Vulnerability and the Feminist Politics of Sexual Violence

Emily Cousens

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for the examination for the PhD degree of Oxford Brookes University is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I declare that my thesis consists of 95,739 words.

Abstract

This thesis asks: how does understanding vulnerability enable feminists to engage with sexual violence? Whilst there has been a 'return to vulnerability' (Murphy 2012: 70) in the recent feminist literature, sexual violence is notably absent. These contributions to the field emphasise the shared character of vulnerability, focusing on it as an ambiguous ontological condition (Gilson 2014). This is in contrast to activist anti-violence movements of the 1970s that articulated a 'structural' account of vulnerability, where women's disproportionate vulnerability to sexual violence was a point of departure. The thesis will argue that an intersectional feminist politics of sexual violence needs to take a two-dimensional approach to vulnerability and incorporate insights from both the structural and ontological perspectives.

It begins with a historiographical argument, which is that the affective and institutional legacy of the sex wars, debates on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1980s that saw discussions about women's sexuality polarise into 'pro-sex' and 'anti-pornography' positions, has resulted in the academic aversion to thinking vulnerability and sexual violence together. By considering in detail the contributions of Andrea Dworkin and Judith Butler on the questions of vulnerability and sexual violence, thinkers associated with anti-pornography and pro-sex perspectives respectively, I disrupt this oppositional narrative. In the process, I pave the way for my own perspective, which argues that sexual violence politics must be able to both i) counter the weaponisation of gendered vulnerability by reactionary movements and ii) challenge sexual violence, as an endemic social issue. I contrast the mainstream #MeToo movement with Tarana Burke's grassroots, black feminist, original Me Too movement in order to draw out the intersectional implications of my argument. Burke's Me Too demonstrated the radical potential for a sexual violence activism that begins with vulnerability in both its ontological and structural dimensions.

Contents

Introduction

I want to be between her legs and all over her and her thighs a vise around my neck; I want my teeth in her; I want her muscles squeezing me to death and I want to push down on her, all my weight on her hips, my skin, bluish, on the inside of my thighs feeling her bones. [sic]

Pleasures are in some sense determined by the melancholic structure of gender whereby some organs are deadened to pleasure, and others brought to life. Which pleasures shall live and which shall die is often a matter of which serve the legitimating practices of identity formation that take place within the matrix of gender norms.

Both of these extracts were written in 1990 by authors who have become heavily associated with sexual politics, and both explore the question of pleasure and desire from a feminist perspective. However, whilst the writer that penned the first quote has become academically maligned and associated with a decidedly anti-sex version of sexual politics, the author of the latter, and the text from which this was taken, has gone on to become canon within the fields of feminism and queer theory. The author of the second is – recognisably perhaps – Judith Butler (1999: 90). The author of the former: Andrea Dworkin (1990: 105-6).

I begin an examination into what vulnerability can do for feminist sexual politics with these two quotes in order to highlight that the academic study of feminism and sexual politics is itself political. Whilst Andrea Dworkin has come to stand for all that is bad and to be avoided in feminist sexual politics – crude, naïve, anti-trans and anti-sex worker[1] – Judith Butler has elevated the feminist study of sex and gender into being a mainstay of almost all undergraduate humanities and social science courses. In 1990, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* was published, offering a 'founding contribution to queer theory' (Jagger 2008: 1) and becoming canon in feminist studies for its consecration of a new era for feminism (Hemmings 2011: 22-3). It has been translated

[1] In chapter three, I outline Dworkin's theory of sex, gender and heterosexuality. Whilst her work has been regrettably deployed by contemporary feminists seeking to delegitimise trans women's claims to womanhood – and therefore to existence on their own terms – this is a distortion and departure from Dworkin's arguments.

into twenty-seven different languages, while Dworkin struggled to get most of her work published at all. There is a citation politics in sexual politics.

This matters because sex matters and how feminists engage with sex matters: 'Feminist theorists must continue to demand recognition and redress for the problem of women's disproportionate availability to various types of violence' (2009: 64) writes Ann Murphy. Yet if the boundaries for engagement are circumscribed from the start, then what feminists are able to explore, think and say will be similarly delineated. And whilst there may be good reasons for this, such parameters need to be acknowledged if they are in play. In addition to exploring how understanding vulnerability can inform feminist theorists on the difficult subject of sexual violence, this thesis makes a historiographical argument, which is that there are unspoken disciplinary conventions shaping the contours of thinking on vulnerability and sexual politics.[2] Contributions to sexual politics from the period categorised as 'the second wave'[3] - women's movements between the late 1960s and 1980s- are dismissed as anti-sex, and much contemporary academic scholarship on sexual politics takes the late 1980s as a point of departure. These citation norms exercise a performative effect on the boundaries of legitimate knowledge which have the effect of excluding important and relevant contributions from lesbians, women of colour and proto-queer theorists, including Dworkin[4].

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[2] This is distinct from the critique of 'wave narratives' (see note 3; also Snyder 2008; Aikau, Erickson & Pierce 2007) or 'generational thinking' (Hogeland 2001). These critiques highlight what gets excluded when clear boundaries such as these are evoked. In particular, it is the self-identification of third wave feminists in these progressive terms that is cause for caution. By contrast, I am arguing that disciplinary conventions are often unspoken and unavowed.

[3] I use the term 'second wave' to designate the way in which a body of knowledge and activism has been categorised. There are important criticisms of the 'wave metaphor'. It is a reductive narrative which reifies upper-middle class women's movement participation, ignoring the experiences of black and Chicana women whose participation did not ebb and fall in such a manner (see Roth, 2004; Enke, 2007). It excludes feminists of color (Springer 2002: 1063) and the history of African American women resisting patriarchal and colonial structures under slavery and Jim Crow, goes unattended to in such a narrative. Thus the wave narrative is reflective of the hegemonic nature of Western white feminism and the power it has wielded in defining what becomes understood as a women's movement in the first place (Guy-Sheftall 2002: 1092). However, whilst I am arguing against oversimplifications in feminist histories, my challenge to these takes the form of a reassessment of the contents of second wave thought and activism, not through renaming the category itself with the intention that this will precipitate a reconsideration of its contents. In chapter four, I highlight some of the limits of resignification and countering dismissive narratives of the second wave feminism requires reconsideration of this body of thought not just renaming. For the moment, as Springer (2002: 1063) notes, the wave narrative is so embedded it remains useful for internal critique of this kind

[4] Dworkin's critique of identity politics, and her own rejection of categories to classify her sexuality motivate my description of her as proto-queer. he recalls how, at a panel on Lesbianism as a Personal Politic the 'room of 200 sister lesbians' confronted her over whether or not she was a bisexual, and therefore 'still fucked men'. Dworkin writes: ' "I'm a Jew" I answered; then, a pause, "and a lesbian, and a

By examining the contributions of both Butler and Dworkin on the question of vulnerability, I will demonstrate that both thinkers have been subject to reductive readings. Where this has led Dworkin to be rejected, Butler has been reified. With respect to vulnerability, this is reflected in the absence of Dworkin's concerns in the recent literature: gender as domination and sexual violence are notable gaps. By contrast, Judith Butler's brief reflections on 'corporeal vulnerability' as providing the basis for a politics of recognition and responsibility are – ironically given Butler's own repudiation of foundational thinking – regularly cited as points of departure (Gilson 2014; Anderson 2017). I propose that combining their insights reveals that Dworkin and Butler's approaches are not as different as conventionally presumed. Together, they provide inroads through which feminist thinkers can develop a two-dimensional theory of vulnerability that is able to outline a means through which feminists can demand recognition and redress for gendered sexual violence. Moreover, whereas sexual violence politics in the name of women has a history of performing its own exclusions (Mahmood 2005; Puar 2007: xi), I argue that vulnerability is a concept that can address these at the same time as being able to name injustice.

The question of exclusions and citation politics offers a moment to reflect on my own citation practices. An argument that traverses this thesis is that both sexual politics and citation politics have led to the systematic silencing of women of colour. Black women have had their epistemic credibility and testimonial authority compromised through the legacies of slavery, colonialism and the residues of these in existing racist norms and practices. I argue that histories of sexual violence and vulnerability need to be attentive to the constitutive role that slavery has played in shaping both of these fields, and that feminist scholarship needs to be meaningfully intersectional if it is to be able to engage in sexual violence in a way that does not reproduce hierarchies of value amongst women, prioritising the safety of some over the safety of others.

In light of this, the dialogue I stage here between Butler and Dworkin, two queer, Jewish, cisgender writers, does not attempt to formulate a complete or generalizable theory of the relationship between vulnerability and sexual violence. Both authors

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woman". She deeply regrets her answer, the no to the question of if she still fucks men: 'All of my life, I have hated the proscribers, those who enforce sexual conformity [...] It humiliated me to see myself then: one who resists the enforcers out there with a militancy, but gives in without resistance to the enforcers among us' (1988: 111). Dworkin's relationships also testify to her proto-queerness; married to a gay man, and having had relationships with straight men and gay women, points toward a lived relationship to sexuality that rejects the heteronormative frame of reference.

have been subject to criticisms regarding the generalizability of their contributions, and the Eurocentric assumptions that their analyses reproduce[5]. Even outside of formal identity categories, the thesis argues that there is much knowledge that does not appear as such within contemporary academic norms, and that these are as valuable to philosophers as published, peer reviewed authors. However, the purpose of focusing on these two authors is to make a more modest argument: that the respective reification and rejection of Butler and Dworkin, which is present to some degree in much Anglo-American feminist theorising on questions of gender and sexuality, relies on reductive readings of both which delimit and circumscribe possibilities for feminist sexual politics in the present. It is the stories feminists tell, which as Hemmings (2011) argues, consecrates standards of acceptability within feminist theorizing. That Dworkin and Butler are central figures in the story of vulnerability and sexual violence is reason to reconsider their apparent antipathy.

The historiographical argument then, is that the stories feminists tell of sexual politics have resulted in bodies of feminist knowledge being dismissed without warrant. One of these, is feminists writing in the 1970s and 1980s, whose contributions to questions of the role of power in the construction and reproduction of sexual norms have been overlooked. More specifically, I argue that the opposition which emerged during the sex wars between sex-positive and sex-negative has come to eclipse much feminist enquiry into the ambivalence of sexuality for women. There is now a negative connotation attached to the 'sex-negative' label, which means that associated authors such as Andrea Dworkin and associated objects of enquiry, sexual violence and rape, are sidelined in academic sexual politics. The feminist second wave is remembered for

[5] Nira Yuval-Davis criticises Butlers premise that signification is illimitable arguing that 'in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions which are more important than others in constructing specific positionings' (2006: 20). I explore Viviane Namaste's critique that Butler under-emphasises the intersectional aspects of gender based violence in Chapter Four. Andrea Dworkin's engagement with black feminism and legacies of slavery and colonialism are undecided, and I elaborate on this in Chapter Three. On the one hand, she attends to the specific nexus of race, gender and class. However, she also treats sexism and racism as theoretically analogous and only occasionally qualifies her appeal to the term women with a recognition that black women are differently situated. Her critique of pornography, and black women's position in it, can be read in light of Jennifer Nash's (2008) critique of the anti-pornography movement as avoiding questions about black women's desires and subjectivities in mobilizing claims about race to bolster her arguments about the gendered harms of pornography (2008: 54).

the phrase "the personal is political",[6] which blurred the lines between theory and personal experience, by foregrounding the power relations contained in personal relationships. However, I argue in chapter two that the women's liberation movement's most enduring legacy was that the sexual is political. Yet such an inheritance is rarely recognised in academic engagements with sexual politics today which – in both feminism and queer theory – take the 1990s as inaugurating the academic study of sexuality (see Amin 2016). Thus this thesis contributes to an emerging discourse questioning the existence of clear boundaries between second wave feminist and queer perspectives on sexuality (Glick 2000; Mirinucci 2010)

This historiographical argument contains an additional argument regarding the boundaries between academic and activist knowledge. One reading of this is to cast a binary between the 'activist' feminism of the women's movement and the institutionalisation of the study of feminism and sexuality, which began in the 1980s (Corbman 2015). The 1982 Barnard Conference on Sexuality discussed in chapter two, where disputes took place between participants and anti-pornography protestors, 'represents a literal collision of feminist activism and knowledge production' (Corbman 2015: 52). Moreover, there were activists among participants and protesters, and activist figures such as Amber Hollibaugh, a sex worker and journalist, have subsequently produced important texts in queer theory (2000). Resisting such a narrative that argues that 'academic feminism betrayed its radical political roots, substituting abstraction for action, legitimacy for risk' (Weigman 2002: 3), I take the project of theorising sexual politics to entail a necessary oscillation between academic and activist practices. The thesis will perform such a double focus itself, engaging with contestations on sexuality from both within and beyond the academy. Recognising that black feminist thought is generated both within and outside of formal institutions (Hill Collins 1991; Mizra 1997), I take Tarana Burke's reflections on vulnerability to be exemplary and generative of scholarly knowledge themselves. Refusing clear divisions between activism and academia is to ensure that relevant epistemology is not limited

[6] The phrase is attributed to American activist Carol Hanisch who wrote an essay in women's movement newspaper *Notes from the Second Year* with that name. However, Hanisch (2006) argues the title was chosen by the papers editors Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt. The Cohambee River Collective expanded the meaning of the term, highlighting that to focus on power relationships necessitated a focus on race: 'A political contribution which we feel we have already made is the expansion of the feminist principle the personal is political. In our consciousness-raising sessions, for example, we have in many ways gone beyond white women's revelations because we are dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex. Even in our black women's style of talking/testifying in black language about what we have experienced has a resonance that is both cultural and political.' (1977)

to the privileged (see Madhok & Evans 2014). Audre Lorde, speaking at a conference a year after Barnard, argues against the 'particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory […] without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians' (Lorde 2017:89). I also demonstrate the paucity of this binary when applied in ways that associate Dworkin with unbridled anger (Levy 1989) and Butler with cool, detached 'profoundly philosophical' (Carver & Chambers 2008: 2) academic sophistication. In each instance, these divisions serve as the rationale for the relative standing of each within the field of feminist theory. Through recalling these authors' own accounts of the formation of their thought in their lived experiences, I demonstrate that for both, theorising and activism are inextricably linked.

0.1 Vulnerability and sexual violence

Whilst 'at first glance, violence and vulnerability make for a straightforward conceptual pairing' (Frazer & Hutchings 2017: 690) and in recent years theorists have turned to vulnerability in order to better understand violence (MacKenzie et al. 2014; Ferraresse 2016a; Cole 2016; Michel 2016), this exploration has not been extended into an enquiry of sexual violence.[7] Vulnerability has been explored for what it offers as an approach to research (Page 2017), as a pedagogical practice with the capacity to tackle racial privilege (Applebaum 2017), and as a methodology aimed at social justice (Oliviero 2018). Erinn Gilson has taken up the meaning of victimisation (2016) and pornography (2014) through the framework of vulnerability. However, for the most

[7] An exception is an emerging body of thought on rape as a weapon of war. (Bergoffen 2003, 2009, 2011; Code 2011). These theories look at the landmark UN war crimes trial at The Hague, where three soldiers were convicted of crimes against humanity for raping and torturing Muslim women and girls. The ruling is considered to inaugurate 'a politics of the vulnerable body' (Bergoffen 2003: 116), where the vulnerable female body replaces the traditional masculinist norm currently encapsulated by the 'universal'. However, these analyses overlook the colonial ideology that constructs rape as a weapon of some wars (Bosnia and Rwanda both being presented as primitive warring nations) and not others. International law is not neutral with regard to the recognition and redress of violence (Phillipose 2009: 177). These approaches therefore run a strong risk of reproducing a logic of American and Western sexual exceptionalism (Puar 2007) whereby sexual progress narratives position the United States or the West as the forerunners of sexual liberalism, which in turn becomes an index of civilisation. These theories are able to embrace The Hague's ruling as they focus only on the discourse of violence against women, prioritising sexual at the expense of racial difference, and thereby ignoring the way in which 'the focus on ethnic, racial and national identities to determine the nature of a crime means that international laws of war against sexual violence transmogrify not the criminalisation of interracial or interethnic sex' (Philipose 2009: 190). Thus the vulnerable body as it pertains to rulings in international law does not inaugurate a new social imaginary but rather risks reproducing colonial frameworks that scapegoat racialised bodies and position 'the West' as the neutral arbiter and protector of women.

part, the topic of sexual violence has been curiously absent from the recent feminist vulnerability literature.

This thesis proposes that investigating vulnerability and sexual violence together is necessary for the following reasons. First, sexual violence has become a key issue in Western politics yet the impact of this is ambivalent. Whilst the global Me Too movement that has emerged in the last couple of years demonstrates a renewed concern with violence against women, at the same time, violence against women is often used instrumentally to ground othering, exclusionary and dehumanising politics of 'protection'. For instance, in the narratives of trans-exclusionary radical feminists and in the portrayal of sexual violence as a problem of racialised masculinity. The 2012 Delhi gang rape and the UK's 'Asian grooming gangs' become popular media narratives that present racial others as sexual others, and sexual violence becomes a problem of culture rather than of patriarchy (Tufail 2015; Alexander 2000; Razack 2004). I will examine the role that vulnerability plays in legitimising these othering discourses, and also the role that understanding vulnerability can play in challenging these narratives.

Second, there is a disciplinary/historiographical motivation for thinking these two terms together. I propose that the absence of scholarship on sexual violence and vulnerability is a product of the association of their conjunction with the arguments of the losing, sex-negative side of the sex wars – and in particular with the academically maligned figure of Andrea Dworkin. Dworkin is one of the most prolific yet controversial thinkers on the topic of sexual violence. The academic community has dismissed her for overdetermining women as vulnerable and victims in this context. However, in light of the resurgence of sexual violence as a political concern, her work is being subjected to renewed consideration. An edited collection of her work was published earlier this year (Fateman & Scholder 2019) and high-profile news outlets have run feature-length pieces considering her radical feminism (Oyler 2019, Goldberg 2019).

By bringing these discussions to bear on one another, this thesis makes a contribution to feminist knowledge by arguing for a feminist politics of sexual violence that foregrounds a dual understanding of vulnerability in its enquiry into both the causes and possible responses to the issue. In the context of sexuality, vulnerability is always both a structural issue – an unevenly distributed lack of bodily autonomy which is

linked to gendered social positions – and an ontological condition, one which applies to everyone and cannot be willed away. Such an understanding enables feminists to resist the co-option of sexual violence discourses that seek to secure protection for some at the expense of others. For instance, the claim made by UK police and media that young girls in Rotherham are vulnerable to sexual exploitation by Asian grooming gangs (Wyatt 2018) is an example of a co-opted sexual violence discourse that seeks to secure protection for (young, white) girls and the stigmatisation of Asian men. Foregrounding sexual vulnerability as inseparable from gender as a power structure forecloses culturalist explanations, which deflects attention away from structural relations of domination and subordination (Razack 2004). Meanwhile, recognition of its ontological character contests the construction of Asian men as only invulnerable 'monsters' (Jolly 2019). It is not to deny the severity of the abuse or the victimisation of the girls. But rather – in recognition of these dimensions – foregrounding vulnerability entails addressing the culture of complicity around sexual assault more broadly and refusing an anti-violence logic that seeks to displace violence, rather than counter it in all its forms.

Vulnerability is also a positive tool for theorising sexual violence. It be used to adjudicate between competing claims to victimhood and protection and, as Katie Oliviero (2018: 5) argues, through its attention to power relations in the plural, 'vulnerability methodologies have the potential to capture how precarity is often perpetuated along intersectional lines of race, class, gender, sexuality nationality, and ethnicity'. I argue in chapter six that Tarana Burke's Me Too movement embodies the intersectional potential of vulnerability for identifying and responding to sexual violence in an inclusive manner. By contrast, I argue that the viral Me Too movement displays what I will term 'oppositional vulnerability', which can be used to underscore divisive politics of blame and lead to protectionism around whose wounds matter.

0.2 Methodology

In light of my desire to tell a different story of vulnerability and sexual politics, I take an approach to constructing theory that prioritises themes over approaches. Sam McBean explains how her undergraduate feminist teacher would 'teach each class in staunch defense of whatever theorist was up for discussion that day', noting that 'there was never a moment in which we were given a perspective, from the present, of how we were supposed to secure a final meaning for the theorist or argument in

question' (2015: 1). Whilst I do not intend to staunchly defend Dworkin, I am sympathetic to the resistance to overdetermine a thinker's contribution from the standpoint of the present. There are elements of 'reparative reading' (Sedgwick 2003) in my turn to Dworkin. I am not holding her to the standards of criticism that would demand that she articulate a clear and consistent rigorous argument. As Butler (2007: 180) says of her own work:

> It never occurred to me to try and establish an internally consistent philosophical position. Because I am, as I write, a living being, I develop new ways, call some of the old ones into question, change tracks, return to older problems in new ways. But I have never, I think, sought to reconcile the writing that I have done at one time with the writing I have done at another.

My own approach, therefore, is one that borrows from different feminist sub-disciplines: postmodernism, Marxism, queer-feminism and postcolonial feminism. Whilst I draw on postmodern ideas about the subject, for instance, the two dimensions of vulnerability I articulate borrow from both Marxist and Foucauldian understandings of power. I seek to avoid implicitly presuming that more recent theorists reflect the fact that we, as researchers, have moved temporally beyond those who came 'before', comfortable that we are now in 'a place of greater sophistication and understanding' (Flessiner 2002: 49). To the contrary, I argue that if there is a 'return' to sexual politics happening in the form of the Me Too movement, then this is more reason to dust off texts that were previously consigned to the dustbin of history.

0.3 Terminology and the 'trouble' with sexual violence

Sexual violence is an enduring phenomenon and has become part of a public conversation in recent years. However, it is also highly politicised and the terminology that it raises is contested terrain as well. Sexual violence brings up numerous questions for feminism that effect the way in which it is conceptualised: Is sexual violence a unique form of violence or a specific aspect of a more generalised phenomenon? Do feminists have a unique relationship to sexual violence? And if so, what are the contents of this relationship? Whilst the cross-cultural ubiquity of sexual violence throughout history is clear, theorising and responding to this fact has proved contentious.

Given that these are unanswered questions; one would expect feminist theory to be replete with perspectives on the topic. However, those engaging with the issue have found that sexual violence is, in fact, a curiously under-theorised issue (Mardorossian 2000; Heberle & Grace 2009). An argument I develop in this thesis is that there is a historical reason for this. Whilst during the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, in the UK and United States, the discovery of the predominance of sexual violence initially looked to be a unifying issue for feminist activists, the battle lines that emerged on the question of pornography and regulation in the 1980s led to affective and enduring scars. Not only have feminists been reluctant to open these wounds, but there is a sense that the questions have been resolved due to the framing of the period in terms of 'sex-positive' and 'sex-negative', with the former understood as having being decisively triumphant. Sex-negative feminism, by contrast, is dismissed for its association with victim-related issues such as sexual violence and vulnerability.

Even apparently elementary questions, such as what sexual violence is – both in terms of the acts it names and possible explanations for these – have been the site of contest and there is still 'no philosophical consensus on precisely what defines an example of rape or sexual assault' (Cahill 2016: 751). The question of who owns a woman's body is central legally, yet saturated with legacies of oppression. According to a principle of coverture, a husband had authority over his wife and so women could not withhold sex from their husbands. Until 1991, it was legally impossible for a husband to rape his wife in the UK. Socially, these values have persisted (YouGov, 2018). Similarly, enslaved women could not refuse sex with their masters or testify against them in court, a presumption that persisted in the aftermath of slavery. To this day, race plays an important role in whether juries find a victim credible (Kennedy, 2003).

Ontologically too, sexual violence is a contested event. My own use of the term 'sexual violence' contains two aspects. First, I am taking a 'continuum' approach to sexual violence. Initially outlined by Liz Kelly (1987), a continuum of sexual violence argues that what constitutes sexual violence is not delimited by already existing legal criteria. Moreover, continuum theories locate the issue of sexual violence within broader discussions of the violence of heteronormativity. As such, it is suitable for deployment in dialogue with Dworkin. In addition, the continuum approach allows for victims to define their own experience. Whilst recognition is always within language, there is a space in continuum theories for experiences that exist in the 'grey area' between consent and coercion (Gavey 2005; Gunnarsson 2018). Moreover, there is an

awareness that the victim might change their account of what happened and that this should not serve to discredit their testimony or epistemic credibility. In short, sexual violence is about living within and negotiating the pervasiveness of power, what it means to live in a body seen as sexually violable and in a society in which power is dramatically skewed' (Kindig 2018). It is about the quotidian character of sexualised and gendered violence under racism and patriarchy.

Another terminology debate within sexual violence is on the question of whether 'victim' or 'survivor' is a more appropriate term. Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray (1993) argue in favour of survivor because of the alternative's association with passivity. By contrast, Nicola Gavey argues that survivor may be a harder word to claim because it connotes overcoming something almost life-threatening (1999). Sharon Lamb is similarly hesitant before embracing the term survivor because of its sense of scale and overcoming a life-threatening assault, which is rarely people's experience (1999: 119). Here I will argue that the context is relevant. This thesis demonstrates that there are both paternalistic and potentially progressive consequences that follow when the victim label is used. For Dworkin, it was an important term for naming the existence and injustice of sexual violence. However, when deployed by a powerful group in order to circumscribe the agency of a less powerful group, the term has controlling and patronising implications[8]. Consequently, the category of victim constitutes a tension for feminists. Nonetheless, I will follow Joanna Bourke and primarily use the term victim not survivor. Bourke highlights that this is a term that is able to 'draw attention to the hurt of abuse; it is not a moral judgement, nor an identity. Many "victims" are survivors' (2007: 7). In places, the terms will be used interchangeably to reflect the presence of both in dominant sexual violence discourses. When I discuss Burke's Me Too movement, I elaborate on the rationale for the term survivor in this context –as an identity that can be claimed. As an identity, it is an inclusive 'empowering' (Murray 2019) one, which unites individuals without being predicated on a realm of othering and exclusion that haunts many engagements with identity politics (Hall & du Gay 1996).

Finally, I use the terms 'cisgender' and 'transgender' to indicate whether or not one assumes one's gender identity on the basis that they were assigned at birth. This is in

[8] This is an argument that has been well developed in refugee studies and development studies (Johnson 2011; Hesford & Lewis 2016).

line with leading LGBT rights charity Stonewall's definitions. Transgender is a fairly encompassing term. Julia Serano (2007:225) explains that

> While the word originally had a more narrow definition, since the 1990s it has been used primarily as an umbrella term to describe those who defy social expectations and assumptions regarding femaleness and maleness; this includes people who are transsexual (those who live as members of the sex other than the one they were assigned at birth), intersex (those who are born without reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical definitions of female or male), and genderqueer (those whose identity outside of the male/female binary), as well as those whose gender expression, differs from their anatomical or perceived sex (including crossdressers, drag performers, masculine women, feminine men, and so on)[9]

Whilst I am mindful of instilling an ontological binary between cis and transgender (Henderson 2018) the distinction is useful when addressing activism that seeks to circumscribe gender identities in ways that essentialise membership of either male or female on the basis of essential biological properties or supposed experiences. Whilst the impossibility of delineating a coherent category of woman has been critiqued as not only privileging and extrapolating from certain experiences (Alexander & Mohanty 1997) but a Eurocentric project in itself (Oyewumi 1997), trans-exclusionary feminist politics co-opt feminist discourses to present trans women as 'predatory, dangerous and essentially male' (Phipps 2016: 311). Therefore, whilst I follow Sara Ahmed's lead and for the most part use the term 'woman' to refer 'to all those who travel under the sign women' (2017: 14), at times the additional modifiers of cisgender and transgender will be included.

Both Dworkin and Butler's accounts of the social construction of sex and gender are explored and I highlight that these are more similar than typically presumed. One of my key arguments is that Dworkin (1974) anticipates Butler's (1999) positing of sex as equally as constructed as gender. Dworkin's argument is that if sex is as constructed as gender, then a critique of the way that sex-as-biology functions to secure binary gender, which Butler codifies, necessitates, too, a critique of the way that sex-as-

[9] See Stryker (1994: 251-52 n.2) for an influential early formulation of trans vocabulary and Heyes (2003: 1094) for an application of this for thinking feminism and transfeminism together.

intercourse functions to secure binary gender. However, whilst I present both as having a non-exclusionary ontology of gender, Dworkin's emphasis on the violence of the gender binary itself leads her to overlook the possibilities for male and female, masculinity and femininity and dominance and submission to be wrested from their compulsory formations. Her subjects can only be violently interpellated into gender roles, and gender is necessarily an effect of domination (see Joy Cameron 2016: 10). I will demonstrate that Butler's insights into linguistic vulnerability are central to an understanding of how the social categories of male and female, and sexual positions in intercourse, can be meaningfully inhabited. In addition, Butler's work extends not just the meaning of gender but the meaning of violence and she foregrounds the normative violence of gender; a necessary complement to Dworkin's focus on physical and material violence.

0.4 Research relevance

The relevance of each of these motivations has been confirmed over the period of the PhD itself. When I began at the beginning of 2015, vulnerability was only beginning to emerge as a fruitful concept for feminist theory. In 2014, a couple of key texts – Catriona Mackenzie's edited collection *Vulnerability: new essays in ethics and feminist philosophy* (2014) and Erinn Gilson's *The ethics of vulnerability: a feminist analysis of social life and practice* (2014) – were published, and these were two of the first texts to take up the concept for feminist philosophy. Legal scholar Martha Fineman was also pivotal in advancing a feminist perspective of vulnerability (see Fineman & Grear 2013) and in 2008 she established the Vulnerability and the Human Condition Initiative, which uses the concept of vulnerability to rethink the role of the state. Alongside feminist theorists' engagements with vulnerability, it is a topic with wide-reaching contours[10].

This is not to say that vulnerability is a new concern for feminists or an altogether new concept with which to think. To the contrary, this thesis argues against such a linear progress narrative of vulnerability, highlighting the way in which it has always been present in feminist enquiry and activism in different ways. Moreover, both vulnerability and resistance have structured women's experiences of sexual violence-

[10] In the 'self-help-terrain' Ewa Ziarek writes how 'from books to talk shows, vulnerability signifies a risk that has to be managed by individuals themselves or is reclaimed as a new virtue to be cultivated' (2013: 67)

most significantly that of enslaved African American women. As Darlene Hine comments: 'One of the most remarked upon but least analyzed themes in Black women's history deals with Black women's sexual vulnerability and powerlessness as victims of rape and domestic violence' (1989: 912). However, the period in which I have been researching has seen vulnerability emerge as a newly central focus within feminist conversations. In 2016, journals curated special issues on the theme of vulnerability,[11] and in the UK in 2017 the British Academy hosted a conference on the theme of Vulnerability and the Politics of Care: Cross-Disciplinary Dialogues. The Institute of Advanced Study at University College London similarly chose vulnerability for its 2017-2018 research theme. Vulnerability has, in recent years, become a field of study in itself (Cole 2016), one favoured perhaps for its apparent capacity to bridge both disciplinary and intersectional approaches (Oliviero 2018). Given the centrality of it as a research topic in the past few years, then, the almost complete inattention to sexual violence within the scholarship is notable.[12]

When I began my research, not only could I not have anticipated the increase in scholarly enquiry into vulnerability, but that sexual harassment and violence would become a key cultural concerns. In addition, that this would generate renewed interest in the work of Andrea Dworkin also seemed unthinkable. What does it mean to say that sexual politics is happening 'now' or having a 'moment'? Where is this 'now'? To what point in the future does it extend? And who is captured as its referent? Whether in the form of sex panics (see Duggan & Hunter 2005; Halperin & Hoppe 2017), concerns over child sexualisation (see Attwood & Smith 2014), or discussions of the instrumentalisation of progressive sexual politics in the form of pinkwashing and homonationalism (see Gill 2007; Witt 2016; Puar 2007), sex is a constant site of political contest.[13] However, whilst as a material phenomenon sexual violence has proven stubbornly consistent and endemic across the world (see Heise 1995; Lombard & McMillan 2013), as a discursive event or a news story, it has emerged in a way that I could not have anticipated. If sexual violence had been somewhat of an afterthought

[11] *Culture and Communications* (2016) and *Critical Horizons (2016)*

[12] Outside the 'rape as a weapon of war' literature, some exceptions to this tendency include Erinn Gilson exploration of border issues to sexual violence and the meaning of vulnerability in relation to victimisation (2016), as well as the place of vulnerability in pornography (2014). Ann Murphy critiques Judith Butler's 'ethics of vulnerability' by applying it to sexual violence (2009).

[13] There are echoes of the second wave in the return of a public conversation around sexual violence, and the way that the issue has functioned to mobilise women. I will discuss this and the ambivalences represented by what has become a viral and global #MeToo movement in chapter six.

for a popular feminism, oriented towards – disempowering – celebrations of empowerment (McRobbie 2009: 49), and sexual politics in academia more typically signifying queer theory, transgression and the enabling aspects of sexuality (Martin 1993) developments across the world have put a firm brake on such a linear trajectory towards sex-positivity. In the United States in particular, postfeminist discourses of women's empowerment are having their credibility tested in the context of the election of Donald Trump, whose campaign period saw the leaked circulation of a video in which he brags about grabbing women 'by the pussy'. This was followed by the election of Brett Kavanaugh to the Senate Judiciary Committee, after having been accused of sexually assaulting Christine Blasey Ford. The idea that sexual politics is a shared concern for women has seen women's marches taking place annually on the day of Trump's inauguration across the world. Organisers of the event in 2017 reported 673 marches worldwide.

Commentators have called this a #MeToo moment (Lukose 2018: 35), after accusations against media mogul Harvey Weinstein spawned testimonies and 'speaking out' against sexual harassment and abuse (Serisier 2018) on social media across the world. The public Me Too campaign has seen 'a collective of voices testifying to a persistent, repetitive vulnerability and injury caused by sexual harassment, assault, and abuse'. At the same time, it 'has, perhaps paradoxically, become praised as a feminist movement for empowerment, justice, and change, and a societal force to be reckoned with (Koivunen et al. 2018: 1). In this way, sexual violence, or at least certain groups' experiences of it (ibid; Phipps 2019b), has taken centre stage in public feminist discussions. The final chapter applies the thesis' arguments regarding the dual character of vulnerability to this movement in order to assess its promise and limitations. The Me Too movement is of further relevance to this thesis given the way in which aspects of it are reminiscent of the sexual politics discourse of the 1970s. 1970 was a year that feminist historian Victoria Hesford has described as a 'watershed' year for the women's liberation movement, due to the publication of key texts such as Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Robin Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* and Toni Cade's *The Black Woman* and immense media coverage. Exploring the continuities and breaks between the two movements is therefore illuminating; the sense of history repeating itself contests ideals of progress and raises the question of whether there may be lessons we are yet to learn.

Andrea Dworkin, who was until recently subject to unanimous derision amongst feminist academics (Walters 2016), is being reassessed in light of the new sexual politics. After the publication of an edited collection of her work (Fateman & Scholder 2019), The New Yorker published a sympathetic long read. 'In the reconsiderations of Dworkin that have proliferated in the past couple of years since Donald Trump was elected and Me Too made it fashionable to express scepticism or hatred of men, a positive if qualified consensus has coalesced around her work' (Oyler 2019). In comment pieces and book reviews, her relevance is emphasised: she has been referred to as 'my Sex Pistols for the #MeToo era' (Aronowitz 2019), and Michelle Goldberg, writing in the *New York Times*, begins: 'How Trump helped make Andrea Dworkin relevant again' (2019). These developments, which have occurred over the research and writing period of this thesis, position my arguments at the intersection of both activist and academic debates.

Finally, vulnerability is also a pertinent framework given that commentators and academics have argued that these are 'vulnerable times' (Hirsch 2014). Work is subject to precaratisation as 'feminised' 'flexible' zero-hour contracts become the norm (Federici 2008; Standing 2011). Meanwhile, the future of life as we know it is vulnerable as the world faces a climate emergency in the face of capitalist destruction (Tsing 2015). The United States and the UK have undergone political overhauls, unthinkable not long ago when consensus politics was the norm and political scientists offered assurances of the reproducibility of the status quo (Grofman 1985). Vulnerability has become a concept of increased 'topicality in Europe and the United States' (Ferrarese 2016a: 149) and its potential referents are exponentially increasing. As such, it is perhaps uniquely timely adjectival modifier.

0.5 Chapter outline

My argument will develop as follows. The first chapter will outline two divergent perspectives within feminist contributions to vulnerability: the structural perspective and the ontological perspective. This section is aimed at elucidating, alongside analytical distinctions, the varying motivations and investments of authors that yield different priorities regarding vulnerability, in order to clarify the existing terms of the discussion. I seek to demonstrate that some of the key divergences within the vulnerability literature are more a matter of emphasis than irreconcilable difference. As such, these examples are offered with the aim of rendering visible key themes in

the vulnerability literature; they are by no means comprehensive with respect to the array of contributions that have emerged and continue to be elucidated as I write. Nonetheless, focusing on the ideal types I identify – structural and ontological – enables us to recognise the value of each of these perspectives in order that we do not foreclose vulnerability in a way that might obscure certain experiences or diminish particular political concerns.

These perspectives are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive and my argument is that a politics of vulnerability can take insight from each approach. However, I propose that many of the insights of the structural perspective have been overlooked in recent contributions which, I argue, seek to distance themselves from what is perceived negatively to be a victimising politics of sex-negativity, where women were equated with their vulnerability to sexual violence.

Teasing out the different contexts and motivations for appeals to vulnerability also, as I will discuss in chapter four with the example of Judith Butler, prevents readings and interpretations becoming entrenched, enabling us to approach instances or articulations of vulnerability without overdetermining or pre-empting their meaning in advance. It is my contention that a feminist politics of sexual violence must foreground vulnerability in both its structural and ontological instantiations and that this is necessary both for identifying and intervening in the problem of sexual violence.

In chapter two, I explore the legacy of the sex wars of the 1980s. It is my contention that this period had two important consequences that are relevant to feminist discussions of vulnerability, and which provide the backdrop for the overview of vulnerability that I advance here. The first is that this period led to sexuality being a divisive issue for feminism, rather than the mobilising concern that it had been at the beginning of the women's movement. The second, related point, is that these political divisions have to some degree mapped on to subsequent disciplinary divisions, as queer theory has emerged as the privileged domain for the discussion of sexual politics (Hemmings 2016). The upshot of these has been a heightened cautiousness around deploying vulnerability as a critical concept for fear of aligning oneself with the maligned so-called sex-negative side of the sex wars, exemplified – as I will argue in chapter three – by the affective legacy of Andrea Dworkin.

Whilst the sex wars took place on both sides of the Atlantic, the focus on the United States here represents the grip that cultural events in the United States have on the academy. Whilst this is shifting, and mainstream academic feminism is beginning to question its Anglo-American privileging, it is nonetheless my contention that when it comes to vulnerability, this period continues to shape and structure discussions of the concept today. There is a risk in revisiting this period of overstating and reproducing the dominance of the United States in the academic imaginary. I do so with the proviso that it is a period that is already present in unacknowledged form in much of the contemporary discussions of vulnerability, and that bringing it to the fore may help to challenge such a bias in the future. Revisiting the feminist sex wars then, not only facilitates academic re-engagement with currently outmoded contributions to feminist knowledge production [14] but provides a framework for engaging with the concept of vulnerability and developments in contemporary sexual politics: an approach which does not restrict itself to disciplinary straightjackets.

In chapters three and four, I take an in-depth look at the arguments of two thinkers seen as fundamentally opposed within the feminist canon and for their perspectives on vulnerability. The first, Andrea Dworkin, is an academically-maligned feminist thinker, dismissed for her association with a sex-negative critique of sexuality and her role in drafting anti-pornography ordinances, regarded as a regulation of sexuality. Dworkin is associated with the activist, anti-violence structural perspective of vulnerability – where women are defined as and rendered vulnerable under conditions of male dominance.

Chapter three sets out Dworkin's contribution to theorising vulnerability, arguing that she is insightful regarding its gendered dimensions and the relationship between this, heterosexuality and sexual violence. Her argument is that male dominance is a social structure in which male and female emerge as ontologically empty, acutely policed categories. They are cemented by heterosexuality, which provides the ideological justification of absolute opposites. As a result, the policing of heterosexuality is also crucial to the reproduction of male dominance. This is a system in which violence against women is widespread because it emerges as 'the great male performative', the means through which, in a phallocentric economy, the male is able to confirm his

[14] Kathy Miriam (1998a; 1998b) has argued for a reconceptualisation of radical feminist ideas that were central to the United States women's liberation movement and subsequently de-valued as 'outmoded' in the process of feminism's institutionalisation, through the concept of moral imagination.

similarity with other men and distance from, indeed disdain for, the feminine. Dworkin theorises vulnerability and sexual violence in order to render the gendering of both historical and contingent. There are good reasons to be careful before a full-scale embrace takes place: her personal attacks on fellow feminists, for instance, make aspects of her politics regrettable. Her theory of gender as well, whilst intersectional and anti-essentialist, regularly makes rhetorical use of the gender binary in ways that make her prone to bad readings. Meanwhile, her polemical appeal to metaphors associated with colonisation compromises her intersectional insights. She is contradictory on the relationship of gender expression to agency: whilst she celebrates transgressive gender presentation, she is critical of femininity – particularly in women. It is also unclear what her understanding of resistance and change is, as well as the place for meaningful sexual expression under conditions of inequality. Nonetheless, I argue that the reasons why she has been dismissed are not good reasons and her contribution to feminist knowledge greatly exceeds the role in anti-pornography to which she has been consigned.

As detailed in chapter four, by contrast, Judith Butler is a highly revered academic figure, associated with giving the discipline philosophical complexity and as a result, a key contributor to its institutional longevity. Butler's own works have become canon for questions of gender across almost all humanities and social science disciplines. It is common to present Butler as representing a fundamental departure from the theories of sex, sexuality and gender outlined by 'second wave' theorists such as Dworkin. However, I demonstrate that *Gender Trouble* was intended to address a gap and bias in feminist thought, rather than as a corrective. In this text, Butler sought to expand the meaning of violence and gender to make feminism more inclusive. Similarly, Butler's appeal to vulnerability is for what the concept can do for expanding who gets included in anti-violence politics. Her notion of 'linguistic vulnerability' offers an account of how the meaning of categories can change over time, which enables male and female to potentially signify outside of their dominant binary instantiation. This means that there are possibilities and futures for gender which do not require wholescale dismantling of the structure itself. However, the possibility for categories to be reworked can lead to an excessive emphasis on individual resistance, making it difficult to account for subjects who either desire conformity with dominant norms or who are unable to resist. Butler's focus then moves from performativity to precarity. She develops an account of corporeal vulnerability (2004a) that highlights the centrality of recognition on the part of the powerful in the process of social change.

This is important for enabling the way that experiences of vulnerability can provide a basis for foregrounding interdependence (rather than individualism) in politics. However, critics have questioned what the motivation for the powerful to dislodge their positions of privilege is in the absence of a thorough analysis of structural and institutional dynamics. Whilst Butler does not engage sexual violence directly, both linguistic vulnerability and corporeal vulnerability are insightful for the way in which sexual violence activism can proceed in an inclusive and intersectional manner.

This is an insight I will take forward into chapter five when I argue that mainstream mobilisations of sexual violence politics regularly do not heed Butler's insights. I explore the appeals to gendered vulnerability in both racialised sexual violence politics and trans-exclusionary discourses, such as the 'bathroom bills' in the United States. I argue that these both ignore ontological vulnerability, presenting the condition instead in oppositional terms as a property that pertains to some and not others. In these instances, the vulnerability of people of colour and transfolk is ignored: either strategically or through willful ignorance. As such, vulnerability is utilised as part of a protectionist identity politics rather than the inclusive anti-violence aspirations advanced by Butler. Such oppositional discourses also rely on a distortion of structural vulnerability. In the case of the bathroom bills, for instance, Dworkin's insights regarding the vulnerability of the feminine subject is distorted into an essentialist argument whereby gender, rather than being a social position, is a fixed biological attribute.

Chapter six takes up these questions regarding oppositional vulnerability and its relation to protectionist identity politics through an assessment of contemporary sexual politics. It argues that whilst the Me Too movement in its inception – a grassroots community of colour movement started by Tarana Burke – evidenced a nuanced perspective on vulnerability which contained insights from both the ontological and structural versions, this has to some degree been lost in its mainstream uptake. With the shift from a focus on victims and healing to perpetrators and individual stories, there is an instillation of an oppositional version of vulnerability which at best lends itself to a protectionist sexual violence politics but is inadequate for addressing the structural character of the problem. Second wave insights into the coexistence of pleasure and danger are largely absent, and this results in structural problems of heterosexuality being recast in terms of individual men and women.

In some ways, my argument is fairly straightforward: within feminism, how we understand vulnerability is important for how we understand and respond to sexual violence. However, the questions that the investigation raises, regarding whose wounds are intelligible as violence, who gets read on the subject of violence and how do we respond to violence without repeating, displacing or projecting violence, are all fundamental questions for feminist theorists. Returning to Murphy's assertion: 'Feminist theorists must continue to demand recognition and redress for the problem of women's disproportionate availability to various types of violence' (2009: 64). The following chapters develop a two-dimensional theory of vulnerability in order to do so.

Chapter one

Vulnerability: from structural to ontological accounts of the condition

Why at this time do we all seem to need the concept of vulnerability?
- Estelle Ferrarese (2016a: 150)

1.1 What does vulnerability mean?

Vulnerability has become an increasingly popular concept across the humanities and social sciences (Hirsch 2016: 81-2). It is a highly evocative term. When someone or something is designated as vulnerable, emotions are typically generated, and the designation is frequently a solicitation to respond. Yet its meaning is far from established. Vulnerability 'is one of those general notions we bandy about confidently but carelessly, assuming that we know what it means and that it means the same thing for everyone' (Hoffmaster 2006: 38). However, in recent reflections on it as a political or ethical concept, it signifies differently depending on the intentions and investments of the author. As Kate Brown argues, 'vulnerability means different things to different people and how we understand it matters' (2011: 313). In this chapter, I offer a cartography of the ways in which vulnerability has been appealed to across feminism and in what is being referred to as an emerging field of 'vulnerability studies' (Cole 2016; Hesford & Lewis 2016) more broadly. I will propose that there are two different emphases identifiable in the literature that function as alternative frames through which the appeal to vulnerability has been made.

The first of these is the structural approach which tends to emphasise the negative dimensions of vulnerability, regarding it as a condition afflicting some individuals or groups more than others which can be mitigated or overcome. Ontological approaches, by contrast, depart from the contention that vulnerability is an undeniable aspect of existence for all, not just the marginalised. Vulnerability here is posited as a counter to liberal ontologies of individualism and independence and is seen to generate a rethinking of ethical and political obligations. These are not mutually exclusive conceptualisations and this thesis will argue that a feminist politics of sexual

violence needs both. However, it will also argue that they are distinct, irreducible to one another, meaning that an appeal to vulnerability's structural or ontological dimensions alone will be insufficient at best, liable to weaponisation and discrimination at worst.

Vulnerability is a sticky concept (Ahmed 2004) in that histories and emotions attach to it and it is tempting to disregard articulations of the term which have accrued negative effects. I will argue that the structural approach has become particularly 'sticky' in this way, but that these negative associations are based on reductive readings and oversimplified histories of 'second wave' feminism. I seek to resist citational practices which reify the present; thereby overlooking vast contributions to feminist knowledge production and participating in Oedipal strategies of supersession (Henry 2004). By offering a cartography of vulnerability here, I outline a means by which various – even conflicting – investments in the concept can be navigated. In the process, I pave the way for my own approach which, rather than settling on one meaning of vulnerability, will argue that sexual violence politics requires both.

1.2 Structural perspectives on vulnerability

Perhaps most in line with colloquial deployments of the term, structural approaches conceptualise vulnerability as a negative state afflicting some and not others, and as something to be avoided. As Katie Oliviero explains, 'vulnerability is most commonly associated with exposure to bodily suffering, evident in its derivation from the Latin *vulnare*, meaning "to wound"' (2018: 23). There are degrees of vulnerability: one may be more or less vulnerable depending and the reason for identifying vulnerability in such a context is to direct focus towards what can be done to address it.

Vulnerability is figured here as either situational, one is vulnerable to certain harms as a result of one's relation to specific political, social or even medical situations; or directional, one is simply vulnerable *to* something. These can be different takes on the same circumstance. For example, in the case of a person in poverty, a situational analysis would argue that the person *is* vulnerable as a result of their relationship to the benefit system, employment and other contextual factors. Vulnerability is thus a contingent property of that person. By contrast, a directional approach would interpret someone in poverty as vulnerable *to* something – i.e. hunger or homelessness. On its own, the directional approach has descriptive but not critical

currency. Indeed, it is prone to collapsing into a conservative argument where vulnerability is presented as a fixed property of the individual, or a liberal argument where vulnerability is the responsibility of the individual. If the question of what specific situations and institutional policies have produced the vulnerability are not asked on a structural account, critical insight is foreclosed and an appeal to vulnerability does nothing to ameliorate injustice or inequality.

1.2.1 Structural approaches and power as domination

Structural accounts, therefore, need to be accompanied by an analysis of power relations if they are to have critical currency. Power, on such an account, is conceived as unequally distributed within society. Just as 'in the case of Marxist theory, one's position in the means of production determines one's location in relations of domination as having or not having power' (Schippers & Sapp 2012: 31), structural explanations transpose such an account of power as domination to determine whether or not someone is vulnerable. Whilst structural approaches have been associated with metanarratives, theories of history which universalise from the theorist's own position and tend towards generalisations (Fraser & Nicholson 1988) this is not necessary. Pointing to asymmetrical vulnerabilities and relations of domination can reveal the 'directedness' of sexual violence. Sara Ahmed argues that under racist structures, 'we learn how violence is directed; how the "could be anyone" is someone. I think of feminist and anti-racist consciousness in terms of acquiring knowledge of *directedness'* (Ahmed 2018: 61). In analyzing vulnerability, feminist perspectives which reveal the directedness of sexual violence and avoid essentialist explanations are best placed to illuminate power relations.

Power on structural critiques of vulnerability are linked to critiques of domination and oppression. Amy Allen (1996) identifies two levels at which power relations can be analysed: the microlevel foregrounds particular domination relations, 'between two individuals or groups of individuals'. In the case of sexual harassment, 'the microlevel of analysis will concentrate on what takes place in the particular interactions between those involved: professor and student, boss and employee, and so on' (1996: 267). Whilst this is illuminating, on its own 'an analysis of power relations that remained solely on the microlevel would be incomplete and inadequate. A power relation studied in isolation from its cultural and institutional context is easily perceived as an anomaly and not part of a larger system of domination like sexism, racism, and so on'

(ibid: 268). In order to be illuminating, the macrolevel that 'focuses on the background to such particular power relations' is also necessary for 'it examines the cultural meanings, practices and larger structures of domination that make up the context within which a particular power relation is able to emerge' (ibid: 267). In the case of sexual harassment, these include the culturally specific meanings attached to masculinity, femininity and sexuality, flirting practices and an interrogation of both surface and deep structures of domination (ibid: 268-270).

Allen also divides structures of domination into surface and deep structures of domination. Surface structures of domination involve observations of macrostructures of inequality, enabling 'us to say things like "people of colour are oppressed by whites" and "women are oppressed by men" and "women of colour are oppressed by white women" and so on. Further, it allows us to assert that these statements have meaning across stretches of time and within diverse cultures, even though the particular forms that oppression takes in various times and cultures will necessarily be quite different' (ibid: 270). In the context of sexual violence, 'before a large pattern of harassment had been observed and documented, it was impossible for women who were harassed to name their experience as "sexual harassment"' (ibid: 270). Focusing on a macrostructure enabled such patterns of behaviour to be identified as systemic rather than interpersonal isolated acts. However, an understanding of sexual harassment is incomplete without an analysis of 'deep structures of domination' that 'involves searching for an explanatory framework that will illuminate or explicate the observed patterns of inequality that makeup surface structures of domination'. In the context of sexual harassment again, 'one might locate the gendered division of labour as the deep structure that gives an account of how a pattern of sexual harassment is able to develop over time' (ibid: 270). A structural approach that focuses on the 'directedness' of sexual violence renders itself amenable to an investigation of deep structures of domination as the cause of abuse is not determined in advance.

Surface structures are closely linked to identity politics. Whilst this has historically served the purpose of illuminating commonalities among women, it readily leads to the obfuscation of difference. The introduction of a focus on deep structures facilitates an analysis which emphasises how vulnerability 'is shaped by circumstances that exceed identity-based paradigms such as shifting patterns in immigration status, employment, wealth, age, and health' (Oliviero 2018: 5). In refusing to settle with an essentialist explanation for sexual victimization – men sexually harass women because

men are men and women are women – this approach makes itself available to intersectional considerations by avoiding positing an oversimplified binary 'insufficiently attentive to historical and cultural diversity' that tends to 'universalise features of the theorist's own era, society, culture, class, sexual orientation, and/or ethnic or racial group' (Fraser & Nicholson 1988: 382). In this thesis, I propose that a structural perspective on vulnerability is valuable if it is able to point to deep structures of domination.

The approaches that I am interested in are characteristic of the critical structural perspective that interrogates 'directedness' and the social and institutional mechanisms productive of disproportionate vulnerabilities, refusing to take them at face value. As such, they all fall under the situational approach. These approaches tend to focus on illuminating the causes of vulnerability, ultimately aiming to address and overcome it through a change in social relations. This is a political analysis because 'although vulnerability might be self-evident in a phenomenon like interpersonal violence, the fact that *someone* or *something* is inflicting this would gesture to how conditions creating it are socially and structurally produced' (Oliviero 2018: 23). It is an orientation common 'in feminist and anti-racist struggles' where 'vulnerability is intertwined first of all with subjection to racist and sexist violence, with bodily injury and extreme destitution. In other words, it signifies the damaging and indeed disastrous effects of domination and power' (Ziarek 2013: 68). Moreover, the response directs itself towards power relations: 'modifying the macropolitical structures behind poverty, sexism, racism, heteronormativity, religious strife and nationalisms can mitigate what I term *structural vulnerabilities*' (Oliviero 2018: 23-24). Identifying the vulnerability on such a critical structural account is thought to tell us something about wider social arrangements, and it is to these that possibilities for addressing the vulnerability are directed.

