

Recognition and Reformulation

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Introduction

Violent events belong to those who experience them. The hurt and pain entailed can only be fully comprehended by the individual who is violated. In reproducing and representing violence academics are ever only visitors to the violent experiences of others. We tread a fine line between the need to maintain the integrity of these experiences and our desire to employ them so as to resist the social conditions that make them possible in the first place.¹ In doing so, we inevitably turn the experience of violence into an object of study. Whilst this is a crucial strategy in the struggle against violence, it can also be a problematic one. For example, it is now well recognised that many of the ways that western feminism represents violence against women reproduce normative assumptions about the victims and the perpetrators of that violence. This issue has been highlighted in the context of ethnic, racial and cultural difference. Less consideration has been given to the extent to which differences of sexuality – in terms of homosexuality and heterosexuality – have, or have not, been represented in the feminist literature on violence against women.² It is this issue that I explore in this article.

Violence towards women that involves anti-lesbian or anti-homosexual sentiment has been primarily, although not exclusively, addressed via the literature on homophobic violence. Homophobic violence is now well established as a significant social problem for lesbians and gay men in western countries. Victimisation surveys conducted during the 1980's and 1990's in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand suggest, in approximate terms, that: 70-80% of lesbians and gay men report experiencing verbal abuse in public on the basis of their sexuality; 30-40% report threats of violence; 20% of gay men report physical violence; and 10-12% of lesbians report physical violence.³ Most of these surveys also record incidents where lesbians and gay men have been chased or followed, pelted with objects, spat upon, have had their property vandalised and, in the case of lesbians, have been sexually assaulted.⁴ This research suggests that most homophobic incidents involve a random street assault perpetrated by a group of young males who are strangers to the victim. The victim is often alone or with one or two other

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1 In this article I use the term 'we' to refer to white and/or western feminist academics.

2 In this article I use the term 'sexuality' to refer to categories of sexual preference and identity; identities of lesbian, gay, homosexuality, or heterosexuality. This is very much a question of with whom we have, or desire to have, sex.

3 I derive these figures from an examination of the following publications and empirical studies: Berrill (1990); Faulkner (1997); GLAD (1994); New Zealand Gay Task Force (1985); Mason and Palmer (1996); von Schulthess (1992).

4 Even more disturbing is the research that highlights cases of homicide, particularly against gay men, where the victim's sexuality appears to be a significant factor. See Tomsen (1997).

friends at the time. In cases of physical violence or verbal abuse, the incidents are most likely to occur at night and to take place in public places such as the street, car parks, parks, or beats (Cox 1994; Safe Neighbourhoods Unit 1992; National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs 1999). However, lesbian-specific research suggests that a significant proportion of homophobia-related incidents against lesbians involve abuse by older men, men acting alone, and men who are acquainted with the woman. Such hostility may take place within the home or work environment and may involve an on-going campaign of harassment (Baird, Mason & Purcell 1994; Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project 1992; von Schulthess 1992; Mason 2002).⁵

On the one hand, this means that a proportion of all violence against lesbians has characteristics that are similar to the kinds of violence reported by heterosexual women. On the surface, these commonalities include: the 'private' domain in which the violence takes place, in particular, the home; the existence of some type of prior relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (even if only as an acquaintance); a perpetrator who acts on his own; and the on-going nature of some of the hostility. On the other hand, however, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of anti-lesbian violence does not have these characteristics. Indeed, research that makes broad comparisons between violence towards lesbians and violence towards women as a whole suggests that the former is more likely to involve a stranger and, according to one study, may actually be more frequent (Comstock 1991; Price Waterhouse Urwick 1995).⁶ In short, it is notable that the majority of anti-lesbian incidents bear a certain likeness to the 'stranger danger' image of violence – random attacks by unknown men in dark places – that feminism has long sought to dispel as misrepresenting women's real experiences of violence.⁷

