FEMINISM FOR SALE:
COMMODITY FEMINISM, FEMININITY, AND SUBJECTIVITY

Julie Elizabeth Dowsett

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ABSTRACT

Today it is commonplace for the female consumer to be targeted using appropriated feminist discourses. This dissertation theorizes commodity feminism, a play on Marx's conception of commodity fetishism, at the intersections of Marx/Marxism, feminist theory, and Freud/Freudianism. My method involves exploring a series of relationships through reading canonical and contemporary works of political theory and feminist theory. These relationships build upon one another in each chapter: the first relationship is between women and commodities, and to this relationship I add femininity, social control, and subject formation in sequence. In thinking through these relationships, I critique a variety of trade and scholarly marketing publications and marketing campaigns.

I argue that the theory of commodity feminism provides a crucial, and as of yet unearthed, understanding of the contemporary relationship between women and commodities. I define commodity feminism as the commodification of feminist critique and praxis. In its cultural sense, commodity feminism is the broad phenomenon in which women are encouraged to express their empowerment by purchasing commodities. The politics of commodity feminism are both liberal and conservative. Commodity feminism is liberal in that it offers a type of resolution (however commodified) to the feminism/femininity tension and endorses liberal feminist politics of independence and self-determination. However, I argue that the view of society underpinning commodity feminism is conservative in that the masses are understood to be a problem in need of control. Therefore, commodity feminism, in addition to resolving the

feminism/femininity tension by revaluing feminized commodities and the women who use them, transforms commodities into a form of social control. In other words, commodity feminism makes women entirely unthreatening to the status quo, yet allows them to feel like feminists through their consumption of feminized commodities and production of femininity. This social control is accomplished in part through the role played by commodities and corporations in the production of subjectivity. As this dissertation shows, commodity feminism today constitutes several hegemonic feminine/feminist subjectivities in the Global North and increasingly the Global South.

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INTRODUCTION
Good Girls Consume: Commodity Feminism in Anglo-American Culture and Beyond

They're making gold out of the good girls like me,
They're making dollars out of all our fantasies,
Making bundles of cash from the trash we think we need,
Making gold out of the good girls like me.
—Amy Rigby (1996)

Amy Rigby's mid-1990s song "The Good Girls," from the album *Diary of a Mod Housewife*, describes a day in the life of an American *good girl*. She takes the subway to her work in an office. Concerned with maintaining a conventionally feminine appearance, she spends her lunch break shopping for clothes. She hopes to find a "ray of sunshine in the lining of a thirty-dollar dress." She cannot, however, afford to spend more than thirty dollars on a dress, as "her chances of advancing are ten thousand to one." Her hours of work are long (6–9) and arduous (characterized as "slaving"). She describes her work as "double time," but it is unclear whether her 6–9 hour work day includes domestic labour, or if her domestic labour is completed outside these hours. She identifies as a feminist, especially when compared to her mother who "stayed at home and […] never got paid." Yet she is aware of the limitations of her liberal feminist empowerment and notes with irony: "I'm so tired at night; I think I've got it made." The chorus of "The Good Girls," cited above, is repeated three times. The wording changes slightly in each repetition, indicating different commodities bought, sold, and used by the *good girls*: the capitalists making "bundles of cash" also benefit from the "trash that we read" and the "tapes and CDs." I contributed to some of the "bundles of cash" made by Rigby's recording label in purchasing my copy of her *Diary of a Mod Housewife* CD, as

did many other feminists, given that the album has been a popular text in women's studies courses.

Beyond her feminism and urban American context, most aspects of the identity of the *good girl* in the song are unspecified: her class (she could be a secretary or a lawyer), race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and whether she has a partner or any children. The good girl, therefore, could be many different women. Her feminist understanding is largely informed by liberal feminist discourses of independence and self-determination. Her feminism is expressed by purchasing feminized commodities (such as clothing and cosmetics) with money she earned herself through waged labour. Her feminism is depoliticized in that it does little to challenge the position of women. The very term *good girl* implies an idealized form of femininity, in regards to both embodiment and behaviour, and these ideals are themselves informed by gendered morality. She keeps a tidy household (making her bed "first thing in the morning") and her "sins" are relatively minor (drinking an extra cup of coffee is her "only available sin"). Yet the definition of a good girl has shifted over time: to be too good (in other words, too traditionally gendered like Rigby's stay-at-home mother or the women described by Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*) is no longer a strategy for success. At the same time, although clearly a woman, she is described using the diminutive *girl*, indicating that the distinction between the *office girls* and *businessmen* of her mother's time has not yet been eradicated.

The good girl, I contend, is a *commodity feminist*. In this dissertation, I argue that the theory of commodity feminism provides a crucial, and as of yet unearthed,

understanding of the contemporary relationship between women and commodities. I define commodity feminism, a play on Karl Marx's conception of commodity fetishism, as the commodification of feminist critique and praxis. In its cultural sense, commodity feminism is the broad phenomenon in which liberal feminist discourses are appropriated for the purpose of selling commodities to women and girls. The politics of commodity feminism are both liberal and conservative. Commodity feminism is liberal in that it offers a type of *resolution* (however commodified) to the feminism/femininity tension and endorses liberal feminist politics of independence and self-determination. However, I argue that the view of society underpinning commodity feminism is conservative in that the masses are understood to be a problem in need of control.

The overarching argument of this dissertation, therefore, is that commodity feminism, in addition to *resolving* the feminism/femininity tension by revaluing feminized commodities and the women who use them, transforms commodities into a form of social control. In other words, commodity feminism makes women entirely unthreatening to the status quo, yet allows them to feel like feminists through their consumption of feminized commodities and production of femininity. This social control is accomplished in part through the role played by commodities and corporations in the production of subjectivity. As the dissertation will show, commodity feminism today constitutes several hegemonic feminine/feminist subjectivities in the Global North and increasingly in the Global South.

At a broader level, this dissertation is an inquiry into the good girl, probing the status of feminism in Anglo-American culture today. In this sense, Rigby's song relates to

several of the main themes of this dissertation, both through its lyrics and how it has been produced and consumed. These themes include processes of commodification, the relationship between women and commodities, the relationship between femininity and feminized commodities, and the constitution of the female subject under contemporary capitalism. The good girl, as described by Rigby, negotiates her gendered position through both liberal feminist and masculinist values while purchasing commodities along the way. Rigby's mid-1990s song, then, captures a particular historical moment very well: the rapid growth of commodity feminism as a cultural phenomenon.

A. Framework and Method

As my title *Feminism for Sale: Commodity Feminism, Femininity, and Subjectivity* suggests, I understand commodity feminism to concern the relationship between commodities, femininity, and subjectivity. In a similar manner to how commodity fetishism imbues commodities with a value that has little to do with the actual physical form of the commodity or the material relations through which the commodity was produced, commodity feminism has little to do with the actual politics of feminism or the material circumstances of women's lives. Commodity feminism not only distracts and distances women from feminist issues, but it also produces particular forms of female subjectivity that are necessitated by commodity production and masculinist capitalist social relations. I thus aim to theorize processes of commodification through a feminist lens that does not assume that capitalism *determines* culture. Instead, I

understand capitalism as *shaping* culture and therefore social relations, including the constitution of subjectivity. As such, contemporary commodity feminism is not only a broad cultural phenomenon but also a neoliberal form of subjectivity. Commodity feminism relates to hegemonic forms of femininity in that many of the products sold to women through commodity feminist language, such as clothing and cosmetics, assist in the production of femininity. Indeed, commodity feminism has proven remarkably adept at negotiating the tensions between (Anglo-American) feminism and femininity.

Throughout this dissertation, I also consider the nature of this *form* of feminism. Commodity feminism is feminist only insofar as it does not deconstruct femininity too much,[1] defines femininity with reference to masculinity, is heteronormative, is middle class or at least gives the illusion of class mobility, understands race to primarily constitute a different aesthetic,[2] and, most importantly, mediates itself through the commodity form. With all of these caveats, commodity feminism might seem to scarcely resemble any form of feminism. However, commodity feminism is feminist in that it claims a legitimate terrain of desire for women. Women have been constructed as objects of desire for men in a variety of ways.[3] This construction has resulted in the denial of women's own desire unless, in Luce Irigaray's words, a woman gains pleasure "simply from being chosen as an object of consumption or of desire by masculine 'subjects'" (1985: 84). Commodity feminism offers women their own pleasure in

[1] This would cut into revenue from beauty products, the fashion industry, and other feminized commodities.

[2] Understanding race as an aesthetic downplays racism and empties difference of power and social relations (Bannerji, 2000: 15–55).

[3] Indeed, according to psychoanalytic theory, the breast is a primordial object of desire (Ragland-Sullivan, 1986: 22).

looking—for example, pleasure in looking at the clothing and cosmetics advertised in what Rigby describes as "the trash that we read" (referring to popular women's magazines). Commodity feminism also offers women pleasure in the production of femininity; it revalues femininity and feminized commodities, both of which have been debased historically and contemporarily in Anglo-American society (Rigby is not unique in dismissing the "trash we think we need"). Commodity feminism may do little to enact social or political change, but it does empower the desires of certain women: those whom it simultaneously normalizes and idealizes. In other words, commodity feminism enables women who tend to be white and middle class to participate in the production of particular forms of femininity.

Overall, my method involves exploring a series of relationships through reading canonical and contemporary works of political theory and feminist theory. These relationships build upon one another: the first relationship is between women and commodities, and to this relationship I add femininity, social control, and subject formation in sequence. The primary relationship is discussed in the first chapter; subsequent chapters layer on these secondary aspects in order to probe various dimensions of commodity feminism. In exploring these relationships, I develop the broader themes of this dissertation.

B. Broader Themes and Approach

The first and most important theme is *origins*, that is, origin questions and origin stories. The fundamental *origin question* posed is how exactly feminism became associated with consumption. In theoretical terms, this question is explored in two ways. First, it is

explored through the often contentious relationship between feminism and femininity. In popular Anglo-American feminism, the *femininity question* has been thought to explain a great deal about the position of women. I trace this question back to liberal feminist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), who understood femininity as a problem, and overcoming femininity as critical to the emancipation of women. Second, the origin question is explored through *capitalism under conservatism*, that is, a conservative theory of democracy in which commodity consumption is treated as a necessary form of social control. I trace this theory back to Edward Bernays (1891–1995), a pioneer in public relations and nephew of Sigmund Freud. Bernays also originated the first commodity feminist campaigns in Anglo-America. In *theoretical terms*, therefore, I locate the origins of commodity feminism in the processes through which the feminism/femininity tension is resolved in capitalist terms. This resolution is brought about by revaluing feminized commodities and the women who use them while at the same time subjugating the consumer-citizen within a Bernaysian political framework. Thus, my *theoretical* treatment of the fundamental origin question illustrates both the mass appeal and ascendancy of commodity feminism today.

In *concrete* terms, I explore this origin question through historical trade and scholarly marketing publications on women and their changing roles. The rapid growth of commodity feminism as a marketing practice and cultural phenomenon in the mid-1990s, as captured by Rigby's song, did not occur overnight; rather, it was the result of decades of discussion and debate within marketing circles. I explore how marketing scholars and practitioners in the 1970s and 1980s debated whether and how marketers

should address feminist critiques of their practices (such as the representation of women as confined to the home, and/or as sexualized objects for the desiring male gaze). In the pursuit of profit for their clients, these scholars and practitioners paid close attention to changes in the position of women in Anglo-American societies, and even engaged with popular feminist writings such as Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer. As such, when the consumer base of more so-called *traditional* women (that is, women married to men and outside the paid labour force) shrank, marketers increased commodity feminist marketing techniques. In addition to engaging with the fundamental origin question in theoretical and concrete terms, my origins theme is also explored through origin stories.

The *origin stories* explored are those of Friedrich Engels and Sigmund Freud. Engels' origin story (in which women are reduced to commodities to be exchanged between men) has been highly influential in feminist understandings of the relationship between women and commodities. Freud's origin story (in which a band of brothers feel guilty about the Oedipal killing of their father and desire an authoritative father-substitute) strongly influences his nephew's conservative thought. I do not endorse the origin stories of Engels or Freud; indeed, I contend that both are based on questionable historical and anthropological evidence. This is not uncommon: as Joanne Wright notes,[4] origin story theorists commonly distort history for their own purposes (2004: 24). However, the origin stories of Engels and Freud are useful for illuminating the

[4] My understanding of political origin stories has been influenced by Wright's book *Origin Stories in Political thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship* (2004). See section A of the concluding chapter.

power relations from which commodity feminism emerged and within which it continues to operate.

Related to the first and most important theme of *origins* are two other broad themes: namely, (*feminized) commodities and social control* and *civilizing discourses*. On the former, I explore how commodity feminism works to contain and direct the potentially out-of-control desires and behaviour of individual women and the feminized masses. Femininity (both within individual women and within the masses) is associated with hysteria, excesses of emotion, and irrationality. In short, femininity is a problem in need of control, and the feminized commodities sold by commodity feminist marketers are key to that control. On the latter, I explore the links between feminism, consumption and civilization. Both historically and today, to consume commodities is to consume civilization. Feminism is implicated in the contemporary civilizing mission. Commodity feminism brings *civilization* (that is, commodity culture informed by feminism) to the anti-feminist, often racialized masses.

As evidenced by the broader themes, I locate my approach to theorizing commodity feminism at the intersections of Marx/Marxism, Freud/Freudianism, and feminist theory. This dissertation does not involve an extended critique of the problematic ways in which Marx/Marxists and Freud/Freudians have treated women. There has already been a great deal of ink spilled, for example, on Marx's privileging of production over reproduction, on the actual utility of Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* for feminist theory, and on Freud's treatment of femininity in general and hysteria in particular. Although I do not avoid feminist

critiques of Marx and Freud and their successors, my approach reads these thinkers as political theorists. Obviously this approach is far more unusual for Freud than for Marx.[5] However, given that one of the primary concerns of modern political theory is power and the justification of authority (Brunner, 1995: xxxiv; Klosko, 1995: xx–xxi), both Freud's earlier work on the self and his later work on civilization can be read as political theory.[6]

C. Existing Literature on Commodity Feminism

The existing literature relating to commodity feminism is predominantly located in cultural studies, media studies, and women's studies (or at least women's studies as it intersects with the other two disciplines). There are also some Marxist accounts from the social sciences that critique the commodification of dissent more broadly. Importantly, none of this literature comes from the discipline of political science. With the notable exceptions of Robert Goldman[7] and Donna Landry,[8] few scholars actually

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[5] There are some notable exceptions, including José Brunner's *Freud and the Politics of Psychoanalysis* (1995), Stephen Frosh's *The Politics of Psychoanalytic Theory* (1987) and Paul Roazen's *Freud: Political and Social Thought* (1986). None of these books, however, employ a feminist lens.

[6] Indeed, Freud links the instincts and drives within the self to the instincts and drives within society as a whole (Brunner, 1995: xxvii; Freud, 1961: 25, 46–47, 51, 64, 68–69, 81–82, 106–107; Freud, 2003: 76–82).

[7] In a co-written article (1991) and in two chapters of his book *Reading Ads Socially* (1992), Goldman explores how cosmetics and clothing have been sold to women using feminist language of independence and self-determination. Goldman focuses on analyzing the representation of woman (and accompanying text) in advertisements from late 1980s and early 1990s popular women's magazines. For Goldman, commodity feminism is a *pun* on commodity fetishism (1992: 131), rather than a term in need of defining or theorizing.

[8] Donna Landry, in an article (1992) and in a book co-written with Gerald Maclean (1993), offers a very different approach to commodity feminism. She understands commodity feminism as the institutionalization of feminist theory in the academy. Landry contends that because "feminist theory" can be listed on a curriculum vitae (almost as legitimately as something like "modern political thought"), feminism is a valuable commodity in the academic job market (1992: 154). She suggests that Ph.D. candidates who identify as feminists (in her early 1990s context) "are likely to have been introduced to it in graduate school and to have had little experience of women's groups [or] activist organizing around women's issues" (1992: 161). Specializing in feminist theory is clearly useful for some academic jobs, and

employ the term *commodity feminism*. There are, however, alternative terms used in the literature that encompass at least some aspects of my understanding of commodity feminism (Gamman and Marshment, 1988; McRobbie, 1994; McRobbie, 2009; Hollows, 2000). Other lesser-used terms include *power femininity* (Lazar, 2006), *pro-girl rhetoric* (Riordan, 2001), *capitalist feminism* (Hao, 2006), and *girl power*. Although girl power is associated with the late 1990s British female pop group the Spice Girls (whose fan base primarily constituted young and teenage girls), the term's traction in popular culture has led many academics to use it to describe a version of commodity feminism that specifically targets girls and young women (Fudge, 2006; Karlyn, 2006; Siegel, 2007: 146).

Overall, the existing literature relating to commodity feminism can be situated in two broad categories: first, feminist critiques of specific manifestations of feminism in popular culture that elude a theoretical discussion of the commodity form (primarily literature from cultural studies, media studies, and women's studies); and second, theoretical discussions of the commodity form that involve little or no engagement with feminist theory (primarily literature from Marxist accounts in the social sciences). The existing literature within both of these categories, therefore, does not appreciate the *scope* of the problem under consideration. Additionally and importantly, this literature does not theorize the underlying *politics* of commodity feminism. With that being said, my theorization of commodity feminism would not be possible without some of the

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there are obviously feminist Ph.D. candidates who have never been involved in any form of feminist activism. However, given the widespread commodification of feminism within Anglo-American capitalist societies, the use of the term *commodity feminism* to refer to the (drastically smaller) academic job market alone seems misapplied.

important insights that emerge from this literature. As such, this section explores the strengths and limitations of this literature with respect to the three themes I have identified in the previous section: *questions of origins*, *(feminized) commodities and social control*, and *gender, race and civilizing discourses*.

Questions of Origin

The existing literature on commodity feminism does not interrogate how feminism became associated with consumption or any other origin questions. As previously noted, I situate the origins of commodity feminism through the *femininity question* (that is, the tension between feminism and femininity) and through *capitalism under conservatism* (that is, a conservative view of society as a whole in which commodity consumption is treated as a necessary form of social control). Although questions of origin are absent from the existing literature, I am indebted to this literature for enabling my own discussion of origins in two ways: first, through treating femininity as a serious topic of scholarly inquiry; and second, for not assuming a tension between feminism and femininity.

Femininity is treated as a serious topic of inquiry through the exploration of women's desire and pleasure in consuming feminized popular culture. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, feminists in cultural studies and media studies began to understand soap operas, popular women's magazines, and romantic fiction as cultural texts worthy of analysis (Hollows and Moseley, 2006: 6). An early and often-cited book examining women's consumption of popular culture is British feminist Rosalind Coward's *Female Desires: How They Are Sought, Bought and Packaged* (1985). In this book Coward

examines the pleasure women take in consuming a variety of cultural texts including soap operas, popular women's magazines (including fashion, home and garden, celebrity gossip tabloids, and food-related publications), English period romances (such as *Pride and Prejudice*), and their mass appeal counterparts (pulp romances). Coward describes her approach as "quite deliberately" aiming "at no more than understanding how these representations directed at women enmesh with our actual lives" (1985: 15). Another example of a book that takes women's pleasure in popular culture seriously is Hilary Radner's *Shopping Around: Feminine Culture and the Pursuit of Pleasure* (1995). Many of the cultural texts she discusses are identical or similar to Coward's, including fashion, popular women's magazines, and English period romances (such as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*) and their mass appeal counterparts (Harlequin romances). As such, *Shopping Around* reads like a newer, American version of *Female Desires*.[9] Radner contends that popular culture should be seen as a place where meanings are contested and where pleasure is pursued through the production of multiple femininities. Studies in the vein of Coward and Radner are useful for thinking about the pleasure women take in the consumption of popular culture and production of femininity. More importantly for this dissertation, these studies are valuable for *reclaiming* feminine culture in a masculinist society that treats popular culture associated with men (such as professional sports) as legitimate, while popular culture associated with women (such as soap

[9] Radner expands beyond the scope of Coward's book by including consideration of women's pursuit of pleasure through cosmetics, television, self-help books, and the fitness videos and books of Jane Fonda.

operas) as illegitimate. Although these studies treat femininity as a serious topic of inquiry, none of the popular culture texts discussed are (or claim to be) feminist.[10]

However, feminists in cultural studies and media studies have also explored feminized popular culture that does claim some form of feminism; importantly, this is done without assuming feminism and femininity must necessarily be in conflict. Some of the most frequently discussed examples are television shows with strong female leads. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,[11] which focused on a female superhero and her circle of primarily female friends, was described late in its run as "the intelligentsia's favourite show" (Pasley, 2003: 254).[12] Another favourite television example among feminist scholars is *Sex and the City*.[13] This show focused on the lives of four women living in Manhattan, and was widely acclaimed for its groundbreaking representations of gender and sexuality (Gill, 2008: 37). The scholarly literature on *Buffy* and *Sex and the City* (and other shows featuring strong female leads) concerns the nature of the feminist politics

[10] This raises the question of whether offering women pleasure through popular culture texts that are sexist and heteronormative—such as the storylines of soap operas and romance novels—is feminist. Generally feminists in cultural studies and media studies, including Coward, Radner, and Hollows, reply in the affirmative for several reasons. For example, soap operas allow women to read and take up a range of subject positions and identifications. The enduring popularity of the villainess character who uses marriage as well as her sexuality to attain power is often read by women as a heroine transgressing traditional gendered norms (Coward, 1985: 163–171; Hollows, 2000: 97–98).

[11] Originally a 1992 Hollywood film, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is better known as the American television series which ran for seven seasons from 1997–2003. Season 8 was later released in comic book format. The creator Joss Whedon has often stated that he found his inspiration in the misogynist sexual politics of *slasher* horror films popular from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s (Pasley, 2003: 255). Whedon envisioned a feminist series that subverted and combined the horror, comedy, and drama genres.

[12] Indeed, not only did *Buffy* spawn countless scholarly articles (including several edited volumes devoted exclusively to the show), but academic conferences and university courses devoted to the field of *Buffy Studies* are now well-established. There is even a regularly published online journal, *Slayage* (http://slayageonline.com/), May 18, 2012), and a Whedon Studies Association named after Buffy's creator. The writers of *Buffy* were quite aware of academic interest in the show, and the show featured occasional tongue-in-cheek nods to academia.

[13] *Sex and the City* was a highly popular American television series (loosely based on a 1997 book by the same name) which ran on the HBO network from 1998–2004 and led to a film by the same title in 2008, and a sequel to the film in 2010.

promoted,[14] and interrogates whether these shows "do us a disservice when they do not articulate the version of feminism we would most desire to recognize on the small screen" (Byers, 2003: 184). Representations of femininity are central to concerns about the feminist politics promoted in these shows: for example, while certain aspects of hegemonic femininity (white, middle-class, thin) tend to be reproduced, other aspects (weak, passive, dependent, exclusively heterosexual) are often rejected. Yet nowhere in this literature on feminist popular culture is the suggestion that femininity itself is a *problem* to be overcome; as such, the relationship between femininity and feminism is not assumed to be contentious.

In taking the consumption of feminized popular culture seriously, feminists working within cultural studies, media studies and women's studies have to some extent disrupted ideas that femininity is trivial or frivolous. These ideas are deep-seated and relate not only to the historic privileging of production (associated with men) over consumption (associated with women) but also to misogynist treatments of femininity. Indeed, cultural studies theorist Joanne Hollows has remarked upon how quickly "consumption can be derided by aligning it with 'feminine' qualities and femininity can be derided by aligning it with consumption" (2000: 115). As such, this literature is important for opening up space to think through the tension between feminism and femininity. Yet at the same time, this literature leaves many questions unanswered.

[14] For example, the entirety of Lorna Jowett's 2005 book, *Sex and the Slayer*, is devoted to delineating what she argues is a contradictory mix of "subversive" and "conservative" images of gender and sexuality in *Buffy*. Indeed, such an approach is not limited to Jowett: perhaps *the* central question posed by this literature is whether *Buffy* the show and Buffy the character are feminist (Pender, 2002: 36).

What is the relationship between femininity and the consumption of commodities?[15] How does this relationship relate to the persistent derision of femininity? How did consumption get associated with feminism? Does revaluing femininity necessitate revaluing (or even celebrating) consumption? The only way to answer these questions is to think through the questions of origin relating to commodity feminism as I do in this dissertation.

(Feminized) Commodities and Social Control

Absent from the existing literature in cultural studies, media studies and women's studies are not only questions of origin but also questions of commodification. Yet feminist popular culture is big business. Indeed, during the late 1980s and 1990s, pro-girl or pro-woman rhetoric exploded in marketing, the corporate media, and popular culture generally. For example, strong athletic women wore Nike shoes, women who knew they were "worth it" used L'Oréal makeup, and women who required deodorant "strong enough for a man" put on Secret. Although there is some analysis relating to the material production of culture through the lens of appropriation/co-option, the existing literature lacks a thorough interrogation of feminized commodities, commodification and social control.

[15] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* continues to be a lucrative business (despite the show itself having frequent storylines critical of contemporary capitalism). For example, there are a plethora of *Buffy*-related commodities including an ongoing comic book series, action figures, video games, trading cards, novels and DVD box sets; many of these commodities are labeled *limited edition*, which according to capitalist logic means more valuable. Conventions with steep admission rates regularly held in Canada, the United States, Australia, and Europe allow fans the opportunity to meet cast members and purchase even more commodities. The storylines of *Sex and the City* are perhaps the most honest about the role the show plays in contemporary capitalism. The *feminism* represented is a trendy upper middle-class form of commodity feminism: the empowerment of women is continually equated with conspicuous consumption of feminized commodities, and there is endless fetishization of clothing and shoes from designer labels. Indeed, there is even an episode in the final season entitled "A Woman's Right to Shoes."

Analysis using this lens tends to start with the understanding that feminism sells. Gill notes that the "women are invited to purchase everything from bras to coffee as signs of their power and independence" (2008: 36). Critiques tend to concern how this form of feminism is both individualized and depoliticized (Riordan, 2001: 281–2; Lazar, 2006: 505, 510; Siegel, 2007: 125–126). Karlyn notes that "while girl power may be hot, feminism is not" (2006: 57). Fudge points out that "a girl might be able to kick some undefined ass" under the auspices of commodity feminism, but, "she won't be organizing any self-defense classes or antiviolence workshops for her peers" (2006: 156). Two additional examples of analysis using this appropriation/co-option lens are Samantha King's *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy* (2006) and Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (2002).

King offers an important critique of breast cancer culture[16] by examining the plethora of pink ribbon products available today[17] and the profitability of breast cancer-related marketing (or *pink-washing*) to corporations. In a similar manner to other literature using this lens, King contends that the appropriation/co-option of breast cancer (and women's health more broadly) serves to individualize and depoliticize this

[16] Although not the first study of this culture, it is the most extensive. Barbara Ehrenreich's article "Welcome to Cancerland: A Mammogram Leads to a Cult of Pink Kitsch" (2001) discusses some of her experiences with breast cancer, including her begrudging acquaintance with breast cancer culture. She critiques the association of breast cancer *activism* with purchasing pink ribbon products. All of these products are ultrafeminine (including jewelry, cosmetics, and pink clothes) and some are highly infantilizing (such as the various breast cancer *awareness* teddy bears). Ehrenreich notes that "men diagnosed with prostate cancer do not receive gifts of Matchbox cars" (2001: 46–47).

[17] These commodities include "breast cancer awareness" teddy bear and a "pink slice" toaster. Perhaps one of the most ridiculous pink ribbon commodities, which came out after King's book was published, is a *breast cancer awareness gun*. The gun has a pink handle (Centre for Media and Democracy, 2009).

feminist issue.[18] Yet although commodities are everywhere in *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, they are theorized nowhere. Insofar as she acknowledges a relationship between commodities and social control, the form of regulation King discusses is a diffuse form of power in which capitalism is acknowledged but ultimately deemed extraneous to the analysis of how that regulation is accomplished.[19] As such, she ultimately ignores the important relationship between commodities and social control.

Williamson interrogates the appropriation/co-option of feminism by, in her words, "simply analyzing what can be *seen* in advertisements" and investigating "signifiers and their systems in ads" (2002: 11, 19). She uses a semiotics approach to investigate the mechanisms through which ads create meaning and identity. These mechanisms work through the relationship between signifier and signified, and a chain of signifiers that constitutes the signifying system (2002: 40–42). In more concrete terms, the thirty dollar dress desired by Amy Rigby's "good girl" is a signifier because she does not desire the dress for any utilitarian purpose, such as protection from the elements. Rather, the good girl desires the dress for what it signifies, the "freedom" to consume provided by her full-time job. The good girl's desire for the dress has no meaning outside the social order or signifying system.[20] Williamson's semiotics

[18] King contends that breast cancer is now understood as a "safe," "apple pie" issue, and as such, has become the "darling of corporate America;" however, it took over two decades to construct breast cancer as "somehow beyond the realm of politics, conflict, or power relations" (2006: 64, 2, 112).

[19] For example, she suggests neoliberal capitalism equates citizens with consumers, which ascribes the breast cancer survivor a neoliberal subject position. However, she never links subjectivity and capitalism beyond this suggestion, thus foreclosing the possibility of a deeper analysis.

[20] Although arguably the most well-known author, Williamson is not alone in using semiotics to examine the creation of meaning in popular culture. For example, other studies have examined the use of the colour pink in advertisements, websites, and magazines, and the shift from commodities signifying conservative forms of family values in the 1950s to commodities signifying rebellious non-conformity in the twenty-first century (Koller, 2008; Sharpe, 2006).

approach does theorize the processes through which people come to invest meanings and create identities through commodities, however, it contains no real critique of the commodity form itself or the power relations and social control embedded within commodity feminism.

The existing literature on commodity feminism employing the lens of appropriation/co-option is useful in that it acknowledges the material production of culture through feminized commodities, and highlights some of the ways in which commodity feminism individualizes and depoliticizes feminism. However, this type of scholarly discussion forgets that many *individualized* identities are subordinated to the logic of the commodity form and mass produced commodities. As such, this critique of appropriation/co-option is insufficient to a more fulsome analysis of commodity feminism as it is connected to capitalist social relations. In developing my second theme, feminized commodities and social control, I do not ignore processes of commodification. Rather, I theorize how commodity feminism works to contain and direct the desires and behaviour of individual women and the feminized masses.

Gender, Race, and Civilizing Discourses

Although the relationship between commodities, sexism, racism, and so-called *civilization* is long-standing, this has not been theorized particularly well in Marxist accounts from the social sciences. A notable exception is Anne McClintock's excellent book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (1995). In this book, she uses the term *commodity racism* to describe how forms of racism—previously available only to the nineteenth century British elite—were made accessible to the

masses through the marketing of the commodity (1995: 209). In particular, she centres on how the marketers of soap and other cleaning products connected Victorian cleaning rituals to the *civilizing* mission of British imperialism. Yet on the whole, the existing literature from these Marxist accounts has the tendency of abstracting gender, race and civilizing discourses from commodity feminism. This is not surprising given the historically poor treatment of gender and race within Marxism.

This abstraction of gender and race is evident in the Marxist tradition of critiquing the commodification of dissent. In this tradition, resistance and dissent are understood to be commodified almost as quickly as they are created; in other words, it is impossible to sustain "counterculture" for very long before it becomes "culture" (Jameson, 1991; Frank, 1997; Frank, 1998; Heath and Potter, 2004). For example in the 1960s, the anti-war movement was quickly reduced to selling peace medallions in department stores, and today, the image of Ernesto "Che" Guevara is sold in suburban shopping malls to teenagers and young adults who know little to nothing about the politics of the Argentinean-born Marxist revolutionary. This group of scholars has meticulously documented how a variety of group dissent is commodified, such as activists (from anti-war protestors of the 1960s to anti-globalization protestors of the late 1990s and 2000s) and "counterculture" musicians (from anti-capitalist punk rock of the 1970s to hip hop artists parodying white bourgeois consumption practices of the 2000s). Yet somehow the gender and race politics within these forms of dissent, as well the widespread commodification of feminism, seems to have escaped their notice.

The existing literature employing a Marxist lens is useful for highlighting the prevalence of the commodification of dissent in contemporary capitalism. However, gender, race and civilizing discourses are almost completely absent. Even for Robert Goldman (one of the few Marxist scholars to engage with commodity feminism), feminism is commodified simply because all "oppositional" practices are commodified. According to this framework, there is little left for Goldman to theorize: various schools of feminist theory[21] and everything they have to say about gender and race are irrelevant. This significant gap is filled in the development of my third theme: gender, race, and civilizing discourses. Indeed, I employ McClintock's work to theorize contemporary forms of commodity racism, with a particular focus on skin lightening cream, and the relationship between commodity racism and commodity feminism. Contemporary marketers of skin lightening cream offer the promise of class mobility to South Asian women in a similar manner to how Victorian marketers of soap offered the promise of civilization to the British working class.

Toward a New Theoretical Framework

I am indebted to the existing literature related to commodity feminism for the following reasons: for treating feminine culture and femininity as a serious topic of inquiry (and therefore disrupting ideas that feminine culture and femininity are trivial or frivolous),

[21] Goldman does not seem familiar with feminist theory whatsoever. If he has any familiarity, he does not indicate so in his analysis, other than the odd reference to the "male gaze" and the occasional nod to Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements*. He does not reference the work of any feminist scholars other than Williamson, and does not engage with Williamson's work with any degree of depth. For example, he contends commodity feminism "presents feminism as a style—a semiotic abstraction—composed of visual signs that 'say who you are'" (1992: 133). Goldman's use of Williamson does not extend beyond such brief statements.

for critically examining the *feminism* of feminist popular culture (particularly the depoliticized and individualistic nature of this form of feminism), and finally, for discussions of the commodification of dissent. All of these interventions inform this dissertation; however, much of this literature (with the exception of the Marxist accounts) tends to avoid discussion of the commodity form or processes of commodification and, as such, does not sufficiently address the material production of culture and its relationship to subjectivity. Thus what emerges from this literature review is the need to engage with feminist theory while also theorizing the material production of culture. The theoretical framework of commodity feminism as put forward in this dissertation aims at filling this gap, while simultaneously providing a timely account of the rise of this dominant form of feminism. The subsequent section details how my three broader themes (origins, commodities and social control, and civilizing discourses) are incorporated into the chapters.

D. Dissertation Outline

The first chapter, "The Exchange and Commodification of Women: Marxism, Feminism and the Commodity Form," reconsiders the relationship between women and commodities. This relationship has traditionally been understood through "the exchange of women." I overview the treatment of this relationship within the traditions of Western political theory and feminist theory, with a particular focus on Marx, Engels, Emma Goldman, and Gayle Rubin. I contend that in order to better theorize the relationship between women and commodities, an exclusive focus on the exchange and

commodification of women cannot be maintained. As such, I call for a move from theorizing women as the *exchanged* to women as the *exchangers*, and from commodity *fetishism* to commodity *feminism*. This move involves critiquing without abandoning the utility of the former categories. Finally, I discuss Rubin's approach to theorizing the exchange and commodification of women (namely, her use of multiple theoretical frameworks including Marxism and psychoanalysis) as the basis for my own theorizing of the commodification of feminism.

The second chapter, "Feminized Commodities: The Femininity Question in Popular Anglo-American Feminism," is where I begin the work of theorizing the origins of commodity feminism itself. I examine the *femininity question* in popular Anglo-American feminism. I demonstrate that Wollstonecraft sets up a tension between feminism and femininity (at times using arguments that are misogynist). I contend that her legacy has influenced and continues to influence popular feminist understandings of the femininity question (including Betty Friedan, Susan Brownmiller, and Naomi Wolf) particularly in terms of their treatment of femininity and feminized commodities. I suggest that both queer femme and third-wave feminism (for example, works by Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, and contributors to the Canadian collection *Brazen Femme*) directly challenge the assumption that femininity is a problem to be overcome, while at the same time allowing for and legitimizing commodity feminism. These approaches invite almost any claim to feminist membership (in the name of inclusiveness) and perpetuate a feminism = resistance + consumption equation.

In the third chapter, "Commodities as Social Control: Capitalism under Conservatism in Freudian Theory," I continue theorizing the origins of commodity feminism through re-reading selected texts of Sigmund Freud and Edward Bernays. I explore Bernays' early commodity feminist campaigns in Anglo-America and how he rejected the then-dominant approach of marketing to women as housewives. I also explore Bernays' extensive writings on his profession. It is in Bernays' writings that the influence of his uncle Freud can be seen: Bernays was elitist, suspicious of democracy, and put his faith in the "intelligent few" in society. Amongst these intelligent few is the public relations counsel who helps to preserve stability in society by focusing the irrational, pleasure-seeking masses on consumption. I contend that commodity feminism is underpinned by *capitalism under conservatism*, defined as a conservative view of society in which commodity consumption is treated as a necessary form of social control; this renders women entirely unthreatening to the status quo, yet allows them to feel like feminists through their rejection of Wollstonecraftian misogyny and consumption of feminized commodities.

The fourth chapter, "Commodity Feminism as Subjectivity: Cosmetics and Corporate-Sponsored Empowerment," theorizes commodity feminism with a focus on the role of the modern corporation in subject formation. I examine the work of anti-essentialist Marxist theorists as well as Gayatri Spivak, and critique the former for ignoring Spivak's interventions and treating subjectivity in abstraction from gender and race. I also explore the commodity feminist campaigns of Unilever as an example of a multinational corporation that helps to create subjectivities through their "Fair &

Lovely" brand of skin lightening cream in the Global South and "Campaign for Real Beauty" in the Global North. I suggest that in selling a feminine subjectivity through feminized and racialized commodities, corporations themselves play a crucial role in subject formation. I read contemporary commodity feminism as constituting several prevalent forms of feminine/feminist subjectivity, forms that are also racialized in various ways.

The dissertation concludes by bringing together the various theoretical interventions from each chapter: commodity feminism as a new way into theorizing the relationship between women and commodities; as a way of resolving (however problematically) the feminism/femininity tension; as being underpinned by a political theory of capitalism under conservatism; and finally, as playing a role in feminine/feminist subject formation. This concluding chapter also draws together once again the broader themes of this dissertation: first, the role of origins in the political theory of commodity feminism; second, the (ir)rationality of the feminine consuming masses and social control; and finally, the role of commodity feminism as civilizing discourse. In contemporary capitalist societies, regardless of whether women identify as feminists, commodity feminism is a predominant form of feminism that is practiced. In the words of Fejes, "pulling out the American Express Card has replaced the raised fist" (2002: 197). The story of how the "good girl" has come to reign supreme will continue to be explored throughout this dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE
The Exchange and Commodification of Women: Marxism, Feminism, and the Commodity Form

If commodities could speak, they would say this: our use-value may interest men,
but it does not belong to us as objects.
—Karl Marx (1990: 176)

The "exchange of women" is a seductive and powerful concept […] it suggests that
we look for the locus of women's oppression within the traffic in women,
rather than within the traffic in merchandise.
—Gayle Rubin (1997: 37)

1.1 Introduction

The *exchange of women* has been a topic of interest to both feminist and non-feminist scholars for over a century. Scholars from a wide variety of disciplines including political theory, political economy, anthropology, and history have used the concept to explain the position of women—and the very structure of society—in a wide variety of historical contexts. The exchange of women is linked to their commodification under capitalist social relations. Theorists have located the origin of this exchange in a wide variety of contexts, from the advent of civilization (as in Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*), to pre-state kinship structures (as in Claude Lévi-Strauss' *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*), to capitalism after the industrial revolution (as in Emma Goldman's "The Traffic in Women"). Regardless of where one chooses to situate its origins, however, the commodification of women under capitalism involves a far more intensive objectification than that found in earlier forms of exchange (Rubin, 1997: 37). Indeed, if women are the speaking commodities referenced by Marx in this chapter's epigraph, then he can be read as predicting the objectification of women

under contemporary capitalism. However, as Gayle Rubin points out, this focus on the exchange or commodification of women does not consider how the exchange or commodification of non-human merchandise affects the position of women.

When capitalism, along with the social relations it engenders, is understood to categorize women as the exchanged and men as the exchangers, the following question remains: what happens when women are not only the exchanged but also the exchangers? Clearly the institutions of the market, to paraphrase Marx, have not melted into air (1985: 83). Instead, some women have found a form of empowerment within existing structures, namely freedom to participate in the exchange. Commodity feminists, of course, are women thus empowered. Yet commodity feminism cannot eclipse the exchange and commodification of women: these two social forces work together. As such, understanding women as the exchangers requires an understanding of women as the exchanged.

This chapter sets up the study of commodity feminism by considering the question of the exchange and commodification of women. I undertake a historical overview of this question within the traditions of political theory and feminist theory, focusing on Marx, Engels, Goldman, and Rubin. The chapter proceeds in three additional parts. Section 1.2 examines Marx's discussion of the nature of the commodity form and commodity fetishism, and his rather limited discussion of the relationship between women and commodities. This section primarily, but not exclusively, focuses on the first volume of *Capital* (1867). Section 1.3 furthers the gender analysis of Marxism by exploring Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). It

situates Engels as one of the first theorists to open up the possibility that commodities might be people—or more specifically, women. Section 1.4 explores two essays titled "The Traffic in Women," the first by Emma Goldman (1910) and the second by Gayle Rubin (1975), in order to reveal the similarities and differences between how commodification is treated by feminists and how it is treated by Marx and Engels. This section also examines Rosemary Hennessy's critique of Rubin.

The overarching argument of this chapter is that in order to better theorize the relationship between women and commodities, a conceptual focus must be broadened beyond the exchange and commodification of women. This focus is totalizing, does not allow for resistance, and is ambiguous about the status of women in capitalism (namely whether they are commodified as women or as sex, or whether it is their labour power that is being commodified). As such, it is important to move from theorizing women as the exchanged to women as the exchangers, and from commodity fetishism to commodity feminism; such a move involves critiquing without abandoning the utility of the former categories.

1.2 Marx on the Commodity Form, Commodity Fetishism, and Women

In order to put forth the argument that theorizing the relationship between women and commodities requires a broader conceptual focus, it is important to first overview and critique Marx's work on the relationship between the commodity form, commodity fetishism, and women. As this section will delineate, although Marx introduces concepts that are critical to theorizing the processes of commodification, he unfortunately paid

insufficient attention to the relationship between women and work, the ways in which the commodity is gendered, and the implications of his gendered language.

1.2.1 Marx and Commodities

Before discussing commodity fetishism in greater depth, it is important to return to the nature of the commodity form. Marx begins the first volume of *Capital* by presenting the wealth of society, including the labour power (or capacity to work) of its members, as "an immense collection of commodities" (1990: 125). He begins with commodities not merely because they represent wealth and labour power, but because they represent the very things that mediate social relations under capitalism. As Samuel Knafo points out, the commodity form

> grounds the way in which people rationalize their experiences in capitalism. Hence, the meaning we invest in the world is structured by the way we value commodities. This explains why […] the source of necessity in capitalism is the process of valuation (2002: 158).

This process of valuation can be explained with Marx's famous distinction between use-value and exchange-value. While use-value constitutes merely the utility of the thing and has no existence outside its physical properties, exchange-value is abstracted from both the utility and the physical properties of the thing (Marx, 1990: 126–128). As Marx notes, "no chemist has ever discovered exchange-value either in a pearl or diamond" (1990: 177). To put it another way, the use-value of a thing exists in and of itself, while the exchange-value exists only in relation to other things and concerns "not an atom of matter" (1990: 138).

For Marx, commodities are commodities precisely because they possess both use-value and exchange-value; in his words, they have a "dual nature" (Marx, 1990: 138). Without some degree of use-value, the exchange-value of a commodity could not possibly be realized. This is how Marx characterizes commodities in the first volume of *Capital* and is the understanding of commodities I adopt in this chapter. At the same time, however, Marx argues that use-value is not really value at all, for the elementary form of value is realized only through exchange-value (1990: 152). Indeed, in the first volume of *Capital*, he tends to use the terms "exchange-value" and "value" interchangeably (Hunt, 2002: 210).

As a relation between things, exchange-value varies greatly across time and location (Marx, 1990: 126) while use-value remains constant. For example, the use-value of a coat remains constant in cold climates, since one always requires a coat in winter. Or as Marx explains in the second volume of *Capital*,

> Whether a product is produced as a commodity or not, it is always a material form of wealth, a use-value, destined for individual or productive consumption. As a commodity, its value exists *only* ideally in the price, which *does not affect* its actual use-form (1992: 213, emphasis mine).

According to Marx, despite the "dual nature" of commodities, the use-value and exchange-value of a commodity do not have any bearing upon one another.

The disappearance of utility in exchange-value has several implications. McNally points out that if commodities were exchanged according to their actual usefulness, water would be expensive and diamonds would be cheap (2001: 53).[22] For Marx, the

[22] H.G. Wells' 1909 satire on the emergence of modern consumer capitalism, *Tono-Bungay*, documents the rise of a tonic which is marketed as medicine but has no medicinal properties whatsoever and

most important implication of the disappearance of utility in exchange-value is the disappearance of the useful labour required to produce the commodity. When utility disappears in exchange-value, it is not possible to distinguish between different forms of labour: all labour is "reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract" (Marx, 1990: 125). The exchange-value of a commodity, therefore, "represents human labour pure and simple, the expenditure of human labour in general" (1990: 135). For Marx, the process through which concrete labour becomes more and more abstract is the very key to grasping the logic of capital (McNally, 2001: 52).

The disappearance of utility in exchange-value also means value must be determined by something other than utility.[23] It is determined by labour power, that is, the simple ability to work "possessed in his bodily organism by every ordinary man [*sic*]" (Marx, 1990: 135). More complex forms of labour power count

> only as *intensified*, or rather *multiplied* simple labour, so that a smaller quantity of complex labour is considered equal to a larger quantity of simple labour. Experience shows that this reduction is constantly being made. A commodity may be the outcome of the most complicated labour, but through its *value* it is posited as equal to the product of simple labour, hence it represents only a specific quantity of simple labour (Marx, 1990: 135).

Labour power as the general expenditure of human labour is therefore embodied in the commodity, giving it exchange-value. Yet this labour power is abstract. The logical outcome of this process of abstraction is *commodity fetishism*: although commodities arise from "the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them" (1990: 165), they appear *not* to be a product of human labour but to exist autonomously. In

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moreover is slightly toxic. The main character complains that what passes as "fair trading" amounts to little more than a "damned swindle" (2005: 35).

[23] See Chapter Four for a discussion of the disappearance of use-value in relation to commodity feminism.

McClintock's words, "commodity fetishism flamboyantly exhibits the *overvaluation* of commercial *exchange* as the fundamental principle of social community" and the "fetishized *undervaluation*," if not complete erasure, of human labour (1995: 154). Commodity fetishism is therefore not only the outcome of this process, it is part of the process of abstraction.

1.2.2 Commodity Fetishism

Marx never quite finished his discussion of commodity fetishism. It is clear from earlier manuscripts of the first volume of *Capital* that Marx continued to expand his discussion until it became its own section;[24] namely, the fourth section of the first chapter titled "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret." However, despite the loose ends in Marx's discussion, "the explanatory power of this notion of commodity fetishism has endured the many developments in capitalism" since it was first elaborated by Marx (Bennett, 2001: 113). Indeed, commodity fetishism has even more explanatory power now than it did close to one hundred fifty years ago: contemporary capitalism has seen the expansion and intensification of commodification, and all aspects of social and cultural life are now affected or mediated by the commodity form.

A key distinction made by Marx in his discussion of commodity fetishism is between the *social* and the *natural*. He complains about the way in which political economists have made these distinctions by making an analogy with religion. Marx contends political economists are like the fathers of the church: just as the political

[24] Thanks to David McNally for making this point in the question and answer period of the panel "What Can We Still Learn from Marx's Theory of the Commodity" at the *Rethinking Marxism* conference on October 28, 2006 in Amherst, Massachusetts.

economists treat all pre-capitalist institutions such as feudalism as artificial and bourgeois institutions as natural, the fathers of the church treat pre-Christian religions as artificial (or "inventions of man") and Christianity as natural (or an "emanation of God") (1990: 175). In a similar move, commodity fetishism involves transforming the social into the natural (Marx, 1992: 303). This transformation is central to the process through which the commodity simultaneously appears to exist autonomously and not to be a product of human labour. For Marx, "the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers" are concealed, which makes "those relations appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly" (1990: 168–169). Put differently, human labour concerns social relations and is therefore social. Relations between material objects, whether between diamond rings and ruby necklaces or between the ocean and the sand, seem to have an autonomous existence outside the social and thus become natural.

Commodity fetishism might thus be described not only as a process through which the social is transformed into the natural, but also as a process through which the social is transformed into the *super*natural. Consider Marx's description of the fetishizing process as wood is transformed into a table:

> The table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will (1990: 163–164).

Commodity fetishism, therefore, transforms a thing that is sensuous and ordinary into a thing that transcends sensuousness and is extraordinary. Marx's "table with a brain"

refers to his argument that commodity fetishism makes objects appear to have a life of their own. Additionally, this example highlights Marx's view that the process of commodity fetishism is both magical (that is, "far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing") and sinister or grotesque.

Marx makes another analogy with religion that suggests a supernatural element. In masking social relations between people, fetishized commodities assume "the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx, 1990: 165). Marx's use of the term "fantastic" is purposeful, for he goes on to make an analogy between commodity fetishism and "the misty realm of religion" (1990: 165). Like commodity fetishism, in religion "the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own" (1990: 165). Yet the "misty realm" of which Marx speaks is a reference to a specific set of religious practices, not from his own society but from the societies of western Africa.

Much has been said thus far on the commodity form but little on the fetish. The fetish is a construct of the European Enlightenment that claimed to describe the religious practices and culture of the African "Other." The term "fetishisme" was originally coined in 1760 by the French philosopher Charles de Brosses to mean "primitive religion" (McClintock, 1995: 181); these religions were understood to be fetishistic owing to their belief in things having powers beyond their capacity. In addition to de Brosses, other thinkers including Rousseau, Kant, Linnaeus and Hegel invoked fetishism as "the recurring paradigm for what the Enlightenment was not" (McClintock, 1995: 187).

Nineteenth-century thinkers, although critical in varying degrees of the Enlightenment thinkers who came before them, adopted the Enlightenment fascination with the fetish. Anthropologists originally took up the fetish in the nineteenth-century, who in turn influenced the work of several thinkers outside the field, including Marx, Engels and Freud.[25] McClintock argues that these thinkers did not merely take up the concept as one among many: rather, the concept of fetishism actually *enabled* the development of the Victorian "sciences of man" (that is, namely, philosophy, Marxism and psychoanalysis). In her words:

> Religion (the ordering of time and the transcendent), money (the ordering of the economy) and sexuality (the ordering of the body) were arranged around the social idea of racial fetishism, displacing what the modern imagination could not incorporate onto the invented domain of the primitive. Imperialism returned to haunt the enterprise of modernity as its concealed but central logic (1995: 181–182).

Therefore, although the "primitive" fetish (as well as racialized fantasies about the fetish) originated in the Enlightenment, the fetish became an organizing principle of modern thought.[26]

By the third volume of *Capital*, Marx had long moved from examining the "mystical" nature of commodities to probing the "mystification of the capitalist mode of production" as a whole. This larger mystification he describes as "the bewitched, distorted and upside-down world haunted by Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre,

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[25] While fetishism is most developed as a critical concept in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx originally used the term in writings dating back to 1842 (McNally, 2006: 2). Fetishism as a term to describe sexual *perversions* was popularized by Freud with the publication of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in 1905; however, fetishism was first brought to the realm of sexuality by Albert Binet with an 1888 publication (McClintock, 1995: 181, 415).

[26] The "haunting" of contemporary thought by imperial constructions of the fetish is clear; however, the implications of this haunting, particularly for Marxist thought, are more ambiguous. See section D of the concluding chapter for more on this subject.

who are at the same time social characters and mere things" (Marx, 1991: 969). Here Marx explicitly associates men with capital (and therefore production, labour, and exchange) and women with the earth. Indeed, if the earth is natural, and if commodities become natural through the process of commodity fetishism, women too might be associated with commodities. At the same time, Marx is not entirely following the tradition of masculinist Western thought, whereby men are associated with culture and women with nature, as *both* Monsieur and Madame are social beings who are commodified and objectified as things.[27]

1.2.3 Marx and Gender

Overall, references to gender are few and far between in the three volumes of *Capital*, and in Marx's body of thought as a whole. The references that do exist reflect the ambiguity of his discussion of Monsieur and Madame. This subsection will explore Marx's ambiguity in two ways: first, through Marx's sympathies for the plight of woman workers, and secondly and more importantly, through Marx's comments on the gendered commodity. The former is ambiguous in that it could be read as feminist, paternalistic, or masculinist. The latter is ambiguous concerning whether people (or more specifically, women) can be commodities exchanged between men.

