mean no woman can portray *herself* in such terms, or that she always has to do so outside of the proscribed beauty ideal?

Arguably, Nicki Minaj and Beyoncé's sexual self-presentation is a refutation of the idea that to be sexual is to be oppressed, and it's significant that they present themselves on their own terms. Minaj and Knowles' sexuality may be considered subversive by black women, but as capitulating to stereotypes when viewed by white men. Images of women are often discussed as being objects that are looked at - that women are made objects of, or make objects of themselves - but self-subjectified images can address the male gaze, look back at the gaze, and potentially reclaim the gaze (I'm thinking of Nicki Minaj's infamous Anaconda cover). Feona Attwood, talking about cam-girls, refers to 'the controlled forms of visibility' they choose, and says this is 'a much more empowering position than submitting to traditional forms of the gaze'.⁴⁵¹

Kim's selfie book, entitled *Selfish* (2015), does not submit to traditional forms of the gaze. In her excellent analysis of the book, Lauren O'Neill (2015) talks about how the cover of *Selfish* is a selfie that shows Kim's arms positioned to show she is taking the photo, which reiterates her part in constructing the images and the text itself. *Selfish* could be dismissed as a vain woman

⁴⁵¹ Attwood in Gill and Scharff, 72.

capitalizing on her beauty (and the title of the collection is a nod to this), but it is a collection of images taken by a woman of her own face and body; it is a collection of self-portraits in an innovative form, in an unusual medium, and many of the pictures were taken decades before selfies were commonplace. O'Neill positions the book as a distinctly feminized, and indeed feminist, intervention into the patriarchal western canon.⁴⁵² For O'Neill, Kim's selfies are acts of self-love, and her 'joy' at her own body is radical in a culture that encourages bodily fixation but disparages vanity. Kim and the other family members present themselves as being worthy of being looked at, and so viewing this as automatically complicitous negates the ways we look at women like Kim, and texts like *Selfish*.



⁴⁵² Lauren O'Neill, 'A Portrait of the Artist On Fleek: Self-Awareness, Canonicity, Feminism and Kim Kardashian's 'Selfish'' <<https://hiyalauren.com/2015/06/02/a-portrait-of-the-artist-on-fleek-self-awareness-canonicity-feminism-and-kim-kardashians-selfish/>> [Accessed 23 September 2016].

It is relevant then to consider who reads the Kardashians, and whose reading is heard. In other words, the Kardashian-Jenners are frequently disparaged (they have been publically insulted by Jason Statham, Jonah Hill, Billy Connolly, Charlie Sheen, Jon Hamm, Sinead O'Connor and Rebel Wilson, among others) on the basis of their hypersexual and hyperfeminine presentation, but to position them as complicit with patriarchal constructions of womanhood belittles the groups that consume Kardashian media.

Devaluing the Kardashians on the basis of their gender presentation also devalues those who present in the same way. These groups (including cis women and men, trans women and men, and genderqueer and non-binary people) are often *already* disparaged and undervalued based on assumptions about the way they dress, or on their interactions with beauty culture. By considering some gender presentations on a certain group of bodies as normative, mainstream and therefore complicit, we construct a binary where certain readable alternative-ness is considered culturally worthy and rebellious, and certain readable sexualised self-presentations are considered as operating under false consciousness. In truth, both are performances, constructed and received in a variety of ways by different groups.

The reading of the Kardashians that gets most media space is that of a perplexed and perturbed masculine voice; the family come to stand for a whole host of alleged cultural sins. TV critic Vinnie Mancuso describes KUWTK as 'an abomination to the English language' and declares that watching one episode gave him 'an infectious disease'.⁴⁵³ Journalist Piers Morgan made sure to

⁴⁵³ Vinnie Mancuso, 'I Watched 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' for the First Time, a Review' <<http://observer.com/2015/02/i-watched-keeping-up-with-the-kardashians-for-the-first-time-a-review/>> [Accessed 23 September 2016].

reference Kim's age and status as a mother when he warned her of 'becoming an ageing parody' after she posted a nude selfie on Twitter.⁴⁵⁴ This ultimately obscures the legions of fans who thoroughly enjoy engaging with the Kardashian-Jenner empire for a variety of reasons, and contributes to the dismissal of cultural products coded as feminine. As mentioned above, the Kardashian family are dismissed because of their physical hyperfemininity, and also because of their reality TV credentials, hypervisibility, supposed vanity and ability to harness and maintain renown by non-respectable means, all of which are coded as feminine.

The Kardashians' hyperfemininity is positioned as threatening to men, particularly in online memes about the situation of the male members of the family. It is often suggested that the women emasculate the men – a narrative that has transphobically been applied to Caitlyn's transition. One meme reads, 'The Kardashians turned Scott into an alcoholic, Lamar into a crackhead and Bruce into a woman. I can't wait to see what happens to Kanye!!'⁴⁵⁵ An online list entitled '12 men burned by the Kardashian Curse' lists ex-boyfriends Reggie Bush, Kris Humphries and Tyga as 'victims' of the siblings,⁴⁵⁶ and the 2 November 2015 edition of *Star* magazine features Kim, Khloé, Kourtney and Kris dressed in black with the headline 'Black widows: How the Kardashians

⁴⁵⁴ Piers Morgan, 'You've still got a great body Kim, but if you're really so successful, so secure and so rich why do you still feel the need to pose nude at 35?' <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3482086/PIERS-MORGAN-ve-got-great-body-Kim-really-successful-secure-rich-feel-need-pose-nude-35.html?ito=social-twitter_dailymailceleb> [Accessed 23 September 2016].

⁴⁵⁵ Meme Generator <<https://memegenerator.net/instance/62846964>> [Accessed 23 September 2016].

⁴⁵⁶ Lee Vann, '12 Men Burned By the Kardashian Curse' <<http://hiphopwired.com/2015/09/20/12-men-burned-by-the-kardashian-curse/>> [Accessed 23 September 2016].

destroyed their men'.⁴⁵⁷ The sisters are somehow endowed with the power to ruin careers, and to cause mental illness and addiction. Season 12, Episode 6 of *KUWTK* addresses this narrative directly, showing Kourtney's ex-partner Scott (who has a long history of substance abuse) as he seeks out a psychic to uncover whether he has the 'Kardashian Curse'. The use of the word 'curse' is not only alliterative, but connotes a coven of witches, spurning the men who have wronged them. The sisters' sexuality, glamour and hyperfemininity are spun into an image of them as cannibalistic spiders, pairing with men just to eat them alive.



⁴⁵⁷ Front Cover, *Star*, 2 November 2015 <<http://worldofmagazines.net/star-magazine-2-november-2015/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

Reality TV is coded as feminine because it is considered frivolous and – paradoxically – artificial.⁴⁵⁸ Brenda Weber states that ‘the tensions between high and low [...] are always already gendered’, explaining, ‘[g]reat art is largely considered ‘great’ not because of its privilege but because of its presumed ‘intrinsic worthiness’, which allows aesthetics to fly under the banner of gender-neutrality’.⁴⁵⁹ Works and cultural products considered worthy of critical attention are often created by or feature men (particularly white, cisgendered, straight men), and so by extension, works created by and featuring women are either pigeonholed as just for women (chick lit, rom-coms, soap operas) or considered less culturally important. Weber says that reality TV has a subordinate role in ‘a clearly articulated hierarchy of aesthetics that has been both established and maintained through centuries of tradition grounded in the codes of domination and privilege’.⁴⁶⁰ A favourite tabloid narrative that model Kendall wants to leave the family show and is embarrassed by her family, exemplifies the divide between the world of high fashion and the perceived shame of being associated with reality TV.⁴⁶¹ Likewise, Kendall has commented

⁴⁵⁸ In this context I refer broadly to ‘reality’-based programming, from *The X Factor* to *Big Brother* to *Made in Chelsea*, but there are of course considerable differences at play across the genre.

⁴⁵⁹ Brenda R. Weber, *Reality Gendervision: Sexuality and Gender on Transatlantic Reality Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 14.

⁴⁶⁰ Weber, 16.

⁴⁶¹ This narrative appears across a variety of tabloids and gossip websites, and has been reported for years but never realised. For examples see Erin Silvia, ‘Kendall Jenner Limiting Her ‘KUWTK’ Appearances: Why You’ll Barely See Her On TV’, *Hollywood Life*, 26 May 2017 <<http://hollywoodlife.com/2017/05/26/kendall-jenner-leaving-reality-tv-quitting-kuwtk-show/>> [Accessed 18 December 2017];

George Stark, ‘Is Kendall quitting? Jenner ‘advised to leave Keeping Up With The Kardashians if she wants to pursue modelling’, *Daily Mail*, 21 February 2014

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2565070/Kendall-Jenner-advised-leave-Keeping-Up-With-The-Kardashians.html#ixzz51cVm7EEN> [Accessed 18 December 2017];

Simi John, ‘Kendall Jenner to Quit Keeping Up With The Kardashians? Reality Star ‘Doesn’t Want to be Associated with Them Anymore’ *International Business Times*, 31 July 2014 <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/kendall-jenner-quit-keeping-kardashians-reality-star-doesnt-want-be-associated-them-1459179>> [Accessed 18 December 2017].

herself that her reality background has worked against her in the world of high fashion, and has asked family members not to attend her shows.⁴⁶²

Notably, Kardashian-Jenner beauty is largely enhanced, purchased or worked upon, as opposed to ‘natural’ – though ‘natural’ beauty performances are just as constructed. The sisters are rarely seen without full hair and make-up, often wear hair extensions and fake tan, and dress in carefully curated high fashion looks. Within the family itself, there is a hierarchy of respectability based on certain members’ beauty presentation. Kendall is frequently considered more respectable or ‘normal’ because of her high fashion career and more ‘natural’ appearance; she is also the most ‘white’ sister, both in terms of skin colour and perceived ethnicity. Kendall does not wear hair extensions, has a more high fashion aesthetic, and is fairly low-key and sporty on *KUWTK*. Kendall’s professional interaction with highbrow designers and catwalk fashion is more highly regarded than Kylie’s more classed and raced aesthetic and branding (Kylie and Khloé both appropriate styles that are associated with African-American culture, including cornrows, grills, large hoop earrings and long pointed nails).⁴⁶³ Similarly, Kourtney, with her somewhat pared-down aesthetic and domestic storylines, does not attract as much sensationalist media coverage based on appearance as Kim and Kylie.⁴⁶⁴ Kim and Kylie are the most popular family members on social media,⁴⁶⁵ and the most notorious of the sisters; I

⁴⁶² Véronique Hyland, ‘Kendall Jenner Wants to Be Taken Seriously’, *The Cut*, 28 July 2014 <<https://www.thecut.com/2014/07/kendall-jenner-wants-to-be-taken-seriously.html>> [Accessed 18 December 2017].

⁴⁶³ I have referred to this as a classed and raced aesthetic because the siblings inhabit an aesthetic that is *already* classed and raced. This doesn’t excuse their appropriation, but seeks to reiterate that these styles are already seen through a prism of class and race.

⁴⁶⁴ Though Kourtney is the subject of ongoing speculation about her romantic life.

⁴⁶⁵ As of April 2017, Kim has 98.2m Instagram followers, and Kylie has 91.2m.

argue that this is related directly to their perceived sexuality and their visibly enhanced beauty.

The Kardashians then are subject to value judgements about their overall aims, goals and abilities based on their beauty aesthetic and the genre through which they've gained most fame. Dismissal of Kardashian Jenner beauty-work on the basis of their hyperfemininity derives from sexist and femmophobic judgements based on the value of certain types of celebrity work, genres, and gender performances.

The following section undertakes an analysis of an episode of KUWTK as a way of illustrating some of the discourses already mentioned in the chapter.

'The lips, they changed her life': Lip Service

Season 10, Episode 9 of KUWTK is entitled 'Lip Service' and deals with Kylie's lip-fillers. I have chosen to analyse this episode because it focuses explicitly on beauty work and presents it as directly connected to popularity. The episode is filled with images of and allusions to the body, media, technology and taste. The narrative arc of the episode is that Kylie has 'insecurities' and has not admitted publicly to her lip procedure, and that her sisters will help her come clean, or 'be honest' about it, so that she eventually feels comfortable, has self-esteem and is able to be 'authentic'. Throughout the episode, Kylie's lips are directly linked to her increase in popularity and attractiveness. This storyline works by itself, but is enhanced by the fact that viewers, because of their interaction with her social media, and with magazines and celebrity news, will know that in 'real life' Kylie has become much more popular. In the show, bodily self-improvement is presented as the direct cause of Kylie's increased celebrity. Neoliberal

discourses of self-improvement, self-management and doing things for yourself are at work throughout this episode.



The family frequently espouse the belief that hard work and not ‘being lazy’ will lead to a better body, career and outlook. In an interview with *Cosmopolitan*, Kim says:

If I don't feel confident about my body, I'm not going to sit at home and feel sorry for myself and not do something about it. It's all about taking action and not being lazy. So you do the work, whether it's fitness or whatever.⁴⁶⁶

In reference to her brother's ongoing mental illness, in Season 9, Episode 14, Kim says, 'All right, you complain, you don't like it, get up and do something about it', and in her book (as mentioned previously), Khloé says, ‘You are responsible for your own happiness’,⁴⁶⁷ and ‘Believe in yourself and the dreams will come true’.⁴⁶⁸ This sentiment is prominent across the Kardashian brand.

The discourse of autonomy that the family propagate mythologizes the

⁴⁶⁶ Jo Usmar, ‘Kim Kardashian: ‘I want to be more of a private person’
<<http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/us-gossip/kim-kardashian-tells-cosmopolitan-uk-780539>>
[Accessed 23 September 2016].

⁴⁶⁷ Kardashian, 117.

⁴⁶⁸ Kardashian, 130.

independent self but disguises the extent to which its expression is dependent on personal wealth or being born into a particular social class or ethnic group. That is, the family draw upon meritocratic narratives which imply anyone, regardless of their economic or societal situation, can attain any goal through sheer will and dedication; clearly this obscures the family's immense privilege, and employs entrepreneurial logics that encourage individuals to 'work' toward their own wellbeing without thought for wider structural conditions.

'Lip Service' opens with Scott (Kourtney's ex-long term partner, and father to her three children) and Kim sitting in a restaurant taking a selfie. They refer to tabloid rumours about them and speculate about when middle-age begins. Within thirty seconds, the themes of image, age, body anxiety, technology and media have been introduced. In this scene, and throughout the episode, the family show each other images on their phones from social media or gossip websites. This reiterates the visibility of the family, the mediated nature of their personal lives, and the centrality of images in their lives - specifically reflexive images that depict a constructed self.⁴⁶⁹ The family are consumed even by each other. Kim asks Scott if he thinks people are prettier 'these days'. Scott says that they are, and refers to greater availability of body improvement procedures and practices. The conversation goes as follows:

Scott: You can go pimp your ride anywhere in town...walk in, ten minutes later, you're prettier

Kim: Yesssss

[...]

Scott: Imagine before fake boobs

Kim: Yesssss. When did fake boobs start?

Scott: I don't know but thank God, knock on wood'

Kim: Yeah

⁴⁶⁹ In the most recent season of *KUWTK*, the family's Snapchats are embedded into the episode as transitions between scenes.

Scott: Saggy old boobs hanging to the ground, no thanks, I'll pass,
 keep it moving ladies
 Kim: Yesssss, Yesssss

The sentiment expressed in this interaction is precisely what second-wave feminists railed against when they developed critiques of sexist beauty culture. In this example, fake breasts are the norm, and in contrast, unenhanced breasts are considered disgusting and 'saggy'. The setting of this scene in a restaurant, as well as the light-hearted tone of the cold open (which serves as a vignette), functions to present Kim's and Scott's opinions as commonplace and casual, and introduces the discourse and mind-set that permeate the rest of the episode. Cosmetic surgery is introduced as a modern technology that facilitates an already existing and incontrovertible desire for a normative female body.