These kinds of comparisons are important because they show us that homophobia-related violence towards lesbians is typical of neither gendered violence nor homophobic violence. Neither is it atypical. This is not a problem in itself. It only becomes a problem when we attempt to explain or understand such violence through theoretical frameworks that are singular or universal. For example, the literature on homophobic violence tends to position anti-homosexual sentiment – and its basis in the hierarchical division between homosexuality and heterosexuality – as the paramount power relation within which such violence erupts. This is not to say that gender is ignored but, rather, that it becomes a fairly neutral variable in the definition of homophobia. Whilst homophobic violence is often said to reflect the heterocentric belief that homosexuality violates gender norms, the different implications that gender, as a sexualised power relation *between* men and women, might have for violence towards lesbians and violence towards gay men are often glossed over (Harry 1990; Comstock 1991). With some notable exceptions (Herek 1986, 2000), the literature on homophobic violence continues to allow sexuality to subsume the relevance of gender.

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- 5 In an Australian study of predominantly gay men, only 1.5% of incidents took place at home, only 6% knew the assailant, and 83% of assailants were believed to be under 25 years old (Cox 1990).
 - 6 Comstock (1991) compares violence towards lesbians with violence towards women as a whole in the United States. It should be noted that he does this by contrasting a victim survey with the US national crime statistics which represent crimes reported to the police. Australian research by Price Waterhouse Urwick (1995) suggests that gay men in Sydney are at least 4 times more likely to experience an assault in a 12 month period than other Sydney men, whilst lesbians in Sydney are 6 times more likely to experience an assault in a 12 month period than other Sydney women.
 - 7 It is important to recognise that this picture of violence is concerned with those events where homosexuality is an important contextual factor. Just because a woman is lesbian does not mean that all violence towards her has a homophobic component.

This is not to deny the crucial place of homophobia in understanding violence against lesbians and gay men. Increasingly, however, it is becoming difficult to reduce such violence to a question of homophobia alone. There is now ample research to suggest that the role played by gender relations in the commission of this violence is incontrovertible.⁸ This is particularly apparent in acts of violence by heterosexual men against lesbian women. For example, it is commonly said that it is difficult for lesbians to discern whether they are being abused because they are women or because they are homosexuals. Whilst I don't deny that lesbians may feel like this, the assumption that such categorisations are not only desirable but also possible is deeply troubling. Anti-lesbian violence cannot be categorised as *either* a question of gender *or* sexuality. Instead, it is the product of an interaction between the power relations embodied in dominant discourses of *both* sexuality *and* gender. To my mind, this suggests that we will only be able to come to terms with such violence if we draw upon both the literature on homophobic violence and the feminist literature on violence against women.

Indeed, some commentators have suggested that anti-lesbian violence can *only* be understood through the broad feminist framework that dominates the literature on violence against women (for example, as a product of patriarchal power relations).⁹ Whilst this approach merely mirrors the idea that anti-lesbian violence is solely a question of homophobia, in that it fails to recognise the interaction of gender with regimes of sexuality, it does raise an important point. It forces us to consider whether or not we can turn to the feminist literature on violence against women to explain homophobia-related violence towards lesbians. Feminist literature on violence towards women has had an invaluable and profound influence on our understanding of the kinds of violence that heterosexual men direct towards heterosexual women. But, the question we must ask, and the question I ask in this article, is: to what extent does the formulation of violence embodied in this literature provide us with a conceptual framework that is capable of encompassing the specificities involved in the violence that heterosexual men direct towards lesbian women? This is not just a question about differences of sexuality. More generally, it is a question about the mediums that are available to us for representing different experiences of violence at a theoretical level.

It is here that the question of difference, particularly the representation of difference, becomes paramount. The ways in which we speak about, represent, or 'deal with' difference are integral to the kinds of frameworks that we draw upon to understand violence. In this article I consider some specific limitations of the ways in which the feminist literature on violence against women (which I also refer to as 'gendered violence') tends to represent, or not represent, differences of sexuality and what this might tell us about the representation of difference as a whole. In order to do this, my discussion moves through several sections. First, I consider how the representation of difference has been addressed in western feminist literature in general. Despite the fact that this article is primarily about differences of sexuality, I focus my initial discussion upon difference as it pertains to race and ethnicity. I believe that it is in this context that the most complex and sophisticated debate has taken place: this is a debate from which we can learn much. In other words, I appropriate the feminist literature on racial and ethnic difference as a medium for thinking about how sexuality is represented in the literature on violence against women. I suggest that one of the important points to emerge from these debates is a distinction between the *recognition* of difference and the *reformulation* of theory as a consequence of that recognition. I then