Marx's discussion of woman workers is largely located in the first volume of *Capital*. For example, Marx looks at how the death of a twenty-year-old female milliner in 1863 highlights the appalling labour conditions of women in the London garment

[27] This might be explained by the Marxian dialectic: in a similar manner to Hegel before him, Marx was concerned with reinstating the notion of a synthesis between the human and natural worlds. However, his reinstatement only goes so far with respect to women, as he remains within the philosophical tradition Mary O'Brien refers to as "male-stream thought" (O'Brien, 1979: 102, 100).

industry (1990: 364). Marx also explores the high rates of "consumption" (tuberculosis) among the workers in the female-dominated lace factories of England. Moreover, he is critical of capitalist enterprises that contract-out the finishing and mending of machine-made lace to women (and often children) homeworkers (1990: 595–596). These and other references to women are made in the context of his project in later chapters of the first volume of *Capital*, namely the meticulous documentation of the various effects of industrialization on workers, such as disease, shortened life expectancy, and working hours. It remains an open question as to whether Marx's concern with women workers indicates a feminist position, a paternalistic protectionist position, or an unintentionally gender neutral (and possibly thereby masculinist) position, one in which the situation of women just happens to arise in his empirical research.

Marx also offers some limited commentary on the gendered commodity. The young Marx seems to understand both women and their labour power to be commodities under capitalism. For example, in "On the Jewish Question" (1843) he complains that "even the species-relation itself, the relation between man and woman, becomes an object of commerce" in which women are "bartered away" (1978b: 51). In this reference, women are commodities exchanged between men. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx (with Engels) criticizes "public and private" prostitution, defining the latter as "the system of wives in common" that is bourgeois marriage (1985: 101). In

this reference, both prostitutes and married women are prostitutes whose labour power is commodified.[28]

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx collapses the distinction between the male worker and the (married or otherwise) female prostitute: for "prostitution is only a *specific* expression of the *general* prostitution of the *labourer*" (1978a: 82). This is an important statement as it forms the basis of the classical Marxist view on prostitution (Bell, 1998: 139). Moreover, Marx argues "the one who prostitutes [others]" is the capitalist (1978a: 82). Marx could be read as making a feminist argument, at least insofar as he anticipates feminist understandings of sex work *as work*. Yet Marx eliminates any gendered specificity of women's experiences of work. The varied forms of women's work—from factory work, contracted home work, sex work in (traditional understandings of) prostitution or marriage, to other forms of reproductive work outside or within marriage—are all collapsed into the same category as male factory workers. And all of these forms of work are collapsed again into sex work. As Bell notes, the "employment contract […] is a contract of prostitution rather than the prostitution contract being an *example* of the employment contract" (1998: 139, emphasis mine). In using the term *prostitution* to describe both male workers and female workers selling their labour power, Marx obscures the situation of many female workers who might *also* sell their bodies. Finally, in collapsing the distinction between the male worker and the female prostitute, Marx creates theoretical confusion on the question of how the commodity is gendered. In O'Brien's words, Marx understands

[28] This is not an argument that originates with Marx: Owenite socialists were characterizing bourgeois marriage as the legalized prostitution of women as early as the 1830s (Taylor, 1993: xv).

"male bodies, insofar as they incorporate labour-power, [as] commodities in the labour market" yet "in the marital marketplace men are the traders" (1979: 105). This theoretical confusion might be productive in that it suggests a link between the exchange and commodification of women under capitalist social relations. Women can be understood as commodities in two ways: their bodies are exchanged between men as commodities, and their labour power is commodified.

Although the young Marx seems to understand women and their labour power to be commodities under capitalism (albeit without a sustained discussion of the topic in any of the early texts), his understanding shifts in later texts. By the time he wrote *Capital*, Marx argues that while labour is a commodity under capitalism, *people as such* are not commodities. People are, however, central to his understanding of commodities. It has already been established in the previous section that value for Marx is a social relation, for commodities only have value in relation to other commodities. Moreover, the value of commodities "can only be expressed through the *whole range* of their social relations; consequently the form of their value must possess social validity" (Marx, 1990: 159, emphasis mine). The social nature of commodities generally, combined with Marx's discussion of human labour power as embodied in the commodity, render people central. Yet they are not commodities.

Marx repeatedly describes commodities as *things*. While these things can *seem* to be animated (such as the table example in the previous section), *things* can still be taken to mean inanimate objects with no independent agency. In the later volumes of *Capital*, Marx describes more complex forms of the commodity (such as money in the

second volume and interest in the third), yet even his complex commodities can be described as things. The examples of commodities he provides in the first volume are simpler; for example, he mentions corn, gold, nails, linen, and "wearing apparel." In his discussion of exchange-value, Marx represents commodities and their quantities as letters, that is "*x* commodity A = *y* commodity B" (1990: 139). Any thing could be A, and any other thing could be B; however, Marx prefers his now-famous equation, 20 yards of linen = 1 coat.

Yet in the passage below from the first volume of *Capital*, Marx reverts to the view from his younger days, contradicting his understanding that people cannot be commodities from one sentence to the next:

> Commodities cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their *own* right. We must, therefore, have recourse to their *guardians, who are the possessors of commodities*. Commodities are things, and therefore lack the power to resist man. If they are unwilling, he can use force; in other words, he can take possession of them (1990: 178, emphasis mine).

Here commodities seem to have agency: they have a will over which man may need to "use force" in order to "take possession." One might assume these "unwilling" commodities under discussion are animals (for example, cows that must be forced to walk to the market), since he is clear in *Capital* that people cannot be commodities. However, in the footnote attached to this passage, Marx rules out cows or any other living animal. He lists the "very delicate" items offered for sale in the twelfth-century French market as examples of commodities. These items, which he takes from Guillot de Paris' medieval French poem "Dit de Lendit," include clothing, shoes, leather, implements of cultivation, and skins. The final commodity listed is "femmes folles de

leur corps," translated literally as "women crazy of their bodies" or more accurately as "wanton women" (1990: 178).

The language in the above passage and the footnote attached to it reveal masculinist assumptions behind Marx's understanding of commodities. These "unwilling" and "very delicate" commodities are clearly women, as the other commodities listed do not have agency. The language of women being "delicate" suggests women are weak and passive. The language of men "taking possession" of women and "using force" suggests women are both objects and willful creatures that ought to be put in their place using violence. In commenting on the passage, Ehrbar perceives a "juicy illustration" in which "the 'taking' consists of sexual and other violations" (2005: 461). Ehrbar's reading is clearly misogynist in understanding the "sexual violations" of women to be a "juicy" tidbit rather than sexual assault or rape. Indeed, a longstanding rape myth is that unvirtuous women—unvirtuous being defined in several ways, including choice of apparel, age, number of sexual partners, and involvement in sex work—cannot be raped (MacKinnon, 1989: 175). However, given Marx's language and uncritical use of de Paris' poem, Marx does not discourage such a reading. Regardless of whether or not Marx is endorsing rape, violence against women is justified (at least implicitly) in particular circumstances, namely when they transgress gendered norms by being either wanton or willful.

Further evidence of masculinist assumptions behind Marx's understanding of commodities can be found in wanton women being the exception to the rule that people are not commodities under capitalism. Marx is upholding the sexism of Western

thought in which all men but not all women (as the wanton ones are excluded) can stand in for people generally. As such, he can be situated in the tradition of *malestream* political theory that builds sexual inequality into its very foundation (Phillips, 1991: 3). This tradition, to invoke Moller Okin's famous phrase, consists "of writings by men, for men, and about men" (1979: 5). Overall, the contradictions within the passage, and the contradictions between the footnote and the rest of the text, are revealing as an expression of the commodification of women and their bodies under capitalism.

This discussion of the quote and the footnote raises larger questions concerning the use of language in Marx. In his "Translator's Preface" to the first volume of *Capital*, Fowkes comments on Marx's "vivid use of the [German] language and the startling and strong images which abound in Capital," and declares him to be "a master of literary German" (1990: 88). Marx's use of language seems not to be lost in English translations. References to the plays of Shakespeare run throughout his body of work. McNally is critical of readings that overemphasize Marx's language of illusion in his discussion of commodity fetishism; however, he argues on the whole that language holds more theoretical weight in *Capital* than is often appreciated by Marxist scholars (2011: 115–116). In McNally's words, "Marx's persistent use of metaphors and literary references needs to be read, then, *not as textual ornamentation*, but as integral to the way he theorizes" (2006: 2, emphasis mine). McNally understands the ontology of capitalism as "literally metaphoric, as constituting a social order in which some things regularly stand in for, substitute themselves for, other things" (2006: 1). Marx's statement, *x* commodity A = *y* commodity B, therefore, is both an equation and a metaphor. McNally

provides non-ontological examples of metaphor as well, such as Marx's understanding of exchange-value as a phantom-like entity and capital as a vampire. He argues Marx's highly detailed descriptions of the effects of industrialization on workers and their bodies are not merely illustrative (as many assume): "Marx is *doing* value theory, not embellishing it with extraneous empirical material" (2006: 9). If one accepts Fowkes' argument that Marx used language masterfully and purposefully, and McNally's argument that language is theoretically important, then it follows that Marx's language of force and taking possession of commodities is neither accidental nor haphazard. This claim does not alter the ambiguity of Marx's limited comments about women and gender; it is possible to read a great deal of masculinism, including the idea that commodities can be women, in Marx's body of work.

1.3 (Further) Gendering Marx: Engels on Women

Written after Marx's death and originally published in 1884, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* is drawn from the notes of both Marx and Engels and is based on the anthropological work of Lewis H. Morgan in his 1877 book *Ancient Society*. Nineteenth-century anthropology influenced thinking in a variety of areas. For Engels, the treatment of Marx's *Capital* by German economists was similar to the treatment of Morgan's *Ancient Society* by English "prehistoric scientists": both books were suppressed for their revolutionary content while at the same time plagiarized repeatedly (Engels, 1972: 27). In further praise of Morgan, Engels describes *Ancient Society* as "one of the few epoch-making works of our time," for Morgan rediscovered

the materialist conception of history discovered by Marx before him (1972: 28). In *The Origin*, Engels spends little time discussing commodities and a great deal of time discussing women. His focus on pre-capitalist social relations throughout most of the book precludes much discussion of the commodity form; most of this discussion is in fact confined to the final chapter. Engels does focus on the implications of the advent of private property for women and the exchange of women it might necessitate. As such, he becomes one of the first theorists to open up the possibility that commodities might be people, or more specifically, women.

Engels' treatment of the family is a necessary starting point for a closer examination of his theorizing of the exchange (and even commodification) of women. In highlighting the crucial role of the family as an economic unit in society, Engels claims to be one of the first theorists to historicize the family. Indeed, in his preface to the fourth edition of *The Origin*, Engels remarked that discussions of the family were "still completely under the influence of the Five Books of Moses." It was assumed the family had experienced no historical development since biblical times, and the patriarchal family described in the Five Books was essentially the same (with the exception of polygamy) as the bourgeois family of modernity (1972: 32).

Engels' aim in *The Origins* was to take the family out of the realm of the natural and into the realm of the economic, social, and political. His approach involved adopting Morgan's division of history into three main epochs, each with a corresponding family form: group marriage is the form of family associated with "savagery," pairing marriage with "barbarism," and monogamy with "civilization." Group marriage is defined by

Engels as a state in which "men live in polygamy and their wives simultaneously in polyandry, and their common children are, therefore, regarded as being common to them all" (1972: 58). The status of women was high in this original state of humanity. Engels complains of the "absurd notions" taken from eighteenth-century enlightenment thinkers that in the beginning women were the slaves of men. Instead, he argues that "women occupied not only a free but also a highly respected position" (1972: 76). Engels contends that since only women could be certain which children were their biological offspring, both descent and inheritance went through the female line. These inheritance relations are often described as "mother right."[29]

The stage of history most interesting to Engels is the pairing marriage of "barbarism," and the transition from pairing marriage to the monogamous marriage of "civilization." According to Engels, at the time of contact between Europeans and Aboriginal peoples, America was the "the classic soil of the pairing family" while the European form of the family had developed into permanent monogamy (Engels, 1972: 81–82). Although both pairing and monogamous marriage involve one man and one woman, pairing marriage differs in several significant ways. These differences primarily concern the higher position of women in pairing marriage. Pairing marriage involved a sexual division of labour: the husband was involved in production (for example, obtaining food and the instruments of labour) and the wife in reproduction (for example, in household management). However, this division did not imply a lower

[29] Engels used the term "right" under protest: liberal legal "rights," as we know them, were not yet in existence at this time. However, he retained the term out of respect for J.J. Bachofen, whom according to Engels was the first to make this discovery (Engels, 1972: 69) and whose work was used by both Morgan and Engels.

status for women, since the communal household of pairing marriage carried over from group marriage (1972: 76). It also did not imply the dependence of women on men. In the event of separation, the husband took his instruments of labour and women kept their household goods and children (1972: 83). The most important difference between pairing marriage and monogamy is that the custom of "mother right" existed only in pairing marriage.

While the transition from group marriage to pairing marriage was understood by Engels (following Morgan) to be a matter of natural selection, he did not see the transition from pairing marriage to monogamy as inevitable or a matter of evolutionary theory (1972: 81). He stated that "unless new *social* forces came into play, there was no reason why a new form of family should arise from the single pair" (1972: 81). In Europe, these social forces represented the wealth creation generated by changes in production allowing for the domestication of animals and the breeding of herds (Engels, 1972: 82). In North America several thousand years later, these social forces represented the arrival of Europeans and mercantilism. The result in both cases was similar: as preliminary conceptions of private property were developed (or introduced, in the case of North America) and wealth began to increase, the position of men in the family became more important than women. Men needed to be sure which children belonged to them, and therefore to whom their property ought to devolve (1972: 84). Firmly establishing paternity required the overthrow of matriarchal customs of inheritance; the strengthened position of men in the family allowed this to occur. This

"revolution," he argues, was "one of the most decisive ever experienced by humanity" (1972: 84).

With the overthrow of mother right, the patriarchal family was established. The position of women declined as household management became a private service that no longer concerned society as a whole. Moreover, Engels argues that after the man took control of the home, "the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children" (1972: 85).[30] Finally, due to the primary purpose of monogamous marriage (that is, to establish paternity), women lost the sexual freedom they enjoyed under group and pairing marriage forms. A sexual double standard arose, and conjugal fidelity became compulsory for women only (1972: 86). After the overthrow of mother right, Engels allows women little agency to challenge their exchange and circulation among men. It is left to later feminists such as Goldman and Rubin to articulate this challenge.

As Engels makes clear, the questions *The Origin* raises are central for the final determining factor in history is both the production *and* reproduction of life. This factor has two components: first, the production of the "means of subsistence," namely food, shelter, clothing, and the tools required for their production; and second, the production of "human beings themselves," that is, the reproduction of the species. Furthermore, both kinds of production determine the social organization of labour and the family (Engels, 1972: 27–28). Despite these and other clear articulations, Marxists

[30] Here, Engels cites Morgan who argued that the monogamous family not only contains slavery but also serfdom, since it was related to agriculture from the beginning (Engels, 1972: 86). He then cites Marx, who, commenting upon Morgan, added that "it contains within itself in miniature all the antagonisms which later develop on a wide scale within society and its state" (Engels, 1972: 86).

have persistently ignored "the production of human beings themselves" in theorizing modes of production (Seccombe, 1992: 256).

As one of the first theorists to locate the oppression of women—or as Engels famously wrote, "the *world-historic defeat of the female sex*" (1972: 85)—in the development of capitalism, *The Origin* is a classic text. Engels corrects some of the masculinism of *Capital* in which production is privileged at the expense of reproduction, and social relations are discussed without reference to gender. Moreover, Engels' book continues to influence contemporary work on gender and political economy, in which gender is addressed largely through the problematic of reproduction.[31] At the same time, Engels does not ignore production. As Leacock points out, another influential aspect of *The Origin* follows from a key link established by Engels between production and the position of women. In short, the more a society is organized around production for use rather than exchange, the higher the position of women (Leacock, 1986: 108).

While there are numerous problems with Engels' story of the development of monogamous marriage,[32] the main concern here is the possibility he opens up of

[31] Despite this influence, it is important to note that there is a strong division amongst feminists on the actual utility of the text itself. Feminist positions on Engels fall broadly into two categories: those who hold up *The Origin* as a feminist text (such as Eleanor Leacock and Karen Sacks) and those who are more critical (such as Juliet Mitchell, Catharine MacKinnon and many of the contributors to the 1987 volume *Engels Revisited*). Feminists in the former group consider Engels' theory to be generally correct, although they will acknowledge his ethnographic errors (Gimenez, 1987: 41). Feminists in the latter group extend their critique of Engels beyond ethnographic errors to his larger theoretical framework. They tend to suspect it is too convenient "that the material basis of women's oppression lies in the same institution as the material basis of class oppression" (Humphries, 1987: 12). The latter group might suggest the former group simply *wants* to read Engels, and therefore Marx, as feminist. This is problematic for many reasons, not the least of which is that Engels never refers to feminist activism or feminist arguments that emerged from the women's movement of his day (Maconachie, 1987: 99). Moreover, women's interests remain subordinated to class analysis throughout Engels' work (MacKinnon, 1989: 21, 62).

[32] Some scholars contend that although Engels claims to historicize the family, his process is partial at best. MacKinnon argues that Engels ends up reifying "woman socially to such an extent that her status

theorizing the exchange and commodification of women. As noted from the outset, the focus on pre-capitalist social relations in most of the book precludes much discussion of the commodity form. The limited discussion of commodities in *The Origin* does not expand much beyond Marx's discussion in *Capital*, with two exceptions. First, Engels applies Marx's framework to historical and anthropological examples. This is primarily done by tracing the introduction of private property and the advent of the universal commodity of money through the rise of the Athenian state (1972: 145–152).

Second and most importantly for this discussion, Engels opens up the possibility that commodities can be people, specifically women. The basic relationship he establishes between family forms and modes of production raises this possibility. Monogamy is the family form associated with civilization, and in his final chapter, Engels links monogamy and civilization with commodity production (1972: 213–214). His understanding of commodity production includes not only capitalist modes of production but also slavery and feudalism. He describes the advent of commodity production as follows:

> It was not long before the great "truth" was discovered that man, too, may be a commodity; that human power may be exchanged and utilized by converting man into a slave. Men had barely started to engage in exchange when they

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might as well have been considered naturally determined" (1989: 13, emphasis mine). Many nineteenth-century assumptions about the family and women's position within the family are left intact. Engels assumes, for example, that heterosexuality, heterosexual bonding, and the bond between women and children are timeless and universal (Maconachie, 1987: 106; Redclift, 1987: 114). Assuming that women have a natural affinity for men and children allows Engels to assume that the sexual division of labour is also natural. One example of Engels taking the sexual division of labour as a given is found in his discussion of "American Indians." He writes that the "division of labour was a pure and simple outgrowth of nature; it existed only between the two sexes" (1972: 196, emphasis mine). In sum, despite establishing links between production and the position of women, in many respects Engels still understands biology to be destiny. Feminists have long problematized his assumptions concerning the universality of a sexual division of labour.

> themselves were exchanged. The active became a passive, whether man wanted it or not (1972: 214).

For Engels, the advent of civilization and commodity production saw the advent of people themselves being commodified. This is consistent with Engels' previous argument concerning the "world historic defeat of the female sex." This defeat, which also occurred at the advent of civilization and commodity production, saw the degradation and enslavement of women by men (1972: 85).

Yet if commodities are people and women are exchanged and commodified by men, Engels' discussion is unclear about an important point: whether people are commodities at all stages of civilization or only at specific stages (such as slavery). Engels, in a similar manner to Marx before him, is unclear as to whether people as such are commodities *under capitalism*. Engels does argue that after the "world historic defeat" the "lowered position of women […] has become gradually embellished and dissembled and, in part, clothed in a milder form, but by no means abolished" (1972: 85). This might be read to suggest that women continue to be exchanged and commodified under capitalism, albeit in a less obvious manner. Additionally, following from Marx's argument in "On the Jewish Question" and Marx and Engels' argument in *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels argues that under capitalism the difference between wives and prostitutes is negligible. The wife "differs from the ordinary courtesan only in that she does not hire out her body, like a wage worker, on piecework, but sells it into slavery once for all" (Engels, 1972: 100). This suggests that women, at least in their roles as wives and prostitutes, are exchanged and commodified under capitalism.

In sum, Engels opens up the possibility of theorizing women as commodities in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Despite the many problems with the book (including ethnographic errors, inadequate solutions, economism and Eurocentric and imperialist assumptions), feminists within the traditions of political economy and theory have taken it seriously partly because of this possibility. Feminist treatments of the exchange and commodification of women work both within and beyond Engels' framework.

1.4 The Exchange and Commodification of Women: Goldman and Rubin

In their articles of the same main title, "The Traffic in Women," published in 1910 and 1975 respectively, Emma Goldman and Gayle Rubin examine the commodification of women under capitalism. Goldman's treatment most resembles that of Engels. She does not expand beyond the scope of his discussion and retains his focus on prostitution and marriage (although does offer a lengthier discussion on prostitutes and wives than Engels). Goldman suggests girls are raised to be "sex commodities" for men. However, she is unclear about whether women *as women* are commodities under capitalism; in other words, she is unclear about whether it is women's labour power or their very selves that are being commodified. In leaving many questions concerning the gendered commodity unresolved, Goldman echoes not only Engels but also Marx. In contrast, Rubin complicates the gendered commodity by moving beyond an exclusive focus on Engels and Marx. I conclude this section by suggesting that the framework proposed by Rubin (to theorize the exchange and commodification of women), has inspired my

framework (to theorize the commodification of feminism) in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

1.4.1 Emma Goldman's "The Traffic in Women"

Goldman begins "The Traffic in Women" with a critique of a "superficial investigation" conducted by moral reformers and newspaper writers. This investigation concerns the supposedly widespread "white slave traffic" which forces innocent women and girls into a life of prostitution. Goldman questions why prostitution, the existence of which is known by every member of society including most children, should only now have been "made such an important issue" (1970: 19). Indeed, in the United States and Canada of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there were a large number of books, pamphlets, and newspaper reports that recounted stories of "white slavery." According to these stories, innocent women and girls were being drugged and were disappearing under mysterious circumstances. After kidnapping, they were said to be shipped across provincial/state and national borders, sold into prostitution, and held against their will as prisoners in brothels (Boritch, 1997: 106–8; Beckman, 1984: 85). Such stories were rarely supported with any evidence. By the time Goldman wrote her article, a large-scale moral panic about "white slavery" was underway (Boritch, 1997: 106–8). The *White Slave Traffic Act* in the United States, passed by Congress in June 1910, was the result of this panic. This Act made it illegal for "any woman or girl" to be transported across state borders for commercial or other "immoral" purposes (Beckman, 1984: 85–89).

Goldman contends the traffic in "white slavery" does not exist, at least not to the degree suggested by the moral reformers and media. She describes the crusade as a

"toy" which "serves to amuse the people for a little while" and create "a few more fat political jobs" (1970: 20). Most problematically, discussions concerning "white slavery" serve to obscure the real causes of prostitution (1970: 31). Rather than being caused by corrupt "cadets" (that is, procurers of prostitutes), Goldman contends "whether our reformers admit it or not, the economic and social inferiority of women is responsible for prostitution" (1970: 20). More specifically, prostitution is a direct result of the poor wages and exploitative working conditions of women and girls under the "merciless Moloch of capitalism" (1970: 20).[33] As such, the moral panic over "white slavery" diverts the public from the larger social problems created by industrial capitalism.

Since the moral reformers do not understand the causes of prostitution, Goldman contends that they are not able to offer useful solutions. For Goldman, solutions are required because prostitutes are victims (1970: 27). Her language of victimization—which, interestingly enough, is quite similar to that of the moral reformers she is critiquing—suggests that prostitutes have little agency and that prostitution is not a legitimate form of work. Her discussion of solutions does offer the useful critique that legal and legislative measures criminalize the prostitutes[34] and leave their male clients free to enjoy their services without fear of criminal charges. Men also benefit in that individual male police officers, and the male police force as a whole, garner "blood money" from the prostitutes: through bribes to individual officers, and

[33] She uses the terms "capitalism," "industrial system," and "industrial slavery" interchangeably throughout her paper.

[34] The *White Slave Traffic Act* (although not specifically discussed by Goldman) illustrates her point that legal and legislative measures tend to criminalize women. In its early years, the *Act* was used to prosecute women working as prostitutes: although they were supposedly the victims of kidnapping, women were prosecuted for "conspiracy" under the *Act*. Also, women who did not work as prostitutes were prosecuted under the *Act* for travelling with male partners to whom they were not married (Beckman, 1984: 88, 91).

through legally-sanctioned fines for the police force as a whole (1970: 27). Moreover, laws allowing the police to close down brothels leave prostitutes unprotected and "absolutely at the mercy of the graft-greedy police" (1970: 30–31).

The most important reason the construction of "white slavery" is problematic for Goldman is that this traffic is not limited to white women, or even to impoverished women. The exaggeration of the extent and conditions of the traffic in "white slaves" serves to obscure the extent and conditions of the traffic in *all* women. While prostitution has always existed in some form or another, "it was left to the nineteenth century to develop it into a gigantic social institution" (1970: 22). Echoing Marx's collapsing of the prostitute and the wife in his term "public and private" prostitution, and Engels' argument that the difference between the prostitute and the wife is the length of the contract, Goldman argues that "it is merely a question of degree whether [a woman] sells herself to one man, in or out of marriage, or to many men" (1970: 20). For Goldman, whether women are prostitutes in the traditional sense, "economic prostitutes" in the factories, or prostitute themselves for a degree of economic security within marriage, the condition of being a woman in industrial capitalism is that of a prostitute.

Following from this argument, Goldman seems to suggest that women are commodities under capitalism. Girls and women, regardless of the class into which they are born, are all raised to be "sex commodities;" ironically, however, they are "kept in absolute ignorance of the meaning and importance of sex." Without this ignorance, women would be less willing to form relationships that degrade them "to the position of

an object for mere sex gratification" (1970: 24). Her treatment of the wife/prostitute comparison is considerably lengthier than that of Marx or Engels. However, her discussion of commodification does not expand beyond this comparison, and her solution mirrors Engels' assumption that women will somehow be liberated with the end of capitalism. Goldman adds that in addition to the abolition of capitalism, there must be a "complete transvaluation of all accepted values—especially the moral ones" (1970: 32). Yet she offers no commentary on these values, moral or otherwise, or on how they ought to be changed.

Goldman does expand somewhat on the relationship between gender and capitalism in her article "Marriage and Love." She echoes Marx's collapsing of the distinction between the male worker and the (married or otherwise) female prostitute. For Goldman, capitalism does to men what marriage does to women. She contends capitalism and marriage are similar not only because they are economic arrangements, but also because they are both "paternal" and "parasitic" institutions (1970: 38, 43). Capitalism makes a parasite of men and marriage makes a parasite of women. Goldman's collapsing of the distinction between the male worker and the married woman suffers from all the same problems discussed with reference to Marx: namely, Goldman eliminates any gendered specificity of women's experiences of work, and (most importantly for this discussion) creates theoretical confusion on the question of how the commodity is gendered.

Overall, in both "The Traffic in Women" and "Marriage and Love," Goldman leaves many questions concerning the gendered commodity unresolved. In describing

women as *sex commodities* it is unclear whether women are commodified as women or commodified as sex. Alternatively, it might be women's labour power (and its gendered expenditure through reproductive and sex work) that is being commodified. Goldman seems to slip between all three positions, echoing the slippages in Marx and Engels' discussions of gender and commodification. It is these slippages in Marx, Engels, and Goldman that make Rubin's interrogation of the political economy of sex so important to consider. Rubin complicates the concept of the exchange of women, and in so doing suggests a way forward to better understanding the nature of the gendered commodity.

1.4.2 Rubin's "The Traffic in Women"

Rubin acknowledges Goldman's contribution in giving her paper the same title, "The Traffic in Women." For Rubin, the concept of the exchange of women is paradoxical in that it is "so useful yet so difficult" (1997: 38). She examines how the concept has been used with reference to the economy (in Marx and Engels), society and culture (in Lévi-Strauss), and sexuality (in Freud and Lacan), but questions its utility in explaining the position of women. She argues for replacing the exchange of women with her now-famous concept "sex/gender system," which she defines as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (1997: 28). The stated purpose of her article is to elaborate on this definition, attempting to combine Marxism, structuralism and psychoanalytic theory.

To begin with Rubin's discussion of the economy, she argues that the difference between Marx and Engels is that gender and sex is merely an add-on for Marx, a

"historical and moral element." Yet in Engels, the "relations of sexuality" play as important a role as "relations of production" (1997: 31). Rubin is, however, far too uncritical of Engels: not only does he import a framework for one realm into another, but he does not actually use the term "relations of sexuality." Reproduction ought to be distinguished from sexuality, and Engels does not discuss sexuality whatsoever except to assume everyone is heterosexual. In his discussion of reproduction, he assumes women have a natural affinity for children and the sexual division of labour is therefore natural. The criticisms of Engels that Rubin does offer are problematic as well. She argues that "women are oppressed in societies which can by no stretch of the imagination be described as capitalist" (1997: 30). However, Engels discusses the advent of *civilization* as constituting the "world-historic defeat" of women, not of capitalism.

In Rubin's discussion of society and culture, she examines the exchange of women with reference to the work of theorists of pre-state kinship structures, particularly Claude Lévi-Strauss. She focuses on two aspects of Lévi-Strauss' *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, the gift and the incest taboo, which she argues together constitute his ideas about the exchange of women (1997: 35). In sum, Lévi-Strauss understands the gift to be the universal means of social commerce, with women being the most precious of gifts, and the incest taboo to be means of ensuring gifts were exchanged between families and groups (1997: 36). In this section of her article, Rubin offers some resolution to the ambiguities in Marx, Engels, and Goldman between women being commodified as women, women being commodified as sex, or women's labour power being commodified. Rubin argues:

> It is certainly not difficult to find ethnographic and historical examples of trafficking in women. Women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favours, sent as tribute, traded, bought, and sold. Far from being confined to the "primitive" world, these practices seem only to become more pronounced and commercialized in more "civilized" societies. Men are of course also trafficked—but as slaves, hustlers, athletic stars, serfs, or as some other catastrophic social status, rather than as men. Women are transacted as slaves, serfs, and prostitutes, but also simply as women. As if men have been sexual subjects—exchangers—and women sexual semi-objects—gifts—for much of human history, then many customs, clichés, and personality traits seem to make a great deal of sense (among others, the curious custom by which a father gives away the bride) (1997: 37–38).

For Rubin, women are exchanged in all three ways, including *as women*. They are also more likely to be exchanged than men. And like Goldman, Rubin is clear that capitalism intensifies the exchange of women.[35]

In Rubin's discussion of sexuality, she examines the exchange of women with reference to the work of Freud and Lacan. She incorporates psychoanalytic theory into structuralist approaches to the exchange of women in order to "explain the mechanisms by which children are engraved with the conventions of sex and gender" (1997: 42). Rubin's critical reading of Freud and Lacan allows her to problematize the notion that heterosexuality is natural and eternal. Rubin does not read a sexual division of labour back into history; indeed, she links the sexual division of labour to heterosexuality, and a passive female sexuality to the exchange of women (1997: 40–42).

In theorizing the sex/gender system, Rubin attempts to combine Marxism, structuralism, and psychoanalytic theory. However, Rosemary Hennessy demonstrates effectively that Rubin does not do this very well, arguing that weaknesses in Rubin's synthesis are particularly evident when it comes to incorporating Marxism (Hennessy,

[35] Engels was unclear on this point.

2000: 180). Indeed, although Rubin starts with Marx and Engels, the focus of her analysis of the sex/gender system is a comparison between psychoanalytic theory and structuralism. Furthermore, Hennessy contends that Rubin does not provide enough discussion of the commodity form:

> Certainly, no analysis can attend to every facet of social life at the same time. But in "The Traffic in Women" forgetting for a while about sexuality's relation to commodity production translates into forgetting it entirely, as kinship becomes the sole lens for examining the oppression of women (Hennessy, 2000: 181).

Moreover, Hennessy points out that Rubin ignores how ideologies of racism have structured kinship structures, labour, and sexuality (2000: 184). Finally, Hennessy critiques Rubin for abandoning historical materialism in the 1980s (2000: 185). Overall, Hennessy considers Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" an important early attempt to theorize (however poorly) the relationship between sexual identity and capitalism.

I would both extend Hennessy's critique and (partially) defend Rubin's analysis. By way of adding to the critique, Rubin shares the problems Hennessy outlines with regards to Engels. For example, both Engels' and Rubin's almost exclusive focus on pre-capitalist societies avoids much discussion of the commodity form. Also, both Engels and Rubin do not take a critical view of the construction of race. However, in defence of Rubin, her article (as the subtitle indicates) consists of "*Notes* on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," thus acknowledging Rubin's partial reading. Indeed, Rubin ends with a call for a Marxian analysis of sex/gender systems, and for someone to write a new version of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that recognizes the "mutual interdependence of sexuality, economics and politics" (1997: 55, 58). Hennessy herself

echoes Rubin's call for a "systemic link between a sex-gender system and other material aspects of social life" (2000: 193).

I wish to examine commodity feminism in a parallel way to how Rubin examines the exchange and commodification of women by bringing different theoretical frameworks to bear on the question. Rubin's use of Marx, Marxism, Freud, and Freudianism to theorize the exchange and commodification of women is reflective of my use of these traditions in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.[36] Rubin acknowledges the need for this type of inquiry in the statement cited in the epigraph to this chapter. Similarly, Hennessy argues that although the "two domains of capital's history—the sexual desires of the body and the economic needs of consumers and producers on the market—are persistently considered altogether distinctive," they should be put back together (2000: 196–197). Theorizing commodity feminism as a relationship between commodities, femininity, and subjectivity furthers this project. My project is inspired by Rubin but is cognizant of Hennessy's critique of "The Traffic in Women" (especially Rubin's uncritical view of race and insufficient Marxian analysis) in approaching commodity feminism.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the precursor to commodity feminism, which I locate in Marxist and feminist discussions of the relationship between commodities and women. I have examined Marx's discussion of the nature of the commodity form and commodity

[36] I do not use every theoretical framework employed by Rubin; most notably, I drop her discussion of the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss. Pre-capitalist kinship societies are of little interest to my discussion of processes of commodification in capitalist societies.

fetishism in relation to women, Engels' discussion of the exchange of women, and how the frameworks of Marx and Engels relate to those of Goldman and Rubin. In theorizing the relationship between commodities and women, the focus on the exchange or commodification of women brings with it important limitations. In addition to theoretical confusion about its origins, it can be totalizing. How does one resist a phenomenon that originates with the beginning of civilization (according to Engels) or even the advent of industrial capitalism (according to Goldman)?[37] Additionally, there is ambiguity about the status of women in capitalism: if women are commodified, are they commodified as women or as sex? Or is it their labour power that is being commodified? Marx, Engels, and Goldman are all unclear on these points. Rubin suggests it is all three but does not theorize these connections very well.

The notion of commodity feminism suggests that women are not always commodities exchanged between men, but that they are exchangers and fetishizers of commodities in their own right. As such, the commodification of women and the commodification of feminism work together in the contemporary context. This observation is the platform for the chapters to follow.

An incipient understanding of commodity feminism can be found in Emma Goldman's writing on women's fetishes. She contends that women are more inclined to fetish worshipping than men; for example, they have "been the greatest supporters of all deities since time immemorial" (1970: 51). In addition to religion, Goldman discusses

[37] The traditional Marxist response to Goldman's postulate would be to liberate women by overthrowing capitalism. Such a solution is overly simplistic and suspiciously convenient; moreover, as Mitchell points out, neither Marx "nor his successors ever tried seriously to envisage the implications of this for socialism, or even for a structural analysis of women's oppression" (1966: 23).

war and the home as examples of fetishes that disproportionately impact women, yet paradoxically count women among their most enthusiastic supporters (1970: 51–2). She contends that the modern fetish of women is universal suffrage. Regardless of the accuracy of her characterization of women's greater inclination to fetish worshipping, Goldman's argument is illuminating for her very characterization of *feminist praxis as fetish*. A fetish in its original sense (before Marx and Freud took hold of the term) is something believed to have powers beyond its capacity. Indeed, in the early twentieth century United States in which Goldman was writing, feminist activism had become almost entirely preoccupied with the single issue of suffrage (Tong, 1998: 22). As Goldman predicted, the fetish of the first-wave of feminism did not contain the emancipatory power it promised.

Feminism has not ceased to be fetishized since Goldman's time. If the fetish of first-wave feminism was suffrage, the fetish of third-wave feminism might be commodity feminism. Like the fetish of the first-wave feminists, our modern fetish serves to sanitize the radical critique it appropriates. Subsequent chapters explore several examples of fetishistic practices associated with women including makeup and other cosmetics, cigarette smoking, and fashion. Mitchell contends that a "responsible revolutionary attitude" is one that refuses to fetishize any dimension of the situation of women (1966: 34). If the situation of many women today involves a form of feminist critique or praxis, to be *responsible*, women must refuse the fetishization of feminism. For Goldman, there is nothing more dangerous to the status quo than the "dissection of a fetish" (1970: 61).

CHAPTER TWO
Feminized Commodities: The Femininity Question in Popular Anglo-American Feminism

> These numerous and essential articles [of dress] are advertised in so ridiculous a style, that the rapid sale of them is a very severe reflection on the understanding of those females who encourage it.
>
> —Mary Wollstonecraft (1990c: 32)

> It is an act of misogyny to try and disassociate oneself from things that are "female" simply because you don't like what that "femaleness" means to you and others.
>
> —Allyson Mitchell (2002: 105)

2.1 Introduction

Historically women have been encouraged to buy commodities, from corsets to rouge to vacuums, for two predominant reasons: to produce particular forms of femininity for the desiring gaze of men, or to better perform their role as heterosexual housewives and mothers. Feminists have long been critical of these approaches to the sale of commodities. These approaches changed slowly over the course of the twentieth century, with the transformation picking up pace in the final decades (Goldman et al., 1991; Goldman, 1992). Today, commodity feminism has reached ascendancy. It is far more common for the marketing of commodities to women to use appropriated liberal feminist discourses of independence and self-determination than to use the more traditional discourses of appealing to men or of becoming a better wife.

The ascendancy of commodity feminism has been lampooned by the satirical magazine *The Onion*. The title of a 2003 article, "Women Now Empowered by Everything a Woman Does," announces a fundamental shift in feminism. While once based on social critique and political action, feminism is now based on a politics that understands

women as being *empowered* by virtually everything they do. According to the article, much of what women *do* is consume feminized commodities. The article cites a spoof feminist academic who contends that shopping for shoes and clothes can now be understood as a "bold feminist statement":

> Shopping for shoes has emerged as a powerful means by which women assert their autonomy […] Owning and wearing dozens of pairs of shoes is a compelling way for a woman to announce that she is strong and independent, and can shoe herself without the help of a man. She's saying, "Look out, male-dominated world, here comes me and my shoes" (*The Onion*, 2003).[38]

The spoof academic (whose institutional affiliation is the historically radical Oberlin College) goes on to suggest that beyond shoes and clothing, there are endless commodities that can empower women.[39] Indeed, "from what she eats for breakfast to the way she cleans her home, today's woman lives in a state of near-constant empowerment" (*The Onion*, 2003). Satire tends to occur only when a social phenomenon has become widespread enough to make the humour comprehensible to a large audience. As such, *The Onion*'s satirical take on commodity feminism is itself indicative of its ascendancy. Yet the following question remains: *how* did commodity feminism reach ascendancy in advertising, the corporate media, and popular culture?

Understanding this ascendancy requires understanding the origins of commodity feminism. This chapter theorizes these origins through the *femininity question*, that is, the problem femininity has posed to popular Anglo-American feminism. The femininity

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[38] Rosalind Gill suggests the intended target of the shoe discussion is *Sex and the City* (2008: 37). Indeed, as mentioned in the introduction, there was an episode in the final season entitled "A Woman's Right to Shoes."

[39] For example, shopping for food can also be read as a *feminist trend*. Energy bars fortified with nutrients "for women" are completely "unlike traditional, phallocentric energy bars." Indeed, "pioneers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony could never have imagined that female empowerment would one day come in bar form" (*The Onion*, 2003).

question, in a similar manner to the exchange and commodification of women, has been thought to explain a great deal about the position of women. One of the earliest articulations of this question in Anglo-American feminism can be found in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797). Notably, Wollstonecraft sets up tension between feminism and femininity using arguments that are at times misogynist. Her treatment of femininity writ large, the commodities required to produce femininity, and the women who use these commodities, has influenced popular feminist understandings of the femininity question until very recently.

In this chapter, I put forward an explanation of the ascendancy of commodity feminism through a discussion of third wave feminism, in particular, the relationship of third wave feminism to the femininity question. While the third wave has been credited for being more inclusive (particularly of race, sexuality, and gender identity), it has also been critiqued for *not* addressing issues of class and for inviting "in the name of inclusiveness, practically any claims to feminist membership, [rendering it] easy for external constituents to co-opt third-wave vocabulary as part of its effort to depoliticize feminist gains" (Kinser, 2008: 141, 142). I argue here that the solution to the tension between feminism and femininity offered by the third wave is one that is easily commodified and in fact works to legitimize commodity feminism.

In a manner similar to that of third wave feminism, I discuss how commodity feminism also offers a certain kind of *resolution* to the feminism/femininity tension. I show how this apparent resolution lies in revaluing feminized commodities and the women who use them, both of which have been denigrated since Wollstonecraft. Under

commodity feminism, women are seen as entirely unthreatening to the status quo, yet they are able to feel like feminists through their rejection of Wollstonecraftian feminist misogyny, consumption of feminized commodities, and production of femininity. While commodity feminism does not empower women, it does empower the desires of certain women whom it simultaneously normalizes and idealizes (that is, women who tend to be white, able-bodied, and middle class) to participate in the production of particular forms of femininity.

This chapter is organized into six sections. Section 2.2 defines my use of the term misogyny with reference to the work of Julia Serano and Allyson Mitchell; section 2.3 explores the treatment of femininity in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, including *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1786), *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). The next three sections (2.3–2.5) examine how Wollstonecraft's legacy of feminist misogyny has influenced the treatment of the femininity question (including the commodities required in the production of femininity) in twentieth-century popular socialist and liberal feminisms, with a particular focus on Joseph Hansen, Evelyn Reed, and Mary-Alice Waters' edited volume *Cosmetics, Fashions and the Exploitation of Women* (1954), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Susan Brownmiller's *Femininity* (1984), and Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990). Lastly, section 2.6 examines third wave feminist interventions that directly challenge the assumption that femininity is a problem to be overcome, and that suggest a possible solution to the feminism/femininity tension. This section primarily focuses on Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richard's *Manifesta: Young Women,*

Feminism and the Future (2000) and Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri's edited volume *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity* (2002).

As the title of my chapter indicates, this is not an intervention into feminist theory, but an intervention into popular feminist writing on femininity. All of these texts constitute popular feminism:[40] they are well-known (at least in their time) outside academia, written in an accessible style, and for the most part written by non-academics.[41] In addition, the primary purpose of these texts is to engage with the femininity question. The approach to sources consulted in this chapter is thus strategic, recognizing that commodity feminism is not in competition with the highly theoretical texts of feminists such as Luce Irigaray or Judith Butler. After all, commodity feminism is a form of marketing to women. Women familiar with the arguments of Irigaray or Butler constitute a tiny percentage of North American consumers; from a marketing perspective, they are irrelevant. However, commodity feminism *is* competing with the more accessible texts of popular feminists such as Betty Friedan and Naomi Wolf. Regardless of whether or not women have actually read *The Feminine Mystique* or *The Beauty Myth*, most are certainly familiar with some of the more basic arguments these books offer. For example, arguments concerning housework (that it is repetitive, dull, and women do most of it) and the beauty industry (that making women feel insecure is profitable for business) are a pervasive part of contemporary Anglo-American culture.

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[40] Although Wollstonecraft is clearly a canonized thinker in Western feminist thought, as a polemical writer whose work was tremendously influential in her time, she can also be read as a popular feminist writer. Moreover, several of Wollstonecraft's popular feminist successors (including Friedan and Brownmiller) situate their work with respect to hers.

[41] A few of the contributors to the *Cosmetics* and *Brazen Femme* collections are academics. However, the writing in both collections is highly accessible and the intended audience is not exclusively academic.

2.2 Misogyny and Femininity

The usual definition of misogyny is *woman hating*. However, feminists have used the term to refer to behaviours, practices and social contexts that are deeply hostile to women (Card, 2002). Indeed, in the next section, I understand Wollstonecraft's particular form of misogyny as not a hatred of women per se, but a deep hostility toward almost everything associated with women.[42] This includes behaviours, gendered roles, bodily aesthetics, consumption, and feminized commodities; in short, femininity and the commodities required in its production. In a general sense (that is, beyond Wollstonecraft), I define misogyny as a hatred or deep hostility toward women and/or femininity. My definition engages with and modifies the understandings of misogyny put forth by Julia Serano in *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* and Allyson Mitchell, who is cited in the epigraph to this chapter, in *Brazen Femme*.

[42] By *women*, I mean the privileged women of the upper class (or "ladies") that were eminently familiar to Wollstonecraft; these are the women with whom she was primarily preoccupied. Wollstonecraft's own class position was somewhat ambiguous. She was born into the English landed gentry—that is, a class of landowners without titles who could live off their rental income—on her father's side (Falco, 1996: 2; Todd, 2000). Wollstonecraft's father became wealthy after her paternal grandfather died when she was 5; as such, her family often associated with members of the gentry. However, Wollstonecraft's father ultimately squandered his inheritance, and the class position of her family consistently declined (Altenbernd Johnson, 2000: 2; Todd, 2000: 3–11, 37). Her father was also an alcoholic who was abusive to his wife and children (Godwin, 1967: 9–12; Falco, 1996: 2, Altenbernd Johnson, 2000: 2; Todd, 2000: 5). To support herself and members of her family, Wollstonecraft was eventually forced to work in a variety of positions deemed appropriate for impoverished "ladies" including: lady's companion, running a school for girls, and governess (Godwin, 1967: 37; Todd, 2000: 27, 28, 55–58, 79). Thus within the British class system of her time, Wollstonecraft was not exactly a "lady"; however, the jobs she held were not considered servant positions or appropriate for the working class. Wollstonecraft eventually made her living (albeit while struggling with debt) by writing (Todd, 2000: 138, 141–142, 157). Later in her life she had servants herself; indeed, in his *Memoirs* of his late wife, William Godwin praised Wollstonecraft's behaviour towards "her inferiors in station [and] age," particularly her kindness to "her servants" and children (1967: 33).

Serano's understanding of misogyny is more well-developed than Mitchell's. Serano differentiates between *old* and *new* forms of misogyny and implicates feminism[43] in the persistence of misogyny's newer form. She contends that "much of what has historically been called misogyny—a hatred of women—has clearly gone underground, disguising itself as the less reprehensible derision of femininity" (2007: 340). Although I agree with Serano that both the hatred of women *and* the derision of femininity constitute misogyny, the latter form of misogyny (as the next section on Wollstonecraft will demonstrate) is hardly *new*.[44] Serano's discussion of misogyny relates to my own in that she critiques feminism for its treatment of the femininity question. Moreover, she suggests that misogynist understandings of femininity have persisted in part because feminists have either neglected femininity or have actively

[43] Serano implicates two feminist trends in the persistence of misogyny: *unilateral feminism* and *deconstructive feminism*. She categorizes feminisms according to these "trends" to "illustrate two major tendencies in feminist perspectives on femininity"; she suggests she does not wish "to erase the significant differences that distinguished the individual branches of feminism" or to "ignore other branches of feminism that fall outside these trends" (Serano, 2007: 330). For Serano, unilateral feminists understood femininity as "an artificial, man-made ploy designed to hold women back from reaching their full potential" and consist largely of liberal, radical, and cultural feminists from the 1960s and 1970s. The specific unilateral feminists she mentions are Betty Friedan, Mary Daly, and Germaine Greer (Serano, 2007: 331, 332–334). On the other hand, deconstructive feminism "only empowers and embraces queer expressions of femininity, while straight expressions of femininity are typically portrayed as reinforcing a sexist binary system" (Serano, 2007: 336–337). The only deconstructive feminist she mentions by name is Judith Butler.

[44] In fairness to Serano, the purpose of her study is not to undergo a history of misogynist treatments of femininity but rather to examine the scapegoating of people who express femininity in *contemporary* American culture (primarily trans women but also cisgendered women and feminine men). She contends that misogyny in the contemporary context "focuses more on maligning femininity than femaleness [and] can be found everywhere" (Serano, 2007: 340). In theorizing femininity through her experiences as a trans woman, Serano contends that trans women are "ridiculed and dismissed not merely because we 'transgress binary gender norms,' as many transgender activists and gender theorists have proposed, but rather because we 'choose' to be women rather than men. The fact that we identify and live as women, despite being born male and having inherited male privilege, challenges those in our society who wish to glorify maleness and masculinity, as well as those who frame the struggles faced by other women and queers solely in terms of male and heterosexual privilege" (2007: 4). As such, she views many of her experiences that others (in the feminist and/or queer communities) might label *transphobia* as trans-misogyny or simply misogyny (2007: 5–6, 236).

participated in putting forth the view that femininity is incompatible with feminism (2007: 340, 320). As femininity has been feminism's "Achilles' heel," Serano issues a call to put "the feminine back into feminism" (2007: 340, 320).

Mitchell's claim that rejecting femininity based on its misogynist construction requires restriction. Without restriction it could be read to suggest that *any* critique of femininity is vulnerable to a charge of misogyny. There must be space available for critiques of femininity; for example, critiques such as those offered by Lisa Duggan and Kathleen McHugh in their contribution to *Brazen Femme*:

> In the dominant myth of gender, white men work to support their delicate, morally superior feminine white women. The feminine white woman is offered "respect" only in relation to those excluded from the sacred domestic and its "protections"—the slave, the mammy, the whore, the jezebel, the wage slave, the servant, the hussy, the dyke, the welfare queen. "Femininity" here is the price paid for a paltry and debasing power. This femininity embodies, pays the symbolic taxes of a mythology based on denial of class and race—a mythology that takes no responsibility for its privilege, its hierarchies, its parasitic relation to other's labor and sweat. This myth's enshrining of a saccharine sincerity in the midst of so much deception curdles the spirit and strangles affirmation and power in the throats of all who embrace and believe in the "morality" and "sweetness" of the feminine (2002: 168).

Clearly there must be space to critique the issues Duggan and McHugh mention: the ways in which hegemonic femininities privilege whiteness, heteronormativity, and dependency, and endorse racism, slut-shaming, homophobia, and classism. Other contributors to *Brazen Femme* offer other important critiques of hegemonic femininity, including its stifling conformity ("as a demand placed on female bodies") and the middle-class consumption involved ("picket fences, station wagons, or diamond rings") (Brushwood Rose and Camilleri, 2002: 13; Ruth, 2002: 17).

In sum, I am restricting Mitchell's understanding of misogyny because feminist critiques of femininity serve important functions and are not necessarily misogynist. But this does not take away from the fact that feminist critiques *can* and at times *do* contain an underlying Wollstonecraftian feminist misogyny. In other words, rejecting femininity simply because of the ways it has been constructed may be an act of misogyny (as Mitchell claims) or it may not. Either way, as Serano points out, when an individual woman eschews "femininity in her appearance and actions, she cannot escape the fact that other people will project feminine assumptions and expectations upon her simply because they associate femininity with femaleness" (2007: 341). As such, anti-feminine sentiment (in feminist, queer, and other communities) must be challenged, and it must be acknowledged "that feminine expression exists of its own accord and brings its own rewards to those who naturally gravitate towards it" (Serano, 2007: 343). This chapter will develop this understanding of misogyny as informed by Serano and Mitchell.

2.3 Wollstonecraft's Liberal *Feminist Misogyny*

Femininity has been understood as a problem for Anglo-American feminism in general and for many feminists in particular. As such, there has been a great deal written on the femininity question. In a similar manner to most conventional histories of feminist thought in the Anglo-American world, I begin with Mary Wollstonecraft.[45] She is

[45] This is not to suggest that Wollstonecraft is author of the first Anglo-American feminist text. Barbara Taylor notes that since the seventeenth century, "liberal advocates of constitutional government [were arguing] that the power of men within families, like that of kings within nations, should be exercised only with the consent of the ruled" (1993: 3). Moreover, Wollstonecraft was hardly the lone feminist voice of her time. In the late eighteenth century, "there was a steady stream of writing on women's position" by teachers, parliamentary reformers, novelists, journalists, and poets. These "dissident intellectuals" formed communities in most large towns across Britain (1993). Yet this does not take away from the point that

contemptuous of all or most of the women from the upper class for embracing femininity, which she associates with irrationality, weakness, excessive emotions, foolishness, frivolity, and childlike behaviour. She sets up a tension between feminism and femininity, is harsh in her critique of femininity as an artificial construct that prevents women from exercising their reason, and uses arguments that are—at times—misogynist.[46] Wollstonecraft's legacy of *feminist misogyny*[47] has haunted the subsequent development of popular Anglo-American feminism.