After the cold-open and opening credits, there is a scene of Khloé, Kendall and Kim visiting a cosmetic dermatologist so that Khloé can undergo laser treatment for her stretchmarks and cellulite. Kim greets the doctor with a hug when he arrives, and Kendall and Kim eat cake and drink tea from a trolley brought in for them. It transpires that Kim does not need anything done, and is just there to observe. The sisters' conversation about the procedure could be one about shopping or going to a restaurant. Kim asks, 'What are you guys getting first?' and then explains she cannot have anything done because she has just had a spray tan. Khloé asks, 'So you're just here to enjoy the ride?' which Kim affirms. This normalization of cosmetic surgery is reaffirmed by cutaway confessional shots where the sisters justify getting treatments because they are always in the public eye. Dance music plays over the last few shots of this scene, presenting laser surgery as fun, young and incidental. The sisters are presented as 'vital, youthful, and playful' – Negra and Tasker's description of the 'post-feminist

heroine’ – as comedy is also injected into the scene several times;⁴⁷⁰ Khloé can be heard shouting ‘stings like a mother!’ and Kim jokes about the size of Khloé’s backside.

A later scene shows Kim, Khloé and Kendall eating lunch and commenting on Kylie’s lips. The phrase ‘they changed her life’ is repeated multiple times by the sisters. Kim looks at ‘before and after’ images of Kylie on her phone, which sustains the themes of screen, media and visibility in this episode (and throughout the series). This peer-surveillance (as well as self-surveillance) has been highlighted by Gill as a facet of post-feminism and is ongoing throughout the reality series.⁴⁷¹ Kim and Khloé specifically pinpoint Kylie’s fame, coolness and desirability to one body part: ‘the lips, they changed her life’. Kylie’s coming of age, or womanhood, is directly linked with physical changes (sexualized, hyperfeminine, cosmetically enhanced changes), which are directly connected to her increased celebrity. Beauty is presented through the makeover as ‘both therapeutic and transformative’, creating an outcome that is ‘simultaneously exploitative, sentimental, and compelling’.⁴⁷² Kendall interrupts her older sisters, voicing her opinion that Kylie has ‘gone too far’. This begins Kendall’s positioning as the voice of reason, or the dissenting sister, in relation to cosmetic surgery and bodily improvement. This also reinforces the theme of *appropriate* body modification; the sisters do not endorse any or all bodily change, but just that which is appropriate in achieving a particular marketable aesthetic.

⁴⁷⁰ Negra and Tasker, 9.

⁴⁷¹ Gill, ‘Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism’, 4.

⁴⁷² Negra and Tasker, 10.

In cutaway confessionals, the sisters habitually refer to ‘insecurities’ when talking about their physical appearances, and position their decision to undergo cosmetic work as ‘natural’. Khloé says, ‘When you’re photographed all the time, it’s natural to have insecurities or want to change certain things about yourself’. This presentation of body work as ‘natural’ portrays it as expected, and infers that personality or self-esteem changes stem from physical enhancement. When the sisters talk about ‘insecurities’, they are always pinned to the individual. Kim says, ‘We all have insecurities’, and Kylie says, ‘It’s an insecurity of mine’ (about her lips). Insecurities are seen as imposed by outside forces, but as belonging to, and the responsibility of, the individual.

The sisters present themselves as victims of the media gaze throughout, despite their particular celebrity depending upon exposure and visibility (epitomized by their numerous reality TV shows, but also by their lifestyle apps and heavy use of social media). Shots of phone screens, flashing cameras, red carpets and paparazzi in the episode emphasize how much the family are viewed and consumed as image products, even by each other. In a 2015 interview with *Interview* magazine, Kylie reveals the psychological effects that growing up in the public eye has had on her:

I wake up every morning at, like, seven or eight because I think that there's a bad story about me, and I have to check. My worst fear is waking up and finding something bad about me on the internet.⁴⁷³

In the episode, Kylie says, ‘Everyone always picks us apart’, ‘People are so quick to judge me on everything’ and ‘We have all eyes on us all the time’. This latter

⁴⁷³ Chris Wallace, ‘Kylie Jenner’ <<http://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/kylie-jenner>> [Accessed 23 September 2016].

statement both describes the predicament the family are in – that they are followed by paparazzi constantly and have their images and actions dissected by the entertainment media – and presumably their desired state, as constant buzz translates into steady profit and media opportunities. This predicament encapsulates what is paradoxical about complicity: in terms of exposure, and pressure to be always physically perfect, the family both suffers from and benefits from being the intense focus of media attention.

The sisters are simultaneously victims of the media and imposed beauty standards, and reliant upon and perpetrators of the media and imposed beauty standards. They insinuate that the media causes them to do body work, not because of their consumption of beauty images (the more common narrative), but because they are the subject of those images. There is no mention of their complicity in this system -that they promote the idea that hegemonic female attractiveness is linked to personal happiness and success. There is no suggestion of resistance, subversion or defiance, but just unquestioning adherence to the norm, even if they are part of creating that norm.

The lack of language regarding defiance or subversion in *KUWTK* is notable because part of the appeal of the Kardashians is their ability to expand the bounds of normativity to encompass what would previously have been regarded as excessive or transgressive. They have subverted a norm into another norm in which they are the epitome of the new norm, and yet have to keep living up to, and pushing the boundaries of this norm. Elizabeth Wissinger claims that Kim ‘exemplifies the process by which the fashionably cool’s ever-morphing ideal

seduces publics into chasing it'.⁴⁷⁴ Where the beauty myth used to uphold a 'perfect' goal for women to attain, in postfeminist neoliberalism, the goal is the process of change itself – women are expected to always be in a state of self-disciplined transformation. The Kardashians, with their numerous faces, styles and phases, perfectly embody this heralding of endless makeovers.

It's worth noting that Kylie has had less choice in this lifestyle and career than the other family members (except Kendall who is two years older). Kylie has been on *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* since she was 10 years old, and has been expected to follow the same celebrity career trajectories as her older siblings. This is alluded to in interviews Kylie has given, and she has increasingly spoken about suffering from anxiety from living in the public gaze, and about being bullied. Indeed this episode couches her lip surgery in the context of her age and the difficulties associated with being a teenager. In the 2015 interview for *Interview* magazine (which was criticised because Kylie posed in a wheelchair), she admits she acts 'flashier' because that's what fans want. She also says:

I feel like I'm way too young to wear such heavy makeup all the time. It's just bad for your skin, but I'm always doing photo shoots or red carpets and events, so I just obviously want to look good. And I don't know, I like hiking. I used to do a lot of hiking when I wasn't as busy. I had a lot of anxiety when I was younger, so I would just run to this hill path in the back of my mom's house and listen to Jack Johnson. I would listen to Jack Johnson and stare at the sky until my anxiety went away.⁴⁷⁵

Kylie is still extremely powerful in terms of her financial and cultural capital, and I don't suggest she be excused for posing for images that are racist or

⁴⁷⁴ Wissinger Elizabeth, 'Glamour labour in the Age of Kardashian' *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty*, 7, 2 (2016) 141-152.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Kylie Jenner', Interview Magazine <<http://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/kylie-jenner>> [Accessed 22 January 2016]

ableist, but in terms of beauty and neoliberalism, compared with her siblings, she is conforming to a norm that was popularised by her older sisters, and filmed in her childhood home from when she was ten years old. It's notable too that Kylie emulates Kim's aesthetic more than any other, and is positioned in the press as 'taking over' her older sister's place in the limelight. Without suggesting that Kylie didn't make the choice herself to have the surgery, it is possible to see her decision as a young woman in a highly unusual situation responding to a lifestyle foisted upon her, in service of a career predicated completely on her branded appearance.

As well as seeing bodily enhancement as 'natural', Khloé also presents the desire to be seen and viewed as 'natural'. She tells Kylie that it's unhealthy and not good for her to avoid 'covers of magazines or TV shows'. Kylie is expected to fulfil the role of sexy young celebrity and her decision to have fillers is seen as almost inevitable if her small lips were a barrier to her performing for the camera with confidence. Gill writes that 'confidence culture' calls into being a female subject that is:

[h]eld back not by patriarchal capitalism or institutionalised sexism, but by their own lack of confidence – a lack that is presented as being entirely an individual and personal matter, unconnected to structural inequalities or cultural forces.⁴⁷⁶

Kylie is expected to conceive of her body in terms of ownership – to see her body and image as saleable property that she should shrewdly capitalize on.

In a scene with Kim, Kylie and Kendall where Kim tries to advise her youngest sister on body work, she starts by complimenting Kylie's appearance and telling her to 'bank a couple selfies'. The use of the word bank, and her suggestion that

⁴⁷⁶ Gill, 'Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism', 3.

Kylie capture her current attractiveness to post later, demonstrates the link between the sisters' physical appearance and income. Kylie's appearance is celebrated because of the possibility of sharing and benefiting financially from it – indeed, her extremely popular make-up range does just that. She is encouraged by her older sister to capture her beauty in order to market herself; beauty itself is not the only goal, but the marketization of beauty.

In the conversation between Kim, Kendall and Kylie, there is a persistent discourse of appropriate femininity. Kim encourages Kylie to do whatever she wants with her appearance, but reminds her, 'I don't want you to get like carried away'. Kendall tries multiple times to tell her sisters that they are beautiful already and do not need to undergo beauty treatments, frustratedly reminding Kim that she is one of the most beautiful women in the world. Kim asserts, 'No, I think if something makes you insecure, and you've been feeling that way forever, who doesn't want to look amazing? You only have one life'. For Kim, the desire for beauty, at whatever cost, is inevitable and obvious. Reinforcing the boundaries of enhanced beauty, she says, 'Do what makes you happy – to an extent', 'There's nothing to be ashamed of, it's just handling it the right way' and 'Just make sure you keep everything subtle, and don't go overboard'. Through numerous qualifiers, we see Kim advocating a neoliberal management of self here, where the individual must recognize the appropriate physical goal, and make informed decisions to reach it.

It is relevant that Kendall is the voice of reason in the episode, and also the sister with an alternate career path. Admittedly, Kendall's job as a high fashion model is also beauty and glamour work, but her relative independence from the family brand – working for Estée Lauder, Chanel, Givenchy and other fashion

houses, as well as for Kardashian products – gives her space to be able to criticize her sisters' bodily obsession. If Kendall's main source of income was under the family brand, she would perhaps also wish to enhance her body in line with the Kim/Kylie/Khloé aesthetic. She is able to critique what she sees as their excessive body work because she is a tall, thin, conventionally beautiful, and literally modellesque woman.

Other scenes and storylines in this episode reaffirm the theme of taste and appropriate aesthetic for the family, and foreground the importance of a neoliberal fashioning and branding of everyday life and the self. One subplot involves Kourtney working as Scott's interior designer, and reiterates the importance of appropriate taste in the service of financial reward. Scott aims to renovate, redecorate and sell properties for a profit, and Kourtney is hired because of her 'good eye'. She is fired by the end of the episode because of her inability to stay within budget, thus underlining the importance of transformation within particular 'tasteful' boundaries for monetary outcome.

Another minor storyline is Kim approving the images and design for her rebranded website. She reiterates the importance of her site being up to date, saying she needs to stay 'relevant'. Kim insists that her website be different in 'vibe' and 'feel' to her sisters, highlighting the importance of brand diversity within the Kardashian umbrella brand. Kim must manage her personal brand through imagery appropriate to her unique selling points. A later storyline in the episode shows her going for a naked photoshoot in the desert, with the goal of creating personalised and exclusive material for her upcoming website and app. The final scene of the episode is Kylie on a cover shoot for Teen Vogue, showing her transformation in confidence over the course of the episode. This

serves as a thematic bookend alongside the opening shot of Kim and Scott discussing breast enhancement.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have critiqued the Kardashian-Jenners for their complicity in promoting postfeminist neoliberal discourses about success and female bodily appearance, as well as remaining cognisant of the sexist assumptions made about them based on their own bodily appearance. In attempting to disrupt the idea that the siblings are complicit with patriarchy through their self-subjectification, I have outlined feminist approaches to beauty that show that hyperfemininity and hypersexuality are disparaged both in and outside of feminism. Interactions with beauty culture are not necessarily evidence of patriarchal victimhood, and the siblings face femmephobic accusations that they are more grotesque, superficial and artificial than other celebrities, and that their skills and abilities are less work and less impressive than those of others working in their industry. Reactions like this are frequently rooted in disapproval of the feminized arena of reality TV, and in response to the hyperfeminine and often hypersexualized physical appearances of the sisters.

Whilst this chapter enters into a pre-existing critique of the postfeminist neoliberal rationalizations that exist around beauty culture, I undertake this critique whilst being aware of how the Kardashians are seen and treated by the general public and mainstream media. I consider them complicit in certain aspects of beauty culture, but also affected negatively by aspects of this same culture. They rely upon the media for income, whilst also being subject to its bodily surveillance and hegemonic beauty standards. Furthermore, rather than

simply attempting to defend a super-wealthy celebrity family, I am using the Kardashians here partly as a stand in for those who enjoy them – for those who identify with their gender performance, or who enjoy gendered modes of culture that are seen as not worthwhile. The Kardashian-Jenners are a fitting case study for exploring complicity precisely because they exemplify these paradoxes.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, beauty is a contentious topic for feminisms, and is often considered antithetical to feminisms by non-feminists. In considering the Kardashian-Jenners, and specifically the femmephobia and sexism they face, I have focused on the discourses around their particular embodiment of beauty. By considering the discourses that circulate the family, I have considered beauty as more than simply a set of practices, but as something that exists in varying contexts and incarnations. Furthermore, it is my contention that dismissing women like the Kardashian-Jenners on the basis of their gender performance makes feminists complicit in the characterisation of some gender performances as less ‘real’ or less serious than others. By treating the sisters as a novelty, or as patriarchal dupes, we are complicit in perpetuating a gendered hierarchy of value and respectability that ultimately undermines an inclusive intersectional feminist praxis.

The following chapter is related to this one because it concerns domesticity - a subject that is also entangled with feminism in the public imagination. Looking at a variety of case-studies related to appropriate femininity, I consider the ways white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchy polices those who fall outside its parameters. Where the Kardashians fall outside the bounds of respectable femininity because of their hypersexuality and supposed vulgarity, those discussed in the following chapter represent paragons of white, middle-

class domestic femininity, and representationally and discursively set the boundaries of what it is to be an appropriate woman.

CHAPTER 5

Complicity, Class and The Contemporary Domestic

In the previous chapter I looked at the Kardashian Jenners in the context of beauty. The focus was complicity with postfeminist neoliberal discourses of beauty that suggest a particular normative aesthetic which is achieved through consumption, as a method of self-improvement. I used the Kardashians partly to discuss issues relating to traditional femininity and feminine-presenting women; the sisters should be defended against sexist and femmephobic accusations related to their hypersexuality, and social media presence. Whilst defending the sisters against this I also critiqued their involvement in postfeminist neoliberal discourses and their profiting from some questionable beauty endorsements (waist trainers, diet pills, detox teas). Utilising the concept of complicity as a theoretical tool in this context, I suggest that we consider subjects like beauty - which can cause considerable disagreement among feminists – from a contextual perspective that takes into account the varying ways people may use beauty as a means of subversion, resistance or survival (most explicitly in the case of feminine-presenting trans women). Looking at this topic in terms of complicity also draws attention to the ways in which women are judged according to a privileged white gaze, and points to a broader complicity with participation in discourses that suggest beauty is monolithic, an obligation, and a marker of moral character. My argument overall is that it's not helpful to approach a theme (beauty) or a group of people (The Kardashians) without exploring the ways in which lived experience and wider media representations and discourses operate in relation to that theme or person.