1.2.2 Structural approaches and feminist anti-violence movements

Structural versions of vulnerability have been particularly common in feminist anti-violence movements – enabling the identification of surface structures of domination and thereby, as Allen highlighted, the articulation of previously invisible violence. For

example, activists in the Women's liberation movement[15] and the anti-violence movements spawned by this era of activism (see Arnold & Ake 2017) identified a gendered vulnerability to violence in order to denaturalise male aggression towards women. 'Before the women's movement, rape – like breast cancer – had been a shameful secret' (Rosen 2000: 181). With consciousness-raising sessions, what had been experienced as personal problems became reconceptualised as collective, political ones. This had the effect of illuminating a previously unacknowledged social structure in the form of gender. As Kimberlé Crenshaw explains (2010: 179), identifying vulnerability in this fashion was a way of drawing attention to wider structures of oppression:

> one of the compelling features of modern feminism was to advance a vision of a common vulnerability as women that was typically obscured by ideological and institutional conventions – such as the public-private distinction in law – and by prevailing notions of race and class. In efforts to politicise the everyday practices of domestic violence and rape, feminists asserted a certain "sameness" in terms of common vulnerability that operated against ideological and social distinctions.

Thus, appealing to a common gendered vulnerability was a means of making visible and legible dominance relations between men and women. Women who had experienced abuse were encouraged, through this discourse of women's vulnerability, to see that their situation was shared, not the product of their own individual failing. Consciousness-raising was practiced with precisely the aim of de-pathologising and de-individualising women's experiences and identifying vulnerability was part of this process. As such, highlighting gendered vulnerability was part of strategies of resistance. Indeed, if violence 'has been the unifying ground for much feminist activism' (D'Cruze & Rao 2005: 495), this is equally true of vulnerability.

Anti-violence movements used this idea of women's vulnerability to challenge deep-seated, longstanding beliefs that women were responsible for the unwanted sexual advances of men. Maria Bevacqua writes that 'encouraged by an individualist, misogynist society, victims typically internalised their guilt and anxiety over rape,

[15] I refer here to the self-named women's liberation movement in the United States and the UK, which began at the end of the 1960s. For a discussion of transnational feminist movements see Baksh-Sooden & Harcourt (2015).

thereby privatising the problem. Radical feminists politicised it instead by linking the issue to systemic male dominance' (in Gilmore 2008: 165). A broad-brush approach, whereby women without distinction were defined as vulnerable, had the merit of deflecting the blame[16] from the individuals or groups of women (young women, black women) against whom such attacks would be perpetrated. Emphasising that sexual violence was a gendered problem was a 'generalised construction' that 'helped to foster an analysis of women's vulnerability as both profound and persistent rather than as particular to any racial/ethnic community, socioeconomic position, religious group, or station in life' (Richie 2000: 1134). The notion that 'it can happen to anyone' became a powerful rhetorical device employed by the anti-violence movement in order to gain recognition and resources for their cause. Exploring the rise of the United States' anti-rape movement as a social movement in the 1970s, Bevacqua finds that 'rape served as a bridge issue that brought together radical, liberal, African American, and white feminists in a shared struggle to address sexual violence' (in Gilmore 2008: 166). In other words, appealing to vulnerability as structural and shared both exposed the extent of the problem and prevented stigma attaching to any particular group or community. Depicting women as a vulnerable group thereby served the dual progressive political purposes of enabling women to identify and name their own experiences whilst simultaneously creating a public more conscious of the problem of male violence against women. Exposing surface structures of domination countered the shame of both having experienced sexual violence and the fear of disbelief in speaking up about such experiences. In this way, drawing attention to women's structural vulnerability was a strategy of resistance against the very discourses that naturalised, and thereby reproduced, sexual violence.

Yet, alongside these goals, the strategic simplicity of this narrative rhetorically risked the erasure of other axes of inequality. Against the 'this can happen to anyone' refrain, an intersectional account of vulnerability that emphasises 'differences among women as a call to examine structural inequalities among women' (McCall 2005: 1788) might

[16] Tyson (2019) offers a comprehensive overview of victim-blaming, where victims of a rape are often 'denigrated for their role in the rape, even to the extent whereby the victim is held responsible for the assault' (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Such blaming frequently takes place when outside individuals believe a victims' clothing choices or alcohol consumption suffice as reasons to hold the victim partially responsible for the assault they endured (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; LeMaire, Oswald, & Russell, 2016). Similarly, victim-blaming occurs when arguments suggest that the victim did not fight back or that the victim behaved in a seductive manner (Duff & Tostevin, 2015). Evidence suggests a sizable gender gap exists in rape myth acceptance, with significantly higher prevalence among men (Grubb & Harrower, 2009).

be able to scrutinise the production of vulnerability in a way that prioritises, for example, the specific vulnerabilities of race and class. Crenshaw provides an example of such an analysis in her discussion of how immigrant women in the United States were uniquely vulnerable to battery because it was legally harder for them to leave a marriage if they wished to obtain citizenship status: 'When faced with the choice between protection from their batterers and protection against deportation, many immigrant women chose the latter' (1991: 1247). She discusses how other unique dependencies, such as cultural barriers to reporting and accessing support services, language barriers and dependence on husbands for information regarding legal status highlight the way in which vulnerability to male violence is both structural – the product of institutionalised relations of inequality – and intersectional (ibid: 1265-6):

> When race and gender factors are examined in the context of rape, intersectionality can be used to map the ways in which racism and patriarchy have shaped conceptualisations of rape, to describe the unique vulnerability of women of colour to these converging system of domination and to track the marginalisation of women of colour within antiracist and antirape discourses.

Exposing vulnerability necessitates an identification of and critique of the macrostructures and systems that render some more vulnerable, in this negative sense, than others. Such a focus requires an analysis of deep structures of domination in order to illuminate the patterns in sexual violence which congeal into an overall 'directedness' (Ahmed 2018).

The structural account of vulnerability, as it has been applied in the context of sexual violence, has been politically powerful for two reasons. First, in its identification of the surface structure of domination – male violence against women – it has been able to denaturalise sexual violence, harassment and rape, pointing towards the systematic rather than interpersonal and isolated character of such events. As Rahila Gupta (2003: 10), an activist with the British anti-violence group Southall Black Sisters writes:

> One of the very useful sacred cows of feminism has been the assertion that domestic violence cuts across race, class, religion, age and so on. It underpins the theory that patriarchy uses violence extensively to subjugate women, but it

> also acts as an effective counter against racism which seeks to portray men of particular backgrounds – that is, black men – as more barbaric.

Appealing to gendered vulnerability thus makes violence a social rather than an individual or cultural problem. However, as Allen (1996) demonstrated, surface structures satisfy descriptive rather than critical or explanatory force. Thus, an interrogation of deep structures of domination in the production of vulnerabilities is also necessary. This has been the second political insight of anti-violence movements; the unique vulnerabilities of women of colour tells us something about the way in which race and gender function in society. Thus, we can learn about power from the experience and distribution of vulnerability.

Structural vulnerabilities are embodied and material. They are experienced at the level of the body and are the product of the social meaning of the body. However, they also have very material consequences – unemployment, rape, deportation. Feminist anti-violence movements have directed themselves towards addressing both the causes and the effects of vulnerability, seeking to 'transform the social conditions that perpetuate, justify and normalise violence against women' (Russo 2018: 885). Whilst analytically such a perspective is able to make important links between power, domination and vulnerability, this is an approach that has been present in activist contexts, where the additional question of what follows from such an analysis is raised. Anti-violence movements have responded in different ways and, as chapter two and six will detail, one of the key points of contest has been the role of the state (Arnold & Ake in Bergen et al. 2017: 13; Russo 2018: 86).

1.2.4 Structures of vulnerability, the state and the afterlife of slavery

Structural approaches to vulnerability highlight the relationship between violence and power. The experiences of sexual vulnerability articulated in black women's experiences under slavery (Harriet Jacobs 1988; Ida B Wells 2002) and under Jim Crow laws (see McGuire 2018) point to an emerging archive of vulnerability and resistance, and the constitutive place of physical violence in the formation of black female sexuality. Whilst 'we still have an incomplete record of the kind of daily terrors and indignities black women and girls faced in the Jim Crow South and how they resisted (if they could) and recovered from (if and when they did) the trauma of racial and sexual brutality' (McGuire 2018) it is clear that life under slavery and longafter,

was marked by gendered violence. As Angela Davis highlights, racism has always drawn strength from its ability to encourage sexual coercion (1983: 95) and slavery relied as much on routine sexual abuse by white slave-owners as it did on the whip and the lash (1983: 94). Thus sexual abuse was part of the repertoire of power exercised over enslaved African American women. Moreover, this is a structural form of power backed up by state power. The state amplifies the structural vulnerabilities of those it chooses not to protect. Moreover, dehumanising discourses which accompany the legitimisation of violence against black women in this period, stereotypes and caricatures of "black Hottentots" with freakish feminine proportions; of asexual mammies or lascivious Jezebels; of hypersexual black men lusting after white women (Patton 2012) continue to structure sexual subjectivities in the present[17]. Antebellum stereotypes linger in the modern day image of "sexually available and sexually deviant" welfare queens and hoochies (Donovan & Williams, 2002: 98). Thus structural approaches are necessary to bring to the fore not only patriarchy, but legacies of colonialism and slavery. However, they remain caught in a double bind: seeming to reproduce the idea that there is such thing as a black sexuality, a construct which is itself the product of the very racist and patriarchal logic feminists seek to contest.

1.3 Shortcomings of the structural approach

Whilst articulating vulnerability as a consequence of domination is instructive for illuminating patterns of inequality, including race and gender, for some critics, the political effectiveness of such an appeal is short-sighted. The binary view of power it conjures, where power is the property of the few, is thought to leave few options for resistance and to rest on an appeal to paternalistic protection. For Sharon Marcus (1992) and Wendy Brown (1995) 'predominant feminist conceptions of gendered violence have fixed women as perpetual victims to be protected and rescued by state and law, affirming the inscription of male superiority and female inferiority' (Frazer & Hutchings 2019: 6). In short, naming structural vulnerability by foregrounding

[17] There are important debates in black studies regarding the relationship between domination and sexual subjectivity. Recent contributions have sought to read racialised sexuality outside of a black feminist intellectual tradition that has relied on a framework of harm and considered any and all representation of black female sexuality as harmful because it is steeped in stereotypes. (e.g. Cruz, Nash and Miller-Young). For M.Miller Young 'Erotic sovereignty is part of an ongoing ontological process that uses racialised sexuality to assert complex subjecthood, inside of the overwhelming constraints of social stigma, stereotype, structural inequality, policing, and exploitation under the neoliberal state' (Miller-Young, 2014: 39)

gendered violence is, for these thinkers, to succumb to it – ignoring women's capacity for resistance and inadvertently reaffirming male dominance in the process.

Whilst I will argue that these theorists are too quick to dismiss the potential for resistance inherent in the foregrounding of surface structures of domination, it is certainly the case that a dualistic articulation of vulnerability – where vulnerability is attributed to some and not others – frequently rests on and reproduces the problematic binary logic of active/passive, oppressor/victim. This is an argument I will develop at length in chapter five. The lack of attention to the internal differentiation of these positions can lead those articulating them to valorise the experiences of certain women at the expense of others. As Gilson asserts (2016: 76):

> This conception of vulnerability not only contracts and rigidifies the meaning of the (feminine) female body, destining it for violation, but also precludes recognition of victimisation among those who are not cisgendered women by tying victimisation to a particular kind of vulnerability that is thought to be the property of particular kinds of bodies.

Thus, when a one dimensional understanding of power is employed, and it is posited that there is just one structure, in this case, gender, within which one is either dominant or subordinate (corresponding to male and female respectively), then a whole host of subject positions will be rendered unintelligible. As Allen explains (1999: 15), such a view is not structural enough:

> Conceiving of domination on a dyadic model is insufficiently structural; such a conception simply fails to make sense of the complex structural mechanisms at work in contemporary Western societies that both reinforce and provide the opportunities for subverting women's subordination.

As was the case with feminist anti-violence movements, simply attending to one axis of oppression is insufficient and 'rigid assertions of sameness at the level of intervention can function to marginalise and further subordinate individuals who are not "the same" as the imagined survivor of domestic violence' (Crenshaw 2010: 179-180). Whilst revealing certain relations of power that have been hitherto concealed or naturalised, it runs the risk of instantiating new relations of dominance as the binary

analysis of vulnerable/victim and exploiter/oppressor rarely – if ever – constitutes the whole picture. Accordingly, where the structural perspective relies on a dyadic model of gender and power, it risks oversimplifying analyses of vulnerability along a victim/perpetrator model and excluding altogether those whose 'contexts are not anticipated' (ibid: 180). This ultimately substitutes the experiences of some for the experiences of all.

1.3.1 Problems of ascribing vulnerability a negative value

A key assumption of the structural approach is that vulnerability is a negative condition to be avoided or ameliorated. However, feminist critics have argued that such a characterisation is reductive and 'can be used to justify paternalistic and coercive forms of state intervention' (MacKenzie et al. 2013: 15). If vulnerability is a condition that applies to some and not others and a negative state, then it quickly becomes opposed to agency. As Kate Brown elaborates, when individuals or groups are labelled vulnerable by a presumably less vulnerable yet invested party, such a designation can be patronising and paternalistic, it can function as an instrument of social control and it can have stigmatising and exclusionary consequences (2011: 316). For example, when people with learning difficulties are defined as 'vulnerable', 'the use of the concept creates images of people with learning difficulties based on inabilities, limitations and deficits' (Wishart 2003: 20, cited in Brown 2011: 316). When violence and victimisation does take place, it becomes an inevitable outcome of an already present vulnerability, a rationale that is tantamount to victim-blaming (ibid).

Moreover, there is a clear resonance to concerns of paternalism for feminists given that women have been historically categorised as a vulnerable group, authorising men's relative power and dominance. In light of vulnerability's capacity to designate those in need of protection, attributions of vulnerability frequently align with restrictions on agency and autonomy. There are paternalistic and also colonial overtones as 'the concept of vulnerability still encourages a sense of societies and people as weak, passive and pathetic' (Bankoff 2001: 34). The notion that permeates structural engagements with vulnerability, that only some are vulnerable, may, therefore, reinforce relations of domination when appealed to in an othering manner (ibid).

The designation of certain groups as more vulnerable than others can serve to naturalise already existing relations of inequality, denying the agency and subjectivity of those so labelled. The concerns of victimisation and paternalism are legitimate in the context of the labelling of one group as vulnerable by another more socially privileged actor. However, they both exemplify the directional approach to vulnerability, where an individual or group is observed to be vulnerable to violence or harm. A structural approach that is not only situational but focuses on both the macrolevel of power and the deep structures of domination underscoring these is neither victimising nor paternalistic. For Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Leslie McCall, 'what makes an analysis intersectional – whatever terms it deploys, whatever its iteration, whatever its field or discipline – is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about sameness and difference and its relation to power' (2013: 795). Power within intersectional frameworks is still linked to social privilege and domination, but along multiple axes and coinciding in complex, unpredictable ways. Naming vulnerability can be a way of naming domination and relations of inequality.

For Louis Althusser (1968), descriptive theory is a necessary first stage in any theory and I propose that articulating structural vulnerability is likewise necessary for a theory of sexual violence that seeks to both critique and challenge the existing mechanisms upon which it is reproduced. Rather than naturalise vulnerabilities and shore up already existing hierarchies of protection, such a perspective – in its critical variant – looks to the role of supposedly neutral institutions, environments and contexts in the production of these, and as such provides the foundations for a political interrogation into unequal vulnerabilities. In doing so it deflects scrutiny and blame away from those who are in a state of vulnerability and toward institutional and social arrangements.

1.4 Ontological perspectives on vulnerability

The concerns regarding victimisation and paternalism have led feminist philosophers to rethink the meaning of vulnerability and its significance in relation to violence. Indeed, the 'concept of vulnerability is doing a lot of heavy lifting these days providing new ways to rethink enduring problems, ranging from social marginality and economic insecurity to international warfare' (Cole 2016: 262). It has become, in Estelle Ferrarese's words, 'a concept with which to undo the world as it is' (2016a:

149). Yet, despite the concept's broad appeal, it is notable that sexual violence, which has been at the foreground of activist engagements with vulnerability, is not one of the list of problems to which it has been directed.

In recent academic literature, vulnerability, as Alyson Cole explains, has been resignified through an emphasis on its universality and generative capacity (2016: 260). These 'ontological accounts' of vulnerability focus on the political ramifications of foregrounding vulnerability as a shared condition linked to or equated with exposure to not merely harm, but a range of positive effects, emotions and physical experiences as well. Thinkers taking this approach (Butler 2004a; Butler et al. 2016; Gilson 2014; Anderson 2017; Mitchell 2018; Maillard 2011) have reconceptualised vulnerability in terms of openness, a constitutive condition arising from embodiment: 'our very corporeality means that we are porous – interrelationally and radically open to the world' (Fineman & Grear 2013: 50). In contrast to the structural account, which focuses on negative instances of exposure and the inequalities of power that lead to these, ontological analyses 'consider vulnerability as a multifaceted concept depicting our relational and embodied nature' (Boublil 2018: 183). As such, they point towards what vulnerability illuminates about the subject and its relations with others, rather than the maldistribution of power and the effects of inequality.

Whereas the structural approach engaged with violence as a consequence of vulnerability, ontological perspectives seek to challenge such an association, regarding it as unduly negative. Whilst vulnerability can expose one to violence, this is figured as the exploitation of vulnerability, in contrast to experiences such as love, which constitute the shared, intersubjective embrace of the condition. As Erinn Gilson writes, 'rather than being a way of taking advantage of a preexisting condition of weakness, the exploitation of vulnerability amounts to the appropriation and reduction of a plastic potentiality' (2016: 89). In other words, vulnerability has no particular normative force, rather it is the way in which the inherent, ambiguous condition is lived, engaged with and responded to that is of ethical and political interest. As Alyson Cole explains, 'broadly speaking, the literature endeavors to transvalue, even normalise vulnerability as a shared, constitutive and connective feature of our existence that encompasses not merely susceptibility to harm but also receptivity to positive forms of intersubjectivity' (2016: 261). In contrast to the more straightforwardly negative perspective taken by structural accounts, vulnerability is an ambivalent condition, the value of which cannot be determined in advance. It is an

ever-present state of potentiality that opens individuals to both the negative and positive dimensions of embodied existence.

Many thinkers advancing such a perspective take their lead from Judith Butler's writings in *Precarious Life* (2004a) on the role that coming to terms with vulnerability might offer for rethinking our social obligations. It is her contention that reckoning with our constitutive corporeal vulnerability may provide the basis for rethinking politics, away from reactionary violence and toward a global ethics prioritising interdependence and our ensuing obligations. The details of her ongoing, complex and highly generative work on vulnerability will be the subject of chapter four, where I argue that Butler's reflections in *Precarious Life* are best understood in the context of her wider work, where vulnerability – and its relation to a politics of non-violence – can be seen to be recurring concerns.

In what follows, I will focus on Gilson's comprehensive resignifying and revaluing of vulnerability, as well as her elaboration of the merits of such a move for a politics of sexual violence. Whilst the ontological perspective and its emphasis on the ambivalence of vulnerability have become dominant in recent feminist reflections (Boublil 2018; Oliviero 2018; Gibbs 2018), I focus on Gilson's at length because her extended theorisations on the topic amount to the most detailed engagement with what rethinking vulnerability has to offer feminism, and also because my own perspective draws on many of her insights. Gilson is illuminating with respect to the undervaluing of vulnerability, and her insight that dominant engagements with the term cast it in 'reductively negative' terms as a condition of dependency to be avoided (2014: 5) is one which I will return to throughout.[18] In addition, Gilson argues that the widespread mischaracterisation of vulnerability results in the 'ideal of invulnerability', which she argues is impossible and oppressive (ibid: 7). To this end, I follow Gilson in her diagnosis of the social life of vulnerability. However, I depart from her response to this, which is the construction of a more complex concept of vulnerability. Whilst Gilson is correct to point to the less decidedly negative aspects of vulnerability, I contend that her motivation for a complete resignification of the condition rests on a false characterisation of all structural accounts of the term as 'reductively negative' (2014: 31). Whilst Gilson's interest is in how we can generate ethical responses to

[18] In chapter five I will develop her framework in order to elucidate the dynamics of 'oppositional vulnerability' at work in anti-feminist mobilisation of gendered vulnerability to sexual violence.

vulnerability thereby challenging the societal aspiration toward invulnerability, I am also interested in the 'directedness' of vulnerability; the way in which negative vulnerabilities are illuminating with respect to power relations. Therefore, at the same time as Gilson has been an important dialogue partner for me, there are clear differences between our investments in what the concept of vulnerability can do for feminism. A feminist politics of sexual violence needs to be able to identify and explain patterns of vulnerability, as well as to respond ethically in individual instances.

1.4.1 Erinn Gilson: vulnerability, ambivalence and ambiguity

Erinn Gilson argues for a reconceptualisation of vulnerability that focuses on its ontological dimensions, the fact that 'we are now and always vulnerable' (2014: 38). For her, vulnerability is a significant concept because it is a fundamental part of the human condition. However, its meaning is frequently taken for granted as susceptibility to harm, which leads to the 'non-logical implication'[19] of a reductively negative view of vulnerability (ibid: 5).

> Common presumptions about vulnerability are reductively negative in two ways: first, they constitute an implicit understanding of vulnerability that equates it with liability to injury, weakness, dependency, powerlessness, incapacity, deficiency, and passivity; second these assumptions often devalue vulnerability deeming it a condition or quality that is bad. Vulnerability is understood in a reductively negative way by both definition and in terms of its value.

Reductively negative views of vulnerability are problematic because they 'overdetermine the meaning of vulnerability' (ibid: 5) in a way that circumscribes and curtails potential ethical responsiveness. As Gilson explains, whilst 'it is frequently ceded that the meaning of vulnerability goes way beyond the way it opens us to harm, this other aspect of vulnerability – as the basis of care and love – remains neglected and the concept retains a negative connotation' (ibid: 32). If vulnerability is only

[19] This is a term Gilson borrows from Chershire Calhoun. It refers to 'the "explanatory beliefs" whose general acceptance would have to be supposed in order to explain the rationality of the particular patterns of philosophical conversation and silence which characterise moral theory' (Calhoun 1998: 462, cited by Gilson 2014: 5).

conceived negatively, it becomes a condition to be avoided and disavowed and those who are vulnerable take on the negative value attached to the condition itself.

This devaluing of vulnerability leads invulnerability to be prized: 'The ideal of an invulnerable self is defined by complete self-sufficiency, self-sovereignty and autonomy, independence from others and an imperviousness to being affected, even if these are impossible aims' (ibid: 7). Victimisation and paternalism arise from the ideal of invulnerability as it renders the vulnerable inferior and in a relation of relative dependence to those who view themselves as invulnerable. Gilson's reformulation is intended to resist the 'patronising, paternalistic, and controlling interaction' which she argues follows from an understanding of vulnerability 'as oppositional and fixed' such that 'those who are not vulnerable must comply with those who occupy the role of invulnerable saviour' (ibid: 35). On such a view, those 'identified as vulnerable are believed incapable of transforming their situation or exercising agency. Indeed, agency is regarded as incompatible with vulnerability, which is conceived as a hindrance, and thus, by definition, the vulnerable person is weak, incapable, and powerless' (Gilson 2016: 74). Gilson's reformulation of vulnerability is undertaken in order to challenge what could be referred to as the pervasive ideology of 'invulnerability in capitalist Western societies' (2014: 7). She argues instead for a more complex, 'nondualistic concept of vulnerability' (ibid) which takes the condition to more properly index openness 'to being affected and affecting in ways that one cannot control' (ibid: 2). Gilson's resignified vulnerability has four central features (ibid: 7-8):

> First, vulnerability is 'univocal,' which means that in its most basic sense it is said of all beings in the same way, second, vulnerability is a condition of potential rather than an already determined condition of harm, third, vulnerability is both ambivalent and ambiguous in how it is experienced and in value, and fourth, vulnerability has a diversity of manifestations.

Vulnerability is ambivalent because it makes possible both positive and negative outcomes.[20] It is the significant yet shifting undercurrent of encounters such as 'being

[20] Adriana Cavarero articulates an ambivalent account of embodied, constitutive vulnerability: 'As a body the vulnerable one remains vulnerable as long as she lives, exposed at any instant to *vulnus*. Yet the same potential also delivers her to healing and the relational ontology that decides its meaning. Irremediably open to wounding and caring, the vulnerable one exists totally in the tension generated by this alternative' (2009: 30)

in a foreign country, speaking in class, or being in love' (ibid: 127); experiences which relate to feelings of exposure. The value of vulnerability itself cannot be determined in advance and what matters, for Gilson (forthcoming) is how it is responded to:

> Whereas ambivalence names vulnerability's bi-directionality – how it opens us to care and injury, love and hate, etc. – ambiguity names the intertwining of that which dualist thought would separate. Ambiguity is not merely murkiness, vagueness, or lack of clarity. It is holding together in thought that which is inseparable in experience and existence. Thus, as ambiguous, vulnerability not only leads to bimodal outcomes but precipitates complex, multi-layered, and conflicting modes of experience.

This understanding of vulnerability enables recognition of experiences of vulnerability that are not decidedly negative. It also provides a framework for responding to vulnerability in a non-reactionary manner; i.e. not seeking to resolve it through striving for invulnerability. Focusing instead on the shared character of vulnerability and resisting its negative attributions, Gilson's approach is successful in its aims to avoid stigmatising the vulnerable and preventing recognition of the positive dimensions of vulnerability.

Gilson does not refute the structural insight that there are 'specific forms that vulnerability takes in the social world, of which we have a differential experience because we are differently situated' and that these 'situational vulnerabilities are significantly inflected by the most salient social differences like race, class, gender and sexuality, disability, nationality and so on' (2014: 37). However, she proposes that (ibid: 38)

> An understanding of vulnerability that does not equate it with susceptibility to violation is more accurate as well as able to acknowledge vulnerability as a shared condition because it does not participate in the polarisation of incapacity and capacity, power and powerlessness, weakness and strength.

Thus, whilst situational vulnerabilities are acknowledged, the move to counter vulnerability's negative valuation leads Gilson to subsume the violence that stems from vulnerability into a more generalised condition 'that makes possible love,

affection, learning, and self-transformation just as much as it makes possible suffering and harm' (ibid: 38). The potential for situational vulnerabilities to illustrate the dynamics of domination is effaced by Gilson's move to resolve different aspects of vulnerability into the same univocal condition of openness (ibid: 137-138).

Gilson's key concern is 'neither to judge nor to praise but rather to gesture to how we might better understand how to respond to vulnerability' (ibid: 12). Conceived as a condition of indeterminate potential however, Gilson's approach cannot tell us anything about existing social relations until exploitation of this condition takes place.

Gilson is highly insightful in her critique of the way in which invulnerability as an aspiration functions to marginalise and stigmatise, as well as its illusory character more broadly. Addressing some of the concerns of the structural formulations, her approach has the 'advantage of avoiding the association of women or a particular ethnic or regional group with vulnerability while at the same time providing a challenge to liberal conceptions of the sovereign and individualistic subject as the basis of ethics and politics' (Petherbridge 2016: 590). Moreover, in articulating vulnerability as primarily ambivalent and ambiguous she provides a mechanism by which various aspects of the concept can be held in tandem – a necessity I also argue for. However, her foregrounding of these dimensions overlooks the difference between a dualistic account of vulnerability being articulated in order to name an injustice or to legitimise one. Asymmetric vulnerabilities, whilst not the extent of vulnerability, are also not always reductively negative.

1.4.2 Enabling vulnerabilities and productive power

Gilson's emphasis on the ontological aspect of vulnerability and the condition's ambivalence are reflective of the move in feminism to emphasise the productive and enabling aspects of power, rather than to position women as structurally subordinate. Where the anti-violence movements and structural versions of vulnerability draw on a Marxist understanding of power as linked to domination and oppression (Schippers & Sapp 2012: 31), the ontological perspective takes a more Foucauldian route, highlighting the generative dimensions of power 'as a dynamic and ongoing process' (ibid: 32). Rather than conceive of power as a 'possession attached to a structural position' for theorists working with a Foucauldian model, power is 'a field of force relations that is always present' (ibid: 32). This is important because it has implications

for understandings of agency and resistance. On the more Marxist perspective, resistance needs to be systemic and this has led to criticisms that agency is reduced as the individual themselves can do little on their own to intervene in the system. Such an account 'has a hard time explaining how those who are socially defined as powerless will ever be able to wield the kind of power necessary for changing society' (Allen 1999: 1). Emphasising the enabling aspects of vulnerability as well as the condition's negative and constraining aspects is reflective of a shift away from understanding power in terms of domination and vulnerability as domination's effect.

However, what the structural approaches taken by feminist anti-violence movements sought to assert, was the potential for agency and resistance which came from a recognition of vulnerability in common. As Ferrarese argues (2016a: 157-158):

> it is worth insisting not only on the fact that exposure to another's power does not signify one's own powerlessness, but also on the idea that a large part of our capacities are deployed *against*, or set out from, a vulnerability.

In other words, there is an account of agency and a politics of resistance to be derived from the naming of patterns of vulnerability – something that the anti-violence movement in the 1970s demonstrated. What are the power relations that do overdetermine the meaning of vulnerability? And why is it that the vulnerability of some groups will give rise to protection whilst others have their vulnerability ignored? These are vital questions for feminism and ones that entail reckoning with vulnerability as a negative condition which is an effect of domination. In seeking to avoid the problems of paternalism and victimisation associated with understanding vulnerability as a negative condition, Gilson overlooks the illuminating potential of structural approaches that focus on the conditions of possibility for vulnerability and seek to identify i) that some are more vulnerable than others and ii) why this is.

Gilson offers a general resignification of vulnerability in order to counter concerns regarding the tendency of negative valuations of the term to scapegoat and stigmatise. In her focus on the constitution of individual subjects as open to both harm and pleasure, however, she loses sight of the disproportionate vulnerabilities pertaining to certain groups, which is central for accounts of gender injustice. Yet her critique of the ideal of invulnerability is an important one. I will end this chapter by examining more contextualised revaluations of vulnerability that share Gilson's critique of the

aspiration of invulnerability but focus on specific contexts – care work and the treatment of the disabled – in order to ground their claim for ontological vulnerability. These approaches do not eschew the concept's intimate connection to passivity, dependency and power inequalities. Rather, they direct their challenge at the negative valuation of these proximate terms.

1.5 Revaluing vulnerability

The resignification of vulnerability by theorists such as Butler and Gilson builds on more applied revaluations of the concept across queer theory, fat studies, performance studies and crip theory. Butler (in Butler et al. 2016: 19) writes that:

> both performance studies and disability studies have offered the crucial insight that all action requires support and that even the most punctual and seemingly spontaneous act implicitly depends on an infrastructural condition that quite literally supports the acting body.

Thus, Butler's own thinking on the interdependence of corporeal existence stems from specific contributions in other disciplines. Gilson (2014: 9) credits care ethics and ecofeminism for revaluing dependence, noting that

> If the reality of human life is that we are always dependent to varying degrees, then our conception of autonomy ought to reflect such facts of dependence, interdependence and the significance of care-giving and receiving rather than relegating them to the status of exceptional and abnormal.

In contrast to Gilson's renewed, complexified theory of vulnerability, these approaches direct their focus to what is revealed by the fact of vulnerability's devaluation. The negative valuation of vulnerability is epistemically significant in itself.

Eva Kittay has undertaken such a revaluation of vulnerability and dependency from the perspective of care ethics. She focuses on the implications of foregrounding dependency for the organisation of social responsibilities and relations. Building on

Carol Gilligan's (1982) foundational contribution to the field,[21] Kittay pursues the question of what happens when dependence and connection are conceived as both inevitable and enabling rather than as limitations. By focusing on dependency work – the relations it reveals, how society supports these relations and how society distributes the work – she outlines a framework for a politics of dependency.

Kittay is motivated to explore dependence and disability due to her experiences as a care-giver for a severely dependent daughter whose 'conditions of severe mental retardation and cerebral palsy have meant that she can never carry on a life without constant assistance' (1999: xii). She theorises the unique vulnerabilities of both the caregiver and charge and the implications of these for questions of justice. For Kittay, a just society is one which begins with the fact of dependency (ibid: 77), recognising it as a central and inevitable aspect of human life. Indeed, whilst Kittay's own experience is a unique one, and many people will spend the majority of their lives not caring for a severely dependent charge, the relation of caregiving itself gives rise to broader political insights. In contrast to an ethics or politics that begins with the presumption of subjects' independence and 'masks inequitable dependencies, those of infancy and childhood, old age, illness, and disability' (ibid: xi), beginning ethical inquiry from the experience of a highly dependent other encourages a shift away from understanding these states as inconvenient departures from the norm.[22] Kittay argues (2011: 56) that

> Acknowledging the inevitable dependency of certain forms of disability, setting them in the context of inevitable dependencies of all sorts, is another way to reintegrate disability into the species norm. It is part of our species typicality to be vulnerable to disability, to have periods of dependency, and to be responsible to care for dependent individuals.

[21] Feminist care ethics have challenged the elevation of abstract ideals such as justice and the devaluation of relational and interpersonal ideals such as care on the basis that the latter have been excluded because of their historical association with the feminine. Gilligan's ground-breaking research critiqued the masculinist assumptions of her supervisor Lawrence Kohlberg's psychological theory of moral development, according to which women tended to score as less morally developed when faced with certain moral dilemmas. Gilligan's investigation found that theories of psychological development ignored a more contextualised ethical decision-making process which includes attention to interpersonal relationships. Gilligan's challenge to the abstracted ideal of justice foregrounded an alternative subject of ethics: the relational subject of care.

[22] Kittay (1999) takes vulnerability, as conventionally understood, to be a source of moral obligation (see also Goodin 1985).

Rather than detach questions of vulnerability from an association with dependency, Kittay argues 'we need to see our dependency and our vulnerability to dependency as species' typical' (Kittay & Feder 2002: 247). This is an ethical approach in so far as it foregrounds questions of responsibility. However, it is also highly political in its challenge to Western ideals of individualism. As Sandra Laugier outlines, 'measuring the importance of care for human life means recognising the possibility of subjectivity defined not by agency, self-assertion or autonomy, but by dependence and vulnerability' (2016: 207-208). Thus, revaluing dependency functions as a significant challenge to the premise of individualism and independence underscoring Western political theory and policy. Kittay is not resignifying vulnerability as ambivalent and indeterminate openness; she finds that vulnerability and dependence are conditions that arise within power imbalances rather than potentially enabling conditions in themselves. However, neither is hers a structural approach that aims at eradication of vulnerability. What she seeks instead is accommodation: what is important is how these relations are socially organised so that both the dependency worker and the one they care for can thrive. This involves material support through social welfare and a politics which foregrounds the fact that everyone at some point in their lives will be involved in caring relations – as carer or cared for.

This challenge to the ideal of invulnerability through a partial ontologisation of vulnerability highlights 'the importance of care for human life, for the relations that organise it, and the social and moral position of caregivers. To recognise this means recognising that dependence and vulnerability are traits of a condition common to all, not a special category – the 'vulnerable'" (Laugier 2016: 211). Linda Alcoff & Eva Kittay (2007: 11) summarise that:

> Care ethics takes the paradigm case of human experience to be embedded in familial and dependent relationships, rather than in those of autonomous individuals [..] A care ethics postulates the importance of a concept of self that is always in-relationship, a self with somewhat permeable ego boundaries that sees itself connected to others.

This leads to reconsideration of the appropriate domain of ethical inquiry more broadly 'exploring and reconsidering the value of those human relations obscured by the affirmation of independence' (Whitney 2011: 555). This has resulted in a reconceptualisation of vulnerability as an inevitable and important aspect of embodied

existence and an understanding that the 'fact of human vulnerability and frailty that dependency underscores must function in our very conceptions of ourselves as subjects and moral agents'[23] (Kittay & Feder 2002: 3). In affirming interdependence and vulnerability as a fact of social, biological existence, albeit one which affects certain people more acutely than others, Kittay – and care ethics more broadly – problematises longstanding assumptions in Western philosophy surrounding the ideals of individualism and abstraction in deciding our relationship to others. Once values of abstract individualism are challenged the negative connotations of vulnerability and dependence lose their epistemic grounding.

Kittay's affirmation and politicisation of vulnerability is important. However, some critics have argued that she does not go far enough in rethinking dependence. Kittay retains the conception of power as 'power over' that underscored the structural perspective, and to be vulnerable is to be in a position of relative powerlessness. Given that her own theory emerges from the experience of looking after someone whose capacities for acting are significantly reduced, this is not perhaps surprising. However, some critical disability theorists have argued that in extrapolating the social and political meaning of dependency from her own experience of caring *for* her daughter, she articulates a narrow understanding of vulnerability and an oppositional account of dependence that risks maintaining the asymmetrical power relations whereby the more-than-ordinarily vulnerable are dependent on the benevolence of the less vulnerable. Whilst her own daughter is clearly vulnerable because of her disability, designating those with disabilities as vulnerable in this negative sense more broadly risks naturalising vulnerabilities better explained by an interrogation of the specific situation.[24]

Stacy Clifford Simplican for instance, whilst praising Kittay's politicisation of the needs of dependency workers and disabled dependents for exemplifying 'how our collective denial of dependency leads to political lacunas that induce these crises of care' (2015: 219), argues that her articulation of vulnerability is overly simplistic. By presenting vulnerability as a permanent state, Kittay leaves no room for the possibility that 'dependents can be both vulnerable and aggressive' (ibid). Thus, she relies on an

[23] For a distinction between vulnerability and dependence see Susan Dodds (in Mackenzie et al. 2013).

[24] Sharene Razack gives the example of how 'women with developmental disabilities have been constructed almost universally as vulnerable a social construction most often used to *explain* tremendous social and sexual violence in their lives' (1994a: 899—900).

oppositional understanding of vulnerability, where some are vulnerable and others not. This, Clifford Simplican argues, means that Kittay not only romanticises care but, in presenting care-givers as fully transparent subjects, ends up reproducing the liberal independent subject that she aims to subvert. This self-reflecting, internally accessible subject disavows the way its own subjectivity is constituted in and through the person they are caring for. Clifford Simplican argues that this leads to a mischaracterisation of vulnerability. The lack of reciprocity between the caregiver and dependent on a subjective level – the caregiver is able to separate the interests of themselves from those of their charge – reflects an account of vulnerability 'positioned within the self-other dichotomy characteristic of the liberal notion of selves she resists' (Whitney 2011: 563).

Building on Kittay's contributions, but resisting this characterisation of vulnerability as powerlessness, Shiloh Whitney and Clifford Simplican argue for a more relational ontology. Clifford Simplican challenges the labelling of the disabled as vulnerable, arguing that such a perspective fails to treat the disabled as 'the complicated and fully human individuals that they are' (2015: 224). Here, as with the structural approach, Kittay risks reifying the vulnerability of some whilst ignoring the vulnerability of others, with the effect that some are overdetermined by their passivity. Whitney examines what else gets revalued and brought into view when vulnerability is no longer decidedly negative:

> Of particular interest are those powers that are inseparable from vulnerabilities, powers we have failed to affirm, and have instead obscured and even sanctioned by interpellating them as a pure vulnerability within a discourse of normative independence. For example, the ability of an artist with arthrogryposis to pick up her coffee with her mouth, or the blind professor's ability to negotiate his social and physical environment relying primarily on hearing and touch (2011: 569).

Here, revaluing vulnerability facilitates a shift in perspective such that previously overlooked or devalued capabilities signify as positive and valuable. Vulnerabilities can be empowering once certain norms of able-bodied existence are shed. This focus on the enabling aspect of vulnerability brings it closer to Gilson's ambivalent ontology. There is a slight difference in so far as it is not vulnerability itself which is resignified, but the structure of social meanings which designate vulnerability as negative. In a

way, critical disability studies and crip studies are 'queering' vulnerability – resisting the able-bodied normative order which gives rise to its negative valuation.

Critical disability studies and crip studies, like care ethics, have highlighted the importance of affirming vulnerability in order to counter the ideals of autonomy and independence which undergird Western political theory and politics more broadly, as well as to challenge the notion that vulnerability is most productively conceived as either oppositional (the property of some and not others) or asymmetrical (the property of some more than others). Indeed, the resignification of vulnerability has gone hand in hand with the resignification of disability. Critiquing able-bodiedness as illusory and ideological (McRuer 2006), the idea that anybody can persist without social, relational and institutional support is called into question. The deployment of vulnerability as a label to designate distance from the norm is challenged. As a result, it is the normative ideal to which vulnerability is presumed to depart, rather than vulnerability itself that needs to be addressed. Pursuing this argument, Scully calls for a shift in our conception of ontological vulnerability, such that the vulnerabilities of the disabled are included into the realm of normal life rather than otherness (2014: 206). Normalising the vulnerabilities of the disabled through an expanded ontological account of vulnerability will have the two benefits of i) countering the stigmatisation of the disabled, and ii) encouraging us 'to examine in detail exactly which social, cultural, and political responses ameliorate rather than exacerbate them' (ibid: 219). Scully here maintains some of the insights of the structural approach, that we examine the ways in which vulnerability is institutionally produced, whilst also taking the affirmative route of re-valuing vulnerability as inevitable, not inherently negative and more universal than currently conceived. These challenges have wide-reaching significance. For Susan Wendell, 'in a culture which loves the idea that the body can be controlled, those who cannot control their bodies are seen (and many see themselves) as failures'[25] (1989: 113). Indeed, when the dominant culture 'distrusts and devalues dependence on other people and vulnerability in general' (ibid: 105), affirming vulnerability can be a radical act of resistance.

Whilst contributions in care ethics and critical disability studies may initially seem tangential to a discussion of sexual violence, the re-valuation of passivity and vulnerability that each pursue are in fact integral to countering the attribution of

[25] This is an insight that has been brilliantly explored in Fat Studies (Rothblum 2011).

negative affects, such as shame, to experiences of this nature. The very notion of victim-blaming, that can happen at either the social, interpersonal or individual-internalised level, depends on the liberal myth of 'ourselves as autonomous and in control' (Butler 2004a: 19-24). Sharon Lamb points to the association of shame with vulnerability: 'Why is there such a deep feeling of humiliation associated with being overpowered or vulnerable or hurt or unable to come to one's own defense?' (1999: 119). Both care ethics and disability theorists have highlighted that challenging the masculinist discourse that devalues historically feminised traits necessitates exposing 'the often unquestioned historical association of masculinity with and ennobled or vilified form of self-reliant and categorical agency' and rethinking 'the implied conflation of domination and agency this formulation perpetuates' (Mardorossian 2014: 14). Through revaluing vulnerability, a feminist politics of sexual violence can provide a counter to the logic that valorises resistance and self-defence, leading to experiences of violence to be registered as a humiliating and shameful failure of individual control. As Mardorossian contends, if 'we came to terms with the fact that we are all, by definition, characterised by vulnerability, then it becomes more difficult (if not impossible) to hold it against people that they are vulnerable' (ibid).

In contrast to Gilson's resignification of vulnerability, which focuses on it as shared and ambivalent, theorists in care ethics and disability studies have revalued vulnerability whilst holding onto some of the structural insights regarding power, domination and the proximity of vulnerability to terms such as dependence and passivity[26]. By taking vulnerability and dependence to be a norm rather than an exception, they offer a critical framework through which the negative associations of vulnerability can be explained. This is a critique that directs itself toward the structural level at the same time as it ontologises vulnerability, as it sheds light on the specific norms, institutions and histories productive of the ideal of invulnerability in the first place – and the relations of dominance that these uphold.

At the beginning, I stated that it was not my ambition to settle on one approach and the rest of this thesis will argue that the structural and ontological perspectives are both essential for a feminist politics of sexual violence. However, what is significant at

[26] Queer Femme sexual politics pursues such a resignification of vulnerability in the context of lesbian relationships (Dahl 2017; Hollibaugh & Moraga 1983; Harris & Crocker 1997). In contrast, Gilson argues that if 'we are to reckon with vulnerability we must also reckon with the cultural baggage with which the notion is laden' (2014: 128).

this point, is that Butler and Gilson, along with other reformulations of the condition as ontological, are being situated within a progress narrative.[27] For Anne Murphy, for instance, the 'return' to vulnerability within feminist literature is 'redemptive and aspirational', a 'resurrection' (2012: 70). The effect of such a narrative is that previous feminist activist accounts of the concept are either overlooked or dismissed. I seek to retain the insights of all the contributions sketched out here – that vulnerability has positive, generative and ambivalent effects yet, in responding to situational vulnerabilities, the negativity of vulnerability needs to be taken not to index merely exploitation of a more fundamental vulnerability, but the effect of domination. In the context of sexual violence, this will mean attending to the dynamics of power that follow from conceptualising gender as a structure.

1.6 Conclusion

Through charting the different motivations taken when employing the concept of vulnerability within feminism, I hope to have set the terrain for my own engagement with the matter. It is my contention that the resignified ontological approach has become the dominant one in contemporary discussions of vulnerability and some of the political, intersectional insights from the structural perspective have been sidelined.

The philosophical seductiveness of a theory that is able to address all instances of vulnerability as manifestations of the very same corporeal openness cannot be underestimated. But whilst the ontology of openness and potentiality that Gilson elaborates is highly sophisticated and illuminating, how we respond to vulnerability does not adequately capture what I understand to be the priorities for a feminist politics of sexual violence. Indeed, its relevance is limited to such contexts that she offers as examples; the experiences of being in love, and similar types of uncertain exposure. This focus on ambiguity and potentiality becomes unhelpful in situations of vulnerability that are more decidedly either positive or negative. I will argue that a politics of vulnerability must be able to i) articulate the clearly positive dimensions of the condition, in order that liveable worlds can be created that foster this aspect of

[27] Progress narratives where 'the past' is depicted in reductive terms as naive and uninformed in contrast to the relatively enlightened present are common in feminist storytelling (Hemmings 2011). Within such accounts, 'feminist work produced in the 1970s is consigned to the "dustbin of history", and frequently dismissed without even being read' (Browne 2014: 10).

human existence, and ii) articulate a critical account that can both illuminate the disproportionate vulnerability of certain individuals and groups, pointing to structural and institutional injustices, and intervene in reactionary vulnerability discourses that instrumentally employ the rhetoric of vulnerability for divisive political purposes.

In the following chapter, I explore the legacy of the feminist sex wars through examining the ways in which this period has been received, documented and remembered. I will propose that so scarring and polarising were the debates on sexuality that took place, that articulating a structural account of vulnerability has been over-determined as aligning oneself with the largely maligned 'sex-negative' perspective seen as emerging during this period. Like Alyson Cole, I argue that contemporary feminist engagements with vulnerability need to reckon with the genealogy of 'the debates of the 1980s and 1990s over oppression, identity and agency' (2016: 262) that this period spawned. Tracing aspects of this genealogy, 'the process by which we moved from talking "victim" (and similar terms from the vocabulary of injustice) to rethinking "vulnerability"' (ibid: 268) will be the subject of the following two chapters.

Chapter two

Vulnerability and the sexual politics of the sex wars

Sexuality is an area both of oppressive inequalities and of constructive struggles towards women's 'liberation.' This very duality gives rise to confusion.

- Freedman & Thorne (1984: 102)

2.1 Vexed histories

The last chapter highlighted the distinction between structural and ontological emphases when engaging with vulnerability and noted that ontological perspectives, which resignify vulnerability away from its negative connotations, have become the dominant focus in recent academic literature. An emphasis on the potentially generative aspects of vulnerability in place of a perceived over-association with victimisation has been advanced. For Ann Murphy, such a move is 'no doubt due to the fact that previous waves of feminist thinkers have claimed as their aim a critique of women's disproportionate availability to various types of violence, whether symbolic, material, or both' (2011: 108). Whilst Murphy is hesitant to embrace such a story herself,[28] this chapter takes her characterisation of a problematic past life of vulnerability as a point of departure. It 'especially in regard to the issue of sexual violence' that vulnerability 'is deeply vexed in the context of feminist theory' (2012: 70). If the conjunction of vulnerability and sexual violence promote scholarly unease, rather than acquiescing to this, I propose that it is time to return to the unexamined source of this discomfort, in order that feminist scholarship may be able to engage with both vulnerability and sexual violence more fully.

In this chapter, I will dig deeper into this 'vexed history' and its implications for theorising vulnerability today. I will argue that the period to which Murphy and other feminists noting vulnerability's problematic past life – for example, Butler (2015b:

[28] Murphy highlights the problem that 'the renaissance of interest in vulnerability is not one that critiques various forms of sexed and gendered violence' (2012: 108). Thus, 'when thought through in the light of the political realities of sexual violence' she argues that ontological vulnerability is too abstract and needs to be subjected to a 'reality check' (in Heberle & Grace 2009: 54).

139)[29] – refer, is the sex wars of the 1980s: a series of increasingly fraught contestations over the meaning of women's sexuality under patriarchy. These crystallised around the question of pornography and the role of the state in regulating it. However, the contents of these disputes have been reduced to a 'sex-positive' vs. 'sex-negative' binary, which obscures a great deal of critical engagement with the question of women's sexuality under patriarchy that either predated these contests or do not fit into such tidy categories.

I am arguing that it is the legacy and historicisation of the sex wars in terms of a narrative of winners and losers that haunts engagements with vulnerability today. I seek to demonstrate that the period has been too readily received with sex-positive feminism and sexual pleasure on one side of the equation, and sex-negative feminism and violence against women on the other.[30] This, in turn, has led to the dismissal of a large body of feminist knowledge production relevant to conceptualising sexual politics in the present. Sex-negative feminism has become somewhat of a 'straw-woman' (Siegel in Heywood & Drake 1997: 68) figure in sexual violence discourses and this has resulted in sexual violence being the 'taboo subject of feminist theory' (Mardorossian, 2002: 743) generally, and an unacknowledged absence in vulnerability studies more specifically.

I will begin by focusing on the Barnard Conference, where some of the most contentious debates were aired. This conference is not only 'often thought to mark the beginning of "pro-sex feminism"' (Corbman 2015: 54), but '[Gayle] Rubin's Barnard paper, "Thinking Sex," is sometimes cited as the founding text of queer theory' (Echols 2016: 16; Love 2010; Amin 2016) due to its challenge to feminism as the 'privileged site of a theory of sexuality' (Rubin 1984: 307). Thus, it was an event with significant repercussions for the institutionalisation and direction of the study of sexuality. Whilst Barnard is thought to have cemented 'battle lines' (Walters 2016: 1) over whether feminist sexual politics depart from an analysis of pleasure or danger, I will contextualise this dispute by highlighting how the women's movement in its

[29] Butler alludes to the sex wars when she cautions readers against a feminist analysis of 'women's bodies as particularly vulnerable', as this immediately takes us back to 'the long and lamentable gender politics that allocates the distinction between passive and active to women and men respectively'.

[30] I will use the terms 'pro-sex' and 'sex-positive' interchangeably. Whilst pro-sex was the term coined by Rubin (1984) to distinguish her thought from that of the anti-pornography movement, the opposition has been codified as sex-positive/sex-negative and this is the terminology more frequently in circulation today.

inception was motivated by this tension. I will argue that the depth of the divisions between so-called sex-positive and sex-negative feminists were not due to opposed perspectives on women's sexuality under patriarchy. To the contrary, this was a productive tension that became obscured by the personality politics and opposed perspectives on the role of the state that developed in relation to pornography. Thus, whilst sex-negative feminism has become associated with violence against women and vulnerability, what pro-sex feminists were actually positioning themselves against was the anti-pornography movement's siding with a right-wing Regan administration and the vitriolic attacks on feminists who practised sadomasochism (S/M).

This chapter contains some of the key historiographical arguments of this thesis. Victoria Hesford writes that she seeks to challenge the 'overdetermined and reductive ways in which the [women's liberation] movement has become an object of knowledge in contemporary memoirs, conventional historical studies, subcultural memory and collective cultural memory' (2013: 7). My ambitions are similar. I will argue that resisting overdetermined readings and knowledges not only contributes to discussions around vulnerability, sexual violence and sexuality more broadly, but also complicates queer and feminist genealogies, which present this period, and its ruptures, as heralding the transcendence of feminism by queer theory (Martin 1996; Hemmings 2016).

I argue that the cementing of the sex-positive/sex-negative binary was in part due to the queer politics of resistance that developed in response to the AIDS crisis. When anti-pornography feminists aligned themselves with the right-wing Reagan administration in the United States – which was, at the same time, cutting the AIDS budget – the pro-sex emphasis on the importance of protecting minority sexual expression proved paramount and anti-pornography became unviable as a feminist sexual politics. However, the chapter ends by urging that we resist the over-association of critical perspectives on sexual vulnerability with anti-pornography feminism. The two arguments I develop in this chapter are that i) sex-negative feminism – understood as the emphasis on women's danger in the arena of sexuality – needs to be separated from anti-pornography feminism and, following this, ii) sexual politics needs to reanimate critical perspectives on sexuality under patriarchy and that such a perspective is complementary to literature emphasising agency and the enabling aspects of sexual practices.

2.2 The sex wars

The 'sex wars' refers to the increasingly hostile and adversarial feminist perspectives on sex, pornography and the role of the state that were aired in the 1980s. Lynn Comella describes these as 'a set of deeply felt ideological divisions about feminism's relationship to pornography, power, pleasure, and a range of "deviant" sexual identities and practices' (2008: 202-3). The opposing perspectives that crystallised in this period became popularly characterised as sex-positive (or pro-sex feminism) and sex-negative (or anti-pornography)[31] – and 'within the academy', writes Suzanna Walters, 'there is no doubt that the so-called pro-sex position has "won"' (2016: 4). When the pro-sex, anti-porn rupture is conceived as a natural endpoint in second-wave feminist theorisations of sexuality, the more nuanced debates that led up to, but did not necessitate, this rupture get obscured.