Wollstonecraft's critique of femininity and her larger project of women's emancipation is informed by her liberalism and, related to that liberalism, her belief in the Cartesian subject, that is, a subject defined by rational thought. The Cartesian subject is dualistic in that the body is separated from the mind, or as Wollstonecraft articulates it, "there is no sex in souls" (Jaggar, 1983: 40; Brown, 2006: 61–62, 64–65). A clear danger of adopting the Cartesian subject is masculinism, given that disembodied, abstract subjects have tended to allow men to stand in for people in the history of Western thought. Yet Wollstonecraft's Cartesianism underpins not merely masculinism

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Wollstonecraft is understood to have written the founding text of modern feminism with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. As such, her influence (both generally and with specific reference to her understanding of femininity) has been considerable.

[46] Wollstonecraft associated femininity with these traits in the context of theorizing constraints imposed on women through her nascent theory of gender-role socialization and her critique of the education of (non-working class) girls and women. See sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2, and 2.3.3.

[47] This term *feminist misogyny* was originally coined by Susan Gubar in 1994. Gubar uses the term to suggest a dialectical relationship between feminism and misogyny. Although I am indebted to Gubar for coining the term, my understanding of the term and focus both differ. I do not understand feminism and misogyny to be in a dialectical relationship; indeed, even Gubar acknowledges that although "there can be (need be) no feminism without misogyny," at the same time "feminism historically has not been the condition for misogyny's existence" (1994: 462). Like Gubar, I do focus on Wollstonecraft's use of misogynist language in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. However, I expand beyond Gubar's focus to include discussion of other Wollstonecraft texts as well as considering the relationship between femininity, commodities, and capitalism in Wollstonecraft's work and subsequent popular feminist texts.

but also her feminist misogyny: she is feminist in the way she fights for women to be included in the category of the rights-bearing (abstract disembodied Cartesian) subject, but misogynist in her assessment of women who inevitably remain gendered subjects.

2.3.1 Wollstonecraft's Liberal Feminism

Before making this argument, it is important to first provide an overview Wollstonecraft's liberal politics. I characterize Wollstonecraft as an Enlightenment thinker and liberal feminist with occasional radical tendencies to nonconformity.[48] She may be characterized as such due to her adoption of the Cartesian subject of the Enlightenment, and because of the liberal politics that follow from that subject. On the former, Wollstonecraft's view that there is "no sex in souls" is similar to other Enlightenment thinkers such as Poullain de la Barre. Following Descartes, de la Barre declared in 1673 that the "mind has no sex." The unsexed nature of the mind and the soul means women and men share the same moral nature; as such, they ought to share the same moral status and rights (Brown, 2006: 62). Wollstonecraft's liberal politics are evident in her arguments for women's education, for the ability of women to reason given a proper education, and for the inclusion of women in public life (Ferguson, 1999: 427; Brown, 2006: 62). She can also be characterized as a liberal feminist, at least in part based on her engagement with male political theorists. In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, she takes up the theories of John Locke on children as individuals. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, she critiques the conservatism of Edmund Burke in

[48] In characterizing Wollstonecraft as such I am following conventional histories of Anglo-American feminist thought.

Reflections on the Revolution in France. And finally in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, her most famous text, she lambastes the proposals of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Émile* for a gender-segregated education in which boys would be taught to reason and girls taught to please. Therefore, in taking up Locke's individualism, in critiquing Burke's conservatism and Rousseau's gender-segregated education, and in expressing a general optimism about progress through education, Wollstonecraft is definitively a product of Enlightenment thinking and liberalism.

Although Wollstonecraft ought to be characterized as a liberal feminist, both her liberalism and her feminism are limited. This is especially the case in matters of education. Her liberalism does not extend to the working class: she argues that all children ought to be educated in the same manner, but only from age five to nine. After that, working-class children ought to be "removed to other schools" (1990: 107). Her feminism does not extend to the working class either: only middle-class children (or in her words, "young people of superior abilities, or fortune") should be given the same education. This education would consist of "the dead and living languages, the elements of science, and […] the study of history and politics, which would not exclude polite literature" (1990b: 108). Working-class children should retain the gender-segregated education that Wollstonecraft is so critical of Rousseau for advocating: boys would be educated in the "mechanical trades," and girls would be taught "plain-work, mantua-making [and] millinery" (or in other words, basic sewing as well as more specialized

sewing such as gown making and hat making) (1990b: 108).[49] Wollstonecraft's liberalism and feminism also do not extend to women and men of colour: despite over eighty references to slavery in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in almost all of these references she is referring to the *slavery* of white English women. Wollstonecraft was well aware of the abolitionist movement but largely took up its language to apply to these women (Ferguson, 1992: 92, 87). Wollstonecraft's class-based education recommendations, lack of concern for the equality of men and women of the working class, and her strange references to white English women's slavery all point to the limitations of both her liberalism and her feminism.[50]

Despite these limitations, some feminists suggest that Wollstonecraft is radical in that she proposes an embryonic form of socialism in her critiques of class society and private property (Ferguson, 1999: 427–429). For example, Barbara Taylor argues that "the scope of her project took her right to the limit of the bourgeois-democratic outlook and occasionally a little way past it" (1993: 6). Susan Ferguson argues that such readings go too far, contending that Wollstonecraft's feminism is firmly class-based and her critiques of property are of aristocratic forms of property (1999: 432). Indeed, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft endorses private property as long as the holdings are not too large. She contends that it is the "barbarous feudal" institution

[49] Here the liberation of middle-class women from sewing is at the expense of working-class women. Wollstonecraft also argues "against the custom of confining [middle-class] girls to their needle" (1990b: 108), but someone clearly needs to do the sewing.

[50] Wollstonecraft is not only unconcerned with the plight of the working class, but at times seems to understand the working class to pose a threat. For example, in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, she warns mothers (of the middle class) to breast-feed their own children; otherwise, babies will be fed by "ignorant nurses" with "their stomachs overloaded with improper food, which turns acid" (1990c: 28). Therefore, both literally and figuratively, Wollstonecraft understands the acid of the working class to pose a threat to the middle class.

of property to which she objects, as it "enables the elder son to overpower talents and depress virtue" (1990a: 71). She also argues for the enclosure of common land for private use (1990a: 81). For Ferguson, Wollstonecraft is not a liberal reformer, nor does she have a wider socialist vision. She is, rather, a "social radical," which Ferguson defines as someone whose "radical politics […] disrupts status quo notions of governance and authority." As such, Wollstonecraft is not overly critical of capitalism but is part of a "liberal-democratic politics of resistance in the late-eighteenth-century Britain" (1999: 433).

2.3.2 Wollstonecraft on Gender and Femininity

Although I agree with Ferguson that Wollstonecraft is not radical in her discussion of class or property, Wollstonecraft does display some degree of radicalism in her understanding of both gender and femininity. Regarding the former, she contends that there are two possible explanations for the condition of women (by "women," Wollstonecraft means white middle-class women):[51] "either nature has made a great difference between [men and women], or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial." She goes on to argue the latter, that the position of women is not natural but the result of socialization and is "a false system of education" (1990b: 85). She pleads to men to allow for conditions in which women's "faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale" (1990b: 91). In doing so, she

[51] References to women and femininity henceforth in this discussion of Wollstonecraft shall be to white middle-class women and the hegemonic forms of femininity they embody.

offers a nascent theory of gender-role socialization: women's intelligence and capabilities will only be discovered with radical changes to society. Her radicalism can also be situated in her more specific critique of femininity. She is particularly concerned with three predominant forms of femininity: the *mother*, the *coquette* and the *lady*. However, only in the latter two forms does she exhibit her radicalism. She does understand the mother to be socially constructed[52] and wants to rethink this form of femininity. She argues for what I would describe as *rational mothering femininity*: women ought to be educated not so they may enter professions,[53] but so that they will be better (that is, more rational) mothers. For Wollstonecraft, "motherhood informed by reason is and must be the essence of emancipation" (Ferguson, 1999: 445). Indeed, the only form of femininity of which she seems to approve is this rational mothering femininity.

Wollstonecraft understands the coquette and the lady (like the mother) to be socially constructed. Although she never defines the difference between the coquette and lady forms of femininity, the lady seems to be a somewhat less flirtatious and more refined version of the coquette. Wollstonecraft does not want to rethink but completely *eradicate* these hegemonic forms of femininity. Indeed, this can be situated in the context of her concerns—shared with Rousseau—of how the socialization process

[52] Although Wollstonecraft argues "the suckling of a child […] excites the warmest glow of tenderness," she is clear that this "maternal tenderness arises quite as much from habit as instinct" (1990c: 28). Also, while she views parenting as a "natural impulse" and "natural parental affection" as the "first source of civilization" (1990a: 69, 70), she also understands that giving *women* the primary responsibility for childrearing is not natural but social.

[53] As Ferguson notes, for Wollstonecraft "women who work outside the home are likely to be single or at least childless, and of 'exceptional talent'" (1999: 444).

creates artificial and false human beings. Yet what she likes in Rousseau does not get applied to women. Wollstonecraft famously responds, for example, to Rousseau's argument that women are natural coquettes (and whose education must be constructed with the purpose of refining this tendency) with ridicule. She contends that his argument is "so unphilosophical, that such a sagacious observer as Rousseau would not have adopted it, if he has not been accustomed to make reason give way to his desire for singularity, and truth to a favourite paradox." In short, his argument represents nothing short of "absurdity" (1990b: 93).

2.3.3 Wollstonecraft's Feminist Misogyny

Conventional histories of feminist theory have long celebrated Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau's naturalization of femininity. However, Wollstonecraft's critiques of hegemonic forms of femininity and the women embodying them are often overlooked. Her characterization of both is implicitly—and at times explicitly—misogynist. Wollstonecraft's harsh critiques of Rousseau's gender politics might have contributed to a lack of interrogation of certain aspects of her own gender politics, namely its misogynist aspects.

Wollstonecraft's misogyny is particularly evident in her treatment of the coquette and the lady. They are "weak and wretched," "artificial," and "almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures" (1990b: 85, 91; 1990c: 30). Wollstonecraft also ridicules their faces:

> A made-up face may strike visitors, but will certainly disgust domestic friends. And one obvious interference is drawn, truth is not expected to govern the inhabitant of so artificial a form. The false life with which rouge animates the

> eyes, is not of the most delicate kind; nor does a women's dressing herself in a way to attract languishing glances, give us the most advantageous opinion of the purity of her mind (1990c: 32).

The woman who wears makeup, therefore, is not only weak, artificial, and irrational but also disgusting, untruthful, seeking attention from men and possibly unchaste. The woman who follows fashion (as the quote cited in the epigraph to this chapter suggests) is similarly irrational, foolishly buying clothing no matter how ridiculous the style, simply because she is told to by advertisements (1990c: 32).

Since coquettes and ladies tend to get married, Wollstonecraft puts much of the blame for unhappy marriages and families on women in general and their desire for feminized commodities in particular. She blames women in her statement that "affection in the marriage state can only be founded on respect" and poses the rhetorical question, "are these weak beings respectable?" (1990a: 70). Moreover, she claims the coquette and the lady become neglectful mothers (1990a: 70).

Wollstonecraft blames women's desires for feminized commodities in the following statement:

> My very soul has often sickened at observing the sly tricks practised by women to gain some foolish thing on which their foolish hearts were set. Not allowed to dispose of money, or call any thing their own, they learn to turn to the market penny; or, should a husband offend, by staying from home, or give rise to some emotions of jealousy—a new gown, or any pretty bawble [*sic*], smoothes Juno's angry brow (1990b: 108).

In other words, wives are not only manipulative, jealous, and foolish, but they can also be placated with a mere bauble. This passage is an interesting study in the workings of Wollstonecraft's feminist misogyny. On the one hand, she is making a feminist argument against being duped by a bauble (or what Marx would call commodity fetishism) as it

induces women to participate in a system that does not advantage them. On the other hand, Wollstonecraft can be situated in the misogynist tradition that not only blames women for bad marriages and the plight of children but also castigates women for their frivolous desires and disparages female consumption.

Female consumption is a problem for Wollstonecraft in that it is the chief pursuit of the coquette and the lady, insofar as they have any pursuits at all. In Wollstonecraft's words, to be a lady "is simply to have nothing to do, but listlessly to go they scarcely care where, for they cannot tell what" (1990b: 103). She pleads desperately for "the fine lady [to] become a rational woman," because "refinement inevitably lessens respect for virtue" (1990a: 78). Yet despite their idle lifestyle and lack of virtue, women "*all* want to be ladies" (1990b: 103, emphasis mine). Moreover, the lady possesses "few traits […] which dignify human nature" and "though she lives many years she is still a child in understanding, and of so little use to society, that her death would scarcely be observed" (1990c: 39). Wollstonecraft's description of women as lacking virtue, her comparison of ladies to children, and her argument that the very existence of a lady does not matter once again situates her in the misogynist tradition of western thought. Yet the lady's existence did matter, if not to Wollstonecraft then to the expanding capitalist economy of her time, in which female consumption played an increasingly important role.

In the eighteenth century, the centres of commodity production in Europe were undergoing a shift from the household to the market. This shift in production entailed a shift in productive labour—that is the labour that generated income upon which a

family could live. Instead of being undergone by both men and women in the household, productive labour became primarily the realm of men in the public workplace. Women continued to undertake *non-productive* labour in the household, but because that labour did not contribute to household income, it was devalued (Tong, 1998: 12; Hennessy, 2000: 98–99). As such, the economic and social position of European women was in decline. In addition, a new consumer culture was emerging in which women were "recruited as the ideal and consummate consumers" (Hennessy, 2000: 99). Despite the declining position of women, their consumption played an increasingly important role in managing capitalist overproduction (Hennessy, 2000: 99). Indeed, married women of the upper class had little to do *except* consume, as they had servants to do the *non-productive* labour that was required inside the household (Tong, 1998: 12). Since Wollstonecraft is not critical of capitalism, her critique of women's frivolity is misogynist in that she does not find capitalist consumption itself problematic. For Wollstonecraft, consumption only becomes a problem when it is done by women or involves pretty baubles and other feminized commodities purchased for women. Men consume as well, yet their desires are not constructed as "frivolous" (Coward, 1985; Serano, 2007: 327).

Wollstonecraft's misogyny is evident not only in her treatment of women's consumption and other behaviour, but also in her use of language. Gubar summarizes the language Wollstonecraft uses to argue for the eradication of all forms of femininity (except rational mothering femininity):

> Repeatedly and disconcertingly, Wollstonecraft associates the feminine with weakness, childishness, deceitfulness, cunning, superficiality, an overvaluation of love, frivolity, dilettantism, irrationality, flattery, servility, prostitution, coquetry, sentimentality, ignorance, indolence, intolerance, slavish

> conformity, fickle passion, despotism, bigotry, and a "spaniel-like affection" (1994: 456).

To add to Gubar's list, Wollstonecraft also repeatedly describes femininity as "artificial" or "false" (Wollstonecraft, 1990b: 85, 88, 89, 93; Wollstonecraft, 1990c: 30, 32; Ferguson, 1999: 434). The language Wollstonecraft uses to describe femininity is not new. Indeed, there is a long Western tradition that associates femininity with artificiality and duplicity (Tseëlon, 1995: 2–6, 33–37, 77; Serano, 2007: 320–330).[54] Serano argues that using language such as this to describe femininity—regardless of whether or not the author or speaker is feminist—is "blatantly misogynistic." Indeed, (Western) understandings of femininity as "artificial," "contrived," and "frivolous" are "precisely what allows masculinity to always come off as 'natural,' 'practical,' and 'uncomplicated'" (Serano, 2007: 313, 339).

Serano's comparison of the language used to describe femininity and masculinity is also useful in thinking through the long-term effects of Wollstonecraft's language. Serano contends:

> Those feminists who single out women's dress shoes, clothing, and hairstyles to artificialize necessarily leave unchallenged the notion that their masculine counterparts are "natural" and "practical." This is the same male-centered approach that allows the appearances and behaviors of men who wish to charm or impress others to seem "authentic" while the reciprocal traits expressed by women are dismissed as "feminine wiles." Femininity is portrayed as a trick or ruse so that masculinity invariably seems sincere by comparison. For this reason, there are few intellectual tasks easier than artificializing feminine gender expression, because male-centrism purposefully sets up femininity as masculinity's "straw man" or its scapegoat (2007: 339–340).

[54] For example, Efrat Tseëlon has traced these representations of femininity back to Medusa and the Sirens of ancient Greece, and Lilith and Eve of the Judeo-Christian tradition (1995: 33–37).

Utilizing Serano to critique Wollstonecraft requires two caveats. First, as previously mentioned, Serano's 2007 book is dealing with femininity in the contemporary American context. As such, it is important to avoid judging Wollstonecraft by early twenty-first century feminist standards.[55] Second, Wollstonecraft does not leave all forms of masculinity entirely unchallenged.[56] With that being said, I am less concerned with applying Serano to Wollstonecraft as I am thinking through the long-term effects of Wollstonecraft's language (that is, on the construction of the femininity question in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries).[57] Wollstonecraft's constant association of femininity with primarily negative traits (weak, artificial, irrational, deceitful, cunning, bigoted, and frivolous) means that masculinity becomes associated with primarily positive traits (strong, natural, rational, honest, upfront, open-minded, and serious).

Wollstonecraft's use of language in the titles of her two *Vindication* books is also telling. The titles are similar with the important exception that the earlier book is vindicating the rights of men in the *plural*, and the later book is vindicating the rights of woman in the *singular*. Her appeals for the rights of men and woman are ultimately appeals to men. For Wollstonecraft, it is difficult to claim the rights of women (in the plural) and speak to women (as a group) because most are failed Cartesian subjects:

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[55] Indeed, as Andrew Elfenbein points out, definitions of masculinity and femininity in the eighteenth century were not fixed and often contested (2002: 222–229). Elfenbein suggests that Wollstonecraft both questioned gendered norms while recognizing "the need to ground her argument in firm gender distinctions and sexual roles" (2002: 243).

[56] For example, Wollstonecraft is critical of the masculinity of military men, particularly soldiers. She complains that like women, soldiers are given an incomplete and superficial education. Both women and soldiers are "sent into the world before their minds have been stored with knowledge or fortified by principles" (Wollstonecraft, 1990b: 89). At the same time, Wollstonecraft refrains from abusing soldier masculinity (or any other form of masculinity). As such, to invoke Serano's phrase, she leaves femininity as masculinity's Other (2007: 339).

[57] See section 2.3.4.

when the mind is associated with masculine rationality, and the body with femininity, women are a lost cause. Wollstonecraft believes such women will not only be hostile to her arguments, but incapable of even understanding them:

> My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists—I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt (1990b: 86).

Wollstonecraft's sentiment might be understandable in that not all women are feminists, and there are always women antagonistic to feminist arguments. Yet her response to this hostility toward feminism is, ironically, more misogyny: women are hostile to their liberation because they are childlike, overly emotional, and weak. Although she states that women "will soon become objects of contempt," they are *already* such objects for Wollstonecraft. Wollstonecraft's nascent theory of gender-role socialization does not soften her misogyny. Gubar points out that although Wollstonecraft "sets out to liberate society from a hated subject constructed to be subservient […] [that] animosity can spill over into antipathy of those human beings most constrained by that construction" (1994: 457). Moreover, Wollstonecraft's misogyny spills over from socially constructed difference to secondary sex characteristics: for example, her contempt of women's "soft phrases" is contempt for the voices of women which tend to project less than those of men. Wollstonecraft's

Cartesian separation of the mind from the body renders most women contemptuous creatures whose irrationality is linked to their disgusting, feminine bodies.

By vindicating the rights of men (in the plural) and woman (in the singular), Wollstonecraft has been read to suggest that the woman whose rights she is vindicating is *herself*. Gubar suggests that rarely does Wollstonecraft "present herself as a woman speaking to women" (1999: 457). Indeed, unusually for a polemical writer, Wollstonecraft rarely discusses women as *we*, preferring instead *they*; she writes as if *they* are separate from her, the woman whose rights she is vindicating. Similarly, Taylor argues that "Wollstonecraft never saw herself as part of a collective feminist revolt" and "the idea of a feminist alliance among women seems never to have occurred to her" (2003: 238). The arguments of Gubar and Taylor can be contrasted with Macdonald and Scherf, who contend that Wollstonecraft uses *woman* to stand in for *women* (in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*) and *men* to stand in for all human beings (in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*) (1997: 11, 15). Indeed, they cite a letter from Wollstonecraft to Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand Périgord in which she insists: "I plead for my sex—not for myself" (1997: 11). In my reading, if Wollstonecraft is claiming rights for more than just herself, she is claiming them for a "small number of distinguished women" (1990b: 91). These distinguished women she allows to exist are *exceptional*: they would not only be able to understand but would also be sympathetic to her arguments. Yet the question of whom Wollstonecraft is claiming rights—herself, a "small number of distinguished women" or all (non-working class[58]) women—is almost

[58] See section 2.3.1.

beside the point, as her overall misogyny is not softened. Misogyny does not necessarily determine one's attitude toward *particular* women. As such, the implications of Wollstonecraft's *distinguished women* are similar to those of the proverbial *black friends*: the misogyny or racism of the discussion is not attenuated by referencing particular women or black friends who do not fit the mould.

In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft discusses the forms of femininity embodied by white women of the upper class and sets up a tension between feminism and femininity. With the exception of rational mothering femininity, which is closer to her Cartesian ideal, there is no form of femininity of which she approves. Her disapproval of femininity, combined with her understanding of femininity as artificial and socially constructed, leads her to disparage all or most women of the upper class. In other words, because femininity is neither natural nor good, Wollstonecraft treats women who produce femininity and consume the feminized commodities required in its production as objects of scorn. Yet despite her disparagement, she is not critical of consumption or capitalism more generally, only consumption undertaken by women and commodities associated with women. Wollstonecraft's critiques of women's consumption, in addition to her critiques of women's non-consumptive behaviour, and the language she uses to describe femininity, are all misogynist. Wollstonecraft remains a feminist—albeit a misogynist one—and her Cartesianism underpins this tension. Her belief in the Cartesian subject allows her to make (feminist) arguments for the rights of women, yet this belief is also her (misogynist) undoing. If the rights of women, like the

rights of men, are premised on the abstract, disembodied subject, then the subject abstracted from its body need not have a body at all (Jaggar, 1983: 186; Brown, 2006: 65–66). The inability to transcend femininity becomes an inability to transcend the body and a failure to achieve the Cartesian ideal. Overall, Wollstonecraft's treatment of femininity suggests that at the basis of the Anglo-American feminist tradition is a profoundly misogynist thinker.

2.3.4 Wollstonecraft's Legacy of Feminist Misogyny

Wollstonecraft's legacy haunts the femininity question in popular Anglo-American feminism. There has been a great deal written on the femininity question and, as such, any overview must by necessity be highly selective. The texts I turn to next treat the question of femininity with a degree of seriousness, represent different time periods and schools of thought, and most importantly, have been highly influential (within the communities they represent if not wider Anglo-American society): namely, those of Evelyn Reed, Mary-Alice Waters and other socialist feminists involved in a 1954 debate on cosmetics and fashion; Betty Friedan's 1963 liberal feminist book *The Feminine Mystique*; Susan Brownmiller's 1984 liberal feminist book *Femininity*; Naomi Wolf's 1990 liberal feminist book, *The Beauty Myth*, that begins to straddle the divide between late twentieth-century liberal feminism and early third wave feminism; Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richard's well-known third wave feminist treatise *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (2000); and finally, the contributors to the 2002 queer third wave feminist collection *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity*.

Sections 2.4 to 2.6 will demonstrate the conceptual break between the earlier socialist and liberal feminist treatments of the femininity question and third wave treatments. There are several similarities in the ways in which the socialist and liberal feminists (with the occasional exception of Wolf) treat the femininity question. The similarities include the assumption of a tension between feminism and femininity, an understanding of femininity as artificial, and a derision of hegemonic forms of femininity. In other words, they share Wollstonecraftian feminist misogyny to varying degrees. Moreover, because femininity is artificial, women—or at least feminist women—are enjoined to overcome it. The conceptual break that third wave feminism represents concerns the treatment of feminized commodities: socialist and liberal feminists deride feminized commodities, and third wave feminists engage in an almost entirely uncritical celebration of them. In addition, many third wave feminists critique the idea that femininity is incompatible with feminism and, as such, disrupt misogynist understandings of femininity. The focus of the next section is the various positions on the femininity question held by contributors to a 1950s American socialist debate.

2.4 Socialist Feminist Interventions of the 1950s

The 1950s debate concerned the marketing of cosmetics and fashions to women and occurred among members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the United States. The debate is often called the Bustelo Controversy as it was precipitated by an article published by Joseph Hansen writing under the pen name Jack Bustelo (Waters, 1993: 21; Cuddy-Keane, 1994: 126). Hansen published his controversial article, “Sagging Cosmetic

Lines Try a Face Lift," in the *Militant*, a weekly newspaper reflecting the views of the party. In his article, Hansen contends that the cosmetics industry exploits women by tricking them into buying foolish and useless products. The debate raged in the pages of the *Militant* and the *Discussion Bulletin* (the party's internal publication) from July to October of 1954. A leading figure in the party until his death in 1979, Hansen intervened twice more in the debate he triggered. Letters and articles contributing to the debate are collected in the 1986 volume *Cosmetics, Fashions and the Exploitation of Women,* of which Hansen and Evelyn Reed, although both long deceased, are listed as editors along with Mary-Alice Waters. The volume included some additional academic commentary on the debate, notably by Reed, a party member and socialist feminist anthropologist.

Despite the often acrimonious tone of the debate, the contributors shared similar views on the role of cosmetic and fashion marketers in the production of hegemonic forms of femininity: femininity is something that must continually be given time and work to produce. As such, they share Wollstonecraft's understanding of femininity as artificial and link femininity to capitalist commodities. However, as socialists, all of the contributors put a much heavier emphasis than Wollstonecraft on the role of capitalism in the production of this *artificial* femininity. Unlike Wollstonecraft, they problematize capitalist consumption itself. Reed's argument typifies the general view of the contributors:

> The fashion world became a capitalist gold mine with virtually unlimited possibilities […] Natural beauty became more and more displaced by artificial beauty; namely, fashion beauty. And that is how the myth arose that beauty is identical with fashion and that all women have identical fashion needs because they all have identical beauty needs (1993: 63–65).

In other words, in a similar manner to Marx's early argument that the capitalist mode of production alienates people from their species-being, cosmetic and fashion production alienates women from their "natural beauty." The contributors also share the view that "fashion beauty" (or what I have called hegemonic femininity) is determined, in whole or in part, by the ruling class (Bustelo/Hansen, 1993a: 35; Manning, 1993: 32; Patrick, 1993: 42; Waters, 1993: 4).[59] Some are wary of class reductionism and reluctant to exclusively focus on the ruling class, situating hegemonic femininity within masculinist valuations of women for their youth (McGowan, 1993: 48–49; Morgan, 1993: 51). The final view the contributors share is that in order to sell commodities, marketers persistently manipulate women to instill a sense of insecurity about their production of hegemonic femininity.

Despite their shared views on the role of marketing in the production of hegemonic femininity, the contributors differ in their evaluations of the women who buy what the marketers advertise. Two opposing positions can be identified on this issue: first is the misogynist position represented by Hansen and Reed (both leaders of the SWP), and second is the position of the rest of the commentators reacting to the former's misogyny (largely rank-and-file female members of the SWP). The debate concerns whether socialist women in particular, and working-class women as a whole, *should* consume cosmetics and fashion and participate in the construction of hegemonic femininity (in Reed's words "fashion beauty"). The first position suggests that women

[59] For example, Reed, citing an article in the *New York Times*, suggests that "Christian Dior, the famous couturier of the rich, whose styles are copied for the poor, had the power to raise the [length of the] skirts of *fifty million* American women overnight, or lower them, or both" (1993: 66).

participating in hegemonic femininity are foolish, frivolous, improper socialists, or some combination thereof. In the article that precipitated the debate, Hansen facetiously pleads: “Please, girls, don’t let a cutback on the job mean a cutback on cosmetics. If you take a layoff, don’t layoff the lipstick. Remember, to keep up prosperity, keep up your makeup” (1993b: 31). Reed complains that even socialist women who should know better “have fallen into the trap of bourgeois propaganda” and “even worse, as the vanguard of women, they are leading the mass of women into this fashion rat race and into upholding and perpetuating these profiteers, exploiters, and scoundrels” (1993: 67). Hansen was criticized for depicting “women as mere ignorant dupes of the capitalist hucksters” (McGowan, 1993: 48). These commentators hold that Hansen’s derision is misplaced: women do need to keep up their makeup, not only to keep up their prosperity, but in some cases to quite literally survive. In other words, economic survival for women is dependent on adhering to the norms of femininity. Women are not foolish or frivolous but make *rational* decisions to purchase cosmetics and fashions (Baker, 1993: 39; Patrick, 1993: 41). For example, Morgan notes that employers (in her 1950s context) regularly advertise for office help for women “under twenty-five,” and thus women use cosmetics and fashion to maintain the image of youthfulness (1993: 51). In addition, women gain economic security through marriage. Men are conditioned by capitalist society to respond to hegemonic femininity “often without even knowing what [they] are responding to” (Morgan, 1993: 52). Women therefore consume cosmetics and fashion not only to find and keep jobs, but to find and keep husbands, given the economic survival jobs and husbands represent. In sum, while the first group of

commentators considers working-class women who embrace hegemonic femininity to be foolish dupes, the second considers them to be rational survivors.

Related to the evaluation of socialist women consuming cosmetics and fashion is a larger debate about the *value* of hegemonic femininity itself. Hansen and others holding his position despise hegemonic femininity since it is determined by the ruling class. As Hansen argues,

> Most of the customs and norms of capitalist society are ridiculous and even vicious, including the customs and norms of wealthy bourgeois women. As for so-called ordinary women, whether housewives or workers, I think they are beautiful, no matter how toil worn or seasoned in experience, for they are the ones who will be in the forefront of the struggle to build a new and better world (1993a: 35–36).

Moreover, Hansen predicts that in the future (presumably after the socialist revolution) the femininity of "toil worn" working-class women "will be admired […] the way we admire the hardy, ax-swinging pioneer woman of America" (1993a: 36). Reed argues hegemonic femininity epitomizes the uselessness of the ruling class as a whole. She argues that this form is characterized by "flabby, lily-white hands with long red fingernails." These hands that never work signify these women's "empty, vapid, parasitic existence." For Reed, people who do not work are "less than the potato in the ground and [do] not deserve the gift of humanity" (1993: 70). While some independently wealthy men also do not work—and could, theoretically, be included in Reed's potato analogy—because they are less likely to have long red fingernails, the primary target of her ridicule remains hegemonic femininity. In addition, idle married women have historically been a sign of their husbands' class position.

Hansen's critics put more value on hegemonic femininity. They understand the pursuit of femininity as *freedom*, with the caveat that under capitalism, freedom tends to exist for the ruling class at the expense of the working class. Given the association of femininity with youthfulness and leisure, femininity is a freedom ruling class women are *able* to pursue and working-class women *want* to pursue. Or in other words, "the wealthy are beautiful because the workers are wretched" (Manning, 1993: 33). Yet Hansen's critics come to the defence of socialist and working-class women who desire femininity despite the fact that femininity is a symbol of class society. For example, McGowan laments that "once the fresh bloom of youth is gone," the working-class woman joins "the ranks of the drab millions, cheated of a good part of life's thrill" (1993: 49). Manning argues that the woman factory worker cannot be blamed for wanting to "rise above the sweaty grind of the shop, which distorts [her body], and breaks down [her] spirit with fatigue and hopelessness," and the working-class housewife cannot be blamed for wanting to "break away from the monotony and dull routine of trying to manage on a worker's wages" in which she has "no time to take care of herself" and no money for "good clothes" (1993: 32). In sum, Hansen and Reed's position depicts hegemonic femininity as a hated symbol of class oppression, while their critics depicts it as a coveted symbol of freedom, however problematic this freedom may be.

In their characterizations of hegemonic femininity, Hansen and Reed embrace a misogynist virgin/whore dichotomy. The virtuous and industrious (virginal) working-class woman is set up against the vicious and idle (whorish) ruling class woman. As such, they gender the early Marx's conception of class conflict: the proletariat/bourgeois conflict is

re-conceptualized as an us/them dichotomy in which the "toil worn" working-class women guard *our* morality and mark the boundaries that separate *us* from *them*. While their re-conceptualization might be understood as subversive insofar as it reverses traditional virgin/whore dichotomies—in which the morality of the women of the *working class* is under suspicion—it still maintains the dichotomy itself. The characterization of the women belonging to *them* is misogynist; indeed, Reed's discussion of their vapid existence as being worth less than a potato is reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's discussion of the lady's lack of virtue and of her existence not mattering. Yet the characterization of the women belonging to *us* is also misogynist. One of the many problems with the virgin/whore dichotomy, both generally and in Hansen and Reed's specific articulation, is that the virgin is set up on a pedestal where her perfection is impossible to achieve. Indeed, this is recognized by one of the contributors to the other side of the debate. Morgan critiques Hansen's characterization of ideal working-class femininity, and suggests he "may be able to retain a warmth and affection toward the working-class woman who has had too little rest and too much anxiety and worry" but points out that "she herself and her husband and her friends will not find this consideration too useful" (1993: 53). As such, the working-class woman who rejects hegemonic codes of femininity has problems with society at large, and the working-class woman who embraces these codes has problems with socialists such as Hansen. Morgan phrases it more bluntly: she is "damned if she does and damned if she doesn't" (1993: 53). Therefore, the crux of the problem for working-class women is how

femininity is situated in the dichotomy: any (working-class) women who attempts or even desires to embrace hegemonic codes of femininity will fall off her pedestal.

Hansen and Reed's views on the femininity question can also be read as misogynist because femininity is being scapegoated. For Serano, misogyny often involves the scapegoating of femininity (2007: 14); she contends that femininity is scapegoated to allow the normalcy, naturalness, and hegemony of masculinity to be maintained. This is accomplished by constantly projecting inferior meanings onto femininity, particularly in social, political, and economic contexts in which masculinity requires bolstering (Serano, 2007: 18–19, 339–340). Indeed, Mary-Alice Waters reads the Bustelo Controversy of 1954 as an "expression of the struggle to maintain a proletarian party and Marxist program throughout the cold war and anticommunist witch-hunt of the early 1950s" (1993: 4). The Red Scare was at its peak at the time of the controversy: American communists Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed the year before, and membership in the Socialist Workers Party and other organizations on the left were declining. A few months before the Bustelo Controversy, there was a split in the SWP that led to the departure of twenty percent of its membership. There was tremendous pressure on the remaining members *not* to betray the socialist cause (Waters, 1993: 3–6, 21–25).

Following Serano's understanding of scapegoating, femininity became a scapegoat for the leaders of the SWP because the male-dominated party was in crisis. Rank-and-file female party members, who identified as garment workers, factory workers, secretaries, and working-class housewives, defended femininity against the

attacks of party leaders Hansen and Reed.[60] In addition to defending femininity, they were also critical of the language employed by Hansen in particular. McGowan suggests that he is "both offensive and presumptuous in tone, and false in content and implications" and moreover has a "pompous disregard for the aspirations of modern women" (McGowan, 1993: 45).[61] Others accuse Hansen of ridiculing women for their production of hegemonic femininity (J., 1993: 37; Manning, 1993: 32; Morgan, 1993: 52, 54). Morgan accuses Hansen of ridiculing hegemonic femininity and the women who strive to emulate it for "cheap humor which makes a butt out of an easy victim" (1993: 54). Moreover, she contends this is a "sideline issue" at best: even if socialist and working-class women boycotted all cosmetics it would not help to "build a labor party or lessen Jim Crow or halt the war drive" (Morgan, 1993: 54). Femininity, then, is simultaneously derided and scapegoated by a masculinist organization in trouble.

Although the detractors react against Hansen and Reed's explicit misogyny, they do not challenge the misogynist *premise* of the debate. The premise is that femininity is a problem to be overcome because it is artificial and involves capitalist consumption. The detractors address the consumption aspect: they explain why women *must* adhere to the norms of hegemonic femininity (economic security for women is dependent on such adherence) as well as why they *want* to adhere to these norms (cosmetics and fashion offer a particular problematic fantasy about freedom for women whose

[60] There was a clear status and class differentiation between the women defending femininity and those defending Hansen and Reed. In addition to Hansen and Reed both being leading figures in the party at the time, Hansen was a journalist and editor of the publication in which the debate was published, while Reed was an academic.

[61] Interestingly, McGowan left the Socialist Workers Party a short time after the Bustelo Controversy (Waters, 1993: 24).

exploitation is marked on their tired and overworked bodies).[62] Yet at the same time they never address the artificiality aspect. As noted in section 2.3, Serano understands the linking of femininity to artificiality as misogynist in that it does nothing to interrogate masculinity. This is not to suggest that Hansen and Reed's detractors were misogynist *as such*, but rather that they can be implicated in the failure of popular forms of feminism to challenge the idea that femininity is artificial and incompatible with feminist and other social justice struggles.[63] The fundamental point of contention for these socialist feminists is not whether hegemonic femininity *should* be overcome, but whether it *can* be overcome within the constraints of capitalist society. As such, although they effectively challenge Hansen and Reed's overt misogyny, they do not challenge the idea that femininity is artificial and a problem to be overcome.

The records of this 1954 debate among members of the SWP and later academic interventions into the debate offer a good representation of mid-twentieth century socialist feminist understandings of the femininity question. Their approach to femininity incorporates class, thereby going beyond Wollstonecraft's work, which focuses exclusively on middle-class forms of femininity, but follows Wollstonecraft in not incorporating race or sexuality. The most important similarity between Wollstonecraft and all of these mid-twentieth century socialist feminists is their shared view that femininity is an artificial construct and a problem to be overcome. However,

[62] This is not to suggest that critiquing femininity based on how it is caught up in capitalist consumption is necessarily misogynist. As noted in section 2.2, there must be space to critique issues such as classism, which works to render hegemonic femininity more accessible to some people due to their increased ability to purchase feminized commodities.
[63] See section 2.2.

the explicit misogyny of SWP leaders Hansen and Reed renders them more similar to Wollstonecraft than the rank-and-file female participants in the debate.

2.5 Liberal Feminist Interventions, 1960s–1990s

There is a clear Wollstonecraftian influence in popular liberal feminist interventions on the femininity question in the twentieth century. This section explores Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Susan Brownmiller's *Femininity* (1984), and Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990). Like Wollstonecraft, all three women focus on privileged white women of their own class. Friedan not only equates femininity with white, middle-class, university educated, married housewives, but seems entirely unaware of the existence of other forms of femininity or other types of women (Reed, 1964: 1; Elshtain, 1993: 251; Tong, 1998: 26). Brownmiller and Wolf demonstrate awareness of difference, but their discussions of women of colour, working-class women, and queer women are infrequent and brief.[64] In addition, like Wollstonecraft, all three women understand

[64] This is perhaps most surprising in Wolf, given the feminist work that had been done by women of colour in the 1980s. She begins her book with a discussion of "the affluent, educated, liberated women of the First World [… who] do not feel as free as they want to" (Wolf, 1997: 9). Her subsequent alternation between language of "women," "Western women," and "middle-class women"—combined with sparse references to women of colour—renders her work similar to her predecessors in this regard. On most occasions, Wolf's book reads as if "women" are white middle-class women, and "racism" concerns men of colour. For example, when discussing the "PBQ" or "Professional Beauty Quotient" that is almost mandatory for women to succeed professionally, she contends: "Though the PBQ ranks women in a similar biological caste system, female identity is not yet recognized to be remotely as legitimate as racial identity (faintly though it is recognized). It is inconceivable to the dominant culture that it should respect as a political allegiance, as deep as any ethnic or racial pride, a woman's determination to show her loyalty—in the face of a beauty myth as powerful as myths about white supremacy—to her age, her shape, her self, her life" (Wolf, 1997: 55–56). Wolf does not go on to consider women affected by both the beauty myth and white supremacy, in the workplace or elsewhere. But there is one exception. Very late in the book, during an extended critique of the "Surgical Age" that has recast "freedom from the beauty myth as a disease," she critiques eyelid surgery on Asian women and nose surgery on black and Asian women (1997: 226, 264–265). However, despite devoting nearly fifty pages to the topic of surgery, she only devotes one paragraph discussing surgery performed on women of colour.

hegemonic femininity to be entirely artificial. This stems from their shared liberal feminism: as Elshtain notes, liberal feminists understand "the central defining human characteristic [to be] the presumption of an almost boundless adaptability" to the point that people are assumed to be shaped at will, not unlike "Play-Doh" (1993: 240). However, Friedan and Brownmiller share more in common with Wollstonecraft than Wolf: Friedan and Brownmiller argue that femininity is a problem to be overcome, as is the consumption of feminized commodities, although consumption and capitalism more generally are not. Wolf does not argue that femininity *as such* needs to be overcome, but rather that the all-consuming beauty myth needs to be relaxed. Moreover, Wolf concludes her book with a third wave defence of women's use of feminized commodities. In straddling the line between liberal and third wave feminism, Wolf avoids traces of Wollstonecraftian feminist misogyny present in the work of Friedan and Brownmiller.

2.5.1 Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique *(1963)*

For Friedan, femininity is understood to be something false, an artificial overlay—or in her words, a *mystique*. She defines the *feminine mystique* as the view that "the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their femininity" (1983: 43). The mystique is infantilizing and keeps women in a passive, childlike state; indeed, it is not uncommon to see mothers "as infantile as their children" (1983: 295). Feminine women make bad mothers and produce maladjusted children (1983: 288, 295, 325–326). Friedan's critique of femininity involves homophobia and slut-shaming through blaming "parasitic" mothering on "ominous" developments such as the

"homosexuality that is spreading like a murky smog over the American scene"[65] as well as promiscuity among young women (1983: 276). In equating femininity with passivity, childishness, and bad mothering, Friedan's understanding is very Wollstonecraftian. Friedan also makes arguments similar to Wollstonecraft's contention that feminine women are of little use to society and that their very existence does not matter. Friedan contends femininity is a "lower level of living" that is antithetical to self–actualization and human growth (1983: 314–322). Moreover, femininity has little value, "no purpose" and as such is "a kind of suicide" (1983: 314, 336).

Friedan places much of the blame for the feminine mystique on the education of women and girls, which is also reminiscent of Wollstonecraft. Friedan complains that at elite American universities (such as Vassar) women are groomed for little more than getting married. As such, "the very aim" of women's education at universities is not intellectual growth but "sexual adjustment" (1983: 172). Their education is not intended to develop critical thinking skills and is not for "serious use" in professional occupations but rather aims at "dilettantism or passive appreciation" (1983: 366). This is similar to Wollstonecraft's complaint that rather than instilling in women the ability to reason, they were educated in the art of pleasing through the pursuit of "accomplishments" such as learning to play the piano or to speak foreign languages. Friedan sets up an oppositional relationship between femininity and education geared to intellectual

[65] Friedan approvingly cites Freud in her argument that mothers are to blame for their son's homosexuality (1983: 275). She contends that "the boy smothered by such parasitical mother-love is kept from growing up, not only sexually, but in all ways. Homosexuals often lack the maturity to finish school and make sustained professional commitments […] The shallow unreality, immaturity, promiscuity, lack of lasting human satisfaction that characterize the homosexual's sex life usually characterize all his life and interests" (1983: 276).

growth: femininity results from the lack of such an education, and education destroys femininity (1983: 172, 308). Friedan argues that her liberal feminist predecessors, including Wollstonecraft herself and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, were able to make their feminist arguments *only* because they were allowed an education geared to intellectual growth (1983: 93). Friedan credits her predecessors for pressing for women's access to higher education and political participation, as well as particular forms of discrimination in law (1983: 61). Yet despite such gains, the feminine mystique came to "fasten itself on a whole nation in a few short years" (1983: 68). Given how quickly it took hold in the post-war era, the feminine mystique may be false, but it is also incredibly powerful.

Friedan expands beyond a Wollstonecraftian analysis in placing some of the blame for the strength of the feminine mystique on corporate interests. She establishes connections between femininity, the consumption it necessitates, and the changing economic circumstances of her time. She contends that American women are "a target and a victim of the sexual sell" and equates consumption with victimization (1983: 205, 208). Moreover,

> in all the talk of femininity and woman's role, one forgets that the real business of America is business. But the perpetuation of housewifery, the growth of the feminine mystique, makes sense (and dollars) when one realizes that women are the chief customers of American business. Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that women will buy more things if they are kept in the underused, nameless-yearning, energy-to-get-rid-of state of being housewives (1983: 206–207).

Friedan assumes a direct relationship between the women's role as housewives and high levels of consumption in the post-war era. Friedan claims women "wield seventy-

five per cent of the purchasing power in America" (1983: 208).[66] She argues that business*men* on Madison Avenue or Wall Street have a strategic interest in keeping women in the home; indeed, if all women "get to be scientists and such, they won't have time to shop" (1983: 207).[67] She contends that although there was no "economic conspiracy directed against women," this relationship between the number of housewives and levels of consumption is an economic necessity: a decline in the number of housewives would mean a decline in national consumption (1983: 207–208). Despite identifying important connections between the feminine mystique and corporate interests, Friedan underestimates the ability of marketers to adjust to the changing roles of women. The ascendance of commodity feminism today demonstrates that there is not necessarily a relationship between high numbers of housewives and high levels of consumption.

Friedan's work is not explicitly misogynist—in the manner of Wollstonecraft, Hansen and Reed—in that her deep hostility is, for the most part, not directed at women or femininity as such. It is largely directed at the corporations, advertisers, media, and other institutions that manipulate and coerce women into femininity

[66] Friedan does not elaborate or cite any sources for that statistic.

[67] Friedan references a 1945 marketing study in the United States, which examined three categories of female consumers: "The True Housewife Type," "The Career Woman," and "The Balanced Homemaker." The study concluded that the "true housewife" did not consume enough; she preferred to do work herself instead of relying on "time-saving" kitchen appliances and other commodities. The "career woman" or "would-be career woman" was "unhealthy," in fact far worse than the true housewife; although she used appliances, she did not believe that the woman's place was in the home and was "too critical" of advertising directed at women. The ideal category was the "balanced homemaker" who had time to shop, embraced appliances and feminized commodities, and was not overly critical (Friedan, 1983: 209–211). The solution was to use marketing to educate women on the desirability of belonging to the "balanced homemaker" group (Friedan, 1983: 210).

(Serano, 2007: 331).[68] On certain occasions Friedan does stray into more explicit Wollstonecraftian misogyny, such as when she blames foolish women for the plight of their children. However, generally she does not treat the feminine mystique as something for which women can be blamed; she treats it as something that confuses and clouds the judgment of improperly educated women. However, her framework contains *traces* of Wollstonecraftian feminist misogyny in that she understands hegemonic femininity as artificial, as a problem to be overcome, and by suggesting that consuming feminized commodities is a problem, even though consumption and capitalism more generally are not. Serano contends that Friedan "helped reinforce a notion that would appear repeatedly throughout [popular Anglo-American] feminism—that femininity (or at least certain aspects of it) is an artificial, man-made ploy designed to hold women back from reaching their full potential" (2007: 331). In short, Friedan endorses a Wollstonecraftian tension between feminism and femininity.

2.5.2 Susan Brownmiller's Femininity *(1983)*

Wollstonecraftian understandings of femininity continued into 1980s liberal feminism. In *Femininity*, Brownmiller employs liberal feminist arguments for the liberation of women, such as ambition being the opposite of hegemonic femininity, and the usual liberal feminist arguments for the inclusion of women in public life and the nurturing of

[68] Oddly, her solution to the "problem" of femininity focuses entirely on education; as such, she ultimately ignores the corporate interests she so meticulously documents. Friedan glorifies education as the one and only path that will save women from the feminine mystique (Elshtain, 1993: 252). Thus, although her analysis of the problem strays beyond Wollstonecraft, her solution is nearly identical. Like Wollstonecraft, Friedan cannot come to any other conclusion because she does not understand consumption and capitalism as such to be a problem; it is the consumption of feminized commodities required for the production of femininity that is the problem.

women's ability to reason (1984: 221–231). She also employs radical feminist arguments for women's nonconformity. Brownmiller's definition of *women*, however, is limited in that it does not include transwomen,[69] and her arguments for gender nonconformity only extends to cisgendered women. Also in a similar manner to Wollstonecraft, Brownmiller understands femininity to be artificial and irrational. The stated purpose of her book is "not to propose a new definition of femininity" but rather to "explore its origins and the reasons for its perseverance, in the effort to illuminate the restrictions on free choice" (1984: 235). Yet there is little actual discussion of origins, neither the origin of women's subordination (in the way it was framed by those theorizing the exchange of women in the last chapter), nor the origin of femininity. There is also no discussion of the "reasons for its perseverance," such as the profitability of feminized commodities for capitalists. Indeed, although feminized commodities are everywhere in Brownmiller's book, there are theorized nowhere; she does not establish any relationship between femininity and commodity production.[70] Her main argument is simply that women's subordination and femininity are intrinsically interconnected. Femininity is a problem for Brownmiller not only because it restricts "free choice," but because at its best, it is uncomfortable or annoying, and at its worst, it is physically painful (1984: 81, 35).

[69] Brownmiller is quite transphobic; for example, she accuses a transwoman tennis player of undergoing sex-reassignment surgery just so she can play against other women and win (1984: 196).

[70] She does points out that "neighborhood beauty parlors are such an entrenched part of city life that it is hard to believe that they did not exist before the twentieth century" (1984: 75), yet does nothing with this observation.

Brownmiller organizes her book around chapters that each considers a particular aspect of femininity, including body, hair, clothes, voice, skin, movement, and emotion. Femininity is understood to be firmly embodied—it concerns the female body and how it looks, sounds and is adorned and manipulated—and how this embodiment discourages reason. Her book has a confessional tone. For example, in her chapter entitled "Hair," she admits to dying her hair to cover her premature graying, despite the fact that she knows perfectly well it is a "shameful concession to all the wrong values" (1984: 57). In the "Clothes" chapter, she confesses that "on bad days" she misses wearing skirts and criticizes her feminist friends who have gone back to wearing them as indulgent and frivolous (1984: 80–81). In the "Skin" chapter, she is embarrassed to reveal that she was so concerned she was growing hair on her face that she went to an electrologist; she was relieved to find out that what she feared was stubble was in fact a mole (1984: 129). In the "Movement" chapter, she admits to practicing how to raise her eyebrow for hours in front of a mirror (1984: 171). *Femininity* contains countless examples of Brownmiller confessing how she has not overcome femininity to the degree to which she ought.

Brownmiller aligns herself with Wollstonecraft in her *failure* to overcome femininity. She reports that the eighteenth-century writer and politician Horace Walpole once described Wollstonecraft as a "hyena in petticoats" which had the effect of "slandering her femininity and the movement for women's rights in one wicked phrase" (1984: 31). Rather than critique Walpole's misogyny, she assumes feminine apparel is incompatible with feminist politics. She suggests that "part of the reason many people

find old photographs of parading 'suffragettes' so funny is that their elaborate dresses seem at odds with marching in unison down the street" (1984: 101). Just as Wollstonecraft ought to have given up her petticoats and the suffragettes ought to have given up their elaborate dresses, Brownmiller ought to give up her hair dye. She does sympathize with her predecessors and her contemporaries who embrace femininity in suggesting that although femininity is fundamentally incompatible with feminist politics, it continues to be very difficult to overcome.

In a similar manner to Friedan, Brownmiller's framework contains traces of Wollstonecraftian misogyny. Brownmiller is critical of the *explicit* misogyny of those who use "the expensively dressed woman as the hated symbol of selfish disregard for the ills of the world" (1984: 100). This is clearly a strategy used by Wollstonecraft in her critique of the lady and by Hansen and Reed in their critiques of ruling class femininity.[71] Yet despite this critique, Brownmiller repeatedly suggests that women (including herself) who embrace hegemonic femininity are immature, weak-willed, and bad feminists. Serano reads such women quite differently. Indeed, in a society in which men are thought to be better than women, and masculinity better than femininity, she reads the choice to embrace hegemonic femininity as *threatening* to masculinist norms (Serano, 2007: 15–18). Moreover, Serano suggests that

> it takes guts, determination, and fearlessness for those of us who are feminine to lift ourselves up out of the inferior meanings that are constantly being projected onto us […] In a world where masculinity is respected and femininity is regularly dismissed, it takes an enormous amount of strength and

[71] Brownmiller is referring specifically to the new left of the 1960s and the "religious moralists" before them (1984: 100).