8 Tomsen and Mason (2001).

9 Pharr (1988); Rich (1980); von Schulthess (1992).

set the scene for a discussion of this distinction in the context of the violence literature by providing a brief overview of the feminist literature on violence against women. In the last section of the article I bring these sections together by arguing that much of the feminist literature on violence against women may now recognise difference but it continues to resist a reformation of its conceptual or explanatory frameworks so as to account for, rather than subsume, violence towards lesbians. This, I suggest, comes to rest upon a problematic distinction between experience and theory.

Difference and Representation

Although feminism has always been about difference (sexual difference), debates about difference between women erupted during the 1980's and took hold on a global scale during the 1990's.¹⁰ Class difference may have formed the substance of earlier debates around Marxism and feminism, but these more recent 'difference debates' emerged strongly around other issues, most intensely over questions of race, ethnicity, nation, culture, skin colour and religion (Alexander & Mohanty 1997; Mirza 1997; Gunew & Yeatman 1993; Lennon & Whitford 1994). White and/or western feminism became increasingly visible as a universalist and reductionist discourse that marginalised the experiences and voices of Indigenous, black, third world, and migrant women. As white/western feminism has gradually, often far too slowly, risen to meet this challenge the debate has moved beyond the initial responsibility of acknowledging the differences that exist between women. Nowadays, it has just as much to do with how feminism *represents* these differences. As Ang puts it, how difference is 'dealt with' is a difficult matter that is 'typically imagined by the feminist establishment through such benevolent terms as "recognition", "understanding" and "dialogue"' (1995:59). In contrast, Ang suggests that instead of striving to resolve and contain difference, as if it were a problem that could be reduced to benign diversity, there is a need to pay serious attention to the point that Mohanty (1989) made some time ago: there may be differences, produced within hierarchies of domination and resistance, that are simply irreconcilable. White/western feminism does not need to 'overcome' this. Instead, it needs to learn how to listen to ambivalence and ambiguity; it needs to recognise that it does not lay claim to being the only form of feminism.

The question of representation is not merely about ensuring that different voices are heard or different experiences are reproduced. More fundamentally, it is about resisting the tendency to affirm the dominance of the white/western subject through a continual process of 'othering' those who are assumed to be 'different from' this norm. In questioning the assumption that those who are subjugated or marginalised will, or should, necessarily speak in their own interests, Spivak (1988) argues that it is inadequate for the white/western academic to refrain from speaking so that the voices of these 'others' may be heard.¹¹ For Spivak, representation in a figurative sense (*darsellan*) cannot be equated with representation as a political act of persuasion that involves 'speaking for' another

10 The relationship of feminism to a politics of difference has become increasingly complex. The traditional feminist debate about equality and difference has been supplanted by two strands of thinking that have moved the question of difference onto centre stage. First, is the school of feminism concerned with sexual difference, not as a social construction, but as a culturally embodied practice that throws the existing sex/gender distinction into question (Grosz 1994). Sometimes aligned and sometimes not, another wave has moved across the ground of western feminism, engaging it in an intense and sometimes painful dialogue around the differences that exist *between* women: differences of ethnicity, race, nation, class, religion, global economics, sexuality, physical ability and more. In both of these contexts difference manifests as an epistemological and political challenge to the capacity of the category of woman to enact unification based upon a universal gender identity.

(*vertreten*). Despite criticism of various aspects of Spivak's argument (Ram 1993; Moore-Gilbert 1997) her overall point is salient. In backing away from representing and deconstructing colonised, non-western or non-white experience, white/western academics assume that it is only individuals like themselves who must be deconstructed. In contrast, the colonised, non-western or non-white subject is assumed to have an authentic transparent knowledge of their own experience, which they can effectively represent. Not only does this assumption tie such representations to the very experience of subjugation, it also authorises and re-constitutes the white/western subject as the sovereign subject. This adulation is at the expense of the 'other' who, in his or her supposed immunity to deconstructive challenges, continues to function as the western 'Self's shadow' (Spivak 1988:280).