This period was so divisive that it has left an affective legacy that steers feminist discussions on sexual politics today. Moreover, the direction of academic sexual politics is also shaped by the institutionalisation that took place in the aftermath of the sex wars (Corbman 2015), which saw sex-positive concerns become academic objects of inquiry. Heather Love – who admits that she had mainly encountered the period in terms of feminist nostalgia – writes that whilst 'the sex wars were for me a period of glory and revolt, a proximate and enabling past […] like other kinds of wars, sex wars leave wounds that never completely heal' (2011: 11). Indeed, she continues '[it is] the traumatic temporality of the sex wars keeps that time alive for younger generations of feminists and queers' (ibid). The period has generated an 'affective surround', an 'unarticulated mix of feelings and reactions that pervade an event or collect around a figure, in either physical or virtual space' (Duggan 2011). However, despite their influence on scholarly inquiry, these remain 'contentious, understudied and often misunderstood times' (Echols 2016: 12) and so deserve to be revisited.

[31] Lynn Chancer (1998) analyses the divisions in terms of 'sex' vs 'sexism' – to indicate the divergent emphasis on practices of structures. For Ann Ferguson, these divisions consisted of radical versus libertarian feminism, the latter a dismissive characterization of the sex-positive position (1984).

2.3 The 1982 Barnard Conference

Many narratives of the period cite the Barnard Conference of 1982 as a key point in the feminist sex wars. Lynn Comella, for instance, writes (2008: 205):

> The fallout from the conference crystallised opposing viewpoints and political stances, delineated "good" from "bad" sex, and resulted in an ideological turf war over who would define feminism's relationship to sexuality.

This has had ongoing consequences for the formation of academic thought. As Corbman notes, 'decades of feminist, queer and queer feminist theories can trace their genealogies back through this conference in multifaceted and at times surprising ways' (2015: 73). Moreover, many of those who were present at the conference and aligned themselves with the pro-sex position, most notably Gayle Rubin, are now celebrated theorists of sexuality and canonical to queer theory and sexuality studies.[32] Whilst Barnard was just one event, and therefore cannot stand in for the sex wars as such, it has become central to dominant stories of this period. Moreover, the *Pleasure and Danger* anthology (Vance 1984), a collection of all the papers presented at Barnard, remains 'coveted […] for even the hippest of young scholars' (Walters 2016: 4). The point of revisiting Barnard and the accounts of its participants is not to reify it as a turning point in feminist history. Rather, I begin with Barnard precisely to trouble genealogies of sexual politics that inscribe the conference with excessive historical significance, such that the contest that was aired and its terms have come to stand in for a far more complex, nuanced and indeed messy, period of feminist history and activism.[33] If we begin rather than end with Barnard, the negative effects that the conference generated become contingent rather than inevitable, implying that the

[32] A letter in *Feminist Studies* (see Abelove, H. et al, 1983) in response to the protest at the conference, arguing against what the cosignees felt amounted to censorship and accusing 'one segment of the feminist movement' of using 'McCarthyite tactics to silence other voices', was signed by 285 academics and included prominent names that have subsequently become key theorists of gender and sexuality: Henry Abelove, Dorothy Allison, Ros Baxandall, Judith Butler, Pat Califa, John D'Emillo, Ellen DuBois, Alice Echols, Zillah Eisenstein, Kate Ellis, Barbara Epstein, Estelle Freedman, Faye Ginsberg, Donna Haraway, Susan Harding, Lind Hoagland, Amber Hollibaugh, Judith Levine, Cherrie Moraga, Joan Nestle, Esther Newton, Judith Newton, Gayle Rubin, Sara Ruddick, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Ann Snitow, Carole Vance, Daniel J Walkowitz, Judith R Walkowitz and Ellen Willis.

[33] Moves to challenge the oppositional history are evident in Lynn Chancer (1998).

history of feminist sexual politics cannot be overdetermined by or reducible to its most significant rift.

2.3.1 Juxtaposing pleasure and danger

The Barnard Conference is an annual event that brings together a broad community of thinkers and activists on an issue pressing to feminists at the time. In 1982, Carole Vance was the academic coordinator. Vance chose the theme of sexuality with the rationale that 'in light of the current controversies about pornography in the feminist community, sexuality is a particularly timely and appropriate topic. Furthermore, it is an issue of central concern to feminist theory' (1982: 4). Vance's intention in discussing sexuality was to explore the entanglement of pleasure and danger in women's lives. The concept paper drawn up in advance, which 'summarises the main points of the planning committee's ongoing discussions' and 'guides speakers and workshop leaders in regard to the conference's perspective' (ibid: 3), opens with the following (Vance 1984: 443):

> The ninth The Scholar and the Feminist conference will address women's sexual pleasure, choice and autonomy acknowledging that sexuality is simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression and danger, as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency. This dual focus is important, we think, for to speak only of pleasure and gratification ignores the patriarchal structure in which women act, yet to talk only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women's experience with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live.

As Echols points out, the 'pleasure/danger' epithet (2016: 11), which has subsequently mapped onto the sex-positive/sex-negative binary, was initially a nuanced framework through which to explore the contradictory and decidedly ambivalent character of sexuality under patriarchy. The aim of the conference was to break down binary thinking and to expand the possibilities of theorising sexuality.

2.3.2 Opposing pleasure and danger: the dispute over the diary

Whilst the conference was 'designed to open up feminist dialogue about sex', it also sought 'to redress the balance between sexual pleasure and sexual danger as an

intellectual and political intervention in the discussion' (Vance 1984: 431), which it was felt had been dominated by anti-pornography campaigners and their analysis of danger. As Lynn Comella notes, the conference organisers 'argued that since the mid-1970s feminist work on sexuality had been increasingly dominated by feminist critiques that focused almost exclusively on the relationship between sexual danger, male aggression, and violence against women' (2008: 202). Thus, the focus was on supplementing 'danger' narratives through which 'women have come to feel more visible and sexually vulnerable' with discourses of pleasure and agency: 'we must deepen and expand [our radical insights into sexual theory], so that more women are encouraged to identify and act in their sexual self-interest' (Vance 1984: 3). Indeed, the conference was not intended to pit one meaning of sexuality against another, but to open up avenues for thinking about the implication of pleasure and danger with one another, in the domain of sexuality. Some of the questions it sought to answer were (Vance 1982: 1):

> How do women get sexual pleasure in patriarchy?
>
> Given the paradox that the sexual domain is a dangerous one for women, either as an area of restriction and repression or as an arena of experimentation and resistance, how do women of various ethnic racial and class groups strategise for pleasure?

Thus, at the heart of Barnard was an investigation of what it means to exercise sexual agency and experience pleasure under conditions of structural inequality and realities of material violence. The conference was motivated by an exploration of the simultaneity of pleasure and danger in women's sexual lives.[34]

However, the conference build-up and the day itself was shrouded in controversy as anti-pornography activists felt that not only that their perspective was being side-lined,

[34] A slightly different characterisation of the split is offered by Ann Ferguson. She characterises it as radical feminism versus libertarian feminism. Radical feminists assert that 'sexual freedom requires the sexual equality of partners and their equal respect for one another as both subject and body. It also requires the elimination of all patriarchal institutions (e.g. the pornography industry, the patriarchal family, prostitution and compulsory heterosexuality), and sexual practices (sadomasochism, cruising, adult/child and butch/femme relationships) in which sexual objectification occurs'. Libertarian feminists assert that sexual freedom 'requires oppositional practices, that is, transgressing socially respectable categories of sexuality and refusing to draw the line on what constitutes politically correct sexuality' (1984: 108).

but a patriarchal anti-feminist vision of sexuality was being trumpeted. Vance outlines (1984: 431) the events as she experienced them in the week building up to the conference:

> Members of anti-pornography groups made telephone calls to metropolitan area feminists and to Barnard College denouncing the conference organisers for inviting proponents of "anti-feminist" sexuality to participate. They criticised the conference for promoting patriarchal values antithetical to the basic tenets of feminism, and they objected to participants by name, reportedly portraying them as sexual deviants. Because the conference was designed to open feminist dialogue about sex, these women characterised it as dominated by sexual nonconformists, who were in fact only part of the wide spectrum of opinion represented there.

A key aspect of the controversy revolved around a conference diary that had been created by the planning committee[35] and edited by Vance. The *Diary of a conference on sexuality* was a seventy-two-page handbook that had been created as a supplement to the conference. It documented the planning of the conference and the questions that had been grappled with in the lead-up. The Diary was like a sketchbook; it contained illustrations, personal statements and suggested reading. It also, and this is what became the source of controversy, included what planners felt were witty and evocative sexual images. 'Knowing that the conference raised more questions than it could possibly answer, planners viewed the Diary as a way to share these questions and the planning process more fully with registrants' (Vance, 1984: 432).

[35] The planning committee was made up of 25 women: Julie Abraham, Hannah Alderfer, Meryl Altman, Jan Boney, Frances Doughty, Ellen DuBois, Kate Ellis, Judith Friedlander, Julie German, Faye Ginsburg, Diane Harriford, Beth Jaker, Mary Clare Lennon, Sherry Manasse, Nancy K. Miller, Marybeth Nelson, Esther Newton, Claire Riley, Susan R. Sacks, Ann Snitow, Quandra P. Stadler, Judith Walkowitz, Ellen Willis, and Patsy Yaeger.

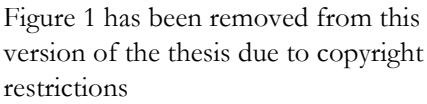

Figure 1*: The Diary* (Vance 1984)

Figure 2: *The Diary* (Love 2010: 55)

Anti-pornography protestors took issue with the Diary and the images it contained, understanding them to be promoting S/M and exhibiting pornographic content. Andrea Dworkin (quoted in Rubin 2010: 26), despite not being a core member of Women Against Pornography (WAP),[36] sent out copies of the Diary with a cover letter stating:

> This is a copy of the so-called Diary put together by the planners of the recent conference on sexuality at Barnard College . . . Please read this Diary from beginning to end. Please do not skip any parts of it. Please look at the pictures. Please read it right away: however busy you are please do not put off reading this. This Diary shows how the S&M and pro-pornography activists . . . are being intellectually and politically justified and supported. It shows too the conceptual framework for distorting and significantly undermining radical feminist theory, activism, and efficacy. There is no feminist standard, I believe, by which this material and these arguments taken as a whole are not perniciously anti-woman and anti-feminist. It is doubtful, in my view, that the feminist movement can maintain its political integrity and moral authority with this kind of attack on its fundamental and essential premises from within.

As a result of telephone calls made less than twenty-four hours before the conference took place, the Barnard administration confiscated 1,500 copies of the Diary in an effort to distance themselves from the allegedly explicit material.

On the day of the conference itself, the situation escalated. Comella outlines (2008: 204):

> Anti-pornography protesters showed up wearing t-shirts emblazoned with the words "For a Feminist Sexuality" on the front and "Against S/M" on the back. They also distributed leaflets accusing conference organisers of silencing the views of a major portion of the women's movement and endorsing a

[36] Bronstein writes: 'Dworkin was not involved with the group day to day, but participated in the group's early actions such as the March on Times Square and the East Coast pornography conference. In this way, her ideas and presence were very much part of the initial public image of anti-pornography feminism' (2011: 179N14). Corbman notes that the protest did not feature in Andrea Dworkin' memoir (2015: 63).

> small offshoot of the movement that, according to them, was part of the backlash against radical feminism.

This leaflet, signed by the Coalition for a Feminist Sexuality and Against Sadomasochism (Women Against Violence Against Women; WAP; New York Radical Feminists) and distributed at the gates of Barnard College, attacked individuals and organisations for advocating a form of 'patriarchal sexuality' due to their association with or advocacy of sadomasochism and other relationships involving consent but sexualising inequality. In focusing on images and individuals, the 'leaflet contributed significantly to an atmosphere in which the diversity of the conference and the broad issues it raised were obscured' (Abelove et. al. 1983: 179). Whilst organisers felt that the Diary indicated a clear prioritisation of 'danger' discourses (Vance, 1982: 18) alongside explorations into pleasure, the protestors felt that sexual violence was sidelined. In the leaflet (reprinted in Abelove et. al. 1983: 180-182), the protestors wrote:

> Represented at this conference are organisations that support and produce pornography, that promote sex roles and sadomasochism, and that have joined the straight and gay paedophile organisations in lobbying for an end to laws that protect children from sexual abuse by adults. Excluded from this conference are feminists who have developed the feminist analysis of sexual violence, who have organised a mass movement against pornography, who have fought media images that legitimise sexual violence, who believe that sadomasochism is reactionary, patriarchal sexuality, and who have worked to end the sexual abuse of children.

The participants at Barnard came under strong attack from the anti-pornography movement. Whilst this was not the first protest by anti-pornography feminists against 'the movement's fetishised Big Three – pornography, sadomasochism, and butch-femme roles' (Vance 1992: xxii); prior to Barnard, critical anti-pornography voices were few and far between. At the beginning of the 1980s, anti-pornography as a movement had been growing in influence.[37] Thus, one of the intentions of the organisers was to counter the increasing monopolisation of the discourse on sexual

[37] See Bronstein (2011) for a detailed discussion of the development of the anti-pornography movement.

politics by the anti-pornography movement. Judith Butler noted this in her review of the Dairy for Boston-based *Gay Community News,* titled 'Politics, Pleasure, Pain: The Controversy Continues' (Corbman 2015: 49). Butler wrote (1982: 1, quoted in Bracewell 2016: 23):

> The clear purpose of the Diary – and of the Barnard Conference – is to dislodge the anti-pornography movement as the one and only feminist discourse on sex [and] counterbalance the anti-pornography perspective on sexuality with an exploration into women's sexual agency and autonomy.

Taking her analysis at face value suggests that there was some merit to the anti-pornography sentiment that, in this instance, their perspectives were being sidelined. However, for Butler, this was about redressing the balance.[38]

Moreover, one idea raised for how a balance of perspectives could be pursued was to have an anti-pornography group discuss pleasure and a sex-radical group discussed danger (Abelove et. al. 1983: 3).[39] Built into the conference planning was a desire for dialogue between these two perspectives. Had the organisers followed through on this suggestion, anti-pornography groups may not have felt so strongly that their structural critiques were being sidelined. On the other hand, the anti-pornography groups' own protest ignored the substantive content and context of the Diary, focusing instead on a few select images. Had they engaged with the ambitions of the conference, again a very different series of event may have ensued. This is to say that the divisions that the event sewed were contingent on the way that proceedings played out.

[38] Butler's language here indicates a place for both pleasure and danger discourses. She does not critique the content of anti-pornography perspectives, but their monopoly on sexual politics discourses. This is relevant for my argument in chapter four that Butler's own theorising on sex and gender was intended to sit alongside what have been subsequently historicised as incompatible and outdated sex-negative perspectives. Both Butler and sex-positive feminism have been historicised as supplanting the critical accounts of heterosexuality held by 'sex-negative' feminists. But this is a misrepresentation of the content of both.

[39] The Diary (1983: 4) notes that one person 'suggested that we structure the conference so that women from Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) are asked to diiscuss pleasure and sexuality and North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) is asked to discuss violence and sexual exploitation'.

Figure 3: A WAP protestor at the gates of Barnard. Photograph by Morgan Gwenwald. (Corbman 2015: 61)

Figure 4: Joan Nestle and Gayle Rubin outside the conference. Photograph by Morgan Gwenwald. (Corbman 2015: 61)

2.3.3 Personal politics

The conference has been historicised as solidifying opposing perspectives on sexuality. However, the depth of the disputes was more a result of the personality politics that took place rather than irreducible ideological oppositions.[40] Gayle Rubin, who was a key target of anti-pornography protesters, recalls that 'some antipornography advocates preferred to resort to ad feminine attacks and character assassination rather than to debate substantive issues' (2010: 16). Rubin was a key target because of her membership in the San Francisco-based lesbian S/M group, Samois, which saw her singled out by anti-porn protesters at Barnard. It was this, rather than the content of her conference contribution – which 'was seldom analysed and refuted' (Duggan 2010: 146). Vance recalls that 'like the phone calls, the leaflet attacked individual women by name and accused them of unconventional sexual opinions practices and fantasies' (1984: 484). Amber Hollibaugh recalls crossing the WAP picket line and realising that until then she had assumed she shared with the women protesting 'an unbreakable sisterhood, a movement, a vision, an anger, a desperately necessary hope of transforming biology and gender' (Hollibaugh 2000: 3). The personal and the political combined here with the second wave dictum taking a particularly pernicious instantiation.[41] Gayle Rubin reflects that, like 'many others involved in the sex wars, I was thoroughly traumatised by the breakdown of feminist civility and the venomous treatment to which dissenters from the antiporn orthodox were routinely subjected' (2010: 16).[42] The splintering was so damaging because of its personal rather than its ideologically irreconcilable character.[43]

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[40] Lynn Chancer (1998: 277 n.3) echoes this point, writing 'these are differences in relative emphases rather than necessarily contradictory dichotomies'.

[41] Sarah Schulman notes that, whilst the personality politics were regrettable, ironically 'condemnation became the basis for notoriety and many of [anti-pornography's] targets went on to achieve mainstream recognition' (1994: 8).

[42] The extent to which the conference contentions were a shock is challenged by the planning committee's remarks in the Diary that from the beginning, 'there was some discussion about the potential explosiveness of a conference on sexuality, given the current polarisation in the feminist community on the issue of pornography. However, many felt that the topic is too important to dismiss at his time, and that in grappling with these issues we ought to try and move beyond the level of current debate' (Vance 1982)

[43] Andrea Dworkin's recently published essay, 'Goodbye to all this' (1983), combines personal disdain for 'sex-positive' feminists, who she addresses in first name, with a sense of remorse and resignation for what she perceives as a loss of the women's movement's revolutionary zeal (in Fateman & Scholder 2019).

2.3.4 Pleasure and danger in black women's sexual lives

At the Barnard conference, pleasure and danger was most explicitly theorised in relation to patriarchy as a structure. Vance writes: 'The subtle connection between how patriarchy interferes with female desire and how women experience their own passion as dangerous is emerging as a critical issue to be explored' (1984: 4). However, the fraught and underexplored nature of sexuality had a particular prevalence in black feminism given the histories of violence and corresponding cultures of silence that had charactrised black women's sexual lives. This may be because the conference committee was overwhelmingly comprised of white women (Corbman 2015: 56). The protracted effects of slavery and its history of racist, gendered and classed sexual exploitation has produced its own silences and the articulation of black women's sexual pleasure has thus been accompanied by different obstacles in light of racist stereotypes equating black women with sexual excessiveness. Discursive cultures of respectability (Higginbotham 1993; Collins-White et al. 2016) or dissemblance (Hine 1989) involved strategies of secrecy around sexuality in the reconstruction and Jim Crow eras as a way of challenging the harmful and negative depictions of black women's sexuality that were so widespread. Whilst there were inclusions of the specific relation of black women to this epithet at Barnard, Hortense Spillers' important essay "Interstices: A Small Drama or Words" examined how black women's sexual experiences are rendered interstitial within (white) feminist discourses on sexuality; both absent and that against which the white feminist imagination structures itself, visible yet negated. Yet, whilst racism was acknowledged as a structure, the specificity of black women's sexual lives and subjectivities with respect to the history and signification of pleasure/ danger was not present. As a result, the conference produced its own absences which have been taken up subsequently in black studies. As a result, Pleasure and danger: 'sex is messy, and pleasure, in black studies, is even messier' (Carney 2019: 135). Indeed, 'since antiblackness is always requiring respectable negroes, the intersection of ideas about blackness, sexuality, and pleasure can refuse this demand and add complexity to understandings about black freedom more broadly (Carney 2019: 135). The occlusion of a sophisticated intersectional analysis of sexuality to emerge at Barnard amplifies the importance of separating discussions of sexuality from the dualistic frame of reference that this period generated. That the either/ or frame of sex positive and sex negative cannot do justice to the complexity of sexuality is clear generally and becomes even more apparent in light of black women's sexual lives.

2.4 Anti-pornography after Barnard: intersectionality and the role of the state

If the conference itself failed to theorise the complexity of sexuality within interlocking power structures, anti-pornography and its supporters and opponents evidenced the problem of 'monolithic categories that are unproblematically imagined to have coherent positions'. It was an issue that had no clear correspondence with identity politics. Prominent lesbians, women of color and white women took varying positions on the issue thereby 'complicating histories of feminism which are narrated through racial or sexual divisions among its practitioners' (Corbman 2015: 57). Anti-pornography had begun in the second half of the 1970s as a movement against sexist representations of women. Images such as The Rolling Stones' 'I'm Black and Blue from the Rolling Stones, and I Love It' advert, which showed a woman in a lacy white bodice, ripped to display her breasts, with her hands tied above her head and her bruised legs spread apart were heavily criticised for glamorizing sexual violence (Bronstein 2013: 93). In this form it attracted diverse supporters and raised important intersectional questions around sex work, the ownership of women's bodies, patriarchal capitalist commodification of women's work and the problem of hegemonic representations of women's sexuality in eclipsing women's own ability to be sexually agentic.

However, the direction and focus shifted in 1983 when Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin authored an ordinance that defined pornography as a form of sex discrimination.[44] 'What began as an internally-contested feminist strategy about sexual imagery first linked up with law and state through the introduction of the ordinance' (Vance 1992: xxxiii). Thus, it was the involvement of the state that became a key point of contest, eclipsing the content of the critique of representations of eroticised subordination and their role in the gendering of sexualised vulnerability more broadly.

In response to the development of the ordinance, the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce (FACT) was established and authored a brief in opposition which stated:

[44] Kathy Miriam explains (Miriam & deLauretis 1983: 94 n.2): 'The ordinance was drafted by MacKinnon and Dworkin in the Fall of 1983 at the invitation of the Minneapolis City Council; it was passed in December and shortly thereafter vetoed by the mayor. The law was supported by a grassroots coalition of women, people of color, neighbourhood groups, and the city's welfare poor and working poor. The ordinance was a law that, for the first time, would allow a woman to go into court to try and prove that she had been injured or victimised by having pornography forced on her, by being coerced into a pornographic performance, or because pornography was used in some sexual assault on her. The ordinance would also allow a woman to sue traffickers in pornography on the basis of the proven harm pornography does to the civil rights of women as a class'.

'We condemn acts of violence against women; incitement to that violence; and misogyny and racism, and anti-Semitism in all media. We believe, however, that the Indianapolis ordinance will not reduce violence against women and will censor speech and imagery that properly belong in the public realm' (Hunter & Law 1987: 89). Whilst there were fierce divisions in the realm of sexuality, once again these were not ideological oppositions regarding sexuality itself, but rather political and strategic divergences regarding the role of the state.

Figure 5 has been removed from this version of the thesis due to copyright restrictions

Figure 5: *I'm "Black and Blue" from The Rolling Stones – and I love it!* (Anon 2016)

The ordinances saw feminists previously involved in anti-pornography, including Adrienne Rich, and who contested the eroticisation of women's subordination sign the FACT brief. Whilst liberal feminists such as Betty Friedan signed the brief for civil liberties reasons,[45] many objections evoked the unintended consequences that such legislation would have for already marginalised sexual groups and practices. It was this concern that led activists like Pat Califa to oppose the ordinance on the basis that whilst 'we cannot ignore the threat to equality resulting from exposure to audiences of certain types of violent and degrading materials', anti-pornography legislation 'has had almost no visible impact on the straight-porn industry. Instead, it has been used to impede the circulation of gay literature'[46] (Califa 2000: 99). Vance echoes this perspective: 'feminist critics warned that vague and open-ended language like "degradation" and "subordination" would prove inviting to groups traditionally interested in controlling sexual materials' (Vance 1992: xxvi). Whilst many, particularly psychoanalytically-minded feminists, contested anti-pornography on the grounds that representations and reality are distinct (see Segal 1998; Willis 1984), and argue that pornography is a healthy realm of fantasy (Rose 1998) and so needs to be separated from critiques of women's vulnerability – a far larger group opposed anti-pornography's appeal to the state. Bronstein (2013: 177) highlights that those who opposed the ordinance felt that

> the courts were a product of the same patriarchal and heterosexist culture that allowed pornography to flourish; it was naïve to assume that jurists, particularly conservative ones, would apply feminist principles when evaluating books, films, magazines and the like.

In contrast to this, MacKinnon and Dworkin emphasised that this was a civil, not criminal, ordinance and so gave a voice to victims of pornography without involving the police (see MacKinnon 1985). The ordinances are understood as a key moment in the sex wars (Abrams 1995), representing the same ideological divide that was expressed at Barnard. Yet again, what is frequently characterised as an ideological rift

[45] Dworkin wrote a personal letter in response (in Allen, 2016 n.8) Rich didn't respond to Dworkin's letter, leading MacKinnon to pen an open letter to Adrienne Rich in the anti-pornography newspaper *Off Our Backs* (in MacKinnon 1985).

[46] Patrick Califa writes: 'The first obscenity case under Butler was a prosecution of Glad Day Bookstore, a gay business in Toronto, for selling the lesbian S/M magazine, Bad Attitude' (2000: 99). This is also discussed in the introduction to Sex Wars (Duggan & Hunter, 2006).

over the character of women's sexuality under patriarchy is better conceived as a divergence in perspectives on the relationship between feminism and the state.

The political context of the moment is crucial to the divisions as well. The sex wars took place against the backdrop of the Reagan administration's ascendency in the United States. Writing at the time, Freedman and Thorne (1984: 104) observed the charged political climate due to 'the presence of the New Right, whose antifeminism opposes nonreproductive sexuality, abortion, and lesbian and gay rights' (1984: 104). Anti-pornography was understood to not only represent an alignment with the state but collusion with the particularly repressive, anti-feminist 'Moral Majority' interested in repressing and curtailing sexual freedoms through co-opting a woman-centred rhetoric. The concerns that were levelled by critics against anti-pornography, that this would be used against women and sexual minorities, were corroborated. Whilst the ordinance failed as a legal remedy, it was appropriated by the Meese Commission, 'the arch-conservative 1985 Commission on Pornography, led by Attorney General Edwin Meese' (Bronstein 2011: 311). The final report in 1986 condemned violent pornography, 'a category that seems to include both rape and S/M, and splitting on whether to also condemn explicit depictions of all sex outside of marriage' (Duggan & Hunter 2005: 24). In the face of cuts to the national AIDS budget and the Supreme Court ruling in Bowers v. Hardwick that the right to privacy does not extend to homosexual sex, the idea that the state was a vehicle for feminist interests was refuted. 'Censorship in the name of feminism' (Duggan 2006: 29) became an indefensible stance.

2.5 Vulnerability and the state in the HIV/AIDS crisis

That these fault lines between pro-sex and anti-pornography feminists lingered and became influential in the trajectory of queer theory (Amin 2016) is inseparable from the sexual politics of the rest of the decade. The AIDS crisis saw the anti-pornography strategy of aligning with repressive state discourses on sexuality in the United States become utterly unviable from the perspective of the safeguarding of minority sexual groups. Indeed, if the relationship between sexuality, vulnerability and repression was significant at the beginning of the 1980s, it would come to occupy a whole new field of meaning in the latter half of the decade in light of the abject failure of the state to act to contain the devastation of the AIDS epidemic. This was a moment that revealed

the most vulnerable groups, such as queers of colour (Cohen 1999)[47] to also be the most socially disposable.[48]

The homophobic scapegoating of gay male sexual practices meant that metaphorically and psychically, AIDS 'helped to concretise a mythical link between gay sex and death' (Hansen in Fuss 1991: 324) Rather than lessen sexual vulnerabilities, the state actively produced them.[49] Jeff Nunokawa (1991: 311) highlights:

> The reluctance of the Reagan administration, as well as most of the state and city governments to furnish significant funding for research, treatment, or effective education their reluctance indeed to do anything other than develop testing apparati for quarantining so-called at risk groups, draws even the least suspicious observer to conclude that they didn't care and don't care much about saving the kinds of people who were and are dying by the tens of thousands.

Sexual pleasure, coded as the 'gay lifestyle', was being framed as the cause of an epidemic. 'By casting his death as his definition' (ibid: 319) the vulnerabilities of AIDS victims who were not deemed socially worthy of protection, resulted in the lives of tens of thousands of Americans by the end of the decade being lost.[50]

If the sex wars had begun a discussion of the need for sexual plurality, diversity and destigmatising sexual practices (Rubin 1984), such an urgency was entrenched by the subsequent mistreatment of the gay community by the media, the medical establishment and politicians. Fighting repression, silencing and stigma became a life

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[47] AIDS continues to disproportionately affect communities of colour (see Cohen 1999; Yingling 1991: 300).

[48] Jeff Nunokawa cites the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services under Reagan: 'We must conquer AIDS before it affects the heterosexual population… the general population' (1991: 311). Leo Bersani (1987) reiterates the way in which the AIDS discourse presumed a 'general public' on the basis of heterosexuality, in so far as the groups most affected by AIDS were discursively positioned as outside of such a national collective.

[49] In light of this, Bersani notes the biopolitical implication, an 'obsession with testing instead of curing and the general tendency to think of AIDS as an epidemic of the future rather than a catastrophe of the present' (1987: 199).

[50] In the UK too, the Thatcher rhetoric 'mobilised fear' of 'how gay men might affect public health and morality and fear of how they might corrupt or threaten children' (Cook 2017: 60). This was enshrined in Clause 28, an amendment to the 1988 Local Government Act that prohibited councils from distributing any materials promoting homosexuality.

and death issue.[51] The AIDS crisis and the devastatingly inadequate responses from the state confirmed the warnings of FACT regarding the necessity of protecting sex-positive discourses to prevent discrimination. The rhetoric that had become categorised as sex-positive became increasingly necessary in a period in which shame, silencing and stigma were used to scapegoat and ostracise an already marginalised community.

A decade that began with sexual politics manifesting itself in the form of anti-pornography ended with the tragedy of the AIDS crisis. The result is that with 'the possible exception of the Shakers, it is difficult to think of an American movement that has failed more spectacularly than anti-pornography feminism' (Levy 2006: xx-xxi). This failure and the political misgivings of the anti-pornography movement have led to sex-negative concerns regarding violence in sexuality more broadly to become tainted too.

What have come to be historicised as the sex wars more accurately refer to a period in which a 'politics of sexuality narrowed to a politics of pornography' (Vance 1992: xxxiv). Whilst there were real differences on sexual politics of a sex-negative and sex-positive variety,[52] these have come to be depicted as inherent oppositions, rather than – potentially at least – productive tensions characteristic of the best inclinations of feminist theory and activism. Indeed, the contradictory character of women's sexuality under conditions of structural inequality had been central to the development of the women's liberation movement. I will now look at what gets elided by such a divisive yet teleological story of sexual politics.

2.6 Second wave sexual politics and the contradictory character of sexuality

Given that the fault lines that emerged in the wake of Barnard were so at odds with the conference's ambivalent ambitions, in what follows, I will trace the background to

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[51] In 1987, the direct-action group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) formed to fight for the medical treatment necessary to end the disease. The group had as its slogan 'Silence = Death'; a poignant expression of the costs of keeping sexual practices a private matter.

[52] *Off Our Backs* and *On Our Backs* were two newspapers reflecting different priorities for feminist sexual politics. *Off Our Backs* was founded in 1970 and in existence until 2008. It ran by non-hierarchical principles and was one of the widely circulated feminist periodicals of the period. *On Our Backs* was first published in 1984. Its title was a satirical reference to *Off Our Backs,* which editors felt was too influenced by anti-pornography. (Sides 2009: 219)

the pleasure/ danger epithet in the development of sexual politics in the 1970s. Whilst, as Echols notes, "'pleasure and danger" has been inseparable from the circumstances of its coinage: the controversial 1982 conference' (2016: 11), I propose that separating it from this moment reveals a productive discourse on sexual politics relevant to discussions on vulnerability. In the rejection of a body of scholarship as 'sex-negative' is the erasure of a structural critique of sexual politics that is relevant to contemporary sexual politics. Moreover, the appeal to 'tidy categories' (Walters 2016) in the narration of feminist lineages of sexual politics has led to key contributions from women of colour, the epistemological foundations of which do not subscribe to such binary oppositions as pleasure and danger, being erased or domesticated.

2.6.1 Sexual politics and the women's liberation movement

There is no one origin of the women's liberation movement, or one women's liberation movement (Hesford 2013). In what follows, I seek not to provide a linear or complete history of the movement but rather to outline some of the discussions around sexual politics that took place in the United States in the 1970s. I explore how sexuality, which had begun as a uniting theme for women, grew into such a contested issue.

The women's liberation movement in the United States grew out of the New Left movements and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. In response to the sexism white women faced in these activist circles, they began organizing separately (Echols 1989, Breines 2007). Ann Snitow was a movement activist who went on to be an active anti-anti-pornography feminist and member of FACT. She explains the emergence of the women's movement and the motivation of responding to the sexual discrimination women faced (Snitow et al. 1983: 25):

> Women's liberation emerged from the experiences of a particular generation of women, those who came of sexual age between (roughly) 1960 and 1970 and were the first US women to have ready access to birth control before marriage […] The opening volleys in the women's liberation critique of sexual freedom came from women in the New Left and Civil Rights movements. Like abolitionist women, white New Left women, especially those who went south to work against racial discrimination, found that the acknowledgement

> of the oppression of others led to a recognition of their own sexual, social and economic oppression.

The 1960s promised sexual freedom, yet activist women found that despite a discourse of liberation and the possibilities promised by the birth control pill and the sexual revolution, relations between men and women had not liberalised accordingly. Jane Gerhard (2000: 465) explains that

> The combination of a revolutionary rhetoric that emphasised sexual freedom, on the one hand, and political women's experience of being ignored, patronised and sexually exploited on the other, proved toxic for many women. Feminists claimed that women were entitled to both social and sexual independence'.

Thus, two motivating factors behind the movement's emergence – the failure of the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s to extend its fruits to women (Willis in Echols 1989: xiii), and the sexism women faced in the New Left movements of the 1960s (Evans 1979) – ensured that sex and sexuality were central concerns from the start.

The contradictory character of sexuality for women was one that had a specific relevance for black women activists. Sexual violence and exploitation constitute the conditions of possibility for black female gender formation (Hine 1989). The afterlife of slavery (Hartmann 2006: 6) is present in the persistance of sexualised violence against black women. Yet, 'the continued notion of Black women as "Jezebel-ish people" stemming from antebellum notions of Black women as promiscuous and therefore justified targets of sexual violence' (Law 2018) means that much of this systemic violence goes unrecognised. This has also shaped the discourses on black female sexuality produced by black feminist writers, with pleasure, exploration and agency going underanalyzed (Hammonds 1997: 177). However, black women didn't feel as powerless as white women in groups such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). For activist Joyce Ladner for instance 'we came from a long line of people, of women, who were doers, strong black women, who had never allowed anyone to place any limitations on them' (Breines 2007: 19). The late 1960s was also a time of Black Power's compelling racial identity politics. Black women were unlikely to favour radical white feminist organisations which, despite

having relatively sophisticated understandings of race and class, often saw women as an undifferentiated class and in place of basic survival issues, prioritised concerns such as pay and housework (ibid). Central themes such as 'the family', 'patriarchy' and 'reproduction' become problematic and contradictory when applied to black women's lives (Carby 1999: 69). 'Women's issues' were not universal and the second wave women's movement did not emerge as a unified whole, many black women developed feminist organizations that combined gender, race and class politics[53]; not just embracing antiracist politics as the white women's movement did, but actually rooting this politics in the lives of black women (ibid; Springer 2005). The Cohambee River Collective statement's strong expression of a black anti-capitalist, lesbian feminist politics, critical of black male patriarchy but loyal to the black community and divided from white feminists because of their racism, stands as a milestone in the history of feminism and as an early articulation of intersectional identity politics.

However, whilst sexual politics signified differently across race, it was a particularly intersectional issue. Black lesbians and feminists criticised white feminists for ignoring race and black activists for overlooking gender and sexuality (see Hull et al. 1982). Combahee was instrumental in founding a local battered women's shelter and throughout the period of their existence, worked as individuals and together on political issues such as sterilization abuse, reproductive rights, battered women, rape and ran national campaigns to defend unfairly imprisoned black women, including Joan Little, a local female prisoner who had killed a guard who had sexually assaulted her (Brienes 2007: 123). The premium that was placed on black women's reproductive capacity (Davis 1983: 3), both by slave owners and subsequently by the black community meant that this was a particularly pressing issue. Formally, increased reproductive control has done little to alter conditions of bodily autonomy more broadly and these women spoke out against 'black male revolutionaries" insistence that 'women should bear many "warriors" and never even consider having an abortion' (Rosen 2000: 147-148).The Black Women's Liberation Group, which arose

[53] The most well known of these was the National Black Feminst Organization (NBFO), founded in 1973 in New York City. The organisers were primarily educated professionals who saw the need for a black feminist organization (polls consistently showed that black women supported feminist goals), and they convened a meeting to which 400 women came. Within a year the organization had a membership of 2,000 in ten chapters around the country. The Combahee River Collective formed a year later in Boston. Its members came together out of the NBFO, deciding to form their own collective because their politics were more radical, particularly regarding lesbianism and socialism.
This also runs counter to the narrative which argues that Black feminism emerged after the white feminist movement, or deviated from it (Roth 2004)

directly out of the Civil Rights movement and lasted for over a decade until 1976 put forward a position paper 'Statement on birth Control' which argued: 'Poor black sisters decide for themselves whether to have a baby or not to have a baby' (in Morgan 1970: 404). This class based analysis of black women's lives achieved recognition in large parts of the white feminist movement, shaping the broader discourse on reproductive freedom at the time. At the same time as sexual oppression posed different challenges to different communities (Carby 1999), it was general enough to be a bridge issue (Brienes 2007: 22). Whilst the women's movement was not a unified whole, black feminist organisations and the white women's movement both grappled with sexual violence an often worked together in coalitions that respected their differences when combatting it (Valk 2007).

Ellen Willis (1989: ix) documents how the feminists at the time, coined the terms "sexism" and "sexual politics" to express the idea – novel and even shocking in the contemporary American context, though in fact it had ample historical precedent – that sexuality, family life, and the relations between men and women were not simply matters of individual choice or even of social custom, but involved the exercise of personal and institutional power and raised vital questions of public policy. The concept of sexual politics was able to expose a previously silenced aspect of women's experiences, without presuming the homogeneity of these. The radical contribution of the women's movement from its start was not the frequently referenced refrain that 'the personal is political'. As Echols notes, this idea had its roots in the politics of the New Left (1989: 16). Rather, it was that this personal included the sexual. Where sex had been hitherto regarded as a bourgeois preoccupation on the part of the New Left and civil rights movements (Hesford 2013: 125), for feminists it was central.

Thus, if some of the seeds of the women's movement can be traced to the changing sexual mores of the 1960s, this indicates the presence of the pleasure/danger paradox from the start. On the one hand, feminists sought the promise of sexual freedom that had been on the horizon in the 1960s. However, at the same time, what sexual freedom might look like was hard to define, especially given that more sex for women hadn't corresponded to better sex. Estelle Freedman and Barrie Throne (1984: 103) write:

> During the early 1970s, two themes emerged in the feminist literature, sometimes separately and sometimes together. One was a critique of ways in

> which male domination shapes female sexuality through both practices, such as rape, and beliefs, such as the primacy of the vaginal orgasm […] The second theme, related to the critique of male-defined sexuality, emphasised efforts by women to define and explore their own sexualities.

Kate Millett's best-selling *Sexual Politics* was exemplary of the productive engagement of the pleasure/danger tension.[54] Whilst the book 'affirmed the progressive aspects of the sexual revolution: she saw women's sexual autonomy as a prerequisite for sexual freedom itself. At the same time, she uncompromisingly demonstrated how misogyny played itself out in sexual intercourse' (Snitow et al. 1983: 29). As Hesford points out, Millett's 'explosive' text simultaneously located 'the source of women's subjugation in sex as well as their potential emancipation' (2013: 116). Thus, treading the line between articulating the structural constraints women faced and the possibilities that came from pursuing desire were ideas to be worked out in tandem. Predating the publication of Foucault's celebrated history of sexuality, let alone its translation into English, second-wave feminists theorised power and sexuality in way which highlighted sexualities positive and liberatory dimensions alongside the oppressive character of sex under patriarchy.[55]

From the beginning of the women's movement, the question of what articulating sexual politics and sexual freedom for women entailed required understanding freedom in both its positive and negative dimensions (Berlin 2002). Whilst this was a tension, it tended to be a generative one. The early years of the women's movement were characterised by so much optimism[56] that divisions could be mitigated to some degree by the promise and investment in change.[57] Echols, highlighting the utopianism of the early years, points out that 'if one is to understand the '60s, one must recognise that at that point in time it really did seem that economic and social

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[54] Jana Sawicki notes how 'Foucault and Feminists both challenged the sexual liberationism of the sixties for related reasons. Both recognised that power relations governing sexuality run deeper than is presupposed by strategies that simply aim to lift restrictions on sexual behaviour' (1991: 11). And 'in her suggestion that sexual relations operate as a locus for the production of social power, [Kate] Millett's notion of sex echoes rather than contradicts Foucault's near contemporaneous definition of sexuality as a dense transfer point for relations of power (2013: 116).

[55] Susan Bordo (2004) also argues that second wave feminists anticipated ideas of power which have been received associated with Foucault.

[56] For an account of the movement's simplistic 'liberation theory' see Curthoys (1997).

[57] See Bammer (1991) for a detailed discussion of the utopianism of 1970s feminism.

justice could be achieved, the family reorganised, and all hierarchies based on gender, race, or class erased' (1989: 19). In those heady first years, it really did seem like a historical moment was underway, captured by the title of New York Radical Women's 1968 publication *Notes from the First Year* (Echols 1989:21).

Movement activism translated into shifting academic knowledge as well. As Lynn Chancer (2000: 77) outlines:

> The second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s played an important part in the growth of sexuality as an influential topic of women's studies and social science research by the year 2000. After the publication of radical feminist works like Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* (1970), investigating sexuality and studying power became intimately connected.

Gayle Rubin at the time was a young student and part of an early feminist consciousness-raising group at the University of Michigan. She highlights the way in which these ideas were having a transformative impact at the academic level. *Signs* and *Feminist Studies*, both founded in the early 1970s, were ground-breaking in publishing work regarding the social construction of sexuality. 'It is easy to forget what the field was like before that paradigm shift, when, among other things, much of gay history was the search for glorious ancestors, and male homosexuality and lesbianism were understood to be stable and largely unchanging phenomena' (Rubin 2010: 18). Thus, from its inception, the women's movement – with both its activist and academic dimension – had sexual politics as a driving concern. It was concerned with the interrelationship between domestic and personal relations, social structures and institutionalised political discourses. Sexual politics expressed not only the fact that sex itself could be seen as political, in the sense of governed by power relations (Millett 2016), but that the more typical domains of politics – structures and institutions – were also sexual, in the sense of being governed by, normalising and

reproducing certain relations between the sexes. Taking sex seriously was perhaps the women's movements biggest and most original contribution.[58]

Perhaps though sex was granted excessive significance. Whilst initially, 'sexuality was the primary site of women's liberation's claims to a political collectivity' (Hesford 2013: 118) it became, for anti-pornography feminists, invested as the site of political change itself. 'The good insistence that "the personal is political" often transformed itself into something like "only the personal is political"' (Spivak in Nicholson, 1997: 358). It was this move towards personalising politics and politicising personal practices that led to the personal attacks which would be aired at Barnard. One of the most widely documented fissures within the movement over the subject of sexuality is that of the question of 'the lesbian'. The figure of the lesbian shifted from being regarded as a threat – divorcing women from their object of resistance (men) (see Echols 1989) – to a requirement. [59] Political lesbianism advanced the idea that 'feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice' (Atkinson in Jackson & Scott 1996: 282). However, this was seen to displace the question of desire out of both feminism and lesbianism – desexualising both. As a result, as Jack Halberstam (1997a: 333) chronicles:

> the rise of lesbian feminism in the 1970s presented women with some very thorny questions about the non-continuities between sex and politics and resulted in internal sex wars within dyke communities. These debates over the politics of desire[60] produced both sexual morality and sex radicalism and

[58] Critical histories (see Echols 1989) have presented 'cultural feminism' as superseding 'radical feminism', ultimately leading to the demise of the radical potential of feminist discourses on sexuality as cultural feminists embraced an essential logic of women's sexuality as necessarily more egalitarian, nurturing and different in kind to men's. I resist this logic as part of a broader project of challenging overdetermined histories of feminism. Bonnie Zimmerman has challenged this 'gross over-estimation' of cultural feminism's significance in the late 1970s, although accepts it became very influential (in Medhurst and Munt 1997: 151). Bonnie Mann writes that 'cultural feminist' was created to 'stand in for the self-definition "radical feminist" by those opposed to radical feminist positions (2006: 11 n.20). Echols writes: 'Brooke Williams, a radical feminist who was associated with the reconstituted Redstockings and was also a writer for the women's liberation newspaper *off our backs,* was the first person I know of to use the term "cultural feminism" to refer to this transmutation of radical feminism. See her essay, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism," in Redstockings, eds., *Feminist Revolution'* (1984: 301 n.21).

[59] Within the movement itself, the question of sexuality was particularly divisive as lesbianism went from a secret to a requirement, with many women uncomfortable about the way in which it functioned as a political ideal rather than a desiring practice.

[60] See Amia Srinivasan (2018) for a contemporary discussion about what a non-moralistic political critique of desire can do.

> ultimately led to the overturning of a strongly sex-negative strain within lesbian politics.

Within prevailing feminist histories, the women's movement's demise was because of its inability to contain difference and that the eruption of identity politics that this gave way to. The 'personal is political' became a battleground over questions of desire and sexuality, with the idea of 'politically correct sex' being used moralistically to discredit movement members and their sexual practices. Where early engagements with the ambivalence of sexuality explored the possibilities of pleasure under conditions that rendered women vulnerable, the anti-pornography movement sought to counter women's vulnerability altogether. That they did so by seeking legal redress, despite such a framework's inability to 'recognise the undisciplined nature of sex and desire, nor the systemic violence of capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy' (Kindig 2018) and the necessity of siding with right-wing legislators authorities in the process, overshadowed any generative feminist analysis contained within the anti-porn critique.

2.7 Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa

If the pleasure/danger, sex-negative/sex-positive binaries are crude ones analytically, they are even more inappropriate to theorisations of sexual politics from thinkers for whom such binaries constitute masculinist, Eurocentric reasoning. As Jennifer Nash makes clear, 'black feminist and queer theorists have emphatically argued that black pleasures are not outside of, but embedded within, the violent structures that mark daily life' (Nash 2018). Rather than advancing either/or interpretations of liberation as 'freedom from' or 'freedom to', women of colour writers and activists began their own forays into sexual politics from embodied knowledge; an epistemology that privileges context and experience.

Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa were both writing on sexuality, identity and structural oppression in the decade marked by the sex wars. Yet their texts prove difficult to assimilate within a polarising history of feminist sexual politics. Both depart from an alternate model of epistemic authority to that which adversarial, ultimately abstract, pro or anti-sex positions are predicated, in which the storyteller 'exposes the discontinuities, fissures and contradictions of 'objective' reality' (Gillman

2010: 98). They both weave autobiography with theory, explore sexuality within the plane of the spiritual and ultimately transformational, whilst also articulating firm structural critiques. Exploring their contributions emphasise then the degree to which dominant histories of the sex wars end up erasing radical, highly significant contributions to feminist thought.

Lorde is particularly troublesome for readers who have equated anti-pornography with the personal attacks and pro-censorship strategies. Her perspective is outside of a crude 'sex-positive' frame because of her critical perspectives on sadomasochism and pornography. 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power' was presented as a speech at Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media's (WAVPM) Feminist Perspectives on Pornography Conference in 1978 (Strongman 2018 :47). Subsequently, it was published as a pamphlet by Out and Out Books and then, in 1980, as part of Take Back the Night, the Feminist Perspectives on Pornography Conference anthology (Lorde, 1980). However, Lorde's perspective is not a straightforward moralistic rejection of pornography, but a complex investigation of how black women experience their sexuality and how they can express it in world-shaping ways. Like M.Jacqui Alexander (2005) who talks about erotic autonomy, and Mireille Miller-Young (2014) who conceptualises erotic sovereignty, for Lorde eroticism is a political tool[61]. However, where these theorists see pornography as a potential tool for black women's agency, resistance and negotiation of the violence of racism, for Lorde it was merely surface level exploitation. She writes that 'S/M is not the sharing of power, it is a deeply depressing replay of the old and destructive dominant/subordinate mode of human relating and one-sided power, which is even now grinding out earth and our human consciousness into dust' (1996: 241). Whilst she is clear that her argument is not 'about condemnation', she is critical of the practices of Rubin's group Samois (ibid: 242-3) and advocates a woman-identified lesbian sexuality outside of power imbalances which resembles lesbian feminism (ibid: 246). As such, some of her perspectives are reflective of what has been dismissed as 'sex-negative' and moralising; prioritising sentimental attachments to women's egalitarianism over desirous sexual expression.

Yet, at the same time, her *Uses of the Erotic* indicates a distinct account of sex-positivity:

[61] See Cruz (2016) for a discussion of the way that black women performers use pornographyand BDSM as fertile sites to mobilise "scenes of subjection," humiliation, and degradation to acquire both pleasure and power.

> the erotic is: powerful, shared, empowering, spiritual, joyful. It includes but is by no means restricted to the sexual: 'The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person'. It functions as a bridge across difference (2017: 26).

The erotic for Lorde is a source of knowledge and power. It indicates women's unique relationship to sexuality – repressed or obscured by conditions of patriarchy – the 'erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognised feeling' (ibid: 22). 'It stands in direct opposition to pornography', indeed, these are 'two diametrically opposed uses of the sexual' (ibid: 25). Here, the erotic is ambivalently positioned as both constructed within domination relations yet precisely that which provides the possibility for resistance to patriarchal and oppressive relations. 'Recognising the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift in characters in the very same weary drama' (ibid: 30) It is thus granted the capacity for structural upheaval 'in the face of a racist, patriarchal and anti-erotic society' (ibid).

Lorde's perspective on sexuality is not easily categorised, contravening in the dichotomised thought that characterises the sex wars and its historicisatons. Yet her contribution to sexual politics is groundbreaking and essential for theorising black female sexualities because she foregrounds 'the very aspects of black female sexuality that are submerged- namely female desire and agency' (Hammonds 1997: 181). Her theory of black female sexuality is inextricably linked to these debates about sex, race, pleasure and power. Thus whilst on some accounts her contention that women have a unique relation to sexuality, less contaminated by power, can lead her to be dismissed as a 'cultural feminist' – a derogatory term for feminists who present women as essentially egalitarian, nurturing and possessing an altogether unique relation to sexuality – and her perspective on pornography and sadomasochism might be read as sex-negative, these are dismissive approaches that preclude an investigation into a complex, necessary thinker. If we read Lorde as challenging the very Eurocentric biases within Anglo-American theory that function to contain her contribution, we might be opened up to exploring the ambivalence, complexity and irreducibility of

pleasure and danger within the lives of lesbians of colour. Writing on her own pedagogical uses of the essay, Nikki Young (2012: 301) commends:

> Audre Lorde challenged the Western masculinist characterization of the erotic as an element of human debasement, as well as its use as a tool of oppression. She argued that this framing of the erotic had ghettoised women's sexuality – a means by which we know and orient ourselves to the world – thereby erasing a significant form of our liberating power.

She argues that sexuality is relevant epistemology in a way that is proto-queer, yet without employing a necessarily oppositional frame. Sexuality appears both as excess and as that which can and should be, subject to (non-personal) critique as a domain of human relationality. To focus on 'positive' or 'negative' is antithetical to such an approach.

Gloria Anzaldúa, too, is resistant to categorisation. She was an activist in the Chicano movement seeking Mexican American empowerment that began in the 1960s. Her seminal text *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* takes up the metaphor of borderlands to explore fractured multiple identities and living in multiple worlds. Her concept of the 'mestiza consciousness' comes to signify the multiple consciousness that the queer Chicana develops as a survival strategy in response to contradictory experiences and subjectivities one has to inhabit as a queer, Latina, female (2007: 102):

> The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality […] a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.

Rather than be divided by the borders of inhabiting multiple, competing identities and subjectivities, the metzia is empowered, enabled and distinguished on account of them. Anzaldúa's perspective is characterised by dwelling in ambiguity. As with Lorde, her break down of Eurocentric polarities renders situating her within a logic of sex-positive/sex-negative impossible. Indeed, her work is full of structural critiques of Chicano masculinity in the context of postcolonial society: 'The loss of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even brutalise them. Coexisting with his sexist behaviours is a love for the mother

which takes precedence over that of all others. Devoted son, macho pig' (ibid: 105). On the one hand, Anzaldúa's is an interrogation into the 'negative' character of male heterosexist behaviour in the service of resistance. 'Though we "understand" the root causes of male hatred and fear and the subsequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it' (ibid). Yet at the same time, sensuality is also the source of a privileged knowledge (ibid: 41):

> For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behaviour. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality. Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I made the choice to be queer (for some it is genetically inherent). It is an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. In and out of my head. It makes for loqueria, the crazies. It is a path of knowledge, a way of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our raza. It is a way of balancing, of mitigating duality.

Anzaldúa articulates an unapologetic politics of sexual practices as well as an epistemology of erotic experience and desire. She celebrates the potential for women's sexual pleasure, and in particular queer sexual pleasure. Yet vulnerability and danger is at the forefront of her analysis too. She writes: 'Woman does not feel safe when her own culture, and white culture, are critical of her; when males of all races hunt her as prey' (ibid: 42). Similarly to Lorde, pleasure and danger are inextricably linked in a text that methodologically and stylistically is constructed to challenge such binary oppositions in the first place.