> confidence for any person, whether female- or male-bodied, to embrace their feminine self (2007: 18–19).

As such, when Brownmiller chastises herself and other women for their weakness, immaturity and anti-feminism, she ought to re-think femininity as representing strength, maturity, and feminism. The traces of Wollstonecraftian misogyny, therefore, can be found in Brownmiller's tension between feminism and femininity, her assumption that femininity is always and necessarily a problem, and her blaming of women as the source of that problem.

2.5.3 Naomi Wolf's The Beauty Myth *(1990)*

In *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf repeatedly compares Friedan's work with her own. Wolf's overarching thesis is as follows: after women "released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it waned to carry on its work of social control" (1997: 10). In other words, with the successes of second wave feminism, the formerly isolated and bored white middle-class housewives became engaged and challenged professional working women. This resulted in the *beauty myth* replacing the *feminine mystique* as a form of backlash against feminism.[72] This backlash is directed against women's bodies; indeed, once "the feminine mystique evaporated, *all that was left was the body*" (1997: 67). As such, instead of enjoying their professional success, (white middle-class) women are kept

[72] Wolf argues: "For every feminist action there is an equal and opposite beauty myth reaction. In the 1980s, it was evident that as women became more important, beauty too became more important. The closer women come to power, the more physical self-consciousness and sacrifice are asked of them. 'Beauty' becomes the condition for a woman to take the next step. You are now too rich. Therefore, you cannot be too thin" (1997: 28). As noted in the introduction to this section (2.5), Wolf's focus is on privileged white women of her own class.

"self-hating, ever-failing, hungry, and sexually insecure state of being aspiring 'beauties'" (1997: 66). For Wolf, this late 1980s/early 1990s form of hegemonic femininity is just as oppressive to women as the 1950s/early 1960s form Friedan was describing (1997: 11, 15–16, 64–69, 168–170, 200).

Wolf explores the operation of the beauty myth in different sectors of American society. This includes the workplace in which the "professional beauty qualification" has been institutionalized as a condition for women's hiring and promotion, popular women's magazines, in which the housework of Friedan's time has been replaced with "beauty work," misogynist music videos on MTV, and cosmetic surgeons of the "Surgical Age" who treat healthy women as bodies in need of surgical intervention (Wolf, 1997: 27, 64–66, 162–167, 226–260). She looks at the effect of the beauty myth on girls and women, including girls and young women who are anorexic and bulimic, and professional women who have to spend up to a third of their salary to maintain the "professional beauty qualification" (Wolf, 1997: 179–217, 52). Just as Friedan inspired a second wave of feminism and the rejection of the feminine mystique, Wolf aims to inspire a third wave of feminism and the relaxing of the beauty myth.[73]

Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* straddles the divide between liberal feminist and third wave feminist approaches to the femininity question. The liberal feminist influence is indicative in Wolf's focus on white, middle-class women, her assumption that hegemonic femininity (or the beauty myth) is entirely artificial (1997: 12–14), as well as her repeated comparisons between her own work and Friedan's. However, unlike

[73] Indeed, in a new introduction to the 1997 edition, Wolf suggests that her book inspired both "a renewed conversation about beauty" and "a renewed conversation about feminism" (1997: 5).

Wollstonecraft, Friedan, and Brownmiller—Wolf's liberal feminist predecessors—she does not argue that femininity *as such* needs to be overcome. Indeed, in her concluding chapter "Beyond the Beauty Myth," Wolf argues that women can "wear lipstick without feeling guilty" because "the questions to ask are not about women's faces and bodies but about the power relations of the situation" (1997: 271, 280). Also unlike Wollstonecraft and Brownmiller, Wolf does not *blame* women for using feminized commodities or for adopting hegemonic femininity. Indeed, she contends that "blame is what fuels the beauty myth; to take it apart, let us refuse forever to blame ourselves and other women for what it, in its great strength, has tried to do" (1997: 275). Ultimately, the problem with the beauty myth is women's lack of choice (1997: 272).[74] As such, she calls for the beauty myth to "slacken at once" (1997: 272). Although Wolf is "indebted to the theorists of femininity of the second wave," she declares her project to constitute a new, "third wave" form of feminism (1997: 292, 276–283).

In this section, I have examined the Wollstonecraftian influence in popular twentieth century liberal feminist interventions on the femininity question by focusing on Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Brownmiller's *Femininity*, and Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*. In a similar manner to Wollstonecraft,[75] Friedan, Brownmiller and Wolf critique feminized commodities. Friedan offers a sustained critique and analysis of feminized commodities, although she assumes high levels of consumption require that most

[74] Although she does not define her understanding of *choice*, she appears to mean the choice to reject or embrace the beauty myth without serious repercussions either way. Rejecting the beauty myth can have negative career implications (because of the importance of the "professional beauty quotient" for hiring and advancement) and embracing the beauty myth can mean anything from sexual dissatisfaction (1997: 147) to death from anorexia or cosmetic surgery.

[75] Critiquing feminized commodities is similar to Wollstonecraft, and for that matter, to the 1950s socialist feminists.

women be housewives. Brownmiller discusses feminized commodities everywhere in her book, although theorizes them nowhere, and ultimately suggests that the consumption of feminized commodities is incompatible with feminism. Wolf implicates feminized commodities in her discussion of the beauty myth (or hegemonic femininity) as a form of backlash against feminism but is quite careful to distance herself from her predecessors in her argument that women who wear lipstick should not feel guilty (1997: 271–276). I have outlined other similarities between Wollstonecraft, Friedan, Brownmiller, and Wolf—including a focus on privileged white women of their own class and the assumption that hegemonic femininity is entirely artificial—which stem from their shared liberal feminism.

Wolf's treatment of feminized commodities and femininity in her concluding chapter represents the beginning of a conceptual break in popular Anglo-American feminist treatments of the femininity question. Indeed, as the next section will demonstrate, challenges to the idea that femininity is incompatible with feminism—including challenging the derision toward feminized commodities and the assumption that femininity needs to be overcome—are all characteristics of the third wave. In straddling the line between liberal and third wave feminism, Wolf avoids the traces of Wollstonecraftian feminist misogyny that are present in the work of Friedan and Brownmiller. Moreover, in defending the right of women to use lipstick, she anticipates third wave treatments of feminized commodities and the femininity question more broadly. The traces of feminist misogyny present in Friedan and Brownmiller can be

summarized with the question Elshtain uses to characterize liberal feminism as a whole: "why can't a woman be more like a man?" (1993: 228).

2.6 Third Wave Feminist Interventions, 1990s–present

Beginning in the 1990s, a period generally considered to mark the beginning of third wave feminism, the framing of the femininity question changed. Multiple gendered identities become an increasing point of focus; in other words, third wave treatments of the femininity question, in keeping with third wave feminism more generally, give greater attention to race, sexuality, and gender identity[76] (Kinser, 2004: 141; Harnois, 2008: 126, 133–134; Snyder, 2008: 180). This framing is also complicated by direct challenges to the assumption that femininity is a problem to be overcome—what I have called the feminism/femininity tension—and the overt or trace misogyny this assumption may entail. Two good examples of third wave feminist approaches to the femininity question can be found in Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richard's *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (2000)[77] and the volume edited by Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri entitled *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity* (2002). In this section, the way the femininity question is framed in the more dominant third wave of Baumgardner and Richards will be juxtaposed with the queer femme third wave of Brushwood Rose and Camilleri's collection. Baumgardner and Richards focus on the importance of including all forms of femininity, particularly the hegemonic

[76] As already noted, there is little to no discussion of the relationship between race, sexuality, and femininity in the work of Wollstonecraft, the socialist feminists, Brownmiller, and Wolf, all of whom normalize white heterosexual forms of femininity.
[77] For this discussion, I am using the tenth anniversary edition of *Manifesta*, which was published in 2010.

femininity involving cosmetics, nail polish, and fashion that has been denigrated by second wave feminists (2010: 140–141). Ultimately, however, their treatment of the femininity question involves little more than a celebration of femininity and feminized commodities. The contributors to *Brazen Femme* offer a more nuanced treatment of the femininity question. The commonality in these third wave approaches is their direct challenge of the assumption that femininity is a problem to be overcome. As such, they suggest a way out of Wollstonecraftian misogyny and disrupt the tension between feminism and femininity. Yet this disruption is easily commodified as both approaches allow for—and possibly even legitimize—commodity feminism to take hold. Indeed, *Manifesta* perpetuates a feminism = resistance + consumption equation, and *Brazen Femme* contains endless fetishization of femme-related commodities.

2.6.1 Baumgardner and Richards' Manifesta *(2000)*

Baumgardner and Richards' *Manifesta* is considered an important popular third wave feminist text (Harnois, 2008; Kinser, 2004; Purvis, 2004; Snyder, 2008). In the text, they examine the past, present, and future of American popular feminism—although they spend the vast majority of their book on the present.[78] They examine the work of

[78] *Manifesta* is considered fairly unique among third wave texts as it "conscientiously situates third-wave feminist practices within historical frameworks and acknowledges conceptual links" (Purvis, 2004: 121). Indeed, third wave feminists are often accused of setting up the second wave as a straw person—or straw woman—in order to seem more feminist, less racist, and more encompassing of diversity than the second wave, "overemphasiz[ing] their distinctiveness" and not acknowledging the commonalities between second and third wave (Purvis, 2004: 93–123; Harnois, 2008: 121–123, 133–134; Snyder, 2008: 179–182). Indeed, Baumgardner and Richards are careful to present popular American second wave liberal feminists in a sympathetic light, and even indicate friendship and respect with the older generation. For example, in their acknowledgements they write: "A special thank you to Gloria Steinem, who acted as if it was normal—and even fun—to have intergenerational sleepovers/writers' workshops at her house for a year, and who offered her services as a combination historian and feminist librarian, while still remaining a firm

feminists who preceded them including Wollstonecraft, Friedan, Brownmiller, Wolf, and countless other first and second wave feminists (2010: 20–21, 152–153, 132–133). They explore the work of their third wave contemporaries, and suggest that "the core belief in legal, political, and social equality hasn't changed much since [Wollstonecraft]" (2010: 21). They contend that issues of importance to the third wave include equal access to technology (for example, the internet), HIV/AIDS, child sexual abuse, globalization, body image, legal marriage, and sexual health in *addition* to issues associated with the second wave such as sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and the gendered wage gap (2010: 21). In looking to the future, they provide two appendices that detail how their readers can become engaged in (largely liberal) feminist activism.[79]

In their examination of the third wave, Baumgardner and Richards have a broad and remarkably diffuse understanding of contemporary feminism. Indeed, they contend that

> feminism is out there, tucked into our daily acts of righteousness and self-respect. Feminism arrived in a different way in the lives of the women of this generation; we never knew a time before 'girls can do anything boys can!' The fruits of this confidence are enjoyed by almost every American girl or woman alive, a radical change from the suffragettes and bluestockings of the late nineteenth century, and from our serious sisters of the sixties and seventies. […] for anyone born after the early 1960s, the presence of feminism in our lives is taken for granted. For our generation, *feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it—it's simply in the water* (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010: 17, emphasis mine).

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believer that we know more about our generation of feminism than she does" (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010: xv–xvi).

[79] Appendix B, "A Young Woman's Guide to the Revolution," lists the names and contact information of almost entirely liberal feminist American organizations relevant to each chapter of the book, and Appendix C, "How to Put the Participatory Back into Participatory Democracy," provides readers with a "sample action" (a voter-registration drive) that readers can take up themselves or follow the steps outlined for another issue of their choosing (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010: 343–388).

Feminism can be done by anyone because of this *fluoride effect*: it does not matter whether a woman is sexy or a wallflower, a stay-at-home mom or a sole-support mother, or if she shaves, plucks, and waxes her body; if she wants, she can even shop at Calvin Klein, wear a white wedding dress, and throw a traditional wedding. Baumgardner and Richards contend that "feminism wants you to be whoever you are—but with a political consciousness" (2010: 56–57). In celebrating "whoever you are," the issues of importance to third wave feminism outlined by Baumgardner and Richards are ultimately abandoned in favour of celebrating femininity and consumption.

Regarding femininity, *Manifesta* expands far beyond Wolf's contention in the concluding chapter of *The Beauty Myth* that women who wear lipstick should not feel guilty. Indeed, throughout *all* chapters of *Manifesta*, Baumgardner and Richards celebrate femininity in a concerted effort to disrupt the idea that femininity is incompatible with feminism. In particular, they spend several chapters exploring the *girlie* strand of third wave feminism, which is concerned primarily with embracing and revaluing femininity (2010: 135, 141). Baumgardner and Richards discuss a contentious exchange between panelist Debbie Stoller[80] and an unnamed second wave feminist at an alternative journalism conference. While Stoller was "vociferously arguing that painting one's nails is a feminist act because it expands the notions of what a feminist is allowed to do or how she may act," the second wave feminist "countered that her generation had fought to free women from the traps of femininity" (2010: 140, 141).

[80] The girlie strand of third wave feminism is most associated with Debbie Stoller. She is the co-founder of the third wave magazine *Bust* (founded in 1993) and the author of several *Stitch 'n Bitch* books that link knitting and crocheting to feminism.

Although Baumgardner and Richards are critical of the girlie third wave—largely because most self-identified girlies are privileged white heterosexual women—they also contend that girlies have pushed third wave feminism in an important direction. For example, girlies have been tremendously successful in putting forth the view that cosmetics "can be sexy, campy, ironic, or simply decorating ourselves without the loaded issues" instead of being "a sign of our sway to the marketplace and the male gaze" (2010: 138–139, 161, 136). Baumgardner and Richards do caution, however, that "without a body of politics, the nail polish is really going to waste;" in other words, without feminist politics, there might be little difference between girlie and *Cosmopolitan* magazine (2010: 166, 153–161). Yet they firmly believe that girlie combined with feminist consciousness has revolutionary potential (2010: 161). It is clear that Baumgardner and Richards are very far from their popular feminist predecessors in their understanding of the femininity question. They also differ from their predecessors in their unmitigated celebration of consumption; before examining consumption, however, I will first overview the treatment of the femininity question in *Brazen Femme*.

2.6.2 Brushwood Rose and Camilleri's Brazen Femme *(2002)*

Brushwood Rose and Camilleri, along with other contributors to *Brazen Femme*, offer a queer third wave approach to the femininity question. In a similar manner to *Manifesta*—and the third wave more generally (Snyder, 2008: 179)—*Brazen Femme* actively plays with femininity. In doing so, the book examines the relationship between femme, femininity, and commodities. The contributors tend to resist singular definitions of femme. However, certain themes do emerge in the way in which the contributors

relate femme and femininity. Femme is an aesthetic femininity with something slightly off or out of place. It is "femininity gone wrong," it is a "defiant" and "oppositional" form of femininity, it is an exaggerated or even "quantum" form of femininity (Brushwood Rose and Camilleri, 2002: 13; Bryan, 2002: 152; Ruth, 2002: 15–18). Femme is also inherently queer. Queer is understood "in the broadest application of the word—as bent, unfixed, unhinged, and finally unhyphenated" (Brushwood Rose and Camilleri, 2002: 12). As such, femme does not necessarily have to involve women (Gilbert, 2002: 71–76). It is "released from the strictures of binary models of sexual orientation" and therefore in addition to separating femme from women, femme is separated from butches and from lesbians more generally (Brushwood Rose and Camilleri, 2002: 12). Femme is also not necessarily white. However, given the historical association of femininity with whiteness, non-white femmes often have problems being read as femme (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2002: 33–34; Bryan, 2002: 147; Duggan and McHugh, 2002: 168). Finally and most importantly for this discussion, femme is active and independent (Payne, 2002: 50, 54–55). As one contributor writes, "femininity + sexual agency = potential social chaos" (Payne, 2002: 50). As such, the understanding of femme in *Brazen Femme* can be read as a *feminist femininity* that disrupts the feminism/femininity tension.

In addition to disrupting the tension between feminism and femininity, contributors to *Brazen Femme* challenge feminist and queer treatment of femmes. The feminist treatment of femininity, rather unsurprisingly, has been extended to the femme. For example, one contributor was called in to see her feminist department Chair

to account for her "different" (that is, femme) style of dress. As such, the Chair made "no attempt to extend the school's 'diversity policy' into the realm of 'faculty attire'" (Kole, 2002: 95). In addition, queer theorists—as well as the larger queer community—have historically distrusted, if not maligned, the femme. Indeed, femme identities have historically been, and continue to be, subsumed by female and butch masculinity (Noble, 2005: 166; Serano, 2007: 339). In separating the femme from the butch and other binary constructions of sexuality, *Brazen Femme* carves out and revalues femme identities on their own terms. In sum, although both *Manifesta* and *Brazen Femme* disrupt the (pre-third wave) understanding that femininity is incompatible with feminism, contributors to *Brazen Femme* offer a far more radical treatment of the femininity question than *Manifesta*'s simple celebration of "whoever you are." What *Manifesta* and *Brazen Femme* do have in common, however, is a celebration of the consumption of feminine/femme commodities.

2.6.3 Third Wave Celebration and Fetishization of Feminized Commodities

Baumgardner and Richards claim to be proud of the inclusivity of *Manifesta*:[81] their version of inclusivity, however, seems to be more about including a variety of women who love hip and edgy consumer products than it is about uncovering intersectional forms of oppression. This is revealing in Baumgardner and Richards' contemplation of the third wave "garden":

> What does the Third Wave garden look like? Planted near Madonna, *Sassy*, Wolf, Riot Grrrls, and *Bust* are influential xerox-and-staple zines such as *I*

[81] In the preface to the tenth anniversary edition, Baumgardner and Richards state: "we are proud that we created (not completely) an inclusive book" with the notable exception of trans issues (2010: xi, x).

> *(heart) Amy Carter*, *Sister Nobody*, *I'm So Fucking Beautiful*, *Bamboo Girl*; the glossy but independent zines such as *HUES*, *Roller Derby*, *Bitch*, *Fresh and Tasty*, *WIG*; chicklit and estronet Web sites like Disgruntled Housewife, Girls On, gURL; webzines such as *Minx* and *Maxi*; feature films like *Clueless*, *Go Fish*, *All Over Me*, *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love*; *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *High Art*; art films by Elisabeth Subrin, Sadie Benning, Pratibha Parmar, and Jocelyn Taylor; musicians such as Ani DiFranco, Brandy, Luscious Jackson, Courtney Love as the creamy Versace model, Erykah Badu, Me'shell Ndege'ocello, Bikini Kill, Missy Elliot, the Spice Girls, Salt-N-Pepa, TLC, Gwen Stefani, Team Dresch, Foxy Brown, Queen Latifah, Indigo Girls, and all those ladies featured at Lilith Fair; products galore, Urban Decay, Hard Candy, MAC, Manic Panic; on the small screen, *Wonder Woman* (in comic-book form, too), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *My So-Called Life*, *Xena*, *Felicity*, and Alicia Silverstone in Aerosmith videos; Chelsea Clinton; the New York club Meow Mix and other joints with female go-go dancers getting down for women; funny girls loving Janeane Garofalo and Margaret Cho; angry women loving Hothead Paisan and *Dirty Plotte* comics; Jenny McCarthy, who somehow satirized being a pinup even as she was one; controversial ones like *Backlash* and *The Morning After*; uncontroversial ones like *The* Bust *Guide to the New Girl Order* and *Listen Up*; the West Coast mutual-admiration society of sex writers Lisa Palac and Susie Bright; Monica Lewinsky; the Women's World Cup; the WNBA; and hundreds more films, bands, women, books, events, and zines (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010: 135–136).

The third wave garden is inclusive insofar as it includes several different forms of commodity feminism. Indeed, most of the flowers in the garden can be consumed: CDs and mp3s by Madonna or Ani DiFranco (the latter of whom identifies as a feminist), tickets to the Lilith Fair music festival,[82] Lilith Fair merchandise, "products galore" such as the bright colours and trendy marketing campaigns associated with the cosmetics companies Hard Candy and Urban Decay, blockbuster and more limited release films with strong female characters such as *Clueless* and *High Art*, and comic books and television shows with female superheroes such as *Wonder Woman* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In short, the feminist residing in the third wave garden is young, hip, and spends much of her time consuming popular culture. Baumgardner and Richards

[82] Lilith Fair involved all female-fronted acts and toured Canada and the United States during the summers of 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2010.

contend that the fluoride effect of contemporary feminism means feminism "is becoming mainstreamed via popular culture" (2010: 36). However, *Manifesta* often reads as if contemporary feminism is nothing *but* pop culture and consumption involving feminist—or at least oppositional—forms of femininity.

In a similar manner to *Manifesta*, *Brazen Femme* celebrates feminized commodities; yet unlike *Manifesta*, the book also presents critiques of consumption. The contributors critique consumption through the framework of access. For example, Anderson points out that many femmes cannot afford femme commodities (2002a: 43). This has already been pointed out by socialist feminists (see section 2.4, above) with reference to the production of femininity. However, contributors add that the production of femme can also be problematic for people with disabilities, or when commodities such as cosmetics are made primarily for white faces, or when commodities such as clothes are made primarily for thin bodies (Anderson, 2002a: 44; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2002: 34; Slone and Mitchell, 2002: 108–109). In other words, embracing femme commodities can be problematic because access is constrained by class, ability, race, and body size. However, when the framework of access is the *sole* critique of consumption on offer, producing more commodities becomes the only solution: for example, the production of more shades of foundation to match all skin types, or more sizes of fishnet stockings to fit all body types. In this way, the solution to commodity feminism parallels the problem. In fairness to *Brazen Femme*, however, this constitutes more critique than what is offered by the authors of *Manifesta*.

Both *Manifesta* and *Brazen Femme* allow for—and perhaps even legitimize—an edgy urban version of commodity feminism. This can be argued by comparing the production of femme/feminine feminist aesthetic to the production of a "hipster" aesthetic.[83] In a similar manner to the way in which the young New York City-based feminist of *Manifesta*[84] and the urban Canadian femme of *Brazen Femme* take up femininity, Canadian and American hipsters take up a working-class aesthetic. The hipster does not simply wear second-hand (or *vintage*) clothing, but rather puts together a carefully constructed look using this clothing.[85] The femme, the *Manifesta*

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[83] The term hipster has been in use since the 1940s. Originally used to describe participants in American jazz culture and beat literature, it has evolved to describe a variety of counter-cultural groups over the years (Heath and Potter, 2004: 32, 143, 192, 263; Leland, 2004: 14). The contemporary hipster of the 1990s and 2000s can be defined as a subculture of generally young, white, well-educated, middle-class or upper-middle-class adults living in an urban working class or gentrifying neighbourhood. Although espousing ostensibly leftist politics, the hipster tends to be focused on creating an identity through consumption of non-mainstream commodities such as alternative or independent music, second-hand clothing, and foreign and alternative films. Hipsters understand themselves, and are often treated, as highly subversive; however, they are largely a consumption group that purchases "empty authenticity and rebellion" (Heath and Potter, 2004: 32; Haddow, 2008). Their consumption has the effect of accelerating "the pace of the market" in that marketers are always looking for the next hip thing to sell back to the masses (Leland, 2004: 14). As soon a trend, band, or style gains too much exposure, hipsters look on it with scorn and the cycle begins anew (Heath and Potter, 2004; Haddow, 2008). This subculture has been satirized in Robert Lanham's *The Hipster Handbook* (2003), Christian Lander's *Stuff White People Like: A Guide to the Unique Taste of Millions* (2008) and *Whiter Shades of Pale: The Stuff White People Like, Coast to Coast, from Seattle's Sweaters to Maine's Microbrews* (2010).

[84] The authors of *Manifesta* base their analysis on conversations with their friends, all of whom, although diverse ethnically, "live in New York City and mostly work in the media" (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010: 22).

[85] As discussed in section 2.4 on socialist feminism, the working-class attempts to gain economic security, or even class mobility, by emulating the aesthetics of the middle class. It is therefore ironic that the middle class impose their values and aesthetics onto the working class, while at the same time appropriating a working-class aesthetic. In Haddow's words, hipsters are "a class of individuals that seek to escape their own wealth and privilege by immersing themselves in the aesthetic of the working class" (2008). There are important differences, however, between a working-class aesthetic and how that aesthetic is taken up by the middle-class hipster. Second-hand clothing provides a good example of some of these differences. The hipster can discuss how little they paid for a 1970s leather jacket or 1980s pair of kitten-heel boots, yet it is assumed that they could have afforded to pay more. It takes class privilege and often white privilege to be able to wear worn clothing without being treated like the poor. Second-hand clothing worn by the middle class even has a different term: it is generally called *vintage*. Second-hand implies one cannot afford first-hand or previously unworn clothing, while vintage implies aging for a purpose. Vintage clothing, like vintage wine, is understood to get better with age. That leather jacket or

feminist, and the hipster all take up an aesthetic that has been completely debased and then subvert that aesthetic with commodities. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha from *Brazen Femme* defines her femme identity as such:

> I have magenta silk pillows and a junk shop bureau spray-painted silver […] I ride an adult trike circa the year I was born cuz I still fall over otherwise. I have silk and lace slips, platform boots, charcoal silver and lavender glitter eyeshadow sticks from the Body Shop, Epic, Lust, and Velvet from the MAC counter. I have indigo vintage jeans, fake leopard print furry platform flip-flops, turquoise glitter nail polish, cocoa butter shining brown legs, and panther jacket, and a fake sheepskin furry '70s winter coat […] I have a carrot orange fleece baby hoodie, blue Oshun beads around my neck (2002: 41).

In Piepzna-Samarasinha's articulation of her own femme identity, femme and hipster identities merge: hipsters are also associated with refurbishing old furniture in non-traditional ways, unique bicycles (which in this case is unique because it is as old and a tricycle) and vintage clothing.

Both *Brazen Femme* and *Manifesta* contain a great deal of fetishism of femme/feminist commodities. Contributors to *Brazen Femme* praise the "perfection" of a "bra and panty combo […] in a deep rich red, black, or silver," and understand their femme identities through commodities including "whore boots," "Wet 'N' Wild" cosmetics, bead chokers, bracelets and gold-plated earrings (Anderson, 2002b: 69; Bryan, 2002: 155; Slone and Mitchell, 2002: 109; Tea, 2002: 134). Similarly, *Manifesta* repeatedly celebrates *Bust* magazine, with its plethora of vintage-look clothing modeled by edgy young women who might have tattoos, fluorescent orange (or other non-natural coloured) highlights in their hair, and are not necessarily thin. In Baumgardner and Richards' view, *Bust* promotes a "gynefocal aesthetic" that subverts the more

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kitten-heel boots are even better now than they were when they were mass produced twenty or thirty years ago. In this case, *better* implies *scarcer*, which according to capitalist logic means more valuable.

mainstream aesthetic promoted by non-feminist women's magazines (2010: 133–166). In a similar manner to the hipster who purchases obscure punk music on vinyl records to *subvert* the pop music sold to the masses on compact discs or mp3 files, the femme and *Manifesta* feminist purchase turquoise glitter nail polish, "whore boots" and fluorescent orange hair dye to *subvert* the pink and red nails, lower-heeled boots, and blonde and caramel highlights of the more conventionally feminine masses. From the perspective of a critique of commodity fetishism, the hipster, femme, and *Manifesta* feminist accomplish little more than creating and sustaining niche markets for the production of their identities. Moreover, just as the hipster is the edgy version of the bourgeois consumer, the femme and *Manifesta* feminist are edgy versions of the more traditionally feminine consumer. Both the femme and *Manifesta* feminist, as queer and/or alternative variants of hegemonic femininity, are just as implicated in commodity production and consumption since the production of femme and *Manifesta* feminism requires commodities as much as the production of hegemonic femininity. With that being said, identity is fundamentally affected by several aspects of capitalism, including commodity production and consumption (Hennessy, 2000: 4). As such, producing a non-commodified form of femme or femininity is difficult if not impossible. Moreover, the femme and *Manifesta* feminist are similar to hegemonic femininity only when they are primarily identified with aesthetics. There are, however, different and more radical politics in the production of femme (and to a lesser degree *Manifesta* femininity) than in hegemonic forms of femininity.

In sum, *Manifesta* and *Brazen Femme* offer good representations of third wave feminism, or more specifically, contemporary dominant and queer femme approaches to the femininity question. Both texts go further than their popular feminist predecessors on how femininity is queered and racialized, particularly *Brazen Femme*. Most importantly to this discussion of the femininity question, both texts effectively interrogate the feminism/femininity tension and the traces of Wollstonecraftian misogyny this tension can sometimes entail. Indeed, Baumgardner and Richards understand the reclamation of femininity in a misogynist society to be a feminist act (2010: 215–216), and the understanding of femme in *Brazen Femme* is a queer and *feminist* femininity. Indeed, although Serano does not engage with either *Manifesta* or *Brazen Femme* in her work, the treatment of the femininity question in these texts embraces her view that the feminine needs to be put back into feminism. In her words: "in a world awash with antifeminine sentiments, embracing and empowering femininity can potentially be one of the most transformative and revolutionary acts imaginable" (Serano, 2007: 313). With that being said, the endless fetishization of femme and feminine commodities in *Brazen Femme* and *Manifesta* has much in common with commodity feminism. Indeed, both texts may not only allow for, but also provide feminist justification of, commodity feminism.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has begun the work of theorizing the origins of commodity feminism as a way of understanding its ascendancy today. The focus of this *origins* discussion is the

femininity question in popular Anglo-American feminism. Wollstonecraft's early and influential articulation of this question sets up a tension between feminism and femininity that is at times misogynist. Her *feminist misogyny* is evident in her critiques of women's consumptive and non-consumptive behaviour, as well as in the language she uses to describe femininity. Underpinning her feminist misogyny is a belief in the abstract and disembodied Cartesian subject. This belief allows Wollstonecraft to make liberal feminist arguments for the rights of women in the abstract, while at the same time belittling women who fail to transcend their disgusting feminine bodies and achieve the Cartesian ideal. Wollstonecraft's treatment of femininity influenced popular twentieth century liberal feminists including liberals Betty Friedan and Susan Brownmiller and is even evident in socialist feminist writings, including Joseph Hansen and Evelyn Reed. As such, misogynist elements—whether explicit (in Wollstonecraft, Hansen, and Reed) or simply traces (in Friedan, Brownmiller, and the rank-and-file members of the Socialist Worker's Party)—can be observed in influential texts on femininity by popular Anglo-American feminist writers. I have suggested here that it was not until the third wave that Wollstonecraftian feminist misogyny and the attendant tension between feminism and femininity were to be challenged by popular Anglo-American feminists. These challenges have been presented by Naomi Wolf (who straddles the line between liberal and third wave feminist approaches to femininity), Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, and the contributors to *Brazen Femme*.

I have engaged with the work of Julia Serano and Allyson Mitchell in my definition of misogyny as that of a deep hostility toward women and/or femininity.

Although I have adopted a similar definition of misogyny to Serano, I have disputed her claim that the derision of femininity is somehow *new* and have instead suggested that within the Anglo-American feminist tradition, this can be traced back at least as far as Wollstonecraft. I have also modified Mitchell's understanding that rejecting femininity simply because of the ways it has been constructed is an act of misogyny. Without modification, Mitchell could be read to suggest that *any* critique of the norms associated with femininity—such as its privileging of whiteness or heteronormativity—cannot be made without falling prey to the charge of misogyny. Clearly, such critiques can and do serve an important feminist function, and not *all* critiques of femininity are necessarily misogynist. One question concerning feminist critiques of femininity remains: that is, how to critique femininity without falling into the trap of Wollstonecraftian feminist misogyny.

Mitchell's discussion of misogyny, and Gubar's discussion of Wollstonecraft's misogyny, are useful in thinking through this question. Mitchell discusses misogyny in the context of her reaction to people calling her *mom*. She is normally called mom after she is "too bossy" or has prepared a meal. Although Mitchell is not a mother, she contends that she is called mom because she wears dresses (and other clothing associated with femininity) and is a large woman. Yet she resents being called mom *not* because she is not actually a mother, but for two reasons: first, because of meanings attached to motherhood in contemporary Canadian society, and second, because the tone taken often suggests she is acting like a "shrew" (2002: 104–106). Mitchell contends that her resentment suggests she needs to examine her own "internalized

misogyny." Although she is a self-identified fat femme and fat activist,[86] Mitchell resents being called mom because she has internalized the idea that mothers are fat, unsexy shrews.

Similarly, Gubar has suggested that Wollstonecraft displays an internalized misogyny in that the form of femininity she so harshly criticizes is a self-portrait (1994: 460). After discussing Wollstonecraft's two suicide attempts and disastrous love affairs with men, Gubar asks, "Did anyone better understand slavish passions, the overvaluation of love, fickle irrationality, weak dependency, the sense of personal irrelevance, and anxiety about personal attractiveness than Wollstonecraft herself?" (1994: 460). Wollstonecraft wants women to become abstract, rights-bearing Cartesian subjects, and is deeply hostile to the fact that she (and all the other women in her social class) remain trapped in their *disgusting* bodies and maintain their *frivolous* feminine ways. In short, in a similar manner to Mitchell's resentment at being called *mom*, Wollstonecraft's resentment of *coquettes* and *ladies* suggests an internalized misogyny.[87]

Regardless of whether feminist misogyny stems from internalized misogyny, the important point here is that feminist misogyny is a *danger* that lies within feminist critiques of femininity. This can be illustrated by comparing the dangers of critiquing

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[86] Like other contributors to the *Brazen Femme* collection, Mitchell understands femme to be a crucial project of feminism.

[87] As a sidenote, Serano contends that all women have internalized misogyny. She argues: "at some point, all of us who identify as female have to come face-to-face with our own internalized misogyny. And when people ask me what has been the hardest part of becoming a transsexual, expecting me to say that it was coming out to my family or the growing pains of a second puberty, I tell them that the hardest part, by far, has been unlearning lessons that were etched into my psyche before I ever set foot into kindergarten. The hardest part has been learning how to take myself seriously when the entire world is constantly telling me that femininity is constantly inferior to masculinity" (2007: 276).

mothering with the dangers of critiquing femininity. In Anglo-American culture, the social construction of mothering is very different from the social construction of fathering: for example, the standards for a *good mother* are considerably higher than standards for a *good father*, mothers are expected to behave in a more selfless manner than fathers, all *normal* women are supposed to desire to be mothers, women who do not like children or are child-free by choice are *unnatural* or *selfish*, mothering is assumed to take place within a heterosexual family, mothers are primarily (or solely) responsible for the behaviour of their children and the types of adults they eventually become, and the behaviour of poor/working-class mothers is more likely to be morally suspect and legally regulated than middle-class mothers. Indeed, Wollstonecraft and Friedan are hardly exceptional in blaming women for the plight of their children. But while it is certainly *possible* to critique the mothering practices of women, doing so without a prior understanding of the problems associated with this construction of mothering allows for possible slippage into sexism, heteronormativity, classism, and possibly misogyny. Similarly, in Anglo-American culture, the social construction of femininity is very different from the social construction of masculinity. Feminine attributes are consistently assigned negative connotations and meanings—such as weakness, vanity, frivolity, immorality, stupidity and foolishness—in ways supposedly masculine attributes are not.[88] As such, just as with critiques of mothering practices, it is possible to critique femininity without slipping into misogyny. Yet at the same time,

[88] In addition, as Serano notes, being in touch with and expressing one's emotions is derided and assumed to mean the speaker has difficulties reasoning or thinking logically. Recreational activities associated with femininity (such as decorating) are often considered frivolous while those associated with masculinity (such as watching sports) are not (Serano, 2007: 326–327). See also section B of this dissertation's introductory chapter.

such critiques must be cognizant of how Anglo-American society constructs femininity. Indeed, keeping this understanding at the forefront is key to avoiding the danger of Wollstonecraftian misogyny.

The danger would lessen—that is, it would become easier to put forth feminist critiques of femininity—if the negative connotations and meanings associated with hegemonic femininity in Anglo-American culture could be reduced or eliminated. Indeed, as Kole points out in her contribution to *Brazen Femme*, it is challenging enough to live in a society that "dreads" femininity (2002: 99). Serano argues for a better future:

> we must recognize that feminine expression is strong, daring and brave—that it is powerful—and not in an enchanting, enticing, or supernatural sort of way, but in a tangible, practical way that facilitates openness, creativity, and honest expression. We must move beyond seeing femininity as helpless and dependent, or merely as masculinity's sidekick, and instead acknowledge that feminine expression exists of its own accord and brings its own rewards to those who naturally gravitate toward it (2007: 343).

This recognition and acknowledgement of feminine expression is exactly what Baumgardner and Richards and the contributors to *Brazen Femme* are trying to achieve. Unfortunately, in both *Manifesta* and *Brazen Femme*, this largely takes the form of celebrating consumption and endlessly fetishizing commodities. Indeed, third wave feminism has been accused of including "any approach, as long as it pays attention to gender issues and social justice" (Snyder, 2008: 181). As such, third wave feminism may lend legitimacy to—or even justify—commodity feminism. After all, commodity feminism pays attention to gender issues and a certain brand of highly individualistic social justice. At the same time, it is important not to *collapse* third wave feminism and commodity feminism. Third wave feminism certainly contains strands that are

supportive of commodity feminism; however, commodity feminism lacks the commitment to feminist activism and the collective social action of the third wave.

While collapsing third wave and commodity feminism is problematic, the celebration of consumption as a way of challenging the tension between feminism and femininity is a crucial aspect of both feminisms. Indeed, although satirical, *The Onion* article discussed in the introduction of this chapter illustrates these commonalities well.[89] In the article, (commodity) feminism wholeheartedly, and uncritically, celebrates everything associated with women. A spoof feminist academic contends that "a new strain of feminism has emerged in which mundane activities are championed as proud, bold assertions of independence from patriarchal hegemony" (*The Onion*, 2003). This offers a form of democratization of feminism, in that "empowerment is now accessible to women who were long excluded" (*The Onion*, 2003).[90] More importantly, it allows for a commodified resolution of the feminism/femininity tension: there can be no tension when everything a woman does, everything she buys, and every form of femininity she embraces is automatically read as empowerment. Commodity feminism does not empower women so much as empower particular women's desires to participate in the production of femininity. Yet at the same time, this revaluing of feminized commodities and the women who use them may serve to diminish the explicit and trace misogyny

[89] *The Onion* article does not actually use the term "commodity feminism."

[90] *The Onion* article suggests a muted critique of the failure of feminist academics to adequately respond to the "empowerment" that this shift in feminism represents (Gill, 2008: 36). It also suggests a reason feminist academics have been reluctant to respond: namely, that the democratization and popularization of feminism helps to legitimate their own place as feminists within academia. This will be discussed again in Chapter Four when I look at how several prominent feminist academics have been involved in a well-known marketing campaign that masquerades as feminist activism—Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty"—in a research or other support capacity.

that have been present in many popular feminist considerations of the femininity question since Wollstonecraft.

I conclude by briefly returning to Friedan and Wolf. In her chapter on the "sexual sell," Friedan examines the profitability of early 1960s housewife femininity. She contends that "it would take a clever economist to figure out what would keep our affluent economy going if the housewife market began to fall off" (1983: 208). Almost thirty years later, Wolf replies that

> "clever economists" did figure out what would keep our affluent economy going once the housewife market began to fall off […] the beauty myth, in its modern form, arose […] to save magazines and advertisers from the economic fallout of the women's revolution (1997: 66).

Yet both Friedan and Wolf are mistaken. As the next chapter will discuss, one marketing professional was clever enough to solve this problem over thirty years *prior to* Friedan's observation, even though his techniques were not yet adopted on a mass scale. What Edward Bernays figured out was a way of selling commodities to women that would challenge both the yet-to-be perfected feminine mystique and beauty myth. Through an examination of the social and political theory of Sigmund Freud and Bernays' application of Freudian theory to marketing, the next chapter will continue this exploration of the origins of commodity feminism.

CHAPTER THREE
Commodities as Social Control: Capitalism under Conservatism in Freudian Theory

The psychological poverty of groups […] is most threatening where the bonds of a society are chiefly constituted with the identification of its members with one another, while individuals of the leader type do not acquire the importance that should fall to them […] The present cultural state of America would give us a good opportunity for studying the damage to civilization which is thus to be feared.
—Sigmund Freud (1961: 74)

If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will and without them knowing about it?
—Edward Bernays (2005: 71)

3.1 Introduction

In contemporary Anglo-American culture, Sigmund Freud's reach extends far beyond the university classroom or therapist's couch. Freudian terms regularly circulate in advertising, the media, pop psychology, and popular culture more generally. Regardless of whether one has read Freud, terms such as libido, penis envy, sex drive, death drive, and repression are familiar to many. Much of Freud's popularity (outside of scholarly and psychoanalytic circles) can be attributed to his American nephew Edward Bernays (1891–1995).[91] Although his name is not well known, Bernays' impact on twentieth-century U.S. capitalism was immense. Indeed, he is generally regarded as a *father* of modern public relations (Olasky, 1985: 17; Ewen, 1996: 146; Tye, 1998; Curtis, 2002).

Bernays greatly admired his uncle, and the two kept up a regular correspondence between 1919 and 1933. Indeed, Bernays offered to oversee the translation of *Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis* into English, which Freud accepted since his savings had been depleted by inflation after the First World War. When

[91] Bernays was actually Freud's double nephew, as his mother was Freud's sister and his father's sister was Freud's wife (Bernays, 1965: 4; Justman, 1994: 458).

Bernays marketed *Introductory Lectures* to an American audience for the first time, waiving his usual percentage for doing so, he began a decades-long project of relentlessly promoting Freud and his work (Bernays, 1965: 252–276, 179–180; Justman, 1994: 463; Tye, 1998: 195; Curtis, 2002). Freud later received financial advice, royalties from further publications, and other forms of practical business-related help from his nephew (Tye, 1998: 185–187). Freud loathed the marketing of his image and writings to the American masses but was grateful to his nephew for the financial assistance.[92]

Freud was not the sole beneficiary of this relationship; it was quite lucrative for Bernays as well, who not only promoted Freud but also used his personal relationship with him to raise his own profile. In fact, Bernays' promotion of this relationship was so persistent that *Variety* magazine once mockingly referred to him as a "professional nephew" (Tye, 1998: 189). Bernays, however, liked to think of himself as his uncle's intellectual counterpart,[93] believing that he had revolutionized business just as his uncle had revolutionized psychology. Freud, however, did not feel the same way.[94] When Bernays sent Freud a copy of his book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in 1924, Freud responded with a short comment that it was "a truly American publication." Similarly, Freud wrote to Bernays in 1928 saying that his book *Propaganda* "might prove too American for my taste" (letters reprinted in Bernays, 1965: 269–270). Freud's comments

[92] Bernays reprints several letters from his uncle (written after the First World War) in his 1965 memoirs. Many of these letters outline Freud's financial problems and convey gratitude for his nephew's help (Bernays, 1965: 252–276).

[93] For example, Bernays brags in his memoirs about spending time with his uncle in Carlsbad in 1913: "although Freud was almost a quarter century my senior, we got along like two contemporaries." Moreover, "it was as if two close friends were exchanging confidences instead of a famous uncle of fifty-seven and an unknown nephew of twenty-two" (Bernays, 1965, 62–63).

[94] Indeed, Justman has suggested that Freud considered Bernays "an embarrassment in his family" (1994: 474).

were not intended to be complimentary, as he held a strong—and elitist—dislike of America (Kaye, 1993; Justman, 1994: 473–474; Curtis, 2002; Edmundson, 2003).[95]

I begin this chapter by discussing the personal relationship between Freud and Bernays because it is central to the origins of commodity feminism. This chapter moves from the first way in which I situate the origins of commodity feminism (the femininity question) to the second (capitalism under conservatism), considering the *processes* through which the feminism/femininity tension is *resolved* in capitalist terms. The concept of *capitalism under conservatism*—a conservative view of society as a whole in which commodity consumption is treated as a necessary form of social control—is central to this resolution. I contend that one of the earliest articulations of these politics can be found in the writings of Bernays. In a manner similar to Freud and conservative thinkers before him, Bernays was an avowed elitist, suspicious of democracy, and put his faith in the *intelligent few* in society. For Bernays, the public relations counsel numbered among these few. The PR man helps to preserve stability in society by

[95] Freud's dislike of America increased over the course of his life. In his youth, he was enamoured with American ideals (Kaye, 1993: 118–120). After the depression of 1873, he even considered emigration to the United States (as well as England and Australia) to escape the increase of Austrian anti-Semitism (Kaye, 1993: 119). However, after his first (and only) visit to the United States in 1909, he came to see the country as "a gigantic mistake," a "miscarriage," and "a bad experiment conducted by Providence" (Freud cited in Kaye, 1993: 120). Freud particularly disliked American nationalism, culture, and democracy. American nationalism, he believed, gave most Americans an inflated sense of self beyond what their inferior culture ought to sustain. In understanding America as "God's own country," Freud suggested American nationalists have much in common with religious believers in that they are deluded, narcissistic, and infantile (Freud, 2004a: 138–140; Rose, 2004: xviii–xx). Freud's views on American culture are evident in a 1920 letter to his nephew: he complained about "the rotten taste of an uncultivated [American] public" and "the low level of American literature" (letter reprinted in Bernays, 1965: 262–264). Kaye describes Freud's belief in the inferiority of American culture as a "thoroughly conventional European snobbery toward the New World" that later "gave way to a pervasive and deeply irrational hatred that grew with the passing years" (1993: 120). Finally, for Freud, American nationalism and culture were shaped by American democracy. Freud's dislike of American democracy is reflective of his dislike of democracy more generally, discussed in section 3.4 of this chapter.

manipulating public opinion (or what he sometimes called "the engineering of consent") to focus the public on capitalist values such as buying commodities. Although capitalism under conservatism entails a conservative view of society as a whole, it does not preclude more liberal politics concerning historically marginalized groups in society, including women. Indeed, one of Bernays' most famous public relations campaign is also one of the earliest examples of commodity feminism. His 1929 *Torches of Freedom* campaign for the American Tobacco Company linked women's rights to cigarette smoking. This campaign helped to break the taboo against white middle-class women smoking, and more importantly to the American Tobacco Company, greatly expanded the market for cigarettes. Bernays is important to the origins of commodity feminism, therefore, not only for articulating its underlying politics of capitalism under conservatism, but also for establishing the first commodity feminist marketing campaigns.

The ensuing discussion of capitalism under conservatism is organized into four sections. Section 3.2 makes the case for reading Bernays as both a political theorist and a conservative. Section 3.3 further illuminates Bernays' conservatism through a closer reading of *Propaganda* (1928), "Manipulating Public Opinion" (1928), "The Engineering of Consent" (1947) and *Public Relations* (1952). This section compares Bernays' political project to that of Plato, with a particular emphasis on the similarities between the role of Bernays' public relations counsel and Plato's philosopher-king. However, despite the many similarities between the public relations counsel and philosopher-king, it is Freud, not Plato, whom Bernays repeatedly references in his writings. Section 3.4 considers the

similarities between the political thought of Bernays and his uncle by examining writings of Freud with the most relevance to Bernays' work: *Totem and Taboo* (1912), *Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the 'I'* (1921), *The Future of An Illusion* (1927), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). I will contend that despite Freud's obvious influence on Bernays, his thought is best characterized as a form of crass Freudianism. Section 3.5 demonstrates how Bernays rejected the then-dominant approach to marketing to women (that is, the *happy homemaker* archetype) and examines some of Bernays' early commodity feminist campaigns, including the *Torches of Freedom* campaign.

In situating the origins of commodity feminism through the *femininity question* in the previous chapter and through capitalism under conservatism in this chapter, I expand upon my explanation of the ascendancy of commodity feminism, working within but also going beyond the usual Marxist understandings of processes of commodification; namely, that under capitalism all aspects of social and cultural life are affected or mediated by the commodity form, and that resistance and dissent are no exception (Jameson, 1991; Hennessy, 2000). Unlike its feminist counterparts, commodity feminism *resolves* the feminism/femininity tension not only through revaluing feminized commodities and the women who use them (as discussed in the last chapter) but also through a Bernaysian political framework in which commodities become a form of social control. As indicated by the quote from Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* (cited in the epigraph to this chapter), Freud was troubled by the fact that the American democratic system does not allow for a strong leader. Indeed, in

Freud's work on social groups, America loomed large in his mind as a warning of the dangers of a "society of individuals freed from the submission to any authority" (Kaye, 1993: 124; Justman, 1994). This view would, in turn, have a strong impact on Bernays.

3.2 Bernays as Conservative Political Theorist

It might seem odd to situate the origins of commodity feminism in conservatism, given that the justifying ideology of capitalism is liberalism, and the feminism of commodity feminism is also liberal and highly individualistic. Yet when the imperative to sell commodities and manipulate the masses to keep them consuming is framed as a matter of *moral necessity* to maintain social control (rather than the natural outcome of rational self-maximizing individuals interacting in a market economy) there is a dramatic political shift. Edward Bernays framed his work in this manner. In this section I read Bernays' writings on public relations from the 1920s to the 1950s as a form of conservative political theory.

Few (if any) academic circles would consider Bernays to be a political theorist. Among those who have heard of Bernays, he is known primarily as a public relations hack, a clever marketer of cigarettes, a propagandist for the U.S. government,[96] and one of the people responsible for misleading the American government into sponsoring the

[96] Bernays handled a great deal of public relations for the United States federal government. After the First World War, he worked for the War Department on a national campaign to find jobs for veterans; just before the Second World War, he advised a presidential committee on how to represent its "battle" on the Depression; during the Second World War, he advised the U.S. Information Agency on how to do a better job disseminating U.S. propaganda and also handled public relations for the army and navy (Tye, 1998: 84). However, Bernays did not accept every job he was offered with government and political figures. He claimed to have turned down several jobs including handling publicity for the Leipzig Fair in the 1930s as he was not interested in working for Nazis, handling publicity for Nicaragua's right-wing government, and helping then-Vice President Richard Nixon in his bid for the presidency in the 1950s (Tye, 1998: 89).

1954 military coup in Guatemala.[97] While Bernays filled all of those roles, I argue that he was also a highly influential political theorist, not in the realm of academic political theory, but in the sphere of American capitalism and beyond. In his 1952 book *Public Relations*, Bernays contends that "public relations [should] not concern itself primarily with selling something to somebody or advertising something to someone." Rather, he suggests "it is a field of theory and practice dealing with the *relationships of people to the society on which they are dependent*" (1952: 123, emphasis mine). One of the primary concerns of modern political theory is the justification of authority, that is, the demonstration that a particular form of authority will benefit society (Klosko, 1995: xx–xxi). Bernays had a lifelong preoccupation with authority, both generally and with specific reference to the public relations counsel. The role Bernays establishes for the PR counsel in managing the relationship between people and society, and his preoccupation with authority more generally, suggests that one of the things Bernays is doing in his books and journal articles is writing political theory.

Bernays might not be read as a political theorist due to the obvious self-interest underpinning his writings. He is clearly attempting to both establish public relations as a legitimate field and attract clients in his writings. On the former, in his writings Bernays

[97] Bernays worked as PR counsel to the American-owned United Fruit Company (now known as Chiquita) from the early 1940s to the late 1950s. In 1954, United Fruit was the largest landowner in Guatemala. Jacobo Arbenz, the leftist president of Guatemala, attempted to nationalize lands held by United Fruit; this lead to his ouster (and exile) in a military coup sponsored by the United States government (Handy, 1984; Frank, 2005: 11). Before Bernays' death in 1995, much of his role in toppling the Guatemalan government was speculative. After his death, however, the Library of Congress made public fifty-three boxes of his papers on United Fruit, which "paint in vivid detail his behind-the-scenes manoeuvring" (Tye, 1998: 156). Bernays used and abused his considerable influence in political, business and media circles to help develop consensus on the supposed necessity of American intervention in Guatemala as a means of containing the communist "threat" (Tye, 1998: 160–182).

consistently expresses a desire for the profession of public relations to be taken as seriously as law or medicine. He preferred the term *public relations counsel*, rather than contemporary terms such as *press agent* (today's marketing or advertising professionals) to garner prestige for the field. He chose the title "public relations counsel" as it invoked "legal counsel" (Bernays, 1947: 116; 1952: 6, 83; 2005: 69; Miller, 2005: 23). On the latter, his book *Propaganda* is a piece of propaganda itself. Written when Bernays was a leading figure in the field, the book has been characterized by Miller as "an extended ad for 'public relations' as Bernays himself had learned to practice it with rare intelligence and skill" (2005: 18). Yet this self-interest does not take away from the fact that Bernays is also writing political theory. Indeed, he would hardly be the first political theorist with self-interested motivations. For example, Machiavelli famously dedicated *The Prince* to Lorenzo de' Medici in an (unsuccessful) attempt to resume his political career in Florence (Klosko, 1995: 3). Another example can be found in Locke's *Two Treatises*, which at times reads as "a document written to justify specific policies" (Klosko, 1995: 93). Locke worked as a colonial administrator in Carolina and had considerable political and financial interest in British colonial policies, particularly those concerning taking possession of Aboriginal land (Arneil, 1996; Armitage, 2004). Therefore, insofar as self-interest plays an influential role in his political thought, Bernays has rather high-profile company in the political theory canon.