Ultimately I am advocating for nuance and context, and see complicity as a useful way of enabling it.

This chapter follows from the previous one in that it also looks at a subject that is entangled with feminism in the public imagination – domesticity. The representations of domesticity I traverse in this chapter are related to patterns of consumption and the images we refer to as domestic; this encompasses issues of fertility, motherhood, marriage, family, home décor and food, but is concerned more broadly with appropriate femininity, which is raced and classed. Domesticity is difficult to describe in contemporary terms, and this unarticulated obviousness is part of its ideological underpinnings. Importantly, ‘domesticity’ in late consumerist capitalism doesn’t necessarily refer to a pattern of work, or a lifestyle, but rather to images and their accompanying commercial goods. Domesticity is sold in ‘vintage’ style teacups, on baking programmes, in housekeeping magazines, on blogs, and via celebrity figures. Furthermore, this commodified domesticity is largely white, middle-class, cisgendered, and straight, which means people not in this group can be denied representation in our cultural image of family, parent, or partner. Normative modes of femininity are tied to maintaining white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchal structures – they police women who don’t abide by its strictures. Some ‘outsiders’ are welcomed in, or incorporated, – I discuss Jack Monroe and Nadiya Hussein later in the chapter - but this invitation is precarious. By examining these examples, I don’t argue that Monroe and Hussein are complicit, but rather that mainstream discourses incorporate Others in ways that ultimately reify existing hierarchies of respectability; importantly, other figures (Kirstie Allsopp and Kate Middleton) are held up as paragons of

domestic femininity, and privileging these images facilitates complicity with exclusionary conceptions of the domestic.

Moreover, Allsopp, like the pop-stars in Chapter 3, identifies as a feminist without engaging with any feminist discourse or activism; this chapter positions her as complicit with discursively and representationally overstating the connections between the domestic, and middle-class white femininity. As with Chapter 3, Allsopp's complicity is strengthened by her claiming of a feminist identity. Following a dispute surrounding comments she made about fertility – which I analyse later in the chapter – Allsopp imagines herself as a victim of feminists because of her traditionally feminine gender performance. This assumption that feminists are inherently opposed to representations of traditional domesticity, or traditional femininity, feeds into the wider media misrepresentation of feminisms, particularly because of Allsopp's platform. Related to this, this chapter touches upon media complicity with presenting feminism in simplistic and reductive terms, and engaging with feminist issues or themes that attract superficial and ahistorical argument.

Feminist critiques of domesticity are tied up with second-wave critiques of femininities relating to marriage and motherhood, which were in fact critiques of *white* middle-class femininities. The conclusion for this chapter builds on that of the previous one: firstly, that whilst a feminist critique of certain incarnations of domesticity is valid, it can ignore the ways domesticity is enacted as subversion or resistance for marginalised groups, and the ways dominant narratives and representations of domesticity come to stand for certain practices or performances as a whole, and secondly, that domesticity is an important and prevalent subject when it comes to how feminism is discussed

and viewed. As with the previous chapter, I do not condemn practices associated with domesticity in and of themselves. This includes being a stay-at-home mother, being interested in cooking or home décor, having children, or presenting in a traditionally feminine manner. Rather, I draw attention to the ways dominant representations of domesticity or appropriate femininity are white, middle-class, and cisgendered, and how these images come into contact with feminisms.

I begin by touching upon second-wave feminist work on domesticity, and then move to consider postfeminist incarnations of domesticities, particularly in relation to the resurgence of post-2008 British domestic nostalgia. In the latter half of the chapter, I explore discourses of fertility and class by considering property presenter Kirstie Allsopp and ‘austerity cook’ Jack Monroe. I will then turn to racialized femininities and domesticity in the UK by considering the Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton, and winner of the 2015 Great British Bake Off, Nadiya Hussein.

‘I want something more than my husband and my children and my home’: Second-wave Conceptions of the Domestic

Famously, in 1963, Betty Friedan named the problem that had no name, revealing the ‘feminine mystique’, or the boredom, isolation and mental ill health of millions of white, middle-class American women. Dominant representations of femininity played a large part in subduing and silencing these women; Friedan writes of the idealised housewife – ‘She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment.’⁴⁷⁷ The dominant construction of femininity was one that presented domestic life as blissful and natural, and conversely, it

⁴⁷⁷ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, inc., 1963), 18.

was seen as unfeminine for women to want ‘careers, higher education, political rights.’⁴⁷⁸

Whilst the exclusion and segregation of being a housewife was undoubtedly oppressive for middle-class white women, Friedan’s pioneering feminist narrative excluded working-class women of all races. Focusing on middle-class white women’s exclusion from the workplace obscured the conditions faced by working women, most of whom were poor and non-white. bell hooks writes that the right to stay home would have been ‘freedom’ for many poor women.⁴⁷⁹

Elizabeth Nathanson says:

For decades many women, especially women of color and of lower classes, have worked outside of the home both by choice and out of economic necessity. And popular culture frequently represents heterosexual, white, middle- and middle-upper class femininity as both the norm and the ideal.⁴⁸⁰

The fact that the home, or the ability to care for one’s own family, may have been an important status symbol for less privileged women, as well as a site of refuge and resistance, shows that in one historical context there are varied experiences of domesticity. This doesn’t detract from Friedan’s analysis of isolated white housewives, but is a reminder that multiple feminist frames of reference are necessary.

Other second-wave feminists have theorised the domestic in relation to privileged white women, and used racist language in their comparisons of housework with slavery. Betsy Warrior refers to ‘unpaid domestic slavery’, ‘domestic slaves’, and ‘unpaid drudgery’⁴⁸¹, and Catharine MacKinnon says

⁴⁷⁸ Friedan, 15-16.

⁴⁷⁹ hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody*, 38.

⁴⁸⁰ Nathanson, 9.

⁴⁸¹ Warrior in Crow, 530.

women are ‘obtained’ as wives and ‘are sexually possessed’.⁴⁸² In *Women's Lives, Men's Laws* (2007) MacKinnon refers to women having been treated as ‘chattel’.⁴⁸³ These feminists wished to draw attention to women’s unpaid work in the home, and to the dangers of domestic violence, but comparing affluent (albeit financially dependent) women with generational enslavement appropriates a narrative of pain and trauma that is not borne out of the experience of white women.

As with beauty, domesticity should not be approached as monolithic and homogenous, but as something that has changed over time and therefore something that has a variety of contexts and meanings.⁴⁸⁴ Beauty is frequently presented as antithetical to feminism because of the second-wave critique of women’s *obligation* to be beautiful, and domesticity is presented as antithetical to feminism because of second-wave criticisms of white women’s relegation to the private sphere. A thread that connects the two, therefore, is some sense of obligation.⁴⁸⁵ Friedan is not opposed to domesticity, or certain modes of femininity, but rather locates the feminine mystique in a lack of identity:

The problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity [...] We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: ‘I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.’⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸² Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 28.

⁴⁸³ Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Women's Lives, Men's Laws* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 237.

⁴⁸⁴ *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture* ed. by Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows (London: Routledge, 2008), 12.

⁴⁸⁵ This isn't to say that no feminists opposed beauty practices and domesticity in and of themselves – indeed many radical feminists did.

⁴⁸⁶ Friedan, 32.

Whilst Friedan does deconstruct and criticise the mundanities of suburban middle-class domestic life, she is not opposed to domesticity in and of itself. In saying this, I don't suggest a renewed feminist defence of gendered domestic roles, but to point out that feminist critiques are always situated, both by feminist approach (Friedan is a quintessential liberal feminist) and era. Whilst many feminists were vehemently opposed to normative beauty standards and gendered domestic roles, many were opposed because of how those standards and roles manifested in the world they lived in. Where feminist work can unravel the ways women engage with beauty practices and the domestic sphere, it can unpick the binary of feminist and housewife, or feminist and beauty queen. Postfeminism however, takes third-wave notions of empowerment, choice and agency, and through a consumerist lens, distorts feminism so that any decision made by any woman can be seen as feminist. The meanings and contexts of practices are lost, and the discourse is simplified. Within a postfeminist logic, if women choose to wear makeup and be housewives then feminism has been enacted. Within postfeminism, empowerment is the ability to choose between pre-existing options that are not analysed in relation to material conditions, wider patterns or lived experience.

Consumerism, Austerity, and Time-Crises

As mentioned, the domesticity I deal with in this chapter is related to patterns of consumption, or the 'aesthetics of consumption'.⁴⁸⁷ Rather than focusing on marriage or motherhood as practices or institutions, I refer to images of the idyllic home, or cultural ideas of what it is to be a wife or mother. To consider

⁴⁸⁷ Bauman quoted in Keith Hayward and Majid Yar, 'The 'chav' Phenomenon: Consumption, Media and the Construction of a New Underclass', *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, 2, 1 (2006) 13-14.

representations of domesticity, it is essential to acknowledge the highly consumerist society of the industrialized West. Haywood and Yar write that:

The vast majority of people in the industrialized West now live in a world in which their everyday existence is, to a greater or lesser degree, dominated by the pervasive triad of advertising/marketing, the stylization of social life, and mass consumption. The second important thing to stress regarding the cultural significance of market culture is the continued move towards consumption as a mode of expression⁴⁸⁸

As Marcuse observed, individuals in consumer societies see themselves in their consumer goods – they don't just express themselves through items but understand their sense of self and identity in relation to the objects they own.⁴⁸⁹ Haywood and Yar connect this to social status, saying, 'Individuals not only recognize themselves, but are crucially recognized by others, through their publicly visible consumption choices.'⁴⁹⁰ As articulated by Bourdieu in *Distinction*, consumption choices and taste delineate social groups from one another, and so are integral facets of class.

Later in this chapter I consider Kirstie Allsopp, who embraces a retro-feminine aesthetic and presents lifestyle programmes that involve crafting, jam-making and flower arranging. There has been a surge in 'craft and vintage culture' in the UK, and scholars have traced this to the 2008 financial crisis, right-leaning politics and Conservative implemented austerity.⁴⁹¹ Dirix argues that this visual

⁴⁸⁸ Hayward and Yar, 17.

⁴⁸⁹ Marcuse, 18.

⁴⁹⁰ Haywood and Yar, 14.

⁴⁹¹ Emmanuelle Dirix, 'Stitched Up—Representations of Contemporary Vintage Style Mania and the Dark Side of the Popular Knitting Revival', *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, 12.1 (2014), 95;

Kim Allen and others, 'Welfare Queens, Thrifty Housewives, and Do-It-All Mums: Celebrity Motherhood and the Cultural Politics of Austerity', *Feminist Media Studies*, 15. 6 (2015), 908; Owen Hatherley, *The Ministry of Nostalgia: Consuming Austerity* (London: Verso Books, 2015);

culture – one that is highly connected to images of the domestic – ‘construct[s] a very insular nostalgic vision of the past and England,’ including a regressive stereotype of passive femininity.⁴⁹² Allen et al suggest that ‘the figure of the happy housewife’ undertakes ideological work in favour of the state, which seeks to revive traditional family values and cut public spending.⁴⁹³ As stated by Bramall, austerity discourse frequently interpellates a feminized subject,⁴⁹⁴ and crucially, ‘certain gendered subject positions are more visible, desirable, and possible than others’.⁴⁹⁵

Importantly, the domesticities sold to women in the contemporary UK draw upon retro-nostalgic fifties imagery of housewives (cupcakes, polka dots, circle skirts, and bunting), but are aimed at a female population with much better access to education and skilled labour than was possible in the 1950s.

Housewives in this era were engaged in a monotonous and time-consuming incarnation of domesticity – they scrubbed toilets, cleaned up after children all day, and washed the whole family’s clothes.⁴⁹⁶ Nathanson writes that crafting television shows (such as Kirstie’s Handmade Britain) ‘present nostalgic yearnings for a (fictional) past in which women had endless amounts of time’;⁴⁹⁷ programmes that tap into discourses of austerity are actually aimed at those with the free-time to sew their own clothes, and bake meticulous cupcakes. As stated, second-wave feminist narratives of *The Feminine Mystique* were exclusionary of the experiences of working-class women and women of colour,

Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity, ed. by Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014);
Rebecca Bramall, *The Cultural Politics of Austerity: Past and Present in Austere Times* (New York: Springer, 2013).

⁴⁹² Dirix, 97.

⁴⁹³ Allen et al, 913.

⁴⁹⁴ Bramall, 111.

⁴⁹⁵ Bramall, 111.

⁴⁹⁶ Hollows and Gillis, 8.

⁴⁹⁷ Nathanson, 5.

and so contemporary reimaginings of fifties' suburban domesticity repeat this exclusion representationally, and also obscure the realities of poverty in the contemporary UK.

Because of the resurgence of post-war images of austerity, and the postfeminist assumption that feminism is consigned to the past, temporalities are pertinent to discussions of domesticity. White middle-class women are frequently represented as being 'out of time', having to consider their 'biological clock', and facing the dread of ageing. Diane Negra, in her analysis of various time-travelling films (including *Kate and Leopold*, and *13 going on 30*), demonstrates that female characters are transported to a previous era in order to make sense of the present and restructure their priorities; this is often manifested in the characters leaving their careers and moving to the country, or undertaking some sort of feminised job.⁴⁹⁸ Negra casts this as new traditionalism, or retreatism, where female protagonists are reconnected to the past, or to previous incarnations of femininity (which in reality are fictional reimaginings of previous femininities, such as the happy housewife) in order to find fulfilment in the present.⁴⁹⁹

Time panics are another link between beauty and domesticity – white middle-class straight women are framed as coming up against time when it comes to ageing and bodies, and running out of time in relation to marriage and children. Both time panics are managed through appropriate consumption and self-surveillance - whether that be anti-ageing moisturiser, control pants, efficient dating, or fertility treatments. Nathanson links this perpetual time-panic to the

⁴⁹⁸ Diane Negra, *What A Girl Wants?: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁹⁹ Negra, 32.

glorification of makeovers and girlishness across popular culture – the latter of which features prominently in representations of the appropriately feminine domestic.⁵⁰⁰ Furthermore, time regulation coincides with neoliberal logics of self-surveillance, so that meals, childcare, and daily schedules are all presented as mini-projects that must be undertaken by responsible parents or partners.⁵⁰¹ Allsopp excels in this, and her programmes offer up a feast of organised, carefully crafted (literally) wholesome family fun. Nigella Lawson, who started her career with a wry nod to regressive gender roles - dubbing herself the Domestic Goddess – also embraces a carefully curated domestic feminine lifestyle, and in the USA, Gwyneth Paltrow does the same via her lifestyle website *Goop*.

The following case-study will consider discourses of fertility and how they operate in relation to class in the British mainstream media. I frame television presenter Kirstie Allsopp as complicit in using a privileged experience to make claims about women as a group, and also frame the media (in this case *Newsnight* and the *Daily Mail*) as complicit in representing feminism in simplistic terms, and using feminism as a broad frame within which to be anti-feminist.

Kirstie and Jack: Class, Fertility, and Media Complicity

Kirstie Allsopp is a British television presenter best known for fronting property programme *Location, Location, Location* with ‘TV husband’ Phil Spencer,⁵⁰² as well as other property and crafting shows, such as *Kirstie & Phil's Perfect Christmas*, *Kirstie's Homemade Home*, and *Kirstie's Handmade Britain*. Allsopp

⁵⁰⁰ Nathanson, 8.

⁵⁰¹ Nathanson, 5.

⁵⁰² Allsopp refers to Spencer as her ‘TV Husband’, and he calls her his ‘other wife’.

is from an affluent background and her father Charles Henry Allsopp is the 6th Baron Hindlip.⁵⁰³ Allsopp has been the subject of academic work that relates to domesticity, austerity and retro-femininity, and whilst this chapter touches upon these themes, I focus on an incident in 2014 where Allsopp was embroiled in a social-media scandal because of her comments on fertility and education. Before delving into this incident, I would like to clarify that I do not intend to construct Allsopp simplistically as a ‘complicit woman’, but rather aim to analyse and deconstruct what Kirstie Allsopp stands for in contemporary culture: What discourses does she play into? What narratives does she personally further? And what narratives are furthered through and around her?