The central theme for the mestiza is the 'borderlands' and such a priority of 'in-betweenness' may be instructive for revisiting the sex wars. Just as the mestiza crosses geographies, cultures, languages, identities, so too, in Vance's original use of the epithet, was a borderland envisioned. These positions, relating to the 'dangers of sexuality – violence, brutality, and coercion' as well as 'the positive possibilities of sexuality', writes Vance, are not fixed 'since a woman might choose one perspective or the other at different points in her life in response to external and internal events' (1984: 1). If we want to 'pack up the militaristic language once and for all, to think with the couplet of pleasure and danger but outside the logic of mutually assured destruction' (Walters 2016: 2), perhaps we would be wise to return to those thinkers

whose contributions get lost on such a battlefield in the first place. For Lorde and Anzaldúa, pleasure and danger are never delineable in such a way in the first place. Cathy Cohen critiques the way that reductive approaches to history either contain or erase the heterogeneity and complexity of particularly queer, black subjects (2019: 141). Similarly, the historicising of the second wave in the terms of the sex wars leaves little space for recognition of the unassimilable texts of Lorde and Anzaldúa with respect to theorising both sexual possibility and sexual violence under conditions of racialised heterosexism. As Walters writes, 'Like sex itself, feminism is messy. And perhaps one lesson of those debates is that we would do well to revel in that messiness rather than to divide ourselves into neat and tidy categories of pro-sex and anti-sex feminists' (2016: 2).

2.8 Re-sexualizing the second wave

It is the desexualisation of feminism that permits queer theory's origin story as the inaugurator of a field for the study of sexual politics.[62] 'Second-wave' has come to signify naïve, essentialist, anti-sex perspectives on sexuality. As Sarah Schulman (1994: 9) writes, this constitutes

> amazingly distorted revisionism on seventies feminists and lesbians claiming that they were sexually inhibited and prudish when all documentation from that period points in the opposite direction. Indeed, lesbian writings from the time are obsessed with sexual pleasure, the body, non-monogamy etc.

The second wave was, among other things, a period that saw theorists grappling with the ambivalence of sex under conditions of inequality, producing some of the most typically sex-positive literature at the same time as being profoundly critical of wider conditions of gendered inequalities. Homogenizing and dismissing this period as naive and essentialist also serves to reify the place of white male thinkers in the rise of sexuality studies and overlook the groundbreaking contributions of black and chicana lesbian feminists throughout the 1970s and 1980s. How is it that a movement that

[62] See Halberstam for an example: 'It was precisely within women's studies departments that the study of sexuality in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to take a moralistic turn and seemed to reject the kinds of sexual histories that queer theorists have claimed as their own' (1997b: 259).

inaugurated the politicisation and study of sex has become naturalised as other to that which takes sexuality as its object? Mary Zaborskis (2019: 31) writes:

> A generational divide emerged between scholars doing queer theory and those doing feminist critique, women's studies, and lesbian and gay studies, the latter fields critiqued as backward, too invested in identities, and not invested enough in sexuality.

Within this separation, sex-negative/danger discourses have now become a slur, attached to a progressivist, generational logic whereby 'some third-wavers ascribe the anti-sex position to the second wave in order to grant themselves an unrivalled claim to pro-sex feminism' (Henry 2004: 91). This historicisation of the sex wars, the intransigence of its polarising terminology, and the over-association of sex-negativity with anti-pornography has resulted in the heterogeneity of second wave discourses on sexual politics being dismissed.

Revisiting this history is necessary for understanding the boundaries for theorising vulnerability today, as well as to challenge the stories of disciplinary formation that render certain contributions to knowledge outmoded or overdetermined in advance. Judith Grant writes that queer theory's 'break with feminism occurs at precisely this moment when feminist arguments about the link between male sexual violence and pornography directly attack certain experiences of female pleasure' (2017: 237). Grant thereby evokes the sex wars as motivating the emergence of a separate discipline for the study of sexuality – a historicisation that is established and reproduced through the citing of Gayle Rubin as foundational to queer theory and sexuality studies. Against the notion that queer theory and feminism have opposed perspectives on sexuality, which were gestating during the sex wars, I have argued that the divisiveness of this period was more reflective of the personal nature of the battles and subsequent divergences over the role of the state. Whist anti-pornography feminism was on the wrong side of both of these, critical perspectives on women's sexuality have been lost in the bathwater of anti-pornography's defeat.

Contextualising the sex wars in light of the sexual politics that were developing throughout the 1970s can disrupt overdetermined readings of second-wave feminist sexual politics as concerned with oppression at the expense of pleasure. Rather, it foregrounds an investigation of the fact that, as Lynn Chancer writes, 'the pleasures of

sexuality and the pain inflicted by sexism remain stubbornly enmeshed in male-dominated societies like our own; it is difficult to extricate erotic joy from oppressive vulnerability' (1998: 1). In doing so, it challenges the rationale for not theorising vulnerability and sexual violence together whilst also querying disciplinary conventions, according to which, 'in the sexual division of theoretical labour, queer theorists and not feminist theorists still appear to be having all the fun' (Hemmings 2016: 87). A false dichotomy between violence and pleasure has been cemented through the narration of the sex wars and this has implications for theorising vulnerability today. To resist this, I propose that the notion that queer perspectives constitute a 'break' with second-wave perspectives be reconsidered. This is not to say that the second wave was always already queer. To the contrary, it is to say that the 'second-wave' cannot be contained in such a way and that as a movement that took sexual politics as its object, it may speak to queer theory in ways which have been too readily proscribed.

2.9 Conclusion: the shifting terrain of pleasure/danger

Whereas nearly four decades ago feminists sought to redress the balance away from sexual violence and towards a focus on sexuality, I propose that within the academy at least, the balance has now been tipped too far in the other direction. With the conflation of sex-negative feminism with anti-pornography feminism, possibilities for theorising sexual politics have been narrowly circumscribed.

The false dichotomy between violence and pleasure that grew out of the oppositional perspectives aired at Barnard and became entrenched in the anti-pornography ordinances pervade theorising on vulnerability today. The history of vulnerability is indeed a vexed one, signifying as it does politics of victimisation (anti-pornography) but also very real physical and institutionally compounded vulnerabilities (AIDS). Whilst women's relationship to sexuality is an ambivalent one, dominant histories and frameworks have rewritten this ambivalence as an either/or choice between positive and negative perspectives on sexuality. Vulnerability has become associated with the latter, and in an academic climate in which sex-positive positions emerged triumphant this has led to a lacuna in theorising vulnerability and sexual violence together. Chapter five will illustrate how this has created a space for critical feminist perspectives on sexuality to be mobilised by reactionary agendas.

If the Barnard conference itself has, as Corbman attests, become a key moment in the genealogies of contemporary, American-influenced theories on sexuality, then it has achieved this on the back of well-rehearsed narratives rather than careful reflection. Such a historicisation has resulted in the particular overdetermination of authors associated with theorising sexual violence as having little to offer contemporary sexual politics. It is with this in mind that I now turn to the contribution of Andrea Dworkin.

Chapter three

Andrea Dworkin and the violence of heterosexuality

The attempt here, however modest and incomplete, is to discern another ontology, one which discards the fiction that there are two polar and distinct sexes.

- Andrea Dworkin (1974: 174-5)

3.1 Who's afraid of Andrea Dworkin?

Sarah Schulman (1994: 53) recalls, contextualising an interview with performance artist and drag king Diane Torr:

> Before the explosion of the feminist porn wars, a go-go dancer could read Andrea Dworkin in her dressing room and get something out of it. Soon after this interview the lines of rhetoric would be so tightly drawn that such an intervention would be unthinkable.

The sex wars have had a lasting impact on the boundaries of legitimate knowledge production. The legacy of the personal and political disputes that took place in the 1980s have produced an academic climate in which 'theorists like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon come in for more derision than devotion among both feminist professors and their students' (Walters 2016: 4). Dworkin, who died in 2005, has had her contribution to feminist knowledge production, specifically theorising sex and gender, reduced to the logic of the anti-pornography ordinance. Meanwhile her epistemic authority has been discredited in line with dominant characterisations of her as governed by 'unruly emotions' (Palmer-Mehta 2016) and unprocessed trauma (Serisier 2018). In what follows, I will argue that Dworkin in fact has a valuable contribution to theorising the gendering of vulnerability and sexual violence.

I will demonstrate that not only are her discussions of the equally constructed character of gender and sexuality remarkably prescient but that the account of vulnerability which can be discerned in her work is one which highlights both the ontological and structural dimensions of the condition. To say that it is structural is, as Frazer and Hutchings (2019: 3) articulate, to contend that it is inseparable from

> the system of patriarchal domination of men over women, masculine over feminine, that produces and legitimises gendered violence, and in which direct physical violence or the threat of violence is an element of the system of sexual and gender norms that reproduces women's structural disadvantage.

It is ontological as well because it is a prior, shared vulnerability that Dworkin will argue gets repudiated in the enactment of masculine violence.

By exploring Dworkin's relevance to theorising vulnerability and sexual violence, I will demonstrate that she has a distinct contribution to make to a feminist politics of sexual violence. I will outline how her argument develops such that sexual violence proceeds from normative sex and gender, and show that Dworkin's theorisation of sex and gender, in fact, anticipates subsequent developments regarding the relationship between these. In addition to being more in line with recent queer and feminist contributions to theorizing sex and gender than is typically presumed, Dworkin highlights how sexual violence will be endemic in societies in which masculinity is associated with dominance.

This is not an entirely redemptive project. Dworkin co-wrote the 'anti-pornography civil rights ordinances' (MacKinnon & Dworkin 1997: 5) with Catherine MacKinnon, an influential legal scholar and friend. Criticisms of her role in this movement are well-founded.[63] The last chapter also highlighted her involvement in the bitter personality politics which took place at Barnard and I do not seek to defend Dworkin in either of these regards. However, and this is an argument I will revisit in chapter six, Dworkin's role in drafting the anti-pornography ordinances reflected a departure from the anti-state, intersectional politics articulated in her books such as *Woman Hating* (1974), *Our Blood* (1976) and *Pornography* (1981). As such, I revisit her work separately from her role in anti-pornography legislation and also outside of her friendship with Catherine

[63] The last chapter explored the way in which anti-pornography discourses lent themselves to conservative attacks on sexual minorities and to a sex-phobic climate where non-normative sexual practices were stigmatised - a discourse primed to other or ignore those groups most affected by the AIDS crisis.

MacKinnon.[64] Her contribution aside of these include nine non-fiction books,[65] six works of fiction,[66] poetry and a memoir – in addition to numerous articles and speeches.

The negative affect that surrounds Dworkin extends beyond her persona to her politics. As Ahmed writes, 'texts have lives other than the ones we give them as writers' and 'these lives are partly about how texts are "picked up"' (2016: 482). Yet the lives of Dworkin's texts are particularly narrowly circumscribed. As a result, if vulnerability has a vexed history, Dworkin with her caricatured articulation of women as always already structurally vulnerable to male violence, is the embodiment of this.

For Gordon, haunting implies the sense of the past lingering in the present and it is a useful metaphor for understanding the affective dimensions by which a linear progress narrative may be disrupted. If 'haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place' (Gordon 2008: 8). Within the resurgence of literature on vulnerability, I contend that Andrea Dworkin's ghost is there, determining the very absences that are constitutive of the ambivalent account of vulnerability.

The notion of haunting draws our attention to the constitutive power that the past exercises. In the context of vulnerability, I have argued that there is an affective legacy to the sex wars, which conditions and structures the way in which vulnerability is being conceived today. There are taken-for-granted presumptions, such that to speak of vulnerability in the context of sexual violence is necessarily victimising and that this

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[64] Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin were friends and colleagues. As discussed in the last chapter, they co-authored the anti-pornography civil rights ordinances and they also taught a course on pornography together at The University of Minnesota in 1983. They credited each other with the development of their thought, dedicated books to one another and MacKinnon remains a key defender of Andrea Dworkin's theory and politics.

[65] Dworkin authored the following non-fiction books: *Woman Hating; Our Blood: prophecies and discourses on sexual politics; Pornography: men possessing women; Right-Wing women: the politics of domesticated females; Intercourse; Letters from a War Zone: writings; Life and death: unapologetic writings on the continuing war against women; Scapegoat: The Jews, Israel, and Women's Liberation; Heartbreak: the political memoir of a feminist militant.*

[66] Dworkin's fiction includes: *The new woman's broken heart: short stories* (1980); *Ice and fire: a novel* (1986); and *Mercy* (1990), as well as three unpublished books and a collection of poetry. Dworkin discusses these in her memoir: 'I wrote a series of poems called (*Vietnam) Variations;* poems and prose poems I collected in a book printed on Crete called *Child;* a novel in a style resembling magical realism called *Notes on Burning Boyfriend;* and poems and dialogues I later handprinted using movable type in a book called *Morning Hair*' (2006:76).

is reason to avoid it. Yet, as Butler writes, 'the more rigid the position, the greater the ghost, and the more threatening it is in some way' (1994: 34). I propose that conjuring the spectre of Andrea Dworkin enables us to revisit some of the assumptions that underscore recent engagements with vulnerability and to examine whether the boundaries of these contributions can be fruitfully reconsidered.

To revisit a figure so steeped in negative affect seems to require a defensive stance: to argue that she has been misread, misunderstood, that the charges against her are misplaced or somehow miss a context that would permit a more forgiving reading. Clare Hemmings, in *Considering Emma Goldman* asks, 'what it means to include Goldman in a feminist or queer history without wanting to clean her up first?' (2018a: 6). My engagement with Dworkin raises a similar quandary. Rather than trying to smooth the less palatable aspects of her work, I take these tensions as provoking questions. Whilst Dworkin's anti-pornography campaigning, the personal attacks that she levelled at her contemporary feminist theorists, and the minimal options her account appears to leave for sex under conditions of inequality are all reasons to exercise reserve, in themselves, they are not reasons for rejection. If, as Erinn Gilson writes, vulnerability is a vexed concept in that 'it presents difficulties – ambiguities, complexities and tensions – that do not admit of either clear analysis or straightforward resolution' (2016:73), I propose that we receive Dworkin in this spirit too, as a vexed figure who is not easily embraced or rejected but rather whose contribution, despite our best investments otherwise, seems to linger. Fateman (2019: 12) writes in her introduction to an edited collection of Dworkin's published and unpublished work that:

> in the feminist insistence that women have the right to make and use pornography, to choose sex work, to engage in every kind of censorial act without shame, and to do so as revolutionaries, Dworkin is the censorial demagogue to shoot down. But nearly four decades after the historic Barnard Conference on Sexuality, which drew the battle lines of the feminist sex wars […] and nearly three decades since the ascendance of the third wave signaled her definitive defeat, we hope it's possible to consider what was lost in the fray.

It is here, with the benefit of time and distance, and in the wayside of the sex wars, that my own reconsideration of Dworkin also resides.

3.2 Dworkin's negative legacy

Dworkin's reputation precedes engagement with her writing, such that 'there are many more people who have strong feelings about her than there are people who have actually read her work' (Levy 2006: xi). As a result, the breadth of her work and analysis of patriarchy have been sidelined in historicisations that consign her to clichéd reductions of her thought or mocking characterisations of her appearance.[67] 'When most people think of Andrea Dworkin, they think of two things: overalls (her uniform) and the idea that all sex is rape' (Levy 2006: xii). With her easily caricatured image and readily reducible account of heterosexual relations, Andrea Dworkin has come to stand for everything that has been discredited about sex-negative feminism.

In life, Andrea Dworkin was an incendiary figure, evoking strong, frequently negative reactions. Levy (2006: xx) writes:

> There were other feminists who were as zealous in their commitment [to antipornography] but nobody else could elicit the same disgust and fascination from the public as Andrea Dworkin- they just didn't have her overalls or her anger; they weren't as big. People didn't just disagree with Dworkin, they hated her. To her detractors, she was the horror of women's lib personified, the angriest woman in America.

In death too she has been subject to crude reductionist dismissals. She was 'the inverted sex symbol', (2006: xi) the embodiment of someone who resists the imperatives of white female heterosexual desirability. Palmer-Mehta explores 'the ideological work being conducted by all discourses surrounding Dworkin's death' (2016: 289) and the way in which the framing of her body, life and personhood serves to contain her. 'Dworkin's embodiment was frequently cast, and affirmed, as a reason for her ridicule and lack of power, rather than as an attempt to exist outside of

[67] Whereas Valeria Solanas for instance, another 'unapologetic figure' who channeled negative affect as part of an uncompromising radical feminism, has been subject to redemptive or reparative readings (see Halberstam 2011; Long Chu 2018), Dworkin's legacy has proven remarkably stubborn to revaluation. This is beginning to change; recent years have witnessed a number of articles exploring specific aspects of her work and an edited collection of her published and unpublished writing has been released (Palmer-Mehta 2016; Joy Cameron 2017; Fateman 2019). These all provide important contributions to re-historicising Dworkin as a feminist figure whose contribution exceeds her role in anti-pornography. These recent re-engagements with Dworkin's work have argued that, alongside key second-wave theorists such as Kate Millett, Dworkin's work can be read as literary criticism (Allen 2016; Cameron 2018; Fateman 2019).

patriarchal definitions' (Palmer-Mehta 2016: 300). This framing of Dworkin in constant reference to her unruly appearance and emotions delegitimises her political and theoretical contribution.[68]

In popular media and within the academy, if her work is discussed more sympathetically it is frequently with the caveat that she was writing from a place of pain, an assertion that simultaneously defends her contribution whilst also discrediting her epistemic credibility. Judith Grant, for instance, states that, as with much of the second wave 'as theoretically and politically naïve as they may now sound, they spoke with unmediated authenticity from a woman's place of pain and anger' (2006: 967). To a similar end, her biography, and experiences of sexual violence and being a battered wife, are frequently evoked with the aim of discounting the objectivity and impartiality of her writing. Despite being 'one of the first writers to use her own experiences of rape and battery in a revolutionary analysis of male supremacy' (Fateman 2019: 12), these accounts led her to be discredited as an objective, impartial theorist of heterosexuality (Serisier 2018). Proof of her over-investment is in her rhetorical writing style, which lacks the detached abstraction of concurrent academic work. Andrea Dworkin was never accused of being 'theoretically sophisticated' (Grant 20006: 967). Instead 'her work is regarded as passé and not worth genuine inquiry within most academic circles. At worst, Dworkin is discounted as a ranting fanatic or irrelevant ideologue who does not contribute to real scholarship' (Cameron 2018: 22). Passionate and principled? perhaps. Intelligent and theoretically respectable? Certainly not. Defenses of her work extend only as far as acknowledging her own investment in her subject matter.

3.3 Andrea Dworkin on sex, gender and heterosexuality

Throughout Andrea Dworkin's corpus, she wrote extensively on the meaning of sex and gender. Whilst Leah Clare Allen (2016) articulates surprise that Dworkin is not considered a literary theorist in the way that Kate Millett is, I propose that Dworkin's elision as a theorist of sexuality and gender is also striking. Whilst Dworkin has been popularly dismissed as 'the quintessential essentialist' (Grant 2016; see also Fateman

[68] Fat studies theorists (Cooper 2010) have demonstrated the stigma, phobia and discrimination directed toward the fat body and the treatment of Dworkin's body commentators and journalists is reflective of this.

2019),[69] meaning that she had a fixed understanding of the contents of the category of woman, as Judith Grant (2006) explains, Dworkin's work begins from sexuality and gender rather than 'woman'. In fact, throughout her work Dworkin is adamantly opposed to biologically based essentialist reasoning. She calls biological superiority 'the world's most deadly idea' (1988) and is careful to distinguish between 'biological women' and 'all persons female'. For instance, when discussing what freedom in a world without the existing gender regime would look like, Dworkin says that 'sexual freedom and freedom for biological women, or all persons "female", are not separable' (1974: 153).[70] She applies the modifier 'biological' (1974: 67) when describing what is now more commonly referred to as 'cisgender' women, and her analysis regarding the social construction of gender is not one that takes sex for granted. 'Female' is a sign under which those assigned female at birth or those who assume the sign on the basis of their own gender identification can operate.[71] Rather, her analysis is directed toward gender categories as ontologically empty but – as I will demonstrate – highly socially policed signifiers.

In constructing her theory of sex and gender, Dworkin draws on archive of literary texts, both 'traditionally pornographic and literary' (Allen 2016: 56-6),[72, 73] for what they reveal about the way that male and female are constructed and to investigate the social scripts that they contain. For her, 'literature is always the most eloquent expression of cultural values; and pornography articulates the purest distillation of

[69] Bonnie Mann remarks that "'Essentialist!" took on an almost battle-cry status in academic feminist circles […] functioning to exercise a 'disciplinary function among feminist thinkers' (2006: 11-13). This is an accusation that has functioned to discredit her in light of third-wave feminist self-conception as 'anti-essentialist' (see Gillis, Howie & Munford 2007), and as such, is something that sympathetic readers have defended her against (see Grant 2006).

[70] This is important given that Dworkin's critique of phallocentrism has been taken up by some in the service of trans-exclusionary politics. Whilst I certainly do not argue that Dworkin adequately incorporated trans perspectives, her writing and theoretical approach demonstrates sensitivity to the idea that one's gender might not necessarily align with one's supposed biological sex.

[71] Dworkin is critical of biological arguments to defend gender roles as natural (1988: 135).

[72] Lisa Duggan similarly argues that Dworkin's position re-establishes the very idea of women as vulnerable that Dworkin opposes: 'anti-pornography rhetoric *also* constructs gender. Antiporn gender is a rigid binary of potentially violent, dominant men and subordinated, silenced women. This is not a reflective description, but is itself a production of gender that tells a story mechanically that reverses the porn story into "she says yes but she really means no"' (2006: 7).

[73] Pornography, as Allen reminds us, refers in Dworkin's context, to pornographic novels and text-based pornography rather than filmic pornography, which is more typically associated with the term today (Allen 2016: 50).

those values' (Dworkin 1976: 102). Indeed, in contrast to the rationale of the anti-pornography ordinance, Dworkin (1981: 9) opens *Pornography* with the caveat:

> This is a book about the meaning of pornography and the system of power in which pornography exists. Its particular theme is the power of men in pornography. With respect to both obscenity and the First Amendment: this is not a book about what should or should not be shown: it is a book about the meaning of what is being shown.

In what follows, I will outline Dworkin's theory of sex, gender and heterosexuality as articulated throughout her work. I will highlight the way in which her understanding of masculinity-as-dominance is illuminating regarding the way in which the denial of ontological vulnerability in the performance of masculinity and the impact of this in terms of the structural vulnerability of feminine presenting subjects.

3.3.1 Sex and gender

Dworkin's work presents a structural account of sexual violence underscored by an ontology of vulnerability. The structure that she names is male dominance. This used interchangeably with male supremacy, patriarchy and sexism. The structure is comprised of gender roles that are sedimented in both the ideology and practice of heterosexuality.[74] Within such a system, male sexual violence becomes the performative instantiation of masculinity and the means by which a male confirms 'that he is not her and that he is like other hims' [sic] (1981: 107), as he disavows the any vulnerability and passivity which have been culturally coded as female. I will outline how this notion, that sexual violence constitutes the performative instantiation of masculinity, follows from Dworkin's understanding of sex and gender, before proceeding to explore how this is reinforced through institutional and ideological norms.

[74] Sawicki writes that radical feminisms 'identify patriarchy as the origin of all forms of oppression' and 'hence they view the struggles of woman as a sex/class as the key to liberation' (1991: 19). Whilst Dworkin leans toward granting primacy to male dominance as a structure (see Whisnant 2016), her category of 'primary emergency' (1974: 23) suggests a more intersectional framework (see Fateman 2019). Dworkin treated women as a class in as far as she thought they had a common interest (1988), however, her notion of power alludes to a more complex framework than typically associated with radical feminism (see Cameron 2018).

Dworkin's argument that gender and sexual subject positions are intimately related follows from her highly prescient account of the relationship between sex and gender. When Beauvoir famously declared that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (Beauvoir 1997) she put into circulation the possibility that whatever women are, they could be otherwise, motivating a 'second-wave' of feminists oriented not simply towards improving women's social standing, but re-evaluating the entire contents of what constituted womanhood itself. This took the form of debates on the distinction between nature and culture, and within the academy one of the key debates in feminist philosophy over the 1970s and 1980s was on elaborating Beauvoir's insights regarding the constructed nature of womanhood through an investigation of the metaphysical relationship between sex and gender (Rubin 2011; Chodorow 1978; 1995; Stoljar 1995; Haslanger 1995). Different versions of what Nicholson calls 'the coat-rack view' of gender, in which our sexed bodies are like coat racks and 'provide the site upon which gender is constructed' (1994: 81), were prevalent.

The account of the relationship between gender and sex that emerges in Dworkin is surprisingly close to Judith Butler's contribution almost two decades later. Butler challenged the idea that sex could be the taken for granted based upon which gender is enacted, a contribution that 'shifted the course of debates within feminism by challenging its conventional wisdom about the relation between sex and gender' (Lloyd 2015: 3). Yet, writing in *Woman Hating* in 1974, Dworkin also argues that sex is not ontologically prior to gender. Rather it is the culture's attachment to a discourse of binary gender that produces sex as its effect.

Dworkin's own view of sex is derived from recent discoveries in sexology.[75] She is quick to observe the potentially radical implications of the challenge to male and female discreetness that queer theory and transgender studies have similarly taken up to counter dominant gender epistemologies. Dworkin is highly critical of the medical establishment and its production of binary gender in accordance with 'patriarchal notions of sexual polarity, duality, male and female as opposite and antagonistic'

[75] Dworkin is prescient here too in recognising the challenge to entrenched ideas of gender that stemmed from research in sexology (including the work of Dr John Money), which have provided important contributions to transgender politics (see Stryker 2006: 13-14).

(1974: 162).[76] She writes that we are 'a multi-sexed species which has its sexuality spread along a vast continuum' and in which 'the elements called male and female are not discrete' (1974: 183).[77] As she understands it, sex is a continuum, but the reproductive impetus to divide this into two necessitates a binary construct of gender to serve as its ideological justification.

Dworkin (1974: 34) theorises the gender binary as a social construct, made intelligible and legitimated through its mapping onto the equally constructed, yet received as ontologically prior, binary of sex:

> The culture predetermines who we are, how we behave, what we are willing to know, what we are able to feel. We are born into a sex role which is determined by visible sex, or gender.

The additional clause here, mirroring the logic of gendering itself, is of the imposition of 'two sexes as two paths' (Ahmed 2017: 25). Ahmed explains, following Butler, that the sex/gender 'distinction works as a form of sequencing: as if from sex, gender follows' (ibid) and Dworkin's own characterisation of sex and gender presents the same understanding of the process by which binary gender is constructed. This makes Dworkin in line with more contemporary developments in feminist philosophy (see also Gatens 1991; Lloyd 1984; Grosz 1994), theorises gender as a process – in Ahmed's terms, 'an assignment' (2017: 26) – the terms of which are set out in literature and naturalised via religious and scientific discourses surrounding heterosexuality.

3.3.2 Gender roles to sexual roles

In addition to theorising the equally constructed character of sex and gender, something in common with contemporary feminist and queer theory, Dworkin's contribution performs two further moves. Firstly, she plays on the multiple meanings

[76] Dworkin argues that the classification of transsexuality as a gender disorder is a psychiatric discourse and that 'transsexuality can be defined as one particular formation of our general multisexuality which is unable to achieve its natural development because of extremely adverse social conditions' (1974: 186). Thus Dworkin's analysis involves a critical examination of the role of medical knowledge in the ideological establishment of male dominance and binary sex/gender.

[77] A similar argument was popularised in Anne Fausto-Sterling's *The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not enough* (1993).

of 'sex'[78] and the semantic slips and slides it proffers (Foertsch 2007), in order to explore the role of heterosexuality in the meaning and performance of gender. For Dworkin, not only is sex-as-anatomy an effect of gender, or what she refers to as 'the culture of male-female discreteness' (1974: 186), but sex-as-intercourse is too. Moreover, whilst ontologically it is the discourse of gender that creates sex-as-intercourse, it is in sex-as-intercourse that gender is performatively enacted. There is a feedback loop between the two that needs to be interrogated and interrupted. Where for Butler 'sex does not describe a prior materiality of bodies' but 'imposes a duality and uniformity on bodies in order to maintain reproductive sexuality as a compulsory order' (in Butler & Scott 1992: 19), Dworkin's analysis focuses on the implications of the social conflation of sex and sexuality. As such, deconstructing gender requires deconstructing sex – the practice – as we know it.

Dworkin's writing sets out to denaturalise not only sex and gender but heterosexuality as well. Articulating what Rich (1981) would subsequently term 'compulsory heterosexuality', Dworkin says that heterosexuality 'is properly defined as the ritualised behaviour built on polar role definition' (1974: 174). Within a culture in which 'masculinity is the signet of all worth and masculinity is a function of phallic identity' (1981: 46), intercourse becomes a privileged site for the establishment of gender. 'Fucking', Dworkin writes, 'is the most gender reifying act' (1988: 91). As Cameron argues, it 'is not just that sex acts determine how bodies become gendered but also that the codification of bodies into discrete sexes and genders works to codify sex acts themselves' (2018: 29). We see here the slip between gender as biological sex and sex-as-intercourse. Sex-as-intercourse becomes the place whereby biological-sex is secured and both intercourse and anatomy signify gender. In short, Dworkin's contribution to sexual violence politics, and to philosophical investigations into the relation between sex and gender, is that when we say that sex is an effect of gender we need to critically examine not only sex-as-anatomy but our more closely-held beliefs about 'sex-as-intercourse' too.

[78] Mimi Marinucci (2010: 41) outlines that the 'term sex is used in at least two distinct but related ways. It sometimes makes reference to the sex categories into which people are organised, as conveyed by such expressions as "the female sex" and "the male sex". At other times, however, it makes reference to the various activities commonly recognised as sex acts'.

3.3.3 Normativite masculinity-as-dominance and sexual violence

Dworkin theorises the place of violence in the performance of normative masculinity – effectively putting violence at the heart of heterosexuality. For Dworkin, masculinity is enacted in the subjugation of women. Introducing *Woman Hating*, Dworkin explains that it 'is about women and men, the roles they play, the violence between them' (1974: 26). For Dworkin, gender roles are a pervasive, yet ultimately violent, social phenomenon. They are violent for those who exist outside of the dominant, culturally-sanctioned, binary frame: 'There is no doubt that in the culture of male-female discreetness, transsexuality is a disaster for the individual transsexual. Every transsexual, white, black, man, woman, rich, poor, is in a state of primary emergency as a transsexual' (1974: 186).[79] They also depend on violence for their normative instantiation: 'men are distinguished from women by their commitment to do violence rather than to be victimised by it' (1981: 53). How is it that violence becomes central to gender roles for Dworkin? As Grant (2006: 969) explains, her analysis is directed at the

> binary sex-gender-sexuality system in which all humans are divided into male and female and then hierachicalised. The hierarchy is based on a principle of domination, and that domination is made to be romantic and sexy.

Masculinity is dominance for Dworkin, making it an inherently fragile, relational position and as such, dependent upon a subordinate other for its existence.

It is the dualistic logic of gender that leads to the centrality of violence. As Val Plumwood writes, in 'dualistic construction, as in hierarchy, the qualities (actual or supposed), the culture, the values and the areas of life associated with the dualised other are systematically and pervasively constructed and depicted as inferior' (1993: 47).[80] For Dworkin, the boy will choose to identify with his father to avoid such social devaluation and the risk of violence that accompanies it: 'It is his option, based on the social valuation of his anatomy' (1981: 50), and in treading such a path the man must

[79] The more expansive term 'trans' was not as widely used until the end of the 1990s (Whittle in Stryker & Whittle 2006: xi). Judith Butler, who I consider in the following chapter, also uses the term 'transsexual' (1999: 90), which would now be used in relation to transgender and usually as a basis for self-expression (Namaste 2011).

[80] This is a similar framework to Beauvoir, for whom 'no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself' (1997: 17).

constantly renounce any commonality with the female. Masculinity 'means being as differentiated from women as it is possible to be' (Dworkin 2007: 88). This involves the denial of an earlier, childish, vulnerability common to all, and infantile dependence on women. 'The boy, whatever his chosen style, turns martial in his masculinity, fierce, stubborn, rigid, humourless. This fear of men turned into aggression against women' (Dworkin 1981: 50). As men learn to identify with the privilege bestowed on them by their sexed anatomy, they discard association with, and empathy toward, women: 'You're turned into little soldier boys from the day that you are born and everything that you learn about how to avoid the humanity of women becomes part of the militarism of the country in which you live and the world in which you live' (Dworkin 1988: 165). Masculinity-as-dominance necessitates choosing 'a sense of superiority that substitutes for a real identity' (Dworkin 2007: 72), and the spuriousness of this superiority means that it has to be frequently restated. 'If you look at male violence against women, what you see is the cowardice of that violence' (Dworkin 1997: 110). It is the result of men's fear of other men. Or as Renee Heberle contends, 'we could thus see masculinity violence as symptomatic of threatened dissolution rather than as the effect of self-assured dominance. Sexual violence may be the effort masculinity makes to reassure itself of its solidity given its masochistic ontology' (in Heberle & Grace 2009: 140). Given masculinity's fear of its own powerlessness then, violence becomes the transference of such a psychic vulnerability onto the body of another.[81]

Masculinity-as-dominance is thus the motor of patriarchy and this manifests itself in the hatred of femininity.[82] Masculinity-as-dominance entails sex-as-dominance, which readily lends itself to violence. Pursuing this logic even further, sexual violence, as Jaqueline Rose writes, 'is the great male performative, the act through which a man aims to convince his target, not only that he is the one with the power – which is true – but also that his power and his sexuality are one and the same thing' (2018). It is underscored not by an eternal truth of male strength, but to the contrary, the anxious assertion of an ultimately unstable, impossible dominant subject position. Dworkin's insight is that we cannot separate sexual violence from gender. In the following chapter, I will argue that Butler seeks to challenge the dominant ontology of gender that renders certain lives unthinkable. Dworkin's argument is somewhat similar, in

[81] See Noble (2004) for further discussion of masculinity as fragility.

[82] See Julia Serano (2007) for a version of the argument that patriarchy devalues and stigmatises the feminine.

that she too seeks to establish a new gendered ontology. However, for her, the naturalised ontology that she seeks to expose is not simply an artificial binary, but a violent one. Yet the violent character of this is as invisible as its constructed nature due to the codification of masculinity and femininity in terms of dominance and subordination.

Dworkin focuses on the gendering of vulnerability, not to naturalise women's vulnerability to sexual violence, but as a provocation. She seeks to expose gendered vulnerability, which is as invisible as gender itself, in order to enquire as to the possibility that sexuality for women can be other than its patriarchal manifestation. Dworkin finds that the material gendering of vulnerability, in sexual violence, is the result of the cultural gendering of vulnerability. Masculinity, culturally coded as invulnerability, necessitates the projection of a prior, ever-present vulnerability, onto women. She writes (1989: 50),

> The boy must build up a male identity, a fortressed castle with an impenetrable moat, so that he is inaccessible, so that he is invulnerable to the memory of his origins, to the sorrowful or enraged calls of the women he left behind.

Femininity, culturally coded as passivity and vulnerability, becomes a material reality in a culture in which 'the first rule of masculinity is that whatever he is, women are not' (ibid). Masculinity hinges on the pursuit of invulnerability, which frequently necessitates the enactment of violence and the projection of one's own vulnerability onto the other. In a context of oppositional gender, this leads to violence against women to become the quintessential performative gesture through which masculinity can be affirmed.

3.3.4 Heathcliff, dominance and the disavowal of ontological vulnerability

Dworkin pursues this exploration into how violent sexual relations become part of gendered existence through a sympathetic reading of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1988: 68-85).[83] Heathcliff, an orphan, and Cathy grow up together. As children they

[83] Recent re-engagements with Dworkin's work have argued that, alongside key second-wave theorists such as Kate Millett, Dworkin's work can be read as literary criticism (Allen 2016; Cameron 2018; Fateman 2019).

are inseparable. However, as adults she gets married to the rich, white Edward Linton, causing Heathcliff to turn cruel and vindictive. For Dworkin,[84] 'Bronte's feminist genius was to show how this sadism was made; how and why' (1988: 81). The text details the mechanisms of socialisation, according to which Heathcliff, once so close to Cathy, comes to disavow any affinity with women:

> Heathcliff's persecution in childhood is distinct, a racist oppression. But the locus of male dominance, of power abused, is, according to Bronte, in the commonplace experience of being a male child, powerless as all children are, hurt and humiliated by older boys or adult men. Using narrative, Emily Bronte wrote a psychological and physical profile of the power dynamics of the English ruling class, gender male: how boys, treated sadistically, learn to take refuge in a numb, orthodox dominance, insular, hermetically sealed against vulnerability and invasion. A more familiar example might be the socializing rituals in elite English public schools: how ruling class boys are put through sadistic humiliation and physical abuse. A boy escapes this or other choreographed powerlessness into socially secure and physically safe dominance, and he never risks the possibility of being vulnerable to such injury again. This training, occurring in whatever circumstances, destroys any possibility of empathy with the powerless or the socially weak or women or the exiled or the colonialised or the ostracised because one's own body, having experienced the pain and humiliation of being powerless, is safe only in a complete disavowal of social vulnerability, of identification with the injured. Dominance means safety. One is taught, through emotional and physical torture, to snuff out empathy.

Masculinity-as-dominance is thus achieved through the disavowal of an earlier, ontological, vulnerability, and the projection of this onto socially inferior others. As Dworkin (1988: 74-5) writes:

> having experienced the pain and humiliation of being powerless [Heathcliff] is safe only in a complete disavowal of social vulnerability, of identification with the injured' […] Bronte shows the ineluctable logic of what has become a

[84] This is in contrast to her argument that writers such as the Marquis de Sade glorify, normalise and eroticise male violence toward women.

> contemporary sociological cliché: child abusers have often been abused as children.

Heathcliff, on account of his racial and class background, was subject to distinct practices of ostracism and othering, indicating the way in which masculinity as dominance is articulated, not only in the oppression of women but also in the establishment of race and class hierarchies.[85] The identification with privileged positions within dualistic hierarchies are fragile defence mechanisms. It is 'the instability of identity itself, which drives the incessant need for its reassertion, and the impetus to secure a privileged position through violence' (Lamble 2008: 33). Sexual violence is the logical expression of masculine identity in a system where i) gender is binary and hierarchical, and ii) the penis, and penetration is granted symbolic value as that which differentiates male from female.

3.3.5 Masculinity-as-dominance and intersecting power relations

For Dworkin (1981a: 61), ending male dominance as a structure involves ending dominance in all its forms:

> the feminist aim is to end male domination – to obliterate it from the face of this earth. We also want to end those forms of social injustice which derive from the patriarchal model of male dominance-that is, imperialism, colonialism, racism, war, poverty, violence in every form.

This is an insight that leads to some of her more intersectional contentions: she is clear that feminism needs to be a coalitional project and is highly critical of white feminists who ignore race and class. 'Feminism and the struggle for Black liberation were parts of a compelling whole. That whole was called ingeniously perhaps the struggle for human rights' (1974: 18). However, Dworkin also demonstrates a tendency to reify male dominance as the determining structure: 'all forms of

[85] William F Pinar makes a similar argument, regarding the relationship between racialised gender dominance and violence: 'White men imagine themselves to be both White and men, but these are defensive and compensatory cover-ups. White men are neither, but until the violence – intrapsychic and social – of compulsory heterosexuality ends, men will continue to re-enact the violence they have undergone within; women (Black and White) will continue to be stalked, raped, and murdered, children abused, Black men imprisoned. All are victims of a sex/gender system that divides the Self in binaries and in so doing multiplies the Other' (2003: 272).

dominance and submission, whether man over women, white over black, boss over worker, rich over poor, are derived from the male sexual model' (1976: 12). Thus, Dworkin's account of the intersection of gender with other axes of oppression is not consistent and I will demonstrate both her inclusive insights as well as the places where a far more robust intersectional analysis is necessary.[86]

3.3.6 Scapegoating in sexual violence narratives

The first enduring intersectional insight facilitated by Dworkin's structural analysis is her assertion that gender functions as the vehicle for the articulation of other hierarchies. Masculinity entails the pursuit of dominance through the projection of vulnerability onto others. As such, gendering is a way of securing homophobic racist and ageist positionalities, for instance. 'Youth, poverty and race are the special targets that target males as possible victims of other men. Youth functions to target a male because a youth is not yet fully dissociated from women and children' (1989: 57-8). Gendering is a relational process that works to establish relations of dominance. 'When understood as the "vehicles" for one another, categories do not simply traverse each other, they encode each other: race I always "lived in the modality of gender", gender is always "lived in the modality of race" and so on' (Mason 2002: 70). And while exploring pornography this is something to which Dworkin is always attentive. Against reductive characterisations of rape and sexual violence as only about sexual politics and sexual relations (for example, du Toit 2009), Dworkin is clear that the meaning of violence against women is complex. The final chapter of *Pornography*, Whores, provides a particularly disturbing, detailed account of the racially infused rape of a black woman, Kelly, in the text *Black Fashion Model*. 'Her skin with its color is her sex with is nature'; the two, her blackness and her femininity, cannot be separated in discerning the social meaning of her treatment in

[86] The prioritisation of gender by white feminists, as well as the analytical conflation of race and gender, in the 1970s was commonplace. Shulamith Firestone, for instance, wrote that 'racism is sexism extended'- a clear oversight that 'obscures the role of American slavery and its legacies and the racialised character of 20th century capitalism, and implicitly posits sexism as the more urgent oppression to be addressed' (Margee 2018). However, one which – whilst not defensible - in some cases has contextual reasons. A lot of women's movement activists, including Dworkin, came out of the New Left where they had the experience of Leftist activists taking seriously racism – due to the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam war activism. So explaining sexism in these terms was a way of translating their argument to the political context of the time (Shulman 1994).

this text (1989: 215). In such analyses, Dworkin is clear that the meaning of sexual violence cannot be separated from an understanding of the specificities of the context.

Dworkin also uses this insight to argue that gendering can be used to scapegoat black men. Indeed, 'the relationship between sex and violence has a specific meaning when viewed in light of past uses of lynching to control black male sexuality' (Sawicki 1991: 31).[87] She explores the crucial point that gendered discourses of vulnerability and sexual violence are readily, and regularly, co-opted in the service of racist and reactionary ends. As Davis has thoroughly highlighted, 'The myth of the Black rapist has been methodologically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications' (1983: 93). For Dworkin, gender is a prevailing binary that is readily co-opted in the service of other modes of domination. She writes for instance that rape discourses get believed when they are in the service of racism. Rape culture is not as simple as the institutionalised perpetuation of violence against women, with women's experiences rendered invisible. There is a racialised element, Dworkin reminds readers throughout, which means that some perpetrators are more readily recognised as such than others. Dworkin (1988: 142) is attentive to the racist undercurrent in what Sara Ahmed (2017: 24) calls the discourse of 'stranger danger', where the 'stranger', the constitutive outside of a 'community', is, in fact, recognisable by virtue of their otherness and typically marked by cultural or ethnic difference.

> The stranger in rape is used in a very important political way, especially in organizing women on the right: the stranger is used as a scapegoat. In the United States, the stranger is black and he is a rapist. In Nazi Germany, the stranger was a Jew and he was a rapist. This use of rape associated with a stranger is a basic component of racism.

Dworkin's critical perspective on gendered vulnerability is illuminating with regard to the co-optation of feminist accounts of vulnerability for racist, nationalist and imperialist purposes. At a Reclaim the Night talk, Dworkin begins by warning against

[87] In *Letters from a War Zone* Dworkin discusses the sexist-racist intersection of the politics of forced sterilisation.

the racist trap of conflating 'night' with 'dark' with 'black skin'. She discusses (1988: 15) how

> In the United States, with its distinctly racist character, the very fear of the dark is manipulated, often subliminally, into fear of black, of black men in particular, so that the traditional association between rape and black men that is our national heritage is fortified.

And for Dworkin, along with feminisation, the 'use of a racially despised type of male as a scapegoat, a symbolic figure embodying the sexuality of all men, is a common male supremacist strategy' (1988: 15). Unlike contemporary white feminists writing on rape, she didn't resurrect the trope of the black rapist. To the contrary, her analysis of sexual domination includes the inextricability of it from racial domination. This means that gender is not simply a vector of oppression on its own, but a tool in the articulation of other inequalities. She attends to the complexity of isolating gender from other axes of inequality (1981a: 40):

> It is very difficult whenever racist and sexist pathologies concede to delineate in a political way what actually happened. Racism and sexism are the warp and wood of this Amerikan[88] [sic] society, the very fabric of our institutions, laws, customs and habits.

And whilst much of the activism Dworkin documents in her texts pertain to countering violence against women, her early activism was in the civil rights movement in the United States, and racism is a central concern throughout Dworkin's writing. In her discussions of pornography, for instance, she argues that 'the sexualization of race within a racist system is a prime purpose and consequence of pornography' (1989: 217). Thus, Dworkin's account of the violence of heteronormativity also provides the outline of a framework for thinking

[88] (Footnote my own) Ariel Levy quotes from *Mercy*, pointing out Dworkin's assertion that 'I spelt American with a "k" because I knew I was in Kafka's world, not Jefferson's and I knew Amerika was the real country I lived in'. Levy also highlights echoes of the Beats in Dworkin's writing, and that Allen Ginsberg was an early mentor who later became a nemesis of Dworkin's because she despised his sexual pursuit of underage boys (2006: xvi).

intersectionally about the ways in which discourses of vulnerability may be instrumentalised.[89]

3.3.7 Dworkin's intersectional framework

The specific intersection of gender and racial oppression is one that Dworkin focuses on when she refers to 'the nexus of sex and race' that coalesce in racialised instances of sexual violence. Analysing 'a feature' called *The Art of Dominating Woman* (1989: 165), Dworkin expands on this:

> It is this sexualization of the white woman that is used as the standard sexuality of all women, unless specific racial characteristics are exploited to indicate particular modulations of sexuality. As many black feminists have pointed out, "women" almost always means "white women". So all women are saddled with the supposed sexual nature of white women while women of colour have added onto that nature the sexual attributes imposed as a consequence of color in a society in which that color is seen as deviant from the norm.

This 'nexus' was one that Dworkin explored in economic contexts as well. Indeed, whilst she 'echoes the mistakes of her white feminist peers' in 'her simplification of the thorny issues, a comparison of (implicitly white) women's degraded social role to that of a "shuffling" caricature of minstrelsy, and a jarring deployment of racial slurs to make a point' (Fateman 2019: 16),[90] it is far from the case that gender was her only concern. Her work did include an analysis of progress in which wealthy white women are afforded benefits, erasing the ongoing subjugation of working-class women and women of colour. This is a point she makes repeatedly.

In *Woman Hating* (1974: 21-2) she criticises the women's movement for failing to take seriously race and class:

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[89] This is an investigation I pursue in chapter five.

[90] Dworkin's allegories between racism and gender are difficult to digest. However, within Dworkin's context of civil rights activism and Left organising in the late 1960s and 1970s, it was at least in part a way of translating feminist politics to Leftist movements at the time.

> Most of the women involved in articulating the oppression of women were white and middle class. We spent, even if we did not earn or control, enormous sums of money. Because of our participation in the middle-class lifestyle we were the oppressors of other people, our poor white sisters, our Black sisters, our Chicana sisters – and the men who in turn oppressed them. This closely interwoven fabric of oppression which is the racist structure of Amerika today, assured that wherever one stood, it was with at least one foot on the belly of another human being […] The women's movement has not dealt with this bread-and-butter issue, and that is its most awful failure […] There has been little recognition that the destruction of the middle-class lifestyle is crucial to the development of decent community forms in which all people can be free and have dignity.

Dworkin's definition of feminism, as Whisnant points out (2016), is one that encompasses every subgroup of women, no matter how marginal or despised. In *Right-Wing Women,* Dworkin writes that antifeminism 'is operating whenever any political group is ready to sacrifice one group of women, one faction, some women, some kinds of women, to any element of sex-class oppression' (1983: 23). Whilst Dworkin's intersectional framework is limited analytically by her emphasis on male domination as the source of all other forms of domination, her motivation – that the only feminism worth its name is one which attends to the struggles of all women – is, as I will argue in chapter five, an insight with potentially radical implications.

Dworkin is uncompromising regarding the inadequacies of liberal feminism to address gender oppression: 'Every group that is structurally male dominant, is ideologically male dominant; or its structure would change' (1983: 214). As a result, she critiques tokenism – these are women who are 'not so much role models as rebukes to economically demoralised women who are supposed to accept the tokens as what they too could have been different… smarter, better etc.' (1983: 213). This intersectional extension of the subject of feminist activism to all women also sees her argue for the decriminalisation of prostitution: 'it is very much in our interests as women to see that prostitution is decriminalised. The criminalization of prostitution leaves poor women open to the most extraordinary kind of abuse and exploitation' (ibid: 147). Whilst there are overtones of paternalism here, refusing to accept the progress of some as

collective progress led Dworkin to a pertinent critique of the way that feminism can be co-opted by not only racist but liberal discourses.

However, whilst Dworkin sought to integrate an analysis of all forms of domination into her discussion of male supremacy, her analytical inclusivity was not accompanied by a detailed incorporation of the experiences of black women or poor women; and the overtones of paternalism reflect an objectifying othering. She treats sexism and racism as theoretically analogous and presents pornography as shoring up both male privilege and white privilege simultaneously. As a result, there is little space for the experiences of black women to signify outside of a doubly victimised frame. Moreover, Dworkin's use of language is problematic with regards its tendency to draw on the language of slavery and racism in order to emphasise her arguments about the severity of women's oppression. In *Intercourse* she has a chapter entitled 'Occupation/ Collaboration' which employs the language of colonisation extensively: 'The political meaning of intercourse for women is the fundamental question of feminism and freedom: can an occupied people- physically occupied inside, internally invaded- be free; can those with a metaphysically compromised privacy have self-determination?' (2007: 156). Thus whilst Dworkin demonstrates intersectional insights, the adversarial and provocative character of her prose undercuts some of her more sophisticated analysis through its unremitting and ultimately reductive emphasisation of the harm of sexual violence to women. Indeed, her use of language positions her in a long line of white feminists from the abolitionist movement onwards who 'exercised their privilege over Black women not only by asserting that their vectors of oppression were the exact same, but also by manipulating the horrors of slavery in order to make their fight for liberation much more appealing' (Nathaniel 2019: 55). She overlooks the fact that black women's bodies are always already colonised (Hammonds 1997: 171) and the specific ways in which sexual violence and exploitation come to figure as the conditions of possibility, yet never the extent, of black female gender formation.

3.4 The role of institutions in the reproduction of male dominance

For Dworkin, the structure of male dominance is resilient because of its institutional and ideological support. Institutions such as religion and science provide the ideological justification for the system. 'Religion and biology are the great roots of the

metaphysical idea that men are superior to women because they are' (Dworkin 1983: 210). She argues that 'both conceptual systems – the theological and the biological, are loyal to the creed of male dominance and maintain that intercourse is the elemental (not socialised) expression of male and female which in turn are the elemental (not socialised) essences of male and women' (1989: 80). In other words, both naturalise heterosexual intercourse and provide a foundation for gender roles.

The state and legislation also play a role in maintaining male dominance. Whilst 'the lessons are simple and we learn them well' (1974: 47), socialisation in accordance with the ideology of male dominance is never secure. As such, the state, for Dworkin, steps in where representations and discourses fail. Most acutely policed is heterosexuality, the ideological foundation for gender roles. For Dworkin, the 'laws regulating intercourse are the laws most vital to making gender a social absolute that appears to have a metaphysical basis, an inevitability rooted in existence itself' (1981: 190). In contrast to Dworkin's appeal to the state to protect women from pornography, much of her written work critiques the role of the state in regulating and reinforcing so-called nature. She writes (2000: 60):

> The state is curiously absent unless it is in one's face […] state regulates and mandates the laws of nature, which may be hallucinatory, crazed or sociopathic: for instance the differences between men and women; or the differences between so-called Aryan's and Jews; or the differences between white and black; or the differences between heterosexual and homosexual; or the differences, under Stalin, between workers and kulaks […] The state is built to put everything, everyone in their natural place, nature is part of the authority that grounds state power so that hierarchies, polarities, and discriminations that the state sanctions will appear natural.

Dworkin is strongly critical of the state for establishing the boundaries of what is perceived to be normal and natural.[91] The state has a key role to play in her discussion of the compulsory character of heterosexuality and the amount of work that goes into

[91] Dworkin's conflation with regulation by the (modern) 'state' and 'communities of every description' sees her adopt a universalism that obscures the experiences of postcolonial communities and indigenous communities. See Oyěwùmí (1997).

policing deviance in the realm of intercourse (heterosexuality) points to its essentially constructed, social and political nature. Dworkin notes that (2007: 185):

> Intercourse as an activity is heavily regulated by law […] Communities of every description throughout time have had rules on intercourse that say with some specificity that people will fuck this way and not in that way. Any act so controlled by the state, proscribed and prescribed in detail, cannot be private in the ordinary sense.

Gender roles are never fully internalised, and heterosexuality a norm surrounded by a system of regulation and sanction in order to ensure its reproduction. Rather than sex acts being the expression of unmediated desire, they are the expression of a carefully enforced system of permissions and prohibitions. Sexual politics refers to 'sex as power, the power relationships and values inherent in sex and sexuality as cultural and social institutions' (1988: 129). Within this system, 'laws create nature' (2007: 195) and thus gender roles that assume the status of natural. Indeed, the very necessity of a regulatory framework around what is perceived to be the most authentic act, expressing the 'natural roles of men and women' is an example of the deep-seated way that binary gender and heterosexuality are built into the fabric of society (2007: 187):

> Law steps in where nature fails: virtually everywhere… laws create nature - a male nature and a female nature and natural intercourse - by telling errant, unnatural human beings what to do and what not to do to protect and express their real nature- the real male and the real female.