Bernays would not have characterized himself as espousing a political theory of capitalism under conservatism. Tye describes him as caring "deeply about his legacy as a liberal who was anti-Communist but not paranoid like the McCarthyites" (1998: 182).

This is evident in his support of the use of public relations to promote the rights of women, workers, and African-Americans. For example, he discusses the use of PR as essential to campaigns for suffrage and the eight-hour work day as well as better wages and working conditions for nurses (Bernays, 1952: 187–201; 2005: 130). He even goes so far as to suggest that PR played a large role in the decline of lynching and improvement of race relations. Unsurprisingly, given his tendency to self-promote, Bernays worked directly on two of these four issues personally. In the 1920s, he worked for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) including promoting a controversial convention in Atlanta (Bernays, 1928: 962–964; 1952: 81; 1965: 210–216). In the 1940s, he worked for the American Nurses Association to increase the profile of nursing (Bernays, 1952: 187–201; 1965: 669–670).

Bernays' understanding of his own "liberal legacy" is correct only insofar as he had more sympathy for the aspirations of historically marginalized groups, particularly women and African-Americans, than tends to be found in conservative thinkers. His feminist politics—if he had any—were liberal feminist in their focus on the rights of bourgeois women. Justman describes Bernays' as having "feminist *sympathies*" (1994: 461) rather than feminist politics, which is as far as any of Bernays' commentators are willing to go. For example, both Tye in his Bernays biography and Ewen in *PR! A Social History of Spin* (1996) are reluctant to characterize Bernays as a feminist. At the same time, it has been suggested that his interest in feminism and anti-racism was not entirely profit-driven and contained a degree of sincerity in that he identified with the outsider status of women and African-Americans (Justman, 1994: 461; Tye, 1998:

251–2). Indeed, Bernays comments in his memoirs that it is difficult to be Jewish in a corporate world that provides "equal opportunity for all, especially white Protestant Americans" (1965: 348). At times in his writings, Bernays seems sympathetic to the working class. This is more likely an entirely profit-driven "sympathy," as he was paid well to handle public relations for trade unions.[98] In his later book *Public Relations*, Bernays seems to disapprove of union activities; he contends strikes are indicative of social "maladjustment" (Bernays, 1952: 116, 318). Predictably, Bernays' sympathies (or appearance thereof) for women, African-Americans, and unions often had the effect of alienating him from the larger conservative business community.

The (surprisingly few) commentators on Bernays' work tend to agree that his politics were highly contradictory. For example, Tye argues that Bernays was "a bundle of contradictions" because he espoused liberal values of tolerance, democracy and rights while riding "roughshod over young staffers" and treating "his female employees, and even his wife, like indentured servants" (1998: x). In other words, Tye reads Bernays as a liberal whose politics do not always translate into practice. Ewen contends that Bernays' views are so contradictory he resembles "two different people": on the one hand, he understands society to be full of people with "expanding democratic expectations" launching an attack from below on the "old, hierarchical social order,"

[98] Tye notes that Bernays handled public relations for unions such as the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and the International Union of Electrical Workers. Yet at the same time, he handled public relations for large corporations including manufacturers (such as Proctor and Gamble, his client for over thirty years, as well as General Electric and General Motors), financial institutions (such as Mutual Benefit Life Insurance and Title Guarantee and Trust), communications (such as Columbia Broadcasting System and National Broadcasting Company), magazines (such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Fortune*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, the *New Republic* and *Time*) and retailers (The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, F.W. Woolworth and R.H. Macy). Indeed, Bernays had 435 clients over his forty years of full-time practice, most of which were not trade unions (Tye, 1998: 55–56).

and on the other hand, he views the masses at the bottom as unthreatening and as easily controlled and manipulated by a wise public relations counsel (1996: 399). Therefore according to Ewen, Bernays has two sets of contradictory positions on the masses: between understanding the masses as a threat and not a threat, and between understanding the masses as needing to be appeased and needing to be controlled. For Ewen, such positions are mutually exclusive, and as such, Bernays' views are not only contradictory but dichotomous, and with "this dichotomy characteriz[ing] Bernays' thinking over a lifetime" (1996: 400).

However, I am contending that Bernays' political thought is not at all contradictory or dichotomous but actually quite coherent. Tye's critique that Bernays' behaviour did not always reflect his officially espoused political opinions is irrelevant to his *political thought* as such.[99] In addition, Ewen's construction of a dichotomous Bernays is valid only when underpinned by a liberal understanding of power. Liberals understand power (and the political more generally) as operating primarily through institutions of the state.[100] As such, modern liberalism requires representative democracy (that is, government *derived* from the people) to avoid or reduce abuses of power. Thus for liberals, any legitimation of unelected power within the state—which in the case of Bernays involves the wise public relations counsel controlling and

[99] Indeed, Bernays would not be the first, or last, person to hold strong political convictions that are at odds with his behaviour. Regardless of political orientation—liberal, conservative, feminist, anti-racist or otherwise—it is not uncommon for a person's politics and praxis to diverge.

[100] For liberals, the state has two primary functions: to secure a citizen's rights and liberties within the state and to protect its members from dangers outside the state. Within the state, securing rights and liberties involves making space available for individuals to carve out their own lives and interests. The immediate threat to this space—that is, the potential for abuse of power—comes from the state itself.

manipulating the threatening masses—is anti-liberal and anti-democratic.[101] As Meiksins Wood points out, for liberals who understand power to derive from the people, there can be no politics, or at least no legitimate politics, outside of elected representatives (1994: 68). Therefore, Bernays' political thought is dichotomous only when viewed through a liberal lens: that is, if power is only seen to work through the institutions of the state, then to advocate both for representative democracy *and* for the unelected rule of the public relations counsel is contradictory. At the same time, Ewen might be defended for his construction of a dichotomous Bernays if he is reacting to Bernays' understanding of his own politics as liberal. However, if capitalist social relations are taken into account with respect to power, and Bernays' politics are not assumed to be liberal, his political theory can be read as no longer contradictory or dichotomous but as entirely coherent.

Bernays understood liberal democracy as a way of protecting elite interests: institutions that are ostensibly democratic serve to conceal (and at times facilitate) the way in which desire is contained and directed by capitalist elites. Bernays not only understood this but became highly skilled at controlling the masses by appearing to appease them. Olasky argues that Bernays was one of the first to understand that

[101] Ewen's reading of Bernays as anti-democratic is similar to the original reviews of *Propaganda* by the American press (St. John, 2010: 92–93). St. John argues that in the period following the First World War, most American journalists were aware of the degree to which they were "duped" by wartime propagandists into supporting the war (2010: 34–78). As such, they were anxious to convince the public—and their fellow journalists—of the independence, impartiality, and ethics of a newly professionalized press (St. John, 2010: 77). St. John cites several reviews and editorials by the press of Bernays' *Propaganda*, all of which suggest Bernays is anti-democratic (and, at least implicitly, anti-liberal). For example, an *Editor & Publisher* editorial from September 15, 1928 contends: "Who are you to decide for the public, and for a fee, what is social or anti-social, what is true or false, what is reason or prejudice, what is good or bad? To whom are you accountable, in the event of misjudgment or (forbid) skullduggery?" (editorial cited in St. John, 2010: 93).

“liberalism would be increasingly based on social control posing as democracy” (quoted in Ewen, 1996: 190). Yet Bernays was hardly the first to come to this understanding. As discussed in section 1.2, close to fifty years before Bernays, Marx argued that in distracting the masses with seemingly fantastic objects, commodity fetishism is a form of social control (1990: 163–5). However, Olasky is correct in that Bernays was one of the first to *utilize* this understanding to benefit himself and other capitalist elites. Needless to say, unlike Marx, Bernays did not denounce the distraction of the masses or the benefit it incurred to capitalists. In fact, Bernays understood it as essential to a society that would otherwise descend into chaos (Bernays, 1947: 115; 2005: 168; Olasky, 1985: 19; Ewen, 1996: 10; Tye, 1998: 91–2; St. John, 2010: 81–83). As such, despite his sympathy for the aspirations of historically marginalized groups, Bernays’ political theory is consistently conservative.

Bernays can be read as a conservative political theorist for two fundamental reasons. First, the starting point of Bernays’ analysis is society as a whole in contrast to liberalism’s focus on the individual. He contends that there is a “philosophical reason for the existence of public relations […] an underlying truth” (1952: 3). This philosophical reason or truth is that the masses present a fundamental threat to the stability of democratic societies. It is the moral duty of the “intelligent few” of society to take on the role of public relations counsel: that is, to act as the “invisible government” and use propaganda to “manipulate” or “engineer” the consent of the masses and “bring order out of chaos” (Bernays, 1928; 1947; 2005: 38–39, 127, 168). Implicit in his discussion of societal instability is the assumption that the natural order of society is hierarchical, with

the “intelligent few” properly above and dictating to the democratic masses. The second reason establishes Bernays’ thought less as conservative and more properly as *not* liberal. He declares the (rational self-maximizing) “economic man” to be a myth, contending that “the human personality is far too complex to be pinned down to any simple formula” (Bernays, 1952: 217). Desire for commodities is complex, and despite what liberal political economy suggests, people do not desire for any straightforward, rational reason. Therefore, in starting with society, situating societal stability as central to his theoretical framework, assuming the natural order of society is hierarchical (in which people fulfill their proper place) and rejecting the rational individual of liberalism, Bernays’ political thought is clearly conservative.

3.3 The Public Relations Counsel as Philosopher-King

Bernays’ conservatism is specifically expressed as a political theory of capitalism under conservatism. Capitalism under conservatism involves a conservative view of society as a whole, which holds that because people are unequal, the preservation of social order requires social classes. Indeed, on the question of equality, conservative political thought tends to understand people to have *equal moral worth*, yet requires them to be unequal in *social terms*.[102] Modern democracy is feared because it is thought to give undue power to the unwise, poorly educated masses and threaten social stability. An important role is given to the intelligent few who manipulate the desires and

[102] Conservative thinker Edmund Burke, for example, frequently idealizes the aristocracy. He believes they represent the interests of society as a whole (rather than their own privileged class) in that they help to maintain societal stability for all. The aristocracy is in a unique position to do so as they possess superior qualities not held by the uneducated masses (Klosko, 1995: 266, 276, 308).

dissatisfactions of the masses (including women) to distract them with consumption. In this section, I continue to examine the political thought of Bernays by comparing his conservatism to that of Plato. Indeed, if transposed to a modern capitalist society, Bernays' ideal public relations counsel plays a very similar role to that of Plato's philosopher-king.

Bernays is clearly a conservative thinker in the tradition that dates back to Plato.[103] A comparison with Plato illustrates a great deal about Bernays: both Plato and Bernays are suspicious of democracy, are avowed elitists who believe knowledge and power must coalesce, and understand deception of the masses to be ethical insofar as it maintains order. Bernays himself would likely reject such a comparison, not only because he understood himself as a liberal, but because he situated Plato in the tradition of "socialist, communist, and collectivist" theorists (1952: 25). Regardless of these protestations, on the first point of comparison, Plato understood democracy as a "disease" because it treats people as equals when they are unequal in knowledge, understanding, and ability (1992: 558c, 563e–564a, 564e). Moreover, democracy hands over an undue amount of influence to the "third class" of ignorant "drones" who when assembled become "the largest and most powerful class" (Plato, 1992: 565a). Similarly, Bernays thought very little of the ability of the average person to "think out, understand, or act upon the world in which he or she lives" (Ewen, 1996: 10). Indeed, in a 1947 publication, Bernays claims that the average American has only six years of

[103] As Horowitz and Horowitz argue, it is possible to "draw a line of descent which leads from Plato, through the Stoic natural law, through Christianity's City of God, through the Christian middle ages and its conception of natural law, to modern conservatism" (1988: 100).

schooling[104] and as such, leaders "cannot wait for the people to arrive at even general understanding" (114). He is clear that propaganda should not take the place of the education system (Bernays, 1947: 114–115). However, he contends that even if the American education system were to improve, indeed, even if the United States were to have a perfect education system, "equal progress would not be achieved […] there would always be time lags, blind spots and points of weakness" (Bernays, 1947: 115). In other words, equal opportunity does not mean equal progress. For Bernays, some individuals will always be better (that is, possess greater understanding and ability) than others.

Following from the first point, because the masses are easily manipulated by anyone with a "fine, big, persuasive voice" (Plato, 1992: 568c), it is crucially important that the voice to whom they are listening is a wise one. In other words, power and knowledge must coalesce: for Plato this is when philosophers become kings, and for Bernays this is when the social scientist rules through public relations. In other words, Plato's philosopher-king becomes Bernays' public relations counsel. Just as the philosopher-king applies their extensive education in mathematical sciences to their work, the public relations counsel applies modern social sciences to theirs (Plato, 1992: 537c–d, 522c–531d; Bernays, 1928: 961; 1952: 3, 83, 108–109, 215; Ewen, 1996: 166). More specifically, the public relations counsel must understand psychology, sociology, political economy and other social sciences, read books and journal articles, interview experts, and conduct research in the manner of a rigorous social scientist (Bernays,

[104] Bernays does not cite his sources in making this claim.

1928: 961; 1952: 83, 218–219, 245; Tye, 1998: 91). Indeed, although his degree was in agriculture, Bernays understood his own work as epitomizing this social scientific approach to public relations. Indeed, he contends that he "defined [the] profession" by teaching the first-ever course on the subject at New York University in 1923, and by publishing two "ground-breaking" publications in 1920 (an article in the *American Journal of Sociology* and his book *Propaganda*) (Bernays, 1952: 84, 95). Like the philosopher-king, the counsel is among the "intelligent few" in society, belonging to a "highly educated class of opinion-molding tacticians [who are] continuously at work, analyzing the social terrain and adjusting the mental scenery from which the public mind, with its limited intellect, derives its opinions" (Ewen, 1996: 163, 9–10). Or in Bernays' words, the counsel must "continuously and systematically [work at] regimenting the public mind" (Bernays cited in Ewen, 1996: 166). Although Bernays was an early proponent of the view that knowledge and power ought to coalesce in the public relations counsel, this view is common in contemporary capitalism under conservatism. For example, Horowitz and Horowitz compare the hero in Plato to the hero in modern capitalism: while Plato's hero is the philosopher "whose wisdom is the attainment of the heights of selflessness," the "modern hero is the great businessman, the incarnation of the spirit of rational egoism" (1988: 11). As such, whether the hero is driven by selflessness or selfishness (or a mix of both like the public relations counsel), the best society is one in which the hero is both wise and powerful.

This comparison between the philosopher-king and public relations counsel is further evident in Bernays' discussion of "committees of wise men." Without

mentioning Plato, Bernays argues for something akin to a guardian class. In Plato's *Republic*, the guardians constitute the class from which the philosopher-kings are chosen; the philosopher-kings are the wisest and possess the best understanding of what is advantageous for society as a whole (1992: 412a–413d). In *Propaganda*, Bernays contends:

> It might be better to have, instead of propaganda and special pleading, committees of wise men who would choose our rulers, dictate our conduct, private and public, and decide upon the best types of clothes for us to wear and the best kinds of food for us to eat. But we have chosen the opposite method, that of open competition. We must find a way to make free competition function with reasonable smoothness. To achieve this society has consented to permit free competition to be organized by leadership and propaganda (2005: 39).

In other words, instead of the (likely) superior society favoured by Plato, we have a society of "free competition," that is, a capitalist liberal democracy. Moreover, Bernays suggests that in consenting to a capitalist democracy, we have consented (at least implicitly) to rule by the wise public relations counsel. The public relations counsel, as a member of the "intelligent minority," both administers the leaders and "regiment[s] and guide[s] the masses" (Bernays, 2005: 127). As such, those we think of as leaders—including the President, members of Congress, governors, chairs of corporations and union presidents—are in fact led by others. They are led by "persons whose names are known to a few" and yet "control the destinies of millions" (2005: 61).

Indeed, this is the primary difference between Plato's philosopher-king and Bernays' public relations counsel: the rule of the former can be visible as they govern an undemocratic society, while the rule of the latter must be *invisible* as they govern a democratic society. Bernays gives the example of the leaders of the fashion industry:

> In some departments of our daily life, in which we imagine ourselves free agents, we are ruled by dictators exercising great power. A man buying a suit of clothes imagines that he is choosing, according to his taste and his personality, the kind of garment which he prefers. In reality, he may be obeying the orders of any anonymous gentleman tailor in London. This personage is the silent partner in a modest tailoring establishment, which is patronized by gentlemen of fashion and princes of blood. He suggests to British noblemen and others a blue cloth instead of gray, two buttons instead of three, or sleeves a quarter of an inch narrower than last season. The distinguished customer approves the idea (2005: 61–62).

Of course, in contemporary globalized capitalism, the "anonymous gentleman tailor" discussed by Bernays is likely working for a large multinational corporation. He (and less often she) no longer rules the fashion tastes of the British and American bourgeoisie. Rather, he rules the fashion tastes of those in the Global North who purchase the garments, as well as the working conditions of those in the Global South who produce the garments. Yet if anything, the role of the contemporary multinational corporation only confirms Bernays' understanding of invisible rulers in (ostensibly) democratic societies. For Bernays, the invisible rule of the public relations counsel allows for maintaining the *appearance* of democracy while avoiding the chaos of real democracy (Bernays, 2005: 38, 61).

Both the philosopher-king and the public relations counsel work to guide and temper the excesses of various groups in society. Plato believes in rule by philosopher-king in large part because they are a force for moderation. He defines moderation as "order," "harmony," and a "mastery of certain kinds of pleasures and desires" (1992: 430e, 431e). Rule by those who are not philosopher-kings can only result in excess. For example, rule by honour-lovers (timocracy) encourages war-mongering, rule by the masses (democracy) encourages people to be weak-willed and give into pleasure, and

rule by money-lovers (oligarchy) encourages people to "neglect everything except making money" (Plato, 1992: 549a–549b, 551a, 561c–561d, 556c). Similarly, Bernays believes in rule by public relations counsel because they can temper not only democracy but also unfettered capitalism. In guiding elected "leaders," the democratic masses, and unelected "business leaders," the public relations counsel is a force for moderation. On the latter question, Bernays is quite critical of American capitalism in the 1865–1900 period, of which he complains, "capitalism was aggressive and overindividualistic," and "exploitation of people and things was a keynote of the era" (1952: 51).

Bernays repeatedly discussed ethics in his writings, and he considered it important to temper both war-mongering and the excesses of capitalism. From early in his career, Bernays was well aware of the fact that public relations "can be used constructively or abused." He argued that it was no different from any other profession, as there are both "honest lawyers and shyster lawyers" and because the law can be used "to bring justice or […] to abuse the principles of justice on which the society rests" (Bernays cited in Tye, 1998: 89). He repeatedly states that the public relations counsel should refuse clients whom he believes to be dishonest, selling a fraudulent product, or promoting causes that are "antisocial" (Bernays, 2005: 69–70, 88–89, 122; 1952: 6). Later in his career, as he witnessed American presidents such as Nixon and Johnson use public relations strategies he developed to manage their problems (for example, in the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War), Bernays further distanced himself from those who use deception for evil instead of good (Tye, 1998: 88–89). For Bernays, aggressive capitalism lacks moderation because it lacks ethics. The ethical public relations counsel

is only interested in “socially constructive action” and “worthwhile social objectives” that are not “antisocial” (Bernays, 1947: 113, 116). Thus only the wise philosopher-king (or public relations counsel) can temper the honour-lovers (elected representatives), the money-lovers (business leaders) and the passion-lovers (democratic masses) in society. Indeed, it is because Bernays’ conservatism tempers his capitalism that I have characterized his political theory as “capitalism under conservatism” rather than the reverse.

The final point of comparison between Plato and Bernays is that they both advocate deceiving the masses and believe this deception to be ethical insofar as it helps to maintain order. Plato famously argues for telling the populace “noble falsehoods” as a way of maintaining a just society; which for him means an orderly, hierarchical society where everyone fulfills their proper role (1992: 414a–415e, 433a–e). In his words, “rulers will have to make considerable use of falsehood and deception for the benefit of those they rule” (Plato, 1992: 459c). Similarly, Bernays literally wrote the book on propaganda, in which he argues that deceiving and manipulating the masses through propaganda is crucial to preserving social stability. He delineates ways in which the manipulated will act as desired without knowing they are being manipulated (Olasky, 1985: 21). In his words, “intelligent men must realize that propaganda is the modern instrument by which they can fight for productive ends and help to *bring order out of chaos*” (Bernays, 2005: 168, my emphasis).

Unsurprisingly (given his tendency for self-promotion), Bernays understands public relations to be one of the oldest and most morally demanding professions.

Indeed, in his 1952 book *Public Relations*, Bernays situates the *origins* of public relations in ancient Greece and Rome and traces its use (in a cursory manner) through the European Dark Ages to the United States in the 1950s. He contends "the three main elements of public relations are practically as old as society." These elements are "informing people, persuading people, [and] integrating people with people" (Bernays, 1952: 12). Given the role of the public relations counsel to inform, persuade, and integrate, Bernays aligns himself with literary figures and political theorists such as Dante, Machiavelli, Shakespeare, Milton, Rousseau, Bentham, and Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of the anti-slavery book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) (Bernays, 1952: 18, 20, 22, 41). The glorious history of public relations, according to Bernays, is also evident in the abolitionist cause. He contends that "although the abolitionists were a minority, their public relations was so effective that many politicians were forced to modify their position on the slavery question" (Bernays, 1952: 42). In sum, for Bernays public relations is an ancient and morally demanding profession that replaces the kings of the past (Tye, 1998: 97) and mobilizes deception for the greater good.

This section has read the writings of Edward Bernays from the 1920s to 1950s as a political theory of capitalism under conservatism. If transposed to a modern capitalist society, Bernays' ideal public relations counsel would act very similarly to Plato's philosopher-king, manipulating the masses to preserve stability. Despite my comparison of Plato and Bernays, Bernays' conservatism was more likely influenced by his uncle Freud than Plato (Justman, 1994: 475; Ewen, 1996: 159; Tye, 1998: 97). The next section will connect Bernays' political thought to that of his uncle. Later in this chapter, I discuss

Bernays' application of theory to practice, that is, his commodity feminist campaigns of the 1910s and 1920s.

3.4 Uncle Freud and Bernays

As previously established,[105] Bernays was very proud of his familial and personal relationship with Freud and spent decades promoting his uncle's work. As such, it is not surprising that Bernays repeatedly references his uncle in his own writings on public relations and meticulously documents seemingly every encounter with Freud (both written correspondence and personal visits) in his 1965 memoirs.[106] Yet despite these frequent references, Bernays never engages with the work of Freud with any degree of depth. I will argue that despite Freud's obvious influence on his nephew's thought, Bernays' thought is best characterized as a form of crass Freudianism. Bernays' thought is crass in two senses. First is the sense suggested by the term *crass commercialism*. Indeed, as mentioned previously,[107] Bernays made a great deal of money marketing Freud's image and writings to the American masses. The second (and primary) use of the term crass in this section is in the sense of superficiality. This section will examine the writings of Freud with the most relevance to Bernays' work: *Totem and Taboo* (1912), *Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the 'I'* (1921), *The Future of An Illusion* (1927), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). In these texts, Freud applies his work on individual psychology to different social and

[105] See section 3.1.
[106] In his memoirs, Bernays refers to Freud on several occasions as "Uncle Siggy."
[107] See section 3.1.

political groups.[108] In examining how Freud's relationship between individual and group psychological processes inform his conservative fear of the masses and democracy, this section will focus on his understanding of the *Oedipus complex*. The importance of the Oedipus complex goes beyond individual and group psychology; indeed, it is the central complex around which Freudian theory revolves (Stanton, 1992: 290; Freud, 2003b: 127; 2004a: 142). In Freud's words: "the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex" (1989c: 194).

Freud uses several concepts from individual psychology in his discussion of different social groups.[109] For Freud, "the antithesis between individual and social or mass psychology, which at first glance may seem very important, loses a great deal of its sharpness on close examination" (Freud, 2004b: 17). Moreover, the cultural development of the group and the cultural development of the individual are "always interlocked" (Freud, 1961: 107). Of all the concepts from individual psychology that Freud applies to group psychology, he returns most often to, and places the greatest deal of emphasis upon, the Oedipus complex.

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[108] Indeed, these texts might be characterized as Freud's social and political thought. Although Freud claimed to be a medical scientist, since his youth he had aspired to be a social theorist. As such, Kaye has suggested that Freud's work on human organization should not be understood as "applied psychoanalysis"—for example, applying psychoanalysis to the development of Judaism in *Moses and Monotheism*—but rather as a set of "explorations of those cultural problems that dominated his intellectual life" (2003: 380). Until the late 1960s, Freud was treated as a social theorist in sociology and other social science disciplines, but this approach to his work has fallen out of favour (Kaye, 1991: 81–89). Yet Freud himself believed that psychoanalysis could make its greatest contribution not to the treatment of individual neuroses but to social theory (Parisi, 1999: 16; Kaye, 2003: 377).

[109] These concepts include the Eros (or the life/love/sex drive), the death instinct, the super-ego, libido, narcissism, and the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1961: 75–82, 104, 106–107; 2004: 41–43, 84–85).

3.4.1 Freud on the Oedipus Complex

Originally, Freud developed the Oedipus complex—invoking the plot of Sophocles' ancient Greek play *Oedipus Rex*[110]—in order to apply it to individual psychology. In the play, Oedipus is destined from birth to kill his father and marry his mother. He eventually does both and becomes the King of Thebes. However, because Oedipus was raised by a couple who were *not* his biological parents, he does not realize until many years later that he has attained his destiny: in short, a man he killed at the side of a road long ago was his father, and the woman to whom he is married is his mother (Stanton, 1992: 291). For Freud, the fact that Oedipus killed his father and slept with his mother[111] without *consciously* realizing it is important because it represents the repressed and unconscious desires of everyone (Mitchell, 1974: 63; Freud, 1990a: 56; 1990b: 367). In a letter to his friend Dr. Wilhelm Fleiss, Freud suggests that

> we can understand the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex* […] [because] the Greek legend seizes upon a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he senses its existence within himself. Everyone in the audience was once a budding Oedipus in fantasy and each recoils in horror from the dream fulfillment here transplanted into reality, with the full quality of repression which separates his infantile state from his present one (Freud, 1990a: 56).

This 1897 letter represents the first known mention of Oedipus by Freud. In suggesting that everyone "was once a budding Oedipus," and in separating a person's infantile state from their adult state, Freud is anticipating his later work on the role of the Oedipus complex in child psychosexual development. Although he speaks here of the universality of these Oedipal fantasies, Freud uses male pronouns throughout. This

[110] Today Sophocles' play is commonly known by its Latin title *Oedipus Rex*, which translates into English as *Oedipus the King*.

[111] Oedipus clearly had sex with his mother, as she had given birth to his two daughters (also his half-sisters).

reflects not only Freud's masculinism,[112] but also his uncertainty concerning the relationship (if any) of girls and women to the Oedipus complex.[113] It is ultimately the *male* experience of the Oedipus complex that Freud applies to group psychology.

3.4.2 Freud on the Primordial Parricide

Although Freud gives the Oedipus complex primary importance in *both* individual[114] and group psychology, the Oedipus complex of individual (male) psychology differs somewhat from that of group psychology. The most important difference is that in individual psychology there is repressed *desire* to kill the father; in group psychology, an

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[112] The Oedipus complex, like Freud's work on child psychosexual development more broadly, has been subject to much critique from feminists for a variety of reasons. The most obvious reason is Freud's gendered division of labour and heteronormativity. The Oedipus complex presupposes that *all* children have one father and one mother, with the mother as the primary caregiver, and the father sexually dominating the mother. Indeed, it is the father's sexual domination of the mother that brings about the child's desire to kill the father (Stanton, 1992: 291; Freud, 2003a: 122). Furthermore, in both the Oedipus complex and his broader work on child psychosexual development, Freud equates activity with masculinity and passivity with femininity (Young-Bruehl, 1990: 19–22, 41). Finally, although Freud allows for a wide range of sexual expression outside of heterosexual reproduction in his work, he ultimately contends that various sexual desires and practices *not* associated with reproduction (including lesbian desire, clitoral orgasms, and anal sex) are immature and suggest abnormal psychosexual development (Hardy, 2011: 108–109; Seidman, 2011: 4–5). It is important to note, however, that many feminists have understood feminist potential in Freud's work. For example, in the pre-Oedipal phase, boys and girls are essentially the same and both are bisexual (Young-Bruehl, 1990: 20–21; Freud, 2003b: 122–125). This was a shocking idea for Freud's contemporaries, in part because it opened up the idea that rigid gender roles and heterosexuality are neither "normal" nor "natural" (Mitchell, 1974: 17–23; Kurzweil, 1995: 13–14). Indeed, psychoanalytic feminists have re-told the Oedipal tale to emphasize the ways in which gender identity and the family are socially constructed, and to develop a critique of masculinity (Brod, 1992: 237). Overall, feminists generally agree that Freud's work is highly gendered and heteronormative. The debates tend to concern whether his work is *proscriptive* or *descriptive*, or in Juliet Mitchell's words, whether his work is "a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, [or] an analysis *of* one" (Mitchell, 1974: xv; Bowlby, 1999: 138). The question concerning Freud's feminist potential, or lack thereof, remains a matter of considerable debate.

[113] Freud's uncertainty concerning how, and to what extent, the Oedipus complex applies to girls and women lasts for decades. In 1912, he characterized it as the "typical attitude of a male child towards his parents" (Freud, 1989: 160). By the 1930s, Freud comes to understand the Oedipus complex as a specific phase of development (between approximately three and five years of age) for *both* boys and girls (Stanton, 1992: 290–291). In his final book, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (unfinished at the time of his death in 1939), Freud outlined how girls enter into, pass through, and leave the Oedipal phase in a manner entirely different from boys (Freud, 1990b: 368–369).

[114] At the individual level, the Oedipus complex is more than a phase of development; it is the "nucleus of all neuroses" (Freud, 1989: 194–195).

actual primordial murder of the father is carried out, not by an individual son, but by a murderous band of brothers. Originally appearing in *Totem and Taboo*, this parricide appears in all of Freud's work on group psychology and is ultimately given primary importance in his social and political thought as a whole. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud proposes that "in the beginning was the Deed" (1989c: 200). The *Deed*, which marks the beginning of *civilization*, involves a band of brothers killing and eating their father. After the murder and feast, the collective guilt of the brothers becomes the sense of guilt that every person in civilization attaches to the father or father-substitute (Freud, 1961: 93; 1989c: 187; 2001: 81–83; 2004a: 128–130). Freud outlines several examples of the primordial Deed in religion.

Examples of the Deed can be found in *totemic* or *tribal* religions, Judaism,[115] Christianity, and Islam. Indeed, for Freud the very origin of religion is "the will of the father" (2001: 122). Moreover, "religious phenomenon are only to be understood […] as the long since forgotten, important events in the primeval history of the human family" (Freud, 2001: 58). For Freud, the father(-substitute) in totemic religions is an animal spirit. The father/animal is killed and eaten once a year in a ritual sacrifice (Freud, 1989c: 5, 40–41, 62–65, 85–89, 94–97, 116, 194–195; 2001: 131; 2004a: 129). In Judaism, the father was Moses. In a controversial hypothesis, Freud claims that Moses was not Hebrew but an aristocratic Egyptian—"a prince, perhaps, or a priest or high official"—who adhered to the monotheistic religion of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten

[115] Totemic religions and Judaism each have a whole book devoted to them: *Totem and Taboo* for the former, and *Moses and Monotheism* for the latter. However, both religious traditions appear elsewhere in Freud's social and political writings.

(Freud, 2001: 18). Moses was killed in the forest by a band of rebels, who later felt so guilty about the murder of their father-substitute that they founded Judaism (Freud, 2001: 36–37, 47–50, 69, 89–90, 93–94, 101, 135).[116] In Christianity, the killing of the father becomes the killing of Jesus Christ.[117] It is the collective guilt about the death of the father (as Christians believe that Jesus died for the sins of humanity) that becomes the guilt that characterizes Christians as a social group (Freud, 1961: 106–107; 2001: 101, 135–136). In addition, Freud reads the Christian practice of communion—that is, consuming the blood (in the form of red wine) and body (in the form of bread) of Jesus—as a reenactment of the primordial cannibalistic feast upon the body of the father (2001: 84, 131). Freud also offers far more abbreviated discussions of other religions including Islam (which he suggests is an "abbreviated repetition" and "imitation" of the Jewish Oedipal scene) and the ill-defined "rationalistic religions of the East" (which are "in their core ancestor-worship") (2001: 92–93). Beyond religion, there are several other social and political groups in which elements of the (individual male) Oedipus complex can be located.[118]

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[116] It is important to note that two of Freud's central claims with respect to Judaism—that Moses was an Egyptian and that he was murdered—are not generally accepted by scholars of Jewish theology and history (Paul, 1996: 9–10). In an early review of *Moses and Monotheism*, M. R. Cohen contends that Freud's evidence for suggesting Moses was Egyptian is "questionable" and "does not deserve serious attention;" similarly, Freud's evidence for the murder of Moses is "entirely baseless" (Cohen, 1939: 473). It has been suggested that Freud freely appeals to the Hebrew Bible when it suits him and dismisses it as a distortion when it contradicts his arguments (Cohen, 1939: 471; Bernstein, 1998: 14). R. Z. Friedman goes further than that and suggests that what Freud is doing is entirely recasting "Judaism as a Mosaic religion purged of traditional theological elements and built around an Oedipal explanation of Moses" (1998: 148).

[117] Although Christians believe that Jesus is the son (of God), not the father (God), Freud argues that Christianity "has not escaped the fate of having to get rid of the father" (2001: 136). Indeed, "having arose out of a father-religion, [Christianity] became a son-religion" (Freud, 2001: 136).

[118] Over and over again, history—or rather, Freud's version of history—is full of brothers (or brother substitutes) murdering their father (or father-substitute). See the concluding chapter of this dissertation

All of these murders are reenactments of the original primordial parricide that supposedly ushered in civilization. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud draws out the similarities "between the processes of civilization and the libidinal development of the individual" (Freud, 1961: 51). He contends that both civilization and individuals require a "sublimation of instinct": just as the child must pass through the Oedipal phase to emerge as a well-adjusted, stable subject, society must pass through the parricidal stage to be orderly and stable (1961: 51–52). Parricide, therefore, is a basic human instinct: it is a compulsion that must be resisted by both individuals and social groups. Parricidal instincts relate to other aggressive instincts and sexual impulses held by both individuals and civilization as a whole (1961: 61–69). For Freud, people

> are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him. *Homo homini lupus* (1961: 68–69).

The Latin conclusion here translates as "man is a wolf to man" and is derived from the ancient Roman playwright Plautus. Due to this constant desire to kill, to sexually assault, to humiliate, and to torture, Freud contends that it is absolutely "impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct" (Freud, 1961: 51).

For Freud, the political implications of *homo homini lupus* centre around the following question: "what means does civilization employ in order to inhibit the aggressiveness which opposes it, to make it harmless, to get rid of it, perhaps?" (1961:

(section A) for more on Freud's (mis)use of history in his recasting of the Oedipal narrative as an "origin story."

83). The answer for Freud is a complex relationship between love and authority: love is constituted on the basis of authority, and love is also both the *instrument* and *effect* of authority (Freud, 1961: 88–96; 2004b: 41–43; Brunner, 1995: 173). This relationship between love and authority is explored more concretely by Freud in *Mass Psychology* through various social and political groups, including the military and the Catholic Church. Freud notes that people are not generally asked if they want to join these groups, and they are discouraged from, or even severely punished, for leaving; however, this does not explain why these groups operate effectively (Freud, 2004b: 45–46). Freud contends that both the military and the Catholic Church are held together by the *illusion* that a supreme leader (or father-substitute) exists—Jesus Christ in the case of Catholicism and the commander in the case of the military—and that the father loves each of his believers/soldiers equally (Freud, 2004b: 46). Each individual has libidinal ties to the father and to the rest of the individuals/brothers in the group. By using the military and Catholic Church as examples, Freud intends to demonstrate the critical importance of the father-substitute/leader to group (or mass) psychology (2004b: 47). Thus in order to sublimate our aggressive, violent, wolf-like instincts, all states and nations require a strong and authoritative father-substitute as leader.[119]

[119] To return to the individual/group psychology comparison: Freud contends that just as families need a wise father figure to rule and the rest of the family to obey, large-scale social formations require this form of organization as well (Brunner, 1995: 186).

3.4.3 Freud's Conservatism

Freud's belief in the necessity of an authoritative father—a leader who is both loved and feared[120]—relates to his elitism and dislike of democracy. Elitism underpins Freud's social and political thought to such an extent that Paul Roazen suggests that Moses "had to be an Egyptian *nobleman* if Freud's [elitist] fantasies were to be retained" (1999: 245–246). Clearly Freud shares his elitism and suspicion of democracy with Bernays.[121] Like Bernays, Freud understands democracy to be at odds with cultural progress in that it gives too much power to the democratic masses who are gullible, naïve, and out of touch with reality (Freud, 2001: 55). In addition, Freud suggests the masses are "lethargic and unreasonable, they are averse to renouncing their drives, they cannot be persuaded by arguments that this is unavoidable, and individuals within masses reinforce one another in giving free rein to their lack of restraint" (2004a: 112). At the same time, Freud's reasoning is different from his nephew's insofar as he understands democracy to open up the possibility of another parricide, with social chaos as the inevitable result (Freud, 1961: 69, 74).

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[120] José Brunner critiques Freud's "obtuseness to the dangers of paternal authority" and finds it "astonishing" that developments in Europe in no way suggested to Freud the dangers existing in all authoritarian regimes (1995: 170, 166). Indeed, although Freud criticizes fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union, he never makes any critique of authoritarianism as such (Johnston, 1965: 49–50; Brunner, 1995: 166).

[121] Indeed, in his reading of Freud through political theory, José Brunner describes Freud's politics in similar terms to how I have described those of Bernays: "Freud's outlook was not only authoritarian, it was also elitist. He never believed it was possible to achieve a working social order without the submission of the majority under the command of a minority. He always drew a clear distinction between 'the masses,' whom he thought to be driven by the impulses and passions of their bodies, and a minority of people, who organized their lives according to the reality principle and accepted the demands which social necessities imposed on them" (1995: 166). Moreover, in similar manner to his nephew (and Plato), Brunner describes Freud's understanding that "only those who exercise self-mastery are entitled to govern society" (Brunner, 1995: 166).

3.4.4 Bernays as Crass Freudian

The most important difference between Freud and Bernays is that Bernays' engagement with psychology is crass: while Freud spends several books *applying* his work on individual psychology to group psychology, Bernays does little more than repeatedly suggest that group psychology *ought* to be applied to business. There are two possible exceptions. First, in *Propaganda*, Bernays contends that the business world has been operating for too long under a mistaken belief in the *economic man* of liberal political economy. This man, who desires commodities for straightforward and rational reasons, is far too simplistic. Instead, we should understand

> many of man's thoughts and actions [as] compensatory substitutes for desires which they have been obliged to suppress. A thing may be desired not for its intrinsic worth or usefulness, but because he has unconsciously come to see in it a symbol of something else, the desire for which he is ashamed to admit to himself (2005: 75).

Bernays is presumably using *man* here to refer to people, as he contends substitution and symbolism are also important in marketing fashion to women (2005: 43, 61). Second, in *Public Relations*, Bernays suggests that Freud can help us understand the "hidden markets in the human personality," because "we all have hidden urges to which we respond […] which play a part in our desire to buy" (1952: 218, 217). He even briefly discusses these urges with reference to Freud's work on the id, ego, and superego and suggests that his readers look at Freud's *New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis* (1952: 249–250).

Yet these two exceptions are by no means an in-depth engagement with his uncle's work. In the second exception, Bernays does not actually examine any of the

arguments or themes in *New Introductory Lectures*, he simply defines the terms id, ego, and superego. As such, Bernays' mention of *New Introductory Lectures* reads more like an attempt to give scholarly justification to his own work while simultaneously promoting Freud's work (something he had been doing professionally already). Given this, Bernays had to possess *some* basic understanding of Freud's work on individual and group psychology; indeed, this might explain the similarity between Bernays' politics of capitalism under conservatism and Freud's elitist, anti-democratic politics. Yet Bernays' references to Freud involve little more than platitudes combined with boasting about his personal relationship with an important thinker. If Bernays were interested in rigorously applying Freud's work on group psychology to mass marketing, it would have been impossible to ignore the Oedipus complex or the primordial parricide I have outlined in this section. Given the centrality of the Oedipus complex to Freud's social and political thought—and indeed, to Freudian theory as a whole—it is revealing that Bernays never once mentions it in any of his published work.

3.4.5 Bernays and Psychology

Bernays was not doing anything particularly original or innovative, not only as a crass Freudian, but in another important respect as well. Bernays' view that psychology ought to be used in marketing was not at all unique: beginning in the late nineteenth century and accelerating in the early twentieth, marketing techniques in Anglo-America were undergoing change and the marketing industry as a whole expanded greatly (Strasser, 1982: 242–243; 2009: 27; Ewen and Ewen, 1992; 35–38; Sivulka, 2009: 84–96; O'Reilly, 2011). Central to this change and expansion was the increasing use of psychology (Ewen,

1976: 33–37; Marchand, 1985: 7–13, 235–236; Bowlby, 1993: 96; Sivulka, 2009: 41, 86–96). In his oft-cited social history of Anglo-American consumer culture, Stuart Ewen argues that

> to create consumers efficiently the advertising industry had to develop universal notions of what makes people respond, going beyond the "horse sense" psychology that had characterized the earlier industry. Such general conceptions of human instinct promised to provide ways of reaching a mass audience via a universal appeal. *Considering the task of having to build a mass industry to attend to the needs of mass production, the ad men welcomed the work of psychologists* in the articulation of these general conceptions (1976: 33–34; emphasis mine).

To expand upon Ewen's comments, prior to the late nineteenth century, the "horse sense" (or common sense) approach to selling commodities was used. There was some print advertising,[122] largely within local communities, and these ads tended to employ messages of utility and practicality[123] (Ewen, 1976: 80; Strasser, 1982: 251–253; O'Reilly, 2011). However, marketing as an industry[124] did not yet exist (Strasser, 1982: 251–252; Breazeale, 1994: 2; Sivulka, 2009: 37; O'Reilly, 2011). A large and sophisticated marketing industry, complete with psychological appeals to consume, was brought about by the development of mass production and the need for mass consumption. As such, it is not surprising that in the first four decades of the twentieth century—more or

[122] Until the mid-nineteenth century in Anglo-America, advertising was primarily undertaken by peddlers (or travelling salespeople) in advance of their arrival to a community and found within general stores (Strasser, 1982: 244; Ewen and Ewen, 1992: 37–38, 40–41). Later in the nineteenth century, advertising went beyond the local community through mail-order merchandising and department stores (Ewen and Ewen, 1992: 37–44).

[123] Ewen cites a fifty-year retrospective (1888–1938) in a 1938 edition of *Printers' Ink* magazine that overviewed changes to advertising: "The first advertising told the name of the product. In the second stage, the specifications of the product were outlined. Then came emphasis upon the uses of the product. With each step the advertisement moved farther away from the factory viewpoint and edged itself closer into the mental processes of the consumer" (*Printers' Ink* cited in Ewen, 1976: 80).

[124] Today advertising is generally understood to be one (among many) forms of marketing communications. Marketing encompasses everything from market research to packaging to brand mentions in the media (Fletcher, 2010: 1; Richards and Curran, 2002).

less contemporaneous with Bernays' various work—there was a tremendous output of publications on the psychology of marketing. These included scholarly and popular texts directed at a variety of audiences from door-to-door sales people and department store assistants to corporate marketing firms and business scholars (Bowlby, 1993: 94–97).

Despite Bernays' crass Freudianism and unoriginal argument for the use of psychology in marketing, Bernays' work was highly original and innovative in an important respect: namely, the application of his political theory (of capitalism under conservatism) for marketing to women. In the next section, I examine Bernays' early commodity feminist public relations campaigns of the 1910s and 1920s, particularly his most famous, the *Torches of Freedom*.

3.5 Happy Homemakers and Torches of Freedom

In order to demonstrate the originality and innovation of Bernays' marketing to women, some historical context is required. In 1929, the same year as the *Torches of Freedom* campaign, an oft-cited advertisement in *Printers' Ink* suggested: "the proper study of mankind is *man* […] but the proper study of markets is *woman*" (Emerson B. Knight, Inc., 1929: 133). *Printers' Ink*, the leading trade publication for marketing at the time,[125] was not the only magazine linking women to consumption. That same year *Ladies' Home Journal*, which had the largest circulation of any American periodical (Hunter, 1990: 586), suggested that 80 to 85 percent of the forty billion dollars in annual retail spending in the United States was done by women (Sivulka, 2009: 96). In fact, most marketing trade journals in the 1920s and 1930s attributed around 85 percent of all consumer

[125] *Printers' Ink* later became *Advertising Age* (Strasser, 1982: 244).

spending to women; and few estimated below 80 percent (Ewen, 1976: 167; Marchand, 1985: 66). The originality and innovation of Edward Bernays was not that he marketed *to* women, but *how* he marketed to women. Breazeale notes that there was "widespread acceptance of not only the avalanche of statistics but also the mythology that accompanied it" (1994: 4). This mythology concerned an idealized white, heteronormative, middle-class family. In this family, the benevolent husband earned a *family wage* to support his wife and children; his perky wife was a *happy homemaker* who transformed her husband's earnings into a clean, tastefully decorated home with state-of-the-art appliances (Ewen, 1976: 151–176; Strasser, 1982: 245–249; O'Reilly, 2011; Warlaumont, 2001: 205; Sivulka, 2009: 42). This section begins by examining traditional approaches to marketing to Anglo-American women (including the *happy homemaker* archetype) in order to highlight Bernays' unique commodity feminist approach.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, the *happy homemaker* was used so extensively in marketing to women that it became the predominant image of femininity in Anglo-America. In 1928, *Ladies' Home Journal* contended that housewives no longer required spinning and weaving skills, but rather that "an entirely different task presents itself, more difficult and complex, requiring an infinitely wider range of ability, and for these very reasons more interesting and inspiring" (editorial cited in Strasser, 1982: 250). What was supposedly "more interesting and inspiring" was the new world of consuming commodities. Household consumption was not only framed by marketers as women's work, but as a form of work involving scientific management and advanced

administrative skills: for example, developing budgets, keeping purchasing records, and undergoing extensive research on various consumer products were all required to run efficient households (Ewen, 1976: 163–164, 168–170; Strasser, 1982: 246–249; Marchand, 1985: 167–171; Rutherford, 2003: 33; Sivulka, 2009: 42). Advertising copywriters frequently described the housewife as the family *G.P.A.* or *General Purchasing Agent* (Marchand, 1985: 168). Popular women's magazines "unified the tasks of motherhood and consumption" (Ewen, 1976: 172–173). For all of these reasons, O'Reilly (2011) has described the *happy homemaker* as an invention of Madison Avenue.[126]

Indeed, during this 1920s–1950s time period, several Madison Avenue marketers turned to the development of radio and television programming which venerated the *happy homemaker*. Programs that were developed by Madison Avenue marketers included several 1930s and 1940s radio soap operas and the television program *Leave It To Beaver* (1957–1963). Radio soap operas pioneered the practice of product placement; indeed, these daytime radio serials were originally dubbed *soap operas* because most were sponsored by soap companies. Their storylines repeatedly reaffirmed the importance of homemaking and urged women to consume commodities for their families and identify primarily as housewives. The television program *Leave It To Beaver* was developed by Bob Mosher and Joe Connelly, who met while working together on Madison Avenue at the J. Walter Thompson marketing agency (now known as JWT). The immensely popular show featured perhaps the most famous and iconic

[126] Madison Avenue was the street in New York City on which most of the major marketing firms were located.

happy homemaker, the character June Cleaver (O'Reilly and Tennant, 2009: 51–57; O'Reilly, 2011). June was perky and well-dressed; indeed, she almost always wore a nice dress (or blouse and skirt), pearl necklace and high-heeled shoes, even while cleaning her house. In marketing to women, unlike most of his contemporaries on Madison Avenue (and elsewhere), Bernays refused to use any image of femininity akin to the *happy homemaker*. While most marketers sold women washing machines and cake mix as the family G.P.A., Bernays sold women cigarettes as torches of (feminist) freedom from stifling domestic conformity.

The history of how the cigarette eventually became the preferred form of tobacco consumption in the United States and Canada, along with Bernays' role in its promotion, is a good illustration of early commodity feminism. Machine production of the paper cigarette was introduced in the late nineteenth century. This expansion of cigarette consumption has been attributed to both its lowered costs with mechanization[127] and aggressive public relations campaigns to overcome negative associations with cigarettes in the minds of the American public. There were at least three negative associations that limited the consumer base for cigarettes in the late nineteenth century. First, concerns about smoking-related health problems were widely publicized by the anti-cigarette movement.[128] Second, the original consumers of machine-made cigarettes were recent immigrants from southern and eastern Europe,

[127] For example, in her history of cigarettes in America entitled *Cigarette Wars: The Triumph of "The Little White Slaver,"* Cassandra Tate notes the price of ten cigarettes was the same as the price of one cigar in the 1890s (1999: 18).

[128] An important group in the movement was The Anti-Cigarette League of America, which in 1901 had chapters throughout the United States and Canada, and claimed a membership of 300 000. By the 1920s the movement had started to decline, although the League itself survived into the 1930s (Tate, 1999: 39, 132–3).

where cigarette smoking was already common (Tate, 1999: 18). As such, cigarettes had to be disassociated from immigrants to make smoking palatable to the larger (racist and xenophobic) American population. Third, even after cigarette smoking for English-speaking white middle-class men became socially acceptable, there remained powerful negative associations with white middle-class women smoking.

Following from the third negative association, cigarettes served as a moral marker separating the men of white middle-class America from the women. This morality was in many ways created and sustained by the law, medicine, advertising, and the media (Tate, 1999: 8, 23). Women who smoked could face legal penalties in parts of the United States, often because of concerns about their roles as mothers. For example, Tate notes that in 1904, a woman in New York was sentenced to thirty days in jail for smoking in front of her children (1999: 5). Smoking was seen by some members of the medical profession to be more harmful to women than men, for reasons that it compounded women's supposed higher degree of emotional instability (Tate, 1999: 114). Advertising campaigns from the 1880s to the 1920s targeted men and rarely suggested women smoke. Prior to Bernays, only a small number of advertisements suggested that women smoke cigarettes. Yet such advertisements were still directed at men: it was suggested that women smoke using misogynist reasoning. For example, an early 1880s poster produced by the Duke family tobacco company entitled "My Mother-in-Law" implied that smoking could improve a woman's disposition (Tate, 1999: 105). Despite addressing advertising campaigns to men, women's images were commonly used in promoting tobacco, such as in the popular trading cards that doubled as package

stiffeners (Tate, 1999: 105). The eugenics movement also worked to associate women smoking with immorality. There were concerns expressed in medical journals, the media, and even the tobacco trade press that (white) women who smoked contributed to the supposed problem of "race degeneracy." The linkage of women smoking to "race degeneracy" was first made in the 1880s and reached its height in the 1920s (Tate, 1999: 115).

In making cigarettes palatable to white middle-class women, Bernays had to overcome not only health-related concerns, but also masculinist and racist[129] associations with women who smoked. In 1928 he started working for George Washington Hill, the head of the American Tobacco Company. The Company produced Lucky Strikes, a fast-growing brand of cigarettes. The share of cigarettes consumed by women had more than doubled from 1923 to 1929 (Tye, 1998: 23–24). This increase in consumption is usually attributed to the war having lowered social barriers that inhibited women smoking: soldiers smoked[130] and women serving abroad took up the habit, as did women filling jobs vacated by men in the factories and in tobacco retail (Tye, 1998: 24; Tate, 1999: 106–110). However, in 1929 the share of cigarettes consumed by women was still only twelve percent (Tye, 1998: 24). In an attempt to expand the share of cigarettes consumed by women, Hill asked Bernays to put together

[129] Bernays was never able to address racism directly, as Hill wished him to focus on white women. Bernays did propose aggressively courting black consumers in 1931 in a similar manner to how he courted white women; however, the American Tobacco Company declined as they did not wish to alienate their (racist) white clients (Tye, 1998: 42–43).