Kirstie Allsopp is an example of a highly privileged upper middle-class woman who identifies as a feminist and makes classist judgements about other people’s lifestyles. In 2016 Allsopp caused a brief Twitter controversy when she tweeted disparagingly about a stranger’s breakfast, which she deemed to be a drain on the National Health Service. A prominent wealthy white woman with a considerable public platform locates classed behaviour in someone else’s (‘poor’) consumption choices, creating a narrative where others fail at self-betterment because of their own lack of taste and (middle-class) ‘common-sense’. In a follow-up tweet, Allsopp continued to be classist by referring to ‘chippy types’, and said that those criticising her had ‘a staggering lack of realism’.⁵⁰⁴ The tone of this episode chimes with the no-nonsense ethos of ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’, where British citizens are expected to be sensible,

⁵⁰³ This is a British peerage that was granted to Sir Henry Allsopp in 1886. The title passes to subsequent generations.

⁵⁰⁴ For Tweets, see Marina Hyde, ‘Nutrition, Nutrition, Nutrition – Thank Goodness Kirstie Allsopp Is Keeping an Eye on the Nation’s Diet’, *The Guardian*, 29 September 2016, section Life and style <<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/lostinshowbiz/2016/sep/29/kirstie-allsopp-nutrition-keeping-eye-on-nations-diet-obsession-with-property>> [Accessed 12 October 2016].

restrained, and to make responsible decisions when it comes to income and consumption.⁵⁰⁵

As counter to Allsopp I look at the treatment of food blogger and anti-austerity campaigner Jack Monroe, who rose to prominence through their blog ‘A Girl Named Jack’ where they shared recipes for those living in poverty.⁵⁰⁶ Monroe came out as non-binary in 2015 and continues to publish cookery books and garner an online political presence. Described as ‘Britain’s Austerity Celebrity’ by The New York Times, Monroe’s food is interesting as a counterpoint to Allsopp because their version of austerity is less aesthetically pleasing or twee than the Cath Kidston aesthetic favoured by Allsopp (fittingly, British designer Kidston, who is known for nostalgic floral patterns, is Allsopp’s cousin). Monroe’s recipes use supermarket value range ingredients, tinned food, processed cheese, and replacements such as strong tea instead of red wine for risotto. This is a far cry from the needlework, flower arranging, and homemade scones and jam undertaken by Allsopp on Kirstie’s Handmade Britain. Monroe’s lifestyle advice is not divorced from the material conditions that require it, and was initially undertaken secretly so their friends and family did not realise the extent of their financial troubles.⁵⁰⁷ I am discussing Monroe here as a counterpoint to Allsopp in terms of class, but also because of their gender identity. The New York Times writes that Monroe ‘officially came out as poor’ in a 2012 blog post entitled ‘Hunger Hurts’; this phrasing is derived directly from

⁵⁰⁵ ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ is slogan that originated in a 1939 poster intended to boost the morale of the British public prior to World War 2. It has been rediscovered and repurposed in austerity Britain across all manner of household objects (tea-towels, mugs, coasters). The slogan lovingly embraces a stereotypical sense of upright Britishness and ‘getting on with it’, which intersects with neoliberal discourses of working hard and not complaining.

⁵⁰⁶ Since renamed *Cooking on a Bootstrap*. Monroe uses the non-gendered pronouns they/their.

⁵⁰⁷ Katrin Bennhold, ‘Jack Monroe Has Become Britain’s Austerity Celebrity’, *The New York Times*, 14 January 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/15/world/europe/jack-monroe-has-become-britains-austerity-celebrity.html>> [Accessed 7 November 2016].

the queer community, and positions poorness as something to confess. In attempting to hide their poverty, Monroe was ‘passing’ as financially stable. This framing of Monroe as fluid in terms of class position and gender identity is in contrast to Allsopp’s comparatively fixed class and gender identity, and I argue that this affects how they are heard, or not.

In 2014 in an interview with Bryony Gordon for the Telegraph, Allsopp shared her view that:

Women are being let down by the system. We should speak honestly and frankly about fertility and the fact it falls off a cliff when you’re 35. We should talk openly about university and whether going when you’re young, when we live so much longer, is really the way forward [...]

I don’t have a girl, but if I did I’d be saying ‘Darling, do you know what? Don’t go to university. Start work straight after school, stay at home, save up your deposit – I’ll help you, let’s get you into a flat. And then we can find you a nice boyfriend and you can have a baby by the time you’re 27.’⁵⁰⁸

There are several points to unpack in these comments. To begin with, Allsopp erroneously claims that fertility is not discussed ‘honestly and frankly’.

Arguably, mainstream media aimed at women has published editorial saturated with gendered temporal anxiety for decades. To suggest that female fertility is not discussed at large, or amongst women, is at worst an overt mischaracterisation, and at best a highly uninformed statement. Furthermore, Allsopp had her own children in her mid-thirties and so it is ironic that she asserts that women’s fertility ‘falls off a cliff when you’re 35’. As well as being a medical misrepresentation, this perpetuates the narrative that middle-class

⁵⁰⁸ Bryony Gordon, ‘Kirstie Allsopp: ‘I Don’t Want the next Generation of Women to Suffer the Same Heartache’’, 1 June 2014, section Finance
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/money-saving-tips/10868367/Kirstie-Allsopp-I-dont-want-the-next-generation-of-women-to-suffer-the-same-heartache.html>>
[Accessed 11 October 2016].

women are always time-constrained, and draws upon the essentialist discourses discussed in Chapter 1 (an over relation between women and pregnancy, motherhood and bodies).

In these comments, Allsopp is speaking about middle-class fertility, though not explicitly; she speaks from an upper middle-class experience and assumes this is universal. As mentioned already, middle-class fertility has traditionally been associated with time-crises in a way that working-class fertility and non-white fertility has not. By making reference to university and buying a home, Allsopp aims her advice at women in her socioeconomic bracket. She says:

Don't go to university because it's an 'experience'. No, it's where you're supposed to learn something! Do it when you're 50!

By framing university as something that can be done later in life, Allsopp is complicit in using her privileged experience as a template for that of other women. Allsopp did not attend university, is from a wealthy family and has had a successful career. She does not seem to be aware that most women need educational qualifications in order to secure the employment and income necessary to raise a family and buy a home.

Imogen Tyler in her article 'Chav Mum, Chav Scum' points out that working-class women are often depicted as being excessively and dangerously fertile.⁵⁰⁹ Taylor points to the racist and classist implications of discourses that use middle-class white femininity as a stand-in for all femininities. Working-class women are not conceived of as inhabiting 'pure' whiteness, but rather as occupying 'whiteness contaminated with poverty'.⁵¹⁰ This is heightened in representations of working-class women which foreground unruly sexuality and

⁵⁰⁹ Imogen Tyler, 'Chav Mum, Chav Scum', *Feminist Media Studies*, 8, 1 (2008), 30.

⁵¹⁰ Taylor, 25.

relationships with men of colour (Little Britain character Vicky Pollard is said to have thirteen children, and is shown pushing mixed-race children in a pram).⁵¹¹ Presenting working-class fertility in less ‘civilised’ terms draws upon racist hierarchies and furthers the narrative that white members of the working-class are ‘not quite white’. Kelly writes that younger parents are likely to be poorer, and that young mothers are ‘often dismissed as irresponsible or as breeders’.⁵¹² This can be seen in tabloid treatment of UK celebrities Kerry Katona and Jade Goody, both of whom have been presented as unruly and tasteless totems of inappropriate maternal femininity.⁵¹³ Jensen and Ringrose write that the ‘chav’ is portrayed as uneducated, lazy, and promiscuous,⁵¹⁴ and operates as an object of ‘dirt, fertility, and promiscuity and thus of class distinction’.⁵¹⁵

Chapters 3 and 4 touched upon the mainstream moral panic over sexualisation, particularly as it relates to female celebrities; Dirix argues that the hypersexualised female celebrity (Miley Cyrus or Kim Kardashian) is contrasted with ‘something very pretty and seductive decorated with cabbage roses and cute bows that apparently celebrates a less sexualized and more wholesome femininity’.⁵¹⁶ The Kardashian family, who I discussed in terms of beauty in the previous chapter, are frequently depicted as inappropriately feminine in terms of the domestic. When Kim Kardashian posted a nude selfie in 2016, detractors

⁵¹¹ Taylor, 28.

⁵¹² ‘Kirstie Allsopp and Myths about Women’s Choices - The F-Word’ <https://www.thefword.org.uk/2014/06/kirstie_allsopp/> [Accessed 12 October 2016].

⁵¹³ For research on the ‘Celebrity Chav’, see Imogen Tyler and Bruce Bennett, ‘Celebrity chav’: Fame, femininity and social class’ *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 13 (3), 2010, 375-393.

⁵¹⁴ Tracey Jensen and Jessica Ringrose, ‘Sluts That Choose Vs Doormat Gypsies’, *Feminist Media Studies*, 14.3 (2014), 373.

⁵¹⁵ Jensen and Ringrose, 375.

⁵¹⁶ Dirix, 89.

reminded her of her motherhood, thus policing any overlaps between public female sexuality and being a mother.⁵¹⁷

Taylor contends that the classed discourse around motherhood isn't *just* about hatred and fear for working-class women's bodies, but that it expresses anxiety about the fertility of the middle-classes.⁵¹⁸ White middle-class women are expected to remain aware of their ticking biological clock while they also attempt to break through that ubiquitous glass ceiling. These narratives work together (in a similar way to the narratives of white and black femininities) to reinforce one another. Working-class women are presented as being undeserving of their fertility, and as subjects who should either be working, or establishing a traditional nuclear family. In contrast, middle-class women are presented as biologically faulty, and as focusing *too much* attention on the workplace at the expense of the home. It's important to stress though that these issues of representation are not equal – women of different classes do not have it 'as bad' as each other because of the financial and cultural privilege that middle-class women enjoy.

To incorporate Jack Monroe, the fertility and domestic arrangements of poor and queer people is not treated with the same reverence as that of white middle-class women (Kate Middleton is the epitome of this when we compare the media representation of her family life compared with that of celebrities with lower cultural capital). When Monroe tweeted negative comments about then Prime Minister David Cameron, their contract with supermarket Sainsburys was not

⁵¹⁷ Among the many detractors of this particular nude selfie were journalist Piers Morgan, and actresses Bette Midler and Chloe Grace Moretz.

⁵¹⁸ Taylor, 30.

renewed, and the company distanced itself from Monroe's politics.⁵¹⁹ Monroe accused Cameron of using 'stories about his dead son as misty-eyed rhetoric to legitimise selling our NHS', and became a target of right-wing journalist Sarah Vine. Speaking of Monroe's financial situation, Vine proclaimed Monroe's poverty was 'if not by design, then at the very least by choice.' Citing Monroe's middle-class upbringing and lack of educational qualifications, Vine blames Monroe for having a child that they couldn't support:

I was 34 when I had my first child. Why? Because that was the age at which I felt I was stable enough, both financially and emotionally, to meet the needs of a growing family.

Ms Monroe didn't feel bound by such constraints. She went ahead and had a child in her early 20s.⁵²⁰

Not only are particular groups expected to reproduce and raise their families within certain 'responsible' financial environments, they are also expected to do so within a traditional heterosexual nuclear family - Allsopp speaks of 'a nice boyfriend' and a flat. Vine homophobically writes that Monroe shouldn't have had a child if they were 'in anyway [sic] uncertain of her sexual orientation'.⁵²¹ In relation to Allsopp's comments however, Vine wrote, 'there's truth in what she says.' Vine supports the opinion that middle-class women should forgo university and have children early, but scorns Monroe for doing just this. This rigid adherence to traditional classed and gendered family roles penalises poor and queer women for their 'unruly' fertility.

⁵¹⁹ 'Jack Monroe's Tweet about David Cameron's 'Dead Son' Sparks Backlash', *The Independent*, 2014 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/jack-monroe-david-cameron-uses-stories-about-his-dead-son-as-misty-eyed-rhetoric-to-legitimise-nhs-9879063.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵²⁰ Sarah Vine, 'So Cruel and Such a Hypocrite: Sarah Vine on Jack Monroe', *Mail Online*, 2014 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2848092/So-cruel-hypocrite-SARAH-VINE-describes-food-writer-Jack-Monroe-sent-heartless-tweet.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵²¹ Vine was criticised for 'deadnaming' and using incorrect gender pronouns in her article on Monroe.

Later in the Telegraph interview, Allsopp refers to herself as ‘a passionate feminist’ (this is a symptom of the postfeminist media landscape and the resurgence of the identity ‘feminist’) and uses feminist-intoned terms to slot her comments into a language of equality and activism. She says, ‘Women are being let down by the system’, and refers to ‘a huge inequality [...] this time pressure that men don’t have’. This appropriation of feminist language and operationalisation of social-justice logics is similar to that of Sheryl Sandberg in Chapter 2, and the pop-stars in Chapter 3. The popularity and resurgence of feminism and postfeminism means highly privileged white women can utilise attractive egalitarian concepts when endorsing views or approaches that are highly problematic from a feminist perspective, and which serve to further marginalise those without structural power. There are important questions undergirding this celebrity habit of inhabiting a feminist identity when it suits their needs - Who decides if someone else is a feminist? What does being a feminist rely on?

Speaking to The Independent, Allsopp frames herself in feminist terms, saying, ‘I am an independent woman with my own company who encourages other women’.⁵²² The presenter presents herself as being excluded from feminism because of her traditionally feminine appearance. She says:

Yes, I happen to wear skirts, because I have SMALL ankles and a LARGE arse. It's not a comment on women in trousers. Sometimes I think it's a bit unfortunate, because for a lot of people they see this skirt-wearing, posh, privileged [...] Privileged? Yes, 100 per cent, I'll tick that – tick, tick, tick, tick, tick – they see all that and then they say 'Well therefore she is retrograde, right-

⁵²² Charlotte Philby, ‘Kirstie Allsopp: ‘They Say ‘She Is Retrograde, Backward-Thinking’.’, *The Independent*, 2014 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/kirstie-allsopp-they-say-she-is-retrograde-backward-thinking-fk-off-i-am-a-feminist-9563205.html>> [Accessed 11 October 2016].

wing, backward-thinking, anti-feminist'. They say 'You can't call yourself a feminist'. I can. I CAN! I'm getting a T-shirt: 'F**K OFF, I AM A FEMINIST'.⁵²³

Allsopp assumes the feminist backlash towards her comments is rooted in her domestic persona; as well as referring to being 'posh' and wearing skirts, she mentions her work in 'all this homemaking stuff on the telly'.⁵²⁴ The presenter argues that in order to be listened to as a woman, one must be 'a suit-wearing, university-attending, serious woman'.⁵²⁵ Unknowingly, Allsopp is speaking about femmephobia (which I discussed in the previous chapter), but is using feminist argument and language in a way that is completely divorced from context. Whilst it is indeed the case that many feminine presenting women are disparaged because of sexist assumptions about their intellect, in this scenario it is Allsopp's gender presentation that allows her to make highly exclusionary proclamations about fertility and education.

Allsopp conflates privilege with femininity, saying:

I'm a passionate feminist. I have never been able to understand why someone would say that because you are privileged, you wear heels and talk about up-cycling on the telly that you can't be a feminist. I don't get that.⁵²⁶

The presenter frames her 'poshness' as relating to her TV shows and gender presentation. Whilst I am implicating Allsopp in the wider resurgence of images of traditional gendered domesticity, this is not rooted solely in her aesthetic presentation, but in her concurrent support for regressive gender roles, as

⁵²³ Philby.