Spivak's contention is part of a much broader feminist and postcolonial discussion about speaking positions. A large body of black, indigenous and 'third-world' writing has highlighted the reality that representations of both self and other are always embedded in the political, cultural and corporeal positions of the speaker (Felton & Flanagan 1993; Gunew 1991; hooks 1981; Spelman 1988; Moraga & Anzaldúa 1981; Trinh 1990). As Haraway (1991:193) puts it, to claim transcendence in the production of any knowledge is 'truly fantastic, distorted and so irrational.' For those whose voices are rarely heard in dominant or mainstream forums the act of speaking 'from the margins' may constitute an act of resistance (hooks 1990), but speaking from a particular identity, as a certain type of subject, may also bring with it implications of authenticity, homogenisation and the exclusion of other aspects of identity. Spivak captures this concern when she says: 'The moment I have to think of ways in which I will speak as an Indian, or as a feminist, the ways in which I will speak as a woman, what I am doing is trying to generalise myself, make myself a representative, trying to distance myself from some kind of inchoate speaking as such' (1990:18).

Hence, it is problematic to translate calls to silence the white/western feminist into a blanket prohibition against ever speaking about 'the other'. Such silence inevitably reinforces existing relations of privilege and subjugation. This is not only because it maps a deconstructive/authentic opposition onto the self/other distinction, as Spivak argues, but also because it presumes that if one only speaks about oneself then that speech can never harm others. This belief in a stable boundary between self and other is only possible, says Alcoff, through the 'illusion, well-supported in the individualist ideology of the West, that a self is not constituted by multiple intersecting discourses but consists in a unified whole capable of autonomy from others' (Alcoff 1991-2:19). To contend that only those who are oppressed in a particular way have the authority or authenticity to speak about such oppression is to make a claim of epistemic privilege based upon subjugation, which in the long run 'does not merely recover the agency of socially marginalised subjects but valorises it' (Bar On 1993:92). The authorisation of speech in this way can never be solely a tool of resistance. If we accept Bar On's point that 'speech needs to be authorized only when silence is the rule' (96-7), it may simultaneously be a tool of subjugation.

11 Spivak focuses this particular discussion upon the notion of the subaltern and the subaltern woman; a term derived from Gramsci. She criticises the Subaltern Study Group for its use of the concept to refer to, what she claims to be, an essentialist 'identity-in-difference'. Recently, Spivak has distanced herself from subsequent appropriations of the term subaltern to refer to 'the other' in general (Spivak 1996). Nonetheless, Spivak's own use of the term in this particular article is less than consistent, slipping between a signifier for that group of people on the Indian subcontinent who are most impoverished and a name for broad global marginalisation: both of which are given little historical specificity.

From these debates there has emerged a more critical reflection upon the ways in which we choose or are able to represent ourselves and others; whether 'we' denotes a privileged or a marginal position. The white/western feminist tendency to speak *for* or on behalf of other women has been increasingly abandoned. Although this is a shift that eventually comes to rest upon the porous and problematic distinction between speaking *for* and speaking *about* others (Alcoff 1991-2), it has also been translated into calls for listening to and speaking *with* others (Felton & Flanagan 1993). Such distinctions may offer the beginnings of the delicate manoeuvres necessary to shift the universalising practices of much white/western feminism, but, as Hollinsworth (1995) points out, these manoeuvres do not of themselves create a space within which the other can speak. To assume that they do is to assume that such a space can only emerge through the benevolent acts of privileged academics.