For Dworkin, the policing of deviance is one of the key functions of the state: 'Though some folks keep getting it wrong, law helps nature out by punishing those who are not natural enough and want to put the wrong thing in the wrong place' (2007: 188). Dworkin's framework is one of a socially constructed, carefully enforced system of regulation producing as its effects – the supposedly natural, oppositional and hierarchical categories of male and female. Dworkin's work illuminates the extent of the edifice required to reproduce what is supposedly the most 'natural' act in the world: heterosexual intercourse. As such, the practical implication of Dworkin's model is that every aspect of sociality needs to be scrutinised for its role in shaping the macro-structure of male-dominance. Every institution, ideology and value that

reproduces the ideal of masculinity as dominance is part of the cultural scaffolding of sexual violence.

3.5 Dworkin's contribution to theorising vulnerability and sexual violence

Dworkin's approach contains four analytic insights that I take forward as relevant to theorising vulnerability and sexual violence today. First, she argues that heterosexuality and binary gender are integral to the meaning of sexual violence. Whilst her structural overdetermination – to be female or feminine is to be sexually subordinate – ends up reducing these elements to their relations to each other, her contention that they are related is important. Namaste's notion of 'genderbashing' (1996) highlights the way in which gender presentation constitutes the basis for many homophobic attacks, indicating that, in Western societies, gender and sexuality get confused. Dworkin's contention that not only anatomical sex, but also sex as a practice, is derived from the cultural enforcement of gender, is illuminating with respect to both homophobic and sexist violence. Therefore, the first thing her discussion gives us is that a politics of sexual violence cannot take place in isolation from an examination of normative gender and normative heterosexuality.

Second, and related, she theorises the centrality of the ideal of invulnerability to sexual violence. In the pursuit of invulnerability, the male disavows all that is considered feminine and this is the underlying logic of male violence. As Cameron argues, 'understandings of intercourse as associated with vulnerability or humiliation do not have to be inherent truths, fused to gendered bodies, in order to have real-world implications' (2018: 37). And rather than detach her analysis from the gendered nature of vulnerability, as has become common in a post-sex wars climate concerned to avoid overdetermining women as victims, Dworkin enquires into its conditions of possibility. The ideology of masculinity-as-dominance is dissected and it is here that change needs to take place.

Third, Dworkin highlights the way in which not only sex but sexual violence discourses, become the vehicles for the articulation of other axes of inequality and as such can frequently be used to scapegoat. Her argument reinforces the point that sex never takes place in a vacuum. Whilst this leads to the more difficult to digest notion that one's own sexual desires must be available to scrutiny as there is no such thing as

'pure fantasy', it also leads her to the important critical insight that sexual violence discourses can be complicit in the reproduction of already existing power inequalities.

Finally, addressing sexual violence involves addressing not simply the act itself, but the whole system of social scaffolding which surrounds it. Far from being an individual abhorrence, it is the product of a deeply engrained structure of scripts, discourse and institutional enforcement. To reckon with sexual violence then requires reckoning with all the institutions that normalise or promote violence against women. It involves interrogating all dimensions of social and intimate life, from male-bonding to sexual pleasure, necessitating an examination of above all 'the meaning of the act most of us take to be fundamental to sex, to human existence' (Levy 2006: xv). Dworkin's point is not that sexual violence is immutable and eternal. To the contrary, she believed above all that an alternative was possible. To a group of male activists, she says (1988: 169-70):

> I came here today because I don't believe that rape is inevitable or natural. If I did, I would have no reason to be here. If I did, my political practice would be different than it is. Have you ever wondered why we are not just in armed combat against you? It's not because there's a shortage of kitchen knives in this country. It is because we believe in your humanity, against all the evidence.

Dworkin's argument is that change involves a total re-orientation of everyone's values and lifestyles. Changing a structure cannot happen overnight and doing so involves rethinking dominant social relations and values in their entirety.

3.6 Linguistic essentialism and the reduction of social role to sexual role

Whilst it is the structural dimension of Dworkin's analysis that contains some of her most enduring insights, this is also the feature that contributes to its more difficult dimensions. Whilst I have argued that Dworkin is certainly not a biological essentialist, in places, there appears to be little option for binary gender to signify outside of its normative iterations. This is an inconsistency in her work. For instance, her contention that biological women are a subset of 'all persons "female"' (1974: 154), which indicates a possibility for self-definition outside of structural determination,

runs contrary to her analysis of sex-as-intercourse where one's gender is determined on the basis of one's relationship to penetration.

For Dworkin, 'we want to destroy sexism, that is, polar role definitions of male and female, man and woman' (1974: 153) and this entails the end of sex as we know it. For her, to be penetrated is to be feminised and the only way that the negative meaning of this can be challenged is through the dismantling of the structure of male dominance. This explains the taboo against male sex: 'as long as sex is full of hostility and expresses both power over and contempt for the other person, it is very important that men not be declassed, stigmatised as female, used similarly' (1988: 166). The social meaning of penetration is the stigmatisation of the penetrated.

However, the notion that, until power relations themselves are changed, women are structurally and sexually positioned as subordinate and lacking sexual agency, is precisely the framework that has led her being strongly criticised for overdetermining women as victims. Christine Beasley writes: 'These commentators [Dworkin and MacKinnon] were consequentially inclined to depict women (as a group) as vulnerable and men (as a group) as predatory' (Beasley et al. 2012: 19). If sexual role determines social role, it is impossible to account for sexual relations that involve power and inequality, no matter how consensual and controlled, without automatically invoking the binary gender roles of male and female. As a result, there is much that is left out of this model as either unthinkable and incomprehensible, or that gets interpreted in line with this framework of oppositional binary gender, within which male is equated with dominance and female with subordination.

Dworkin is adamant that there is a 'truth' to gender and the only feminism she will grant is one that fits this 'truth'. Whilst 'reality is always social, a function of sexual politics', 'truth' is something to be found. Thus 'while the system of gender polarity is real, it is not true' (1981: 110). Truth entails the destruction of gender roles and this led to the regrettable consequence of policing the sexual behaviour of individuals.[92] The most uncomfortable example of her rejection of certain forms of expression is from her unpublished manuscript 'Ruins', a novel structured as a series of letters to people from her past. In a piece entitled 'Goodbye to All That', she calls out feminists active against anti-pornography in vitriolic terms. She mocks Amber Hollibaugh for

[92] See Anne Enke (2007) for a discussion of the tendency of 1970s feminist movements to police feminist expression.

her femme activism: 'keep fighting for the right to be femme, honey, take it all the way to the Pentagon, bring the military-industrial complex to its knees' (in Fateman & Scholder 2019: 213). That she felt that it was possible to change the structure meant that she held individuals responsible for their desires. 'Those sexist fantasies which express our most morbid psychic sets', she writes, 'chart the landscape of repression, a landscape that is surprisingly familiar' (1974: 90). Given that in the 1970s 'feminists not only expressed the belief that "reality" should and could be changed but acted on the basis of that assumption' (Bammer 1991: 2), there is no place for desires like these in Dworkin's revolutionary subject and she is unremitting in her critique of feminists who continue to hold onto them (see Fateman 2019).

Dworkin was a structuralist who firmly believed that gender oppression structures and determines reality (Grant 2006; Serisier 2013). As a result, she has strong normative ideas with respect to what is transgressive, politically correct sex and gender presentation, and what is false consciousness. Femininity is an effect of male dominance, and functional for the reproduction of the structure. In *Right-Wing Women,* for instance, the wealthy married woman is described as 'subservient to male will, women believe that subservience itself is the meaning of a female life […] because they are women, they have been robbed of volition and choice' (1983: 21). To accede to normative femininity is to participate in one's own oppression; whilst this might be a survival mechanism, it cannot be a free choice. Dworkin refers to external manifestations of femininity as 'trappings' (2007: 119) and valorises Joan of Arc for refusing the social meaning of femininity (ibid: 124).[93] Whilst she commends what would now be referred to as drag, as 'costuming which violates gender imperatives' as 'part of the strategy and process of role destruction" (1974: 187),[94] her analysis is still

[93] Whereas contemporary readers might pursue Joan's existence on Dworkin' account as an 'exile from gender' along queer lines, Dworkin remains attached to the gender binary she opposes when she argues that Joan exemplified 'male identification as militance' (2007:124).

[94] Dworkin also writes that it is 'commonly and wrongly said that the male transvestite through the use of makeup and costuming caricature the women they would become, but any real knowledge of the romantic ethos makes clear that these men have penetrated to the core experience of being a woman, a romanticised construct' (1974: 114). Whilst she devalues femininity relative to masculinity in this argument, her contention that drag is as 'authentic' a gender expression as normative gender is one which pre-empts Butler's influential analysis of drag in *Gender Trouble.* I will discuss Butler's analysis in more detail in the following chapter. This perspective also counters the progress narrative whereby Butler's embrace of drag as subversive is presented as departing from 'previous' feminisms. For instance, Tim Dean writes that although 'feminist theory now embraces drag, twenty years ago it did not' (2000: 70).

largely instrumental and the goal is the destruction of the structure of gender altogether.

As such, whilst Dworkin is not biologically essentialist, her arguments often present an overdetermining structure in which 'male' and 'female' are linguistically essentialist categories: they are both categories that 'assume certain necessary and sufficient conditions of membership in that definition, whether or not those conditions are biological attributes' (Heyes 2000: 38). For Dworkin, the necessary and sufficient condition for 'female' is a 'passive' relation to penetration, whereas masculinity necessarily entails dominance.[95] This means that gender is only conceivable for Dworkin as an effect of patriarchy. The notion that gender and intercourse are inseparable, indeed that one's gender is decided externally by one's relation to the binary of dominance/ subordination, gives little room for examining the complexities of sexuality. Dworkin's contention that to occupy a gendered subject position is to stand in a relation of either dominance or subordination to another renders unthinkable a whole host of relevant subjectivities, sexual experiences and gender identities.

3.7 Dworkin in dialogue with queer sex-negativity

Yet it is possible to receive Dworkin's insights regarding the social meaning of intercourse without also accepting her more or less implicit prescription that the only solution is the complete abdication from all sex involving penetration or power. Lynne Segal writes that Dworkin's metaphor that 'penetration enacts the subjugation of men by women' is one that 'dangerously reinforces rather than combats phallic illusion' (1994: 112). However, this misses Dworkin's point that it is precisely its illusory character that renders phallic dominance so in need of violent restatement. It is in such a light that Dworkin finds the cultural acceptance of male penetration to constitute a threat to dominant hierarchies: 'The fictive dichotomy of absolute male and female sexual natures rooted in anatomical differences must be maintained; otherwise – especially when it is acknowledged that the male is capable of masochism – male sexual supremacy might be perceived as delusional' (1981: 49-50). Her analysis, as we have seen, is about the social meaning of intercourse, not its absolute meaning.

[95] See Halberstam (1998) and Noble (2004) for a discussion of masculinity without men – i.e. the potential for masculinity to signify outside the strictures of binary gender.

It is at the level of 'truth' that intercourse signifies as violation (Cameron 2018); its 'reality' can be changed.

Indeed, many queer theorists have deployed a similar logic to Dworkin, noting that in the field of sexual relations, penetration and vulnerability are gendered and hierarchically valued. David Halperin, for instance, noted that sex in ancient Athens 'served to position social actors in places assigned to them, by virtue of their political standing, in the hierarchical structure of the Athenian polity' (Halperin 1989: 26). Within this system, adult male citisens achieved higher social standing than younger men, women and slaves because 'sexual penetration was thematised as domination' (1989: 260). However, rather than accept this social valuation within a queer logic of power reversal, theorists like Bersani have sought to embrace it, resignifying sexual vulnerability outside of an economy of victimisation and putting it to work in the service of resistance. Bersani accepts that to be penetrated is stigmatised in accordance with a patriarchal logic of phallocentrism. He writes: 'phallocentrism is exactly that: not primarily the denial of power to women (although it has obviously led to that, everywhere and at all times), but above all the denial of the value of powerlessness in both men and women' (1987: 217), and that this is most acutely policed in intercourse. Highlighting Dworkin's continuities with contributions in queer theory contributes to my argument that the disjunct between queer theorising on sexuality and feminist reflections on sexual violence may be able to inform one another.[96]

Both Bersani and Dworkin agree that women and queer men are culturally stigmatised on account of their (presumed) sexual positions. 'It is not hard to see that the struggle for gay male liberation and women's liberation is a common struggle: both mean

[96] An argument that I do not have the space to develop here but which develops the case for Dworkin to be read alongside queer theory, regards her rejection of identity politics. In an illuminating speech in 1979, published in *Letters From a War Zone,* she argues against fixed identities and ideologies: 'One of the hazards of trying to discuss strategies for social change is that abstractions have a nasty way of taking over. One wants to clarify the elements necessary to sustain effective radical action - or effective reformist or remedial action. One ends up with a list of "isms" that become more and more unreal each time one refers to them' (1988: 126). She writes that 'lesbianism' has lost sight of the erotic reality. 'The word becomes a code word, both shorthand and symbol. We begin to measure ourselves against it instead of measuring it against ourselves. Then, we begin to use the word as a weapon against others, to factor out their experiences which somehow do not quite warrant the "ism" part of the word: not being weighty enough, being personal-not-political enough, being too slight to deserve the grandeur of a whole "ism". At this point, we have lost the word, we have lost ourselves, we have lost our connectedness to our original impulses, meanings and necessities. Inevitably, then, another "ism" comes along to knock our "ism" out of the sphere of legitimate concern altogether, and political discourse is reduced to the war of the "isms", to which "ism" indicates the greater atrocity, the greater pain. "Ism-ism"- if you will please pardon the coining of yet another "ism"- is perhaps the most destructive, and reactionary, disease of political movements' (1988: 127).

freedom from the stigma of being female' (1974: 90).[97] However, Bersani's argument urges a revaluation of vulnerability, and the potential for intercourse – heterosexual or otherwise – to signify outside of a patriarchal pursuit of dominance. In contrast to linguistic essentialism, the notion that power and socially received meanings can be challenged through resignification is an important potential avenue for resistance and one which Dworkin leaves unexplored. By contrast, Butler's analysis of linguistic vulnerability in the following chapter opens up precisely this possibility.

For Dworkin, the overdetermination of sexual practices by gender and her desire for the eradication of the latter means that whilst she does believe that sex can be transformed, the level of overhaul that this requires means that there are few possibilities for sexual conduct in the present. This 'absolute transformation of human sexuality', for queer theorist Leo Bersani, is a reduction ad absurdum that would require 'the criminalization of sex itself until it has been reinvented' (1987: 214). Yet Dworkin comes close to this in her contention that sex as we know it cannot be sustained: 'The end of male dominance would mean – in the understanding of such a man – the end of sex' (2007: xxxii).[98] The ontological dimension of vulnerability is lost in Dworkin's account of social change, which entails full-scale structural overhaul.

One of the arguments of this thesis is that lived experience and knowledge production cannot be clearly delineated. That Dworkin pursues her insight into masculinity as domination/femininity as subordination and does not follow through as strongly on the possibilities opened up by her own conceptualisation of a prior shared vulnerability, is comprehensible in terms of her own experiences of being violently interpellated into subordinated femininity. Interpellation refers to the process by

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[97] For Dworkin, articulating a similar logic to Wittig, 'Homosexuality for women means extinction' (1983: 143). Wittig's argument. That 'lesbians are not women' can be seen to elucidate this: the lesbian is not legible in the terms of a social and symbolic economy of sexual difference (Disch in Carver & Chambers 2008).

[98] Dworkin gives an insight into what a newly egalitarian culture and its sexuality would look like in the chapter Skinless in *Intercourse* (2007: 25-6): 'sometimes, the skin comes off in sex. The people merge, skinless. The body loses its boundaries. We are each in these separate bodies; and then, with someone and not with someone else, the skin dissolves altogether; and what touches is unspeakable, grotesquely visceral, not inside language or conceptualization, not inside time; raw, blood and fat and muscle and bone, unmediated by form or formal limits. There is no physical distance, no self-consciousness, nothing withdrawn or private or alienated'. This is a moral valuation of sex that fits with perspectives labelled as cultural feminism (see Echols 1989) and which have been criticised for positing an essential feminine sexuality as more nurturing, loving and communitarian than 'male' sexuality. Dworkin does at times articulate such an essentialised, nurturing female sexuality (for example 2007: 159).

which individuals are inaugurated into a 'certain order of social existence' through naming (see Joy Cameron 2016: 10) and throughout Dworkin's writing, she emphasises the violent effects of naming. In *Pornography,* she writes that 'men have the power of naming' (1989: 17) and this affects women's subordination. 'He defines femininity and when she does not conform he names her deviant, sick, beats her up' (ibid: 18). She wrote at length about her own experiences of being a battered wife (1988) and as one of the first to speak out on the issue, found that women kept coming to her with their own similar experiences (1997: 29; 1981: xvii). Thus, Dworkin's activism is directed toward speaking to and for women with similar experiences of sexual violence: 'I had the luck of having my books last over enough time to reach women - not elite women but grassroots women and marginalised women. Slowly women began to come to me to say, yes that's right; and I learned more from them, went deeper' (1997: 29). Her work is situated within a specific context and her focus is on the (often invisible and unspoken) effects of gender as a regime rather than the ontology of gender itself.

I propose that we take Dworkin's insights regarding the gendering of sexual violence whilst maintaining that gender can signify outside of such a context and that sexual relations are not the sole cause of gender inequality. Whilst Dworkin's diagnosis of gender, sex and vulnerability are highly illuminating, her politics of resistance and change is fixed and prescriptive. It is on account of her failures in this regard that she has been dismissed – through her role corroborating right-wing anti-pornography agendas and singling out fellow feminists on account of their sexual practices. However, her corpus reveals a rich analysis that remains pertinent and prescient for feminist sexual politics today.

3.8 Conclusion

Dworkin is a complex figure for feminism. Revisiting her corpus reveals a structural analysis of violence against women that contains both pertinent and problematic assertions. On the pertinent side, her argument that gender is a structure in which masculinity is performed as dominance is instructive for attending to the widespread, unyielding nature of sexual violence and abuse. The insight is that sexual violence cannot be separated from an analysis of gender. To understand violence against women we must focus not on individual perpetrators but instead examine the fabric of gendered society itself. This involves critically examining gender roles,

heterosexuality and seemingly benevolent and benign institutions that prop up relations of privilege and domination.

For Dworkin, masculinity-as-dominance entails the denial of a prior ontological vulnerability and this is performatively achieved through sexual violence. Whilst she is not an essentialist with respect to gender, much of the time she speaks as though there is only one way in which gender is constructed: through sexual roles. This leads her to put excessive significance on intercourse as the means through which subjugation is enacted, and to leave little room for meaningful sexual expression within conditions of inequality and bitterly attack her fellow feminists who disagreed with her: 'If sexuality is socially constructed, it only makes sense that women desire male dominance, but where does that leave feminism?' (Snyder 2008: 190). Yet throughout Dworkin's work, there is also a clear and compelling account of the process by which people become acculturated into social roles and the amount of institutional and ideological scaffolding that surrounds this. The invisibility of sexual violence and the way in which women's victimisation goes unremarked is a product of a system of heteronormativity that requires sexual and social opposites, mediated through the ideology of binary gender.

Whilst highlighting the way in which men and women respectively get enculturated into and participate in the reproduction of male dominance, her contention that it is possible and necessary to get outside and beyond these relations of power see her ultimately demanding the impossible. Her structural framework and tendencies toward linguistic essentialism (the meanings of masculinity and femininity are fixed) remain problematic for their inability to accommodate gender expressions as legitimate in themselves. Dworkin's key insight is that investigating sexual violence entails understanding the gendering of vulnerability. Moreover, for as long as masculinity and dominance are socially related, violence against women will be endemic. However, where she equates sexual role and social role her politics ends up reducing power to sexuality, endowing individual sexual practices with excessive significance leading to moralising and prescriptive repercussions. Overall, whilst Dworkin's description of the system of male dominance and the relationship between sex roles and social roles is insightful, she doesn't follow through on her own insight that the fundamentally shared character of vulnerability might be politically motivating in itself. The challenge of attending to gendered violence whilst foregrounding the possibilities that gender

and vulnerability can be lived as more than simply expressions of domination is taken up by Judith Butler in the following chapter.

Chapter four

Judith Butler, vulnerability and livable lives: from performativity to precarity

It is not a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real: How might reality be remade?

- Judith Butler (2004a: 35)

4.1 Judith Butler, the philosopher's feminist

In the last chapter, I explored both the legacy and the writing of Andrea Dworkin. I argued that the way that she has been historicised has led to overdetermined readings of her work and that these function as a caution to contemporary theorists against evoking vulnerability and sexual violence alongside one another. Yet reappraising her work reveals that many of the reasons for which she has been dismissed and derided are not good reasons. They are based more on her affective legacy and reductive caricatures of her thought than on considered disagreement with the substance of her arguments.

Against this, I have demonstrated that Dworkin asks important questions regarding the relationship between gender, heterosexuality and sexual violence. In the language of vulnerability, her insight is twofold. First, she foregrounds the point that women are structurally vulnerable to sexual violence. This a descriptive observation of a surface structure of oppression backed up by a critical interrogation of macrolevel power relations. Women's disproportionate liability to sexual violence is an effect of the structures of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, which consist of power relations in which men – more specifically white, heterosexual men – are positioned as dominant. The second is that the root of this structural vulnerability is in the constitution of masculinity through the denial of ontological vulnerability, and the projection of this onto women and socially inferior others. Structural vulnerability is the effect of a denial of ontological vulnerability rather than the content of vulnerability itself. For Dworkin, to understand sexual violence one needs to understand the gendering of vulnerability. Sexual violence is the content or particular form of women's structural vulnerability under conditions of patriarchy and

compulsory heterosexuality which are conflated: sex as anatomy with sex as intercourse, both of which are governed by a regime of binary sex. For Dworkin, heterosexuality and gender are acutely policed violent regimes, and her focus is on the way in which the normative expression of sexed and gendered roles constitutes conditions that normalise violence against women.

Dworkin's descriptive and critical insights, however, risk linguistic essentialism. Her emphasis on the binary manifestation of gender alongside her privileging of the binary itself as the site of change limits the capacity to register alternative experiences of gender, sex and sexuality that subvert or complicate the dominant frame. In other words, she's so preoccupied with 'getting fucked' and 'fucking' as subordinate/dominant subject positions, she can't engage fully with practices of 'genderfucking' through non-normative performances of sex and sexuality. This is a possibility that has been influentially elaborated by Judith Butler, and so it is to her articulation of a politics of vulnerability and violence that I now turn.

In recent years, Judith Butler has also proposed the value of vulnerability for feminist theorising on the subject of violence. Moreover, she is also a writer who exercises a spectral presence over feminist theory: 'She lingers in the passively rendered disappearance of the concept of "patriarchy", and in the wholescale shift from feminism to discourse theory' (Hemmings 2011: 171). Yet Butler's position within the feminist academy is almost the antithesis to Dworkin's. In contrast to Dworkin, whom scholars position themselves against, Hemmings notes that Butler is consistently endowed with feminism's 'narrative momentum', as citations of Butler function as pivotal in turning feminism away from the 'bad old days' of essentialism. Moreover, Butler's positioning is 'crucial to the separation of queer theory and feminism' (2011: 175), a move that functions to resolve the sex wars and secure subsequent directions in theorising sexuality away from outmoded discussions of gendered power relations. For Hemmings, Butler turns feminism away from itself and as a result, is responsible for the discipline's very survival. In short, when cited, Butler's contribution tends to steer discussions in a positive direction - indicating avenues for the advancement of feminist thought. This stands in contrast to Dworkin's embodiment of embarrassing anti-sex-negativity to be avoided. Yet, both reification and rejection depend on reductive readings and in what follows, I will argue that possible alliances and dialogues resulting from Butler's theorising on gender have

been foreclosed and that this has contributed to the absence of attention to sexual violence in recent vulnerability discourses.

Butler's reflections on vulnerability have become part of an academic feminist progress narrative[99] (Hemmings 2011). Resisting this, I will demonstrate in this chapter that Butler's contribution to theorising vulnerability complements rather than redresses or supersedes Dworkin's position when considered in relation to sexual violence. Recent engagements with Butler on the subject of vulnerability have tended to focus on her articulation of a 'common corporeal vulnerability' (2004a). This is an argument that first emerged in *Precarious Life* (2004a) and has led many commentators to argue that it reflects a new [ethical] direction in Butler's thinking (see Hekman 2014; Murphy 2012; Gilson 2014). Against this, I accord with George Shulman (2011) that vulnerability is an 'abiding concern' for Butler, and I will argue that Butler's discussion of linguistic vulnerability (1997a) is as pertinent as corporeal vulnerability to Butler's broader project. Throughout her work, Butler is concerned with how to limit violence and enable livable lives and her engagement with vulnerability sits within these broader questions. However, I will end by arguing that in seeking to provide an argument for non-violence at the abstract level, Butler loses sight of the specific character of sexual violence. This is reflected in her emphasis on the ontological dimension of vulnerability as the basis for politics – even as her analysis of precarity and precariousness demonstrate recognition of the significance of vulnerability's structural maldistribution as well.

4.2 Butler's positive spectral presence

Butler's spectral presence as a positive disciplining influence on feminist theorists is a result of the canonical place that her 1990 text *Gender Trouble* has assumed in feminist and queer histories. Sam McBean, in an aside, acknowledges 'When Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* in 1990, it as, as goes

[99] David S. Gutterman and Sara L. Rushing, for example, have hailed the possibility of its uptake as 'politically revolutionary' (in Carver and Chambers 2008: 138). For Susan Hekman, Butler's work on vulnerability is 'a – or perhaps the – central ethical issue of our time' (Hekman 2014: 453). Meanwhile, Gilson's own ambivalent perspective takes Butler's contribution as a point of departure on the basis that Butler's move constitutes a positive shift from a 'reductively negative' theorisation to a 'more substantial and nuanced account of the nature of vulnerability, which can allay some of the concerns about an ethics of vulnerability' (2014: 6).

without saying, a game-changer' (McBean 2018)[100] Such a championing of *Gender Trouble* as reanimating feminism or originating queer theory is common in textbooks and handbooks on feminist theory. Writing in the *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Johanna Oksala explains (2018: 476):

> It is no exaggeration to say that *Gender Trouble* caused a paradigm shift in the way that the intertwinement of power, feminist emancipation and the female subject was theorised […] The book was formative for the key ideas behind queer politics.

The logic here is that if sexual politics had reached an impasse in the second half of the eighties, Butler's text resolves these tensions, making possible a 'queer feminist politics' (ibid: 476) that moves sexual politics away from the terrain of a sex-negative focus on sexual violence, towards the deconstruction of sexual identities and sexual bodies. Elena Loizidou (2007: 2-4) echoes such a narrative in accounting for the influence of the text. Its 'entry into different academic fields and spheres of life' was guaranteed by its timely challenge to 'the work of Marxist feminists[101] such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon', which presented 'women as passive hostages to these structures'. In contrast to the stifling structural analysis of MacKinnon and Dworkin's theory of gender as domination, with 'the suicidal attachment that this feminist movement had to the state', Butler's 'intervention introduced a refreshing perspective in feminist thought. Women were not any more to be viewed as passive, repressed by power and waiting for the regime of power to alter, recognise and "represent" them in order to be able to transform their conditions of livability' (2007:

[100] Butler herself has expressed surprise at the extent of the uptake of the text: 'I did not know that the text would have as wide an audience as it has had, nor did I know that it would constitute a provocative "intervention" in feminist theory or be cited as one of the founding texts of queer theory' (1999: vii). She laments that its popularisation 'ended up being a terrible misrepresentation of what I wanted to say!' (in Osborne & Segal 1994: 33). However, what I am concerned with here is the influence of the text on contributions to theorising sexual politics after the sex wars, such that debates which were temporally prior yet discursively concurrent accrued a sense of being passé at best, bad feminism at worst.

[101] Some commentators have positioned MacKinnon as a Marxist feminist on account her structural theory of sexual politics, in which women constitute a subordinate class. Dworkin does not articulate such a grand theory, however may be considered a Marxist feminist by association. This is a categorisation I do not follow for two reasons. Firstly, this thesis argues that categorising feminists in this manner is a flawed enterprise and secondly, such a categorisation is reductive of Dworkin's thought and likely contributes to overdetermined readings of the kind I have argued against.

4). The story of *Gender Trouble*'s emergence is one which establishes the text as inaugurating a new form of feminism.

This framing of *Gender Trouble* as a field-defining text for both feminism and queer theory at the turn of the 1990s is acutely powerful against the backdrop of a story of sexual politics, which includes the triumph of sex-positive feminism at the end of the 1980s and the dismissal of thinkers such as Andrea Dworkin. Within this broader narrative, Butler embodies a redemptive promise for a feminism that had become passé, 'more punitively policing than mainstream culture' (Martin 1994: 105) in its association with a focus on women as victims. In short, according to citation conventions, Butler signals a distinct departure from the sex-negative, essentialist and anachronistic feminism that Dworkin's legacy conjures.

4.3 Contextualising Butler's focus: gender, vulnerability and violence

Butler's work on vulnerability departs from her ongoing preoccupation with violence. In her early work, Butler was concerned to shift feminist concerns regarding the violence of gender away from a focus on male violence against women, with the 'heterosexual bias' (1999: vii) that this reflected, to include the violence of gender norms more broadly. The critique of a heterosexual bias is applicable to Dworkin, given that throughout her writing Dworkin regularly conflates gender with binary gender and binary gender with both heterosexuality and sexual violence, such that the only available gendered subject positions are ones defined simultaneously by heterosexuality and violence. Meanwhile, Dworkin's activism was oriented towards improving the lives of cisgendered women who had been abused by men. Where Dworkin's account and much of the second wave had focused their discussions on the relationship between binary gender and violence against women (social roles and sexual roles), Butler (1999: xix) sought to expand the discussion of violence derived from the feminist critique of binary gender.

> I grew up understanding something of the violence of gender norms: an uncle incarcerated for his anatomically anomalous body, deprived of family and friends, living out his days in an "institute" in the Kansas prairies; gay cousins forced to leave their homes because of their sexuality, real and imagined; my own tempestuous coming out at the age of 16; and a subsequent adult landscape of lost jobs, lovers, and homes.

Butler's own experiences of relatives' familial rejection and institutional containment as a result of possessing bodies and desires that do not fit the heteronormative frame of recognition provided at least part of the backdrop for her contention that feminists needed to work with a broader understanding of gender and the violence it produces, than dominant sex wars discourses, would permit. Violence includes 'the foreclosed life, the one that does not get named as "living", the one whose incarceration implies a suspension of life, or a sustained death sentence' (1999: xix- xx). Such an enlarged conception of violence in relation to gender – incorporating, alongside physical violence, the violence of norms and restricted possibilities necessitates a broader conception of gender. Butler reflects (ibid) that

> The dogged effort to "denaturalise" gender in this text emerges, I think, from a strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality.

Thus, in addition to the violence of gender referring to physical violence, Butler incorporates the additional notions of the violence of norms and the violence of the foreclosed life[102]. She continues, elaborating the context in which *Gender Trouble* was written (1999: xix):

> It was difficult to bring this violence into view precisely because gender was so taken for granted at the same time that it was violently policed. It was assumed either to be a natural manifestation of sex or a cultural constant that no human agency could hope to revise.

Such a critique echoes those I levelled at Dworkin's approach: the acceptance of preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity as the extent of gender, rather

[102] Normative violence is the violence that accrues to those who are unintelligible within the dominant normative frame. It 'can be thought of as a primary form of violence, because it both *enables* the physical violence that we routinely recognise and simultaneously *erases* such violence from out ordinary view' (Chambers & Carver 2008: 76). This is one of Butler's recurring insights and one which has had significant uptake: that there is a constitutive outside to the norm, and that to exist here is to lead a life that is violently foreclosed. The notion of 'normative violence' has received critical attention (Chambers 2007; Mills 2007). Whilst Butler is clear that norms exert violence, she rejects the notion that she is critiquing normativity itself (2007). For her, when fashioning a non-violent politics, the focus is on those who wage violence.

than their unstable and ultimately variable manifestation. The consequence of this is that rather than position subjects as passive vessels of an overdetermined and only ever oppressive binary gender regime, Butler's account begins with the agency of the subject in the face of dominant structures. Instead of seeking to oppose the structure of gender as Dworkin argued feminists might, *Gender Trouble* was intended 'for those who live, or try to live, on the sexual margins' (1999: xxvi). Butler's subjects are the lives that are lived outside of the binary. For her, focusing on binary gender and heterosexuality – even if to critique it – constitutes a futile attempt to get outside a power structure which is not only hierarchical and oppressive but productive (ibid), and to cast outside of intelligibility those lives which already trouble[103] gender in its hegemonic instantiation.

4.3.1 Expanding the domain of possibility and livability

In contrast to Dworkin's attention on those positioned as subordinated within hierarchical vectors of power, Butler directs attention to those who are unthinkable within the terms of such power relations, those gendered and sexed lives precluded from living as such because they are unintelligible and ultimately illegitimate. '*Gender Trouble* sought to uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions' (1999: viii). Rather than accept the received meanings of masculinity and femininity as the extent of gender, for Butler, countering the violence of the life foreclosed means refusing to 'idealise certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion' (1999: viii). Whilst this is a text narrated as 'challenging feminism's foundational category, "woman"' (McBean 2016: 9), I argue that this is not, in fact, it's most enduring legacy- this move was already in play, in Dworkin and throughout the challenges of black feminism (e.g. hooks 1981). Instead, Butler's most enduring contribution in this text is her extension of an examination of gender and violence to include forms of gender and forms of violence that were previously outside the feminist frame.

[103] Butler uses the term trouble to refer to the capacity to upset an existing order, a rebellion which incurs a reprimand: 'To make trouble' will 'get one in trouble'. 'Trouble', she writes, 'is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it' (1999: xxix).

Butler (2004b: 213) explains how she came to this more open-ended engagement with gender, the notion that critiquing its violent consequences need not entail a wholescale rejection of gender itself, through her experiences in drag bars. She writes:

> The only way to describe me in my younger years was as a bar dyke who spent her days reading Hegel and the evenings, well, at the gay bar, which occasionally became a drag bar […] it quickly dawned on me that some of these so-called men could do femininity much better than I ever could, ever wanted to, ever would. And so I was confronted by what can only be called the transferability of the attribute. Femininity, which I understood never to have belonged to me anyway, was clearly belonging elsewhere, and I was happier to be its audience that I ever was or would be being the embodiment of it.

Thus, where Dworkin's focus was on the apparent fixedness of the attribute, her own femininity-as-subordination being violently imposed through an abusive marriage and multiple experiences of sexual abuse and rape, Butler's encounters with gender in the bar contributed to her contention that feminist theorists also needed to account to for the way in which gender exists outside of its violent impositions. More specifically, with respect to femininity, what Dworkin experienced and theorised as forcible subordination, Butler confronted as a set of free-floating signifiers, not inherently fixed to any one body – certainly not particularly aligned with her own body – but when employed and performed elsewhere, on the so-called male body in the drag bar for instance, contained the potential to signify in excess of its conventional opposition to masculinity. These focuses are reflected in their respective activist agendas. Where Dworkin's primary subjects are battered women, Butler's in 1990 are queer subjects who exist or seek to exist outside the binary sex-gender heterosexuality framework.

4.3.2 Butler, Dworkin and heteronormative violence

Whilst Dworkin and Butler have different political priorities, their analysis of heteronormativity as a system is remarkably similar. Both are motivated to discern a different gendered ontology, as evidenced in the opening quotes to these chapters. They also explore similar possibilities for such a reconstitution of 'reality'. Reflecting in 1999 on what she would have written differently, Butler says 'I would include a

discussion of transgender and intersexuality, the way that ideal gender dimorphism works in both sorts of discourses' (1999: xxvi)[104] and interestingly, these are all ideas Dworkin pursued in *Woman Hating* (1974). For Dworkin, 'our notion of two discreet biological sexes cannot remain intact' (1974: 182) once the frequency of 'what is frequently called Intersex' is acknowledged (ibid: 183) and transsexuality is no longer 'considered a gender disorder' (ibid: 186). Whilst these subjects are present in Dworkin's *Woman Hating,* her focus in later texts is on the contents of the social roles of male and female. Nonetheless, in addressing the violence of gender, these authors have congruent concerns.

Focusing on how Butler came to theorise gender in terms of the exclusionary logic of the norm, and the 'transferability of the attribute' (2004b: 213), highlights – in contrast to dominant historicisations and accounts of feminism's own development – that there may be a complimentary place for theorising the violence of the norm for those interpellated within its terms – as Dworkin does – alongside Butler's focus on the norm's exclusionary violence. In short, focusing on violence against women and attending to queer lives are not competing priorities. They are both underscored by an analysis of heteronormativity as a violent institution.[105] Butler explains that *Gender Trouble* was written in 'the tradition of immanent critique that seeks to provoke critical examination of the basic vocabulary of the movement of thought to which it belongs' (1999: vii), demonstrating how her motivation was to complicate and expand second wave insights, to counter the heterosexual bias they contained rather than to erase from feminism a critical discussion of the violence derived from normative heterosexuality altogether.

This focus also counters the notion of academic abstraction regularly levelled at Butler's work (for example, Nussbaum 1999). Indeed, disrupting the notion of Butler's sexual politics as theoretical, in contrast to Dworkin's as activism, Butler

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[104] These are concerns she does explore in *Undoing Gender* (2004b).

[105] Andrea Dworkin makes an early reference to heteronormativity when she critiques 'the old hetero norm' (1974: 87).
For a definition of heteronormativity, I follow Berlant & Warner: 'the institutions and structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms.' (2013: 176 n.3)

(1999: xvi-xvii) firmly situates *Gender Trouble* between the academy and her activist context:

> There is one aspect of the conditions of [*Gender Trouble*'s] production that is not always understood about the text: it was produced not merely from the academy, but from convergent social movements of which I have been a part, and within the context of a lesbian and gay community on the east coast of the United States in which I lived for fourteen years prior to the writing of this book. […] It has been one of the most gratifying experiences for me that the text continues to move outside the academy to this day.

Taking seriously the activist contexts that gave rise to *Gender Trouble* highlights the interplay of lived experience with knowledge formation across contributions to sexual politics. Such a consideration is important in resisting the book's uptake as a universalisable foundation for feminism. Robyn Weigman, for instance, writes that 'no text is more famous' as a deconstructive approach to the regime of sex, sexuality and gender than *Gender Trouble,* highlighting that there is a 'disciplinary disposition that underwrites and follows this theoretical turn' in the form of a 'progress narrative that grants gender a range of new significations' (Weigman 2012: 38 n.1). Yet the motivation for expanding the contents of gender is one with a specifically Western rationale. In contexts where gender is a colonial imposition for instance, it is not so much performative resignification practices but decolonising practices that are required (Lugones 2007; Oyěwùmí 1997). Decontextualising Butler's text inadvertently endows it with a reach as dislocated as its origins, thereby participating in an imperialism of feminist knowledge production, where postcolonial literature emerges from lived experience whilst texts emerging from the Western academy are uniquely unbound.

4.3.3 Reified and reductive readings of *Gender Trouble*

Whilst *Gender Trouble* was intended to contribute to a specific debate in feminism, regarding the relationship between gender, sexuality and violence, it has been received as inaugurating a new feminist sexual politics. The effect of the text on the discipline has been a shift towards Butler's queer subjects as the subjects of sexual politics, and the violence of heteronormativity to be considered as separate from a critical politics

of heterosexuality. When Butler's work inaugurates a new future for sexual politics, the focus for both feminism and queer theory is in the 'future possibilities opened up by non-heterosexual, non-dualistic sexualities and gendered identities' (Joy Cameron 2018: 6). In other words, whilst Butler sought to address a gap in feminism, she has been received as instantiating an alternative set of academic considerations.

Butler's theory entails a rejection of the tendency towards structural determinism of views such as Dworkin's, and the way in which the focus on gender as domination overlooks lives that exist outside of gender's hegemonic instantiations. However, the critical insight that there *is* a relationship between dominant, heterosexual instantiations of binary gender and women's subordination – that normative heterosexuality promotes violence against women and feminised subjects – is one that Butler accepts. *Gender Trouble*, in fact, starts from the premise that among a feminist readership such views are common sense. Butler accepts that 'under conditions of normative heterosexuality policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality', and she affirms that Catherine MacKinnon, who advances the same critique of the relation between gender and heterosexuality as Dworkin, 'offers a formulation of this project that resonates with my own at the same time that there are, I believe, crucial and important differences between us' (1999: xii). Thus, the positioning of *Gender Trouble* and its author as performing a full-scale rejection of sex-negative feminism understood as an approach to sexuality that regards sexual role and social role as intertwined is misplaced.

The differences between Dworkin and Butler's theorisations of gender and sexuality lie in what each regard as the priorities for gender-based activism and this correlates to divergent understandings of power and change. Dworkin's priority is the end of binary gender and this entails resisting the structure of male dominance that exerts power over women. By contrast, Butler's priority is subverting gender, in accordance with her Foucauldian belief that the subject is constituted in and through power; that power cannot be transcended (1997b). Butler's is a more expansive anti-violence feminism, which incorporates i) gender-derived violence against non-normatively gendered subjects, as well as ii,) possibilities for meaningful gendered subjectivity and expression outside of received notions of masculinity and femininity. Nonetheless, there is a relevant dialogue to be staged between Dworkin and Butler that enables the insights of each in regards to sexual politics to inform the other, and which also

intervenes in the progress narrative that elevates Butler's work as inaugurating an altogether different and improved version of feminism to that of the 1970s and 1980s.

4.4 The relationship between vulnerability and violence

Butler's work on gender was concerned with accounting for those lives lived outside of the binary gender-heterosexuality matrix (1999; 2011) and the lives of the marginalised. The violence of the norm in constituting a realm of exclusion remains central throughout her work. As Moya Lloyd (2008: 134-5) remarks:

> While the subject matter may vary, the overall approach does not. Butler's focus remains the relationship between normative violence and cultural intelligibility: how, that is, culturally particular norms define who is recognizable as a subject capable of living a life that counts.

For Butler, this is not simply a politics of doing justice to those harmed by existing normative orders, but a structural challenge to violence and domination more broadly (2009). From a focus on the violence of the foreclosed life, Butler (1997: 161) contends that if the marginalised and socially invisible are afforded protection, a radically different global order would prevail.

> The task it seems is to compel the terms of modernity to embrace those they have traditionally excluded, to know that such an embrace cannot be easy, it would wrack and unsettle the polity that makes such an embrace.

Those currently excluded from such a minimum standard of protection are the figures that haunt the existing social imaginary, and whose visibility and viability would bring into being an altogether different social ontology. For instance, an ontology of binary gender is secured through the exclusion of transgendered and queer subjects. Similarly, American exceptionalism depends on the othering and exclusion of foreign others. Foregrounding a livable life for those currently marginalised within the existing social order constitutes a challenge to that structure itself. The livable life is closely connected to being able to inhabit norms in a way that one chooses, not having to conform to their compulsory imperatives. It interrogates the way in which 'culturally particular norms define who is recognizable as a subject capable of living a life that

counts' (2007: 135) and in what follows I will explore how vulnerability is key to the way in which such norms can be contested.

4.5 Primary dependency

In seeking to expand the domain of livable lives, Butler outlines two concepts of vulnerability in her work. The first is linguistic vulnerability, a concept outlined most thoroughly in *Excitable Speech* (1997a) and the second is corporeal vulnerability, which Butler considers first in *Precarious Life* (2004a) and which has prompted much critical uptake and reflection (Gilson 2014; Hekman 2014; Velicu & Garcia-Lopez 2018). I will argue that whilst there are differences in emphasis between each of these concepts, they, in fact, derive from the same understanding of individuation. For Butler, as outlined in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997b), the subject emerges in conditions of 'primary dependency' – given over from the start to a social world, where persistence is by no means guaranteed. The subject is dependent on caring relations and social recognition in language for its very formation. Contrary to Hobbesian political theoretical accounts which begin with a sovereign individual in the state of nature who first encounters the other as a threat, Butler outlines an alternative origin story of the subject's emergence in relations of dependency. Contesting the normative ideal of autonomy, Butler argues that the subject is born in relations of dependency and, significantly, that these are never dissolved over the life course. The subject is thus constitutively vulnerable, 'dependent on power for one's very formation, that that formation is impossible without dependency' (1997b: 9). Accordingly, aspirations to bounded individualism constitute a disavowal of the very conditions of one's formation. 'If the very production of the subject and the of that will are the consequences of a primary subordination, then the vulnerability of the subject to a power not of its own making is unavoidable' (1997b: 20). Thus, vulnerability is a feature of embodied existence from the very start, rendering subjects interdependent and fundamentally social creatures.

The vulnerability implied by primary dependency can be, analytically at least, separated into the vulnerability that follows from our dependence on language and that which is the consequence of our dependence on care and touch. These give rise to linguistic vulnerability and corporeal vulnerability respectively. Thus, both versions of vulnerability depart from an account of the violence of one's formation; however, the politics which follows varies, as Butler's focus shifts from language to bodily

persistence. Whereas linguistic vulnerability locates agency in the experience of violence and suffering, corporeal vulnerability is an argument for responsibility and obligations originating in that same scene. However, the violence of primary dependency is what links these different versions of vulnerability: 'it may be that precisely because – or rather, when – someone is formed in violence, the responsibility not to repeat the violence of one's formation is all the more pressing and important' (2007: 181). It is the violence of one's formation that highlights the interdependence of existence and which gives rise to our obligations to one another. This is why, for Butler, in order to understand violence, one needs to understand vulnerability.

4.6 Linguistic vulnerability

Linguistic vulnerability refers both to the vulnerability of language itself, meaning that words and norms are never fixed, and to the constitutive dependence of the subject on language. The two are linked in so far as it is because language is inherently social that it is necessarily variable. The dependence of the subject on language is a 'consequence of our being constituted within its terms' (Butler 1997a: 2). We are given over to language before we have the capacity to use it ourselves. 'There is no way to protect against that primary vulnerability and susceptibility to the call of recognition that solicits existence, to that primary dependency on a language we never made in order to acquire a tentative ontological status' (ibid: 26). However, Butler (ibid: 5) notes that recognition can also be injurious:

> to be addressed is not merely to be recognised for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible [...] The terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects.

What is crucial here is the ambivalence of the subject's vulnerability to language: as something that both acts upon the subject and contains the very possibility for its own acting. Language both sustains and threatens the subject in this sense, makes it possible yet subordinates it within its terms. As such, as with the norm, 'the social categorisations that establish the vulnerability of the subject to language are

themselves vulnerable to both psychic and historical change' (Butler 1997b: 21). Language, for Butler, is a system of enabling constraints.

In addition to granting its injurious character, understanding language itself as vulnerable contrasts with Dworkin's tendency toward linguistic essentialism, her oversight regarding the potential for terms to signify differently. Whereas for Dworkin the meaning of male and female were firmly attached to a relation of dominance and subordination, such that resisting the latter entailed resisting gender categories themselves, for Butler, this is not the case. There is 'a gap that separates the speech act from its future effects' and herein begins, Butler explains (1997a: 15),

> a theory of linguistic agency' […] The interval between instances of utterance not only makes the repetition and resignification of the utterance possible, but shows how words might, through time, become disjoined from their power to injure and recontextualised in more affirmative modes.

For Butler, it is the instability of language that underscores the potential for the resignification of injurious terms and norms. As such, language is both the means through which subordination takes place and, paradoxically, provides the very possibility for resistance.

Linguistic vulnerability underscores performativity. Performativity is a theory of agency and change that arises from the fact that what appears to be natural is in fact only contingently so. With gender, it implies that 'a certain kind of enactment; the appearance of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth' whereas in fact 'there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways' (2009: i). That norms and language are both the content of gender, but also unstable, gives rise to a theory of resistance-as-resignification that challenges the structurally-determinist perspective of Dworkin by highlighting how those who are subjected by norms can be the agents of change[106]. We have seen that Butler's concern with gender was in part a response to the way it had been conceived by MacKinnon's [and implicitly Dworkin's] contention that 'to have a gender means to have entered already into a heterosexual relationship of

[106] Butler's assertion that the appearance of gender as 'natural' is in fact a surface, a 'deed' behind which there is no 'do-er' can be read as a post-structuralist reformation of Dworkin's distinction between 'reality'- which appears natural but it an illusion- and 'truth', what humans could be if the binary gender-heterosexuality regime (male dominance) was removed.

subordination' (1999: xiii). For Butler, structural constraint is not to be confused with social role. 'Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning against oneself to produce alternative modalities of power to establish a kind of political contestation that is not "pure" opposition, a "transcendence" of contemporary relations of power' (2011: 184). It is in the ambivalence of the norm and the vulnerability of language that the marginalised and oppressed can be the agents of change: 'The force of repetition in language may be the paradoxical condition by which a certain agency – not linked to a fiction the ego ass master of circumstance – is derived from the impossibility of choice' (ibid: 84). Butler seeks to 'overcome the dynamic of repudiation and exclusion by which "coherent subjects" are constituted' (2011: 79). This involves a reiteration of the norm by those figured outside its terms, which calls into question the logic of the norm itself, thereby exposing its exclusionary and constructed nature.

4.6.1 Resistance-as-resignification and the limitations of linguistic vulnerability

Linguistic vulnerability is a concept that appeals to the power of the performativity as the condition by which we may be able to expand the domain of livable lives. However, the agents of this change are those currently excluded from the norm. Therefore, whilst Butler's theory of performativity is able to give agency to those subjected, she ends up overstating the insurrectionary agency of these subjects. Her emphasis on the ability for the disenfranchised to 'reterritorialise the term from its operation within dominant discourse precisely in order to counter the effects of [one's] marginalisation' (1997a: 158) implies that enacting social change is the responsibility of those who live outside of normativity.

Resistance-as-resignification becomes implicitly a prerogative of subjected or marginalised and there is a lack of focus on the stickiness of structures and the structural constraints that might constrain or prevent resistance in any one instance. In the case of hate speech, for instance, if some subjects can return the slur, refusing its historical connotations, those who do get injured by the same assault appear to be the victims of their own failings. In arguing that the 'revaluation of terms such as "queer" suggest that speech can be "returned" to its speaker in a different form, that it can be cited against its originary purposes, and perform a reversal of effects' (1997a: 14), Butler can account for the transformation of the slur 'queer' in the hands of those against whom it is intended, but not for the psychic force of injury that such insults

can accrue. She can account for the reclaiming of pornography by feminists *for* feminists, but not the multibillion-dollar character of an industry that, despite the best efforts of sex-positive feminism, continues to trade in the erotic subordination of women – from the banal to the violent.

Moreover, that the marginalised are structurally privileged here with respect to resistance in the form of resignification seems to implicitly require that they do so. Indeed, her account of livability itself is a normative one, presupposing more or less subversive modes of existing. This is revealed in her discussion of Venus Xtravaganza in *Bodies That Matter* (2011), when she discusses Jennie Livingston's 1991 documentary *Paris Is Burning*. The film documents the drag ball culture of Harlem and focuses on the lives of various gay men and transsexuals of colour. Butler's interest in the film is in what it 'suggests about the simultaneous production and subjugation of queers, but which nevertheless produces occasional spaces in which those annihilating norms, those killing ideals of gender and race, are mimed, reworked, resignified' (2011: 84). The drag houses are one such space where signifiers of gender take on a new meaning and, as such, demonstrate the potential for resistance to hegemonic ideals that takes place through resignification. For Butler (2011: 95)

> This is not an appropriation of dominant culture in order to remain subordinated by its terms, but an appropriation that seeks to make over the terms of domination, a making over which is itself a kind of agency

Similarly, Butler (ibid: 94-95) commends the way that the drag ball houses resignify kinship relations:

> These men "mother" one another, "house" one another, "rear" one another, and the resignification of the family through these terms […]is doubtless a cultural reelaboration of kinship that anyone outside of the privilege of heterosexual family […] needs to see, to know and to learn from […] Significantly, it is in the elaboration of kinship forged through a resignification of the very terms which effect out exclusion and abjection that such a resignification creates the discursive and social space for community that we see an appropriation of the terms of domination that turns them toward a more enabling future.

Thus, when it comes to challenging hegemonic norms of gender and the heterosexual kinship relations that sustain them, the drag ball performers are involved in the performative reworking of otherwise injurious terms, expanding the domain of livable lives in the process.

In the film, however, Venus, 'a Latina preoperative transsexual cross dresser, prostitute and member of the "House of Xtravaganza"' (ibid: 84) dies – presumably at the hands of a client who discovered that she was a transgender woman. Her death is theorised by Butler within the framework of resistance-as-resignification and thus the analysis offered is one that downplays the presence of structures of oppression and overstates Venus' capacity to have acted otherwise. Venus' death is the result of a non-subversive and ultimately unsuccessful citing of the dominant norm. Butler (ibid) writes that

> As much as there is defiance and affirmation, the creation of kinship and glory in that film, there is also the kind of reiteration of norms which cannot be called subversive but which led to the death of Venus Xtravaganza, a Latina preoperative transsexual cross dresser, prostitute and member of the "House of Xtravaganza".

Venus, who aspires to find a man and to live as a woman in the suburbs with a washing machine performs 'a reworking of the normative framework of heterosexuality' (ibid: 91). As Butler sees it, Venus overidentifies with the terms of domination in such a way that renders her a victim of the norms she approximates.