⁵²⁴ Katy Finbow, 'Kirstie Allsopp on Being a 'Posh Feminist'', *Digital Spy*, 2014 <<http://www.digitalspy.com/showbiz/news/a600375/kirstie-allsopp-i-can-be-a-feminist-even-though-im-posh/>> [Accessed 12 October 2016].

⁵²⁵ Finbow.

⁵²⁶ Finbow.

evidenced in her suggestion that women should forgo university in order to get married and have children early. Feminist critiques of Allsopp's privilege are concerned with the advice she gives and how it stems from her extremely privileged background and personal social life; feminist critiques are not rooted in her affinity for sensible wrap-dresses or polka dot blouses. As well as presenting *herself* as a victim of feminist femmephobia, Byrony Gordon in the Telegraph remarks of Allsopp, 'For some, the idea of a woman who has made her living selling bed linen and homeware having an opinion is simply too much.'⁵²⁷ As with the women in Chapter 3, feminist arguments are called upon, but appear divorced from their original or contemporary contexts.

To look at the wider framing and platforming of this issue, it's pertinent that *this* issue was seen as a feminist debate by mainstream media outlets, rather than issues surrounding domestic violence, the feminisation of poverty, or refugee women. Allsopp, property presenter, was invited onto current affairs programme Newsnight (BBC2, 1980 -) to discuss her views with feminist magazine Vagenda co-founder, Holly Baxter.⁵²⁸ The segment opens with Baxter calling Allsopp's comments 'depressing', which is met with a snort of derision from both Allsopp and a particularly bemused and un-invested Jeremy Paxman. Allsopp refers to both her and Baxter as feminists, saying they agree with one another and want the same things; this muddies the parameters of feminism for

⁵²⁷ Gordon.

⁵²⁸ Kirstie Allsopp's 'depressing' advice for women – Newsnight
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzwkT8n8q1g&t=212s>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

the audience, so that being a woman and identifying as ‘feminist’ legitimises any opinion (a problem I outlined in the Introduction and Chapter 1).⁵²⁹

Allsopp argues that ‘nature is not a feminist’, and so she positions herself as a feminist in order to further a narrative that is distressing and ‘depressing’ to the feminist sitting opposite her. In participating in this ‘debate’ in the way she does, Allsopp is complicit with a wider tendency in popular culture and popular media to appropriate feminist language, and with using middle-class women’s experiences to speak about the experiences of all people who can get pregnant. Allsopp asserts that, ‘this fertility window has been a taboo topic Jeremy, people have not discussed it’, which Paxman ultimately affirms by calling her claim that women’s fertility ‘falls off of a cliff’, ‘inarguable fact [...] a biological fact’.

Liberal feminist issues like this, when presented in the mainstream media, are framed in simplistic and essentialist terms. The discourse between the *Newsnight* participants is operating at a level where intersectional feminism cannot logically figure. Speaking about women in essentialized terms, and making calls to nature and the fixity of fertility, is so far outside the framework of most contemporary feminisms that feminist arguments and defences for this cannot manifest.

In an admirable attempt to gain control over the discussion, Baxter affirms ‘the biological fact’ that female fertility is time-limited, and adds that ‘it’s also a biological fact that two people make a baby’. In playing into and working within the problematic framework at hand, Baxter ensures that the debate standards are set by a non-feminist organisation and a woman who otherwise doesn’t

⁵²⁹ This also happened in a *Newsnight* discussion between then-Conservative politician Louise Mensch, and left-wing feminist Laurie Penny. Mensch argued that Conservative feminism is possible.

advocate for any feminist issues. Drawing upon McPhail's theory of negative difference (articulated in Chapter 1), Baxter is complicit with participating in the simplistic and essentialized liberal discourse that already exists, and therefore is unable to break down and overcome the structures of the debate in order to mount a defence.⁵³⁰ This isn't to downplay the efforts made by Baxter, but utilising the terms set by Allsopp and Paxman cannot allow for a true reflection of complex feminist thought relating to this issue. Because an intersectional perspective does not get airtime, issues like domesticity (in which I'm encompassing fertility here) are framed in relation to white, middle-class experience. It is of course salient that simplistic rather than complex discourses are more suited to television formats, particularly those that pit two opposing sides against one another, and thus assume a simple 'for' and 'against' model.



⁵³⁰ McPhail, 'Negative Difference'.

This case-study has considered discourses of fertility and how they operate in relation to class in the mainstream media. I suggest that Allsopp is complicit in using a privileged experience to make claims about women as a group, and that the media (in this case Newsnight and the Daily Mail) is complicit in representing feminism in simplistic terms, and using feminism as a broad frame within which to be anti-feminist. This adds to the public perception of feminism as particularly concerned with issues pertaining to domesticity, whether that be childcare, pregnancy, or housework. Having looked at some differences in the representation of fertility amongst middle and working-class people in the UK mainstream media, I will now turn my attention to racialized femininities, and how they intersect with images of domesticity and patriotism. To begin, I consider Kate Middleton, and then Nadiya Hussein.

Kate and Nadiya: Racialized Femininities and Patriotism

Famous for sensible coats and a bouncy brunette blow-dry, Catherine, The Duchess of Cambridge, dutifully smiles and poses for official photographs. Together with her husband, Prince William, The Duke of Cambridge, Middleton has managed to reignite worldwide interest in the otherwise ageing and unengaging British monarchy.⁵³¹ The resurgence of interest in the British Royal Family gained ground during the Royal Wedding in 2011, which was broadcast in 180 countries and watched by millions across the globe.⁵³² The resurgence of post-war British nostalgia following the 2008 financial crisis and Conservative implemented austerity, is closely related to patriotism – this is illustrated by the

⁵³¹ I say this particularly with regard to younger generations. Likewise, the 2017 engagement of Prince Harry with American actress Meghan Markle has sparked yet more interest in the British Royal Family.

⁵³² Martin Beckford and Graeme Paton, 'Royal Wedding Facts and Figures', 29 April 2011, section News <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/royal-wedding/8483199/Royal-wedding-facts-and-figures.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

popular slogan ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’, which is seen on everything from tea towels to phone cases. Allen et al write of this nostalgia:

This was captured in a series of national events in the summers of 2011 and 2012 including the Royal Wedding and Golden Jubilee celebrations, and coincided with a ‘renewed fascination with aristocratic elites’ (Negra and Tasker 2014, 10) in TV shows like *Downton Abbey* (ITV) and *Life is Toff* (BBC3).⁵³³

Furthermore, Kate Middleton is a central image within this contemporary reimagining of British thriftiness, domesticity, and motherhood.⁵³⁴ Vron Ware reminds us that The Royal Family have continually been ‘useful vehicles for reinforcing the image of the civilized white woman,’⁵³⁵ and it’s important to centralise not just Middleton’s upper middle-class background but her whiteness. Kirstie Allsopp referred to Middleton and her husband as ‘the poster boys and girls for the ‘make do and mend’ generation,’ and Middleton’s affinity for high-end high-street fashion is seen as proof of her ability to responsibly present herself in an appropriate manner, within appropriate monetary boundaries.⁵³⁶

Middleton’s classic English rose beauty is understated and appropriate; she is elegant without being flashy, and dressed expensively without appearing tacky or vulgar. Middleton wears a mixture of designer fashion and high-street staples, favouring Alexander McQueen, Mulberry, Reiss, and L.K. Bennett, among others. Website whatkatewore.com catalogues her outfits, offers ‘RepliKates’ for more expensive items, and lists her iconic looks and favourite brands. *Vogue* has described the Duchess as ‘an object of fashion fascination’

⁵³³ Allen et al, 911.

⁵³⁴ Allen et al, 911.

⁵³⁵ Ware, 15.

⁵³⁶ Allen et al, 912.

and British high-end high-street retailer Reiss sold out of its “Nannette” dress multiple times after Middleton wore it for her official engagement photos.⁵³⁷ Popular items worn by the Duchess often sell out, and this has been dubbed ‘The Kate Middleton effect’. Additionally, Middleton is seen as aspirational from a class perspective because whilst her family is wealthy and has aristocratic heritage, her mother Carole Middleton worked as a flight attendant and her father Michael as a flight dispatcher.⁵³⁸ The national obsession with the Duchess upholds existing norms of appropriate domestic femininity which are clearly raced, classed, and heteronormative.

In 2013, historical fiction writer Hilary Mantel gave a speech at a literary event at the British Museum which was later published as ‘Royal Bodies’ in the *London Review of Books*. Mantel is an acclaimed writer, and the only British writer and only woman to have won two Man Booker prizes (for historical novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*). Mantel’s speech at the British Museum was an eloquent and thoughtful rumination in which she asserted that female royals are put on display, admired for their ability to further the Royal line, and trapped by their popularity and obligation to be perfect. Speaking about Anne Boleyn, Mantel notes that ‘her real self is hidden within the dramas into which we co-opt her’, and that Boleyn was ultimately valued for her body parts (specifically her womb) above ‘her intellect or her soul’.⁵³⁹ Of Henry VIII’s third wife Jane Seymour, she writes, ‘the royal body exists to be looked at [...] a royal lady is a royal vagina’ - a sentiment which runs through the entire piece. She describes Marie Antoinette as ‘a woman eaten alive by her frocks’, and

⁵³⁷ Lauren Milligan, ‘The Kate Effect’, *British Vogue* <<http://www.vogue.co.uk/article/kate-middleton-fashion-style-shopping-influence>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵³⁸ The Middletons went on to found a party business and became millionaires as a result of this. The Middleton children attended private schools and enjoyed an upper-middle-class lifestyle.

⁵³⁹ Hilary Mantel, ‘Royal Bodies’, *London Review of Books*, (2013) 3–7.

Queen Elizabeth II as having been transformed by monarchy into ‘a thing which only had meaning when it was exposed, a thing that existed only to be looked at.’ These remarks clearly do not refer to these women as individual people, but as sites of meaning in the public and historical consciousness.

Despite talking broadly about female royals throughout history, it was Mantel’s comments about Kate Middleton that caused widespread media traction.

Contrasting her with Diana – “The People’s Princess” – Mantel characterises a pre-pregnancy Middleton as the ‘Plastic Princess’, ‘a shop-window mannequin, with no personality of her own, entirely defined by what she wore’. Mantel aims her ire at the press and their scrutiny of Middleton:

Once she gets over being sick, the press will find that she is radiant. They will find that this young woman’s life until now was nothing, her only point and purpose being to give birth.

Contrasting Middleton with her famed mother-in-law, Mantel comments that Kate appears ‘to have been designed by a committee and built by craftsmen’, as ‘painfully thin’, ‘without quirks, without oddities’, and as ‘precision-made, machine-made’. Rather than being an assessment of Middleton as a living, breathing, human woman, Mantel deconstructs the role of female royal and the ways that the royal family have adapted and evolved from Diana-era to Kate-era. Mantel suggests that public fascination with royals –and particularly female royals – dehumanises them. She criticises the media for their incessant hounding of royal women (referencing Diana’s death) and finishes by stating: ‘We don’t cut off the heads of royal ladies these days, but we do sacrifice them’.

Mantel’s essay is of pertinence to this chapter because the backlash towards it shows the degree to which traditional, white, middle-class, straight femininity is

revered and fiercely defended in 21st century Britain. Middleton is an excellent example of this precisely because she's a royal; her femininity is tied up in patriotism and traditionalism - in notions of Britishness. Due to the perception that Middleton is 'owned' by the British public, or belongs to the nation, perceived criticisms of the Duchess are interpreted by some as an attack on Britishness itself. When topless pictures of Middleton sunbathing on holiday were published in European magazines in 2012, the British press, who otherwise fight for their freedom to publish topless photographs and sidebars of shame, were outraged.⁵⁴⁰ Middleton, because of her particular incarnation of femininity (which includes her appearance, and her role as mother, wife, and royal), is seen as worthy of protection (however, like Kim Kardashian, she is not allowed to be seen as sexual).

To return to Mantel, several weeks after her speech at the London Review of Books Winter Lectures, the British media began to construct a narrative in which Middleton had been 'attacked' by the author. The Daily Mail headlined their article, 'A plastic princess designed to breed': *Bring Up the Bodies* author Hilary Mantel's venomous attack on Kate Middleton'.⁵⁴¹ The article described Mantel's lecture as 'a bitter attack' and 'an astonishing and venomous critique', and positioned Mantel as 'among the novel-writing elite'. Reaffirming the critique the author was making, the online article for the tabloid featured

⁵⁴⁰ The sidebar of shame is the name given to the sidebar that runs down the side of *The Mail Online*. It generally features celebrity pictures, focusing on female celebrities in swimwear, gym-wear, and on 'nip-slips' or 'side-boob'. British tabloid *The Sun* features a topless model on Page 3 of its print edition newspaper every day, despite feminist campaigning against it.

⁵⁴¹ Francesca Infante, "A Plastic Princess Designed to Breed": Bring Up the Bodies Author Hilary Mantel's Venomous Attack on Kate Middleton', *Mail Online*, 2013 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2280911/Duchess-Cambridge-plastic-princess-designed-breed-Booker-prize-winner-Hilary-Mantels-venomous-attack-Kate.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

pictures of the women side-by-side, with one caption reading ‘Attack’, and another ‘Pretty as a picture’.

The Independent referred to Mantel’s words as ‘a withering assessment’, BBC News as ‘some pretty outspoken and some pretty cutting remarks’, and The Sun as ‘a bizarre rant’.⁵⁴² Using their trademark hyperbolic language, The Sun spoke of the ‘Plastic’ princess slur’, and declared that Mantel said Kate’s ‘only purpose is to breed’. Newspapers were sure to mention Middleton’s pregnancy, which furthers the narrative of white female fragility; Metro referred to the Duchess as ‘the pregnant wife of Prince William’, and The Sun called her ‘the mother-to-be’.⁵⁴³ As well as this, the Daily Mail completely and overtly misrepresented Mantel’s position. In an act of astonishing hypocrisy, the tabloid said:

Hilary Mantel said the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge should not complain about invasion of privacy when pictures are taken of them on private holidays as a 'royal body exists to be looked at'.⁵⁴⁴

This is the exact opposite of what Mantel’s lecture sought to convey and redirects her critique back towards her. The paper takes valid and nuanced criticism of its practices, distorts them, and reframes them as a catfight rooted in jealousy. They also do this by including audio clips of the lecture, but only include the supposedly controversial lines they have draped their narrative on.

⁵⁴² ‘Hilary Mantel Attacks ‘Bland, Plastic, Machine-Made’ Duchess of’, *The Independent*, 2013 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/hilary-mantel-attacks-bland-plastic-machine-made-duchess-of-cambridge-8500035.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017]; Video in ‘Cameron Defends Kate over Mantel Comments’, *BBC News*, 19 February 2013, section Entertainment & Arts <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-21502937>> [Accessed 27 April 2017];

‘Top Author: Duchess of Cambridge Is a ‘plastic’ Princess’, *The Sun*, 2013 <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/515984/plastic-princess-slur-at-kate/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁴³ Tariq Tahir, ‘Mantel Hits out at ‘Machine-Made’ Kate’, *Metro*, 2013 <<http://metro.co.uk/2013/02/18/booker-prize-winner-hilary-mantel-hits-out-at-machine-made-duchess-of-cambridge-in-scathing-attack-3502827/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁴⁴ Infante.

It is perhaps unsurprising that newspapers pitted the women against one another, but *The Independent* actually included a section entitled, ‘Prize fight: the author and the princess’. Again, these editorial decisions confirm what Mantel was initially criticising, and also further the well-trodden narrative that high-profile women are spiteful towards one another (a narrative that Sandberg also furthers, discussed in Chapter 2). *The Independent*’s ‘Prize fight’ section lists age, occupation, education, experience, literary credentials, and style icon for each woman. The section is careful to include that Mantel ‘discovered socialism’ at university, and cites a comment the author made about body image in the ‘style icon’ section:

Reflecting on her body image, she once wrote: ‘You throw tantrums in fat-lady shops, where the stock is grimy tat tacked together from cheap man-made fabric, choice of electric blue or cerise. You can’t get your legs into boots, or your feet into last year’s shoes.’

There is a not so subtle judgement being made here about Mantel’s attractiveness, as well as her political leanings. In the ‘education’ section for Middleton it says, ‘Marlborough and St Andrew’s, where she caught Prince William’s eye modelling lingerie’, and in the ‘experience’ section it reads, ‘Keeping world’s media at bay during nine-year ‘will-they, won’t they’ relationship with William.’ There is an implication here, and in other newspapers, that Mantel is jealous of the younger, prettier Middleton. The *Daily Mail* includes a box in their online article entitled ‘A History of Hilary’, which tells the reader that Mantel has had ‘body issues of her own’, gained weight when she was 27, is infertile, and that ‘The 60-year-old author said she sometimes dreams of being thin again’. Positioning the author as old, infertile,

ugly, fat, jealous, and bitter, the Daily Mail is passionately invested in Middleton as a paragon of white, respectable British femininity.

This manufactured outrage wasn't limited to the press however, as then Prime Minister David Cameron took time out of his trade mission to India to comment on the matter. The Daily Mail reported Cameron's comments in the following manner: 'Kate puts her baby bump on parade as Prime Minister mauls best-selling author Hilary Mantel over 'plastic princess made for breeding' jibe'.⁵⁴⁵ Cameron commented that Mantel's comments were 'completely misguided'.⁵⁴⁶ Whilst this intervention completely flattens the potential for untangling the UK's relationship with the royals, media, and gender, it surely doesn't meet the requirements for a 'mauling'. Leader of the opposition at the time, Ed Miliband, also commented, saying 'these are pretty offensive remarks'. Both men were described by The Mirror as having 'leapt to [Middleton's] defence', thus reinforcing the sense that Middleton must be protected.⁵⁴⁷ Female royals are spoken about, but do not speak. Fittingly then, Middleton herself did not comment on the issue.

There's something to be said for the nature of the British media in this case, and in the Allsopp case outlined above. The forms of media that host these 'debates' or 'conflicts' are not, in their current incarnation, conducive to any deeper understanding or discussion. Importantly, they are not designed to facilitate meaningful dialogue, but rather to attract advertisers, encourage clicks and profit financially. For this story, information was relayed via short online clips,

⁵⁴⁵ Infante.

⁵⁴⁶ 'Cameron Defends Kate over Mantel Comments'.

⁵⁴⁷ Victoria Murphy, 'Lay off Kate: David Cameron and Ed Miliband Defend Duchess of Cambridge after Hilary Mantel Jibes', *Mirror*, 2013 <<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/kate-middleton-david-cameron-leaps-1717821>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

and in tabloid articles made almost entirely of quotations taken out of context; what was initially an academic take on an historical political dynamic, was reported as celebrity news.⁵⁴⁸

Presenting a historical political critique as simplistic belittles the agency and complexities of the women involved, portrays feminism as petty and vindictive, and serves to maintain the political and financial interests of the mainstream press. The reason this incident is interesting in the case of feminism, class, and domestic femininities, is that the British press are otherwise highly invasive and frequently misogynistic in their coverage of female celebrities. I suggest that Middleton is protected from this because of her relationship to the state and therefore to notions of (white) Britishness, and also because she inhabits a highly normative gender performance. Middleton is smiling and non-threatening, she produces royal heirs, she poses for photographs. She is thus spared the dehumanising and intrusive treatment of the UK tabloid press because she connotes purity and ideal femininity. What is it about Kate Middleton that requires her to be so viscerally defended against an academic commentary in a fairly niche publication? I would suggest that her particular gender presentation – of upper middle-class straight white femininity – with its historical connotations of virtue and submissiveness, suggests that she needs to be defended. Criticising Kate Middleton is akin to criticising traditional gender norms and the nuclear family, and both of these are seen as central facets of contemporary British life, but also of capitalism.

⁵⁴⁸ ‘Cameron Defends Kate over Mantel Comments’.

Several commentators did point out that Mantel’s words were being misrepresented, though within articles or segments that also presented the tabloid narrative. Historian Kate Williams spoke on BBC News and informed viewers that Mantel had actually been discussing ‘the intellectual representation of consorts down the ages’, and Arts Correspondent David Sillito on the BBC News website reiterated that Mantel was attacking the press rather than Middleton.

Whilst I'm using this example to show the classed and raced hierarchy of femininities (and thus widespread complicity in favouring privileged ones, as illustrated in this case-study), I am also pointing to media complicity in framing complex political issues in an overly simplified manner that relies on various binaries - in this case, a pure, innocent, youthful and appropriate femininity, pitted against an old, bitter, fat, uncivilised femininity. Both Newsnight in the Allsopp case-study, and the British press in this example, reframe a multifaceted feminist question as a woman versus woman catfight, mediated by a perplexed yet authoritative masculine tone, or an outright misogynistic one.

Having looked at privileged white femininities and their proximity to traditional and normative visions of the domestic, I now turn to Nadiya Hussain, the winner of the 2015 Great British Bake Off (GBBO). Whilst I have argued that white, cisgendered, straight, middle-class femininities are favoured in media representations of the domestic (wife, mother, homemaker), Hussein is a Muslim woman who has been embraced by the British public. Arguably, Hussain rising to prominence within the context of a baking competition, and one that relies heavily on twee representations of British nostalgia, is indicative of an assimilatory attempt to incorporate 'difference' in the service of maintaining existing gender norms. I explore Hussain's mediation in the public eye by thinking through resistance, tokenism and assimilation. Before looking closely at Hussain, I touch upon Islamophobia in the UK and further afield, and consider the intersections of Islam and feminisms.

Following the world-changing events of September 11th 2001, and the subsequent 'War on Terror', there has been 'a strong resurgence of an old Orientalism and an immediate intensification of surveillance, detention, and the

suspension of rights for those who are 'Muslim-looking'.⁵⁴⁹ According to Abdelkader, there has been an increase in religiously motivated hate-crimes in the UK since at least 2013, following the murder of Lee Rigby,⁵⁵⁰ and a post-Brexit increase in hate-crimes against Muslims and immigrants.⁵⁵¹ Islamophobia is rampant in British tabloids, with The Sun claiming that one in five British Muslims sympathised with Islamic militancy (the newspaper was eventually forced to apologise for this erroneous claim), The Daily Express claiming 'Muslims tell British: Go to hell', and The Daily Mail exclaiming 'Millions are eating halal food without knowing it'.⁵⁵²

In preparation for the June 2017 UK General Election, right-wing populist political party United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) released their 'Integration Agenda' which proposes: banning face coverings in public places, banning Sharia law, implementing yearly checks on girls from groups at risk from female genital mutilation (FGM), immediately closing schools 'where there is evidence of Islamist ideology being taught', and making failure to report FGM

⁵⁴⁹ Sherene Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 5.

⁵⁵⁰ Engy Abdelkader, 'A Comparative Analysis of European Islamophobia: France, UK, Germany, Netherlands and Sweden', *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law*, 16 (2016), 21.

⁵⁵¹ Abdelkader, 22.

⁵⁵² The Sun, 23 November 2015;

Apology written about in Kevin Rawlinson, 'Sun Ordered to Admit British Muslims Story Was 'Significantly Misleading'', *The Guardian*, 26 March 2016, section Media

<<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/mar/26/ips0-sun-print-statement-british-muslims-headline>> [Accessed 27 April 2017];

John Twomey and Cyril Dixon, 'Muslims Tell British: Go to Hell', *Express.co.uk*, 2010

<<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/209432/Muslims-tell-British-Go-to-hell>> [Accessed 25 April 2017];

Sean Poulter, Guy Adams, Mario Ledwith, and Matt Chorley, 'Millions Are Eating Halal Food without Knowing It', *Mail Online*, 2014 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2622830/Millions-eating-halal-food-without-knowing-How-big-brand-shops-restaurants-sell-ritually-slaughtered-meat-dont-label-it.html>> [Accessed 25 April 2017].

a criminal offence.⁵⁵³ In 2010 the French government banned face-coverings, and in 2016 attempted to ban the burkini – a modest item of swimwear, not dissimilar to a wetsuit. More recently, President of the USA Donald Trump enacted a controversial ‘Muslim Ban’ which barred the entry into the United States of citizens from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, and suspended the entry of Syrian refugees.⁵⁵⁴

Islamophobic representations of Muslims often characterise Muslim men as ‘violent and hyper-patriarchal’,⁵⁵⁵ and Muslim women as:

submissive and subjugated, apathetic and uninformed beings, unable or unwilling to act as subjects in their own right and hence not entirely worthy of the many rights accruing from social, economic and political participation⁵⁵⁶

Furthermore, Muslim women endure ‘a ‘triple penalty’ due to their religion, ethnicity and gender’,⁵⁵⁷ and are subject to ‘a mixture of imperial fascination and humanist pity’.⁵⁵⁸ This treatment hasn’t come solely from Western men or non-feminist women, but from imperialist feminists believing they are, as postcolonial feminist Spivak puts it, ‘saving brown women from brown men’.⁵⁵⁹ Razack describes this treatment as a ‘technology of empire’,⁵⁶⁰ where the West uses gender in its imperial narratives of civilisation. Indeed, Eisenstein points

⁵⁵³ ‘Our Bold New Integration Agenda Aims to Bring Communities Together’, *UKIP* <http://www.ukip.org/our_integration_agenda_aims_to_bring_communities_together> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁵⁴ The ban – officially Executive Order 13769 - has attracted significant controversy and been blocked by several judges.

⁵⁵⁵ Razack, 4.

⁵⁵⁶ Danièle Joly and Khursheed Wadia, *Muslim Women and Power: Political and Civic Engagement in West European Societies* (New York: Springer, 2017), 2.

⁵⁵⁷ Abdelkader, 23.

⁵⁵⁸ Lisa K. Taylor and Jasmin Zine, *Muslim Women, Transnational Feminism and the Ethics of Pedagogy: Contested Imaginaries in Post-9/11 Cultural Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 10.

⁵⁵⁹ Spivak in Rosalind C. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 48.

⁵⁶⁰ Razack, 18.

out that the US used women's rights rhetoric to justify its invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq,⁵⁶¹ and Power accuses the US of 'bombing in the name of women's rights'.⁵⁶² Being a Muslim woman in the public eye, amongst so many dehumanising and patronising narratives and representations, is no easy feat, which is what makes British-Bangladeshi Nadiya Hussain an exceptional case.

Hussain was studying for an Open University degree in childhood and youth studies when she applied to be a contestant in acclaimed BBC amateur baking contest *The Great British Bake Off*. Before the programme had aired a single episode, Quentin Letts at the *Daily Mail* wrote that the show was stuffed full of 'fashionable minorities', and accused the BBC of social engineering, and picking contestants 'because they fitted some Twitter-influenced metropolitan wishlist'.⁵⁶³ Letts described every contestant as 'box-ticking' and 'faultlessly politically correct'; he refers to Dorret as 'afro-haired', and the caption under a picture of Nadiya describes her as 'a Muslim head-dress wearer'. Letts assumes that all British citizens are white, and that the mere existence of non-white British citizens on TV is an act of unnecessary positive discrimination. He furthers the narrative that the 2015 GBBO contestants are taking the 'rightful' place of the deserving British national (who is white, in the tabloid imagination). He says:

Were these new contestants chosen on merit? Were they representative of the humdrum, plain-as-white-flour, Middle-English bumlbers whom I bet comprised the majority of the thousands of applicants who tried to get onto the show?

⁵⁶¹ Eisenstein, 1-2.

⁵⁶² Nina Power, *One Dimensional Woman* (Ropley:O Books, 2009), 11.

⁵⁶³ Quentin Letts, 'QUENTIN LETTS: I Adore Bake Off. But Does It Have to Be so Right On?', *Mail Online*, 2015 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3178064/I-adore-Great-British-Bake-does-right-Asks-QUENTIN-LETTS.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

For Letts then, Hussain (and many of the other contestants in the 2015 cohort) was an imposter on the GBBO. In spite of this racially motivated hostility, Hussain went on to win the show, and has since pursued a career in publishing and on television. Hussain can be seen as both resistant within dominant discourses of domesticity, and can also be read as conformist, or complicit with dominant gendered discourses of domesticity. She has been representationally recruited into a neoliberal narrative that serves to assuage white guilt over perceptions of ‘tolerance’, but actually makes no effort to counter Islamophobia.

I have already mentioned that Hussain was a full-time mother, studying for a degree, when she appeared on the GBBO, and this plays into the image of her as a conservative or traditional mother. Throughout the series, Hussain was shown as being unsure and self-deprecating, and was popular for her bemused facial expressions and shock when she received positive feedback from the judges. The image of the self-effacing woman who has success bestowed upon her echoes the colonial subject achieving personhood and a sense-of-self through work and praise from white authority figures. Upon winning the competition (her final “showstopper” was a wedding cake), Hussain gave a now-famous speech where she wept and said she wouldn’t doubt herself again; her final words spawned a hashtag – ‘I Can and I Will’.



The culmination of narratives at play in Hussain's representation makes her an ideal wholesome celebrity; her trajectory from unsure wife and mother, to national treasure, through the homely pursuit of baking, is ideal for a nation besieged with neoliberal 'journeys' and 'emotional rollercoasters'. Hussain was asked to bake the cake for the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations, and has been depicted as a multicultural success for the UK as a whole. In an interview with Refinery 29, the baker is asked about wedding cakes, her husband and children, being a role model, and being a victory for tolerance and multiculturalism, all of which are significant aspects of her mediation.⁵⁶⁴ This is one of many interviews and articles where Hussain is exemplified as a success for 'tolerance', implying that Muslims are something that must be tolerated in the first place.

Hussain could arguably be compared to the Kardashian Jenner sisters because she subverts norms of domesticity, and has achieved empowerment and personal success through traditional modes of gendered domesticity, enabled by certain neoliberal, multicultural narratives. Unlike the reality stars, and unlike Allsopp and Middleton, Hussain doesn't have a wealth of power and a significant platform – she is famous, but it is precarious fame, fame that must be expertly navigated (not unlike Jack Monroe). In appearing on British television and winning a competition that relies upon its depiction of a nostalgic British domestic tradition, Hussain occupies space as a Muslim woman in ways that aren't often seen. Her presence on British TV subverts what the domestic looks like, and humanises and foregrounds a group that is otherwise stigmatised and dehumanised.

⁵⁶⁴ 'How One Woman Is Using Her Oven To Change The Way The World Views Muslims' <<http://www.refinery29.com/2015/10/96378/nadiya-hussain-bbc-great-british-bake-off>> [Accessed 15 November 2016].

Regardless of the undeniable positivity of Hussain's appearance and success on the show, it's worth considering how she is used by the British media in a self-congratulatory manner. To use the language of Zillah Eisenstein (who I mentioned in Chapter 2), Hussain could be described as a racial decoy. She is used in a tokenistic fashion by the mainstream British media as a way of celebrating and demonstrating the nation's 'tolerance' of Islam – as long as it's an appropriate embodiment of Islam. The decoy analysis is somewhat different in this case (in comparison with Sheryl Sandberg in Chapter 2) because Hussain does not have political or financial power, and does not explicitly propagate a narrative of domesticity (whereas Sandberg does espouse and profit from a discourse of women needing to 'Lean In'). Regardless, 'neoliberal capitalism seizes any body that can do its work.'⁵⁶⁵

Daily Mail journalist Amanda Platell wrote during the contest that middle-class white contestant Flora may not have been eliminated had she 'made a chocolate mosque'.⁵⁶⁶ After Hussain had clinched the title however, Platell changed direction and framed the win as a Muslim woman escaping her conservative lifestyle. She said, 'She had finally decided to break out from domesticity and do something for herself'.⁵⁶⁷ Platell also foregrounded Hussain's role as a mother and wife, admiring her 'solid bedrock of home and family, of traditional values'. Gendered stereotypes are put to work by Platell in a way that's commonly seen in the Daily Mail, but this time in reference to a non-white Muslim woman.