It is increasingly the case, therefore, that white/western feminists are taking responsibility for asking of their work, what 'readings are not privileged, ... what questions can't be asked?' (Gunew 1990:61). While the acts of speaking *with* each other, require this, there is no ready made solution that allows the epistemic and political difficulties of representation to be 'put under the carpet' through well intentioned academics either speaking in the interests of the disenfranchised or stepping aside so that 'authentic voices' can be heard (Spivak 1990:63). Although Spivak (1990) suggests that the question of who should speak may be less crucial than the question of who will listen, the generosity of this position is only appropriate where the voices of the subjugated actually *do* direct a dialogue with the voices of the privileged. Movement towards this dialogue necessitates speech from differing subject positions and an understanding that the very dualistic terms (centre/margin, privilege/subjugation, western/non-western) through which we commonly examine the question of representation are in themselves a fundamental effect, as well as a cause, of the problem. In short, the point is not to avoid representations of difference but rather to focus upon the context, character and ramifications of such representations.

Academic discourse is sometimes only distinguishable from social discourse because of the manner in which the researcher actively and consciously introduces a framework through which he or she talks about particular phenomena. Through this intellectual intervention the experiences of others are selectively, but unavoidably, interpreted and re-presented. It is the capacity of such representation to tell us something about the mechanisms that create and sustain power relations that is important. In order to challenge such relations, and to move towards a counter discourse, it is not enough for academics to simply acknowledge difference in an experiential or ontological sense; as if the fact that we no longer ignore it is sufficient in itself. Rather, we need to interrogate the very conceptual and theoretical frameworks that we bring to different women's experiences. This does not, as Ang says, simply involve 'dealing with' or 'containing' difference by subsuming it into existing frameworks. Instead, it involves, at a minimum, bringing difference to bear upon the very premises implicit to those frameworks. According to Probyn this is a question of location: 'In order for [the non-white or non-western woman] to ask questions, the ground constructed by these practices must be rearranged' (1990:186). The contribution of white/western feminists to the achievement of such a rearrangement can never rest upon the proliferation of (impossibly) unadulterated subjugated voices; that is, it can never simply rest upon *recognising* difference. The challenge thrown out by a politics of difference is not simply about 'substituting the lost figure of the colonized' but is instead about 'learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide' (Spivak 1988:295). That is, it is about *reformulating* the frameworks that we employ to interpret and understand experience.

In the section that follows I am concerned with the western feminist literature on men's violence towards women. I believe that it is important to spend some time laying out the broad achievements of this body of work, before considering how it is that differences of sexuality have been represented within it; that is, before considering to what extent such literature both recognises difference and employs it in the reformulation of its theoretical frameworks. To my mind, such a critique cannot operate in a vacuum. If my commentary on the limitations of this field of literature is to be constructive, it is imperative that it respects, and does not ignore, the contribution made by such literature (where such contribution is as significant as it is in the feminist literature on violence against women). I can only do this if I contextualise my discussion against a background of existing accomplishments.

Western Feminist Literature on Violence Against Women

As I look at the sub-heading above I am overwhelmed by the enormity of the territory it proclaims to discuss. Since at least the early 1970's, the production of feminist writing (not to mention visual and aural texts) on violence against women has been nothing short of tremendous, in terms of size, quality and influence. There is no way to encompass the sheer breadth and complexity of this material without reducing it to a parsimonious, and inevitably dissatisfying, encapsulation. I am encouraged by the thought that the impossibility of ever doing justice to this literature reflects the strength of its dimensions and the diversity of its origins in activism, journalism, academia, policy, politics and the community sector. Instead of attempting to provide a summary of this mammoth knowledge-base I would like to refer to what, for me, are some of the most significant contributions of the field.

Prior to the emergence of the second wave of the women's movement in western countries the violence that women reported was commonly understood in social and legal domains through an individualised, often pathological, framework that tended to shift responsibility for the violence away from the, mostly male, perpetrators and onto the victim. While the legacy of pre-feminist ('anti-feminist' or 'post-feminist' might also be appropriate here) analysis continues to haunt popular, professional and legal reactions to, and representations of, the violence that men do to women, the intervention of feminist activism and theory has deeply troubled this model. It is no longer accurate to say that masculinist understandings of such violence reign supreme. This is not to suggest that feminist models of violence have come to dominate but, more modestly, that feminism has made a profound impression upon contemporary attitudes to the diversities of violence that women report and the ways in which the body politic responds.