Butler has been criticised for this instrumental depiction of transsexuality (Prosser 1998; Namaste 2011).[107] Venus' transsexual status is dealt with, not on its own terms but presented as a vehicle to her transcending her race and class status. Moreover, for Butler, it is Venus' over-identification with heterosexual ideals which means that rather than displacing the norm, she herself ends up being displaced by it. Venus wants to 'find an imaginary man who will designate a class and race privilege that promises a permanent shelter from racism, homophobia, and poverty' (2011: 89). Yet, Butler writes, this is merely a 'phantasmatic pursuit […] A promise which, when taken

[107] See Dean (2000: 68-9 n.12) for an extremely comprehensive summary of the critical reception of the film and for an analysis of Butler's theory of gender in relation to her discussion of drag (ibid: 69-70).

too seriously, can culminate only in disappointment and disidentification […] Her death testifies to a tragic misreading of the social map of power' (ibid: 90). Rather than performatively resignifying gender, Venus' identification with it ultimately leads to her death: 'The citing of the dominant norm does not, in this instance, displace that norm; rather, it becomes the means by which that dominant norm is most painfully reiterated as the very desire and the performance of those it subjects' (ibid: 91). The elevation of the transsexuality of some in the film as subversive and others as not shows Butler's theory of performativity contains its own normative binary. There are good and bad ways of reworking the norm. Moreover, in focusing on the subversive potential of transness and locating her analysis here, Butler's discussion elides the intersecting structures and power relations in play. Butler's failure to recognise that Venus' death also mirrors the deaths of many women who make a living selling sex – trans, cis, white, Latina and the myriad of other stratifications of women – exposes the limits of her analysis. When read entirely through the lens of the promise of performativity given the vulnerability of language, her death becomes the result of her own naïve phantasmatic identification with hegemonic norms. The institutional and structural conditions which overdetermine Venus' death are overlooked.

The problem with this reading and one that exposes the limits of linguistic vulnerability as the basis for politics is that in its valorisation of the potential for non-normative subjects to rework the norm, those that fail to do so become unintelligible on their own terms. Venus' own agency is undermined: her subjectivity is merely 'phantasmatic promise', her desires those of someone subject to 'hegemonic constraint'. Linguistic vulnerability appears to go too far in the other direction to Dworkin with respect to emphasizing the possibility of agency. As Lois McNay (1999: 176) notes:

> The idea of the performative provides a compelling account of the open temporality of structure that permits the emergence of autonomous action, but it does not really consider how this symbolic indeterminacy relates to other social structures and how it may catalyse or hinder change.

As McNay continues, 'the relation between resignificatory practices and other social structures remains unexplored' (1999: 180). Butler's focus on Venus' death in terms of her own performative failures, rather than in terms of the structures of racism and transphobia in particular that render her outside the normative order, reveals the

problems of such an absence for discussions of vulnerability. Indeed, whilst performativity offers a nuanced account of the agency of the subjected subject, it understates the power relations which contribute to the enduring life of oppressive institutions and structures. Butler (1997a: 19) raises this question:

> There are reasons to question whether a static notion of 'social structure' is reduplicated in hate speech, or whether such structures suffer destructuration through being reiterated, repeated, and rearticulated. Might the speech act of hate speech be understood as less efficacious, more prone to innovation and subversion, if we were to take into account the temporal life of the "structure" it is said to enunciate?

However, I propose that she is too quick to resolve the problem of the rigidity of the structure. Evoking instability by way of the (mis)repetition, and subversive citation of its norms (ibid: 19-20) does not enable us to understand, for example, 'heterosexuality not merely as normative but as consistently perverse when violently exercised across the colonial modern gender system so as to construct a worldwide system of power' (Lugones 2007: 197). Whilst structures are not static, uniform and unchanging, Dworkin demonstrated the ideological and institutional mechanisms by which male dominance is reinforced, rendering it both global (whilst culturally variable) and stubbornly resistance to change. Butler's account of linguistic vulnerability needs to be supplemented by a focus on the way in which histories, structures and institutions produce certain vulnerabilities that complicate an account of agency and resistance as the performative reworking of the norm. The resilience of the structure, as well as its capacity to be resisted through resignification, are important.

4.7 Corporeal vulnerability

Corporeal vulnerability is a concept Butler first uses in *Precarious Life*, a text reflecting on the events of September 11th and the United States administration's emboldened violent offensive that followed. Butler (2004a: 29) asks her reader:

> What politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself, a situation where we can be vanquished or lose others. Is there something to be learned about the geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability from our own brief and devastating exposure to this condition?

For Butler, the 'conditions of heightened vulnerability and aggression that followed from these events' (2004a: xi) amounted to a disavowal of a common, shared vulnerability. Through experiencing itself as the subject of violence, the United States' conception of itself as a Hobbesian actor-sovereign and inviolable was revealed as illusory. Butler reflects (2004a: xi):

> That US boundaries were breached, that an unbearable vulnerability was exposed, that a terrible toll on human life was taken, were, and are, cause for fear and mourning; they are also instigations for patient political reflection.

Violence is a moment for political opportunity because it 'reveals the vulnerability that underlies it' (Gilson 2014: 48). Yet in responding defensively, this vulnerability is denied. In the same way that Dworkin regarded the performance of masculinity-as-dominance to entail the projection of vulnerability onto others, the pursuit of dominance on the part of the United States administration also necessitates the displacement of vulnerability onto others. Yet for Butler, given this revelatory potential inherent in the experience of violence, the United States was in fact 'missing an opportunity to redefine itself as part of a global community' (2004a: xi). 'From where', she asks, 'might a principle emerge by which we vow to protect others from the kinds of violence we have suffered if not from an apprehension of common human vulnerability?' (ibid: 30). The experience of violence, if reckoned with, has the capacity to reveal a shared vulnerability and interdependence: 'One insight that injury affords is that there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know'. Through such experiences 'something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us' (ibid: 22). The sovereign conceit is shattered.

Violence then reveals the second sense of vulnerability that Butler's postulation of primary dependence gives rise to vulnerability as constitutive interdependence. From the realisation that the self can be impinged on by another, the illusion of invulnerability is exposed and 'mindfulness of this vulnerability can become the basis of claims for non-military political solutions' (ibid: 29). Corporeal vulnerability emerges as the non-negotiable fact of embodied existence. Whilst most of the time we, much like the United States, may experience ourselves as Hobbesian, bounded, invulnerable individuals, this is a mistake. Butler insists that 'although we may

legitimately feel that we are vulnerable in some instances and not in others, the condition of our vulnerability is itself not changeable' (2015: 150). The subject is thus vulnerable in a more fundamental, ontological sense than the structural account would suggest, and in a more shared sense than linguistic vulnerability, with its focus on the differential operation of the norm, highlights. Butler writes that 'each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies- as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure' (2004a: 20). Yet aspirations toward sovereign mastery and dominance, such as those of the United States, disavow this feature of existence and the generalised obligations to others that follow from it.

When appealing to a common corporeal vulnerability, Butler is seeking to harness the potential for recognition of this condition on the part of the dominant to reconstitute global relations, arresting cycles of violence and promoting protection of the other. For it is only socially dominant subjects who have the luxury of disavowing vulnerability in the first place – something Butler appears to acknowledge when she notes that 'women and minorities, including sexual minorities, are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility, if not its realization' (2004a: 20). Butler's argument is that if we are to reckon with vulnerability rather than disavowing it through the escalation of violence we are 'returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another' (2004b: 23). As Shulman notes, this is an appeal 'to the powerful through their own vulnerability to injury' (2011: 231). Whilst corporeal vulnerability is presented as an egalitarian ethics, in reality, collective responsibility and shifting global obligations hinges on prior de-colonial practices that entail far-reaching structural and psychic changes (Adams & Estrada-Villalta 2017). Corporeal vulnerability amounts to a proleptic and performative conjuring of a future of renewed relationality. As a horizon for resistance-as-recognition it an assertion of interdependence and obligations toward others. In such a move, Butler seeks to challenge the existing deployment of vulnerability, according to which it is used to delimit who is deserving of protection and who is not.

4.7.1 Resistance-as-recognition and the question of motivation

Whilst the shift towards a focus on what the powerful can do in enabling livable lives addresses the challenges that faced a politics of resistance-as-resignification, there are questions that remain. In particular, regarding what the content of such responsiveness would look like and the rationale according to which the privileged give up their position of dominance – no matter how ontologically fragile. Criticisms have queried how Butler intends the move from a postulation of a generalised vulnerability to a politics motivated by such a condition (Petherbridge 2016); that is, from awareness of vulnerability to responsiveness. In this vein, Ann Murphy argues that 'the invocation of ontological vulnerability is not *sufficient* for an ethics of nonviolence' (2012: 7). Rather, awareness of one's own vulnerability may equally result in defensiveness. For her, 'in the absence of normative claims, there is no clear extrapolation from the reality of embodied vulnerability to a just politics. This is because there is nothing prescriptive or necessarily normative in the acknowledgement that we are dispossessed and vulnerable before others' (ibid: 73). As Gilson questions (2014: 61)

> one may be aware of the ontological reality of a common vulnerability – one may have read Butler! – but without a consideration of the concrete ways vulnerability is repudiated or appropriated as a form of privilege, it is difficult to translate that awareness into an ethical response.

For Lloyd (2009), there is a tension between Butler's social ontology – which is always in flux – and her apparent positing of an unexamined ontological desire for existence. This leads to an unresolved question at the level of politics, which is 'what is it in the experience of vulnerability, in other words that might lead us to treat the other, indeed any other wherever and whomever they are, as deserving an ethical response from us, moreover a response that reveals our own potential vulnerability at their hands?' (2009: 11). Without a more concrete discussion of the conditions of responsiveness, 'there is nothing in the experience of loss that guarantees we will be able to "see" or "recognise" another's loss' (Lloyd 2015: 229). This concern, that there is a 'motivational deficit' (Lloyd 2015: 7; see also Mills 2007: 153) in corporeal vulnerability, is one that points toward the limits of an appeal to vulnerability that ignores histories, contexts and structures.

Moreover, even if such a motivation were located, precisely what such responsiveness would look like is not spelt out; Butler does not stipulate 'the terms of that responsiveness here' and the 'acts that would signify acknowledgement [of vulnerability] remain open to specification and context' (Shulman 2011: 232). In short, even if we accept the philosophical grounding of corporeal vulnerability, what exactly is the politics that follows from such a condition? What it would look like for the powerful to reflect on their own constitutive vulnerability and then act in accordance with this remains unclear. This is not to argue that corporeal vulnerability cannot be evoked in order to dislodge privilege and provide the basis for a feminist relationality. However, when appealed to as a general potential, rather than an embedded political practice, it is unclear precisely how this happens.

Another criticism that has been levelled at corporeal vulnerability is that it is reflective of a turn to ethics in Butler's work that abdicates political responsibility (see Dean 2008; Coole 2008) and 'lacks the bite and urgency of Butler's earlier interventions into the politics of gender' (Love et al. 2004: 19). Bonnie Honig (2010) has characterised Butler's position as a 'moralist humanism', in which suffering is appealed to as the condition that may unite subjects obscuring a more action-oriented grounding for politics. Distinguishing between linguistic vulnerability and corporeal vulnerability certainly demonstrates Butler's move away from an emphasis on the agency of the subjected toward the obligations of the powerful. Butler (2009b: i) recognises this shift in her own work, stating:

> I moved from a focus on performativity to a more general concern with precarity. Performativity was, to be sure, an account of agency and precarity seems to focus on conditions that threaten life in ways that appear to be outside of one's control.

However, rather than see this as a move from politics toward ethics, I regard this as a shift from a focus on a politics of resignification to a politics of recognition. Both are concerned with Butler's initial question with respect to expanding the domain of intelligibility to ensure a livable life for all. However, whereas one focuses on change from the perspective of the marginalised, the latter looks toward questions of obligation and responsibility in order to effect change.

Moya Lloyd also contests the interpretation that Butler's 'turn to vulnerability' reflects a 'turn to ethics that heralds either a turn *away* from politics or its displacement' (2015: 208). On her reading, Butler is fully aware of 'the ways that politics and ethics are inter-imbricated' (ibid). Rather, for Lloyd, the 'difficulty is rather that there is a tension in Butler's work between ethical responsiveness as abstract potentiality arising from ecstatic relationality and existential precariousness *and* the actualisation of ethics and politics in specific contexts of politically induced precarity' (ibid). Precariousness and precarity are concepts that Butler introduces in *Frames of War* (2009), seemingly in response to the charges of depoliticisation and abstraction that were levelled at corporeal vulnerability. Precariousness is a generalised human condition, mirroring the shared character of corporeal vulnerability, whereas precarity is contingent; a product of political arrangements. They are 'intersecting concepts' (Butler 2009a: 25). Lives are, by definition, precarious (a generalisable, non-contingent universal) and precarity is the outcome of the failure of institutions to respond to 'those very needs without which the risk of mortality is heightened' (ibid). As such, 'precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death' (ibid). The introduction of precarity thus attends to the disproportionate, structural vulnerabilities of the marginalised and dispossessed.

However, precarity,[108] as theorised by Butler, remains an undeveloped concept for illuminating structural vulnerability. As Lloyd notes, nowhere in Butler's discussion of precarity does she 'ever explore in detail the actual mechanisms that give rise to the concrete precaritisation of a particular population' (Lloyd 2015: 219). Indeed, precarity is a one-sise-fits-all 'rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless' (Butler 2009b: xii-xiii). As such, whilst demonstrating to some degree the importance of a combination of ontological and structural perspectives on vulnerability, Butler's notion of precarity mirrors her notion of violence in its abstract generality. There is no attention to intersectional power structures that would be able to detail the difference between, for instance, gendered and economic vulnerability, and their relation to sexual violence or the violence of poverty. Whilst corporeal vulnerability takes the emphasis away from the marginalised

[108] Guy Standing's *The Precariat* (2011) outlines an emerging class that is the product of the post-globalisation labour market; characterised by lack of job security and no sense of work identity. The term was coined by Italian trade unionists and circulated among French labour organisations before being adopted by Standing.

in affecting change, it still remains insufficiently structural in order to be able to name the mechanisms that produce vulnerability (or precarity) in the first place. In fact, despite producing its own normative demands of subjects, linguistic vulnerability had more political purchase in its attention to the specific norms, categories and discourses at work in instances of injury and the differential effect of the norm on different subjects. Corporeal vulnerability, in emphasising the commonality of vulnerability is an important rejoinder to a politics that strives toward invulnerability for the relatively privileged and this is an argument I will develop in the following chapter. However, on its own, the motivation for the powerful in dislodging their positions of privilege is under-theorised. And for those who do reckon with vulnerability on a daily basis, the idea that this may be politically promising may add insult to injury.

4.8 Vulnerability and sexual violence in Judith Butler

George Shulman names vulnerability and injury as Butler's abiding concerns (2011). However, Butler's interest in these is for what they reveal about the potential for non-violent political futures. Given her constant return to the question of violence then, it is surprising that Butler does not discuss sexual violence. However, I demonstrated at the start that Butler's intention was to expand the meaning of gender and the meaning of violence in light of the debates of the sex wars. To this end, linguistic vulnerability and corporeal vulnerability are directed primarily toward the violence of the foreclosed life, with precarity being introduced subsequently to discuss the institutional mechanisms behind this. Nonetheless, contrary to historicisations that oppose sex-positive and sex-negative feminism and associate Butler firmly with the former, Butler's understanding of the interplay of sex and gender demonstrates sympathy for Dworkin's contention that normative gender roles and violence against women overlap, and that under conditions of male dominance this makes sexuality a compromised arena for women. Commenting on the Me Too movement, for instance, Butler (in Yancy 2019) reflects on some of these issues, arguing that

> It is not just that murder is committed on the basis of gender; violence against women is one way of establishing the femininity of the victim. The violence seeks to secure the class of women as killable, dispensable; it is an attempt to define the very existence of women's lives as something decided by men, as a masculine prerogative.

In such an analysis she is resurrecting the insight of Dworkin in regards to the connection between sexual role and social role. However, her elaboration of linguistic vulnerability provides a way in which gendered subjectivities can exist on their own terms as well. Not only does gender mean trouble – or in Dworkin's words, getting fucked – it can also *be* troubled and *be* fucked, and this insight has proven central to queer and feminist sexual politics. Linguistic vulnerability thus ensures the inclusivity and fluidity of sexual politics and avoids reducing individuals to pre-existing subject positions.

Corporeal vulnerability substantiates Dworkin's own reflections on the shared character of vulnerability and the way in which this gets repudiated in the performance of masculinity-as-dominance. Moreover, it redirects a focus away from the subjects of violence to those who wage it. However, the question of a 'motivational gap', how one moves from the experience of violence to a recognition of one's own vulnerability and the vulnerability of the other, is a problem which appears to be particularly pertinent to sexual violence. Maria Lugones highlights that the experience of violence on the part of men of 'who have themselves been targets of violent domination and exploitation' has not yielded 'any recognition of their complicity or collaboration with the violent domination of women of color' (2007: 189). Moreover, the fact that 'men who have been victims of sexual abuse themselves as children are more likely to become sex offenders themselves' (Jones 2012 : 237) would seem to demonstrate Murphy and Gilson's concern that the experience of vulnerability itself is not sufficient for a just politics. What reckoning with and responding to the experience of violence with a focus on interdependence in this context entails is both unclear and seems to underplay the imminent danger posed to certain lives, such as Venus', by virtue of her structurally overdetermined exposure to this condition: she is poor, feminine, trans, Latina, sex worker.

In both of these versions, Butler's focus on the ontological dimension of vulnerability overstates the potential for structural change to come about without an analysis of the structures of domination themselves. In addition, it lacks the normative detail that could elaborate more fully what either resistance-as-resignification or resistance-as-recognition would entail. Nonetheless, there are important contributions to be gleaned from the resignifiability of gendered subject positions and an ontology of interdependency that could be profitably read alongside Dworkin's detailed critique of the gendering of vulnerability under conditions of male dominance. Indeed, I began

by contextualising Butler's focus in order to demonstrate that her own examination of violence, with its corresponding focus on ontological vulnerability, was not intended to deny the gendered logic of sexual violence. Rather it was to complicate and contribute to a wider understanding of what constituted gender and violence in such a discussion. It follows that if we need to understand vulnerability to understand violence we need both Dworkin and Butler's perspectives.

4.9 Conclusion

Typically received as a thinker who paved an altogether new direction for feminism, Butler's work and the ideas she explores are often figured as inaugurating a new horizon for feminism. This was the case with her account of gender – and in recent years' her reflections on corporeal vulnerability have assumed a similarly influential and foundational place in discussions of the concept. However, taking Butler's ideas as the beginning forecloses significant avenues for deliberation and circumscribes in advance the boundaries of acceptability when it comes to dialogue partners. Ironically, despite Butler's own postulation of contingent foundations for philosophy (1995: 39-40), her accounts of gender and of vulnerability have gone on to assume a foundational status of their own; effecting constitutive exclusions in the form of the widespread dismissal of second wave or sex-negative feminism.

However, such a historicisation simultaneously elevates Butler's work and encourages reductive, overdetermined and constrictive interpretations of it. Clare Hemmings has demonstrated that there is an ontological impact of her fixed, although significant, place within citation structures, and focusing on dialogue partners other than Foucault enables her work to 'reference a more complex feminist past, present, and future than existing narratives usually allow' (2011: 194). Butler's own assertion that Catherine MacKinnon's analysis of the politics of heterosexuality shares much in common with her own (1999: xi) collapses the notion of a clearly entrenched barrier between the sex-negative feminism of the 1980s and sex-positive position codified by Butler.

My argument has therefore departed from the assertion that rather than consecrate a radically divergent account of sexual politics to Andrea Dworkin, the two are relevant dialogue partners. Like Dworkin, Butler posits gender and sexuality as intimately related. Indeed, Butler's assertion that the construct of gender is established through the positing of binary sex as natural and prior is one articulated also by Dworkin,

although in admittedly less certain terms. However, Butler's work is animated by a desire to render visible those subjects excluded by this normative order and her focus on violence and vulnerability is located at the margins rather than at the centre. Butler's work repeatedly returns to the violence of unintelligibility and it is here too that she explores the purchase of an appeal to vulnerability. In her early work, she examines linguistic vulnerability to outline an account of the agency of the marginalised in effecting social change and in resisting victimisation. Her later work turns to corporeal vulnerability and the focus is lifted off the marginalised (and away from performativity) toward the powerful and the ethical potential of recognition. Where Dworkin posited ontological vulnerability as a background condition, disavowed and projected in the pursuit of masculinity-as-dominance, Butler foregrounds vulnerability's ontological dimensions, highlighting the positive politics that can follow from recognition of interdependence. There are questions as to the actionability of such a politics – but the value of interdependence can be minimally accepted as a horizon for ethical relations, even if not a clear blueprint.

Whilst Butler's work is invested in the relationship between violence and vulnerability, as I have argued is a feature of recent vulnerability reflections, there is no specific consideration of sexual violence and vulnerability. Yet, as Dworkin demonstrated, the violent projection of masculine vulnerability frequently takes a sexualised form, given the centrality of sexual role as a signifier of gender. Whilst Butler importantly counters the assertion that to be a woman is to be sexually subordinate, her analysis loses some of the critical purchase of Dworkin's in its sidelining of the relationship between sexual role and social role.

Chapter five

Mobilising vulnerability in sexual violence discourses

To theorise sexual violence is to theorise the vacillating boundaries of legitimacy that enable the visibility of certain vulnerabilities and the invisibility of others. Bringing theory to bear on the problem of sexual violence brings certain dimensions of this problem into relief that may otherwise remain veiled, among them who counts as victims of sexual violence, and which women are 'real' enough within the purview of our cultural imaginary to warrant attention.

- Ann Murphy (2009: 64)

5.1 The political purchase of gendered vulnerability

Having established that Dworkin and Butler are productive dialogue partners on the question of vulnerability and its relation to violence, I will now apply their insights to contemporary sexual violence politics in order to outline a critical feminist politics of sexuality which can move beyond the sex-positive/sex-negative binary. The sex wars and the subsequent association of sex-positivity with progressive sexual politics has resulted in an absence of feminist engagement with the question of gendered sexual vulnerability. However, the discourse which argues that women have a unique vulnerability to sexual violence has not ebbed with the academic consensus that women's sexual agency is an analytical priority (Marcus 1992: 395). A gendered conceptualisation of sexual vulnerability is a readily available discourse that frequently gets mobilised by exclusionary agendas seeking to harness the moral undertone of a claim to the protection of women, yet actually furthers violence against women.[109] Whilst vulnerability is weaponised in these discourses, it is misrepresented. Foregrounding the way in which vulnerability is irreducibly both ontological and structural provides the beginnings of a framework for in inclusive anti-violence politics.

Vulnerability is a politically powerful concept. Its affective resonance (Koivunen et al. 201; Oliviero 2018), the fact that it 'presupposes a moral evaluation' (Ferrarese 2016a: 151), coupled with the ambivalent emotions it generates – compassion, anger,

[109] In this chapter, I will consider the white-saviour narrative, anti-immigration politics and trans-exclusionary feminist discourses as examples of mobilisations of an idea of women's disproportionate availability to violence for a politics that promotes violence against women, despite claiming to protect [some] women.

protectiveness (Oliviero 2018) – all combine to give the term immense normative force in its naming of injury and injustice.[110] Far from being descriptive and neutral, it is a condition around which people can and do mobilise. Whilst Butler's appeal to vulnerability in chapter four was for what the concept offered by way of global political obligations, commentators have noted that, by itself, 'the discourse of vulnerability can support various political agendas including paternalistic, racist, misogynist, homophobic, and anti-feminist ones' (Koivunen et al. 2018: 5). When it is a gendered vulnerability that is being cited, and feminist rationality around the injustice of sexual violence is being named, it becomes a matter for feminist theorists to discern the political agenda in question.

Alison Phipps highlights that in the case of testimony, it needs to be asked what 'experience does as it enters the feminist field' (2016: 307). The deployment of experience is not merely descriptive but does political work. A similar question must be asked about the appeal to vulnerability in sexual violence politics. What is the performative effect of vulnerability in an instance? This is not simply an analytical argument, but one with clear political ramifications given that 'state recognition of some kinds of vulnerability […] can actually intensify the precarity of particular groups such as migrants and queers' (Oliviero 2018: 14). I agree with Joanna Fax (2012), for whom, despite the collusion of what she terms 'vulnerability discourse' with anti-progressive causes, 'vulnerability is not necessarily a term to throw out altogether' (2012: 336). Given that 'sexuality is particularly susceptible to charged emotions including feelings of vulnerability and power' (Duggan & Hunter 2005: 256), distinguishing between objective and felt or constructed vulnerabilities in the sphere of sexuality is imperative.

Taking up these questions, this chapter will examine what is at stake in articulating a feminist theory of vulnerability and sexual violence. I argue that not only is understanding vulnerability crucial for illuminating the gendering of sexual violence, but also for intervening in reactionary mobilisations of vulnerability in the name of women The posited sexual vulnerability of the white female and the cisgender female

[110] Whilst I am concerned with sexual violence discourses, the moral and evocative character of vulnerability means it is readily instrumentalised by political discourses more broadly: Hesford & Lewis discuss the mobilisation of vulnerability in human rights discourses, where certain bodies – frequently children – 'take on the identity of "absolute victims" their bodies reduced to an innocent and fragile vulnerability intended to ignite Euro-American humanitarian recognition' (2016: viii). See also Michael Lechuga (2017) examination of the rhetoric of vulnerability articulated by the White House.

are each are premised on what Gilson has identified as a 'reductively negative' (2014, 2016) approach to vulnerability where the term functions as an othering, dividing tactic and does not illuminate anything about the causes of sexual violence.

By contrast, a feminist perspective on vulnerability in the context of sexual violence is one that incorporates the detailed insights of both structural and ontological accounts and I carry these forward in the final section of the chapter. These include the structural insight that vulnerability to sexual violence is a consequence of gendered power relations. Power is not simply binary on this account and 'power-over' does not signify the inability to act or self-determine. To the contrary, as intersectional anti-violence feminists have explored, naming power-over, relations of domination or declaring oneself a victim is an assertion of agency and part of the process of resistance. This critique needs to be held in tandem with the ontological insight regarding the impossibility and corresponding detrimental effects for others of the pursuit of invulnerability. As soon as resistance to domination takes the form of a protectionist pursuit of invulnerability, a feminist politics is compromised as privilege is sought. The chapter ends by examining how combining both the structural and ontological perspectives facilitates an assessment between vulnerability discourses, and ultimately can counter the scapegoating logic of instrumental and divisive deployments of these. This two-dimensional theory of vulnerability also informs a feminist politics of sexual violence that addresses the concerns levelled by critiques of identity politics, which motivated a resignification of vulnerability in the first place.

The chapter begins by exploring the characteristics that make for a mobilisation of vulnerability to be feminist or anti-feminist. It argues that feminism which tends towards a protectionist identity politics, where protection for the relatively privileged is sought at the expense of women and marginalised others, is generally anti-feminist. It then turns to the first example of an anti-feminist sexual violence narrative, where the figure of the white woman as vulnerable victim is appealed to in order to license either imperialist white saviour missions or protectionist anti-immigration policies. I argue that in each of these instances there is a denial of ontological vulnerability, and moreover, that such a denial is in itself reflective of privilege. However, appealing to ontological vulnerability alone is not sufficient to counter reactionary sexual violence discourses. The second example, trans-exclusionary radical feminism, exemplifies how the misrepresentation of gender as a structure can be mobilised to intensify the vulnerability of transgender subjects. The relationship between sexual vulnerability

and gender as a power structure is also crucial – and I recall Dworkin's arguments in making this point. The chapter ends by arguing that if a reason for vulnerability theorists' near omission of sexual violence is a concern with engaging with a discourse that equates women with victimhood, in the contemporary political climate,[111] where woundedness itself is valuable political currency (Phipps 2019b), such an association needs to be met head-on.

5.2 Feminism and anti-feminism in vulnerability discourses

What does it mean for a deployment of vulnerability to be feminist? Indeed, the terms 'reactionary', 'anti-feminist' and 'progressive' are normative categories and as such an analysis that invokes them runs the risk of tautologically affirming that which it already seeks to prove. I propose the following minimum intersectional criteria for a deployment of vulnerability to count as progressive and feminist: i) power relations rather than the cultural or social identities of the actors involved are appealed to, and ii) it refuses the privileged position of valuing protection for some over protection for all. This is to say that it is neither essentialising nor exclusionary.

To elaborate on each of these intersectional requirements, identifying power relations precludes individualised, pathologised explanations for sexual violence that function to obscure what Nicola Gavey refers to as 'the cultural scaffolding for rape' (2005: 2) in their exceptionalising of the incident. Focusing on power relations also refuses the logic of 'cultural deficit' (Razack 2004: 131) explanations for sexual violence, where if the actor is from a minority culture, then culture rather than gender is put forward as an explanation. Given that intersectionality insists on a 'consideration of gender, race, and other axes of power' (Cho et al. 2013: 787), responding to sexual violence intersectionally necessitates illuminating and interrogating such interlocking vectors of oppression. Second, refusing the protection of some over the protection of all means that to oppose sexual violence and an unequal distribution of vulnerability entails opposing all the institutions which foster and enable it, attending to all vulnerabilities equally. Oliviero (2018: 239; italics in original) articulates how a discourse which presents vulnerability as a zero-sum game, and

[111] I am referring here to the UK and the United States.

> mistakes the *effects* of structural inequalities (e.g. increasing irregular migration, family fragmentation and abortion) for their *source*, sidestepping how more diffuse, structural forces such as transnational capitalism and gender inflected socioeconomic disparities create these phenomena.

In the context of sexual violence, this means a focus on workplace sexual violence and harassment needs to be articulated in tandem with a focus on sexual violence in police custody (Ritchie 2017), in prisons (VanNatta 2010) and among sex workers (Miller & Schwartz 1995; Kurtz et al. 2004; Monto 2004). The alternative is what I will refer to as a 'protectionist politics of protection' or 'protectionist identity politics', whereby minimising violence against some is pursued, even if this means the displacement of violence onto others.

5.3 Reactionary mobilisations #1: racialising vulnerability

The first example of the mobilisation of vulnerability by anti-feminist politics is in racialised sexual violence narratives. In these discourses, vulnerability is tied not only to femininity but to whiteness and its associated logic of protection is appealed to in order to construct nonwhite men as sexual threats. There are two variations of this: In the first, the 'white-woman-as-victim', the body in need of protection is the white woman and the racialised threat is a threat to the nation and its accompanying sexual norms. In the second version, the 'white-saviour narrative', the Muslim woman is constructed as a victim whose vulnerability is a precondition for colonial intervention. Whilst the two might appear distinct insofar as the ethnicity of the vulnerable body in each varies, they both appeal to the same logic of oppositional vulnerability in order to depict racialised masculinities as a sexual threat and the racial other as a sexual other. However, whilst the white-woman-as-victim is presented as a complex victim, whose subjectivity is deserving of attention, the Muslim-woman-as-victim is emptied of interiority and the structural conditions of her vulnerability are ignored.

5.3.1 White woman as victim

The white-woman-as-victim is an enduring trope of sexual violence discourses that seek to depict men of colour with uncontrollable, dangerous sexualities in order to legitimise their dehumanisation and mistreatment. Jennifer Henderson highlights how 'images of white female vulnerability set against the sexual aggression of male subalterns were deeply implicated in the legitimation of colonial authority' (Henderson 2003: 103; see also Midgley 1998: 129). Moreover, the invocation of a feminised subject in need of protection gives such colonial discourses affective and rhetorical legitimacy. Jenny Sharpe discusses how in India and Jamaica colonial governments deployed a 'discourse of rape' (1993: 68) that utilised the figure of the vulnerable white woman as a guarantee of the moral value of colonialism. In both instances, white women are presented as vulnerable and in need of protection by white men, from brown men who are essentialised as sexually aggressive.

The indexing of vulnerability as whiteness not only serves to construct the non-white male as sexually aggressive, it constructs the non-white female as relatively invulnerable too. Vron Ware writes that 'this particular couplet figuring the vulnerable white woman and her fantasy of the aggressive black man' enables 'particular ideas about white and black femininity to work against each other in relation to black and white masculinity to legitimate different types of power and which affect everyone' (2015: 4). The dichotomy of white-woman-as-victim, non-white-male-as-aggressor gives rise to the 'the invulnerable body of colour'[112] (Mara Lee Gerdén 2018: 163) who can withstand hardship. Maria Lugones (2007: 203) outlines such a rationality:

> The characterization of white European women as fragile and sexually passive opposed them to nonwhite, colonised women, including female slaves, who were characterised along a gamut of sexual aggression and perversion, and as strong enough to do any sort of labor.

Such discourses, in which sexual vulnerability is posited as the property of white women, have the performative effect of legitimising the mistreatment of racialised bodies. Moreover, whilst they were central to colonial authority, such an idea of 'white

[112] DiAngelo's notion of 'white fragility' (2011) has given rise to a productive discussion about the way in which whiteness itself instrumentalises vulnerability in various contexts (see Appelbaum 2017; Kanjere 2018; Ylva Habel in Koivunen et al. 2018: 85; Phipps 2019).

femininity as precious, emotionally fragile, and at risk of abuse' (Gondouin et al. 2018: 128) remains present and continues to manifest itself in the idea of the 'strong black woman' who is able to withstand both racism and male violence (Richie 1985; Collins 1990), no matter how structurally vulnerable she is. The indexing of vulnerability as whiteness thus functions to render visible victimisation and woundedness in white women and results in stereotypes that do not grant women of colour pain or weakness.

5.3.2 White-saviour discourses

A variation on the discourse of threatening racialised masculinity is the white saviour narrative. In this version, it is the vulnerability of women of colour that is foregrounded as in need of protection by white men. Gayatri Spivak pithily described the sexual politics at work in the relationship between coloniser and colonised as: 'White men are saving the brown women from brown men' (1988: 993). The feminised body of colour is granted symbolic suffering[113] in accordance with an appeal to protection, which more regularly obscures the structural and historical conditions for vulnerability and violence in the first place (Enloe 1989). Historical examples include the selective concern about the veiling of Egyptian women, with no accompanying support to women's education (Abu-Lughod 2013). Similarly, Mikki Kendall recalls the 19th-century colonial construct of the "'degraded" black woman in need of salvation' (2015: xiii). The moral value of vulnerability constructs 'a deserving victim in need of rescue – a rescue narrative caught up in the logic of Western imperialism parading under the cloak of international humanitarianism' (Hesford & Lewis 2016: viii).

More recently, the construction of the imperilled Muslim woman (Razack 2004) who needs protection from dangerous Muslim men has been appealed to in justifications for American-led imperial wars. Sherene Razack writes how 'the Taliban's treatment of Afghan women far overshadowed the historical context in which they gained power, a context in which the United States played an active role while securing its own economic interests in oil' (2004: 130). Thus, in the case of both Afghanistan and Iraq, whilst the interventions were framed in the language of women's liberation, the

[113] This is to say that the suffering of the women of colour in need of protection is not a holistic concern. Rather it is posited to enable a politics of protection that offers little in the form of actual protection for those women.

discourse of vulnerable Muslim woman actually served as a weapon in the war (ibid). These interventions involved the 'manipulation of racialised discourses of male supremacy and female helplessness as justification', reflecting 'a new mobilization of historically embedded colonial practices and rhetorics of male superiority and white supremacy; of female vulnerability, inadequacy, and inferiority; and the subjugation of oppressed masculinities of men of colour' (Riley et al. 2008: 3). As with the white-woman-as-victim discourse, gendered and racialised vulnerability has a long and ongoing history of being weaponised in sexual violence discourses for the purpose of scapegoating men of colour.

5.3.3 Racialised vulnerability and anti-immigration narratives

These associations persist in Western political discourses around violence and protection (Ahmed 2017; Ware 2015). The white-woman-as-victim discourse has assumed particular force in recent anti-immigration narratives, where the body of the woman comes to stand for the values of the nation. Gender roles, and in particular white feminine purity, becomes attached to nationalist ideals and is at risk of contamination by immigrant men. Such a logic was evident in the response to the sexual assaults, theft and violence in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015. The German weekly *Focus* ran a cover depicting a white woman with black handprints all over her body – a stark visualisation of the racial othering of sexual threats.

Figure 6: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Focus* front pages. (Boulila, S. C. & Carri, C 2017)

Similarly, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, one of Germany's largest daily newspapers, with a centre-left political alignment, ran an image of a black hand groping a white body. The simultaneous racialising and gendering of sexual vulnerability and threat demonstrates the way in which modern colonial regimes are 'unfinished business' (Burton 1999), continually reinvested with the paternalistic power to protect white women from sexually and racially-othered men. As Butler et al. note, 'when nations advertise their hyper vulnerability to new immigrants […] the recourse to "vulnerability" in such instances can become the basis for a policy that seeks to exclude or contain women and minorities' (2016: 4). In short, gendered vulnerability is appealed to and the consequence of such a discourse is *increased* vulnerability for women and men of colour.

In the UK, the 'Muslim grooming gang' has emerged as a site for the projection of anxieties about the sexual threat posed by immigration. Claire Alexander charts how 'the Asian Gang' came to signify as 'a reinvented "other" – young, male, working-class or underclass – Increasingly fused with the spectre of religious "fundamentalism"' (2000: xiii) and Tufail (2015: 31) highlights how in recent years this vilification of Asian masculinity has taken a particularly sexualised form:

> Recent high-profile news stories relating to sexual abuse occurring within the towns of Rotherham in South Yorkshire and Rochdale in Greater Manchester have led to a number of significant consequences [….] A prominent feature in the media and political discourse that followed, however, was that these events could be examined through a lens of race and ethnicity.

The Asian gang has become the site of sexual threat, after a case in 2012 where nine men from Rochdale in Manchester were found guilty of sexually exploiting a number of underage girls inciting a 'moral panic over South Asian grooming gangs preying on white girls' (Gill & Harrison 2015). Subsequent high-profile cases involving Asian men and the abuse of young girls have entrenched the idea of the racialised sexual threat, where 'race' is only relevant in cases where the accused is from a minority background (Ashfar & Maynard 1994). In reporting of such cases, the girls are always 'vulnerable' and 'craving attention and love' (Jolly 2019), granting moral legitimacy to the racialised othering of the accused that ensues. Once again, the discourse of white feminine vulnerability readily lends itself to the othering of minority groups. Sexual violence quickly becomes framed as a 'cultural issue' when the perpetrator is from a minority

ethnicity and this discourse is readily aligned with right-wing, anti-immigrant rhetoric. Pre-existing anxieties about race become legitimised through an appeal to the vulnerability of white British girls to predatory Asian men. This reproduces a history of racialised masculinities being framed as threats to the white female body, which comes to stand in for the nation, in keeping with a logic of "sexual exceptionalism" (Puar 2007: 79), where to be a racial other is to be a sexual other.

Anne Bitsch observes a similar logic in Norwegian rape cases, where 'nationality or ethnicity is mentioned as a relevant fact when it involves minority men but not majority men' (2019: 946). Moreover, where minority men are subject to 'stigmatic' shaming by society, majority men are subject to 'reintegrative' shaming. Extrapolating from her findings indicates that whether or not the identity of a perpetrator becomes fixed and essentialised will often be in keeping with racialised stereotypes equating non-whiteness with sexual threat. By contrast, at no point in the revelation of Jimmy Saville's abuse of hundreds of children and women at the height of his fame was whiteness raised as part of the equation. Sexual violence discourses regularly essentialise vulnerability along both gendered and racialised lines in pursuit of a politics which seeks protection for a feminised subject and blame or exclusion for a masculinised other. Whilst feminists need to respond to all instances of sexual violence, scapegoating discourses that present vulnerability as a racialised and gendered property function within a wider 'feminisation of fascism' (Ahmed 2004: 123) function to obscure structures of power, enabling the 'vulnerable body' to be recruited under the guise of feminism but in pursuit of anti-immigrant agendas that promote violence against women.

5.4 Oppositional vulnerability in racialised sexual violence discourses

Racialised appeals to vulnerability depend on an oppositional construction of the condition, essentialising sexual vulnerability as the property of white bodies in order to legitimise the scapegoating of racialised men and the oppression of racialised women. As Davis summarises: 'the mythical rapist implies the mythical whore' (1983: 103).

They are exemplary of what Gilson (forthcoming) articulates as the reactionary and reductively negative discourse of vulnerability:[114]

> These reactive claims invoke vulnerability as part of a binary – vulnerability/invulnerability, weakness/strength, them/us, open/closed, insecure/secure, bad/good – and capitalise on the simplistic negative sense of vulnerability as a rationalization for practices of securitization that harm others.

In short, ontological vulnerability is elided in such a characterisation of the condition as the property of some and not others. The structure of such arguments lends itself toward othering and scapegoating and as such, a feminist politics of sexual violence needs to be able to expose such arguments as misrepresentations of vulnerability. In light of this, when discerning between politically progressive and reactionary deployments of the condition, one can ask, with Gilson, does the appeal to vulnerability imply complexity, as Gilson argues it must, or duality? The former opens up avenues for investigation of power relations, seeking to illuminate them in their multiplicity. By contrast, reactionary mobilisations seek to determine causality in advance, thereby precluding any investigation into the complex conditions of possibility for the production and reproduction of vulnerability. Whilst the former indicates an awareness of ontological vulnerability, the latter essentialises vulnerability. Dualistic accounts of vulnerability are thus closely related to identity-based victim politics and may be deployed in order to blame or other. At the end of the chapter, I highlight the difference between inclusive and protectionist identity politics, arguing that when a two-dimensional theory of vulnerability is foregrounded, identity politics may be the basis for intersectional resistance to sexual violence. However, what is significant at this stage is that for Gilson, it is both the negative valuation and the dualistic configuration of vulnerability that renders it 'easily aligned with racist, xenophobic, and other pernicious beliefs' (forthcoming). 'When vulnerability is construed simplistically as mere susceptibility to harm, a negative condition to eschew, and an asymmetric condition to pertaining to some and not others' (Gilson forthcoming) it is readily weaponised as a political and rhetorical tool.

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[114] Whilst Gilson refers to such formulations as 'reductively negative', because I seek to hold a space for negative yet critical versions of vulnerability, I will refer to such dualist characterisations as 'oppositional vulnerability'

5.4.1 Striving for invulnerability

Oppositional vulnerability discourses not only fragment the condition but in denying its ontological character, they strive for invulnerability. This may involve self-identification with vulnerability despite this not reflecting material reality. Oliviero notes that 'vulnerability often subjectively feels real whether or not it is institutionally prevalent'[115] (2018: 17) and a dislocation of privilege is often experienced as a sense of vulnerability. For example, Michael Lechuga (2017: 325) describes how

> In the United States today, angry, straight White men are mobilizing political affect to magnify the spectacle of threat facing their sexist and heteronormative political values. In many cases, these nativist expressions gender the nation and its citisens as vulnerably feminine to justify violent and masculinist expressions of state power over those who are threatening them.

The sense of threat here may be a genuine experience of vulnerability in the face of change. However, when it is coupled with a denial of ontological vulnerability it can lead to what I term 'protectionist identity politics', where invulnerability is sought at the expense of heightened vulnerability for others. As discussed in relation to Butler, the ability to be able to identify with invulnerability is itself a reflection of privilege. This is what Butler gestured towards when she argued that precarity is a rubric that unites across marginalisation, bringing together 'women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless' (2009: xii-xiii). For none of these groups is the ideal of invulnerability available. Rather, an ontology of vulnerability, far from being abstract, is part of everyday lived reality. However, reactionary mobilisations attempt to deny this, seeking to 'divide and conquer' vulnerability through enhancing their own protection.

[115] The pursuit of invulnerability on this model can be seen to correlate with Sedgwick's reworking of Klein's paranoid-schizoid position, which refers to a constellation of anxieties, defences and internal and external object relations which are present in infancy and continue to a greater or lesser extent into childhood and adulthood (2004, 2006). It is characterised by splitting of both self and object into good and bad and the inability to tolerate anxiety and ambivalence. If corporeal vulnerability is characterised by ambivalence, as Gilson writes, 'an experience born of discomfort with the unfamiliar, the uncontrolled, or the unpredictable' (2014: 127) then it makes sense that the pursuit of invulnerability mirrors the defensiveness of paranoia. For Sedgwick, paranoia is a way of protecting oneself against the unknown, and thus we can extend this to see it is a guard against the uncertainties of vulnerability.

5.4.2 Willful ignorance and epistemologies of oppression

In the instances above, the denial of ontological vulnerability can be understood through the notion of willful ignorance. Indeed, Gilson illuminates how the maintenance of a subjective identification with invulnerability is predicated on willful ignorance on the part of the privileged (2011: 313). Black feminists and critical race theorists have articulated how this happens in the case of whiteness, where a willful ignorance of the vulnerability of the person of colour may be cultivated in order to justify protection of the white body and a lack of support for the 'invulnerable body of colour' (Lee Gerdén 2018: 163). This is an insight that Dworkin also articulates: 'black people are unable to refuse to know, because their chances for survival depend on knowing every incidental sign of white will and white power'[116] (2007: 63). In other words, the epistemic ignorance of the suffering of some – which manifests itself in structural inequality – is only available to those in the 'centre' (see Hooks 1984 & Mills in Sullivan & Tuana 2007). For each of these theorists, a denial of ontological vulnerability involves the cultivation of ignorance in order that a fragile sense of dominance can be pursued (see Hobgood 2000).

These insights can be applied to sexual violence too. Ann Cahill outlines how a similar logic of vulnerability denial is at work in the act of sexual violence. For her, the victim is 'one whose ontologically necessary vulnerability has been exploited by a harmful other' (2009: 26). Carine Mardorossian affirms this insight, noting that sexual violence entails the instrumentalisation of another, and as such 'is based not on the recognition of our vulnerability but on its rejection' (Mardorossian 2014: 131). These analyses echo Dworkin's account of the way in which masculinity disavows and projects its ontological vulnerability onto socially inferior others – for fear that reckoning with it will compromise the quest for ontological dominance. Thus, in the case of sexual violence, male-identified subjects may fashion a willful ignorance of their own vulnerability in order to justify its projection onto others.

Willful ignorance of ontological vulnerability serves the pursuit of violence either through the denial of one's own vulnerability and the naturalisation of the

[116] Dworkin develops this idea through her reading of James Baldwin. Dworkin commends James Baldwin: 'wilful ignorance of the world is the basest sin' (2007: 67). His texts point to the fact that '[m]aintaining racism has required an emotional numbness, a proud and fatal incapacity to feel because that is the cost of purposely maintaining ignorance: one must block out the world around one and one's emotional possibilities' (2007: 72).

vulnerability of others or through claiming vulnerability and denying vulnerability in others. However, both versions depend on the fragmentation of the condition and are different routes to the same goal – the pursuit of invulnerability for a few. Oppositional vulnerability not only denies the shared character of the condition but seeks to overcome it through striving for invulnerability. This is a regular feature of reactionary sexual violence discourses and both obscures power relations and seeks protection for some at the expense of others. Foregrounding ontological vulnerability in such instances is a means by which the divisive logic can be exposed and challenged.

5.5 Reactionary mobilisations #2: the vulnerable cisgender woman

Whilst the fragmentation of vulnerability as elaborated by Gilson functions in the service of reactionary mobilisations, on its own, an appeal to ontological vulnerability does not guarantee progressive politics. In reactionary mobilisations, there is also a denial of the structural maldistribution of vulnerability: 'in the anti-feminist discourse there is very little if any recognition of the political dimensions of vulnerability and the ways it becomes asymmetrically lived, managed, assigned and made palpable for various groups in global and local power structures' (Kyrölä 2018: 45).

Focusing only on the ontological character of vulnerability can, in the process of countering a 'protectionist identity politics' also counter the structural critique of privilege at work in identity-based politics. Katariina Kyrölä, for instance, notes that 'the anti-feminist and white supremacist voices that oppose trigger warnings do not see or recognise walls or structural oppression in the world, but prioritise an equally shared ontological vulnerability and suffering' (Kyrölä in Koivunen et al. 2018: 47). Moreover, ontological vulnerability alone, whilst drawing attention to the fact that everyone is capable of suffering, and that invulnerability is an illusion, does little to explain or address structurally embedded asymmetries that prevail. However, without such an analysis, reactionary mobilisations are able to 'create state protection for more dominant groups' and institutions' precarities by obscuring and intensifying those of marginalised communities' (ibid: 239). The lack of a counter-discourse challenging these mobilisations of gendered vulnerability make it readily available for those seeking to legitimise scapegoating, supremacist politics.

This leads me on to my second example of such a divide and conquer approach to vulnerability, which is the anti-trans rhetoric advanced by cisgender feminists who claim vulnerability for themselves. A dualistic and divisive, reductively negative configuration of vulnerability is at work in these discourses. Trans-exclusionary feminists deploy the evocative and affective character of vulnerability but in ways that obscure the mechanics of gender as a power relation and prioritise protection for cisgender women at the expense of transgender women. Vulnerability is presented in biologically essentialist terms in order to legitimise the othering, exclusion and silencing of trans subjects and in order to displace or deny the structural vulnerability of this group. Whilst the mobilisation of vulnerability can function to deny a range of structural vulnerabilities, in what follows my focus is on gender as a structure, which has been misrepresented in recent sexual violence politics.

5.5.1 Bathroom bills

The so-called 'bathroom debate' refers to 'the right of trans women to use women's public toilets' and is 'at the centre of feminist debate around transgender' (Hines 2019). In the United States, this has been most pronounced due to the passing of so-called 'bathroom bills', which legislate whether sex-segregated public facilities may be accessed by individuals on the basis of the sex they were assigned at birth or the person's gender identity. In May 2016, North Carolina passed its House Bill 2 (popularly referred to as HB2), which legislated against transgender people using bathrooms that corresponded to their gender identity. Those supporting the bill do so on the grounds of safety. The KeepNCSafe (2019) coalition released a public statement which argued:

> Any businesses threatening to not do business in our great state based on dishonest attacks by opponents of women's and girls' privacy and safety are only hurting themselves. Thanks to Governor McCrory and the General Assembly's leadership and immediate action to ensure North Carolinians' privacy and safety receives maximum protection, North Carolina will continue to flourish. It would be a shame for any companies to miss out on that simply because they believe men should be allowed into locked rooms with girls and women.

Here, a dyadic relation of threatening/vulnerable that neatly maps onto the gender binary is evoked in order to support the curtailing of the rights of transgender individuals. This is an example of oppositional vulnerability; some are vulnerable and others are not. Here, the evocation of trans people as the threat served the additional function of distracting from the very real vulnerability to violence and assault faced by these individuals.[117] In the public arena, discussions on transgender rights frequently mutate into discussions around women's safety and an oppositional appeal to cisgender women as a vulnerable group is deployed in order to position trans people as potential perpetrators of violence. This runs in stark contrast to the empirical reality, in which 'the routine murders of transgender people of colour across the United States serve as morbid contemporary evidence of the vulnerability of transgender lives' (Kim 2018: 230). In response to the bill, then-President Barack Obama issued a directive in opposition, intended to protect the rights of transgender people to use the public bathroom of their choice and the Attorney General launched a lawsuit against North Carolina. This however led to a backlash, with many states passing restrictive bathroom bills on their own.

The bathroom is already a place of risk for trans or gender-nonconforming individuals. Jack Halberstam explains that 'in public bathrooms for women, various bathroom users tend to fail to measure up to expectations of femininity and those of us who present in some ambiguous way are routinely questioned and challenge about our presence in the "wrong" bathroom' (1998: 20). Yet these concerns are frequently framed in terms of safety, with a posited ideal cisgender women's vulnerability to attack being deployed more or less explicitly to, in one breath, deny the gender presentation of those using the bathroom but not assigned female at birth and invoke the idea that the normatively intelligible female is at direct risk of attack from 'other' bathroom users. This relation of supposed danger is invoked despite the clear lack of evidence to support it. As Serano highlights, even 'in San Francisco (the U.S. city most likely to have the highest percentage of transwomen per capita), there has never been a single police report of a trans woman harassing another woman in a bathroom' (2007: 242). Feelings of vulnerability, which may or may not be subjectively real, are mobilised in complete absence of any structural analysis of violence and victimisation

[117] In the United States, the federal Victims of Crime Office reports that 50% of transgender people are sexually abused or assaulted at some point in their lives (Armatta 2018: 19).

in order to secure protection from a relatively privileged group.[118] These discourses employ the motif of women as a vulnerable group in order to legitimise displaced anxieties about people's gender presentation. As Sheila Cavanagh explains, 'anxiety about gender variance is keenly felt in public washrooms and often projected onto transfolk […] Those who are ill at ease with transgender and transsexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or intersex people are, ironically, posing questions about their own safety, rights to privacy and access to public washrooms' (2010: 1). Thus, public bathrooms have become the site for debate about the extent to which gender-nonconforming people can move freely in public spaces.

5.5.2 The misrepresentation of gender

The bathroom bills highlight that what mobilisations of oppositional vulnerability in sexual violence discourses miss is not only a recognition of the ontological character of vulnerability but also of gender itself as a structure. Indeed, many trans-exclusionary discourses make use of Dworkin directly. The insight that masculinity is achieved through the performance of dominance, which is a social argument, gets manipulated into a biological argument, where the penis is reified as essentially violent. As Phipps argues, the penis becomes "'stuck" to trans women through an invasive and violent obsession with their surgical status, but also imagined as a separate entity which is itself responsible for sexual violence' (2016: 311). Dworkin's insights about 'the co-constitution of masculinity and violence and the symbolic threat of the phallus' (ibid) are thereby manipulated into 'a biologically essentialist preoccupation with this particular organ (which is always already coded as violence)' (ibid). This narrative overlooks the structural dimensions of gender in two ways: first, by overlooking the disproportionate levels of sexual violence against trans bodies on the basis of their gender presentation (Namaste 2011; Kim 2018); and second, by distorting feminist analyses of gender such as Dworkin's by moving away from an interrogation of the production of masculinity-as-dominance through institutions and ideologies, and toward biologically fixed properties.

Trans-exclusionary mobilisations highlight that to resignify vulnerability along the lines of ambiguity and ambivalence has limitations. It resolves critical engagement

[118] Kae Greenberg (2012) discusses the particular and unique vulnerability of trans women to abusive relationships.

with negative dimensions of vulnerability too quickly in terms of exploitation of ontological vulnerability. As Sara Ahmed (2017: 30) articulates:

> The personal is structural. I learned that you can be hit by a structure; you can be bruised by a structure. An individual man who violates you is given permission: that is a structure. His violence is justified as natural and inevitable: that is a structure. A girl is made responsible for his violence: that is a structure. A judge who talks about what she was wearing: that is a structure. A structure is an arrangement, an order, a building; an assembly.