Inserting a pretty Muslim woman who won a British themed baking context into

⁵⁶⁵ Allen et al , 921.

⁵⁶⁶ Amanda Platell, 'AMANDA PLATELL: Why Womb Transplants Make Me Shudder', *Mail Online*, 2015 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3258338/AMANDA-PLATELL-womb-transplants-make-shudder.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁶⁷ Amanda Platell, 'PLATELL'S PEOPLE: Why I Fear for Nadiya Now She's a Celebrity', *Mail Online*, 2015 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-3267211/PLATELL-S-PEOPLE-fear-Nadiya-s-celebrity.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

an existing gendered domestic norm is a way of diversifying or multi-culturalising an arena without actually analysing or changing the reasons that Muslim women were excluded from this space in the first place. Celebrating Hussain as a mother and wife that's 'just like us' humanises Muslims, which *appears* positive, but this celebration is slotted into a narrative of women as cooks, mothers, and wives, and thus reifies a traditional gendered division of labour.

This 'add Muslim and stir' model also feeds into Islamophobic narratives of Muslim women as always oppressed. It is through participating in and winning a British baking competition (with all its connotations of national pride and homemaking) that Hussain is framed as gaining access to personhood. The narrative is that Hussain was a Muslim woman who stayed at home with her children, and who ultimately found empowerment through competitive participation in a British tradition (there are comparisons to be drawn here with Somalian Muslim immigrant Mo Farah, who is also wholly embraced by the British public through his huge success as a British track athlete.) Presenting Hussain in this way utilises assimilatory logics where she is 'actually just like us', which, while humanising, erases the difference in how members of the Muslim community experience the world and are treated. This encourages privileged members of the audience to 'not see race' or 'not see religion', which ultimately is a performance of indifference which insists upon forms of difference.

Audre Lorde writes of women of colour, 'The tokenism that is sometimes extended to us is not an invitation to join power; our racial 'otherness' is a

visible reality that makes that quite clear.’⁵⁶⁸ Hussain is always presented in the context of her race and religion (particularly because she wears a hijab, but also in her food documentary *Chronicles of Nadiya* where she travels around Bangladesh), and whilst this is positive in terms of representation and recognising difference, it also ties her to this, thus framing her as a representative or positive ambassador for millions of Muslims. Good News Network described Hussein’s win as a ‘recipe for race relations’, which plays upon feminised domestic language whilst also attaching wider political significance to her success.⁵⁶⁹ Hussain is a signifier of multiculturalism and ‘tolerance’, rather than one representation of Muslims among many. It’s significant that the most prominent hijab-wearing woman on British television is a former stay at home mother and the winner of a baking contest. This isn’t to demean either baking or the important work of child-rearing, but to question why *this* is the most visible Muslim woman on British television. By openly supporting Hussain and celebrating her win, white people are able to signal themselves as non-Islamophobic (this is referred to as ‘virtue-signalling’)⁵⁷⁰ without interrogating their wider perceptions of Muslims and how this relates to their political beliefs and personal behaviours. Framing the audience of GBBO as white non-Muslims, Good News Network said:

⁵⁶⁸ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 1984, repr. 2012), 118-9.

⁵⁶⁹ Terry Turner, ‘Muslim Mom Winning Prestigious British Bake Off Is Delicious Recipe for Better Race Relations’, *Good News Network*, 2015 <<http://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/muslim-woman-winning-national-british-bake-off-is-recipe-for-race-relations/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁷⁰ James Bartholomew coined the term ‘virtue-signalling’, which describes how ‘many people say or write things to indicate that they are virtuous’ but don’t undertake any actions to back up this moral virtuosity. See James Bartholomew, ‘I invented ‘virtue signalling’. Now it’s taking over the world’, *The Spectator*, 10 October 2015 <<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/10/i-invented-virtue-signalling-now-its-taking-over-the-world>> [Accessed 18 December 2017].

Over the course of the season, Hussain transformed from ‘a Muslim in a headscarf,’ as she put it, to someone audience members could identify with.

In interviews with Hussain, there’s some implication that she has been brought out of a regressive and segregated Islamic society into a mainstream Western one – she has a job now, she’s monetising her caring skills. There are also colonial narratives at play that figure Hussain as being saved through winning access to the neoliberal capitalist sphere.

After winning the competition, Hussain spoke about the constant racial abuse she has faced as a Muslim British woman. She said she expects to be ‘shoved or pushed or verbally abused’⁵⁷¹ because she has experienced this treatment for years. She also spoke of being afraid of getting on a bus with her children because of people looking at and judging her. Despite clearly saying that she has suffered this Islamophobic abuse for years, and still expects it as part of her life as a Muslim woman, the British press reported this information with a tone of shock. The Daily Express wrote ‘racists still target me’, and ‘winner Nadiya Hussain is plagued by racist taunts, despite her fame’, implying that visibility or acceptance by the mainstream would stop racism.⁵⁷² The Express also shows surprise that Hussain suffers from anxiety as a result of a childhood racist attack, saying she ‘has revealed’ the condition, rather than assuming it would be a standard response to a traumatic formative event. The BBC reported that Hussain ‘reveals’ racist abuse, but people of colour do not need this revealed to them – again, the implication is that the readership is white, and that racism is

⁵⁷¹ Nadia Khomami, ‘Bake Off Winner Nadiya Hussain Says Racist Abuse Is Part of Her Everyday Life’, *The Guardian*, 14 August 2016, section Television & radio <<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/aug/14/bake-off-winner-nadiya-hussain-racist-abuse-is-part-of-her-everyday-life>> [Accessed 15 November 2016].

⁵⁷² Julia Kuttner, ‘Nadiya Hussain: Racists Still Target Me’, *Express.co.uk*, 2016 <<http://www.express.co.uk/pictures/galleries/3236/The-Great-British-Bake-Off-tv-show-baking-cooking-contestant-BBC-Nadiya-Tamal-Ian-pictures>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

uncommon or occurs in isolated violent instances (as illustrated by DiAngelo's 'racist=bad/not racist=good' binary in Chapter 3).⁵⁷³ This framing positions racism as individual, rather than as a structural and pervasive issue with direct ties to media representations, global politics and government rhetoric.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, it is often the case that white people see themselves as the arbiters of what is racist and what isn't. Because of the framing of Hussain as an aspirational ethnic minority, she is considered particularly trustworthy when it comes to her experience and perception of racism. This is compounded by her response to racism, which is to maintain silence and not rise to it. Whilst this is a completely understandable tactic of living in a white supremacist society, in a landscape with few representations of people of colour, it can come to be seen as the only way to deal with racism, and thus delegitimise other approaches. Hussain's response to acts of racism is an individualistic one. She says:

So I live as positively as I can and all those things that do happen to me, hey, it happens but it happens to other people too and we deal with it.⁵⁷⁴

It's worth considering a hypothetical scenario where Hussain suggests racial sensitivity training for the British public, more Muslims on screen, or direct action and protest. Reporting Hussain's response to racism without context of how other people of colour respond to it allows white members of the public to remain complacent and to not see themselves as implicated in the overall problem.

⁵⁷³ 'Nadiya Hussain: The Great British Bake Off Winner Reveals Racial Abuse', *BBC News*, 14 August 2016, section Entertainment & Arts <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-37058043>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁷⁴ 'Nadiya Hussain: The Great British Bake Off Winner Reveals Racial Abuse'.

Furthermore, Hussain says she started wearing a hijab to cover her ‘bad hair’, and *The Telegraph* reports that her parents ‘were not particularly religious’.⁵⁷⁵ This allows white middle-class audiences to project a secular and non-patriarchal narrative onto Hussain which allows her to be framed as a ‘good’ Muslim. Hussain had an arranged marriage – something that is often framed as oppressive in mainstream white culture – but she won *GBBO* by making a wedding cake that represented both sides of her cultural heritage; her wedding was reframed and re-presented in a way that made it more palatable to a non-Muslim audience. It isn’t reasonable that Hussain is obliged to represent a whole segment of the population, but it is relevant that she is the one who does. This isn’t to say Hussain isn’t talented or deserving, but that her story and persona can be put to use in service of existing narratives about race and class.

Conclusion

This chapter has incorporated a number of British case-studies to explore the different race and class dynamics that operate within the arena of the contemporary domestic. Firstly I looked at comments made by Kirstie Allsopp as a way of exploring classist perceptions of fertility and motherhood. I also used Allsopp’s appearance on *Newsnight* as an example of media complicity in furthering simplistic narratives about feminism and feminist issues. Moving to Kate Middleton, I suggested that her incarnation of normative femininity is vehemently defended by the tabloid press because of its whiteness, straightness and middle-class-ness. Using the example of Hilary Mantel’s essay on female royals, I contend that certain femininities are privileged when it comes to

⁵⁷⁵ Radhika Sanghani, ‘Nadiya Hussain’s ‘Bad Hair’ - and the Other Reasons Why Muslim Women Wear Headscarves’, *The Telegraph*, 10:08, section life
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/nadiya-hussains-bad-hair---and-the-other-reasons-why-muslim-wome/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

representations of domesticity, so that Mantel was used as a grotesque counterpoint to Middleton's idyllic mother/wife role. Finally, I considered tokenism and assimilation in regards to Nadiya Hussain, arguing that whilst white middle-class femininities are privileged, there are also attempts to diversify the domestic representative sphere by incorporating 'others' in a way that does not require structural overhaul or national reflection. In this third case-study I also point to media complicity, where subtle racialized narratives are employed that bring an otherwise stigmatised subject into the neoliberal secular sphere, in a way that flattens difference.

These three case-studies deal with different facets of domesticity, including discourses of fertility and their intersections with class, and notions of fragile white motherhood. In Hussain's case, I suggest there is a diversification of representations that may both offer space to subjects otherwise not represented in relation to the domestic, but also limit those subjects to restrictive gendered and classed parameters. GBBO is an interesting case study as it offers many new depictions of the domestic whilst retaining a sense of performed retro-Britishness.

More broadly, this chapter aims to reiterate the suggestion that privileged feminists can use complicity as a theoretical tool that incorporates the lives and experiences of others, rather than looking at something from a white middle-class perspective and deeming it 'not feminist'. Furthermore, I contend that feminists can maintain their own stances on the domestic without condemning those of others, and that exploring the nuances of representations enables this. The final chapter has dealt with issues pertaining to class and the domestic, and

in the conclusion to this thesis I summarise the research, clarify this work's original contribution, and make suggestions for further research.

Conclusion

'I don't know what it means to be... complicit'



American comedy show Saturday Night Live aired a sketch in March 2017 featuring Scarlett Johansson playing Ivanka Trump, advertising a perfume called 'Complicit'.⁵⁷⁶ The sketch including the following lines:

She's beautiful, she's powerful, she's complicit

She's a woman who knows what she wants, and knows what she's doing. Complicit

A feminist, an advocate, a champion for women, but like, how?

Complicit, the fragrance for the woman who can stop all this, but won't

Further to this, in an interview with CBS in April 2017, Gayle King asked the first daughter whether she was complicit in the actions of her father. Trump initially answered, 'If being complicit is wanting to be a force for good and to

⁵⁷⁶ Complicit – SNL <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7o4oMKbStE>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

make a positive impact, then I'm complicit', but went on to say 'I don't know what it means to be... complicit'.⁵⁷⁷ Following this, 'complicit' was a top-trending word on the Merriam Webster Dictionary's website, became a talking point amongst columnists,⁵⁷⁸ and in December 2017 was announced as Merriam Webster's second word of the year (after 'Feminism' which was first).⁵⁷⁹ Arwa Mahdawi at The Guardian implicates the wider public in Ivanka Trump's complicity, saying:

Ivanka and Melania don't deserve our sympathy. They are not victims, they're profiteers. And Ivanka deserves far better than our excuses. She is far more than a daughter stuck in a difficult position. She is an intelligent woman who has shrewdly benefited from sexist notions of women as nurturers rather than murderers. If we continue to allow her that narrative then we too are complicit.⁵⁸⁰

Complicity is also a factor in the recent spike in sales of Margaret Atwood's feminist dystopian classic *The Handmaid's Tale*, which features a theocratic patriarchal dictatorship where women are categorised according to their class, race, and ability to reproduce.⁵⁸¹ Atwood has described her book as 'a study of power', where the highly regulated caste system also creates hierarchies

⁵⁷⁷ 'Ivanka Trump: 'I'll Weigh in with My Father on the Issues I Feel Strongly About'' <<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/ivanka-trump-interview-full-transcript/>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁷⁸ 'Trending: Lookups For 'Complicit' Spiked After An SNL Sketch Used The Word To Describe Ivanka Trump' <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/news-trend-watch/lookups-for-complicit-spiked-after-an-snl-sketch-used-the-word-to-describe-ivanka-trump-20170313>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁷⁹ 'Merriam Webster's 2017 Words of the Year' <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-of-the-year-2017-feminism/feminism>> [Accessed 18 December 2017].

⁵⁸⁰ 'Ivanka Trump Is Complicit in Her Dad's Mission to Get Rich at the US's Expense', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2017, section Opinion

<<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/14/ivanka-trump-complicit-dads-mission-get-rich-us-expense-trumps-heartland-appeasing-liberals>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁸¹ Adi Robertson, 'In Trump's America, *The Handmaid's Tale* Matters More than Ever', *The Verge*, 2014 <<http://www.theverge.com/2014/12/20/7424951/does-the-handmaids-tale-hold-up-dystopia-feminism-fiction>> [Accessed 23 April 2017].

between men.⁵⁸² Importantly, narrative aspects of *The Handmaid's Tale* can be seen as a critique of second-wave feminism, or as a warning against absolutist ideologies. The women in the book, because of their separation into various classes, are not inherently supportive of one another, and are often agents of oppression towards one another. American on-demand service Hulu released a ten episode series based on Atwood's book, featuring Elisabeth Moss, Samira Wiley, and Joseph Fiennes. Following the release of the trailer in March 2017, Trump supporters took to Twitter to brand the series 'leftist propaganda' and 'liberal shit'.⁵⁸³ A dystopian novel written in 1984, with considerable discourses of complicity, was taken by some Trump supporters to be a new text - one written in relation to the current political situation. In late April 2017, the *New Republic* published an article entitled 'The Handmaid's Tale Is a Warning to Conservative Women', saying the book and series reveal women's 'collusion with the patriarchy,' and that some conservative women are a reminder that 'American fundamentalism [...] could not thrive without the enthusiastic backing of women.'⁵⁸⁴ Complicity is essential to discussing these issues, particularly considering the increasing polarisation of left and right-wing politics across Europe and the USA.

In light of a Post-Brexit United Kingdom, and a United States headed by Donald Trump, it's more crucial than ever to consider complicity, and to make a focused effort to stridently avoid it as much as possible. For example, where white

⁵⁸² 'No Balm in Gilead for Margaret Atwood' <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/09/03/specials/atwood-gilead.html>> [Accessed 27 April 2017].

⁵⁸³ Dana Schwartz, 'Trump Supporters Are Getting Triggered by an Adaptation of a Novel Over 30 Years Old', *Observer*, 2017 <<http://observer.com/2017/03/trump-handmaids-tale-elizabeth-moss/>> [Accessed 23 April 2017].