During the 1970's violence became firmly implanted as a pivotal feminist issue. Published works and private dialogues produced a framework for thinking about the violence that men directed towards women. As women gradually gave voice to their experiences, the links between supposedly different types of violence – such as rape and domestic assault – became visible (Edwards 1987). The diverse contexts within which women experience violence have since been highlighted by research which looks, for example, at prostitution (Miller & Schwartz 1995), disability (Razack 1995) and the workplace (Schneider 1993). Although some research has emphasised the violence that women experience in more public forums, such as exhibitionism or sexualised street harassment (Stanko 1992), overall, feminist chronicles of violence have been effective in shifting our understanding of the problem away from the classic image of 'stranger danger' to the idea that violence is most commonly enacted by a man known to the woman and is

most likely to occur at a place of residence, work or study. Discrediting the myths that have surrounded gendered violence have made it possible to see the disturbing extent to which violence is prevalent in the lives of many women. The creation of spaces for women to voice their experiences and perceptions of violence ('breaking the silence') has ensured that we are now only too aware that crimes such as rape, domestic violence and child sexual assault¹² are not isolated, strange occurrences that take place between people who are 'not like us' (Edwards 1987; Dobash & Dobash 1992; Radford & Russell 1992).

By drawing rudimentary connections between diverse violent behaviours, previously only acknowledged as isolated problems in themselves, feminism has been able to effect dramatic changes to traditional explanatory models of violence. In historically locating men's violence towards women within a structuralist model of patriarchal power it has been possible to rearticulate certain forms of violence as a fundamentally gendered problem of massive national and cross-national proportions (Brownmiller 1975; Dobash & Dobash 1992). For example, concepts such as 'the continuum of violence' (Kelly 1988) have been influential in making connections between the plethora of harassing and violent events which women experience in the course of their lives. The idea of a continuum can be understood in two senses. First, it signifies that violence, particularly sexual violence, often manifests in a continuous series of pressured, abusive or forceful situations that may defy conventional linguistic and legal categorisations. Second, it asserts that the common denominator underlying many different types of violence is the fact that men can use these different forms of abuse in order to control women.¹³ In exposing the capacity of violence to engender fear among those individuals who see themselves as its likely targets, it has been possible to show how violence acts as form of regulation over the minds and bodies of women (Hamner & Saunders 1984; Stanko 1993). In short, feminism has given us a language for talking about, interpreting and understanding violence. This naming process has proven crucial in the struggle against violence.¹⁴

None of this is to suggest that feminist interventions around violence have been smooth sailing or that the battle against violence has been 'won'. Feminists who work in this field may share a common desire to ameliorate the problem and to challenge misogynistic constructions of, and reactions to, violence, but there is no unified position on how to do this. Distinct tensions and polarities have emerged.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the common

12 Although I am looking here only at violence towards women, it is difficult to exclude the important contribution feminism has made to unearthing the prevalence of child sexual abuse within the family.

13 Although masculinity has long been recognised for its association with both violent and non-violent crime, feminist attention has recently been directed to the specifics of this relationship in an attempt to deepen our understanding of the perpetrator side of violence. This field of research attempts to move away from the tendency to treat men and masculinity as 'largely taken-for-granted backdrops in the counting games' (Stanko 1994:35).

14 For example, although there is much dissent between the 'family violence' model and the 'feminist' model of domestic violence (Kurz 1989), simply naming the behaviour provides a means for addressing it that was unheard of before the 1960's (Brienes & Gordon 1983). Similarly, the feminist-inspired shift from the language of victim to the language of survivor represents a crucial attempt to emphasise the fact that women may be victimised by violence but their sheer capacity to physically and emotionally survive (for those who do) is a feat of resistance against the processes of victimisation. In addition, feminist commentators have challenged concepts and categories of violence that are often taken for granted. For example, strategic critiques have been made of the notion of the 'serial killer' (Cameron & Fraser 1987; Hollway 1981).