Focusing on structures in the context of sexual violence means attending to the surface structures of oppression, but also to deep structures and to power relations.[119] Where trans-exclusionary discourses name a surface structure – that men oppress women – they essentialise each of these categories and ignore the contextual specificities and power relations necessary to illuminate the specific vulnerabilities of trans women. These include the specific vulnerabilities that follow from existing in 'legal limbo' due to the barriers to getting legal gender recognition as well as the sexual violence which trans women get subjected to because they are trans or gender non-conforming (Greenberg 2012: 201). This is not to argue that gender is a determining structure. To the contrary, sexual violence exists within intersections of systems of power, experiences are highly unique, and causes aren't discernable in advance (Sokoloff & Dupont 2005). However, the argument that sexual violence is gendered recognises, in line with Dworkin and Butler, that gender and sexuality are fundamentally imbricated power relations (Haynes & DeShong 2017) and to analyse sexual violence, an analysis of gender is necessary. Moreover, it is to argue that both are equally constructed and, as Butler emphasised, identities are fluid such that fixed, essentialist explanations for violence are untenable.

[119] This was an argument I developed in chapter one through the work of Amy Allen (1998).

5.5.3 Investment capital and rhetorical economies of oppression

Alison Phipps (2016: 304) examines the 'investment capital' present in divisive discourses such as trans-exclusionary 'debates'.[120] She highlights how in such discussions:

> Rhetorical use of distressing experiences by the powerful and privileged are mobilised to generate feeling and create political gain. In the process structural dynamics are masked; the privileged are able to capitalise on the personal and deflect critique by marginalised groups whose realities are invisibilised or dismissed, even as they are spoken for.

In trans-exclusionary narratives 'the rape experience, in particular, becomes capital, mobilised by trans-exclusionary feminists alongside a construction of trans women as predatory, dangerous and essentially male' (2016: 311). A dualistic figuration of cisgender women as vulnerable and trans women as either aggressors or undeserving of protection is appealed to with the effect that the material vulnerabilities of trans women are excluded altogether (Greenberg 2012). As Phipps explains, 'the claim to "ownership" of rape victimisation by cisgender women, through the projection of violence on to trans women, further commodifies it and invisibles the experience of trans women who have been subjected to violence and abuse' (2016: 312). Thus, vulnerability is fragmented, invulnerability sought, and in the process, material vulnerabilities are projected onto the bodies of trans women in the name of 'protection'.

As with racialised reactionary mobilisations of vulnerability, this discourse is not new. Janice Raymond's 1980 *The Transsexual Empire* employed exactly the same tactics, as Carol Riddell explains (2006: 157):

> she [Raymond] encourages the deflection of energy and anger which needs to go outwards, against the male system inwards, against a small group of

[120] The criticism of selective, evocative vulnerabilities was levelled at the anti-pornography movement in the 1980s. Their method of 'slide shows' displaying graphic images of sexual violence in pornography was highly contested. (See Bronstein 2011: 273)

> vulnerable women, by labelling them rapists, personifications of male organs and such nonsense.

Sadly, its familiarity highlights its effectiveness. The rhetorical device of positing oppositional vulnerability in order to legitimise mistreatment of whoever gets positioned as a perpetrator is thus one that it is imperative for feminists to challenge. Vulnerability, as an evocative and affective term with moral overtones, is valuable investment capital in discourses that seek to deflect from a structural enquiry into privilege and the sources of systemic vulnerabilities.

Rather than resignify vulnerability as ambivalent and ambiguous then, I propose that, in the context of sexual violence, the asymmetrical character of vulnerability must be foregrounded. This is not an essentialising move; 'vulnerability is not an inherent characteristic of women's bodies, rather, it is an effect that works to secure femininity as a delimitation of movement in the public and over-inhabitance in the private' (Ahmed 2004: 70). However, it is in its status as an effect that it is illuminating with respect to the character of gendered power relations. It is not simply the case that there is a 'shared socio-ontological vulnerability' (Gilson forthcoming), which reactionary discourses seek to fragment, although the insight that the ontological character of vulnerability gets denied by reactionary movements is important. Structural vulnerabilities are revealing not only as denials of a more fundamental vulnerability but for illuminating patterns of power and privilege themselves. Asymmetries of vulnerability, and what Ahmed describes as the 'directedness' (2018: 61) of vulnerability, are epistemically salient in the context of sexual violence for what they reveal about gender as a structure. In short, whilst there is an ontological dimension of vulnerability – which is ambivalent, ambiguous and needs to be reckoned with as such – vulnerability to sexual violence is gendered and the disproportionately high rates of violence against both trans women and trans men is revealing of social anxieties around gender more broadly (Namaste 2011).

Butler and Dworkin both highlight the necessity of an interplay between vulnerability as ontological and vulnerability as differentially distributed. Whilst Dworkin holds ontological vulnerability as a background condition, by not foregrounding it, her insight into the construction of male violence gets deployed via an essentialist reworking in the service of trans-exclusionary, violent narratives. If the categories in question are fixed from the start (ignoring linguistic vulnerability) or if the ontology is

built on opposition and individualism (ignoring corporeal vulnerability), then a structural account will be inadequate at best, reactionary at worst. For instance, if the statement 'women are vulnerable to male violence' indexes categories open to change and is predicated on the contention that this is not a natural or necessarily enduring state of affairs, a progressive feminist politics may follow. One is immediately invited to consider what the conditions of possibility are for this contingent relation to be established, and it is here that one's energies may be directed. By contrast, if these are static categories there is no space for either critique or resistance; violence against women becomes predetermined from the start.

5.6 Two-dimensional vulnerability and victims of sexual violence

This chapter has illustrated both the risks of appealing to vulnerability in the context of sexual violence and also what needs to be countered in already existing assertions of gendered and sexual vulnerability. Sexual violence discourses frequently mobilise the affective currency of vulnerability to ground divisive victim-perpetrator narratives. This is evident in racialised sexual violence discourses as well as trans-exclusionary narratives, where men of colour and trans women are essentialised as sexual threats and unintelligible as victims. In both of these instances, oppositional vulnerability underscored a victim-perpetrator narrative readily mobilised by reactionary discourses seeking to scapegoat and blame.

5.6.1 Oppositional vulnerability and victim-perpetrator narratives

Whilst white women have a privileged position in relation to victim/perpetrator discourses, it is certainly not the case that white women's vulnerability or victimisation is always recognised. Sharon Lamb discusses how institutions and dominant discourses around sexual violence tend to be underscored by the image of a 'culturally approved victim' (1999: 117). This victim is a cisgendered woman and is not only white, but 'innocent, young, thin, attractive, and from the middle class. She will cry and show humiliation in having to describe sex acts. She will never be angry or bitter' (ibid). She is instead 'pure, innocent, blameless and free of problems (before the abuse)' (ibid: 108). Such an 'authentic victim' (Randall 2010) is expected to suffer long-lasting trauma (Lamb 1999: 113) and to be rendered helpless (ibid: 116). In the courtroom, extensive 'appearance work' (Konradi 1996) and 'emotional labour'

(Hochschild 1988) will go into the performance of victim as vulnerable, necessary for a victim to be legible as such. Should the victim appear too resilient they will be less likely to be believed (Lamb 1999: 116). This happened in the UK when cricketer Mustafa Bashir was spared jail after beating his wife Fakhara Karim with a cricket bat and forcing her to drink bleach. Judge Richard Mansell, the sentencing judge, was not convinced that Bashir's victim was particularly vulnerable as she was plainly intelligent, having graduated from university and having a network of friends (Bulman 2017). A believable victim is vulnerable, and this is demonstrated through a delicate combination of identity-based, appearance-based and behaviour-based norms.

The construct of the ideal victim thus works to disqualify the experiences of particular victim-survivors.[121] Oppositional vulnerability is heavily in play in the ideal victim discourse: 'The victim is pure, innocent, helpless and sometimes heroic. The perpetrator is monstrous and all-powerful. These images are dichotomised; they are never integrated' (Lamb 1999: 118). Victim-perpetrator narratives deploy feminist principles yet essentialise and idealise both of these terms, evoking a mutual opposition that renders them politically compromised. This results in widespread, intersectional barriers to women's testimony being believed (Larcombe 2002), 'inconvenient addictions and less-than-reputable lifestyles tend to cut against the image of the undeserving victim who is the typical social justice martyr' (Williamson 2018). Dworkin's argument was that few women will be believed in cases of sexual harassment and assault: 'The essence of rape, then, is in the conviction that no woman, however clearly degraded by what she does, is a victim' (1989: 138), and the widespread disbelief that accrues to women's testimony (Serisier 2015) supports this.[122] There is a tension then between claiming victimisation in order to register

[121] Older women and women who are not conventionally attractive often have a harder time getting accepted for their accounts. Then again, women who are considered 'too sexy' and women who are prostituted are either not believed about rape or held responsible for it. Women from oppressed races who have been raped by white men are much less likely to be believed than white women reporting rapes by men of oppressed races. Lesbian survivors may be believed, but their rapes are more often discounted as less important (and may be seen as therapeutic). Survivors of multiple incidents of sexual violence are not believed. Survivors of especially heinous ritualised sexual abuse are (Alcoff & Gray 1993: 266-267).

[122] Due to the difficulty in many cases of externally verifying rape; in such cases where clear evidence doesn't exist, the jury will have to make a judgement between what is 'consensual sex' and what is 'rape' (Brookes 2008: 417). The idea that women lie about rape and that a false prosecution could destroy an innocent man's career combine to make a judgement that rape has in fact taken place seem to be a risky one. Moreover, addressing the 'grey areas' between consent and coercion may be something that jurors wishing to preserve their own sense of control over the sexual history may wish to avoid.

injustice and articulating an essentialist and exclusionary victim-perpetrator politics that is readily instrumentalised and promotes violence against women.

For Dworkin, emphasising victimisation was a necessary part of resistance. She was operating in the manner of 'second-wave feminists [who] proclaimed women's status as victims of patriarchal oppression in order to bring about social change'[123] (Mardorossian 2014: 39). For her, women's sexual victimisation is inseparable from dominant gender ideals and as such, is unrecognised as injustice. Where Butler argued that the ontology of gender is the naturalised effect of a performative order, Dworkin's argument went further argument that sexual violence is the naturalised yet performative effect of our dominant gender ontology. Dworkin argued that gender norms effectively construct women as vulnerable so that their structural vulnerabilities and violence against them is downplayed as 'business as usual'. An emphasis on making vulnerabilities visible is an inclusive move that highlights power relations in their plurality. For example, a sexual violence politics that does not illuminate sexual violence against sex workers will be neither intersectional nor illuminating: given that between 50-100 per cent of street sex workers experience physical, sexual and economic violence in their job (Sanders 2007). However, calling for decriminalisation,[124] Dworkin writes that 'violence against prostitutes, regardless of its ferocity, is nothing less than an acceptable fact of life' (1989: 83). The invisibility of naturalised victims necessitates a strong structural critique in order to elucidate who is vulnerable and to what precisely such a vulnerability consists. Such a structural critique is present in the Black Lives Matter movement, which claims victimhood in order to resist 'power over'. Here 'it is precisely that inequality, that asymmetry of power, which serves as a starting point' for engagement in politics (Cole 2016: 273). Thus, naming gender as a power structure, rather than entrenching women as victims, provides a way in which the dynamics that contribute to disproportionately high levels of violence against women and trans people can be addressed.

[123] Patricia Hill Collins' contention that 'long excluded from positions of power to define what counts as violence, African-American women have been particularly vulnerable as targets of sexual harassment, assault, domestic abuse and rape, while having such victimization largely erased from view' is pertinent here as well (Hill Collins 1998: 926).

[124] Dworkin is critical of the institution of selling sex as reflective of women's subordinate social status and she regards it as part of the system of male-supremacy that promotes the male ownership of women's bodies. However, she is clear that selling sex should be decriminalised (1988: 133).

5.6.2 Ontological vulnerability and vanishing victims

However, in recent years an account of victimisation and feminist politics of resistance have become heavily opposed. Rebecca Stringer writes that since the 1980s, across a wide array of discourses in media, academia, official politics and movement politics, there has been a concerted move away from the language of victimhood, prompted by the emergence of a surprisingly widely shared critique of the very notion of 'victim' (2014: 2). In feminism, it is the association of vulnerability with victimhood (Cole 2016; Gilson 2016) that has led vulnerability to become 'vexed' in the context of sexual violence (Murphy 2011), and much of the recent theorising on sexual violence has sought to deconstruct women's status as victims, heeding Wendy Brown's influential cautionary remarks that to focus on women's victimisation will fix women's identity as 'wounded', creating a class of 'dependent subjects' unable to act for themselves and thus reliant on and defined by paternalistic protection (1995; see also Grosz 2000). For Alison Phipps, in response to this, 'recent approaches to sexual violence, in particular, have tended to emphasise women's resistance and agency, with victimhood seen as an unhelpful second-wave relic' (2014: 36). Victim politics was argued to ensue from the sex-negative critique of sexuality as being an arena where women were vulnerable. Adopting Foucauldian insights regarding the productive capacity of power and discourse meant that 'making injustices visible may result in reinforcing gendered assumptions about vulnerability as non-agency' (Koivunen et al. 2018: 5), thereby entrenching women's subordination to paternalistic power structures. And, as chapter two outlined, the anti-pornography ordinance was a codification of such a negative, victimising portrayal of women's relationship to sexuality. The Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce (FACT), for instance, decried its 'stereotype of women as powerless victims unable to act affirmatively to protect themselves' (Hunter & Duggan 2005: 275).

This has permeated into vulnerability discourses by way of the emphasis on the ontological dimensions of vulnerability and the elision of the structural aspects. Ontological vulnerability affirms women's agency, allowing for resistance to be reincorporated into discussions of vulnerability. For Butler, this counters the risk that follows from a 'wounded identity politics' and dismantles the presumed opposition between vulnerability and agency in light of the 'important criticism' that 'emerges from those who argue that vulnerability cannot be the basis for group identification without strengthening paternalistic power' (Butler et al. 2016: 25). Against structural

perspectives on vulnerability that emphasise the restrictive aspects of social locations, 'the pro-sex argument that the production of sexuality within power relations does not preclude agency for women, but in fact can enable it, has become the theoretical foundation for 1990s discourses like Butler's' (Glick 2000), where sexual practices can function as resistance. Emphasising sexual agency against gendered analyses of vulnerability as a more effective sexual politics was affirmed by poststructuralist approaches to sexual violence, which prioritise its discursive constitution (Marcus 1992). In this way, ideas of what vulnerability signifies in the domain of sexuality have been rethought, away from an over-association with 'danger', sexual harassment and sexual victimisation, towards an emphasis on the enabling aspects of vulnerability in this context (Dahl 2017; Gilson 2016).

I argued in chapter two that the move away from critical perspectives on women's relationships to sexuality was grounded in the need to reassert women's sexual agency and subjectivities in the face of an over-association with women's victimisation following the sex wars. However, that move inadvertently ceded the ground of sexual politics to queer theory, leaving little space for feminists to theorise sexual violence alongside a sex-positive engagement with sexuality. I end this chapter by arguing that the slippage between negative vulnerability and reductively negative vulnerability that Gilson makes is present too in the move away from victim-based identity politics, which took place in the aftermath of the sex wars (Cole 2016). This has had the unintended effect of handing identity politics to those who deny ontological vulnerability, seeking to securing privilege for a few. I will propose that sexual violence theory and activism begins with vulnerability and victimisation as the basis for a wide-reaching politics of protection.

5.6.3 Structural vulnerability and revisiting victims

Understanding vulnerability can enable an assessment between protectionist identity politics, which seek invulnerability for some, and an inclusive identity politics that opposes violence more generally. Two characteristics of anti-feminist sexual violence discourses are that they fragment vulnerability – attributing it to some and not others – and that they strive for invulnerability (Gilson forthcoming). This amounts to a deployment of oppositional vulnerability for protectionist purposes. When vulnerability is claimed for oneself, alongside willful ignorance toward the ontological vulnerability of others, this leads to protection for one group at the expense of

another. In the examples of racialised sexual violence discourses and trans-exclusionary feminism, it is the denial of ontological vulnerability that permits the erasure of the structural and systemic vulnerability of and violence towards trans women and immigrant men.

Beginning with victims in the plural is a non-protectionist move that appeals to the logic of corporeal vulnerability, that one's experience of suffering may provide the basis for a shared resistance. For Butler, recognition of the corporeal vulnerability of the other was one way of expanding the domain of livable lives. Extending this logic into the politics of sexual violence entails recognising the sexual vulnerability and victimhood of the other and acknowledging that protection against the injury that one has suffered does not amount to either justice or resistance. Whilst identifying the causes of sexual victimisation is not always straightforward, enquiring as to the institutional and political dynamics which make violence possible is integral. This entails foregrounding asymmetrical vulnerabilities and seeking to make links between various instances of sexual abuse. Oliviero praises the way that the #SayHerName campaign, which seeks to challenge the media's lack of focus on violence against black women, does this. It departs from the experiences of vulnerability in order to analyse 'the connections between violence toward black men, women, transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals' (2018: 267). Rather than respond to the experience of violence with reactionary responses such as blame or protection, the movement 'highlights the connections between gender inequalities, violence police surveillance, economic intrusions, among other forces that perpetuate unevenly shared, intersectional vulnerabilities' (ibid). This is, in fact, reflective of the early women's movement which departed from such a coalitional focus. The women's movement was responding to the inability of male activists to recognise the ontological vulnerability of women by organising in groups that emphasised women's victimisation (Russo 2018).

5.6.4 Foregrounding vulnerability in sexual violence politics

It is my argument that feminist sexual violence politics needs to counter reactionary deployments of vulnerability and that doing this entails foregrounding both ontological and structural vulnerability. Such a framework not only counters the instrumentalisation of gendered vulnerability narratives but enables an understanding of both the causes and possible responses to sexual violence. Foregrounding

ontological vulnerability means recognising the vulnerability of all, rather than pursuing defensive protectionist politics. Beginning with the most vulnerable as a way of ensuring that willful ignorance is countered. This is an argument that women of colour and trans activists (Spade 2015) have long held. The Combahee River Collective (1986), for instance, argued that 'if Black women were free it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression'. As Horak notes, such a 'political attention to vulnerability (e.g. to the structures that produce it, the people who are most impacted by it, what it feels like, and how people survive in the face of it) builds on a queer and transnational women of color feminist tradition' (2018: 97) and this is one that is central to a feminist politics that seeks to address the injustice of gendered sexual vulnerability.

For Dworkin (1974: 23-24), starting with the most vulnerable can be done through an appeal to 'primary emergency':

> all women are not necessarily in a state of primary emergency as women. What I mean by this is simple. As a Jew, in Nazi Germany, I would be oppressed as a woman, but hunted, slaughtered as a Jew. As a Native American, I would be oppressed as a squaw, but hunted, slaughtered, as a Native American. That first identity, the one which brings with it as part of its definition death, is the identity of primary emergency.

This allows for contextual factors to be taken into consideration and resists the reification of identity pursued by reactionary sexual violence politics. It highlights that whilst all women have a stake in dismantling male supremacy, they are positioned differently and for some women, it will not be a priority. As quoted in chapter three, Dworkin believes that 'every transsexual, white, black, man, woman, rich, poor, is in a state of primary emergency as a transsexual' (1974: 186), and thus prioritising the structural vulnerability of trans women is a priority.

Foregrounding structural vulnerabilities alongside this means that whilst no-one is reducible to their position within power structures, disproportionate vulnerabilities are intimately related to and illuminating with respect to power inequalities. Enquiring into deep structures of domination and macro-level power relations (Allen 1996) is necessary in order that the institutional and ideological components of vulnerability

are highlighted. This is a point that is strategically elided in trans-exclusionary discourses that shift the focus away from structures to pathology and biology, and racist discourses that shift the focus to culture. Attending to asymmetrical vulnerabilities is a necessary first step towards a politics of sexual violence that begins with the structurally vulnerable rather than one which begins and ends with the aggrieved.

Gendered vulnerability to violence is highly politicised, which makes it important for feminists to engage with. Butler and Dworkin have both highlighted that reckoning with vulnerability is relevant for the way that we respond to violence, and for both, the point of such an analysis is to underscore the possibility for change, for a different gendered reality with less violence. Whilst their prescriptions differ, they both write to envisage and shape a less violent social world. Vulnerability is both gendered and sexualised and women and feminine presenting subjects are disproportionately victims of such violence. In short, women are both culturally coded as and materially rendered, sexually vulnerable. Academic engagement with vulnerability needs to be accountable to the material realities of women's lives. What it means to reckon with sexual violence then, is to take seriously the politics of vulnerability that underscores it. In asking 'whose wounds constitute politics' (Phipps 2019) – or whose vulnerability is attended to – I have demonstrated that a two-dimensional theory of vulnerability provides a necessary framework by which to respond.

5.7 Conclusion

Returning to the etymology of vulnerability – to wound – is a useful starting place in light of 'the influence of claims "to woundedness" across the contemporary political spectrum' (Phipps 2019: 6). As Butler demonstrates, there is a politics at work in terms of whose vulnerability and whose wounds may be recognised in the first place, meaning that vulnerability is closely tied up with questions of the social valuation of a life (2009: 1). Sexual violence discourses regularly make use of vulnerability in their reductively negative version in order to circumscribe who is deserving of protection by paternalistic power. Racialised rape narratives and anti-trans bathroom discourses are just two examples of the rhetorical purchase of vulnerability at work in the legitimisation of claims to sexualised victimhood or as a way of sanctioning reductive and divisive narratives of victim and perpetrator. Given the deployment of the category 'woman' and a stated gendered vulnerability in each of these instances,

'feminists need to attend to the ways in which vulnerability can be mobilised as a form of activism, as well as to the ways in which differently positioned bodies can perform resistance through the mobilization of vulnerability and precarity' (Hesford & Lewis 2016: xi). Whilst there are highly varied ways in which structural vulnerabilities are lived, experienced and manifested, beginning with the most vulnerable is necessary in order to counter protectionist identity politics.

Whilst 'reactionary movements attempt to reify vulnerability as an identity, universalizing from narrow feelings of injury' (Oliviero 2018: 250), a feminist politics of vulnerability and sexual violence begins from an ontological understanding of vulnerability. The contention that vulnerability cannot be circumscribed as the property of the few, and that meaningfully addressing the causes of vulnerability means foregrounding the experiences of the most structurally vulnerable, is central.

When underscored by a logic of opposition, vulnerability discourses seek to fix certain identities, precluding possibilities for change. The structure of these arguments makes them readily mobilisable by those seeking to justify an aggressive, defensive politics of injury and blame. However, although dualistic conceptualisations of vulnerability are integral to reactionary mobilisations of the concept, analytically resolving negative instances of vulnerability in terms of exploitation offers little by way of an insight into power relations and the way in which sexual vulnerability is gendered.

Engaging with the negative dimensions of sex for women is crucial in order that these issues do not become weaponised by right-wing and reactionary movements. In addition, women's structural vulnerability to violence, far from being an abstract, academic framework, is a daily reality and one that has proved stubbornly persistent despite feminist activist work to address it (McMillan in Lombard & McMillian 2013: 72). Dworkin's insights regarding the gendering of vulnerability and the way in which heteronormative society materialises gender through sex, resulting in masculinity being pursued through sexual dominance have been crucial for elaborating this understanding. For Dworkin, as long as normative masculinity is constructed as dominance, sexual violence will be endemic. These considerations have led me to argue that rather than simply resignifying and universalising vulnerability, as many feminists rethinking its relation to violence have done, if vulnerability is to be illuminating with respect to sexual violence, its gendered dimension needs to be foregrounded. Reductively negative conceptualisations of vulnerability that fragment

the condition, attributing it to some and not others in order to harness the evocative power of the term for divisive political purposes, are distortions of a structural analysis. The question is not one of foregrounding either the ontological or the structural dimensions of vulnerability – such a binary between the ontological and structural is inadequate for understanding the lived experiences of oppression. Rather, understanding the interplay between experience and structure involves holding both the ontological and structural dimensions of vulnerability in play. A two-dimensional feminist politics of sexual violence facilitates an inclusive identity politics, which, rather than seek to overcome the condition, begins with the most vulnerable in order to seek protection for all[125].

[125] Benita Roth's concept of 'The Vanguard Center' (2004) puts forward the case that black women, by virtue of their position at the centre of overlapping oppressions, were best suited to lead a revolutionary movement as their liberation implied the liberation of all.

Chapter six

Vulnerability, Me Too and feminist sexual violence activisms

What's interesting is that if we woke up tomorrow and 13 million people had a disease – because that's what these people said, "Me too! I've got it, too!" – the whole world would stop. There would be three questions: how did we get there; how do we stop it; and how do we make sure it never happens again? Those three questions haven't been answered in a year. It's so commonplace that most of us don't even think about it.

– Tarana Burke (in Brockes 2018b)

6.1 Introduction: The return of sexual politics

In 1970, the magazine *Time* ran a special issue titled The Politics of Sex, with a painting of Kate Millett's[126] face filling the entire cover. In September 2017, Millett passed away, and obituaries and commentators wrote nostalgically about the gap between the world Millett was writing about and the activism she symbolised, and the present. In *The New York Review of Books,* for example, Judith Shulevitz writes, maybe 'Second Wave feminism now seems so far away that we're hazy about what once made it so thrilling and threatening' (Shulevitz 2017). The idea of a movement of women around sexual politics appeared profoundly anachronistic. One month on and the political climate was different: 'After years of backlash as well as somewhat triumphalist claims about "post-feminism," feminism as a universalizing horizon of justice and possibility seems more alive than ever in recent history' (Lukose 2018: 35). Sexual politics in public consciousness and feminist activism 'seems to have a new lease of life' (ibid). Reflecting on the 'unconscious sexism' of *Time*'s cover story on Millett, Rachel Mead writes that 'it is useful to look at the characterization of feminism – and of *Sexual Politics* – in the popular media, because it is there that unconscious biases and presuppositions of a culture can be found, fossilised' (2016: 366). This chapter will examine the place and potential of vulnerability in sexual violence politics and will thus focus at length on the media representation of the movement, regarding this as mutually constitutive of the contemporary discourse and activism around sexual politics. In such a contention, I follow Phipps, who situates her analysis in 'the

[126] The caption reads: Kate Millett of Women's Lib (see *Time* 1970).

"discursive public's" of contemporary Western feminism, which encompass academic, activist, and public/media discussions' (2017: 307).[127]

Whilst sexual politics has reemerged within the discursive publics of contemporary Western feminism, this thesis has argued that in the aftermath of the sex wars a number of factors coalesced to make theorising the issue fraught (Heberle & Grace 2009; Mardorossian 2002). The emergence of sex-negative feminists such as Dworkin as decisive 'losers', the development of queer theory as a privileged discipline for the study of sexuality and the influence of a Foucauldian notion of power as productive, collectively compromised feminist engagements with 'negative' aspects of sexuality under patriarchy. The notion that women have an ambivalent relation to sexuality on the basis of the widespread character of rape and violence against women was largely dismissed. In the classroom, Dworkin is derided (Walters 2016) and issues associated with sex-negative feminism have 'been relegated to introductory women's studies courses' (Mardorossian 2002: 743). Instead, feminism and sexuality studies are kept largely separate and 'it remains rare (though of course not unknown) for there to be sexuality courses that combine LGBT issues and queer theory and politics with sessions on abortion, romance, sexual freedom, or the sexualization of culture, reproductive technology or tourism' (Hemmings 2016: 85). The affective surround (Duggan 2011) is one of caution at best and avoidance at worst, evident in the vulnerability literature, where sexual violence only emerges, in an ambivalent form, through discussions of the resignification of the concept of victim and the equivocal character of pornography (Gilson 2014, 2016).

The previous chapter highlighted how feminist engagements with sexuality need to reanimate some of the insights of second-wave feminism that have been too quickly dismissed as sex-negative. In particular, the idea that gender is a power structure that renders women and trans people more vulnerable to sexual violence is an insight that I have argued needs to be taken forward in vulnerability studies. I proposed that foregrounding victimisation does not have to entail protectionist identity politics or a denial of women's agency. This chapter will argue that Me Too, as originally formulated by Tarana Burke, is able to incorporate the urgency and 'militant spirit' (Ahmed 2017: 227) of aspects of second-wave political activism, whilst creating a movement intersectional in both analysis and prognosis. Chiefly, Burke's MeToo

[127] 'Discursive publics' is a term Phipps develops from Rentschler & Thrift (2015: 239).

movement is a politics of sexual violence that neither prioritises protection for some over protection for others nor minimises the urgency and severity of sexual violence (Myhill & Allen 2002) and stands in a long tradition of black women's anti-violence activism.

6.1.1 Sexual politics and Me Too

The resurgence of sexual politics has taken the form of 'the #MeToo moment' (Lukose 2018: 35). Whilst MeToo is a phrase that has its origins in women-of-colour grassroots anti-violence organising in the States, in recent years, the explosion of the Me Too movement has made sexual violence a media news story, a workplace issue and a global concern (Hilhorst 2017). In this chapter, I ask what happens to the Me Too movement when we foreground vulnerability in its structural and ontological dimensions? I will begin by exploring the sophisticated politics of vulnerability contained in Burke's formation of the movement. However, I will argue that in its mainstream uptake, insights from both the structural and ontological perspectives have been lost. As such, privilege is insufficiently attended to, with the effect that some of the divisive aspects of reactionary mobilisations are repeated.

From herein, I will use 'Me Too' to refer to Burke's conceptualisation of the movement and '#MeToo' to refer to the popular uptake of the movement in recent years across social media and reported in mainstream media outlets. This reflects the fact that whilst there is overlap between the two, there is also dissonance. Although Burke works with the mainstream movement (Burke 2019) her formulation of the movement is part of on-the-ground, long-term, strategic activist work, for which the hashtag and individual stories are just a small part. Her contention that 'the hashtag is not a movement' (Burke & Polgreen 2019) is not generally reflected in the public conversation around #MeToo, a point that demonstrates the potential for the politics and nuanced underpinnings of the movement to be lost.

In discussing the #MeToo movement, my aim is not to provide a final assessment of the movement. To the contrary, I argue that it indicates elements that are causes for both optimism and caution (see Zarkov & Davis 2018), and that, from the vantage point of the present at least, the value of the movement – which is unfolding as I write – is decidedly indeterminate. In addition, there is no single #MeToo discourse that permits straightforward analysis. The hashtag is appealed to for different reasons in

different contexts. Rather, as I laid the framework for in the last chapter, I will examine #MeToo through the framework of a two-dimensional approach to vulnerability. In focusing in length on Burke's activism, I seek to extend Lorde's insight that clear divisions between activism and academia function to discredit the contributions of women of colour to feminist knowledge. Exploring the contexts through which Dworkin and Butler came to theorise gender demonstrated the interweaving of the personal and activist dimensions of their lives with their theoretical output. And I propose that Burke too is an important feminist thinker who integrates the personal, theoretical and activist dimensions of her life in her articulation of an intersectional approach to vulnerability and sexual violence. Burke situates her activism and thought within the canon of black feminist theory. She discusses the theoretical influences on her: 'My mother had an extensive library, so I was exposed to Alice Walker and Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou at very, very young ages' (2019). In conversation with Steve McQueen, she says, 'I was talking the other day about a book called *All The Women Are White, All The Blacks Are Men, But Some Of Us Are Brave* […] and one of the think it deals with is the erasure not just from the movement but in general, of black women, for whom there's a choice: do I choose to be black first or do I choose to be a woman?' (Brockes 2018b). She is also beginning to be received as a key figure in 'black women's long and ongoing history of antiviolence activism' (Roach 2020: 516), alongside pivotal figures including Harriet Jacobs, Recy Taylor and Anita Hill. Taking seriously the insights of black feminism entails foregrounding activism as a source of feminist knowledge.

6.1.2 Chapter outline

The chapter is structured as follows. It begins by introducing Tarana Burke's activism and her rationale for the Me Too movement. I will argue that the rationale reflects aspects of corporeal vulnerability, in as far as the experience of violence becomes an occasion for reflection on the shared character of vulnerability. I will discuss the insights that follow from Burke's prioritisation of survivors, which are: first, the identity category of survivor as appealed to by Burke is open-ended and inclusive, thereby avoiding linguistic essentialism and the problems of protectionism that can follow when identities are reified, which is relevant for naming and identifying experiences of sexual violence; and second, prioritising survivors resists a focus on perpetrators and prosecution, which ultimately individualises and regularly intensifies structural vulnerabilities through its recourse to a discriminatory justice system. The

first half ends by reading Burke through Dworkin, a dialogue that illuminates previously overlooked intersectional aspects of Dworkin's sexual violence politics. Dworkin sees prison as producing gendered vulnerability in the same way as she argued that pornography does. Taken together, Burke and Dworkin's politics reflects the necessity of responding to sexual violence intersectionally and the compromised position of the criminal justice system in such a project.

The second part of the chapter then discusses the mainstream media version of #MeToo, illustrating the way in which the intersectional and inclusive dimensions of Burke's dual approach to vulnerability are sidelined in a discourse that frequently rests on an oppositional understanding of vulnerability. I argue that the media framing of the movement regularly sexualises victims or vilifies perpetrators, thereby reaffirming the very same power dynamics upon which male-dominance depends. The media does not have the monopoly on the narrative; one of the most promising aspects of the global #MeToo movement is the way in which the hashtag can – in theory at least – be used by anyone, anywhere. Nonetheless, the media's contribution to the discursive public on sexual politics has masked the militancy of Burke's activism. The chapter ends by returning to the question of sexual politics and asking, half a century after the women's movement politicised sex, what does it mean to do sexual politics today?

6.2 Tarana Burke's Me Too movement: A movement of survivors

Tarana Burke founded the Me Too movement in 2006. As Sarah Jaffe (2018: 82) points out,

> like so many movements that appear spontaneous, the #MeToo movement is built on the work of long-time organisers. Tarana Burke has worked for decades with young women of colour who survived sexual violence, and in 2006 she named her campaign "me too" as an expression of solidarity.

The title of the movement came about after Burke's experience of a young girl disclosing her experience of sexual violence and Burke, herself a survivor, unable to say anything in that moment in response (Garcia 2017). Burke recollects: 'She had brought up all the stuff that I was not dealing with […] And the nagging thing in my brain was, this happened to me too' (Burke 2019). A decade later, having established

Girls for Gender Equity and Just Be Inc., a community-based non-profit organisation based in Alabama that describes itself as 'focused on the health, well-being and wholeness of brown girls everywhere!' (Justbeinc 2019), Burke found 'we were encountering numbers of girls who were disclosing sexual violence. They were disclosing their experiences. And sometimes they didn't know that it was sexual violence' (Snyder & Lopez 2017). So, she made a Myspace page to support survivors in the program, with the dual purpose of helping black and brown girls in the process of healing 'as well as helping people to understand what community action looks like in the fight to end sexual violence' (ibid). Burke named the accompanying movement for victims of sexual harassment 'Me Too'.

6.2.1 Corporeal vulnerability in a movement of survivors

Burke's experience of being confided in for the first time embodies Gilson's insights regarding the ambiguity of the experience of vulnerability. As Burke recalls, 'I will never forget the look' on the girl's face, 'the shock of [the girl] being rejected [by Burke] the pain of opening a wound only to have it abruptly forced closed again - it was all on her face' (Rodino-Colocino 2018: 97). At the time, Burke recalls that she 'could not muster the energy to tell her that I understood, that I connected, that I could feel her pain… I watched her put her mask back on and go back into the world like she was all alone and I couldn't even bring myself to whisper… me too' (ibid). In this interaction, the girl, by disclosing her experience, is making herself vulnerable. As Cahill writes, 'the vulnerability of the moment of disclosure[128] endows it with both promise and risk' (2019 forthcoming). The promise is that one will be believed and that something might be done. It points toward an enabling vulnerability, illuminating what Butler et al. articulate in terms of 'resistance as drawing from vulnerability as a resource of vulnerability, or as part of the very meaning or action of resistance itself?' (2016: 1). The risk, on the other hand, is 'the potential for the original trauma to be compounded if a narrative is disbelieved or rejected' (Serisier 2015: 70).[129] If disclosure is met with disbelief, then the experience of vulnerability is likely to lead to defensive protection mechanisms on the part of the confider. A vulnerability, which had the potential to be experienced as shared, becomes internalised in a fractured

[128] Defined by Cahill as the moment when a survivor of sexual harassment or assault shares their experience with another person (2019 forthcoming).

129 Serisier (2018) explores Dworkin's publication of her account of being raped in a Paris hotel room a year earlier as such an example of the disbelief that accrues to rape disclosures.

form. There are elements of corporeal vulnerability in the fact that saying 'me too' has the potential to bring to the fore an otherwise disavowed or individualised vulnerability. 'The words me too are so simple, but the underpinning of it is that I agree with you. I am with you. I understand you, and I'm connected to you' (Burke 2019). In such an experience of being 'undone' there is the capacity to realise oneself as 'something other than "autonomous"', bringing to the fore 'the fundamental sociality of embodied life' (Burke 2004a: 27-28) and contesting the ontology of individualism upon which aspirations to invulnerability depend. Sharing vulnerability through the words 'me too' thus provides a form of corporeal connectedness which names injustice without seeking sovereign protection.

Burke repeatedly makes clear that the Me Too movement is a movement of survivors (Greenfield 2018). There is a presumption of sharedness in the words 'me too' that enables those disclosing to be simultaneously 'handing oneself over to the multitude and the heterogeneous' (Lee & Webster 2018: 250). In stressing experiences in common, it contests the narrative in which victimisation is necessarily a shameful, individualised and isolating experience. Burke explains that Me Too 'became the way to succinctly and powerfully connect with other people and give permission to start their journey to heal' (Murray 2017).

6.2.2 Resisting linguistic essentialism through the category of survivor

In the last chapter, I argued that there is a place for a politics that names victimisation in order to reveal the 'directedness' (Ahmed 2018) of sexual violence. Whilst victim-perpetrator narratives underscored by oppositional vulnerability essentialise each of these categories, an appeal to 'victims' can be made in a way that is illuminating with respect to the 'directedness' of sexual violence and inclusive. In other words, the resistance to evoking vulnerability in the context of sexual violence that follows from caution around evoking women as victims is misplaced. A politics of victimisation is not necessarily essentialist or paternalistic. Tarana Burke's use of the term 'survivor' exemplifies its potential to function as an identity that people can claim as part of the process of healing and resistance. 'Survivor' here is thus congruous with a politics that addresses sexual victimisation, 'a more general phrase that can encompass the range of acts that comprise sexual violence, assault, and abuse' (Gilson 2016b: 73 n.1). It is an inclusive category that reflects linguistic vulnerability in its lack of fixed referent and contains space for a diversity of experiences to register.

Not essentialising the gendered dimension of sexual violence is not to detach the issue from a discussion of gender as a power structure. To the contrary, as Dworkin's work evidenced, refusing the notion that men are biologically perpetrators enables one to draw attention to the structure in which victimisation happens along gendered lines. As Ann Russo argues, holding 'a belief in the inherent humanity of all people […] no one is born a rapist, sexual harasser, racist, or transphobe, and that no one is inherently a victim' is to 'make visible the multiple systems of oppression and privilege that create power lines within and throughout our relationships' (Russo 2018: 98). By contrast, naturalising women's status as victims is to reproduce the same power structure which produces them as victims. This is not a Foucauldian argument regarding the productive dimensions of power. Rather, the point is that it is because victimhood and vulnerability are associated with femininity that they get disavowed by men in the performance and pursuit of masculinity-as-dominance. Resisting the patriarchal structure that inscribes masculinity as dominance then requires challenging the idea that men cannot be victims. As Dworkin argues 'one must turn this around: men must be made aware of their fragility and vulnerability – or is that what creates male aggression, precisely that awareness, never spoken?' (2000: 337). Burke's open-ended focus on survivors notes that to move beyond the gendered production of victims, the gendered construction of victimhood also needs to be addressed.

For Burke, the patriarchal repudiation of masculine vulnerability and male victimisation needs to be addressed. This is an insight present in Dworkin, for whom men are victims of other men in accordance 'to their devalued position in an exclusively male hierarchy' (1989: 59), meaning that the young, poor and black are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse. This, she continues, explains 'the indifference of society at large to the sexual abuse of men in prisons', which 'is directly attributable to the fact that prisons are populated by the poor and by blacks' (ibid: 60). The vulnerability of the socially disposable goes unremarked. Given the heterosexist association of sexual victimisation with women, Dworkin argues that 'no one really knows the extent of male sexual abuse of other males. Largely in response to the prejudice against male homosexuals that is endemic in the United States and the discriminatory attribution of sexual crimes to homosexual men, the reality of such abuse is often denied even by those who have experienced it' (ibid: 60). Responding to sexual violence without acknowledging the existence of male victimisation is thus to partake in the oppositional logic that denies male vulnerability – inadvertently reaffirming the very gendered mechanism one seeks to address. For Burke (2019),

there is no discord between treating sexual violence as a product of patriarchy and responding with the recognition that men are also victims.

> The work of Me Too builds on the existing efforts to dismantle systems of oppression that allow sexual violence, patriarchy, racism and sexism to persist. We know that this approach will make our society better for everyone, not just survivors.

As such, her work refuses the reductively negative characterisation that underscores oppositional victim/perpetrator narratives and the linguistic essentialism that these contain.

6.3 Intersectional activism and the problem of prisons

By foregrounding survivors, Burke's Me Too movement yields intersectional insights regarding how to respond to violence. It deflects a focus away from perpetrators and prosecution and thus resists an overreliance on the criminal justice system (Richie 2000, Coker 2005).[130] Black women have to negotiate the judicial system- which disproportionately incarcerates black men and women. And 'the continued notion of Black women as "Jezebel-ish people," stemming from antebellum notions of Black women as promiscuous and therefore justified targets of sexual violence' (Victoria Law 2018) positions black women precariously in relation to being believed as well as to whether the state will serve to protect them and their community.

Instead of prioritising criminal justice solutions that are regularly violent in themselves, frequently discriminatory (Gilmore 2017: 14) and often leave victims re-traumatised (Lamb 1999: 118), Burke argues that 'we have to talk to survivors for what they need […] A lot of times they just want their story to be told. They want to say it loud and have some level of accountability' (Snyder & Lopez 2017). This is an

[130] I emphasise overreliance to indicate that this is not an argument for the immediate end to prosecution and prisons. It is rather an argument about where feminist energies are best directed, and to highlight the need for sexual violence politics to take seriously the intersectional concerns with criminal justice based solutions that may end up treating violence protection as a zero-sum game. As Angela Davis asks, 'reliance on the government has resulted in serious problems. I suggest we focus our thinking on this contradiction: can a state that is thoroughly infused with racism, male dominance, class bias, homophobia and that constructs itself through violence act to minimise violence in the lives of women? Should we rely on the state as the answer to the problem of violence against women?' (2000).

anti-reactionary approach to activism, not predicated on a reductively negative conception of vulnerability that automatically attaches responding to injury with a divisive politics of protection and blame.

6.3.1 Intersectional activism before Me Too

Burke's Me Too is a project that emerged in the context of her own long history of black feminist activism. Tyson writes that 'following in the footsteps of gender violence activists like Rosa Parks, Burke continued the long history of black women and women of colour who raised awareness of sexual violence both within and outside the marginalised communities they came from' (Tyson 2019: 174). This is a black feminist tradition recognising 'criminalization and the punishment of individual perpetrators which might actually contribute to fortifying the structural racism of the justice system without in any way addressing the systemic violence that is misogyny' (Pellegrini 2018: 263). As a result, it takes both violence against women and anti-carceral politics as central points of departure.

In 1989, at 16, Burke had been a member of the youth activist organisation 21st Century Youth Leadership Movement for two years when she organised a rally against the vilification of five young black and Latino boys arrested for the rape and attempted murder of a white woman in Central Park. Burke recalls that 'Donald Trump took out full-page ads in all the major Newspapers in New York calling for their death. He labelled them animals. We wanted to push back against the way these young, black and Latino boys were being portrayed in the media […] That changed the trajectory of my life' (Burke 2019). This formative experience demonstrates how Burke's anti-violence politics starts from the necessity of resisting scapegoating sexual violence discourses and their institutional endorsement: 'I've been fighting back against Donald Trump for a long time' (ibid). The presentation of the state as neutral in the production of violence and an equation that says that sexual violence is either dealt with legislatively or not at all, are both positions that neither Burke, nor feminists of colour more broadly, has had the privilege of debating. Rather, as I argued in the last chapter, sexual violence politics that prioritises protection for a few entails willful ignorance reflective of an epistemology of privilege.[131] Me Too thus cannot exist in

[131] Burke has been involved too in 'Say Her Name', a movement that highlights the deaths and sexual assault of black women at the hands of the police.

isolation: 'The #MeToo movement is in every single thing I said. It's in our economic justice work. It's in our mass incarceration work. It's in our community health work. It's everywhere' (Riley 2018). Responding to sexual violence alone reflects a misconception of vulnerability. 'To resist an intersectionality of systems, we need an intersectionality of struggles' (Phipps 2019a) and this is the black feminist tradition in which Burke's activism is located.

6.3.2 Anti-carceral feminism

A key problem of criminal justice-based solutions is outlined by anti-carceral feminists who point to the structural racism of the criminal justice system and question the investment in a prison complex that has no proven record of addressing crime or violence (Richie 2012, Davis 1978: 25). A politics in which prison signifies justice is not intersectional, given that the prison population is disproportionately poor and black.[132] In the United States, Gross (cited in Armatta 2018: 18) notes the racism in rape convictions is reflected by the fact that:

> According to surveys of crime victims, about 70% of white sexual assault victims were attacked by white men and only about 13% by Black men. But 57% of white – victim sexual assault exonerees are Black (101/199), and 37% are white – which suggests that Black defendants convicted of raping white women are about eight times more likely to be innocent than white men convicted of raping white women of their own race.

Willful ignorance is present in the idea that prison is an effective response to sexual violence as it involves overlooking sexual violence against prisoners. This evidences a denial of ontological vulnerability reflective of privilege. Thus, whilst some, typically white, feminists have argued for greater rates of prosecution and longer sentencing lengths for perpetrators in order to address the patriarchal undervaluing of women's lives and the lack of belief that accrues to women's testimony (Hampton 1998), these strategies have been met with strong criticisms that such reforms have

[132] Whilst this is true of the UK, where over a quarter of the prison population is from a minority ethnic group, and white Britons are the only group under-represented in prison (Sturge 2019), it is even more prominent in the United States where, in 2017, black people represented 12% of the adult population but 33% of the sentenced prison population. White people accounted for 64% of adults but 30% of prisoners. And while Hispanic people represented 16% of the adult population, they accounted for 23% of the prison population (Gramlich 2019).

not empowered women and are regularly detrimental to racial and ethnic minority women (Snider 1998: 3; 10).

In the case of sexual violence, the move to incarcerate is a move to displace rather than counter the problem, given the high rates of sexual violence in prisons. As Jessi Lee Jackson elaborates, 'incarceration is itself an act of racialised sexual violence, one enabled by the mobilization of fantasies of violent black male sexuality' (2013: 198). Given that few people will leave prison without having experienced any physical violence, and studies on the problem in men's prisons in the United States have reported the rate of 'sexually coercive behaviours' to be as high as 20% (Struckman Johnson & Struckman Johnson 2000; Wooden & Parker 1982), the idea that prison addresses violence has been found wanting.

6.3.3 Andrea Dworkin and the pornographic violence of prisons

Returning to Dworkin in light of the critique of carceral solutions to sexual violence is both illuminating and surprising given her over-association with the anti-pornography ordinance. Dworkin (2006: 165-166) writes:

> Perhaps because I came from the pacifist left, I had an intense and abiding hatred for prisons (even though the U.S prison system was developed by Quakers). After the publication of *Our Blood*, I wrote a proposal for a book on prisons. I was struck by the way prisons stayed the same through time and place: the confinement of an individual in bad circumstances with a sadistic edge and including all the prison rites of passage. I was struck by how prisons were the only places in which men were threatened with rape in a way analogous to the female experience. I was struck by the common sadomasochistic structure of the prison experience no matter what the crime or country or historical era. That proposal was rejected by a slew of publishers. I found myself at a dead end.
>
> But an odd redemption was at hand. I had noticed that in all pornography one also found the prison as leitmotif, the sexualization of confining and beating women, the ubiquitous rape, the dominance and submission of the social world in which women were literally and metaphorically imprisoned. I decided to write on pornography because I could make the same points –

> show the same inequities – as with prisons. Pornography and prisons were built on cruelty and brutalization; the demeaning of the human body as a form of punishment; the worthlessness of the individual human being; restraint, confinement, tying, whipping, branding, torture, penetration, and kicking as commonplace ordeals. Each was a social construction that could be different but was not; each incorporated and exploited isolation, dominance and submission, humiliation, and dehumanization.

I quote at length because the idea that Dworkin, who has become so sutured to anti-pornography in the cultural memory, only contingently came to this position through her critique of prison is striking. Dworkin's argument, whilst displaying her characteristic binary thinking, illustrates the paradox for feminists in seeking to respond to sexual violence with incarceration. It does nothing to address the background conditions for domination and increases net levels of sexual violence. At the same time, there is very little by way of justice, recognition or healing for victims. Angela Davis asks: 'how to develop an analysis that neither furthers the conservative project of sequestering millions of men of colour in accordance with the contemporary dictates of globalised capital and its prison industrial complex, nor the equally conservative project of abandoning poor women of colour to a continuum of violence that extends from the sweatshops through the prisons to shelters, and into bedrooms at home' (2000). Whilst this is a contradiction that is far from easily resolved, it is one within which Burke's activism is located.

6.3.4 Vulnerability in Burke's Me Too movement

Burke's focus on survivors tackles shame and silencing, but also the state. In this way, it prioritises the most vulnerable in the way that I argued a structural focus on vulnerability must. 'Everyday people – queer, trans, disabled, men and women – are living in the aftermath of a trauma that tried, at the very worst, to take away their humanity' (Burke 2018). Yet 'when [American] law targets certain people for incarceration or deportation, it criminalises those people of colour who are always already most vulnerable and multiply marginalised' (Cacho 2012: 4). Thus, a focus on perpetrators and prosecution seeks to resolve structural vulnerability by denying ontological vulnerability. However, it merely displaces sexual violence and prevents an

interrogation into the structural causes of vulnerability and violence, which includes a critique of the state.[133]

This nuanced position where ambivalence and tension is accepted reflects what Patricia Hill Collins terms a 'black feminist sensibility', whereby victimisation, and awareness that one is 'vulnerable to rape as a gender-specific form of sexual violence', co-exist with the quotidian tasks of walking the streets, taking younger siblings to school – each act constituting participation 'in a Black women's legacy of struggle' (in Nicholson 1997: 244). Thus vulnerability is both an effect of domination, and already part of resistance. Foregrounding the ontological dimension alongside this highlights the way that the shared character of vulnerability can function as a resource and the illusory character of a politics that strives toward invulnerability. In foregrounding survivors, Burke's movement was one that foregrounded vulnerability in the service of resistance. The experience of vulnerability, and the instance of victimisation that materialises it is thus not one that is opposed to agency. Rather, being able to articulate an experience of vulnerability is an instance of being able to reclaim one's agency. '#MeToo, in a lot of ways, is about agency. It's not about giving up your agency, it's about claiming it" (Brockes 2018a). As Burke formulated it, the movement in its inception was one in which identifying vulnerability was about building a fabric of already existing resistance.

[133] Andrea Richie (2017) documents the extensive levels and modes of police violence against black women and women of colour. As one young Black woman put it, "They say they are protecting us, but they only make us feel more at risk'" (ibid: 113). That the police regularly enact violence renders them inadequate as a response to violence. In responding to sexual violence, 'as an initial step, we need to create space for survivors to come forward that do not require them to turn to the very institution that perpetrated sexual violence against them' (Ritchie 2017: 213). Moreover, the threat of violence in response to reporting is pervasive for sex workers and immigrants, who risk being criminalised themselves if they report violence (Namaste 2011). Given that the groups who experience violence at the hands of the police also experience sexual violence at disproportionately high rates, that feminist responses need to look beyond the police if they are to adequately address sexual violence is apparent.

6.3.4 Situating Burke's Black Feminism

This thesis has argued that one of the oversights in the recent vulnerability literature, which emphasises the condition's ontological aspects and sidelines its structural dimensions, is regarding the contribution of anti-violence movements to discourses of both sexual violence and vulnerability. This has the effect of effacing the specific character of sexual violence and overlooking its victims, who are disproportionately trans and disproportionately black. This also leads to the occlusion of the long histories of resistance that such structurally embedded violence has produced. Nathaniel's (2019: 54) elaboration of this history provides a context for Burket:

> More than one hundred and fifty years after Harriet Ann Jacobs hid in a crawl space for nearly a decade to avoid the sexual abuse from her slave owner before later becoming an author and activist, more than one hundred years after Sojourner Truth traveled the country using her speeches to single out the unique oppression committed against Black women in America, more than fifty years after Billie Holiday sang "Strange Fruit," which allowed a "view" of the abused Black body to the mainstream media, and more than a decade after Kimberle Williams Crenshaw originated the term "intersectionality" and advocated for Black women's rights, #Me Too developer Burke added to the long legacy of Black women sharing spaces, identifies, and voices with each other.

Burke saw the need for a movement that foregrounded the specific needs of black women and girls because of the cultures of silence that continue to surround sexual violence against black women. These silences are part of the aftermath of slavery and the ongoing desire to recoup the black female body as a site of agency and desire rather than victimisation and violence. Silence thus forms one way of reclaiming bodily autonomy in a culture in which discourses of black female sexuality have been used to denigrate and to license further abuses. Silence is also part of a black feminist care ethic given the disbelief that accrues to black women's testimony, and the violence against black men that ensues if women are to be believed. In the face of what Hine termed "the culture of dissemblance" (1989) Burke's movement was about providing a framework for black women and girls to speak about their experiences of violence, without the threat of either disbelief or violence from the state: 'There are nuances in our community around sexual violence that are informed by centuries of oppression and white supremacy, but we have to confront them' (Burke in Adetiba & Burke 2018). In doing so, her movement exemplifies the potential for ontological vulnerability to form part of the tapestry of resistance, as recognition that violence was shared formed the basis for collective healing and community repair. At the same time, Burke's movement is entirely attentive to the structures of power that distribute vulnerability unevenly, and the historically entrenched and institutionally secured nature of this. As such, the MeToo movement in its inception indicates the potential for a two-dimensional approach to vulnerability to be able to name harm, but to move beyond it in a way that does not require defensive maneuvers or the escalation or displacement of violence. Burke's politics is not about naming or shaming individuals, but addressing the structures that produced him and protected him in the first place.