[130] Tate argues that soldiers smoked in large part due to the American government: the War Department issued soldiers cigarettes in their rations and subsidized their sale in the United States and abroad. The reason was that because the U.S. had entered the war under the banner of moral reform, smoking was seen to divert soldiers from worse sins such as "bad liquor and worse women." Indeed, "the American government soon became the largest single purchaser of cigarettes in the world" (Tate, 1999: 66).

a campaign that directly targeted women. From a feminist perspective, his first campaign was not much of an improvement over the days of trading cards depicting hegemonic forms of femininity for the objectifying gaze of men. Although Bernays' first campaign actually addressed women, it did so by suggesting they be concerned about their weight. The slogan, "Reach for a Lucky instead of a Sweet," sold women cigarettes as a fat-free way to curb their hunger (Tye, 1998: 24). Bernays' second campaign was not only more feminist but was also far more successful.

The campaign relied on the ostensibly *empowering* image of women marching for their rights, and linked women's rights to cigarette smoking. In 1929, the Easter Parade in New York City was set to receive a great deal of media attention. Bernays organized a group of fashionable young women, dressed in the flapper style that signified so-called *modern* femininity, to march in the parade. During the march, the women were directed to pull out and light cigarettes together in a grand flourish. Bernays told the press that the women were marching for women's rights and provided the catchphrase *Torches of Freedom* to describe their cigarettes. The campaign received a tremendous amount of coverage and established a precedent for selling women cigarettes using feminist discourse (Bernays, 1965: 386–387; Ewen, 1976: 160–161; 1996: 3–4; Tate, 1999: 105; Tye, 1998: 27–31; Curtis, 2002).

It is important to note, however, that the extent of Bernays' role in overcoming the taboo against white women smoking is controversial. In the documentary *The Century of the Self* (2002), Adam Curtis suggests Bernays' role in overcoming this taboo was substantial. In contrast, Tate argues that women were smoking in considerable

numbers *before* the cigarette industry began directing messages at them. Moreover, she contends the industry "made virtually no direct overtures to the female trade until after that trade was already so large and so widely accepted that it was safe to do so" (Tate, 1999: 105). Indeed, the twelve percent share of cigarettes consumed by women in 1929 when the *Torches of Freedom* campaign was launched—however small it seemed to Hill and Bernays—is significant. Bernays claimed that his *Torches of Freedom* campaign single-handedly popularized smoking for women (Tate, 1999: 105), although this ought to be treated with skepticism. Indeed, one of the problems with evaluating the extent of Bernays' role in any public relations campaign is Bernays himself. As mentioned previously, Bernays tended to be perpetually self-promoting: he "found it tough to turn off the rhetoric even when he was telling his own story," and therefore tended to take more credit than he actually merited (Tye, 1998: viii, 75, 253).[131] Whatever the extent of Bernays' role, it is clear that cigarette use among women greatly expanded in the 1930s.[132] Yet the extent of his role is almost beside the point. It does not take away from his importance to the origins of commodity feminism.

There were other (albeit less famous) campaigns in which Bernays was involved earlier in his career that can be described as commodity feminist. The first was his

[131] In the last chapter of his biography, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (1998), Larry Tye argues that Bernays' longest and last public relations campaign was to sell himself as a historical figure. Bernays outlived all of his contemporaries (he died in 1995 at the age of 102) and to the end of his life continued "to advance his contention that he, more than they, deserved to be called the prince of publicity" (Tye, 1998: x). Tye also contends, however, that Bernays' "actual accomplishments were so momentous that he didn't need to bend the truth" (1998: 75).

[132] The greatest expansion of the use of cigarettes was actually in the 1930s, with cigarettes eventually reaching their height in 1965 when 42 percent of American adults smoked them (Tate, 1999: 3). The expansion of cigarette use is quite remarkable when one considers that in 1880, of the total quantity of tobacco consumed in the United States, cigarettes constituted barely 1 percent. Chewing tobacco was the most popular, accounting for 58 percent, followed by tobacco for pipes and cigars at 19 percent. Even the consumption of snuff, at less than 3 percent, was higher than cigarettes (Tate, 1999: 11).

promotion of the play *Damaged Goods* in 1913. The play was controversial as it dealt with syphilis and prostitution, and attacked the prevailing standards of sexist prudery. Bernays and his business partner Fred Robinson turned the controversy into a cause, recruited backers who were public role models, and after doing so sold many tickets to the play (Tye, 1998: 6–7). The second was a 1922 media event with his new wife Doris Fleishman. Bernays handled the public relations for the Waldorf Astoria and instituted a policy whereby the press would be immediately notified about anything newsworthy that happened at the hotel. Knowing this policy was in place, after his wedding to Fleishman, Bernays persuaded her to register with him at the hotel under her maiden name. This act resulted in newspaper headlines in both the United States and Europe, and Fleishman became a symbol of women's rights. More importantly, the Waldorf Astoria gained a reputation for being modern and forward-thinking in allowing a married woman to register under her own name (Tye, 1998: 2–3). Fleishman also reiterated her status symbol for women's rights in being the first married woman in the United States to get a passport issued in her maiden name (Tye, 1998: non-paginated picture page); thus Bernays, by extension, became a symbol of the enlightened feminist husband.

From a capitalist perspective, Edward Bernays was a thinker and practitioner who was ahead of his time. Today the *Torches of Freedom* is seen as "a classic in the world of public relations" and one in which Bernays "roughed out what have become the strategies and practices of public relations in the United States" (Tye, 1993: 31; Ewen, 1996: 4). Bernays influenced the subsequent development of other (now-famous)

commodity feminist campaigns for cigarettes. For example, Lucky Strike used Amelia Earhart, a pioneer in women's aviation, to sell cigarettes (Ware, 1993: 98; Hermann, 2000: 94). Earhart is best known for being the first woman (and only second person) to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean in 1932, as well as for her mysterious disappearance somewhere over the Pacific Ocean in 1937. Earhart herself identified as a feminist and is described by feminist historian Susan Ware as a "model of women's postsuffrage achievement" (1993: 13, 202).[133] Another example of commodity feminist campaigns influenced by Bernays can be found in Virginia Slims' brand of cigarettes. The brand has been selling cigarettes with the slogan "You've Come a Long Way" (later adding "baby" to the end) since they were first marketed in 1968. Outside of cigarettes, commodity feminism remained a niche form of marketing from Bernays' early commodity feminist campaigns until the 1980s.

3.6 Conclusion

Peter Gay has noted that "we all speak Freud now, correctly or not. We casually refer to Oedipal conflicts and sibling rivalry, narcissism and Freudian slips" (1989c: ix). I began this chapter by discussing the role of Edward Bernays in popularizing his uncle Sigmund's work. Indeed, it is in large part due to Bernays' efforts that "we all speak Freud" in Anglo-America today. Similarly, in her recent book *The Aftermath of Feminism,* Angela McRobbie has suggested that "feminism has achieved the status of common

[133] Earhart used her image for financial gain in more than just cigarettes. She was married to public relations counsel George Putnam—who was not as well-known as Bernays but quite successful in his own right—and the couple used her image to promote commodities signifying modern, active femininity, including luggage and "active clothes" (Ware, 1993: 97–103).

sense" (2009: 6). Just as Anglo-Americans draw casually upon Freudian terms, they also draw casually "upon a vocabulary that includes words like 'empowerment' and 'choice' […] as a kind of substitute for feminism" (McRobbie, 2009: 1).[134] Given the tremendous influence of marketing and commodity culture, *feminism as common sense* cannot be disentangled from the ascendancy of commodity feminism today. In this intervention on the origins of commodity feminism, I have explored Bernays' writings and his early commodity feminist marketing campaigns. I have read Bernays as a political theorist and as espousing a political theory of *capitalism under conservatism*, defined as a conservative view of society in which commodity consumption is treated as a necessary form of social control. In undergoing this reading, I have compared the behaviour of Bernays' ideal public relations counsel to Plato's philosopher-king and explored the relationship between Bernays' elitist anti-democratic politics to his uncle Freud's belief in the necessity of a strong and authoritative father(-substitute). Finally, I have suggested that after Bernays, commodity feminism has developed from an unconventional approach for marketing to women in the early twentieth century to its ascendancy in the early twenty-first century.

Indeed, on the final point, most marketing to women in Anglo-America continued to rely upon heteronormative, *traditional* roles for women until the 1980s. Although the *happy homemaker* in marketing imagery started to decline in the 1960s, women continued to be marketed to primarily as men's girlfriends or potential

[134] Although McRobbie's primary focus of inquiry is feminism in popular culture (rather than commodity feminism in my understanding of the term) her point is quite relevant. She looks at a variety of popular culture sources, from the *Bridget Jones' Diary* books and film adaptations to television makeover programs. For more on feminism in popular culture—and how it differs from my understanding of commodity feminism—see the introductory chapter to this dissertation.

girlfriends, wives, and mothers (Warlaumont, 2001: 204–208, 233); in other words, women were defined in terms of their relationships to men and the family. The difference was that (beginning in the 1960s) women started to be more sexualized in ads, which was a marked departure from the seemingly asexual *happy homemaker* (O'Reilly, 2011).[135] In addition, women started to be depicted undergoing activities that would have been considered inappropriate for the virtuous *happy homemaker*: for example, women were behind the wheel in automobile ads, and drank alcohol in liquor ads (Warlaumont, 2001: 205). Yet on the whole, prior to the 1980s, women were largely represented by marketers as confined to the home, and/or as sexualized objects for the desiring male gaze.

In the 1970s, change was anticipated by many American scholars and practitioners of marketing. Studies were conducted that claimed to empirically test the *accuracy* of feminist critiques of advertising (Toland Frith and Mueller, 2010: 91). Interestingly, most studies agreed that feminist critiques were justified (Dominick and Rauch, 1972; Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976; Kovacs, 1972; Venkatesan and Losco, 1975; Venkatesh, 1980), or "at least partially justified" (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971: 95; Wagner and Banos, 1973; Brown, El-Ansary et al., 1976; Duker and Tucker, 1977). These were important studies (from a capitalist perspective) because women in the 1970s were as much the key decision-makers in purchasing many consumer products as they were in the 1920s.

[135] Indeed, the iconic *happy homemaker* June Cleaver did not sleep in the same bed as her husband Ward: they slept in separate twin beds.

What was debated was *how*—and less often *whether*—marketing practitioners should address feminist (or so-called *women's liberationist*) critiques. Opinions ranged from the idea that ignoring feminist critiques would be a serious and costly mistake (Dominick and Rauch, 1972; Kovacs, 1972; Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976), to the idea that having marketing practices influenced by feminist values would alienate the considerably larger consumer base of more so-called *traditional* women who were married to men and did not participate in the paid labour force (Lazer, Smallwood et al., 1972; Duker and Tucker, 1977). On the latter perspective, Jacob M. Duker and Lewis R. Tucker warned in 1977:

> Women's lib attitudes, especially among younger women may, after all, be an affectation or a fad or both. Marketing or advertising policies which cater to affectations or fads should do so consciously and deliberately. To alter a product image in a mistaken belief that the change to be accommodated is long term when it really is not can be costly (1977: 470).

Yet among the marketing scholars and practitioners writing in this time period, Duker and Tucker were largely exceptional. Most agreed that change was required in marketing to women; the primary debate was the *degree* of change. After all, it is the marketer's job to maintain and expand consumer bases, and this involves paying close attention to social, cultural, political, and economic changes.

Indeed, by the 1970s, it was hard to ignore not only feminist critiques of representations of women by marketers, but also significant changes to the position of women in Anglo-American societies. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, the participation of women in the paid labour force expanded greatly, brought about by second wave feminism combined with a labour shortage and economic boom in the

Global North (Newman and White, 2012: 192). In addition, Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*[136] helped to create a wide public discourse in the popular media (including books, magazines, newspapers, television and radio shows) that explored the limitations of traditional understandings of femininity and the need for women to develop "identities of their own" (Starr, 2004: 276). Marketing scholars and practitioners in the 1970s were paying attention to these social, cultural, political, and economic changes. As such, most did not share Duker and Tucker's view that feminism was merely an *affectation* put on by some women or a *fad* that would come to pass. Indeed, some of these marketing studies even engaged with then-popular feminist writings including Friedan and Germaine Greer (see Dominick and Rauch, 1972: 259; Venkatesan and Losco, 1975: 49). Of course, the underlying motivating factor in these studies was the pursuit of profit, competition, and free trade, rather than social justice (Belisle, 2003: 194).[137] In other words, these studies were less concerned with how predominant representations of women by marketers were limiting or demeaning, focusing rather on how women's *perception* of these representations as limiting or demeaning could adversely affect profit margins.

In a 1980 special issue of *Marketing News*,[138] various Anglo-American marketing scholars and practitioners outlined their predictions and recommendations for the new decade. Fabian Lindon, in his article "Demographically, 1980s Look Bright," contended

[136] See section 2.5 for an extended discussion of Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.
[137] Indeed, as Donica Belisle notes, "an unbridgeable political gulf" separates marketing scholarship from social history and cultural studies (2003: 194); indeed, I would add that this political gulf separates marketing scholarship from the critical social sciences as a whole. Moreover, the former is in many ways the antithesis of the latter (Belisle, 2003: 194).
[138] *Marketing News* was (and remains) a trade publication of the American Marketing Association (AMA). This special issue concerned retail marketing in the 1980s.

that one of the reasons the 1980s "look bright" is the "the ever-increasing number of working women" that are well-educated with a high disposable income (1980: 2). Roger D. Blackwell predicted that successful marketers of the 1980s would be "able to understand and cater to […] unique lifestyle segments," particularly the empowered working woman (1980: 3). Another article argued that marketing research in the new decade must be entirely different from the 1970s, in that it needs to accurately reflect changes in the position of women (*Marketing News*, 1980: 21, 23). This issue of *Marketing News* was part of a larger discussion among practitioners and scholars in the early 1980s on women and their changing roles, and more importantly, *how* these changing roles could be harnessed in marketing consumer products to women (see also Taylor, 1980; Young, 1980; Collins, 1981; Johnston, 1981; Luongo, 1981; Schaninger and Allen, 1981; *Business Week*, 1982; Willard, 1983). The *happy homemaker* archetype,[139] and the attendant assumption that the so-called *women's market* was "any housewife 18 to 49" (Bartos, 1977: 31), had long been abandoned. In addition, debates from the 1970s concerning *women's lib*—that is, whether and/or to what extent it should have an effect on marketing to women[140]—had ceased. The only question for 1980s marketing practitioners and scholars was how to *best* sell commodities to the (supposedly) newly empowered woman.

Commodity feminism remained a niche form of marketing from Bernays' early commodity feminist campaigns until the 1980s, during which there was a widespread adoption of commodity feminist marketing practices in Anglo-America. In the 1980s,

[139] See section 3.5.
[140] See section 3.6.

commodity feminism expanded at the same time as popular women's magazines flourished; the magazines themselves became purveyors of commodity feminism, both in editorial content and advertising (Goldman et al., 1991: 331, 337; Goldman, 1992: 130–154; McRobbie, 2009: 13–14, 34). The archetype of the *power dressing* career woman was used regularly in marketing and popular women's magazines.[141] This expansion of commodity feminism also occurred at a time in which consumption was increasingly framed as patriotic (by state discourses) and conspicuous consumption was fervently celebrated (by popular culture) (Banet-Weiser and Mukherjee, 2012: 5).[142]

In concluding this chapter (and my discussion of the *origins* of commodity feminism), it is important to note that both Bernays' political theory and public relations campaigns greatly influenced the subsequent development of commodity feminism. From the outset, the politics of commodity feminism involved liberal feminist political values combined with capitalism under conservatism: liberal political values allow

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[141] The power dresser was, or aspired to be, a business executive or other high-powered woman. Power dressing generally involved a tailored skirt or pants in a neutral colour (such as grey, black, or navy blue), a matching suit jacket with shoulder pads, discreet jewelry, and tasteful makeup (Brewis et al., 1997: 1287; Entwistle, 1997: 311). The power dresser was often depicted as a white woman wearing a business suit and running shoes, sprinting through the streets of Manhattan. She was also regularly likened to powerful female public figures such as then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Indeed, Thatcher reportedly changed her clothing style in the early 1980s after reading the British edition of John T. Molloy's 1980 dress manual, *Women: Dress for Success* (Entwistle, 1997: 311–312). According to Molloy's book, and the power dressing popular wisdom that followed, women were supposed to *dress for success* by learning the rules of, and purchasing the commodities associated with, power dressing (Entwistle, 1997: 323; Zukin and Smith Maguire, 2004: 182). As Entwistle notes, power dressing "marked the *emergence of a new kind of consumption for women*, who are traditionally associated with the 'frivolity' and aesthetics of fashion" (1997: 312; emphasis mine). In other words, power dressing can be seen as a pre-third wave feminist reclamation of feminized commodities and consumption. (See part B of the introduction and section 2.3 of this dissertation for more on the construction of women's consumption as "frivolous." See section 2.6 for a discussion of third wave feminism from the 1990s to present.) However, unlike the third wave, power dressing made no claims of inclusivity; this was clearly a form of commodity feminism exclusively for university-educated, professional career women (Entwistle, 1997: 314).

[142] Indeed, the 1980s are often referred to as the "free-spending 80s" and "the decade of consumption" (Gray, 1992). Over the course of the decade, consumption of consumer products increased substantially in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere (Attanasio and Weber, 1994).

women to *feel* like feminists through their consumption commodities, yet because this is contained within a framework of capitalism under conservatism, these commodities serve as a form of social control. Bernays recognized a century ago that passivity in both women and men is the key to social control in a large capitalist democracy. In lighting a Bernaysian torch of freedom, a woman may feel a temporary sense of liberty while at the same time find herself lulled into complacency.

CHAPTER FOUR
Commodity Feminism as Subjectivity: Cosmetics and Corporate-Sponsored Empowerment

The question of the subject was and remained a problem for Marx.
—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987: 49)

Under the auspices of corporate management, the commodity form penetrates and reshapes dimensions of social life […] to the point where subjectivity itself seemingly becomes a commodity to be bought and sold on the market.
—James Livingston (1998: 416)

4.1 Introduction

The British fashion model Lesley Hornby, popularly known by her nickname "Twiggy," first appeared in the pages of *Vogue* in 1967. At the time, her body was considered shockingly thin. Her nickname was explained by a *Vogue* writer as the result of her appearing "as though a strong gale would snap her in two and dash her to the ground" (Wolf, 1997: 184). Today models with a body type similar to Twiggy are the norm; models any larger are considered *plus-sized*. According to the fashion industry, clothes *hang better* on the very thin. Feminists have long critiqued the unrealistic representations of femininity embodied by these models and linked these representations to a wide variety of psychological and physical harm to girls and women, such as low self-esteem and eating disorders. What is often lost in these critiques is discussion of commodities and processes of commodification. Insofar as there is discussion, it usually concerns how the models themselves are objectified and fetishized as commodities. Yet as the previous chapters have made clear, the relationship between women and commodities is more complicated than this type of discussion would suggest.

Fashion models are not simply commodities in and of themselves: as the concern for the manner in which clothes *hang* would suggest, they are also clothes hangers for other commodities.[143] Women are expected to starve themselves, not only to be better commodities, but also to be better *display frames* for other commodities. When we ignore women's status as display frames, any representation of femininity that deviates from the Twiggy norm becomes understood as progressive. A good example of such a representation is the Dove Corporation's "Campaign for Real Beauty." Since 2004, Dove (a subsidiary of the Unilever Corporation) has used *real* women—that is, women with no previous modelling experience, bodies larger than the Twiggy norm, and not necessarily white—to sell Dove products. Women in the Global North are encouraged to endorse this ostensibly *progressive* campaign by purchasing the commodities displayed by other women. Yet in the Global South, Unilever is selling women the skin lightening cream Fair & Lovely. Although the Campaign for Real Beauty is not associated with Fair & Lovely, both are Unilever initiatives and the marketing of the latter uses language and strategies strikingly similar to the former. As such, the corporate-sponsored *empowerment* offered by the Unilever Corporation globally reinscribes women's status as display frames for other commodities (if not commodities themselves), suggests women understand this status as empowering, and solidifies a relationship between feminist activism and the consumption of (racialized and racist) commodities.

[143] Although it is difficult to confirm, Hornby herself likely understood her job in this manner. It has been widely reported that when asked why she was retiring from modelling at the age of twenty, Hornby responded with the statement: "You can't be a clothes hanger for your entire life!"

The previous two chapters charted how commodity feminism has gained ascendancy as a predominant form of feminism today. Additionally, they established commodity feminism as both empowering (in revaluing femininity) and disempowering (in creating docile consuming female subjects). Although it has not yet been brought to the forefront, underlying the discussion of commodity feminism as simultaneously empowering and disempowering is the question of subjectivity. This chapter moves from theorizing the origins of commodity feminism to theorizing contemporary commodity feminism, locating the ascendancy of commodity feminism in its role in subject formation. This maneuver from origins to ascendancy also involves moving from the unconventional public relations campaigns of one individual (Edward Bernays) in the early twentieth century United States to a dominant paradigm for the globalized marketing campaigns of the early twenty-first century. As the Unilever examples will demonstrate, the campaigns and political writings of Bernays continue to influence contemporary commodity feminism.

The ensuing discussion of subjectivity and cosmetics is organized into five sections. Section 4.2 examines in greater depth the marketing of the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty and Fair & Lovely of the Unilever Corporation for its so-called empowerment of women in the Global North and South respectively. The next two sections concern Marx's conception of subjectivity. Section 4.3 discusses Marx's use of the term species-being, as it tends to be understood as his theory of subjectivity. Finding that it is overly essentialist, I argue for a different Marxist conception of subjectivity. Section 4.4 examines two articles published in the 1980s, Gayatri Spivak's "Scattered

Speculations on the Question of Value" (1985) and Jack Amariglio and Antonio Callari's "Marxian Value Theory and the Problem of the Subject: The Role of Commodity Fetishism" (1989), both of which establish a relationship between subjectivity and value. Yet it is only the latter piece which has been taken up by what Swanson refers to as "anti-essentialist" Marxist theorists (2005: 87), primarily in the pages of the journals *Rethinking Marxism* and *Historical Materialism*. I critique this body of literature for ignoring Spivak's original contribution, and as such, treating subjectivity in abstraction from gender and race. I read commodity fetishism as a particular white male subjectivity typical of capitalist social formations. Through these sections, I rethink Livingston's argument (from the quote cited in the epitaph to this chapter) that subjectivity *seems* to become a commodity sold by corporations. Section 4.5 returns to Spivak to contend that if commodity *fetishism* constitutes particular forms of white masculine subjectivity then commodity *feminism* constitutes particular forms of feminine/feminist subjectivities located in both the Global North and South. This argument is made by further exploring the operation of the Campaign for Real Beauty and Fair & Lovely. The overarching argument of this chapter, therefore, takes Livingston one step further: in selling a feminine subjectivity through feminized and racialized commodities, corporations themselves play a crucial role in subject formation. Commodity feminism in the contemporary context will be read as constituting several prevalent forms of female subjectivity, which are racialized in various ways.

4.2 The Unilever Corporation in the Global North and South

In order to put forth the argument of this chapter, it is important to first describe my reasons for choosing Unilever as my example of contemporary commodity feminism, overview both the Campaign for Real Beauty and Fair & Lovely, as well as the contradictory messages between the two campaigns. This section sets up the subsequent discussion of the role of corporate-sponsored commodity feminism in the formation of subjectivity (using Marx, Spivak, and the anti-essentialist Marxists[144]). In addition to an overview of the various aspects of the two Unilever commodity feminist campaigns, subsection 4.2.2 also links Edward Bernays' political theory of capitalism under conservatism to the Campaign for Real Beauty.

4.2.1 Rationale for Unilever Example

There are several reasons I have chosen Unilever as my example of contemporary commodity feminism. First, the marketing of cosmetics is a particularly apt site of investigation, given the historical role of cosmetics in popular feminist debates concerning the femininity question.[145] Unilever is well-known for its cosmetics[146] (and so-called "cosmeceuticals"[147]) directed at women, particularly the brands Dove and Fair

[144] See sections 4.3–4.5.
[145] See sections 2.3–2.7.
[146] Cosmetic products sold by Unilever—or more specifically, Dove and Fair & Lovely—include those associated with skin (such as creams, lotions, face cleansing products, and a variety of skin lightening products including creams, face washes, and sunscreens) and hair (such as shampoo, conditioner, mousse, and hair spray).
[147] The term *cosmeceuticals* suggests a blend between cosmetics and pharmaceuticals; these are products that promise longer-lasting changes than cosmetics such as makeup. In the twenty-first century, cosmeceuticals (including skin lightening cream) constitute a growing segment of the industry. Before the advent of cosmeceuticals, cosmetic products were understood to involve temporary changes to one's appearance (such as covering liver spots on the skin), while more permanent changes (such as removing

& Lovely. In fact, Dove and Fair & Lovely are considered the flagship brands of Unilever and Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) respectively; the latter has become the largest selling skin lightening cream in the world (Karan, 2008; Chakraborty, 2011; McDougle, 2013). Second, perhaps in part due to Unilever's sheer size and marketing budget,[148] Unilever's commodity feminist marketing campaigns have been highly profitable. The Campaign for Real Beauty is seen to have completely "revitalized" a brand that was "commercially stagnating" (Robinson et al., 2008). Indeed, before the campaign began in 2003, sales were declining to the point that major retailers such as Walmart were threatening to stop stocking Dove products (Robinson et al., 2008). Although Fair & Lovely has consistently been the market leader in the skin lightening cream industry in India, in the early 2000s the brand was facing problems with fakes and duplicates in rural India (Vasavada-Oza et al., 2012: 12). This problem has largely been overcome through commodity feminist marketing practices in rural communities (Vasavada-Oza et al., 2012: 10, 12–13, 15). Today, Fair & Lovely "defines the cosmetic industry in India, [as] most women only use one cosmetic—and that is a fairness cream" (Chakraborty, 2011). Third, Unilever's commodity feminism is highly regarded among marketing scholars and practitioners (and the wider international business community). Dove's

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these spots entirely) would be classified as a drug. Cosmeceuticals create regulatory difficulties for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States and similar government agencies in other countries because it is unclear whether cosmeceuticals are cosmetics or drugs. Although *cosmeceuticals* as a term was invented by marketers, the industry continues to insist that cosmeceuticals are cosmetics (as cosmetics are subject to less strenuous testing and regulation than pharmaceuticals). The cosmetics industry has a vested interest in keeping cosmeceuticals subject to less regulation: the global market for thigh creams alone, the effectiveness of which is questionable, is worth 90 million USD (Dowsett, 2011: 346–347).

[148] Unilever is a huge multinational corporation. It is the second-largest advertiser in the world today, and two billion people use its products on a daily basis (Clift, 2013).

Campaign for Real Beauty is widely considered to be an example of marketing best practices, and it is regularly used as an example in business schools such as Harvard (WARC, 2009). The campaign has received a tremendous amount of attention in the marketing trade and scholarly publications, and other corporations have launched similar campaigns.[149] HUL has been credited as developing best practices for marketing to poor, rural women (Kopper, 2010).

The two final reasons I have chosen Unilever as my example of contemporary commodity feminism concern the way in which Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty has escaped much critique. First, within Anglo-American mainstream media and popular culture, the campaign has received almost exclusively positive publicity, and an exceptional amount of it. For example, the campaign landed on the cover of *People* magazine in 2005 and has been featured on popular American television shows such as *The Today Show*,[150] *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*,[151] *The View*, *The Apprentice* and *Good Morning America* (Flavelle, 2006: A6; MacLeod, 2007; Johnston and Taylor, 2008: 942, 951; Robinson et al., 2008).[152] Second, the campaign has yet to be subject to much feminist critique; in fact, some academic feminists were

[149] For example, the Procter & Gamble brand "Secret" deodorant—long-associated with the commodity feminist slogan "Strong Enough for a Man"—has recently started a campaign for the U.S. market to (ostensibly) promote self-esteem in girls. This campaign uses many of the same language and tactics originated by Dove.

[150] As Robinson et al. note, "Katie Couric […] spent 16 minutes on *The Today Show* with Dove's firming girls, exposure that you just can't buy" (2008). The "firming girls" were the women who appeared in the earliest Campaign for Real Beauty advertisements for firming cream.

[151] Oprah Winfrey dedicated an entire show to the Campaign for Real Beauty's Pro-Age products in February 2007. Winfrey and Dove were in a public relations partnership at the time. This partnership has been credited as giving Dove a 6:1 return: that is, Dove made $6 USD for every $1 spent (Robinson et al., 2008).

[152] The campaign also received coverage in nearly every major media channel in the United Kingdom (January 2007) and Germany (February 2007) (Robinson et al., 2008).

actually involved with the campaign. For example, Carol Gilligan (author of the 1982 text *In A Different Voice*), Mary Pipher (author of the 1994 text *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*), and Joan Jacobs Brumberg (author of the 1997 text *The Body Project*: *An Intimate History of American Girls*) played an active role in Dove's market research (or *Global Studies*, which are discussed in the next section). This suggests that much has changed since 1992, when marketing scholar Barbara B. Stern complained about the "anti-consumption stance" of academic feminists who are "hostile to corporate America" (1992: 11). She called for "a re-integration of feminist and business research" given the "potential for enriching our [marketing] discipline by offering innovative ways to look at advertising text and consumer responses" (Stern, 1992: 11). Feminist participation in Dove's campaign suggests that Stern's call is starting to be heeded.

4.2.2 The Campaign for Real Beauty

In 2004, the Campaign for Real Beauty launched in the United Kingdom. It subsequently spread to various countries in North, South, and Central America, Europe, and Southeast Asia, although it remains concentrated in the Global North. Ostensibly designed to challenge unrealistic images of women in mainstream media and marketing, the actual goal of the campaign is to sell Dove products, using *real* women rather than models. The campaign uses traditional marketing, such as advertisements in magazines, on billboards, and on public transportation vehicles. It also relies heavily on non-traditional

marketing, through an interactive website,[153] social media, and even consumer-generated content. The campaign website encourages women and girls to engage in *democratic* activities such as casting votes, participating in online workshops, attending local consciousness-raising events sponsored by Dove, and even creating content for the website itself. The campaign's website also has an ever-growing collection of articles on various topics related to the body image of women and girls. Dove has produced several short films which have received wide circulation via the video-sharing website YouTube: *Mothers and Daughters*, *Evolution*, and *Little Girls*[154] in 2006, *Onslaught* and *Amy* in 2007, and *Camera Shy* and a series of six *Real Beauty Sketches* in 2013. One of the most well-known of the early Dove films, *Evolution*, received some circulation before trailers in North American cinemas and then was posted to YouTube just as the website was gaining popularity. It became an internet sensation, as millions of viewers circulated the film through e-mail and media-sharing websites (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 40). *Evolution* has been credited by marketers as saving Unilever tens of thousands of dollars it might have otherwise spent in advertising (Flavelle, 2006: A9; MacLeod, 2007).

Other aspects of the campaign include a play and the creation of a Self-Esteem Fund. *Body & Soul*, the play commissioned by Dove and performed in Toronto's Distillery District in 2008, was meant to "give a voice to women over 45" (according to a marketer) and challenge conceptions about women and aging (Bradshaw, 2008: R1, R4). Unsurprisingly, the play happened to correspond to Dove's then new Pro-Age line of

[153] See www.campaignforrealbeauty.com.

[154] *Little Girls* is more commonly known as *True Colors*, after the 1986 Cyndi Lauper song that is used in the film. This film first appeared on North American television during a commercial break in the 2006 Superbowl and then received wide circulation through the internet (Robinson et al., 2008).

products for women over 45. The Self-Esteem Fund sponsored by Dove offers free online educational tools to promote girls' self-esteem and also funds charitable organizations that foster self-esteem. Of course, the education tools also serve to *educate* young girls on the importance of purchasing commodities, and Dove commodities in particular.[155] Of the various aspects of the campaign, it is their website and internet films that are considered "revolutionary" in marketing circles (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 44; Clift, 2013). The internet aspects of the campaign will be discussed in more depth with respect to subject formation in section 4.6.

The Campaign for Real Beauty illustrates the continued relevance of Edward Bernays' political theory of capitalism under conservatism in contemporary commodity feminism both in how the role of the marketing professional is framed, and the use of social science research in marketing. This is particularly clear when examining two public talks given by marketing representatives from the campaign (Sharon MacLeod and Janet Kestin) and four *global studies* commissioned by Dove. To begin with the talks, both were given by white women who presented themselves and the work they do as feminist, albeit without actually mentioning the word feminism. The first talk was given by Sharon MacLeod (the Dove Brand Director) to the York University Collegiate Branch of the American Marketing Association in January 2007.[156] The second talk was given by Janet Kestin (the Chief Creative Officer of Ogilvy and Mather Ad Toronto) at a luncheon

[155] According to Janet Kestin, these online workbooks have been used all over the world by parents in discussion about body image issues with their children, in schools, in churches for Sunday school classes, and by therapists whose patients have eating disorders. She also notes the *Dove* programs have been worked into the regular school curriculum in Australia and claims there is lobbying for that going on all around the world (Kestin, 2008: 4–5).

[156] MacLeod's lecture was one of a series of events devoted to give students insight into the world of marketing and careers in marketing.

supporting a shelter for battered women in Mississauga, Ontario in June 2008. Both MacLeod and Kestin presented themselves as playing an important role in a feminist struggle: MacLeod as a lone agent for change in a culture that is hostile to women's self-esteem,[157] and Kestin as a feminist hero in a male-dominated advertising world (MacLeod, 2007; Kestin, 2008: 7–8). Despite these presentations, not only was the word feminism never mentioned, but there was no acknowledgement of the existence of a women's movement in any form or at any time. Indeed, an uncritical observer of MacLeod and Kestin's lectures might come to the conclusion that no feminist texts had ever been written on the femininity question, no activism around body politics existed before the campaign, no large scale quantitative research on women's body image had been done prior to Dove funding their global studies, and no school curriculum ever included topics on body image or eating disorders. The one exception is when Kestin mentioned Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (Kestin, 2008: 1). However, given that Wolf has served as a spokesperson for the campaign (in exchange for Dove donating money to The Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership, a feminist organization she co-founded), this is hardly surprising. Overall, the impression was given that it is MacLeod and her company Dove, and Kestin and her advertising company Ogilvy and Mather, who are fighting this fight on behalf of all women.

MacLeod and Kestin are both commodity feminist marketers in the tradition of Edward Bernays. MacLeod framed her discussion of marketing as a matter of "ethics,"

[157] MacLeod, to her credit, did admit that her "fight" is lucrative for her company and herself. For example, she acknowledged the great deal of free advertising the campaign has secured through YouTube and media coverage (MacLeod, 2007).

enjoining marketing students to think about the ethics of marketing generally and the ethics of choosing a company for which to work more specifically (MacLeod, 2007). She claimed that although she did not think about ethics when looking for a job, she was fortunate enough to secure a job with an "ethical company," the Unilever Corporation. For this reason, "employees of Unilever are very proud to be so" (MacLeod, 2007). It is a matter of ethical imperative, argued MacLeod, to think about what one is selling. She urged students to think about themselves at retirement age. She questioned how one would feel to look back upon one's career and know that one did not do anything except persuade people to smoke or children to eat sugar. According to MacLeod, marketing is about creating culture and makes a tremendous difference in people's lives. She contended Dove is creating a counter-culture that is broadening the definition of femininity, challenging people to think about beauty stereotypes, and sparking dialogue (MacLeod, 2007). Similarly, Kestin began her talk by stating that after graduation, her best friend in university went to work in Africa (presumably doing development work), and she went to work in advertising. She contended that advertising can be a "guarantee against self-worth, if you kind of have the lurking suspicion that you kind of want to do something useful with your life" (Kestin, 2008: 2). Pro bono work for charities is the advertiser's one chance to redeem themselves, or in her words, the advertiser's "hedge against going to hell for all the kinds of stuff that we do" (Kestin, 2008: 2). Although she acknowledged the campaign is not exactly pro bono work (at least insofar as she admitted to Unilever's profit motive), she contended that since corporations have the power to reach people, "they might as well use [that power] to

do good" (Kestin, 2008: 3). Both MacLeod's discussion of the ethics of marketing and Kestin's good/bad marketing distinction are reminiscent of Bernays. As discussed in the previous chapter,[158] Bernays believed that in a similar manner to the law (in which there exist both "honest lawyers and shyster lawyers"), marketing can have both good and bad consequences (Bernays cited in Tye, 1998: 89).

MacLeod and Kestin also share with Bernays his Platonic belief that knowledge and power ought to coalesce in the marketing professional, and his conviction that marketers ought to conduct social science research in the manner of an academic. On the former point, both talks suggested that marketing professionals (such as MacLeod and Kestin) are uniquely situated to understand the serious problems with female body image, and as such, had the responsibility to make the masses of women and girls aware of this problem.[159] On the latter point, Dove combined the ostensibly greater knowledge of marketing professionals with academics to conduct four global studies: "The Real Truth About Beauty: A Global Report" in 2004, "Beyond Stereotypes: Rebuilding the Foundation of Beauty Beliefs" in 2005, "Beauty Comes of Age" in 2006, and "The Real Truth About Beauty: Revisited" in 2011. They claim to adopt an "academic approach" that is "rigorous" (Etcoff et al., 2004: 3; 2006: 9; Butler et al., 2006: 9). As mentioned in section 4.2, several prominent feminist academics were involved with these studies. The conclusion of each of these studies was that women in various countries have a distorted body image and that some of the blame for this resides with popular culture

[158] See section 3.3.

[159] See section 3.3's discussion comparing the role of the philosopher-king in Plato's *Republic* to the role of the public relations counsel (or marketer) in Bernays' political writings. Bernays viewed the masses as having limited intellect, and as such, as needing to derive their views from the marketer. For Bernays, this was crucial to preserving the stability of society.

and the media; as such, the studies present findings that are hardly revolutionary. The second study expands the parameters of the first to include more women in the Global South. Interestingly, the paper emerging from the study critiques the association of whiteness with beauty and contends this leads to girls growing up in Asia and Saudi Arabia wishing for "lighter or fairer skin" and wanting to change their skin colour as adults (Etcoff et al., 2006: 21, 42). Unsurprisingly, the paper does not acknowledge Unilever's role in creating this association of whiteness with beauty through Fair & Lovely.

4.2.3 Fair & Lovely

Long before Unilever was selling women in the Global North *empowerment* with the message that different sizes and colours of bodies are beautiful, they were selling women skin lightening cream with the message that lighter-coloured skin is more beautiful in the Global South. Yet ironically, Unilever uses similar commodity feminist language and marketing strategies in the Global South with Fair & Lovely as it does in the Global North with the Campaign for Real Beauty. In fact, the commodity feminism of Fair & Lovely predates the commodity feminism of Dove by a year. In this section, I overview the commodity feminism of Fair & Lovely in India: both the marketing of the product and the Fair & Lovely Foundation.

Fair & Lovely was patented in 1971 by Unilever's Indian subsidiary Hindustan Lever Limited (now Hindustan Unilever Limited), after the patenting of its active ingredient, the melanin suppressor niacinamide. It was test marketed in southern India in 1975 and became widely available all over the country in 1990 (Nakano Glenn, 2008:

297; Karan, 2008). The success of Fair & Lovely encouraged Unilever to launch the product in other South Asian countries, and it has sold particularly well in Sri Lanka and Pakistan (Shevde, 2008). It is currently sold in forty countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East; however, its largest single market continues to be India. Indeed, Fair & Lovely held a 50–70% share of the skin lightening market in India in 2006; this market was valued at $212 million USD in 2008 and has been consistently growing at 10–15% each year (Karnani, 2007: 1352; Shevde, 2008; Hussain, 2010). The expansion of the skin lightening market in India has been read as a result of the neoliberal economic reforms dating back to 1991[160] (Nakano Glenn 2008: 297).

Fair & Lovely's commodity feminism began as a response to complaints of racism. A variety of Indian feminists, most vocally the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), were highly critical of Fair & Lovely's television advertisements in the early 2000s (Parmar, 2003: 4; Anonymous, 2004: 61; Nakano Glenn, 2008: 297). One advertisement critiqued by AIDWA depicted a financially strapped father lamenting that he did not have a son to help support the family.[161] His ostensibly "unattractive" (that is, dark-skinned) daughter overhears his lament and decides to try Fair & Lovely. A few months later, the daughter not only looks different—her skin has lightened and she wears a mini-skirt—but she has also started a successful career as a flight attendant. The advertisement ends with the daughter taking her father out to dinner at a five-star restaurant, and both family members are happy (Parmar, 2003: 4). AIDWA received no

[160] See section C of the Conclusion.
[161] This advertisement was put on Indian television in December 2001 and finally pulled in February 2003 (Parmar, 2003: 4).

reply from Unilever after complaining about the father-daughter ad and another similarly racist and sexist ad. In response, AIDWA launched a year-long campaign against Fair & Lovely in 2002, including a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission (Parmar, 2003: 4). After the Commission passed the complaint on to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the federal government issued notice of the complaints to Unilever. The two advertisements named in the complaint were pulled off the air. To recover from the bad publicity these complaints created, the Fair & Lovely Foundation was launched in 2003. The stated mission of the Foundation is "empowering women in India to change their destinies through Education, Career Guidance and Skills Training" (Fair & Lovely, 2009).

The Fair & Lovely Foundation has supported several projects since its launch. The main project is funding scholarships for Indian women from lower-income families to pursue higher education, from undergraduate to doctoral degrees. Offered annually every year since 2003, in ten years these scholarships have funded close to 1500 women (Fair & Lovely, 2013). It is unclear whether women must use Fair & Lovely to lighten their skin in order to receive scholarship funding.[162] It is also unclear whether the applicant's physical appearance affects their chances of receiving a scholarship.[163] Past projects funded by the Foundation also include career guidance fairs for women in cities across India (2003–2005) and projects funding women's athletics and women training to be preschool teachers (2005). Also in 2005, the Foundation funded a thirteen episode

[162] The website does not specify whether women are required to lighten their skin to receive scholarship money. When called by a representative from *Ms.* magazine in 2004 with this question, the corporation refused to comment (Anonymous, 2004: 61).

[163] According to the website, women are required to send two photographs of themselves as part of their application package. The website also states that incomplete applications are automatically rejected.

television series entitled “Fair & Lovely Shikhar.” Each episode of the series focused on a different Indian woman who overcame adversity to “change her destiny.” Some of the featured women included an engineer, a domestic violence activist, an athlete, a Bollywood dance choreographer, a photojournalist, and an activist against the sexual exploitation of women and girls. Much like Dove’s Self-Esteem Fund, the projects funded by the Fair & Lovely Foundation work to justify the role of the corporation in society, improve Unilever’s public image (including mollifying critiques of racism in the case of Fair & Lovely), and of course, increase sales of their products.

The commodity feminism of Fair & Lovely products and the Fair & Lovely Foundation continue to be racist. The success of AIDWA in getting two television commercials pulled off the air in 2003 has not prevented Fair & Lovely from continuing to produce commercials with the same narrative of a depressed woman gaining a brighter future by lightening her skin. However, while earlier commercials tended to show women acquiring a husband or boyfriend through lighter skin, newer (commodity feminist) twists on the narrative have been added to show women acquiring employment through lighter skin. Some commercials show women not merely gaining employment but doing so in professions normally held by men, such as cricket match announcers (Timmons, 2007; Chakraborty, 2011). Another example can be found in Fair & Lovely changing their marketing slogan to “The Power of Beauty.” According to this slogan, women are supposed to gain feminist empowerment through embracing racist standards of beauty. A final example can be found on the main page of the Fair & Lovely Foundation’s website. On this page is an image of a woman in a dark room. She is

looking longingly through an open door into a well-lit room full of books, which is presumably a university library. The light from the library spills into the dark room and casts a dark shadow of the woman (Fair & Lovely, 2009). The image suggests a Foundation scholarship will allow the woman to step out of the dark and into the light. This image is similar to product advertisements in that oppression is linked with dark and empowerment with light: the Foundation allows dark women to be bathed in the light of the library, just as the products allow dark women to be bathed in light after use. In stepping into the light, Fair & Lovely scholarships and products allow women to free themselves from the darkness of their skin colour and taint of their class position.

To conclude this section, commodity feminism has become a dominant paradigm for the globalized marketing campaigns of the early twenty-first century. As such, its days of limited and unconventional marketing tactics by one individual are long past. While the examples of commodity feminism from the last chapter are the various (local and national) American public relations campaigns of Edward Bernays in the early twentieth century, the examples from this chapter are two multinational marketing campaigns of Unilever in the early twenty-first century with a particular focus on India, Canada, and the United States. Yet the political writings and public relations strategies of Bernays continue to influence contemporary commodity feminism. In a similar manner to Bernays' campaigns, both the Fair & Lovely Foundation and the Campaign for Real Beauty frame corporations such as Unilever as a legitimate social and political institution, and suggest the corporation is an indispensable agent of social change. They offer an individualized solution to a social problem: we can consume our way to social

change. The exceptional amount of positive publicity received by the campaign highlights the degree to which corporations are allowed to *control* the terms of the public debate and legitimately present themselves as the liberator of girls and women. This control is achieved in part through the role of the corporation in subject formation. Before theorizing the role of Unilever in the production and maintenance of racialized and feminized subjectivities, the next two sections will consider subjectivity through the work of Marx, Gayatri Spivak, and the anti-essentialist Marxists.

4.3 Marx on the Subject: Species-Being and Essentialism

Marx's conception of subjectivity is generally understood to be encapsulated in the term *Gattungswesen*, which is usually translated as *species-being*. Making this claim is somewhat problematic in that *the subject* and *subjectivity*—at least as they are conceptualized in twentieth and twenty-first century social and political thought—did not exist in Marx's time. However, the contemporary use of subjectivity is generally understood to capture the experience of being a person (Davies 1991: 43), which might explain why species-being tends to be understood as Marx's theory of subjectivity. Marx borrowed the term from Ludwig Feuerbach's 1841 *The Essence of Christianity* and uses species-being in several texts, including "On the Jewish Question" (1843), *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and the *Grundrisse* (1858). This section will examine Marx's various uses of the term in these texts, critique species-being for its essentialism, and argue for a different Marxian conception of subjectivity.

Species-being is first introduced by Marx in "On the Jewish Question." Marx seems to understand species-being to be that which defines men as men,[164] and the term plays a crucial role in his argument concerning the difference between *political emancipation* and *human emancipation*. Political emancipation is the form achieved with the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* in France and with various state constitutions in the United States. Marx argues that political emancipation is not actually emancipation. Rather, it is the "reduction of man […] [to] an *independent* and *egoistic* individual" (1978b: 46). Man becomes a "profane being" who "treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers" (1978b: 34). The profanity of political emancipation is that man becomes completely disconnected, or alienated, from his species-being (1978b: 38). In Marx's words, "man is far from being considered, in the rights of man, as a species-being; on the contrary, species-life itself—society—appears as a system which is *external* to the individual and as a *limitation* of his original independence" (1978b: 43, emphasis mine). In other words, the politically emancipated man is so disconnected from his species-being and from other men, that he might be actively *hostile* to his species-being in that he understands it as a limitation. The only real form of emancipation for Marx is human emancipation. While political emancipation involves hostility to species-being, human emancipation involves embracing species-being. In Marx's words, "human emancipation will only be complete when […] he has become a *species-being*" (1978b: 46). Although

[164] I retain Marx's characterization of the individual as male; however, I do so critically. Feminist theory generally understands the use of masculine pronouns in malestream political thought to be *not* universal but rather referring to men in general or particular groups of men. Retaining Marx's assumption of the male individual is in line with my subsequent argument that conceptions of subjectivity as put forth by both Marx and his interpreters are masculinist.

species-being figures largely into one of the main arguments of "On the Jewish Question," Marx does not offer a very specific definition of species-being or much clarification on how men might become species-being.[165]

In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (or *1844 Manuscripts*), Marx clarifies why "man is a species-being." Rooting the species in "inorganic nature," he contends the species is not only man's being but also his object: the species is his being because it is his very means of life (he "lives on inorganic nature"), and the species is his object because it is "the instrument of his life-activity" (1978a: 75). Alienation from species-being is not only alienation from himself and from other men, as Marx already established in "On the Jewish Question," but also alienation from life-activity (1978a: 77). For Marx, life-activity is labour; indeed, what he terms life-activity in the *1844 Manuscripts* he later terms labour power.[166] Although Marx clarifies a definition of species-being in this text, he does not suggest how the species might be reconciled with the man. Given that life-activity is labour, the reconciliation of species with the man requires a much more extended critique of capitalism and its alternatives.[167]

The final text in which Marx discusses species-being is the *Grundrisse*, where he discusses species-being only once, and in specific relation to his critique of the individualism of liberal theory. In this discussion he equates species-being with a "clan

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[165] Marx suggests that the latter would occur when man "has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres*) as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political power*" (1978b: 46). However, he offers no further explanation.

[166] Labour-power is the capacity to work or general expenditure of labour. Useful labour is the useful character of different concrete forms of labour. When utility disappears into exchange-value, all labour is reduced to labour in the abstract (Marx, 1990: 125). The process through which labour becomes more and more abstract is key to understanding the logic of capital. Thus, Marx's early writings on life-activity represent the beginning of his thinking on the relationship between labour and capital.

[167] The critique is accomplished by Marx, of course, in the three volumes of *Capital*.

being" and "herd animal," and he differentiates clearly between species-being and Aristotle's conception of the "political animal" (1993: 496). Marx expands upon his critique of the profanity of individualism from "On the Jewish Question" by arguing that men are not by nature "isolated individuals," but rather they "become individuals only through the process of history" (1993: 496). There is, however, an important difference between the previous two texts discussed and the *Grundrisse*. In the earlier texts, Marx argues man ought to return to his species-being; however, it is difficult to see how that would be possible in this text. For example, Marx argues:

> Exchange itself is a chief means of this individuation. *It makes the herd-like existence superfluous and dissolves it.* Soon the matter [has] turned in such a way that as an individual he relates only to himself, while the means with which he posits himself as individual have become the making of his generality and commonness (1993: 496, emphasis mine).

Given Marx's argument that individuals have been created through historical processes—historical processes that involve the development of relationships of exchange—it is unclear at this historical juncture how we could return to species-being. This is especially the case given that in the *Grundrisse*, Marx equates species-being with clan beings and herd animals.

Despite the differences in Marx's treatment of species-being in "On the Jewish Question," the *1844 Manuscripts* and the *Grundrisse*, the common thread in all of these treatments is essentialism. He assumes that people themselves have natures (or real essences) that underlie and explain their other properties. This is particularly evident in the *1844 Manuscripts*, in which he argues man is estranged from his body, nature, and "spiritual essence" (1978a: 77). Moreover, Marx contends that this fundamental

estrangement from body, nature, and essence underlies other forms of estrangement and alienation, such as the estrangement from other men already established in the "Jewish Question" and the estrangement from the product of their labour (1978a: 77). His essentialism starts to unravel in the *Grundrisse*, insofar as he tries to balance essentialized species-being with more historical conceptions of subjectivity. He argues the subject has "more or less naturally arisen" yet "at the same time […] results of a historic process" (1993: 496). Yet species-being remains essentialist in that it relies on a relationship with nature: however dialectical and historical this relationship, nature itself remains untheorized. At the same time, although he maintains species-being in the *Grundrisse*, it is only in one passage, and even within that passage he is putting forth a more dialectical conception of history. Given this limited treatment in the *Grundrisse*, and the fact that he drops species-being altogether in the three volumes of *Capital*, Marx seems less committed to species-being (and therefore an essentialist conception of subjectivity) over time. Moreover, Marx's most substantive discussion of species-being occurred *before* he developed his larger analysis of capitalist modes of production.[168] All of this suggests that Marx's conception of the form of subjectivity specific to *capitalist society* ought *not* to be understood as species-being. Before moving on to argue for an alternative Marxist conception of subjectivity, however, there is a final point to be made about the essentialism of species-being.

[168] For example, in "On the Jewish Question" Marx refers to elements of what would later be included in his analysis of the capitalist mode of production, such as the worship of commodities, money as a commodity, and alienated labour. However, he refers to these elements as constituting "hucksterism" or, in one of the many examples of anti-Semitism in this article, "real and practical Judaism" (1978b: 48).