⁵⁸⁴ 'The Handmaid's Tale Is a Warning to Conservative Women', *New Republic*, 2017 <<https://newrepublic.com/article/141674/handmaids-tale-hulu-warning-conservative-women>> [Accessed 23 April 2017].

people may have previously defended their reasons for not rebuking family members for racism (fear of estrangement, fear of being seen as extreme, knowing hostility can entrench opposing views, fear of upsetting family dynamics), the political situation is such that these considerations are arguably outweighed by the need for everyday citizens to become more politically engaged and radicalised. In the course of undertaking this research, political shifts have been dramatic enough to convince me to be even more mindful of complicity. In ‘Totalitarianism in the age of Trump: lessons from Hannah Arendt,’ Zoe Williams refers to Arendt’s well-known characterisation of evil as banal. She says:

If we think of evil as this one person, this one big event, then we tend to want to match that with one big display of resistance. But actually, if evil is banal – a set of ordinary, mundane decisions day by day – then maybe we have to start living differently day by day.⁵⁸⁵

Small Capitulations and Quotidian Compromises

It is a condition of human life that our actions affect others, and the current political landscape makes this particularly so. Globalisation, the digitisation of everyday life, the blurring of work and leisure, and the ever-growing technological mediation of human existence shrinks the world, and pushes us up against our fellow citizen. We need then, to talk about how we impact one another’s lives - materially, discursively, and representationally. This work offers a mediation on how we think about each other - a consideration of how my words and beliefs may affect your ability to survive or exist, and vice versa.

Ultimately, this work has attempted in a small way to consider this in relation to

⁵⁸⁵ Zoe Williams, ‘Totalitarianism in the Age of Trump: Lessons from Hannah Arendt’, *The Guardian*, 1 February 2017, section US news <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/01/totalitarianism-in-age-donald-trump-lessons-from-hannah-arendt-protests>> [Accessed 2 February 2017].

a variety of pertinent feminist concerns. This thesis traces strands of complicity from various perspectives, from early feminist writing to contemporary pop culture. It talks about the potential use of complicity as a way of seeing, the ways it appears across popular culture in images and language, and its relationship to particular political moments.

Throughout feminist histories, feminists have positioned women as participating in their own oppression, or participating in the oppression of others. Across a whole host of practices and themes, feminist theory navigates the ways in which we interact with the world and each other. It follows that discourses of complicity have always been a consideration within feminisms but haven't been dealt with at length, and specifically have not been addressed in relation to pop-culture figures in the current historical moment. Whilst there are many think-pieces and hot-takes on what makes someone feminist or not, these rarely incorporate an awareness of feminist histories, or multiple possible feminist approaches.

At the beginning of this thesis I argued that various political and discursive shifts necessitate a more explicit focus on complicity. Firstly, the move from essentialism to intersectionality opens up discursive space for subjectivities that didn't previously have a space to be articulated or heard, and the centrality of social media to fourth-wave feminisms attests to this. The ability of otherwise marginalised voices to be heard in online spaces has diversified the feminist landscape, and contributed to the still necessary decolonization of feminist discussion and activism. Rosalind Gill writes, 'We need approaches that can

offer subtle and complicated appreciations of the way that multiple and contradictory ideas can co-exist in the same moment, plane, field.’⁵⁸⁶

There is so much to explore and consider across popular culture, and utilising one feminist way of seeing does a disservice to the many ways we can consume images of women across the contemporary landscape. Using a multi-dimensional mode of seeing like intersectionality means feminist critique can be more and more nuanced, and it gives language to tensions and overlaps that existed in previous feminist discussions. Without suggesting a very linear chronology of feminisms (where the second-wave was flawed and primitive and subsequent waves are complex and brilliant), in the slow incorporation of intersectional theories, there has undoubtedly been a move away from radical feminist models that worked from an understanding of an all-consuming patriarchy, to a feminist political discourse that is more aware of its many moving parts.

As well as the steady move towards intersectionality, I situated the need for this research against the pervasive and insidious rationalities of postfeminism and neoliberalism. These twin forces normalise and give voice to discourses of self-surveillance, choice feminism, responsibility, and a conception of life as a project owned by the individual. The dominance and normalisation of these ways of thinking must be continually interrogated by feminist work, and using complicity to cut across them is one such interrogation. Complicity is offered in this work as a way in, and as a means of addressing the influence of such narratives on our lives. Crucially, postfeminism and neoliberalism do not exist away from, or outside of, me; I am thoroughly embedded in the discourses I

⁵⁸⁶ Gill, ‘Postfeminism and the New Cultural Life of Feminism’, 3.

critique in this work. Speaking about reality television, Stephanie Genz says ‘We have to aim for a more nuanced understanding [...] to expand beyond an oppression-submission hypothesis.’⁵⁸⁷ This thesis contributes to this project.

In the introduction to this thesis I mentioned that some treatments of complicity are more clear-cut than my own because they deal with the law or with historical atrocities. Because feminism is an amorphous, ever-changing, multi-faceted movement, I have foregrounded the question – ‘Complicit with What?’ This consideration formed the basis for my chapter choices, which is why each chapter deals with a particular feminist theme, and considers various feminist approaches. The themes covered – corporate feminism, cultural appropriation, beauty, and domesticity –and the women used to traverse them in each chapter are: entangled in the public imagination of feminism, the subject of many articles, and deeply implicated in postfeminist and neoliberal representations of gender, race and class. Each chapter can be taken as an individual treatise on complicity, which models my suggestion that complicity should only be utilised within historically informed and intersectional contexts.

More broadly, complicity can be utilised to think about a variety of practices. To take a personal example, to avoid complicity with that which I disagree with, I would be a vegan (as an aside, it’s interesting to note that veganism is a political stance that refuses to be complicit), eat fair-trade organic food, wear responsibly produced clothes, and cycle rather than drive a car. Whilst it’s certainly not impossible to live this way, there are limited ways to do so, and not everyone is equally placed to afford the time or money required to be an ethical consumer.

For example, my ability to recycle and travel by sustainable means may be

⁵⁸⁷ Stephanie Genz, ‘My Job is Me: Postfeminist celebrity culture and the gendering of authenticity’ *Feminist Media Studies*, 15, 4 (2014) 552.

hampered by the facilities and routes available where I live. Whilst I would like to work for an organisation that pays a living wage, doesn't rely on zero hour contracts, and pays corporation tax, I also need to pay bills, and gain the experience necessary to procure long-term employment. Avoiding complicity is difficult, and has various implications for different demographics. When I extend this to the examples I have used in this thesis, it becomes all the more impossible to completely avoid complicity. As someone who regularly engages in beauty practices, I defend the right to perform femininities, to be creative and playful, and to feel confident in an image-based patriarchal society. However, how do I avoid contributing to the idea that wearing make-up is essential? Or that it makes women look better? How do I straddle the knowledge that wearing makeup shouldn't be necessary for some women to feel confident, but that it does within particular contexts? How do I step outside these narratives? I can try to avoid perpetuating them myself, but I likely buy products that use these narratives in their advertising.

Related to this is the way I have used case-studies throughout this work. I want to stress again that I do not suggest that 'some women', or 'bad women' are 'letting women down' or are responsible for patriarchy or oppression. The women discussed in this work represent problems or tensions within feminism and should be looked at in order to consider how we also are complicit, and could try not to be. How can feminists defend 'femininity' and not perpetuate discourses that suggest appearance (and a particular type of appearance) is an obligation for women, or is related to just women? How can feminists secure employment and operate within the workplace - one whose ethos and language we may vehemently disagree with - and not bring that language and managerial

ethos to our politics, to our views on other people, to a self-management of our own lives and relationships? How can we respond to and loudly critique these discourses? I have offered complicity as a way of acknowledging our participation in discourses and systems we do not agree with, and find it to be a useful way of reading popular culture.

Andi Zeisler, in her excellent article on feminist think-pieces, argues that confessional writing about feminism reinforces the idea that feminists must defend ‘the quotidian compromises of their daily lives’ because of their political beliefs.⁵⁸⁸ Zeisler points out that male writers rarely have to publicly reconcile their interests with their political stance, but female writers often have to justify or defend their affinity for Taylor Swift, fake tan or taking selfies. Interestingly, Zeisler locates this problem in ‘the age of 24-7 content’, and a public taste for writing where women present themselves as ‘insecure, conflicted and even fraudulent’. Zeisler differentiates between lived and theoretical feminism, and acknowledges the many inevitable complicities – ‘small capitulations’, ‘quotidian compromises’ - of living in white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchy. Part of Zeisler’s argument is that feminists shouldn’t pander to a higher level of credentialism than other political subjects. In other words, feminists should not write about or defend every action they take, particularly because such writing is consumed by a non-feminist audience.

I wholly agree with this stance, particularly as it relates to non-feminist audiences, but this isn’t to say that feminists themselves should never pay attention to these ‘quotidian compromises’. There is an argument within some

⁵⁸⁸ Andi Zeisler, ‘The Crisis of ‘bad Feminism’ Is Worse than You Think’, *Salon* <http://www.salon.com/2014/09/01/the_crisis_of_bad_feminism_is_worse_than_you_think> [Accessed 13 October 2016].

feminisms that it's pointless, annoying or trivial to engage in the 'is X feminist?' 'Can you be feminist and X?' discussion. This is understandable precisely because of what Zeisler argues – feminists are persistently expected to defend every minor life choice or taste through the prism of their political beliefs, and so many do not wish to pander to this. There is an overlap between these types of discussions and this research – clearly I *am* interested in whether beauty can be conceived of as feminist or not, and whether Miley Cyrus is a feminist or not (though not in such dualistic terms). On the one hand, I have argued that mainstream white feminism is always engaging these sorts of arguments, and that this misrepresents feminist theory and activism, and simplifies feminisms. On the other hand, I do think it's useful and worthwhile to undertake a feminist analysis of, for example, selfies. Defending selfies, or reading them from an alternative feminist perspective, pushes back against femmephobic and sexist assumptions that young women are vain, self-involved, and image-obsessed; it argues that they are creative, self-loving, and positioning themselves in an image system that has long preceded the selfie. A moralistic think-piece asking 'Are selfies feminist?' mightn't be particularly helpful for feminist discourse and activism, but this doesn't mean that selfies shouldn't be a feminist object of analysis, particularly from an intersectional feminist perspective, in a way that doesn't centre cis straight white middle-class women. Similar to this, I don't think it's helpful to reiterate the binary between 'hard' political or activist feminisms and 'soft' representational or deconstructive feminisms. They go hand in hand, and are entangled with one another in the broader landscape. Ultimately I have made the case for addressing complicity, recognising our own inevitable complicity, and taking care to do this respectfully, empathetically,

from a range of positions, and being cognizant of our own privileges and how these may vary in different contexts.

What's New? Original Contribution Revisited

As stated at the beginning of this work, this thesis is a feminist consideration of complicity in one place, explicitly. I claimed that discourses of complicity exist across the feminist landscape, that these latent discourses should be taken seriously, and that complicity itself – as a way of seeing or thinking – is a useful and vital prism for talking about political issues. The various chapters and case-studies demonstrate both the pertinence of feminist imagery and language across contemporary pop-culture, and the ways that these representations can be framed by applying complicity as a theoretical tool. As well as considering an underexplored facet of feminist discourse, this thesis deals with contemporary examples, and advocates a reflexive methodological approach. It is the combination of these that constitutes the original contribution of this work.

Limitations and Looking Forward

It is an ongoing concern throughout this research that I focus on women and not men; however, because this thesis is about discourses of complicity, this is unavoidable. From my standpoint, it's obvious that the actions of many men are harmful to women and to feminism's political project, and so hopefully it goes without saying that I don't blame or accuse women more than I do men. Moreover, I do advocate a structural understanding of power and not an individual one - that is, I don't blame any individual of any gender for patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism or heteronormativity. Rather, I see it as something we are all complicit in, to varying degrees.

As stated throughout, I am a white, middle-class, cisgendered, straight woman, and so it is inevitable that this research does not cover the experiences and perspectives that it ought to. Despite me having read writing and theory from women of colour and queer writers, I cannot fully embody these perspectives and shouldn't foreground my interpretation of their writing at the expense of these groups speaking for themselves - which they already do, of course. This thesis also engages with issues concerning race more than issues of sexual orientation, class or disability, and future work on this topic would be better for interacting with other intersections of oppression. As a white woman I am hesitant to speak about black women's complicity, working-class women's complicity, and so on; in fact, I believe it would be deeply offensive for me to do so. I have focused on white women's complicity (with racism, corporatism, postfeminist approaches to beauty, and classed conceptions of domesticity) because I cannot understand the complex realities that make up lives other than my own. It is not my place to judge other women, or to attempt to understand their space, their lives, and their decisions.

Additionally, this research would really come to life through ethnographic research with a range of participants. It would be especially useful to have a cross-generational discussion to compare the approaches and attitudes of women who have been involved in feminist organising during different periods. Adrienne Evans and Sarah Riley's work on postfeminist raunch culture (which I mentioned in Chapter 4) combines Foucauldian and Butlerian theory on subjectivity, agency and identity with sociological research that involves speaking with young women about their views on and interactions with contemporary 'raunch' culture. This combination allows for a theoretical

discussion, an incorporation of women's voices in their own voices, and some reflection based on the outcomes of those conversations. This would also be a useful reflexive exercise for the feminist researcher. Equally, further media research that involves audience reception theory would offer a clearer picture of how particular groups read celebrities like Iggy Azalea or Sheryl Sandberg.

Finally, I have traversed several feminist topics here – corporate uses of feminism, cultural appropriation and racism, postfeminist neoliberal discourses of beauty, and class-inflected notions of appropriate femininity - but there are many more that could be explored through the lens of complicity, both in terms of feminist complicity, and more generalised complicity. I am particularly interested in the complicity of Western consumers in the exploitation of textile workers, and in complicity with moralistic discourses of food and health.

Perhaps future research can explore these areas.

Conclusion

This thesis looks at previous feminist uses of complicity and decides not to deliver a fixed framework for going forward with complicity as a theoretical tool. My argument throughout is that we need to consider all feminist issues, but particularly those to do with complicity, from a contextual, positional and respectful position. We must be cognisant of our feminist history, a history that has replicated the unequal hierarchical divisions of white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchy. Rather than advocating a postmodern deconstruction of every single theme and situation women may find themselves in (though I do advocate a postmodern approach in many ways), I suggest an opening up of our horizons, an acknowledgement that our way of seeing an issue, our way of living an issue, is not always the same as that of others.

Following from Ahmed in *The Promise of Happiness*, and Gilson in her work on vulnerability and ignorance, I suggest complicity as a feminist theoretical tool not as a way to tear women down or to criticise and condemn women, but as a tool for improvement and subversion and expansion. Complicity should open up, broaden, deepen, and offer nuance in the place of binaries. It allows us to take accountability, to see ourselves as part of a bigger collective, and to decentre our own experiences. Further to this, the increased use of the term validates my claim that complicity is significant to contemporary politics.

The foundational assumption of this thesis is the assertion that we are all complicit with white supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist patriarchy. We can consider ourselves complicit at all times because of the system we live within, but this does not excuse us from perpetuating oppressive systems. I have suggested in various chapters that our ability to dissent is limited by consequences, both informal and formal. Complicity would not be an issue if people could dissent and suffer no consequence. If we are all participating in social structures, it is imperative that we look at our role in reproducing them.

Complicity challenges the clearly delineated categories of good and bad - the good people and the bad people, good politics and bad politics. By considering our relations with others, our ways of understanding, and our approaches, we can embrace the blurriness, and the 'fuzziness' of lives. Ultimately my research emerges from the fact that feminism, and life, is messy. We can't easily map goodness and badness (or feminist and not-feminist) onto our lives, actions, decisions, and behaviours. I became interested in complicity because it was something that stuck out, something that didn't make sense. The point of this

research is not necessarily to find an answer, but rather to talk about the question.



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