6.4 The viral #MeToo movement

In October 2017, the actor Alyssa Milano tweeted 'If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write "me too" as a reply to this tweet' (Pflum). The aim was to make apparent the widespread character of sexual harassment and sexual violence after the issue became newsworthy on the back of high profile sexual-abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein from women in the film and media industry. The hashtag went viral.[134] Within 24 hours it had generated thousands of replies and retweets, including

[134] On Facebook it was shared in more than 12 million posts and reactions in the first 24 hours. In just one year, the #MeToo hashtag has been used more than 19 million times on Twitter alone' (Chan 2019)

by high-profile celebrities (Pflum 2018).[135] The hashtag #MeToo became a global phenomenon (Davis & Zarkov 2018: 3) and went on to circulate in 85 countries. Ahmed's image of the domino effect that follows when the lid is lifted on what is permissible to articulate in the context of sexual harassment – 'a "drip drip" becomes a flood' (2017: 30) – is particularly apt, as millions of women across the world retweeted the hashtag, often accompanied by their own stories.[136]

Burke (2019) recalls her surprise and mixed response at the sudden spread of the phrase:

> I went on Twitter, and I was floored. I just saw that this hashtag was trending. So that really is what set the panic off. The possibility that black women's work being erased, and of me being lost in this narrative is a reality. But for me the decision was, am I going to be in conflict in this moment, or am I going to be who I said I was which is somebody who was in the service of survivors. And that wasn't hard. I had to figure out a way to insert myself into this conversation, not to take ownership of it, but because I have something to contribute to it. [sic]

There is a long history of the origins of anti-violence activism in communities of colour being obscured, as Phipps (2019b) highlights (see also Smith 1981; McGuire 2011; McNeil 2001; Thompson 2002; Berger Gluck 1998). The lack of reference to Burke's longstanding movement in the initial tweet is another instance of this. As the #MeToo movement spread, the sidelining of its origins has been repeated. For instance, whilst Burke was credited as one of *Time*'s People of the Year in their Silence Breakers story, she is not on its cover – and thus her foundational role is visually effaced. Moreover, not only is the pivotal role of black feminists in establishing the #MeToo movement overlooked but so is the intersectional and anti-institutional character of this activism. As such, the viral #MeToo movement is one that departed from Milano's tweet and has a political life that exceeds and does not always complement, the politics and ambitions of Burke's grassroots movement.[137]

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[135] Lady Gaga, Viola Davis, Javier Muñoz and Evan Rachel Wood.

[136] See Hasunuma & Shin (2019) for a comparison of the impact of the movement in Japan and South Korea.

[137]

In addition, given the reach of the movement, it does not signify an abstraction from the contexts and economies within which it circulates, and discussing it in the singular is to risk homogenising distinct iterations of it. Instead, I take #MeToo as a broad framework that indexes a wide array of relatively recent responses to, and discourses surrounding, sexual violence and harassment. My interest is in the way in which vulnerability itself gets appealed to in these discourses, and the performative force of vulnerability herein. It is what vulnerability does in sexual violence discourses, as well as what it can do, that is my chief concern. I will now briefly outline what I take to be some of the more promising and also the potentially compromising aspects of the #MeToo discourse as it currently stands, before returning the focus to how understanding vulnerability can inform sexual violence activism more broadly.

6.4.1 Sexual violence as a newly discovered problem

One notable character of the way in which the #MeToo movement has been framed is in terms of sexual violence and harassment as a newly discovered problem. One of the ambitions of this thesis has been to complicate the intellectual history of feminist sexual violence discourses. In this light, what is striking about much of the reporting of the #MeToo movement has been the degree to which any situatedness within a broader history of feminist activism is overlooked. As Serisier (2018: 93) notes, the *Time*'s Person of the Year cover story 'Silence Breakers only mentions feminism twice, each time in order to disassociate with it.[138] Moreover, the very notion of 'silence breakers' indexes a previously unspoken issue and neither sexual violence or sexual harassment are new issues.[139] Indeed, the sexual politics of the 1970s 'uncovered' exactly the same issues that have crystallised in a 'watershed' (Proulx et al. 2018) moment again: workplace harassment (MacKinnon 1979), the continuum between non-violent acts of sexual harassment and rape (Kelly 1988), and the widespread nature of both. Dworkin (MacKinnon & Dworkin 1997: 33) commended the

[138] The first reference critiques feminists' role in past high-profile accusations of sexual assault in the United States, noting 'that feminists placed loyalty to the Democrats above belief in the women who accused the then American president Bill Clinton of sexual violence'. Meanwhile, the second 'declares that this new movement, built through social media, is based on the mass stories of ordinary women, and smaller numbers of men, many of whom would 'never call themselves feminists' (Zacharek et al. 2017)' (ibid).

[139] Alcoff & Gray note that 'the strategic metaphor of "breaking the silence" is virtually ubiquitous throughout the [anti-violence] movement' (1998: 261), which contests the novelty of #MeToo narratives.

women's movement for its silence breaking in ways that echo the framing of the #MeToo movement:

> The accomplishment of the women's movement in this regard was staggering. Silence – a heavy tombstone over each women's hurt body and torn heart – was broken; one could hear the concrete crack, splintering, breaking open, crevices becoming gorges. Women talked: this happened to me. The stories were similar even as the women were different. The rapes were similar even as the rapists were different. The devaluing through insult and overbearing arrogance and vulgar assumptions of an innate superiority was the same, no matter what the social or economic status of the woman appeared to be.

Thus the novelty of the phenomenon is predicated on the erasure of the women's liberation movement (Rosen 2000), the anti-violence movement (see Thuma 2015; Russo 2018) and the battered women movement (Schneider 2000), to name notable feminist activism and consciousness-raising around sexual violence and harassment in the United States alone. It is also predicated on overlooking the thinkers and discussions on sexual politics that accompanied the movement. Halberstam wonders whether, in light of #MeToo, 'we should all be thumbing through out old copies of Catherine MacKinnon and wondering whether she was in fact on to something when she wrote: "male pleasure is inextricably tied to victimizing, hurting, exploiting"?' (2017) and even more than MacKinnon, Dworkin's interrogation into the violent scripts of normative gender are relevant.

Ignoring history also minimises the deeply entrenched nature of the problem and stifles the discussion regarding potential avenues for change. Treating sexual violence as a newly recognised phenomenon might imply that 'speaking out' is conducive to social change. As Zarkov highlights, there is a worry that 'visibility and exposure will be taken as a solution' to the problem of sexual violence, that 'making a person (especially the accused) visible' will be mistaken for 'making the problem visible' (Zarkov & Davis 2018: 6). However, as the legacy of the 'speak-outs' and consciousness-raising of the second wave demonstrate, whilst such practices are instructive for enabling individuals to situate their experience within a shared, structural context, they do not themselves constitute a challenge to such a structure (Echols 1989). It is less a discovery of patriarchy as an organising structure that #MeToo reveals, but rather the stubborn 'persistence of patriarchy' (Browne 2014),

such that, despite the apparent inroads Dworkin attributes to the women's movement, very little seems to have changed. Burke herself articulates the sense of 'history repeating itself' in response to the Brett Kavanaugh[140] hearings: 'it is so disheartening that we're here again' (2018). As a newly discovered social problem, rather than deeply entrenched, long-contested structural problem, the #MeToo discourse risks a misplaced optimism that testimony and experiences-in-common are sufficient to reveal and challenge gendered power structures.[141]

6.5 Oppositional vulnerability and the viral #MeToo movement

In addition to its decontextualised 'novelty', another problem that has been levelled at the #MeToo movement is its emphasis on perpetrators. To the extent that this is the dominant currency movement – 'every time it seems we have exhausted our supply of top-tier sexual harassers, another one bites the dust' (Goldner 2018: 235)– power structures are obscured[142]. Stories of perpetrators rely on a dualistic figuration of vulnerability, thereby effacing ambiguity. The presence of oppositional vulnerability is evident as victim and perpetrator are figured as mutually exclusive positions. This has led to victims being disbelieved or discredited as they are unable to meet the idealised standards of innocence required. For instance, when it was publicised that Asia Argento, one of the 'leaders' of the movement and earliest accusers of Weinstein, had paid off a young actor who alleged that she sexually assaulted him when he was 17[143] the movement was met with charges of hypocrisy (Whelan 2018; Stolworthy 2019). Oppositional vulnerability, where one is either vulnerable or not, functions to discredit the testimony of Argento.

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[140] Donald Trump's Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh was accused of sexually assaulting Christine Blasey Ford while in high school. The Senate Judiciary Committee questioned both Kavanaugh and Ford. During the trial two other women accused Kavanaugh of separate past instances of sexual assault. Despite the multiple allegations, Kavanaugh was still confirmed to the Supreme Court..

[141] By contrast, for Burke, it is what the stories lead to that is important: 'Sometimes we have to tell our stories for ourselves, or in service of other people. But just having them available? That's not the solution. Once a book is written about a bunch of trauma stories, what happens then?' (Fessler 2018). The politics of Burke's Me Too cannot be reduced to 'speak-outs'.

[142] See Williamson (2018) for a discussion of the structures that are effaced in the need to contruct killers as monsters in serial murder cases involving black victims

[143] This was below the legal age of consent in California at the time.

Oppositional vulnerability also makes it difficult to identify perpetrators who present in an ambivalent manner. 'The continuum of wrongs – including sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape – is flattened' (Gilson 2016b: 85) so only extreme cases, where violence is present, register as victimisation. The corresponding notion that 'consensual sex' is clearly distinguishable from 'coercive sex' (see Gavey 2005; Gunnarsson 2018) makes naming ambiguous experiences difficult. Lupita Nyong'o (2017) presents her encounters with Harvey Weinstein as ambiguous. She was made to feel uncomfortable on certain occasions, such as when he asked her for a private massage in his home bedroom. However, she oscillated between a feeling that something was 'up' and that perhaps this behaviour was usual. Her concerns about his behaviour were appeased when he invited her to dinner and said that two of her male friends could join (ibid). When victims and perpetrators are juxtaposed in accordance with an oppositional notion of vulnerability, ambivalent experiences such as this become difficult to disclose or decipher. Oppositional vulnerability thus functions to reinforce the perception of a 'real rape script' which 'involves a sudden and physically violent attack on an unsuspecting woman, usually by a stranger' (Ryan 2011: 776). Moreover, the notion of a 'real perpetrator' means that Weinstein's ambivalent affect – Nyong'o describes him as both charming and domineering – contributed to the ambiguous status of her experiences with him. She explains that he 'was charming and funny once more, and I felt confused about the discomfort I had previously experienced […] He was definitely a bully, but he could be really charming, which was disarming and confusing' (ibid). Rather than meet the culturally approved script for a perpetrator, Harvey's personable traits further conceal the structural vulnerability in the encounter, blurring the lines between victimisation and business as usual by presenting in a manner that departs from decidedly objectionable. Foregrounding the ambivalence of vulnerability, Gilson argues (2016a), enables ambiguous experiences of victimisation such as these to become intelligible. Rather than sexuality being clearly a domain of pleasure of danger, the contradictory character of experiences can be engaged with.

6.5.2 Effacing ambiguity and stabilising heterosexuality

The lack of language for addressing ambivalence in sexuality was evidenced in the 2018 Aziz Ansari case. 'Arguably, one of the most divisive, high-profile cases to arise from the #MeToo movement' (Hindes & Fileborn 2019: 2) was Grace's story (a pseudonym) of her date with stand-up comedian Aziz Ansari, chronicled on Babe.net:

'I went on a date with Aziz Ansari. It turned into the worst night of my life'. The article was a blow by blow account of a date in which, despite numerous 'verbal and non-verbal cues' to Grace's discomfort, Ansari continued to proceed with the script of the date. When he quickly invited Grace back to his flat after dinner, 'she remembers feeling uncomfortable at how quickly things escalated' (Way 2018) as the comedian made numerous moves on her despite her lack of reciprocation. 'Most of my discomfort was expressed in me pulling away and mumbling. I know that my hand stopped moving at some points' (Way 2018). Hindes & Fleborn (2019: 2) summarise the grey areas as the date proceeded:

> When Ansari asked her to have sex she suggested "maybe next time" to which Ansari responded, "well, if I poured you another glass of wine now, would it count as our second date?" She then told him she "did not want to feel forced"; however, he kept aggressively kissing her and pressured her into giving him oral sex.

The story was met with controversy and accusations of #MeToo having gone too far, her letter was described as 'appalling', as Grace's narrative was of 'a bad date' not 'legal criteria of sexual assault and harassment' (Serisier 2018: 111-112). Serisier notes that Grace's 'story exemplifies the enforcement of generic boundaries around #MeToo'. For Dworkin however, it is the scripts of normative heterosexuality themselves that need to be interrogated. Her provocation that 'seduction is often difficult to distinguish from rape. In seduction, the rapist bothers to buy a bottle of wine' (1987), gestures towards the 'murky interface of consent and coercion' (Gunnarsson 2018: 6). To interrogate sexual violence is not to overdetermine gender as its cause, but rather to ask into the place of normative gender and heterosexuality in its conditions of possibility. Such an analysis entails moving beyond clear victim-perpetrator discourses and looking at the structural context of vulnerability, including the gendered barriers to saying 'no', and being heard in such an encounter (Coy et al. 2016: 86).

The lack of ambiguity afforded by the rhetoric of oppositional vulnerability in mainstream media dominated discursive publics is coupled with a resistance to challenge normative gender. For Dworkin, sexual violence is an expression of normative gender roles and thus to address the former one has to address the latter.

Yet Hemmings (2018b: 971) highlights how there is also a conservative appeal to sexual violence discourses which reinscribe normative gender roles:

> Part of the shared cultural horror of the #MeToo campaign is indeed that sexual abuse is both anachronistic and ever-present. As suggested, this is an oddly reassuring feminism that can confirm (as much as it challenges the consequences of) sexual difference, operating as the oppressive alternate side of the celebration of those differences in declarations of feminism as newly feminine.

In other words, a focus on sexual violence reinstates a politics of binary sexual difference at precisely a time in which trans and non-binary identities are becoming normalised (Roof 2016; McBean 2018). The universal appeal of sexual violence politics is that whether 'freed from gendered and sexual oppression or continuing to be subject to it, women and men remain recognizably women and men' (Hemmings 2018). Dworkin's structural enquiry into masculinity, by contrast, provides a basis by which we may be able to reassess the pursuit of dominance, its expression in intercourse, and its institutional and cultural scaffolding.

6.5.3 Oppositional vulnerability and the invisible, invulnerable woman of colour

The mainstream #MeToo movement displays oppositional vulnerability in its privileging of the stories of relatively privileged, thin, white women (Hoyd 2018; Gentile 2018; Chan 2019; Young 2018). For Burke, the 'world responds to the vulnerability of white women. Our narrative has never been centred in mainstream media. Our stories don't get told and as a result, it makes us feel not as valuable' (Young 2018). The ideal #MeToo victim is one whose vulnerability is made intelligible through the embodiment of ideals of Western femininity; whiteness, passivity and fragility. Recognition of vulnerability figures as a precondition for empathy (Butler 2004a) and the myth of the 'invulnerable body of colour' means that 'black women fail to meet the requirements for public empathy more often than not' (Lemieux 2017). The amplification of white women's stories of sexual violence might 'reinforce notions of what a victim looks like: notions that exclude survivors who are women of colour, trans, poor and/or have past histories with law enforcement' (Law 2018). Selective empathies are present in whose stories get told and this is apparent in the

divergence in outrage in the case of perpetrators whose victims are predominantly white (e.g. Weinstein) in contrast to those whose victims are black women. There was far less public outrage in the case of R. Kelly than Weinstein for example (Tillet & Tillet 2019) and in the Bill Cosby scandal, the media chose to share the stories of victims who were mostly white, even though nearly a quarter of Cosby's alleged victims were women of colour (Mallenbaum et al., 2018).

Burke (in Brockes 2018b) highlights how the racialisation of gendered vulnerability operates to elevate the suffering of white women, obscuring that of black women:

> Often, I've said that, while sexual violence does not discriminate, our response is highly racial – around who gets to be a victim and who gets sympathy. We are all socialised to respond to the vulnerability of white women first. So you have the biggest names in Hollywood – they're thin, beautiful, wealthy, glamorous white women, top of the food chain. We want to know everything about them; what they eat, who they're married to, so it's no surprise that we'd want to know about this part of their lives that was broken, too.

Moreover, the construction of the victim in these terms has implications for responses to violence. The paradigmatic victim of #MeToo is an upper-class white woman, and because of this 'the solutions for this problem are found in corporate boardrooms, the carceral courts, the therapist office, or in the spectacular public and not in structural transformations to the gender, class, and race structures' (Metz in Restrepo Sanín 2019). When vulnerability is coded as the property of a subset of women and appealed to along oppositional lines, this serves to circumscribe, not extend, empathy.

6.5.4 The eroticisation of vulnerability

The amplification of the stories of white women's victimhood is also reflective of Dworkin's insights regarding the sexualisation and commodification of [white] women's vulnerability. if what is newsworthy is what sells (Herman & Chomsky 2008), then why is it that sexual violence sells? Whilst news outlets, for instance, might cite outrage and disgust at the behaviours of those accused, they are at the same time profiting off the fact that – as groups such as Women Against Violence and

Pornography in the Media sought to resist (Bronstein 2011) – images of vulnerable women sell. As Dubravka Zarkov (2018: 4) writes:

> If I take a look around me, I do not see that things have changed for the better since the 1970s regarding the voyeuristic, sexist and misogynist nature of our societies. I have always been wary of public descriptions of sexual assaults with vivid details. In many ways, such descriptions re-inscribe women as sexual objects.

Stories that at face value contest the objectification of women, with headlines like '"Take Off Your Dress": How Men in Hollywood, From Steven Seagal to Harvey Weinstein, Treated Women for Decades' (Walters 2017), perform the very same sexualisation they contest. The value of such stories is derived from sexualised images and details encoding women's bodies as simultaneously vulnerable and eroticised. In other words, headlines protesting outrage at the sexualisation of women in Hollywood, rely themselves on sexualised images and erotic, lurid details in order to ensure circulation (Gill 2007; Baldwin 2006). With respect to the Harvey Weinstein narratives, Jaqueline Rose points out this discrepancy; as the public were bombarded with 'endless photo spreads of Weinstein's female targets', she wonders whether these 'weren't so much designed to provoke outrage or a cry for justice as to grant the voyeur his pleasure. That, of course, is a pleasure on which the cinema industry thrives and which made these women vulnerable in the first place'. As more and more newspapers were being sold on the pretext of outrage at a newly discovered social problem, 'I couldn't help feeling that the actresses were once again being asked to audition for their part. Or being paraded across the red carpet on Oscar night' (Rose 2018). This demonstrates the libidinal investment of the media and the public in the very behaviour they position themselves as deploring.

The very newsworthiness of the contemporary sexual violence politics and the speed at which it has been assimilated into a dominant discourse runs contrary to the idea that a reckoning is really taking place. Rather the 'outrage economy' (Phipps 2018) present in reporting of the #MeToo movement trades in exactly the same eroticisation of female subordination and powerlessness that underscore the very abuse. This is not to make the causal argument that these representations cause the violence they name. But rather that through such representations, not only are the structures that make possible sexual harassment obscured, but they may be appealed

to and relied on in the very framing of the 'problem'. As Rose articulates: 'while attention to violence against women may be sparked by anger and a desire for redress, it might also be feeding vicariously off the forms of perversion that fuel the violence in the first place' (2018). In short, sexual violence has become newsworthy because it trades in the same sexualised images and accounts of white female vulnerability and sexual availability that constitute the broader social scaffolding for abuse in the first place.

6.6 Vulnerability and sexual violence activisms

Vulnerability is both what makes violence possible and central to how we respond to violence. A simplified argument of this thesis might be that there are better and worse ways of engaging with vulnerability as a response to violence. To respond intersectionally entails refusing the protection of some over the protection of all. Yet a politics of protection itself may inadvertently reinforce the ideal of invulnerability that underscores much violence in the first place. In chapter two, I argued that a key insight of the second wave was the politicisation of sex as an insight into the nature of power. Meanwhile, chapter one proposed that vulnerability itself in its uneven distribution may be able to illuminate power relations. Drawing these insights together, and to foreground the radical and positive potential for vulnerability in sexual violence politics, I return to Burke (2018b):

> To make vulnerability sexy would be amazing. I have a friend in the BDSM world, and we had this really wonderful conversation once about what the world can learn from BDSM because it's all based on consent.

If sexual vulnerability is the displacement of one's own vulnerability, then embracing vulnerability in sexuality may be one way of preventing its violent disavowal. Here, Burke draws on the logic of resignification as a way to challenge structural violence. As such, her contention mirrors the revaluing of vulnerability advanced in care ethics and crip theory. If vulnerability is divorced from its codification as female subordination, the performative logic by which women's physical subordination is materialised in the performance of gender is challenged. Sex remains highly political and vulnerability is illuminating with respect to power relations. However, there is a place for vulnerability too in a positive sexual politics.

In this, Burke echoes femme theorists of sexuality who have sought to resignify the experience of vulnerability in sexuality (see Dahl 2017). For example, in a dialogue exploring the significance of role-play in lesbian relationships, Amber Hollibaugh tells Cherie Moraga femme is 'active, not passive […] It's hard to talk about things like giving up power without it sounding passive […] I want to give up power in response to her need. This can feel profoundly powerful and very unpassive' (1983: 59-60). As Ulrika Dahl details, 'femme activism inevitably responds to and challenges heterosexist assumptions about feminine aesthetics and sexuality' (2011: 173). The revaluing of vulnerability thus serves to challenge the heterosexist assumptions with which it has been imbued. Challenging the static, oppositional ascription of role-play within sex as mapping onto power or lack thereof, Moraga and Hollibaugh explore the multiple, shifting significations available within the butch/femme framework. Likewise, Laura Harris and Liz Crocker propose that femme sexuality reveals that 'what seems to be passivity is actually activity: she allows the butch to control her pleasure. But this control and the pleasure are exactly what the femme has desired' (1997: 4). Sexual experiences such as these provide an epistemological challenge to the reification of autonomy and the association of power with dominance. 'Dykes writing about sexuality and vulnerability' explains Ann Cvetcovich, 'have forged an emotional knowledge out of the need to situate intimate lives in relation to classism, racism and other forms of oppression' (2003:4). Vulnerability becomes something to be negotiated, rather than a negative condition to be avoided. As Biddy Martin notes, this is an intersectional revaluation. 'Moraga's analysis of her own history implies a larger argument, that the definition of feminine gender in terms of subjection to a bodily vulnerability coexists both ideologically and often physically with the construction of race as subjection to a body that can be escaped only in the form of disembodied consciousness, role neutrality, and the absence of marks of specificities' (Martin 1994: 117). If the idea of escaping power is, as I have argued, an aspiration reflective of privilege, butch-femme discourses on sexuality reveal an intersectional account of the negotiation of vulnerability within one domain.

Butch-femme sexual politics apply the ontological perspective on vulnerability, foregrounding the condition's ambivalence but ultimately its unavoidability within the context of sexuality. If 'part of coming to terms with vulnerability entails rejecting these dualistic terms as givens and so not reifying vulnerability as a condition inherent to female sexuality' (Gilson 2014: 172), harnessing the linguistic vulnerability of vulnerability itself, whilst not the extent of a feminist sexual politics, may play a part.

If vulnerability is only ever something to be avoided, it is hard to imagine how the aspiration to invulnerability that leads to violent disavowals of vulnerability in the first place can be countered.

Responding to vulnerability is a complex issue for feminists and one which entails foregrounding both its ontological and structural dimensions. Burke's Me Too movement contained such an analysis. However, this chapter has argued that the intersectional insights of Burke's black feminist Me Too movement have been largely lost in the mainstream uptake of the movement, which puts excessive emphasis on perpetrators and sexualises white female victims whilst sidelining the experiences of women of colour. As a result, it is insufficiently critical of the violence of the criminal justice system. Foregrounding the ambivalence of pleasure and danger may be a way of reckoning with the ambivalence of sexuality whilst drawing attention to erotic injustice at the same time. The revaluing of vulnerability by femme activists is one way in which the insights of ontological vulnerability may be put into practice, whilst holding onto the analysis of asymmetrical power relations and domination integral to structural accounts seeking to enact social change.

6.7 Conclusion

In the 1970s, the women's movement politicised the act considered most personal and private – sex – as the lid was lifted on experiences of coercion and violence. As a discursive public has again formed around the political character of sex, and the silence has been broken on the decidedly ambivalent character of the act presumed to be most pleasurable, this chapter has asked what vulnerability can bring to these discussions.

Tarana Burke's Me Too movement was founded on the basis of corporeal vulnerability. In response to the vulnerability of a young girl's disclosure, Burke was moved to reflect on her own experiences of violence. The movement's slogan of 'empowerment through empathy' reflected this notion that experiences of suffering, when shared, become the basis for both individual healing and structural change (Rodino-Colocino 2018). Thus, Burke demonstrates the importance of an ontological understanding of vulnerability for revealing the extent of violence and also for countering the aspiration to invulnerability that follows from the defensive pursuit of protection and blame. There is too a structural analysis of the asymmetrical

vulnerabilities of the marginalised in Burke's movement. For her, patriarchy, power and privilege are central to the reproduction of sexual violence, and therefore changes that need to be made are systemic rather than individual. Finally, these combined insights lead Burke to an inclusive, intersectional politics of responding to sexual violence. Her activism is grounded in black feminist theory and a lived experience of the inadequacy of carceral solutions to sexual violence. Burke is clear that activism against sexual violence cannot be treated in isolation, and that resisting mass incarceration (Riley 2018) is central to a politics that seeks to resist rather than displace violence. This is an insight Burke shares with Dworkin. Moreover, that attending to structural vulnerability entails recognising the ontological vulnerability of all was precisely the politics that Butler's motive to expand the domain of human intelligibility was directed at (2004a: 35). In creating Me Too as a grassroots movement of and for survivors, Burke's activism evidences insights of Butler's discussion of linguistic vulnerability too. Survivor is an inclusive category, able to name injustice whilst not circumscribing in advance whose victimisation will be recognised.

As Gilson argues is the case with vulnerability, sexual violence too does not admit of straightforward solutions and Burke's simple framework is one that is able to focus on the harm of sexual violence without relying on reductive characterisations of either the causes or solutions to the problem. However, as a movement that began at a local level in communities of colour, it faces limitations when applied globally. Empowerment through empathy may be readily transformed into a liberal argument in favour of resilience. In addition, divorced from context, it can support an austerity agenda, which in the UK has already seen cuts to domestic violence refuges. Given that one of UK Domestic Violence Charity Women's Aid's early achievements was making gendered vulnerability visible (Dobash & Dobash 1992), a focus on the importance of sharing vulnerability needs to go hand in hand with a discourse of sexual violence as a public and social issue.

Whilst the global #MeToo movement has certainly made sexual violence a public concern, the discourse has frequently evoked a logic of oppositional vulnerability – where vulnerability is the property of some and not others. This has the effect of depoliticising the problem – at the same time as it becomes a political problem – as the focus is on individuals and not power relations more broadly. Moreover, oppositional vulnerability discourses neglect both the structural and ontological aspects of vulnerability. The structural aspect highlights that vulnerability to sexual

violence is a social and systemic issue, and as such requires wide-scale change. For Dworkin, this involved scrutinising gender itself and cases such as Aziz Ansari, rather than being exemplary of sexual politics going too far, are precisely where sexual politics starts. Meanwhile, the ontological insight necessitates resisting the privileged position of willful ignorance, where the vulnerability of some is amplified and others' overlooked.

The point of this chapter is not to construct a new positive/negative binary, with Burke's movement embodying intersectionality and inclusivity and the mainstream movement foregrounding only white women and straightforward solutions. The #MeToo movement has raised the issue of 'grey areas' in sexual violence (Hindes & Fileborn 2019) and the question of what justice looks like is far from settled. It has also countered the observed trend in the 1990s towards postfeminism (McRobbie 2009) and has a reach far more global and intersectional public than dominant media news stories reflect. Thus to the extent that the movement is able to raise the questions of pleasure and danger in tandem (Richards 2018), whilst moving beyond an oppositional logic of vulnerability, it has the capacity to reanimate key considerations that get lost in the wayside of the sex wars. However, to the extent that the mainstream discourse reproduces sexual politics without reference to such a nuanced frame, it obscures the institutional dynamics that contribute to the proliferation of sexualised violence in the first place and narrows the options for response. Beginning with survivors in their plurality is a simple but important place to start.

Chapter seven

Conclusion: Vulnerability and bodily autonomy

How can feminist work on sexual violence use the concept of vulnerability given its questionable status?
- Gilson (2016: 72)

In 1974, at a the National Organization for Women[144] conference on Sexuality, Andrea Dworkin wrote 'women who are feminists […] have tried to understand, struggle against, and transform the political system called patriarchy which exploits our labour, predetermines the ownership of our bodies, and diminishes selfhood from the day we are born' (1976: 11). In her introduction to *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler writes that the 'point is emphatically […] to understand how the "viability" of a woman's life depends upon an exercise of bodily autonomy and on social conditions that enable that autonomy' (2004b: 12). I opened this thesis with quotes from these typically opposed thinkers in order to demonstrate the citation politics in sexual politics. I now return to Dworkin and Butler to highlight a means by which the varying investments in vulnerability, which chapter one staked out, can be navigated. For both, the question driving sexual politics is the question of bodily autonomy. By way of conclusion, I will argue that vulnerability provides a way to rethink the concept of bodily autonomy as a basis for a coalitional and inclusive politics of sexual violence.

7.1 Bringing sexual violence into vulnerability studies

Both 'vulnerability' and 'sexual violence' are terms that have proved uniquely vexing for feminist theorists. When considered as issues that disproportionately attach to women or femininity, they appear to cement relations of inequality. When brought to bear on one another, this problem is presumed to be amplified. Arguing that women are especially vulnerable to sexual violence raises an array of potential political and theoretical issues that the near triumph of sex-positive feminism at the end of the 1980s sought to dissolve. This includes the accusation of false consciousness that

[144] The National Organisation of Women (NOW) was one of the first women's activist organisations in the United States. It was founded by Betty Friedan in 1966. Subsequent debates over the direction of the organisation led to the formation of New York Radical Women, which took a more activist focus and criticised the liberal politics of NOW (see Echols 1989).

follows from a critique of women's pleasure under conditions of patriarchy. Moreover, contemporary political discourses instrumentalise the rhetorical potency of equating certain women with a vulnerability to violence in order to license the protection of white Western women and the persecution of minority men. Thus, the equation of women with vulnerability to sexual violence has frequently functioned to obscure the capacity for women to embrace their own pleasure and is a discourse that has been directed toward anti-feminist ends.

However, sexual violence maps onto power relations. Linda Alcoff (2018) notes that most victims are female, young, gay, trans, and/or in prison, and thus it is those who are positioned as socially inferior in a particular context who will be vulnerable to sexual violence. As a result of its relation to power, sexual violence is also an intimately intersectional issue. Black women are more than twice as likely to be killed by their partner than white women (Law 2018). Gender, Dworkin argued is central to the lived reality of sexual violence. Indeed, 'becoming a woman involves the daily negotiation of violence and its threat' (Kingid 2018) Avoiding such a connection, in theory, does not counter these correlations in reality. Rather than revisit thinking vulnerability and sexual violence together then, for fear that to do so will reproduce the divisive politics of the 1980s, where women were essentialised as victims, this thesis has argued that there is both a political urgency to intervening in existing vulnerability-sexual violence discourses and also theoretical insight to be gleaned from doing so. Sexual violence is a daily negotiation for everyone who chooses to be or is more or less violently interpellated as a woman. And whilst 'poor women, trans women, women of colour, undocumented women, refugee women, trafficked and enslaved women are made infinitely more precarious [....] none of us are unqualifiedly free' (ibid). In a historical moment in which discourses citing vulnerability to sexual violence are being regularly used to license discrimination, particularly against trans women and refugee populations, an intersectional feminist analysis of the concurrence of these two terms is integral. It is my aim that this thesis can open up this discussion, and I fully recognise that an intersectional feminist perspective can only be achieved by the inclusion of far more voices and traditions than those gathered here.

7.2 Collating the contributions of the thesis by way of bodily autonomy

In chapter one, 'Vulnerability: from structural to ontological accounts of the condition', I argued that whilst ontologies of vulnerability have become predominant

in the recent literature, these contributions have notably avoided the question of sexual violence present in feminist activist discussions of vulnerability. Erinn Gilson's (2014; 2016) extensive theorisation of the ontological character of vulnerability was instructive for highlighting the oppressive politics which follow from the aspiration of invulnerability. Her move to revalue vulnerability is complimented by work across disability studies (Dodds 2014; Wendell 1989; Clifford Simplican 2015) and care ethics (Kittay 1999), where the negative valuation of dependence is conceived as an important aspect of the marginalisation and stigmatisation of those who are perceived to deviate from the normative ideal of independence. These are essential considerations for understanding the way in which vulnerability gets used as a label to designate those that deviate from the norm, and as such have insights pertinent to both feminist theory and queer theory. However, I proposed that the inability to attend to gendered patterns of vulnerability within the arena of sexuality highlighted the need for a negative conception of vulnerability as part of a critical theory of normative gender and heterosexuality. Thus, rather than resolve negative aspects of vulnerability through an affirmation of its ambiguity, feminists need to move towards the 'directedness' (Ahmed 2018) of negative vulnerabilities in order to make sense of gendered relations of domination.

Nicola Gavey notes that 'critique is not equivalent to rejection or denunciation, the call to rethink something is not inherently treasonous but can actually be a way of caring for and even renewing the object in question' (2012: 14), and in calling for a critical approach to recent engagements with vulnerability, my aspirations are similar. It is not that I seek to displace recent contributions but rather to suggest that the structural focus has been too quickly ceded in the aftermath of the sex wars and that whilst resignifying vulnerability away from pure negativity is important, it remains necessary to be able to address the specifically gendered character of sexual violence.

Each of these aspects of vulnerability, from its devalued character to its unequal distribution, can be illuminated through the lens of bodily autonomy. Following Butler, this is not a notion of autonomy bound up with fantasies of sovereignty and self-control (2004a). Rather it is autonomy understood as the ability to operate within the 'enabling constraints' (1997a: 16) of normativity without fear of violence. Gilson's insight, for instance, is that 'reductively negative' (2014: 31) conceptualisations of vulnerability overdetermine how the condition is responded to in ways that promote defensiveness in the form of violence. Against this, she argues that 'this sense of

capacity and bodily autonomy needs to be developed without turning into a pursuit of invulnerable mastery' (2016: 78). Care ethics and disability studies expose how bodily autonomy is allocated unequally in a social world that guarantees infrastructural support for some and not others. Meanwhile, anti-violence movements share with pro-choice activists the assertion that women have a right to determine what happens to their bodies (Oliviero 2018: 169). The structural and ontological dimensions of vulnerability, whilst distinct, can be bridged by an appeal to the centrality of bodily autonomy.

In chapter two, 'Vulnerability and the sexual politics of the sex wars', I revisited the Barnard Conference and the feminist activism prior to it in order to argue for foregrounding the ambivalence of sexuality for women through a reanimation of the pleasure/danger epithet. The contention that sexuality for women is primarily a sphere of pleasure has led to critical perspectives on heterosexuality and the violence it entails to be relatively lacking in the academic study of sexuality. As a result, the sex-negative discourse has become a floating narrative with moral undercurrents, readily weaponised by right-wing, reactionary movements – a key argument of chapter five. This concern motivated Vance to choose sexuality as a theme for Barnard: '[women's] sense of vulnerability has been played on by the right' (1989: 2). However, exploring the tension posed by women's sexuality was obscured by the disputes that came to a fore at Barnard. These crystallised sex-positive and sex-negative as opposing positions, resulting in an absence of sex-negative concerns in women's studies classrooms (Hemmings 2016). That sex is both a domain of pleasure and danger is something that Rubin (1984) and Dworkin (1974) both recognise. Rather, the disputes were over whether or not the anti-pornography ordinance, representative of the involvement of the state in questions of feminist sexuality, would harm or hinder sexual expression, as well as whether practices of BDSM were reproductive of the very power relations feminist were opposing. On these questions, Dworkin was on the wrong side. However, the binarising historicisation of this period has resulted in the under-theorisation of sexual violence (Heberle & Grace 2009; Mardorossian 2002) and a lack of attention to the nuances of the sexual politics of the second wave.

The second wave has been commonly caricatured as anti-sex (Snyder 2008: 180). Whilst a single position is hard to discern, such a characterisation misrepresents prescient criticisms of heterosexuality as an institution from this period with puritanical visions of sexuality. For instance, Kate Millett, a forerunner of second-

wave feminism and its foregrounding of sexual inequality under patriarchy (1970), also explored the possibilities of sexual practices outside of domination relations, including countering the taboo on intergenerational sexual relations and child sexuality (Millett 1984). In general, a critique of sexual relations was part of a broader sexual agenda, which included liberation at the same time as highlighting the barriers to this under conditions of social, psychological and physical domination. Whilst pro-sex feminism is seen emerging victorious from the ashes of the sex wars, in many instances, it was there all along. Moving away from dualistic categories enables theorists such as Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa to contribute more fully to discussions of sexual politics. These are thinkers for whom the ambivalence of sexuality is central. This has however rendered them less amenable to inclusion within subsequent annuls than more decidedly sex-positive thinkers such as Ellen Willis and Gayle Rubin. Foregrounding vulnerability in its ambiguity facilitates a foregrounding of 1970s and 1980s contributions which grappled with the ambivalence of sex under conditions of inequality. If sexual politics is simultaneously a site of pleasure and danger for women, a site of embodied vulnerability to violence (Dworkin 1989) and enabling vulnerability of erotic pleasure (Dahl 2017), then the presence of bodily autonomy can be a way of navigating these.

In chapter three, 'Andrea Dworkin and the violence of heterosexuality', I argued that Dworkin has been subject to reductive and overdetermined readings that disregard the insightful critique of gender and heterosexuality her work contains. Her work is an example of a body of feminist knowledge that has been lost in the wayside of the sex wars (Fateman 2019). It was only after these disputes that the idea of a 'go-go' dancer reading Dworkin became paradoxical (Shulman 1994: 53). Before then, her analysis of the violence of heterosexuality as a critique of the limits of women's bodily autonomy under patriarchy was entirely compatible with the pursuit of autonomy through sex work. Not only is Dworkin insightful on the dynamics of male dominance and the way in which women's vulnerability to violence is coded into the contents of gender roles, but her philosophy of sex and gender is remarkably prescient too. She articulates many of the insights Butler systematised in *Gender Trouble* and as such her work makes for instructive dialogues with much feminist and queer theory. Her key contribution here, which is the one that made her so unpopular, is that when we say that sex is an effect of gender, we need to critically examine not only sex-as-anatomy but our more closely held beliefs about sex-as-intercourse too.

In this thesis, I have only been able to focus on one aspect of Dworkin's extensive contributions to feminist thought – her ontology of sex and gender and what this implies about vulnerability to sexual violence. In addition to having analytic insights relevant to a politics of sexual violence, Dworkin has an additional contribution to vulnerability that will be relevant for academics working on vulnerability in autofiction (Mitchell 2018); she was a vulnerable writer. As Fateman (2019) notes, Dworkin was one of the first to use her own experiences of rape and battery in a revolutionary analysis of male supremacy. She refused to be shamed on account of the experiences she had suffered and was adamant in her articulation of 'victim' as a political category and not a wounded identity. As well as writing about gender, heterosexuality and sexual violence, Dworkin also wrote passionately about what it meant to be a writer, a woman writer and the politics of getting published (1976). What happens to queer women writers (Schulman 2012) is another important dialogue to which her work can contribute.

Whilst some of Dworkin's arguments may be, or are intentionally,[145] difficult to stomach, she surely warrants engagement outside of broad-brush dismissals. As Ariel Levy writes, 'she wanted what all writers want and what she actually deserved: to be read' (2006: xxvii). In my future research, I will continue to work with Dworkin's generative ideas and consider what it means to receive Dworkin as a 'larger-than-life' (Serisier 2012: 43) figure in dialogue with fat studies (Cooper 2010). I will discuss the abjection that Dworkin's physical body generated – alongside the rejection of her body of work. This will enable me to consider how Dworkin wrote herself as a feminist activist not only through the 'stridency' (Fateman 2019) of her words and the 'fury and drama' which 'characterise her rhetorical style' (Levy 2006: xii) but also through her body itself.

In chapter four, 'Judith Butler, vulnerability and livable lives: from performativity to precarity', I explored Judith Butler's corpus and her engagements with the theme of vulnerability. I demonstrated how vulnerability is central to how she understands both violence and resistance. Moreover, her focus has shifted from an emphasis on linguistic vulnerability, which opens up the potential for resistance-as-resignification to a postulation of a common corporeal vulnerability, where recognition is central to the

[145] Ariel Levy argues that Dworkin's arguments make you rethink the most intimate aspects of your existence (2006: xv). Jessica Joy Cameron write that Dworkin's texts 'interpellate' readers, and the response to this can be disavowal (2018).

dynamics of social change. In this shift, Butler moves from emphasising the more local resistance that can come about through the subversion of norms, to societal resistance that follows when shared yet previously invisible vulnerabilities are registered and responded to by the powerful. Throughout her work Butler has been concerned with the question of the 'livable life'. Her early work on the violence of gender sought to expand a focus on the violence that heterosexuality exerts on those who abide by its norms to those who live outside of its dominant norms (1999). Thus, whilst she rejects the liberal aspiration to autonomy that disavows dependence, there is an aspiration to bodily autonomy in her work, conceived as the ability for subjects to inhabit norms on their own terms. Both linguistic vulnerability and corporeal vulnerability are different routes by which a less violent relation to norms can be achieved (2009). Whilst Butler does not take up the question of sexual violence directly, her contribution to vulnerability highlights i) that the meaning of gender cannot be reduced to the effects of domination (linguistic vulnerability), and ii) that vulnerability is shared, cannot be disavowed making the pursuit of invulnerability is illusory (corporeal vulnerability). Against Dworkin then, Butler contends that social role and sexual role are separable and that focusing on where these come apart is insightful in understanding the possibilities for resistance.

Judith Butler's work is already canon for feminist and queer studies. I propose, however, just as she argued we must trouble gender, we can trouble the reception of her work and the taken-for-granted position that it occupies. Hemmings (2011) has highlighted how citation strategies form an important part of telling feminist stories otherwise. Building on this, putting Butler in dialogue with theorists such as Dworkin and introducing her into debates on sexual violence can lead to the proliferation of her ideas away from her work's own overdetermined readings.

Reductive readings of feminist thinkers matter not only because contributions to feminist thought get dismissed, but because in the realm of sexual politics the misrepresentation of ideas has violent consequences. The oversimplified binary of sex-positive/sex-negative that the respective dismissal and reification of certain thinkers permits underscores divisive sexual politics today. Anti-trans rhetoric and the weaponisation of white women's vulnerability by anti-immigration movements, for instance, depend on the effacing of ambiguity in the arena of sexuality (Phipps 2016; Gilson 2016; Oliviero 2019). If both Butler and Dworkin were motivated by the contradictory character of sexuality as a place of pleasure and danger, foregrounding

this prevents the monopolisation of sexual violence discourses by movements that seek protection for some whilst licensing violence for others.

Chapter five, 'Mobilising vulnerability in sexual violence discourses', took up precisely this concern: what happens to sexual violence politics when it is detached from a feminist attempt to address violence in all its forms? I argued that where oppositional vulnerability is present, the problem of sexual violence can be mobilised for reactionary purposes, such as the scapegoating of racialised masculinity in line with colonial or anti-immigrant agendas, or to exclude trans women from public bathrooms. These discourses depend on willful ignorance of the ontological vulnerability of the black male or the trans woman, in order to legitimise actions that heighten their structural vulnerability. Once again, the question of bodily autonomy is a means by which vulnerability can be negotiated and reactionary discourses can be exposed. Emi Koyama writes that a key principle of transfeminism is 'that we have the sole right to make decisions regarding our own bodies, and that no political, medical, or religious authority shall violate the integrity of our bodies against our will or impede our decisions regarding what to do with them' (2003: 245). Reactionary movements that mobilise vulnerability, by contrast, authorise paternalistic authorities with the power to protect some bodies and curtail the movement or expression of others.

My argument in this chapter builds on work regarding the mobilisation of the affective currency of vulnerability (Oliviero 2018; Koivunen et al. 2018) and argues that this is a particular concern in sexual violence discourses. Here, reactionary movements are licensed and legitimised through the moral auspices of a feminist concern with women's protection. This chapter therefore not only addresses a theoretical gap but highlights an urgent political project for a feminism that seeks to resist the operationalisation of a discourse of gendered vulnerability that furthers violence against women. The conjunction of vulnerability and sexual violence has a political life, and it is one that makes use of the validating character of feminism. Addressing this is urgent.

Instead of allowing discourses of gendered vulnerability to be mobilised, chapter five argued that intersectional sexual violence politics need to begin with the most vulnerable. This is an argument that has been highlighted across black feminism (Combahee River Collective 1986) and transfeminism (Spade 2015). If the reproduction of privilege depends on the denial of the vulnerability of the most

marginalised, countering privilege entails foregrounding the needs of the most marginalised. Taking up the figure of the black femme, for instance, exposes the structural dynamics of gender, heterosexuality and racism (Keeling 2007). Whilst this analysis has remained abstract in its assertion of the need to foreground lived structural vulnerabilities, there are promising avenues for future research, to begin with, these. Chapter four touched upon the unique vulnerabilities of Venus Xtravaganza, and to understand deep structures of domination, instances of sexual violence need to be attended to in their complexity (Lamble 2008). When violence against women remains understood as a preoccupation only for those with an attachment to essentialised binary sex categories, the potential for dialogue between trans and feminist anti-violence discourses is foreclosed. This is another question that I will return to in future research: once oppositional conceptions of vulnerability have been collapsed – how can sexual violence be an experience that grounds a coalitional politics with wide-reading potential? If the everyday struggle of the black, femme, trans and queer to ride public transport safely (Lubitow et al. 2017), is brought into dialogue with the fear of violence facing women across the world who walk the streets alone at night (Cahill 2001), then what future forms of protection will be foregrounded?

Chapter six, 'Vulnerability, #MeToo and feminist sexual violence activisms', juxtaposed the radical intersectional politics of vulnerability in Tarana Burke's Me Too movement with its mainstream uptake. It argued that Burke's activism demonstrates a black feminist awareness of the pitfalls of an oppositional account of vulnerability, where protection for some is privileged at the expense of protection for all. I highlighted how her sexual violence politics provided a frame for both identifying the extent of the problem and responding outside of a carceral orientation. I also demonstrated that Burke's connection of sexual violence with the violence of the state is one with a surprising parallel in Dworkin. Whilst Dworkin has been remembered for advancing 'carceral solutions to sexual violence' (Tanenbaum 2019), her move to write on pornography was a response to the rejection of her proposal of a book on prisons. In its inception, Me Too was a movement that highlighted the political potential of vulnerability, conceived beyond opposition to move feminists towards a politics of accountability and repair. It exemplified insights from each of the structural, affirmative and ambivalent perspectives of vulnerability. Burke's initial notion of 'empowerment through empathy' (Rodino-Colocino 2018)was a grassroots – yet just as philosophical – articulation of Butler's corporeal vulnerability as a

humanising heuristic. Yet this movement was also attentive to what Dworkin illuminated in regards to the sedimented gendered distribution of violence, and the importance of focusing on the violence specific to heterosexuality alongside the violence done to those who fail to operate in accordance with that social institution.

The mainstream #MeToo movement in some ways resembles the sexual politics of the 1970s. The logic of the hashtag has commonalities with consciousness-raising and the metaphor of 'silence' being 'broken' has resurfaced. This is a cause for concern in so far as the movement is being framed in terms of novelty, thereby effacing earlier activisms. Moreover, if structural change did not come from 'speaking out' (Serisier 2018) in the 1970s, there is little indication that anything is different today. Moreover, the logic of #MeToo also resembles the idea that it can happen to anyone, which had the effect of obscuring the unique vulnerabilities of women of colour and the 'directedness' (Ahmed 2018) of sexual violence. Whilst some commentators have begun to examine the similarities and differences between the sexual politics of the #MeToo movement and the sexual politics of the women's movement (Cossman 2018; Zarkov & Davies 2018), this is an area ripe for further investigation.

Dworkin was adamant that addressing violence entails addressing all instances of violence. Whilst she was overly quick to subsume these under the structure of male dominance, staying with some of her insights demonstrates the limitations of the contemporary #MeToo movement. Sexual violence is problematic not as an exception, but as a quotidian, structuring and constitutive part of the lives of all those gendered female. Whilst mainstream champions of the movement have articulated sexual violence as a problem, it has not been accompanied by a critique of binary gender and normative heterosexuality.

This highlights the significance of the disciplinary argument of the thesis, which is that when queer theory is privileged as the discipline for theorising heteronormativity, the way in which heteronormativity produces violence against women gets sidelined.[146] Foregrounding the question of vulnerability in relation to sexuality highlights how the parameters for theorising sexual politics deserve to be rendered more porous themselves. Queer theory, as a theory of sexual politics, needs to attend to violence

[146] See Halberstam for an example (1997: 259) 'It was precisely within women's studies departments that the study of sexuality in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to take a moralistic turn and seemed to reject the kinds of sexual histories that queer theorists have claimed as their own'

against women as one aspect of this. Reciprocally, sex in feminism is not 'straight' or necessarily normative. Stacey Patton asserts that 'black sex was long defined as "queer"—outside the norms of society—through the legitimacy given the rape of black women, the breaking up of black families, and the emasculation of black men in slavery?' Disrupting disciplinary norms, and the citation politics therein, permits a far more radical and inclusive theory of sexual politics. What links Dworkin and Burke, The Women's Liberation Movement and the abolitionist movement, is a contention that what happens to our bodies is where politics begins[147]. This, Kindig argues, represents 'the deepest and potentially most radical, inclusive and visionary claim of feminism' (2018). I believe it also permits an inclusive approach to theory too, enabling reparative readings of Dworkin for whom bodily autonomy for all was her driving concern and opening up the archive to thinkers who articulated demands for bodily autonomy perhaps through migration rather than writing (e.g. Hine 1989 , Wanzo 2020).

7.3 Vulnerability: what now and where next?

This thesis has argued that understanding vulnerability is central for a feminist politics of sexual violence. How it gets mobilised is a key aspect of the instrumentalisation of feminist discourse, and this is a challenge that needs to be met on. At the same time, a two-dimensional notion of vulnerability can provide the basis for a non-protectionist, coalitional politics against sexual violence. Vulnerability in its structural manifestations is an unevenly distributed lack of bodily autonomy. However, asymmetrical vulnerability is not only what enables sexual violence to happen but is also the springboard for resistance. Vulnerability is a concept well-placed to address both the gendered structural aspects of sexual violence and to provide a rubric for responding in an intersectional manner. A two-dimensional theory of vulnerability, which contains the insights of both the ontological and structural perspectives, is able to avoid essentialising women as victims whilst illuminating the gendered injustice revealed by the directedness of sexual violence. Whilst taking a context-sensitive approach might appear to be an evasion of decisiveness, an academic luxury that shirks engagement with the world of activism where undecidability is unaffordable – I contend that quite the opposite is the case. That in fact, such sensitivity enables one to conduct a more

[147] For a detailed discussion of Rosa Parks' bus boycott in terms of protecting black women's bodily integrity, see Danielle L. McGuire (2018).

generous approach to feminisms past and present, activist and academic. The desire to secure, once and for all, a superior account of a concept leads to the automatic dismissal of a vast amount of feminist history and literature. This has a particularly acute resonance in sexual violence politics where theorists and activists have been sidelined from contributing to academic sexual politics due to the over-association of sexual violence critiques with the anti-pornography movement's conservativism. Feminism itself has a myriad of different commitments and concerns and just as 'feminist theory is more fruitfully conceived as a multifaceted, multisided project than as a bounded field' (Hawkesworth and Disch 2018: 1), the same can be said about vulnerability.

Whilst the academic literature on vulnerability has notably avoided the question of sexual violence, outside the academy, this is not the case. Taking the argument of this thesis forward, I propose that contributions to feminist knowledge production are considered from all locations. Fateman writes that 'Dworkin was a philosopher outside of and against the academy' (2019: 12) and my inclusion of Tarana Burke is likewise in recognition of her role as feminist thinker, outside the academy yet informed by and in dialogue with black feminist thought. A politics of sexual violence that begins with the most structurally vulnerable needs to consult philosophers not necessarily institutionalised within higher education[148]. Sarah Ahmed has looked at Sister's Uncut, a UK-based sexual violence direct action group that 'show in how they do what they do that a politics that foregrounds sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual violence can be done through an intersectional lens' and how addressing the 'lived reality of domestic violence […] must also be about racism, including state racism, immigration, detention, poverty, unemployment and the erosion of the welfare state, all those structures that distribute vulnerability and fragility unevenly to populations' (2017: 211-12). Exploring progressive appeals to vulnerability such as these provide a way of creating new feminist knowledges beginning with gender and sexual violence. Audre Lorde writes that 'in our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower' (2017:92). If reactionary sexual violence politics have done the former with vulnerability, it is imperative for feminists to do the latter. I propose that starting with philosophers on the ground is the crucial next step.

[148] Darlene Hine (1989: 912) highlights how much sexual violence writing in black feminism takes place in literature and novels.

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