In maintaining an essentialist conception of nature, Marx falls into a similar trap to the possessive individualists he is critiquing.[169] Possessive individualism is an important aspect of liberal theory and has been since the seventeenth century. Liberal theorists such as Hobbes and Locke read market relations back into the very nature of people (or state of nature). Their deductions start "with the individual and [move] out to society and the state;" however, their starting point "has already been created in the image of market man" (Macpherson, 1962: 268, 269).[170] Marx, on the other hand, stresses the importance of *not* abstracting the "individual" from "society" and critiques the "so-called rights of man" and other tenants of liberal theory for doing so (1978a: 86; 1978b: 40). Possessive individualism and species-being seem to be making opposite arguments: possessive individualism suggests the subject of modern capitalism is natural, while species-being suggests the subject of modern capitalism represents an artificial covering over what is natural. Yet both rely on an essentialist conception of nature in that possessive individualism invokes nature to justify capitalist social relations, and species-being invokes nature to critique capitalist social relations.

Possessive individualism and species-being have more than essentialism in common: neither say much about how the subject of modern capitalist societies comes to be constituted. Yet there is clearly a link between possessive individualism and subjectivity. As Livingston argues:

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[169] Possessive individualism is not a term Marx himself used; it was coined by Macpherson in 1962 with the publication of *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*. However, the term conveys quite well the aspect of liberalism Marx was critiquing in his use of the term species-being.

[170] See section B of the conclusion for discussion of state of nature theorizing in political origin stories.

> The sovereignty of the modern self is experienced and expressed as the ontological priority of the unbound individual, that is, the individual whose freedom resides in the release from obligations determined by political communities, or, what amounts to the same thing, in the exercise of "natural rights" that such communities can neither confer nor abrogate" (1998: 413).

Possessive individualism (or "sovereignty of the modern self," in Livingston's words) cannot be thought of an as artificial overlay that can easily be ignored or suspended: it is an important aspect of people's life experience and cultural and political expression. As Marx starts to move away from species-being and toward a more dialectical conception of history in the *Grundrisse*, he does suggest a relationship between possessive individualism and subjectivity. As already mentioned, he contends that the creation of the sense of the individual is central to exchange, and "exchange itself is a chief means of this individuation" (1993: 496). In other words, one must feel *some* degree of possessive individualism in order to enter into exchange relationships. Yet in species-being, being remains associated with species (or nature) and as such, subjectivity is nothing more than an artificial overlay—subjectivity is merely an effect.

A more complicated way of understanding subjectivity in capitalist societies is clearly required, and that can be found in *Capital*. Species-being is dropped in favour of commodity fetishism, which as discussed previously, Marx gives predominance by locating it in the first chapter of the first volume. Yet Marx's early writings have haunted interpretations of *Capital*: more specifically, his writings on species-being have affected how commodity fetishism has been understood. Although he clearly argues that commodity fetishism involves transforming the social into the natural and therefore masks the social relations between people involved in the production and exchange of

the commodity,[171] commodity fetishism has commonly been understood as a form of "false consciousness" (Kennedy, 1985: 968–969; Amariglio and Callari, 1989: 38, 57; Knafo, 2002: 149). In this false consciousness framework, commodity fetishism is artificial and covers over what is natural; yet Marx clearly argues that commodity fetishism appears to be natural and covers over what is social. The next section will use the work of Gayatri Spivak and Jack Amariglio and Antonio Callari to read into *Capital* a conception of the subject that is not essentialist.

4.4 Marxist Theorists on the Subject: Commodity Fetishism and Anti-Essentialism

The question of subjectivity has been described as "the great lacuna" of Marxist theory (Wayne, 2005: 209). Jack Amariglio has been credited, both for his work in the 1980s and for the piece co-authored with Antonio Callari in 1989, for bringing the question of subjectivity to the forefront of Marxist analysis and for inaugurating "a debate and research agenda that still continues" (Madra, 2006: 212). In their 1989 piece, Amariglio and Callari argue that commodity fetishism constitutes Marx's theory of subjectivity, or more specifically, "the peculiar subjectivity typical of capitalist social formations" (1989: 31). They make this argument through value theory. In doing so, they acknowledge Gayatri Spivak—in a footnote—for her earlier "kindred reading" of value (Amariglio and Callari, 1989: 32). Spivak treats subjectivity as an inherent part of value theory and brings questions of gender and race to Marxist subjectivity. Yet Spivak's contributions remain largely ignored by not only Amariglio and Callari, but also theorists who have subsequently taken up the relationship between value and subjectivity. This group of

[171] See subsection 1.2.1 for further discussion.

theorists has been described by Swanson as the "anti-essentialist" Marxist theorists (2005: 87). In this section, I will compare the anti-essentialist arguments of Spivak with the anti-essentialist arguments of Amariglio and Callari and their commentators, and I contend that the latter are problematic in that they abstract subjectivity from processes of gendering and racialization. I critique this body of literature for ignoring Spivak's original contribution, and as such, treating subjectivity in abstraction from gender and race. This would suggest that commodity fetishism is a particular white male subjectivity typical of capitalist social formations.

Before discussing the articles by Spivak and Amariglio and Callari, it is important to briefly return to and expand upon my previous discussion (in Chapter One[172]) of Marx's understanding of commodities and the value ascribed to them. To briefly recapitulate, commodities are imbued with a value that has little to do with the form or production of the commodity itself: while value *seems* to be either a natural relationship between things or technical relationship between things, it is in actuality a social relationship between people. Marx originally understood this social relationship as being between capitalists and labourers; however, later theorists (especially feminist theorists) have understood this social relationship in more complicated ways. Regardless of how the social relationship is understood, the social relations inherent in value are concealed through commodity fetishism. To push beyond the scope of the first chapter, the social relations of modern capitalism do not exist between *already* constituted subjects, but rather, they require the production of particular subjectivities. Commodity

[172] See section 1.2.

fetishism does not merely *conceal* the social relations inherent in value; commodity fetishism also helps to produce and sustain these social relations and their requisite subjectivities. The concealment of social relations, in other words, cannot be separated from their production and sustainment. In more general terms, the relationship between social relations and commodity fetishism is also a relationship between subjectivity and value.

In "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," originally published in 1985, Spivak argues that to understand value one needs to understand the predication of the subject.[173] She contends that there are two predominant conceptualizations of subjectivity: the "materialist predication of the subject" and "idealist predication of the subject," both of which are exclusive predications and do not speak to one another (1988: 154). Spivak is primarily concerned with the former, although she critiques the "embarrassment of the final economic determinant" (1988: 155).[174] She argues economic determinism is problematic because questions of value can "escape the onto-phenomenological question" (1988: 155). In order to bring ontology and phenomenology (or crudely, conceptions of being and bodies) back to questions of value, she reconsiders Marx's understanding of use-value.

[173] In "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" Spivak builds on an article from 1983, which was later expanded upon and published as "Speculation on reading Marx: after reading Derrida" in 1987. I reference the earlier written "Speculation" in this section yet focus on "Scattered Speculations," as the latter involves a more extended discussion of the relationship between subjectivity and value.

[174] Indeed, Spivak has remained consistently concerned with how contemporary theory far too easily writes off any consideration of capitalism as mere "economic determinism" (Chow, 1993: 3). Her consideration, therefore, moves beyond narrow economic determinism in considerations of subjectivity but without removing capitalism.

Use-value, to briefly review, is differentiated by Marx from exchange-value in *Capital*. He argues that use-value remains constant while exchange-value varies greatly across time and location (1990: 126). As such, the utility and exchange-value of a commodity do not have any bearing upon one another (1992: 213). Yet at the same time, Marx repeatedly references the "dual nature" of commodities. Marxists have tended to ignore Marx's "dual nature" references and have focused on exchange-value instead; indeed, Knafo argues that use-value tends to be rejected altogether in favour of grounding theory entirely in exchange-value (2002: 160–161). Spivak's reconsideration of use-value moves against this tendency. She suggests use-value is "both outside and inside the system of value-determinations" (1988: 162). Indeed, in an earlier publication, she argues that the opposition between use-value and exchange-value is false and suggests use-value is a "theoretical fiction" (1987: 40, 54).[175] In "Scattered Speculations," she argues use-value "puts the entire textual chain of Value into question" (1988: 162).

Spivak reconsiders use-value because exchange-value does not answer the onto-phenomenological question: it only allows the subject to be read as labour power (1988: 164). Any ontological or phenomenological considerations of the subject, including subjectivity, are excluded because "consciousness itself is subsumed under the 'materialist' predication of the subject" (Spivak, 1988: 164). When the subject is read as labour power alone, the subject is assumed to reside in the Global North. As such, the

[175] Knafo, following Spivak, contends that due to its simultaneous insider and outsider status, where commodities are concerned, there cannot be a fundamental difference between use-value and exchange-value (2002: 162).

international division of labour is ignored, and the creation of value in the Global South is erased (Spivak, 1988: 166).[176] Moreover, the gendered effects of the exacerbation of the international division of labour are also ignored (Spivak, 1988: 167). In making this argument, Spivak brings a discussion of social injustice and global inequality into her interrogation of use-value in particular and the relationship between value and subjectivity more generally (Chow, 1993; Kaplan and Grewal, 1999). She wishes to "join forces with those Marxists who would rescue Marxism from its European provenance" (Spivak, 1988: 157). In Castree's words, Spivak offers a new "prism" for understanding how a "complex, intersecting, but often discontinuous array of individual and group identities and activities in production and place are brought into a social relation" (1996/97: 72). Yet that "prism" is not fully realized. At the end of her piece Spivak remarks that she "must now admit what many Marxist theoreticians admit today: that in any theoretical formulation, the horizon of full realization must be indefinitely and irreducibly postponed" (1988: 175). Despite this, the space she opens up is important. Spivak's "Scattered Speculations" is important not only for linking subjectivity and value but also for opening up space to consider gender and race in Marxist subjectivity.

Spivak's methodology is similar to Amariglio and Callari's in "Marxian Value Theory and the Problem of the Subject: The Role of Commodity Fetishism." In one respect, however, Amariglio and Callari put forth a more developed thesis: in reading commodity fetishism as Marx's theory of subjectivity, they come to more definitive

[176] Moreover, Spivak goes on to argue that "any critique of the labor theory of value, pointing at the unfeasibility of the theory under post-industrialism, or as a calculus of economic indicators, ignores the dark presence of the Third World" (1988: 167).

conclusions about subjectivity in capitalist social relations. At the same time, their thesis is *less* developed than Spivak's in that their discussion of the relationship between subjectivity and value is abstracted from gender and race. Amariglio and Callari begin by contending that subjectivity remains a problem in contemporary Marxism. They suggest there are two predominant conceptualizations of subjectivity: those of the "economic determinists" and those of the "autonomists" (which are similar to how Spivak characterizes the "materialist predication of the subject" and "idealist predication of the subject"). The "economic determinists" understand subjectivity as "mediating" the economy, yet because they continue to assert the primacy of the economy "in the last instance," their accounts "remain embedded in, or at least infected by, an economic determinism" (1989: 32). Thus, also in the same vein as Spivak, Amariglio and Callari understand this economic determinism to constitute an embarrassment. Moreover, economic determinism ultimately negates the problem of subjectivity (1989: 33). Yet at the same time, the "autonomists" privilege culture, ideology, and power as constituting the subject, which renders subjectivity completely autonomous from the economy. Economic determinism is replaced by another form of determinism, namely, the determinism of culture, ideology, and power. These economic determinists and autonomists create a schism within Marxism that is both "unnecessary and unproductive" (1989: 33).

Amariglio and Callari believe that overcoming this schism between economic determinism and autonomism requires joining value theory with a theory of the subject. Such a union makes sense in that "the act of exchange is not simply the site of an

economic process, but also one of the key locations within capitalism in which a symbolic order is partially constituted and learned" (1989: 56). Or to use terminology from the last section, the exchange of commodities instills within the exchangers a sense of self constituted by possessive individualism. Amariglio and Callari do not use the term "possessive individualism." However, the set of attributes they describe as being associated with the individual—namely, economic rationality, equality, and private proprietorship (1989: 49–53)—mirrors Macpherson's description of possessive individualism. In joining value theory with a theory of the subject, Amariglio and Callari re-read the first chapter of the first volume of *Capital* with a focus on the question of equality. By "equality," they mean the conception of exchange-value, or "equal exchange," in neo-classical political economy. Marx argues that exchange-value renders all labour abstract, not allowing for differentiation between forms and amounts of labour (1990: 125). In Amariglio and Callari's reading, the upshot of Marx's critique of this process of abstraction is that the exchange of commodities is in fact an exchange of "labour times." As such, equal exchange does not exist; the exchange of commodities is always unequal in that "*unequal* magnitudes of *actual* labour times" are being exchanged (1989: 45). Moreover, they contend that because equal exchange is derived from the assumption of possessive individualism, and possessive individualism enables equal exchange, in disposing of possessive individualism we dispose of equal exchange (1989: 44–45, 57).

Disposing of possessive individualism and equal exchange only joins value theory with a theory of the subject in the realm of bourgeois political economy, although this

has implications for the realm of Marxist political economy. It establishes that the social constitution of the individual is both a *precondition* for the exchange of commodities, as much as an *effect* of this exchange. In other words, the individual does not simply exist and enter into exchange relationships naturally: the individual is constituted historically, and entering into exchange relationships only further constitutes them as an individual (Amariglio and Callari, 1989: 44–45). Yet the most important implication of this joining in the realm of Marxist political economy can be found in the role of commodity fetishism. Amariglio and Callari contend that Marx introduces commodity fetishism in order to resolve the contradiction between equal exchange and unequal magnitudes of labour time (1989: 48). In their words,

> Marx employed the concept of commodity fetishism to introduce questions about the "social constitution of the individual" with the aim of urging his readers to locate the manifold forces that give rise to the particular form of subjectivity involved in the "exchange of equivalents" under conditions of generalized commodity trade (1989: 34).

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For Amariglio and Callari, these "manifold forces" are not entirely economic. As such, commodity fetishism is a form of subjectivity not entirely determined by the economic (1989: 52). Although they start with larger theoretical concerns and end with a particular argument, their article can be summarized by starting with the particular: commodity fetishism not only resolves the contradiction between equal exchange and

unequal magnitudes of labour time, it joins value theory with a theory of the subject and therefore contributes to overcoming this schism between economic determinism and autonomism. Amariglio and Callari make a critical intervention that moves an understanding of Marx's conception of subjectivity from the essentialism of species-being to the anti-essentialism of commodity fetishism.

Yet despite the importance of their intervention, Amariglio and Callari's understanding of subjectivity remains problematic in that it is abstracted entirely from gender and race. This is most evident in their discussion of equality. They argue that possessive individualism is a subjectivity constituted by entering into exchange relationships inscribed as *equal*; however, they also suggest "that the cultural and political construction of equality is partially constituted prior to and outside of exchange" (1989: 53). Although this claim about equality is critical to their non-deterministic, anti-essentialist conception of subjectivity, they do not expand upon it. This raises questions of where this *partial constitution* of equality is located, and what the political ramifications of critiquing equality *entirely* through the lens of equal exchange would involve. While liberal discourses of *equality* and *rights* have clearly served as the justifying ideology of capitalism, they have also been used with a certain degree of effectiveness by feminist, anti-racist, and other social justice movements. This effectiveness has, however, been limited in part by the linkage of equality with sameness (Brown, 1995: 153–154). In critiquing the collapsing of equality with equal exchange *without also* critiquing the related collapsing of equality with sameness, Amariglio and Callari re-obstruct what they claim is being obstructed. Or to put it

another way, in ignoring gender and race, they make one (possessive individual) subjectivity stand in for another and thus replicate the very exchange of equivalents they critique. They obscure the fact that there are different subjectivities in capitalist societies, and indeed, even different possessive individual subjectivities.

The anti-essentialist Marxist theorists who have taken up the work of Amariglio and Callari, primarily but not exclusively in the pages of *Rethinking Marxism* and *Historical Materialism*, have continued the tradition of discussing subjectivity in abstraction from gender and race. When race and gender are mentioned, they tend to be simply mentioned rather than theorized. For example, Richard McIntyre's only mention of either are references to women who emulate Madonna, dancing "girls" in advertisements, and the "white guilt" associated with consumption in our society[177] (1992: 52, 57). Yet such cursory references do not constitute theorizing. McIntyre does not theorize how the subjectivities of women who emulate Madonna, or the subjectivities of women who dance (or watch other women dance) in advertisements relate to his discussion of commodity fetishism as subjectivity. Moreover, he does not even mention women who do not participate in these activities, or any women or men of colour residing in the Global North. Based on his discussion of the "white guilt" of consumption, the latter group must be assumed not to consume. Another example can be found in Robert Tanner's argument that the subjectivities created by fetishism are an "equal" problem to those created by "gender inequality, discrimination based on race and sexual preference, nationalism, and so forth" (2001: 64). Perhaps because he

[177] By "our society," McIntyre presumably means the Global North, as he suggests "our society" is something different from the "third world" (1992: 57).

understands “the list is long” (2001: 64), he cannot do any further theorizing on the relationship between these categories of identity and the subjectivities created by commodity fetishism. Dimitri Dimoulis and John Milios contend that commodity fetishism not only creates subjects but also subordinates those subjects to the market (2004: 40). Yet they separate out the subordinated subjectivities created by commodity fetishism from the “other social constructs,” which for them constitute “gender, national identity, stigmatization of certain individuals as criminals” (2004: 32), as if the identities in the latter group have no bearing upon the former. Mike Wayne suggests that in its most “general *form*,” subjectivity grounded in fetishism can be related to the (vaguely defined) “socially differentiated field occupied by different ‘players’” (2005: 194). Yet at the same time, he states that commodity fetishism simply “cannot explain the specific content and development of, for example, sexist and racist ideologies” (Wayne, 2005: 217). While undoubtedly commodity fetishism cannot explain sexism or racism, Wayne (like many of his anti-essentialist Marxist counterparts) uses this to ignore how commodity fetishism not only constitutes a process of abstract subject formation but also a gendered and racialized process in need of theorization.

Some anti-essentialist Marxist theorists writing on subjectivity attempt to do more than merely mention gender and race; however, these limited efforts remain unsatisfactory. For example, Bruce Pietrykowski (2007) carefully discusses the gendered nature of consumption and feminist approaches to political economy. At the same time, however, feminist theory does not factor into his analysis of the “multiple and conflicting subject positions” created by commodity fetishism. These subject positions

remain for him workers and consumers, or the producers of commodities and the purchasers of commodities (2007: 265). Another example is Yahya Madra, who issues a call to incorporate conceptions of sexual difference (from Lacanian psychoanalysis) into Marxist subjectivity (2006: 222). He does no more than issue a call, however, and does not attempt to theorize the gendered subject positions in capitalism. Nor does he acknowledge the question of race or racialized subject positions. It is difficult to understand how these anti-essentialist Marxist theorists writing on subjectivity can discuss gender and race in such an uncritical (McIntyre) or cursory manner (Tanner, Dimoulis and Milios, Wayne), as if the entire bodies of literature on feminist theory and identity politics were never written. Ultimately, more work in the spirit of Pietrykowski and Madra needs to be done on theorizing Marxist subjectivity.

This tradition of discussing subjectivity in abstraction from gender and race among the anti-essentialist Marxist theorists might have been less of a problem had the interventions of Spivak *not* been so consistently ignored. This problem dates back to Amariglio and Callari themselves: as previously mentioned, other than a footnote crediting Spivak for her "kindred reading," they do not engage with her remarkably similar arguments whatsoever. Although Madra cites the Amariglio and Callari piece in his article, he appears not have read that particular footnote. He contends that the doctoral dissertation of Amariglio from 1984, in combination with the piece co-authored with Callari in 1989, constitute the "first discussion of the question of subjectivity within the context of class analysis" (2006: 212). Yet Spivak's earliest publication on this topic is from 1983, which pre-dates Amariglio's dissertation by one year and the original

publication of the Amariglio and Callari article by six years. This problem is not limited to Madra: not one of the anti-essentialist Marxist theorists I have discussed mentions Spivak. Nor is this problem limited to the anti-essentialist Marxist theorists who use the work of Amariglio and Callari. The reception of Spivak by contemporary Marxist theorists in general has been described as "ambivalent" at best and completely erased at worst (Kaplan and Grewal, 1999: 350, 353). In a rare discussion of Spivak in the pages of *Rethinking Marxism*, Noel Castree finds it "surprising" that so few of his contemporaries have engaged with her work (1996/97: 49). He contends that "we await a thorough-going elucidation of Spivak's scattered speculations on Marx and the question of value" (1996/97: 49). Kaplan and Grewal offer an explanation as to why we are still waiting: they describe the community of Marxist theorists as a "male agon." This agon is not merely a historical phenomenon but "continues almost without interruption" to the present day. Spivak cannot be included in the agon, as it would change too radically its character and intensity (1999: 354).[178]

In the past two sections, I have considered competing conceptions of Marx's theory of subjectivity: the previous section rejected species-being for its essentialism, and this section explored commodity fetishism as anti-essentialist subjectivity. Originally theorized by Amariglio and Callari, commodity fetishism provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between the commodity form and the

[178] Although Kaplan and Grewal are discussing the general reception of Spivak's body of work by Marxist theorists, their comments translate into the reception of "Scattered Speculations" and other work in the pages of *Historical Materialism* and *Rethinking Marxism*. Yet Kaplan and Grewal do not lay the blame exclusively on masculinist Marxist theorists. They argue that "Anglo-American feminism has displayed an, at best, ambivalent regard toward Spivak" (199: 355). This is evidenced by the continual misreading of one of Spivak's few articles that is taken up by Anglo-American feminists, "Can the Subaltern Speak." This misreading is a result of their "complicity in colonial and neocolonial discursive formations" (1999: 355).

constitution of (possessive individual) subjectivity in capitalist social formations. Yet this framework is problematic in that it treats subjectivity in abstraction from gender and race. In the history of Western thought, discussions of abstract subjects have tended to allow men to stand in for people, and whiteness to stand in for civilization. Given that Marx himself upheld the sexism of Western thought and offered limited and ambiguous comments about racialized subjects,[179] it is important to have a healthy scepticism about contemporary theorists who use Marx to theorize subjectivity in such abstract terms. In the absence of any theorization of gender or race, the possessive individual subjectivity described by Amariglio and Callari and their interlocutors is not abstract at all, but a particular form of white male subjectivity typical of capitalist social formations. It is important, therefore, to theorize subject formation as a gendered and racialized process. The next section will contend that if commodity *fetishism* constitutes particular forms of white masculine subjectivity then commodity *feminism* constitutes particular forms of feminine/feminist subjectivities located in both the Global South and North. This will be theorized by examining with more depth the commodity feminism enacted by the Unilever Corporation and returning to the work of Spivak.

4.5 Commodity Feminism as (Feminized and Racialized) Subjectivity

Georg Lukács once suggested that all problems of consciousness (including subjectivity) ultimately lead back to the commodity. Terry Eagleton has argued that this claim is "a trifle overweening" and questions "in what important sense […] can the doctrine that men are superior to women, or whites to blacks, be traced back to some secret source

[179] See subsection 1.2.1.

in commodity production" (1991: 87).[180] Thus far in this chapter, I have vacillated between both positions to contend that commodity fetishism can explain subject formation in capitalist societies, but only partially as it is abstracted from processes of gendering and racialization. In this section, I concretize this discussion by examining both Unilever's imperialist past and multinational present, and consider how both can be implicated in subject formation. Spivak's critique of use-value offers a useful inroad to theorizing commodity feminism as subject formation, particularly when applied to the use-value of Fair & Lovely skin lightening cream in contemporary post-colonial India. In other words, I theorize subjectivity through Unilever's historical commodification of the British imperial project and its contemporary commodification of feminism.

Unilever has a long history of supporting the British imperial project and the privileging of lighter-coloured people involved in that project. A colonial example of this privileging can be found in the development of evolutionary racism. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the emphasis and attention given by the British to racialized difference grew. By the 1820s and 1830s, the British understood themselves to constitute a race apart and thus in a privileged position to observe others (Arnold, 2004: 261, 273). Evolutionary racism was the science that claimed that proof of the evolution of men from their ape ancestors to the present could be traced through the contemporary *races* of man. Unsurprisingly, the most evolved *race* was thought to be middle-class and aristocratic British men. Working-class British men and Irish men were

[180] Interestingly, Kaplan and Grewal include Eagleton in a list of theorists who despite their "supposedly oppositional practices" leave unchallenged masculinist "constructions of culture and recuperate another form of patriarchy […] deployed by the status and prestige of the U.S. academic left" (1999: 352).

thought to be less evolved and closer to Africans (Dyer, 1997: 52–57; McClintock, 1995, 36–39).[181] Such narratives linked bodies to culture and considered (white) British bodies and British culture to be the most evolved (Nakano Glenn, 2008: 289; Arnold, 2004: 263). The evolutionary racism of the nineteenth-century was also applied to the inhabitants of India.[182]

There were thought to be different races within India: the Aryans of the north were considered more evolved than the aborigines or Dravidians of the south.[183] The former generally had lighter-coloured skin (and skulls allegedly shaped similar to those of Europeans), while the latter had darker-coloured skin (and skulls allegedly shaped differently to those of Europeans) (Arnold, 2004: 270–272). Lighter-coloured Indian bodies were not only considered to be more evolved, but they were also thought to be more beautiful. For example, Indian men whose skin colour was characterized by the British as "light copper" or, even better, as "wheaten"

> were allowed to be "handsome" as well as "manly," especially when […] they came from northern India […] But in a situation in which ideas of race and gender were often mutually reinforcing […] it was often women […] who were singled out as having a near-European face or form, at least to the extent of resembling southern Europeans: even the most attractive [*sic*] of Indian

[181] My use of the term *men* here is intentional. Women only tended to enter the narrative when evolution was linked to beauty (McClintock, 1995: 39).

[182] Indeed, as Edward Said notes, the long European tradition of treating the "Orient" as an object of fascination and study can be witnessed in the British treatment of Indians (Said, 1979: 228).

[183] Although evolutionary racism was clearly introduced in India by the British, it is important to note that these categories existed prior to British colonialism. Indeed, the first colour-based hierarchies within India are often blamed on the caste system. This system is generally thought to have been introduced by the nomadic, Caucasian Aryan group when they arrived in India around 1500 B.C.E. Social historians have suggested that in order to keep the native population (which consisted of darker-skinned Dravidians) suppressed, the Aryans differentiated people into various social strata based on skin tone (Glenn, 2008: 289; Shevde, 2008). At the same time, the origins of these categories and colour-based hierarchies in India are somewhat beside the point: the British clearly exploited these categories and hierarchies for their own purposes, and they invested these categories and hierarchies with "scientific" authority using evolutionary racism.

> women were seldom, in this cartography of colour, allowed to penetrate far into northern Europe. Thus, according to Captain Herbert in 1830 the "Hindustani beauty" was, "in all that regards form and feature, […] a Greek; only with a darker skin" (Arnold, 2004: 264).

Although the "Hindustani beauty" could be thought to resemble the Greek beauty, this was a dubious distinction in that southern Europeans were considered less evolved than the British. Moreover, the "Hindustani beauty" was too dark to even properly pass as a southern European. As Arnold remarks, in setting themselves up as the ideal body type, the British "adjudicated among Indians on the basis of their appearance as if at some eternal beauty contest" (2004: 263). It is important to note that while certain Indians might have been regarded by the British as fellow Caucasians or Aryans, the British remained the sole adjudicators.[184] Yet these adjudicators were not *any* British people but those of a particular class. Up until the middle of the nineteenth century, evolutionary racism and other narratives of imperial progress[185] were only available to the literate, propertied elite of British society (McClintock, 1995: 209).

The British masses were taught narratives of imperial progress through *commodity racism*. The term commodity racism was coined by Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather* to capture how the "decidedly fetishistic faith in the magical powers of the commodity underpinned much of the colonial civilizing mission" (1995: 227). She examines the commodity racism enacted by a variety of advertisements from late

[184] Interestingly, even the adjudicators had to maintain their whiteness. Since at least the mid-eighteenth century, white British women in the colonies used cashew nuts to lighten their skin. Given that this oil can be caustic, it was somewhat painful to use (Coleman, 2003: 171).

[185] I have focused on evolutionary racism in my discussion of the construction of a relationship between lighter-coloured skin and civilization in nineteenth-century Britain. However, such a relationship was also set up in poetry, philosophy, travelogues, novels, political theory, economics, and the writings of imperial administrators (Said, 1979; McClintock, 1995: 209).

nineteenth-century Britain, focusing particularly on soap and other personal hygiene and cleaning products. In these ads, these products became not only a symbol of British superiority but offered the promise of civilization to both the British working class and the colonized. Soap itself was invested with the magical power to wash "from the skin the very stigma of racial and class degeneration" (McClintock, 1995: 214). Many of the advertisements featured "before and after" bodies of the British working class (such as coalminers) and racialized bodies from the colonies turning significantly *lighter* from commodity consumption. One ad portrayed a crate of soap washing up onto shore to the wondering eyes of awestruck natives; another featured a group of Sudanese men falling to their knees to worship a large rock into which the words "PEARS SOAP IS THE BEST" were carved (McClintock, 1995: 211–227). Interestingly, the second ad makes the same analogy as Marx in his characterization of commodity fetishism, namely between the European commodity worshipper and the African fetish worshipper. Yet Marx and Pears make this analogy for opposite purposes. Marx suggests the European commodity worshipper is *as bad as*, or at least, *no better than* the African fetish worshipper;[186] Pears suggests the African can be *as good as* the European (or almost as good) through commodity worship. McClintock argues that commodity racism not only brought narratives of imperial progress to the masses, but "*no preexisting form of organized racism* had ever before been able to reach so large and so differentiated a mass of the populace" (1995: 209, emphasis mine). Unilever was one of several companies to

[186] See section C of the Conclusion for further discussion.

connect their product to the so-called *civilizing* mission of British imperialism in the nineteenth-century,[187] and it continues to enact commodity racism today.

There are differences between historical and contemporary commodity racism. The first difference is that the racism is more implicit in the latter. An 1899 ad for Pears' soap explicitly linked the "white man's burden" of Rudyard Kipling poem to their product:

> The first step towards lightening THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness. PEARS' SOAP is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances, while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place—it is the ideal toilet soap (reproduced by McClintock, 1995: 33).

Language of white and light from Victorian England have been replaced with the euphemism *fairness*. In Fair & Lovely's commercials, print ads, website, and packaging—despite the many images of women's skin becoming whiter and women's faces bathed in light—the words *white* or *light* never appear.

A second important difference between the commodity racism of the Lever Brothers of Victorian England and HUL of contemporary India is that the former sold their product to the colonizing nation while the latter is selling theirs to the formerly colonized. This shift in the target consumer of commodity racism is important. British colonizers found the natives of their colonies uncivilized in part because they were not impressed by European commodities (McClintock, 1995: 229–231). Indeed, colonizers were prone to "murderous temper" when commodities such as clocks, guns, and soap were not given their due respect (McClintock, 1995: 230). Given this equating of

[187] Originally called the Lever Brothers, the corporation that is now Unilever started as a soap manufacturer in Britain in 1884. Their company slogan was "Soap is Civilization" (McClintock, 1995: 207).

commodities with civilization in imperial capitalism, the use of commodities (especially those produced by a western corporation such as Unilever) indicates India's progress toward *civilization*. While Indian women who use Fair & Lovely do not take on the white man's burden—the marketers appeal to their identity as South Asian women—they should have lighter coloured skin.[188] This shift in the consumer of commodity racism, therefore, does not mean the commodity is no longer doing (in McClintock's words) the "civilizing work of empire" (1995: 222). Indeed, the putative superiority of whiteness is suggested in the marketing of both the Lever Brothers of Victorian England and HUL of contemporary India.

Following a conventional Marxian understanding of use-value, the actual use-value of the historical and contemporary products discussed in this section are somewhat unclear. McClintock notes that toward the end of the nineteenth century, the commodity itself disappeared from many ads (1995: 225). Even when the commodity did appear, ads enacting commodity racism focused on the exchange-value rather than the use-value of the commodity: in the case of soap, it represented the civilizing mission of colonialism rather than facilitating sanitary living conditions. As such, commodity racism (like commodity fetishism) does not concern the use-value of an object. Without

[188] In 2007, Ashok Venkatramani, who was in charge of the skin care category at the Indian subsidiary of Unilever, was quoted as saying that taking offense at Fair & Lovely is "a very Western way of looking at the world." He contended that the definition of beauty in Asia differs from the west: in the former, it is "all about being two shades lighter," whereas in the latter, beauty "is linked to anti-aging" (Timmons, 2007). Venkatramani's claim serves to deflect critiques of Fair & Lovely's racism in two ways. First, in claiming this standard of beauty emerges from Asia alone, any critiques of this standard must stem from a "Western way of thinking" and possibly neo-colonial thought. This claim erases the existence of Asian feminists who critique this standard, or at best, it writes them off as internalizing neo-colonial thought. Second, even if this standard is racist, then Fair & Lovely cannot be implicated. It is simply responding to a standard that already exists, rather than being actively engaged in its production.

the transformation of use-value into exchange-value—indeed, without the fetishization of soap—nineteenth-century commodity racism would not have existed. In less abstract terms, simply linking the use of soap in hand washing to reducing the spread of infectious diseases would not be racist. However, linking hand washing to the British imperial project is racist. Although commodity racism at the end of the nineteenth century was based on the disappearance of use-value, at this time use-value existed and was made to disappear. Commodity racism at the beginning of the twenty-first century differs in that there seems to be *no use-value* to disappear. Fair & Lovely does not facilitate sanitary living conditions or reduce the spread of infectious diseases or accomplish any other health-related social good; it simply lightens skin tone. A similar argument can be made with reference to the commodity feminism of Dove products. Without the transfer of use-value to exchange-value, without the fetishization of soap (and body wash and deodorant and moisturizer), twenty-first century commodity feminism would not exist. In less abstract terms, simply linking the use of body wash to reducing the spread of infectious diseases would not be feminist.[189] However, linking body wash to feminist empowerment is feminist. Thus, commodity feminism at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in a similar manner to commodity racism, seems to possess no use-value.

Fair & Lovely not only seems to have no use-value but may in fact be harmful to users. Although it is sometimes marketed as a health product—some products are suggested to give women's skin multivitamins or protect skin from sun damage—it is

[189] While health would certainly be considered a feminist issue, body wash has nothing to do with the feminist issues with which Dove is concerned—that is, women's body image and self-esteem.

actually toxic. Like many skin lightening creams, Fair & Lovely contains mercury, which can be absorbed through the skin with adverse health effects. In a study of Fair & Lovely on mice, Al-Salah et al. contend that repeated applications could have toxic effects on different organs, particularly the kidneys (2004: 172–173). Moreover, other studies have demonstrated that mercury absorbed through the pregnant women's skin can be transmitted to the fetus. Mercury can remain in the bodies of babies' months after their birth (Al-Salah et al., 2004: 173). This is even more troubling in that Fair & Lovely sells a product directed at pregnant women called Anti-Marks, which is supposed to both lighten skin in the abdomen area while reducing the appearance of stretch marks.[190]

The use-value of Fair & Lovely, especially when used by the very poor, is questionable. In her discussion of the immense popularity of the twenty rupee sachets of Fair & Lovely, Shevde questions "why, in many Indian villages today, [do] young girls spend their few pennies not on food but rather on Fair & Lovely sachets?" She contends that this is perplexing because skin lightening cream "does not fill any vital human need" (2008). An explanation using a conventional Marxian understanding of commodity fetishism would understand this as a process through which the social (for example, the racist association of female beauty with lighter skin) is transformed into the natural (for example, ancient Ayurvedic ingredients), but also a process through which the social is transformed into the supernatural (for example, a magical process through which

[190] On the topic of babies and skin lightening products, transmission from the mother is not the only way babies might be impacted. The baby massage oil Healthy and Fair (a product sold by the Indian corporation Emami Ltd., which is not associated with Unilever) stresses the importance of lightening skin from a very young age.

twenty rupees can buy one a husband and lifelong economic security).[191] Yet at the same time, it is important not to fall into the habit (as has been done in the Global North for generations of people on the left) of critiquing working-class or poor women who embrace hegemonic codes of femininity and the commodities these codes necessitate.[192] In other words, it is important not to dismiss women who purchase the twenty rupee sachets as mere dupes. Indeed, economic security for women, especially poor women, is often dependent on adhering to the norms of femininity. Shevde's question is problematic in that she assumes Fair & Lovely has a use-value that is knowable.

Indeed, underlying my discussion of use-value thus far in this section is the implicit assumption that use-value is something obvious and knowable. For Spivak, use-value is neither, and it can and ought to be critiqued. In a Spivakian vein, David Levine asks:

> Why restrict the social character of the commodity to the exchange-value? Why devote so much time and energy to value and so little to use, making the former a part of political economy, the latter a "work of history"? Why treat the usefulness of things in satisfying want as if it were something obvious, or of purely historical interest? (Levine, 1998: vi)

For Spivak, the use-value/exchange-value dichotomy renders use-value natural and exchange-value social, and as such, it essentializes use-value. To apply Spivak to Fair & Lovely, it is not the use-value of Fair & Lovely that is problematic, but rather, the very *conception of use-value itself*. Use-value (in the conventional Marxian understanding) is supposed to have utility, to possess something that people want or need. In her critique

[191] See section 1.2.2 for a discussion of how commodity fetishism transforms a thing that is sensuous and ordinary into a thing that transcends sensuousness and is extraordinary.
[192] See section 2.4.

of Fair & Lovely as not providing a "vital human need," Shevde does not bother to question the conception of *need*. Levine notes that there is a tendency to take "what is most problematic for granted, as if saying the words want, need, preference, choice were enough" (1998: 2–3). Nakano Glenn contends that Fair & Lovely advertisements are not "simply responding to a preexisting need but actually *creating a need* by depicting having dark skin as a painful and depressing experience" (2008: 298, my emphasis). In creating a need, Fair & Lovely (in a similar manner to historical commodity racism and contemporary Dove products) is creating a particular gendered and racialized subject. Wants and needs do not exist on their own; rather, they have "roots in a concept of the subject, whose want expresses those attributes we associate with being a subject" (Levine, 1998: 39). Or in other words, the process of creating wants and needs cannot be separated from the process of subject formation.

Spivak's argument that use-value puts the entire chain of value into question can be read against Amariglio and Callari. Indeed, the latter read commodity fetishism as subjectivity *entirely* through exchange-value: that is, they examine the contradiction between equal exchange and unequal magnitudes of labour time to contend that possessive individualism is a subjectivity constituted by entering into exchange relationships. Following Spivak, if use-value puts the entire chain of value into question then use-value can be employed to critique commodity fetishism *as* subjectivity. Use-value is firmly material; exchange-value is firmly not-material. If exchange-value is not material, then commodity fetishism (which concerns exchange-value) is a de-materialized, disembodied form of subjectivity. As such, commodity fetishism is

ostensibly gender-neutral; however, in a similar manner to many concepts that claim to be gender-neutral, it is masculinist and white. In bringing materiality back into the equation with her discussion of use-value, Spivak is bringing back a conception of subjectivity that is firmly embodied and therefore gendered and racialized.

In sum, following from Spivak (and to a lesser extent Levine), I am making two separate claims about use-value: first, it is neither obvious nor immediately knowable; and second, it is firmly material and embodied.[193] On the former, I have proposed that the actual use-value many of the Unilever products discussed in this section is either unclear (in the case of Fair & Lovely in contemporary India) or disappears into exchange-value (in the case of Pears soap in Victorian England or Dove body wash in contemporary Canada). On the latter, I have suggested that the materiality of use-value allows for an embodied, gendered and racialized understanding of subjectivity. In creating wants and needs through which women come to see commodities (Dove or Fair & Lovely) as having use-value, the corporation (Unilever) participates in the production of feminized and racialized subject formation. In *Scattered Speculations*, Spivak briefly critiques what she calls "feminist individualist consumerism" and suggests that this is a form of subjectivity (1988: 169, 294–295). She does not, however, elaborate further.[194] In this section—and indeed, the chapter as a whole—I read commodity feminism *as*

[193] These are not contradictory claims: to be material and embodied is not necessarily to be *natural* or immediately knowable. Indeed, most feminist and anti-racist thought has long understood gender and race as not stable, ahistorical, or natural phenomenon, but rather as *processes* that must be continually produced and reproduced to be given meaning.

[194] Spivak simply states (in footnote 15): "the relationship between feminist individualism and the military-industrial complex on the one hand, and the problem of anti-sexism on the other, is too overdetermined for me to deal with it in more than a footnote" (1988: 295).

subjectivity. Indeed, the ascendance of commodity feminism today might be explained by how caught up it is in subjectivity.

4.6 Conclusion

Nancy Fraser has questioned whether there is a "subterranean elective affinity" between feminism and contemporary neoliberalism.[195] If there is such an affinity, she suggests that it resides in the shared critique of traditional forms of authority (2009: 108, 115). Indeed, capitalism has effectively broken down traditional hierarchical social structures and ways of life.[196] For example, although queer desire and queer relationships have always existed, capitalism played a fundamental role in the development of queer *identities*, as individual waged labour came to replace the heterosexual family unit in production (D'Emilio, 1983; Hennessy, 2000: 30, 98–110). Fraser suggests that neoliberalism does not have a problem with identity politics as such—be it queer, feminist, diversity, or otherwise—as long as nothing is demanded of the state. In her words, neoliberalism "would much *prefer to confront claims for recognition over claims for redistribution*" (2009: 113; emphasis mine).[197] This is because neoliberalism builds a "new regime of accumulation on the cornerstone of women's

[195] Fraser is discussing second wave feminism specifically (not commodity feminism). She characterizes second wave feminism as a whole as "an epochal social phenomenon," rather than "this or that activist current, […] this or that strand of feminist theorizing; not this or that geographical slice of the movement, nor this or that sociological stratum of women" (2009: 97).

[196] For Marx and Engels, there is no social structure specific to or necessary for capitalism to operate (Marx and Engels, 1985: 83; Hennessy, 2000: 29–30). This is quite unlike past modes of production such as feudalism. Hennessy notes that "whereas feudal production was essentially conservative, the technical basis of modern capitalism is revolutionary because it never takes any existing aspect of social life to be definitive" (2000: 29).

[197] Fraser has long contended that justice requires both recognition and redistribution: recognition seeks to redress cultural injustice and redistribution seeks to redress socioeconomic injustice (1995: 69–74).

waged labour, and seeks to disembed markets from social regulation in order to operate all the more freely on a global scale" (Fraser, 2009: 113). In other words, *recognition* of women's individualized identities—that are separate from the role of wife and/or mother but linked to participation in the capitalist economy—is an important part of both feminism and neoliberalism.

Although Fraser is not concerned with *commodity* feminism per se, her discussion of the relationship between feminism and neoliberalism relates to my example of Unilever in India. Fraser contends that an important part of the neoliberal search for new markets (and expansion of existing markets) is harnessing identity politics (2009: 108–109). This was made explicit by Harish Manwani, Unilever's Chief Operating Officer and HUL's Chairman [*sic*], in a 2011 talk in Mumbai. Manwani is considered to be an expert (in international marketing circles at least) on *building markets* in contemporary India (Tiltman, 2011). In other words, he is an expert on connecting poor rural Indians to commodities (previously seen as unnecessary) sold by multinational corporations. For Manwani, the key to building markets is understanding that there is not "one India": "the country covers different consumer segments, different price points, not to mention a huge cultural diversity" (Manwani cited in Tiltman, 2011).[198] Within the logic of neoliberal capitalism, therefore, diversity becomes "market segmentation" and identity politics becomes a useful differentiation between

[198] A similar point has been made by marketing scholar Falguni Vasavada-Oza and marketing practitioners Aparna Nagraj and Yamini Krishna, who contend that a common mistake by marketers is "dividing India into two uniform groups: the urban India and the rural India, the assumption being that these two are very different from each other but are uniform in themselves." They go on to describe how "rural India has several 'Indias' in itself" (Vasavada-Oza et al., 2012: 8).

potential consumer groups. Additionally, Fraser contends that the subjection of women under neoliberalism is seen as "an obstacle to capitalist expansion" that confines "economic rationality within a limited sphere" (Fraser, 2009: 115). In other words, conventional neoliberal wisdom suggests that economic development requires women being incorporated into market economies, both as workers and consumers.[199] Hindustan Unilever's "Project Shakti" is a good example of incorporating poor rural women[200] into the market economy. The program, which started in 2000, ostensibly *empowers* women across India by giving them microcredit loans and training to become direct-to-consumer sales distributors selling Unilever's products on commission (Kopper, 2010; Tiltman, 2011; WARC, 2011; Vasavada-Oza et al., 2012: 10). In 2010, there were 45,000 Shakti "entrepreneurs" reaching three million homes in 135,000 villages (Tiltman, 2011).

Unilever (and its subsidiaries including Dove and HUL) is a good example of the relationship between commodity feminism and neoliberalism. Unilever (like multinational corporations more broadly) is assumed to be a rightful agent of social change under neoliberalism. This cannot be disassociated from the corporation's role in subject formation. For example, through Project Shakti, HUL has been credited with giving "rise to the financially active woman in rural India." This has inspired other multinational corporations to follow their lead (Vasavada-Oza et al., 2012: 10). In this chapter, I have contended that in selling subjectivity through feminized and racialized

[199] Hester Eisenstein also makes this point in her discussion of the "dangerous liaison" between feminism and corporate globalization (2005: 503).
[200] 80% of the participants in Project Shakti are women (WARC, 2011).

commodities, corporations *themselves* play a crucial role in subject formation. Although the association of feminism (and other forms of activism) with consumption is problematic in and of itself, the role of the corporation in subject formation is particularly troubling.

CONCLUSION
Making Sense of the Relationship Between Commodity Feminism, Femininity, and Subjectivity

> If we don't want to know how a woman "comes into being" let's leave Freud's science alone […] [for] to ignore Freud is like ignoring Marx.
> —Juliet Mitchell (1973: 168)

> In the early nineties, many of us who were young at the time saw ourselves as victims of a predatory marketing machine that co-opted our identities, our styles and our ideas and turned them into brand food. Nothing was immune: […] not even […] campus feminism or multiculturalism. Few of us asked, at least not right away, why it was that these scenes and ideas were proving so packageable, so unthreatening—and so profitable. Many of us had been certain we were doing something subversive and rebellious but… what was it again?
> —Naomi Klein (2002: 81–82)

Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, I was always tall for my age. I had a growth spurt around the age of eleven or twelve that rendered me considerably taller than all of the other girls and boys in my class. Having internalized the norms of hegemonic femininity, including the idea that girls are supposed to take up less space than boys, I became extremely self-conscious, shy, and withdrawn. If I had to take up more physical space, then I could at least take up less metaphorical space. Although some of the boys, and even one or two girls, reached my height in high school, I had already developed an extremely problematic relationship with both my body and food. The summer after my first year of university, having heard about Naomi Wolf in my introductory Women's Studies course, I read *The Beauty Myth*. I had barely read a few pages of her then-new (1997) introduction when I had my first of many beauty myth *eureka!* moments. By the time I reached the chapter entitled "Hunger," I was convinced that Wolf was speaking directly to me. As a young, white, middle-class woman living in Anglo-America, I was certainly part of her intended audience. When I re-read *The Beauty Myth* for this

dissertation in my early thirties, I used the same copy from my original read at age nineteen. I felt a real fondness for my nineteen-year-old self, who spoke to me through the marginal notes written over a decade earlier. The appearance of the pages was bright and eye-catching. Passages I was particularly excited about were underlined and starred with sparkly silver and gold. Although I read the book with a far more critical eye than I did at age nineteen, I was amused by the sparkly stars and bright pink and purple arrows that dotted the pages of Wolf's critique of femininity.

When I discovered feminism in the late 1990s, I never assumed there was a tension between feminism and femininity. Perhaps this was because I came of age during the third wave of feminism and read *The Beauty Myth* at such a formative age. Indeed, Wolf herself contended that feminists can wear lipstick without feeling guilty (1997: 271).[201] I still love bright colours and lipstick and dressing up in clothing constructed as feminine. At any given time, I have at least ten different colours of nail polish in my bathroom cabinet, many of which contain sparkles. I also love arts and crafts activities. I own the entire series of *Stitch 'n Bitch* knitting and crocheting pattern books by Debbie Stoller. In addition to being a crafter, Stoller is the co-founder of the third wave magazine *Bust,* and proponent of the *Girlie* strand of third wave feminism.[202] The *Stitch 'n Bitch* series, like *Girlie* feminism more broadly, promotes the idea that women's work is valuable, that reclaiming feminine culture is a feminist act, and that crafting is a powerful link both to one's female ancestors and women's history more

[201] Also see section 2.5.
[202] See section 2.7.

broadly.[203] In a similar manner to Stoller, I experience crafting as a celebration of my female relatives and ancestors: it was my maternal grandmother who taught me how to knit, and she was taught by her grandmother; it was my aunt who taught me how to crochet, and she was taught by her mother (my long-deceased paternal grandmother). Although I share with my maternal grandmother a love of nail polish, lipstick, dressing up, and knitting, she was (and continues to idealize) the 1950s *happy homemaker*[204] while I am a feminist. Yet the question for me has never been how to think through my expressions of femininity as a feminist. Instead, my question concerns how my own third wave-influenced feminism has been repeatedly bought and sold. I begin the concluding chapter in this manner in order to both discuss my personal investment in this dissertation and concretize my theoretical concerns.

My theoretical concerns are illustrated well by Juliet Mitchell in the epigraph to this chapter where she contends that both Marx and Freud are central to understanding the subject formation of women in capitalist societies. This chapter completes my inquiry into commodity feminism by drawing together some of the primary themes of this dissertation. Section A explores the role of *origin stories* in my understanding of commodity feminism, specifically those of Engels and Freud, using Joanne Wright's *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship* (2004). Section B concerns the *social control* underpinning commodity feminism by exploring the relationship between hysteria, femininity, and group psychology. In doing so, I link

[203] For example, in *Stitch 'n Bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker*, Stoller discusses how sewing, embroidering, knitting and crocheting "inextricably [bind] me to my female relatives. With each stitch, I follow in the footsteps (handsteps?) of my ancestors, carrying on centuries-old traditions and paying respect to their wide and varied crafting skills" (2006: 3).
[204] See section 3.5.

Freud's conservatism and misogynist understandings of femininity to reactionary work on group psychology, particularly Gustave Le Bon (1895) and Ann Coulter (2011), to examine how commodity feminism sells feminism to direct and control the supposedly hysterical, feminine masses. Section C reads commodity feminism as a *civilizing mission* which brings so-called *civilization*—that is, commodity culture informed by feminism—to the anti-feminist, often racialized masses. I return to the question of how Marx's original conception of commodity fetishism was tied up in racist discourses of civilization and link this to Naomi Klein's critique of commodity culture in *No Logo* (1999). In addition to drawing together the primary themes of this dissertation, this concluding chapter aims to suggest a way of *resisting*—both theoretically and politically—the commodified politics Klein is discussing in the epigraph to this chapter.

A. Commodity Feminism, Origin Stories, and Origin Questions

This exploration of commodity feminism has involved several stories of origin. I have discussed Engels' story of the advent of private property as involving the "world historic defeat of the female sex" (section 1.3), Freud's story of the dawn of *civilization* as involving guilt about the Oedipal killing of the father (section 3.4), and my own story of the origins of commodity feminism being rooted in the femininity question in popular Anglo-American feminism (Chapter Two). In this section, I further explore the theme of *origin stories*, using Joanne Wright's *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship* (2004) as a starting point. In her book, Wright explores the "origins imperative" in political theory: origins not only play a significant role within

(historical and contemporary) political theory, but they might also be essential insofar as they fulfill a basic human need to reflect upon our beginnings and make sense of the world (2004: 3–23, 163). Although this dissertation does not examine the same origin stories as Wright,[205] in thinking through the origin stories associated with commodity feminism, I heed her call to become "more critically aware and reflective about the function of origin stories and their more pernicious falsehoods and uses" in order to "advance our search for an equitable politics" (2004: 164). Following from this, this section will contend that the origin stories associated with commodity feminism should not be understood as either actual historical events or as foundational to social and political life. Instead, I suggest that these origin stories ought to be read as illuminating the power relations from which commodity feminism emerged and within which it continues to operate. I thus open up (rather than close off) possibilities of resisting commodity feminism and working toward decommodification.

The origin stories of Engels and Freud share several crucial points. In the usual manner of political origin storytellers, both begin with a primordial state of nature and move on to discuss the formation of a social contract between men. Neither Engels nor Freud use the language of "state of nature" or "social contract;" nevertheless, their narratives follow the basic trajectory established by social contract theorists (including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau).[206] What makes them stand

[205] Wright examines both the masculinist origin stories concerning the beginnings of politics and power (Plato and Thomas Hobbes) as well as feminist origin stories about the beginnings of patriarchy (Carole Pateman and various 1960s and 1970s radical feminists).