15 Some of the most heated debates and polarisations within feminism have centred upon questions of violence, such as the contested relationship between pornography and violence (Read 1989; Dworkin 1981), the ability of a feminist model of patriarchy to account for the way in which violence is refracted through regimes of class and race (Patel 1997), and, more recently, the capacity of feminist theory to respond to the violence that women perpetrate (Kelly 1996).

denominator that continues to link many divergent strands of research is the belief that men's violence towards women is the product of unequal gender relations, particularly of masculinity and its problematic alliance with the institution of heterosexuality (Edwards 1987).

Sexuality and Violence

Although it is often taken for granted that 'lesbians are everywhere' within white/western feminism the degree to which the experiences of women who are not heterosexual inform the theory and praxis on violence varies considerably. Although there is a small body of research that examines lesbian accounts of violence (Mason 1997; Pharr 1988; Robson 1992; von Schulthess 1992) the vast majority of feminist literature on violence towards women has paid little overt or direct attention to lesbian experience as an object of study; although exceptions appear now and then, such as Schneider's (1993) study of workplace sexual assault against heterosexual and lesbian women. This is not to say that lesbian women have not conducted research or have not been included as research subjects but, rather, that much empirical and theoretical commentary has little to say about how lesbian experiences or perceptions of violence might differ from those of heterosexual women. It is more common for lesbianism to enter feminist texts on violence through an analysis of the way in which 'accusations' of lesbianism can be used to regulate the behaviour of potentially any woman (Edwards 1987). Moreover, it is interesting that, to date, the most detailed coverage of lesbian experience has come through material that addresses, not violence by men, but violence within lesbian relationships (Renzetti 1988; Lobel 1986; Taylor & Chandler 1995; Robson 1992; Kelly 1991, 1996).

One of the implications of this, and other, lacunae has been the evolution of a series of feminist statements about the violence that men enact upon adult women which, while capturing many heterosexual women's encounters with violence, do not sit so easily with the lesbian encounters that I described earlier. Take, for example, the feminist maxim that women are most likely to experience violence at the hands of men they know and that they are at greatest risk of such violence in their own homes or workplaces. When read as a whole, this is a picture of violence that is most accurately characterised by the adjective 'heterosexual', in the sense that such violence is more likely to be experienced by heterosexual women than homosexual women. This is not to suggest that this picture of privatised violence never applies to lesbian women. As I have suggested, it is not unusual for lesbians to recount violence and hostility by men they know, including ex-partners. Nor is it unusual for such violence to take place near the woman's home or place of work. However, as we have already seen, the major proportion of anti-lesbian violence appears to involve a more public form of hostility that may well be perpetrated by a stranger. In short, scenarios of violence that are the *most* common for heterosexual women may be the *least* common for lesbian women, and vice versa.

Although lesbian experiences of violence have only occasionally been recognised in the empirical knowledge-base that feminism has produced on gendered violence, the same cannot be said about the concept of sexuality itself. Associations between patriarchy and the institution of heterosexuality have always been fundamental to feminism. Early writers such as Millett (1970) and Daly (1978) sought, in different ways, to make this connection apparent. In relation to violence, heterosexuality has been most strongly implicated in crimes of rape and sexual assault. For example, in 1979 Susan Griffin argued that 'the basic elements of rape' were involved in all heterosexual relationships because 'heterosexual love finds an erotic expression through male dominance and female submission' (Griffin

1979:29). Brownmiller put it in terms of biological capacity: 'Man's structural capacity to rape and woman's corresponding structural vulnerability are as basic to the physiology of both our sexes as the primal act of sex itself' (1975:13). More recently, the work of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon has been particularly influential in the field of gendered violence (Dworkin 1981; MacKinnon 1982, 1983). Under their separate and joint argumentation, violence, sexuality and law have been brought together in a complex vector of patriarchal and sexual relations: a model which continues to be explicated and reimagined in various ways in the work of others (Dworkin 1981; MacKinnon & Dworkin 1997; MacKinnon 1982, 1983, 1993). MacKinnon, in particular, has, as Brown puts it, 'extraordinary political purchase' (1995:77) and the influence of her work upon feminist analyses of violence is immeasurable. For MacKinnon, rape, incest, sexual harassment, pornography and prostitution are all abuses of sex and must be understood within a model that uses the notion of sexuality to signify heterosexual objectification and the eroticisation of the dominance/submission relation between men and women. In other words, forced heterosexual sex is central to MacKinnon's conceptualisation of sexuality: she states, for example, that the 'more feminist view ... sees sexuality as a social sphere of male power of which forced sex is paradigmatic' (MacKinnon 1983:646). In this convergence of sexuality and gender, sexuality emerges as a 'form of power' embodied by the social construction of gender and 'not the reverse' (1982:533). Indeed, it is 'the primary social sphere of male power' (1982:529).