[206] Seventeenth and eighteenth century social contract theorists postulated a *state of nature* as the supposedly *natural* condition of men and women before the advent of society, politics, or economics. For example, Locke, theorist of the English bourgeoisie and early agrarian capitalism, understood the so-called

out from the standard social contract origin story, however, is the importance placed on gender and sexuality in both their narratives.[207] In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels proposes that "group marriage" (that is, unrestricted sex between all members of the group) was the original state of humanity.[208] Similarly, in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud contends that "the oldest and most powerful of human desires" is to have sex with all other members of the primordial (totemic) group (1989c: 41). In both origin stories, therefore, the primordial stage involves no restrictions on who can have sex with whom.[209] For Engels, this restriction comes with the invention of incest (Engels, 1972: 63). For Freud, this restriction comes with the development of the taboo (Freud, 1989c: 41). Moreover, Freud suggests that the earliest taboos—that is,

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Indians running around improperly clothed in the woods of North and South America to be a perfect example of the state of nature. Indeed, in *The Second Treatise of Government* (1690) he famously declared: "in the beginning all the world was America" (Locke, 1980: §49). Locke, therefore, made the Aboriginal societies of the Americas (or rather, an inaccurate and romanticized version of these societies) an integral part of his justification of the emerging liberal capitalist state.

[207] Gender and sexuality are largely absent in the origin stories of Hobbes, Locke, and other social contract theorists. At the same time, I would be remiss not to mention Carole Pateman's now classic book *The Sexual Contract*. According to Pateman, *implicit* within social contract theory is a sexual contract. Pateman argues that contract theorists tell only half the story: in dealing with the transition between the state of nature and political society, these theorists discuss the social contract but ignore the *sexual contract* (1988: 1). She takes up the task of writing the sexual contract back into their stories. In short, the sexual contract explains a silence in the narrative. In the state of nature, women and men are equal. However, in political society, in a similar way in which men have subordinated their natural freedom to monarchical power, women have subordinated their natural equality to what Locke refers to as paternal power (Pateman, 1988: 91, 218). Men choose to subordinate themselves (to the monarch) to protect their property, yet the reason women choose to subordinate themselves (to patriarchy) is never explained. Pateman proposes that the sexual contract is not a contract at all: women join political society because they were raped. Indeed, on this point it should be noted that Pateman is specifically referring to Hobbes. According to Pateman, Hobbes was the only social contract theorist to hint at a reason for women's so-called *choice* to subordinate themselves to patriarchy. In her reading, Hobbes was more honest than Locke, who left the reason unstated (Pateman, 1988: 49). Her radical feminist appropriation of the language and method of masculinist origin stories effectively demonstrates the partiality of these stories. At the same time, Pateman is offering an interpretation of what is *unsaid*, or at best *implicit*, within these stories; as such, her book does not dispute my claim that gender and sexuality are largely absent from most social contract theory.

[208] See section 1.3.

[209] Both Engels and Freud, however, assume that all sexual activity in the primordial stage is heterosexual.

not killing the totemic animal and restricting sexual relations—represents the "oldest human unwritten code of laws" (1989c: 25). As such, the subsequent development of both religious and human laws can be traced back to this taboo (Freud, 1989c: 26).

In both Engels and Freud, the transition out of the primordial stage (or *state of nature* in the terminology of contract theorists) involves the establishment of a masculinist social contract. For Engels, of course, this transition occurs with the simultaneous development of monogamous marriage and commodity production (1972: 85). With this development, women become commodities to be exchanged between men.[210] For Freud, this transition involves the rise of father-rule followed by the primal horde (or band of brothers) killing and eating their father.[211] This transition also involves the renunciation of the incestuously desired women within their horde, and the brothers of the horde exchanging *their* women with the women belonging to the brothers of another horde (Freud, 1961: 53–61; Paul, 1996: 22–23). Thus for both Engels and Freud, the social contract is made between men for the possession and exchange of women.

In addition to the crucial points of commonality shared in the origin narratives of Engels and Freud, they both (at times) treat their stories as actual historical events. Engels believed he was writing history, while Freud was more unclear. Engels' abilities as a historian are crude at best. His evidence has been described by Gayle Rubin as "quaint to a reader familiar with the more recent developments in anthropology" (1997: 31). Seccombe argues that Engels' belief that the origin of women's subordination lies in the

[210] See section 1.3.
[211] See section 3.4.

advent of private property is not sustained by modern studies. Referencing contemporary work in anthropology, historical sociology and social history, he contends that support is not lent to "the orthodox Marxist position, stemming from Engels, nor to its opposite, which posits a universal pattern of male dominance" (1992: 36). As such, the historical origins problem Engels claims to have solved remains in question.[212] Freud relies even less on historical and anthropological evidence than Engels, which might explain his ambiguity concerning whether or not he is writing history. Freud has the tendency of presenting the Oedipal narrative *as* history, while including the occasional caveat that acknowledges he is not equipped to handle questions of historical or anthropological accuracy. For example, in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud states unequivocally: "the events I am about to describe occurred to *all* primitive men—that is, to all our ancestors" (2001: 81; emphasis mine). Yet elsewhere in this book, Freud responds to critiques of his use of ethnography in his earlier work (*Totem and Taboo*) by stating: "I am not an ethnologist but a psycho-analyst" (2001: 131). Engels and Freud are not alone in their (mis)use of history: as Wright notes, origin story theorists commonly distort history for their own purposes (2004: 24).

For Wright, beyond the distortion of history, what is particularly problematic is the treatment of origin stories as *foundational* to social and political life. Both Engels

[212] In addition to "quaint," Engels' evidence is perhaps better described as highly Eurocentric. Engels is reliant almost exclusively on Greece, Rome, and early Germany to discuss the transition from kin-based to class-based society (Leacock, 1981: 25). Almost all the non-European and non-Asian world is placed in the (itself heterogeneous) category of kin-based societies. As Leacock points out, this leaves in "a very unsatisfactory state the colonial peoples who were in various stages of transition to class and state organization when their autonomous development was interrupted" (1981: 25). Engels did very little of the anthropological work himself and relied almost exclusively on Morgan. Yet the anthropological material he added relates to early Germanic and Celtic societies (Leacock, 1972: 14).

and Freud treat their origin stories in this manner. In addition, Freud's (Oedipal) story is treated as foundational to not only social and political life but to individual psychological life as well. Wright contends that this emphasis on foundations has "a way of limiting our thinking, [and] of narrowing our perspectives, precisely because [origin stories] presuppose a belief in essences, original orders, and primordial truths" (2004: 162). Moreover, she suggests that origin stories "deny the complexity and messiness of politics" (2004: 162). I would add that reading origin stories as foundational denies the possibility of resistance. Indeed, if civilization *began* with guilt about the murder of the father (Freud), if the development of private property and capitalism can be linked to the re-establishment of masculinist rule (Engels), if the rule by an authoritarian father-substitute is a fundamental aspect of both individual and group psychology (Freud), and if the exchange of women is central to capitalism (Engels), then how does one engage in feminist and anti-capitalist resistance? A better understanding—one that is less totalizing and allows for resistance[213]—will reject the idea that origin stories represent actual historical events or are foundational to social and political life.

Origin stories are better understood as highlighting *certain aspects* of the complexity and messiness of social and political life. In this dissertation, I have used the origin stories of Engels and Freud to make sense of certain aspects of commodity feminism. Engels' origin story concerning women being reduced to commodities to be exchanged between men—developed from his work with Marx—has been highly influential in feminist understandings of the relationship between women and

[213] See section 1.5 for more discussion of the problem of resistance in Engels.

commodities.[214] In Chapter One, I suggested that the commodification of women is a necessary precursor to understanding the commodification of feminism. Indeed, not only are women exchanged between men, but women are also exchangers and fetishizers of commodities in their own right.[215] As such, I have used Engels' origin story on the "world historic defeat of the female sex"—along with Gayle Rubin's use of this story for understanding the exchange and commodification of women[216]—in developing my theoretical framework for understanding the commodification of feminism. Freud's origin story concerning the guilt about the Oedipal killing of the father, and subsequent desire among the band of brothers for an authoritative father-substitute, is central to his social and political thought. By extension, Freud's origin story is also important to the social and political thought of Freud's nephew Edward Bernays. In Chapter Three, I suggested that Bernays—originator of the first commodity feminist marketing campaigns and lifetime promoter of Freud's image and writings—was strongly influenced by Freud's masculinist, elitist, and anti-democratic politics. Overall, the origin stories of Engels and Freud have helped to illuminate aspects of the relationship between women and commodities, and the conservatism underpinning commodity feminism.

In this dissertation, I have explored the origins of commodity feminism while intentionally avoiding writing another (to use Wright's term) *foundational* origin story. I have not posited a primordial state of nature, nor have I invented a prehistory based on

[214] See sections 1.3 and 1.4.
[215] See section 1.5.
[216] See section 1.4.

incomplete speculations. Instead, I have heeded Wright's call for "increased historical sensitivity" in feminist political theory (2004: 16). This sensitivity is evident in my examination of the treatment of the femininity question within popular Anglo-American feminist texts,[217] my discussion of historical shifts in marketing to women from the *happy homemaker* onwards,[218] and finally, my discussion of 1970s and 1980s marketing debates on the changing roles of women.[219] I have not treated the origins of commodity feminism as essential or fundamental or unchanging; as already established, such treatments of origins are limiting and simplistic (Wright, 2004: 161–162). Instead, I have explored origins as a way of understanding the popularity of commodity feminism today—that is, its ascendancy as a form of feminism—and as a way of exploring the underlying power relations within which commodity feminism operates. More specifically, I have situated the origins of commodity feminism through the *femininity question* in Chapter Two and *capitalism under conservatism* in Chapter Three. I have argued that commodity feminism resolves the feminism/femininity tension in two ways: first, through revaluing feminized commodities and the women who use them (in their production of femininity); and second, through a Bernaysian-conservative understanding of society in which commodity consumption is treated as a necessary form of social control.

In transitioning between the first theme (*origin stories*) and the second (*social control*), it is useful to briefly consider Juliet Mitchell's reading of Freud's Oedipal

[217] See Chapter Two.
[218] See section 3.5.
[219] See section 3.6.

narrative. Mitchell contends that the narrative should be read as "the story of the origins of patriarchy" (1974: 403). She contends that within both the Oedipal narrative (the origin story) and the Oedipus complex (the stage of child psychosexual development), "the little boy learns his place as heir to the law of the father and the little girl learns her place within it" (Mitchell, 1974: 203). Although my use of Freud in this dissertation has focused on the Oedipal narrative (and to a lesser extent the Oedipus complex), it is important to note that before the complex or narrative, Freud's earliest work was on hysteria. The next theme (and section) concerns *social control*, and more specifically, how that control relates to both hysteria and femininity.

B. Commodity Feminism as Controlling the Hysterical, Feminine Masses

In exploring the theme of social control, I use Freud's work on hysteria as a starting point, particularly focusing on his case study of Dora. I return to my earlier comparison of individual and group psychology[220] to relate Freud's understanding of the psychology of Dora (an individual, supposedly hysterical woman) to other work on the psychology of the masses (which are understood as both hysterical and feminine), while drawing attention to the misogyny underpinning the characterization of both Dora and the masses. In doing so, I use the work of feminists (particularly Hélène Cixous) who have read hysteria as a form of proto-feminism to link Freud and Bernays' conservative, misogynist understandings of femininity, and conservative/reactionary work on group psychology (particularly Gustave Le Bon's 1895 *The Crowd: A Study in the Popular Mind* and Ann Coulter's 2011 *Demonic: How the Liberal Mob is Endangering America*). This

[220] See section 3.4.

section will contend that if the hysteria of individual women, particularly Freud's Dora, is a feminine/feminist protest against the rule of the father (or father-substitute), controlling the hysteric is necessary to maintain that rule. Moreover, the control of Dora by the father(-substitute) is similar to the control of the (commodity) feminist by the public relations counsel (that is, Bernays' capitalist version of Plato's philosopher-king[221]).

The etymology of the word *hysteria* is *hysterikos*, the ancient Greek word for uterus. Intermittently since ancient Greece, hysterics have been understood to be women whose wombs were disturbed, or "wandering" around their bodies in some manner (Goldstein, 1991: 134; King, 1993). For example, in *Timaeus*, Plato described a woman's uterus as such:

> if it remains unproductive long past puberty, it gets irritated and fretful. It takes to wandering all around the body and generating all sorts of ailments, including potentially fatal problems, if it blocks up the air-channels and makes breathing impossible. This goes on until a woman's appetite for childbearing and a man's yearning for procreation bring the two of them together and they strip the fruit from the tree, so to speak (2008: 91c).

In other words, the cure for many of women's chronic and potentially fatal health problems is to have sexual intercourse with a man and conceive a child. For much of its history (that is, from ancient Greece to the sixteenth century), the medical and cultural understanding of hysteria lacked any real coherence, beyond vague and recurrent ideas about women's wandering uteri. As G. S. Rousseau notes of this time period, there was a "protean ability to sustain the existence of a condition called hysteria without a stable set of causes and effects or, more glaringly, a category identifiable by a commonly

[221] See section 3.3.

agreed upon characteristics" (1993: 92). By the mid-nineteenth century, western doctors were divided on whether or not hysteria was a disorder of the uterus or a disease of the nerves (that is, the neurological system). However, there was consensus on hysteria being a "quintessentially feminine" disease rooted somewhere in women's bodies, the symptoms of which were excesses of emotion, fits, and irrational behaviour (King, 1993: 13). There was also widespread agreement among the masculinist medical establishment that the only certain way to ensure hysterics got better (or at least not worsen) was for the woman to conform to hegemonic femininity, primarily through marriage and motherhood (King, 1993: 63–64).

Freud started his work on hysteria in 1885 and broke from conventional understandings of the (supposed) disorder/disease in several ways. Most importantly, he came to understand hysteria as rooted in *psychology*, not physiology (that is, neither the uterus nor the neurological system) (Freud, 1989a: 7). Following from this understanding, he linked the disease to sexuality (Freud, 1989a: 13; 1989b: 173–174, 193, 197).[222] Additionally, Freud broke from conventional understandings in suggesting hysteria was *not* exclusive to women. Despite Freud's idea that hysteria could occur in men, his published case studies on hysteria concerned almost exclusively women patients (Link-Heer and Daniel, 1990: 202). Freud's most famous case study was on Ida Bauer or "Dora" (as she was originally called to protect her identity). As Maria Ramas noted in 1980, *Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora")* (1905) represents

[222] Indeed, it was his studies on hysteria that led to his interest in sexuality (Freud, 1989a: 14), and it was through his interest in sexuality that Freud came to *discover* the Oedipus complex (Freud, 1989a: 20–23; Bergmann, 2001: 346, 351–353).

"a classic analysis of the structure and genesis of hysteria and has the first or last word in almost every psychoanalytic discussion of hysteria" (1980: 473).

In *Fragments*, Freud outlines his treatment and analysis of Dora five years previously. The primary people focused upon in Freud's re-telling are "Herr K." and "Frau K." (a married couple in their forties and friends of Dora's family), Dora's father, and of course Dora herself. Dora tells Freud that her father and Frau K. have been lovers for many years.[223] In 1900, Dora is eighteen and has (supposedly) long been suffering from hysteria.[224] She is brought to Freud by two men—her father and Herr K.—after threatening to commit suicide. Freud links Dora's symptoms to two so-called *incidents*[225] with Herr K. when she was fourteen and sixteen years of age respectively. At fourteen, Herr K. deceived and manipulated Dora into a situation in which she would be alone with him;[226] he then cornered, kissed and rubbed against her, after which she managed to escape and run out into the street (Freud, 1989b: 183–184).[227] At sixteen, Dora was obliged to spend the summer in the Alps with her father and the K. family. One day by the lake, Herr K. made "advances" to Dora, saying that he "got nothing from [his] wife." Dora slapped him in the face and again ran away (Freud, 1989b: 228). Dora

[223] Dora's mother is said to suffer from the ill health of housewives and is mentioned only sporadically. Juliet Mitchell has commented upon "the patriarchal suppression of Dora's mother to a marginalized position of housewife's neurosis, of making life more difficult and of being ill-educated and lacking culture; she appears not to count in either the life history or the text" (2000: 96).

[224] According to contemporary understandings of mental health, Dora would be understood today as suffering from anxiety and depression (French, 2008: 249).

[225] This is the term Freud uses throughout his case study of Dora.

[226] Herr K. lured Dora to his place of work on the pretence that Dora, himself and his wife would have a good view of a street festival (Freud, 1989b: 183). Upon arriving at Herr K.'s business, she found him alone. All the clerks had been sent home and Frau K. was not present.

[227] Neither Herr K. nor Dora acknowledged this incident afterwards. Dora avoided being alone with Herr K. after that and did not tell anyone about the sexual assault until her therapy sessions with Freud four years later (Freud, 1989b: 184).

told her father about the scene by the lake and begged him to take her home; Dora's father suggested she was merely "overexcited" and the whole scene was a product of her imagination (Freud, 1989b: 182, 194). Dora told Freud that she had become an "object of barter" between her father and Herr K.; that is, she was "handed over to Herr K. as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife" (Freud, 1989b: 188). Freud suggested to Dora that she was in love with Herr K., an interpretation Dora rejected (1989b: 190, 210–211). Moreover, Freud suggested that Dora secretly wished Herr K. would divorce his wife and marry her (1989b: 229–230). After this suggestion—and eleven weeks of therapy—Dora leaves and never returns. Freud interprets this as "an unmistakable act of vengeance on her part," presumably because Freud pointed out Dora's supposed love for Herr K. (1989b: 230).

Freud's discussion of Dora's supposed hysteria is masculinist, heteronormative, and misogynist. Freud does not problematize the *incidents* at age fourteen and sixteen as sexual assault. Granted, Freud (unlike Dora's father) does believe what she tells him about Herr K. (Freud, 1989b: 195); Freud is also unclear about the details of the second *incident*.[228] At the same time, the first incident involved a man in his forties forcing sexual activity upon a fourteen-year-old girl without her consent, which is clearly sexual assault. Indeed, as French suggests, "a contemporary assessment of Dora's situation would read Herr K.'s sexual advances as paedophilic and his treatment of Dora as child abuse" (2008: 250). Additionally, Freud does not in any way problematize the behaviour of Herr K., who was clearly abusing his position of power as an adult and trusted family

[228] Freud is unclear on whether these "advances" were verbal or both verbal and physical. Although it is impossible to know with certainty, this might reflect Dora's lack of clarity in therapy.

friend. Rather, Freud problematizes *Dora's reaction* to his behaviour. He reads Dora's "violent feeling of disgust" during and after her sexual assault at age fourteen as indicative of her *abnormality* and *hysteria*. Freud suggests that this was "surely just the situation to call up a distinct feeling of sexual excitement in a girl of fourteen who had never before been approached" (Freud, 1989b: 184). In Freud's view, Dora's disgust renders her "entirely and completely hysterical" (Freud, 1989b: 184). Freud describes Herr K. as "still quite young and of prepossessing appearance" (Freud, 1989b: 184). In doing so, Freud is following a long line of misogynist thought that blames the victim (rather than the perpetrator) in cases of sexual assault, and assumes women ought to enjoy it once it is underway (particularly where the assaulter conforms to hegemonic notions of masculine attractiveness). For these and other reasons, it is not surprising that Freud's masculinist and heteronormative assumptions about Dora have been critiqued extensively by feminists.[229]

In addition to critiquing Freud's problematic assumptions, feminists have read Dora (and to a lesser degree Freud's other cases of *hysteria*) as enacting a form of feminism or proto-feminism. This has been quite common in feminist theory, particularly feminist theory influenced by Freudian (or Lacanian) psychoanalysis since

[229] For example, in her play, *Portrait of Dora*, Hélène Cixous challenges Freud's heteronormative reading of Dora as being in love with Herr K. Instead, she proposes that Dora is actually in love with Frau K. (Cixous, 2004: 41–43). In Freud's original work, there are hints of Dora's attraction to Frau K. For example, Freud notes that "when Dora talked about Frau K., she used to praise her 'adorable white body' in accents more appropriate to a lover" (1989b: 205). However, at no point during his treatment of Dora do any of these hints appear to register as significant to Freud. He persists in his understanding that Dora is secretly in love with her father(-substitute) and assaulter, Herr K. Freud does note in a footnote, five years after treating Dora, that "the longer the interval of time that separates me from the end of this analysis, the more probable it seems to me that the fault in my technique lay in this omission: I failed to discover in time and to inform the patient that her homosexual *[sic]* (gynaecophilic) love for Frau K. was the strong unconscious current of her mental life" (1989b: 237).

the late 1960s (Price Herndl, 1988: 52–54; Kahane, 1990: 31; Showalter, 1993: 286–288; Benjamin, 2001: 33; Dimen and Harris, 2001: 26). Discussions of Dora have been so commonplace that Juliet Mitchell has suggested that "with the second wave feminist movement, 'Dora' became a household name" (2000: 82). Mitchell herself links Freud's earlier work on hysteria to his later work on Oedipus, contending that within "the body of the hysteric lies the feminine *protest against the law of the father*" (1974: 404; emphasis mine). Hélène Cixous, who has always been "fascinated" by Dora, famously questioned: "what woman is not Dora?" (Cixous and Clément, 1986: 147, 150). For Cixous, Dora is the

> one who resists the system, the one who cannot stand that the family and society are founded on the body of women, on bodies despised, rejected, bodies that are humiliating once they have been used. And this girl—like all hysterics, deprived of the possibility of saying directly what she perceived, […] still had strength to make it known. It is the nuclear example of women's power to protest. […] *Yet the hysteric is, to [Cixous'] eyes, the typical woman in all her force*. It is a force that was turned back against Dora, but, if the scene changes and if woman begins to speak in other ways, it would be a force capable of demolishing these structures (Cixous and Clément, 1986: 154; emphasis mine).

For Cixous, therefore, Dora's hysteria is a form of protest against the masculinist order: Dora may not be able make her protest explicit, but she makes it known nonetheless. Cixous reads Dora as having an "incredible strength" by making her (family) system break down to the point that "the men drop like flies" (Cixous and Clément, 1986: 150).

Whether or not the men in Dora's life are dropping like flies, Dora certainly subverts the masculinist (family) order in which she is enmeshed. Dora rejects Herr K.'s so-called advances twice; she is disgusted by Herr K.'s violation of her trust and bodily integrity; she names Herr K.'s behaviour as wrong; she critiques her status as an object

to be exchanged between her father and Herr K.; and finally, she quits seeing Freud after he replicates the masculinism of her family. In other words, Dora refuses to submit to the authority of both her father *and* her two father-substitutes—namely, Herr K. and Freud himself. Freud regarded his psychoanalytic treatment of Dora as incomplete and relatively unsuccessful (1989b: 231–239). Ultimately, Freud failed in directing and controlling the (supposedly hysterical) Dora. His nephew, Edward Bernays, was much more successful in directing and controlling the (supposedly feminine and hysterical) masses. Before returning to Bernays, however, it is first important to briefly explore the construction of the masses as both hysterical and feminine (to the conservative mindset) and the misogyny underpinning this construction.

The relationship between hysteria, femininity, and the masses is evident in a variety of historical and contemporary conservative texts, including nineteenth-century French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon and contemporary American conservative pundit Ann Coulter. Le Bon's 1895 *Psychologie des foules* (generally translated into English as simply *The Crowd*) has been highly influential in group psychology[230] as well as conservative and reactionary[231] thought and politics. In *The Crowd*, Le Bon proposed that individuals in a crowd effectively lose their personality: the crowd takes control of, transforms, and makes the individual behave in ways they would not otherwise behave

[230] Leach describes *The Crowd* as "the most imaginative and widely-read exposition of crowd psychology" (1992: 12). Indeed, Freud himself devoted over one-third of his classic text on group psychology, *Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the 'I'* (1921), to a synopsis and discussion of Le Bon. See section 3.4 for a discussion of *Mass Psychology*.

[231] Le Bon was influential among fascists. For example, Benito Mussolini in his autobiography singled out *Psychologie des foules* as a text that had particularly influenced him (Hayes, 1992: 64). Additionally, Le Bon's terminology and principles were repeatedly taken up by Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, and the architects of the Third Reich employed Le Bonian principles (Hayes, 1992: 64–65; Leach, 1992: 25).

(1968: 33–34). He understood the crowd to be highly suggestible, completely irrational, to have no ability to comprehend logic, as often hysterical, and sometimes violent (Le Bon, 1968: 37, 51, 52, 59, 107–110, 125–126). In other words, in a similar manner to his successors Freud and Bernays, Le Bon is both anti-democratic and fears the masses.[232] In addition to hysteria and irrationality, Le Bon also repeatedly associated crowds with women and femininity. For example, he suggested that

> among the special characteristics of crowds there are several—such as impulsiveness, irrationality, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgement and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of sentiments […] which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution—in women […] for instance (Le Bon cited in Hayes, 1992: 65).

Le Bon's misogynist associations have been picked up by others, including fascists[233] and more recently, conservative American journalist Ann Coulter.

Coulter, often considered a leading voice of contemporary American conservatism,[234] is known for her hyperbolic and incendiary writing and speaking style, and unapologetic misogynist and racist language. Coulter begins *Demonic* by suggesting that "the demon is a mob, and the mob is demonic" (2011: 4). She suggests that her book explores the "root cause" of a (supposedly) "widely recognized" fact, which is that the left in America is "hysterical, unreasonable and clueless" (2011: 5). She situates Le

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[232] For example, Le Bon describes the ideals of the French Revolution (and democratic thought more generally) as a "grave delusion" (1968: 75–76). Le Bon sees the nobility who lost their privileges as the real heroes of the French Revolution (1968: 206). He also complains about the suggestibility and irrationality of parliamentarians when in a group (1968: 195–196, 205).

[233] For example, Mussolini contended that: "The crowd loves strong men. The crowd is like a woman" (Mussolini cited in Hayes, 1992: 65). Hitler suggested that just as a woman "would rather bow to a strong man than to dominate a weakling, […] the masses would love a commander more than a petitioner and feel inwardly more satisfied by a doctrine, tolerating no other beside itself, than by the granting of liberalistic freedom" (Hitler cited in Hayes, 1992: 65).

[234] Coulter has written multiple books (most of which have appeared on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list), hundreds of articles, and she has made frequent appearances on television, talk radio, and the lecture circuit.

Bon's work as central to her explorations, because in her view, contemporary American "liberals could have been Le Bon's study subjects" (2011: 5). Throughout *Demonic*, Coulter repeatedly associates the masses with so-called "primitives," irrationality, women, and (what she understands to be) "The Left."[235] For example, Coulter argues that:

> The Left's passionate adoration of President Obama—and Clinton, FDR, JFK, Hillary, Teddy Kennedy, and on and on—are the primitive emotions of a mob. These are sentiments generally associated with women, children, and savages, according to Le Bon. It's not an accident that *when Republicans of all stripes* […] *choose an epithet for Democrats, it's to call them women* (Coulter, 2011: 27; emphasis mine).

Although Coulter identifies as a woman, it is to be assumed that she is exempt from those weak-willed, Democratic Party-voting, primitive, emotional, irrational, woman-like masses. Another interesting aspect of this quote (and the book as a whole) is Coulter's use of Le Bon to give her views scholarly justification. Coulter is not unique in this regard: Le Bon is regularly used to "explain behaviour that is unacceptable to the person using the explanation" (McPhail, 1992: 13). Overall, Le Bon's work has been said to owe "less to psychology than to conservative politics" (Leach, 1992: 13). In other words, although *The Crowd* has been embraced by conservatives (and reactionaries) for over a century, Le Bon's scholarship has long been discredited by academics in psychology and other disciplines.[236]

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[235] Coulter's use of the "The Left" is unclear; at times it seems to be self-identified American liberals and members of the Democratic Party, at other times it seems to include all Americans who are not staunch Republicans.

[236] For example, in *The Myth of the Maddening Crowd*, Clark McPhail contends that Le Bon was instrumental in creating myths about crowd behaviour (1991: 1–20, 25). He criticizes Le Bon (and those who have taken up his work) as making no attempt whatsoever at the systematic observation or study of crowds. He suggests that those who have made this attempt have found that individuals are not driven

Le Bon and Coulter are good examples of conservatives who associate the masses with hysteria and femininity in a misogynist manner. In this dissertation, I have defined misogyny as a hatred or deep hostility toward women and/or femininity.[237] Julia Serano (whose work I used extensively in Chapter Two) critiques misogyny in American

> political discourse, where advocates for the environment, gun control, and welfare are undermined via "guilt by association" with feminine imagery as seen in phrases such as "tree huggers," "soft on crime," and pro-"dependency"—where male politicians who exhibit anything other than a two-dimensional facade of hypermasculinity are invariably dismissed by cartoonists who depict them donning dresses (2007: 340).

Ann Coulter's language in *Demonic* is exactly the sort of discourse Serano is critiquing: Coulter employs *woman* as a derogatory term and uses the language associated with femininity to denigrate her political opponents. Although Serano's *Whipping Girl* was published four years before *Demonic*, Coulter's use of misogynist language has long been part of her rhetorical strategy (Chambers and Finlayson, 2008; Farrar and Klien, 2009). Thus underpinning the need to control the (hysterical) masses is a misogynist understanding of femininity.

The question remaining concerns how Freud's work on the hysteria of Dora and other conservative work on the hysteria of the masses relates to the theme of *social control*. Edward Bernays is key to this relationship. In 1929, when trying to figure out how to sell cigarettes to women for the American Tobacco Company, Bernays asked psychoanalyst A. A. Brill for advice.[238] Brill confirmed Bernays' belief that the taboo on

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mad or do not lose cognitive control in crowds; in fact, the crowd behaviour Le Bon and his followers describe is "infrequent and virtually never involves more than a few crowd members" (1991: xxii–xxiii).

[237] See section 2.2.

[238] When questioned by an interviewer as to why Bernays consulted with Brill instead of his uncle, Bernays replied that Freud was in Vienna (Curtis, 2002). However, it seems unlikely that Freud would be interested

women smoking[239] was of great psychological significance. Brill, American translator and lifelong correspondent of Freud, contended that

> some women regard cigarettes as symbols of freedom […] Smoking is a sublimation of oral eroticism; holding a cigarette in the mouth excites the oral zone. It is perfectly normal for women to want to smoke cigarettes. Further the first women who smoked probably had an excess of masculine components and adopted the habit as a masculine act. But today the emancipation of women has suppressed many of the feminine desires. More women now do the same work as men […]. Cigarettes, which are equated with men, become torches of freedom (Brill cited in Ewen, 1976: 160).

Unsurprisingly, it was Brill from whom Bernays took the term *torches of freedom*. Brill's quote is significant, not only because of Bernays' adoption of the term, but for two other reasons.

First, the quote can be read as an expression of the importance of containing and directing the potentially out-of-control desires and behaviour of women. While Brill saw smoking as empowering women while safely containing their oral eroticism, Bernays understood commodity (feminist) consumption as simultaneously empowering and pacifying the masses. Similarly, Freud read Dora's disgust of the so-called "incident by the lake" with Herr K. as a "symptom of repression in the erotogenic oral zone" (1989b: 185). The key, therefore, is to avoid repression (thus avoiding hysteria) by allowing liberation, as long as it is contained and directed by the wise father-substitute. Second, the quote can be related to Freud's understanding of smoking as both love and submission to the rule of the father. Freud told Dora that she was in love with Herr K. as a father-substitute. This was because Herr K.—like her father and Freud himself—was a

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in helping his nephew in what he considered to be an unsavoury line of work. See section 3.1 for more on Bernays and Freud's relationship.

[239] See section 3.5 for a discussion of Bernays' role in overcoming this taboo.

voracious smoker. After Dora recounted a dream involving smoke, Freud concluded that Dora desired to kiss both Herr K. and Freud himself (1989b: 213). For both Freud and his nephew, therefore, the wise father-substitute (the therapist or the public relations counsel) must direct desire while controlling the potentially hysterical feminine woman or masses.

Overall, hysteria provides a useful lens for thinking through the theme of social control, and provides further links between Chapters Two and Three on the origins of commodity feminism. This exploration of the workings of social control in commodity feminism does not negate agency or resistance. Just as the supposedly hysterical Dora rejected the control of both her actual father and father-substitutes (including Freud himself), the supposedly hysterical masses of women can reject the social control underpinning commodity feminism and reclaim a decommodified feminism.

C. Commodity Feminism as a *Civilizing Mission*

The relationship between commodities and so-called *civilization* is long-standing. The nineteenth-century World Exhibitions (held in Paris, London, and other centres of imperial power) were described by Walter Benjamin as "places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish" (2002: 17). The 1851 World's Fair in London was similarly described by Anne McClintock as a monument to mass consumption and imperial progress (1995: 57). More recently, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on a bastion of capitalist power (the World Trade Centre in New York City), then President George W. Bush famously urged the American public to combat terror by going shopping. To

consume commodities, therefore, is to consume civilization. In order to understand how commodity feminism is implicated in the so-called *civilizing mission*, this section will build upon both the discussion of commodity fetishism in Chapter One and of commodity racism and Unilever in Chapter Four. Additionally, I will link this analysis to Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (1999).

To begin by building upon the discussion of commodity fetishism in Chapter One, in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx theorizes commodity fetishism through an analogy between the European commodity worshipper and the African fetish worshipper.[240] Jane Bennett has argued that Marx's conception of commodity fetishism "seems to draw some of its power from an image of the masses in Western Europe as creatures who bear the repulsive trace of the African savage" (2001: 118). She contends that this trace can be found through a series of associations:

> Its drama aligns the primitive with the negro, the negro with pagan animism, animism with delusion and passivity, passivity with commodity culture. And this line of equivalences is contrasted with another consisting of the modern, the light, the demystified, the debunking critical theorist (Bennett, 2001: 118).

Marx himself does not make all of these associations explicitly; however, in the imperial context in which he is writing, the analogy between the European commodity worshipper and the African fetish worshipper requires this "repulsive trace." Moreover, in comparing the commodity and fetish worshippers, Marx is taking up an impartial third position that is somehow outside this us/them, civilized/primitive dichotomy: that of the enlightened theorist who will demystify the *mysterious* and *enigmatic* character of commodities for *us*.

[240] See section 1.2.2.

If there is a “repulsive trace” underlying Marx’s discussion of commodity fetishism, it is picked up in racist readings of Marx’s original text. For example, Arthur reads Marx’s analogy as between “the subservience of the producers to the laws of the commodity market” and “the superstition of the savage who fashions a fetish with his own hand and then falls down and worships it” (1986: 16). In other words, Arthur reads Marx as arguing that the European producer is no better than the African *savage*: both are subservient, passive subjects too dim to recall that the object they worship was something they created themselves. The Arthur example highlights how difficult (if not impossible) it is for a white European such as Marx, at the height of European imperialism, to critique the cultural practices of African societies outside of these racist discourses.

McNally has a very different reading from Bennett. He argues that what Marx is actually doing is *reversing* imperial discourses concerning fetish worship in Africa in stating that the biggest worshippers of things are Europeans. In his words, Marx is launching an “ironic attack on the European ruling classes as idolaters, as people who worship things” (2011: 205). In making this argument, McNally draws upon the young Marx’s critique of the gold fetish of Spanish colonizers of the Americas, and wood fetish of the rulers of the Rhineland (2006: 2). All of the moralizing by colonizers about the heathens and pagans in the colonies is brought back on the colonizers themselves: the *civilizing mission* of imperialism is required more for the *civilized societies* than the *primitive*. If there is a reverse imperialist logic underlying Marx’s discussion of commodity fetishism, it is picked up in anti-racist readings of Marx’s original text, such

as McClintock's use of the term "commodity racism" to explore a variety of advertisements from late nineteenth-century Britain, in which "Victorian cleaning rituals were peddled globally as the God-given sign of Britain's evolutionary superiority, and soap was invested with magical, fetish powers" (1995: 207).[241]

While there are racist readings of commodity fetishism to support Bennett's argument and anti-racist readings to support McNally's argument, I situate myself between Bennett and McNally. Marx's analogy implies denigration for Bennett and critique for McNally. I contend that Marx's analogy implies equivalence. In making the analogy between commodity and fetish worshippers, Marx might not be inverting colonial discourses so much as equating Western Europe with Western Africa. In making both *uncivilized*, Marx is not necessarily critiquing *or* taking up discourses concerning the *uncivilized* or *primitive*. At the same time, lending support to McNally's argument is Marx's jest concerning "political economists [who] are fond of Robinson Crusoe stories" (1990: 169). Of these storytelling political economists, Marx only specifically mentions Ricardo, yet clearly his target is the variety of origin storytellers (such as Hobbes and Locke) who used caricatures of the original inhabitants of colonized lands as the basis of their theorizing. Therefore Marx's jest *could* be read as demonstrating his awareness of problematic uses of the *primitive* in Western thought. However, as Paul cautions, there is a "widespread […] tendency to transform Marx and Engels into progressives on every issue of twentieth-century concern" (1981: 138). McNally's argument could be read as a continuation of that tendency into the twenty-first century. The nature of Marx's use of

[241] See section 4.5.

colonial discourses in his commodity fetishism/"misty realm of religion" analogy is irresolvable and must remain ambiguous.[242] Yet this debate is somewhat beside the point. In making an analogy between the European commodity worshipper and the African fetish worshipper—whether problematic, critical, or a bit of both—Marx's conception of commodity fetishism is intrinsically tied up in the *civilizing mission* of European imperialism in Africa.

In Chapter Four, I explored how the British masses were taught narratives of imperial progress through *commodity racism*.[243] In thinking through how commodity feminism is implicated in the so-called civilizing mission, it is useful to explore the similarities between historical and contemporary commodity racism. First, just as the soap of Victorian Britain promised "racial upliftment through historical contact with commodity culture" (McClintock, 1995: 220), Fair & Lovely promises racialized empowerment through commodity consumption. Heavily-run television commercials[244] and print ads in India have put forth variations on the same narrative: a depressed

[242] Indeed, retaining this ambiguity is critical because outside of his discussion of commodity fetishism, references to Africans in the work of Marx are quite sparse. Paul has surveyed the references that do exist, not only in the collected works of Marx and Engels, but also in their correspondence with each other and their commentaries on the work of others. She concludes that they "were not consistent anti-colonialists, and they were not progressive about race either; they were simply no better or worse than most of their contemporaries" (1981: 120, 138). Nimtz has come to similar conclusions: he notes that when Marx's daughter Laura married a man who was one-eighth black, Marx wished to convince his daughter and son-in-law that he had progressive ideas about race. At the same time, in his correspondence with Engels, Marx displayed at times essentialist views on race typical of his nineteenth-century context (Nimtz, 2003: 158–161).

[243] See section 4.5.

[244] Fair & Lovely is well known for its major television advertising campaigns in India. For example, in 2002, it was among the most advertised brands during the World Cup (Karnani, 2007: 1353). One of India's largest advertisers is Hindustan Unilever Limited. Industry sources claim the corporation has spent $5 million USD on television advertising for Fair & Lovely alone (Shevde, 2008). In a study of urban women under twenty-five in Hyderabad (in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh), Kavita Karan found that most of the women had seen these commercials. Her respondents commented that the commercials are hard to miss as "they are on every TV channel" and are particularly aired during prime-time serials that are popular with women (2008).

woman with few prospects gains a brighter future by attaining a boyfriend or husband or well-paying job after she uses Fair & Lovely to lighten her complexion (Karnani, 2007: 1353).[245] These ads consistently link happiness and upward mobility with lighter skin. Multiple silhouettes of the same woman lined up from dark to light—reminiscent of the before and after images in Victorian ads—are a recurrent image in Fair & Lovely's commercials, print ads, website, and packaging (Timmons, 2007). Both historical and contemporary commodity racism, therefore, sell class mobility and freedom by promising to remove the taint of darker skin.

A second similarity between historical and contemporary commodity racism is the remaining presence of the racialized beauty contest. Just as evolutionary racism[246] adjudicated among Indians *as if* they were in an "eternal beauty contest" (Arnold, 2004: 263), contemporary merchants of commodity racism sponsor *actual* beauty contests in India. These contests, such as the Pantaloons Femina Miss India pageant (or simply *Miss India*), consistently rank lighter-coloured skin as more beautiful. Dove is a regular sponsor of the Miss India pageant, and like Fair & Lovely, Dove is both a subsidiary of Unilever and a producer of skin lightening cream. These pageants are very influential in shaping contemporary notions of female beauty in India.[247] Indeed, since the 1970s beauty pageants have been a tremendously popular viewer spectacle (Nakano Glenn,

[245] Although I focused on Fair & Lovely's Indian market in this dissertation, Unilever has followed a similar advertising strategy in all the countries where it is sold. Unsurprisingly, advertisements containing this narrative have faced a great deal of criticism from women's groups in many countries including India, Malaysia, and Egypt (Karnani, 2007: 1353).
[246] See section 4.5.
[247] Another important influence shaping contemporary notions of female beauty in India are Bollywood actresses, who tend to have lighter skin and often green eyes (Nakano Glenn, 2008: 290; Shevde, 2008).

2008: 296, 297, 289–290).[248] The remaining presence of the racialized beauty contest demonstrates that the multinational corporation has taken over from the imperialist state. Corporations such as Unilever have taken over from British colonial representatives in the duty of adjudicating Indian female beauty.

A third similarity between historical and contemporary commodity racism is that both are responses to the needs of globalized capital. In the nineteenth century, cotton produced by slave plantations lead to a surplus of cheap cotton goods, while palm oil and coconut oil produced by imperial plantations lead to a surplus of cheap ingredients ideal for soap making. These developments, along with the growing disposable income of the middle class in Britain, lead to a growth in commodities made from cotton and a growth in the soap produced to clean cotton products, as well as bodies and homes (McClintock, 1995: 210). Moreover, as McClintock documents,

> Economic competition with the United States and Germany created the need for a more aggressive promotion of British products and led to the first real innovations in advertising. In 1884 […] the first wrapped soap was sold under a brand name. This small event signified a major transformation in capitalism, as imperial competition gave rise to the creation of monopolies. Henceforth, items formerly indistinguishable from each other (soap simply sold as soap) would be marketed by their corporate signature […] Soap became one of the first commodities to register the historic shift from myriad small businesses to the great imperial monopolies (1995: 210–211).

Given the origins of commodity racism in the marketing of British soap, commodity racism therefore plays an important role in the early development of globalized capital and commodity culture.

[248] Nakano Glenn attributes this popularity to Indian nationalism. India has been very successful in international pageants such as Miss World (2008: 290). Winners of Miss India, of course, go on to compete in Miss World and other international pageants.

In the contemporary context, the expansion of the skin lightening market in India is a result of the neoliberal economic reforms dating back to 1991 and the changing roles of women. With the deregulation of imports, expansion of foreign direct investment, and growth of the urban middle class, multinationals such as Unilever (through their subsidiaries) have set their sights on India as a prime target for expansion (Nakano Glenn, 2008: 290). Women have increasing levels of education and economic mobility, and India has both more working women and more professionally qualified women than any other country in the world. Indeed, India has more women doctors, surgeons, scientists, and professors than the United States. This has rendered Indian women a desirable target for a variety of products, including skin lightening cream and other cosmetics, but also cars, insurance, travel, and hotel services (Karan, 2008).

The flourishing of skin lightening products, however, is not entirely due to the disposable income of Indian women in higher class positions. Certain products are targeted at white collar urban workers and affluent professionals and managers, but others are targeted at rural villagers (Thekaekara, 2006: 10; Nakano Glenn, 2008: 290; Tiltman, 2011).[249] Indeed, in marketing circles, Hindustan Unilever Limited is considered "one of the pioneers of marketing to rural consumers" (Tiltman, 2011). This marketing is done primarily through television advertisements, as most rural villages have at least one community television donated by the government (Thekaekara, 2006: 10). In the last decade, Fair & Lovely has been made available in sample sizes or sachets so that

[249] Unilever's strategy for expansion in the Indian market has been to periodically add new products at different price ranges, including sunscreens and gels, a premium line available only at select stores in large cities, and even a product for men (Timmons, 2007; Nakano Glenn, 2008: 297).

even the very poor can afford to purchase them (Shevde, 2008; Tiltman, 2011).[250] One television commercial featured a woman from a poor family and emphasized her marital success; this success only cost her five rupees (approximately twenty cents USD) to purchase a sachet of Fair & Lovely (Karan, 2008). The commodity racism of Victorian Britain and contemporary India, therefore, are quite similar when viewed as a response to the needs of globalized capital.

Overall, civilizing discourses play an important role in both commodity fetishism and commodity feminism (and provide a link between Chapters One and Four). In *Civilization and Its Discontents,* Freud remarks that using soap as a yardstick of civilization is not surprising (1961: 46). For Freud, beauty and cleanliness "occupy a special position among the requirements of civilization," yet at the same time, "their vital necessity is not very apparent" (1961: 47, 51). This necessity was not apparent to Freud because he failed to appreciate the relationship between commodities and civilization. Indeed, since Freud's time, commodification has expanded and intensified. Naomi Klein refers to this expansion and intensification as "corporate transcendence" (2002: 21). Multinational corporations have transcended manufacturing (through contracting out production). Instead of selling commodities, they sell lifestyles, culture, feminism, and, most importantly, they *sell civilization*.

[250] The sachets marketed to the Indian poor are not limited to skin lightening cream; sachets of shampoos and soaps are also increasingly common. Mari Thekaekara has noted that traditionally every Indian village had local, organic shampoos and soaps (made from various plants including reetha soapnuts and hibiscus flowers). As the villages have been brought into an increasingly globalized market, these shampoos and soaps have become unaffordable to the locals, as they are in demand by elites (in India and elsewhere) who have *discovered* organics. As such, poor women are forced to purchase expensive, chemical substitutes. Moreover, these women are paying a higher price (per gram) than their wealthy urban counterparts who can afford to buy the products in high quantities (Thekaekara, 2006: 10).

D. Moving Toward a Decommodified Feminism

In her lengthy introduction to *Stitch 'n Bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker*, Debbie Stoller traces the etymology of the word *hooker* to crochet lace-makers in nineteenth-century Western Europe. Due to poor wages in the lace-making industry, these women sidelined as sex workers to make a living wage (Stoller, 2006: 6–7). Although *The Happy Hooker* is an unselfconsciously feminist book, in purchasing the book and following its patterns, I am hardly engaging in feminist activism for the rights of sex workers or forwarding any other feminist cause. The only real disturbance I caused was somewhat offending the moral sensibilities of my conservative grandmother as she flipped through the pages of my book. My experiences with crocheting and knitting are very different from those of my grandmother. Like many women of her generation, she learned to knit in order to "help the war effort" (that is, Canadian involvement in the Second World War). She takes pride in the fact that she learned to knit on four needles[251] so she could immediately "do her part." The circular *wristlets* that my grandmother (and countless other Canadian women) knit were shipped overseas and given to soldiers to keep their wrists warm in the gap where their gloves ended and their jackets began. I have always enjoyed knitting with my grandmother and listening to her knitting stories, despite my critiques of her associations with knitting: that is, the wartime militarization of women, *happy homemaker* domesticity, and tender maternalism.

In a similar manner to many feminists of my generation who knit and crochet, I have been strongly influenced by Debbie Stoller. Indeed, the contemporary knitting

[251] Knitting on four needles is very challenging: most knitters are introduced to knitting through the spool, and then work to master two needles before attempting four needles.

movement (sometimes called *craftivism*) has been described as being "defined chiefly through Stoller's lead," and "often positions itself as subverting the conventional associations of knitting" (Bratich and Brush, 2011: 241). Yet at the same time, I am uncomfortable with certain aspects of Stoller's politics. For example, she exhibits a seeming complete lack of awareness of the ways in which knitting is inaccessible to many women. Mastering the craft of knitting—or even developing a basic proficiency—involves a great deal of money and free time. Due to the high costs of yarn and other necessary supplies, purchasing mass-produced scarves, sweaters, and other knit wear is now a more affordable option for many women in Anglo-America. Of course, as Naomi Klein notes, "*somebody* has to get down and dirty and make the products" (2002: 202); these *somebodies* are generally women working under appalling conditions in export processing zones. But the privileged Stoller-esque feminists do not have to be implicated in what Klein refers to as "globalization's dirty little secret" (2002: 347): they do not have to work multiple minimum-wage jobs to make ends meet, and as such, have more free time to make their own scarves and sweaters with beautiful, union-made Norwegian wool. In addition to her lack of awareness of the inaccessibility of knitting, Stoller's politics are problematic for another reason. In *Bust* and elsewhere, Stoller's writing reads very similarly to Baumgardner and Richard's *Manifesta*,[252] in that no critique of consumption is provided whatsoever, and pro-woman pop culture is merrily celebrated along with any and all consumption involving edgy, oppositional, and/or feminist forms of femininity.

[252] See section 2.7.

In thinking through the relationship between commodity feminism, femininity, and subjectivity, I have tried to keep the question of resistance at the forefront. The three themes discussed in this concluding chapter—origin stories, social control, and the *civilizing mission*—provide clues to decommodifying feminism. Section A of this chapter demonstrated that origin stories associated with commodity feminism (that is, those of Engels and Freud) illuminate the power relations and conservative politics from which commodity feminism emerged and within which it continues to operate. Disrupting the view that these origin stories represent actual historical events or are foundational to social and political life allows for the disruption of the politics that follow: namely, the elitist, and anti-democratic politics of Edward Bernays, as well as the marketing professionals that followed in his footsteps. In researching this dissertation, I was struck by the similarities in self-presentation among marketers ranging from Bernays[253] to the those involved in debates about feminism in the 1970s and 1980s to those working on the *Campaign for Real Beauty*. Bernays' views on the immense importance of marketing professionals to society and social change seems to be the norm.[254] Understanding

[253] In *Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel Edward L. Bernays,* which runs well over eight hundred pages, Bernays seemingly describes every accomplishment and every person with any claim to importance he met over the course of his entire career. I wondered on several occasions about Bernays' editor, Merrill Pollack from Simon and Schuster: did Pollack even *try* to moderate the excessive displays of hubris in *Biography of an Idea*, and if so, how did earlier drafts of the biography read?

[254] While Bernays saw the public relations counsel as a member of the "intelligent few" akin to the Platonic philosopher-king, today marketing professionals see themselves as "a playground for the talented. [They] think of themselves as members of a profession, chosen without fear or favour as the best able to perform as the vanguard of consumer capitalism. They were encouraged in this view by an intellectual apparatus that put them among the leaders of the "creative class." In this context the key advertising workers were not the salespeople, account managers or client relations developers, but the people who wrote copy, designed layouts or directed and cut television and film promos. These *creatives* were among the key manipulators of symbols in a world in which the manipulation of information was the key to the creation of new business" (Blake, 2009: 109). With that being said, it is difficult to say for

these politics is the first step of disruption. In other words, a key part of resisting commodity feminism is knowing what we are up against. In section B, I demonstrated that we are up against the idea that femininity and hysteria go hand-in-hand and must be controlled. We are also up against the idea that the feminine, hysterical masses are dangerous, or as Ann Coulter phrases it, "demonic." In section C, I demonstrated that we are also up against the idea that feminism, consumption, and so-called civilization work together. Challenging commodity feminism means challenging conservative discourses about the masses, challenging discourses of civilization, and challenging the way those discourses are tied up in commodity consumption.

As noted in the epigraph to this concluding chapter, Naomi Klein and her university friends in the 1990s had been convinced they were doing *something* "subversive and rebellious" but could not quite remember what (2002: 82). It is important to remember that Freud *failed* in his attempts to control Dora; that is, he failed in his attempts to interpret her history and map out her future. For Freud, the symptoms of hysteria are an "expression of [the patient's] most secret and repressed wishes" (1989b: 173). He himself acknowledged his failure in reading Dora's repressed wishes. Cixous and others have read Dora's wishes[255] as a proto-feminist wish to be free of masculinist structures. In a similar manner to Dora, commodity feminists are constrained by masculinist and conservative limitations. Men like Freud and Bernays become the saviours of Dora and the hysterical feminine masses—the ones to help curb

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certain how much marketers believe of their own self-presentation: marketers must, after all, market commodities, market themselves, and market the marketing profession itself.

[255] We cannot be clear on what Dora's wishes really were, because "until recently, stories about hysteria were told by men, and women were always the victims in these stories rather than the heroines" (Showalter, 1993: 287).

their out-of-control and irrational ways. In other words, what Freud is to Dora is what Bernays is to the feminine masses. As such, if both Dora and the commodity feminist represent different forms of feminism—however inadequate both hysteria and commodity feminism are *as* feminism—then both can reject the social control underpinning commodity feminism and reclaim a decommodified feminism. Feminism can be delinked from consumption and a decommodified future is possible.

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