Vega (1988) neatly synthesises one of the problems with this model. It defines sexuality as violence and, in turn, this violent sexuality functions as the foundation for the construction of gender: that is, (violent) sexuality stands in for biological sex in the determination of femininity. The implication is that 'sexual violence has suddenly been made into "the" feminist theory of power [and] ... forced sex now constitutes "the" social meaning of gender. Patriarchal power equals sexuality, equals force' (Vega 1988:88).¹⁶ By reducing sexuality to a matter of forced heterosexuality, this model implies that it is only in relation to the masculine/feminine binary that sexuality is of any explanatory importance. In other words, sexuality is deemed to be relevant only in so far as it denotes heterosexual practices and, in turn, the ways in which these contribute to the maintenance of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. The fact that this very same regime *privileges* heterosexuality at the expense of homosexuality is disregarded. Or, as Brown puts it, when gender becomes fully constituted by (hetero) sexuality: 'lesbian sex either doesn't exist, is sex for men, or imitates heterosexuality' (1995:89).

The legacy of this model is found in much feminist work on violence that sees heterosexuality as '*the* social system for the control of women' (Hanmer 1990:448, emphasis in original). While concepts of 'heter-reality' and 'hetero-patriarchy' – and the ways these have been picked up in violence discourse – may seek to capture the importance of heterosexuality for gender relations, they still reduce the significance of sexuality to one of male dominance alone; it is merely a question of whether this dominance is articulated as heterosexuality, as masculinity, as patriarchy or as hetero-patriarchy (Raymond 1986; Hester 1992; Hanmer et al 1989). The articulation of sexuality solely as a matter of men's power over women leaves little room for considering the ways in which heterosexuality also represents the privileged half of a heterosexual/homosexual binary that provides the cultural context for violence that is directed towards lesbians (and gay men). This does not mean that psycho-social systems of gender inequality and/or the social construction of masculinity are not cogent rationales for the vast proportion of men's violence towards

16 Further critiques of MacKinnon's work can be found in Cornell (1995) and Butler (1997).

women. But, to put it simply, it does suggest that they tell only one half of the story when it comes to the violence that heterosexual men commit against homosexual women.¹⁷ Not only does this ignore the power differential between heterosexuality and homosexuality but, as Brown (1995:83) asks, 'what if sexuality ... is itself a complex nonschema of discourses and economies, which are constitutive not only of the semiotics of gender but of race and class formations?'

Recognition and Reformulation

This returns us to the question of how difference is 'dealt with' in the study of gendered violence. The conceptual tools that we bring to a social problem like violence fundamentally, albeit in ever-fluctuating ways, shape our knowledge of that problem. This is not merely a question of whether we use concepts such as patriarchy, misogyny, sexism or gender to analyse the violence that women recount. Although I am sceptical about the continuing utility of the concept of patriarchy for feminist politics and theory, the debates about *which* tools we use may be, I believe, less important than the question of *how* we use these tools. Take, for example, recent comments by Hester, Kelly and Radford, researchers and activists whose contribution to the struggle against gendered violence over the last couple of decades has been invaluable. In the introduction to their 1996 edited book on violence they propose that we *recognise* both the differences and commonalities between women's experiences of male violence, but that we do this in a way that continues to position all such violence (which they call 'sexual violence') within the conceptual framework of a patriarchal power relation. Thus they argue that feminism must address 'how within patriarchal societies women's oppression is experienced by women who may be simultaneously privileged and/or oppressed by power structures of race, class, sexuality, age and/or dis/ability while being oppressed by gender' (1996:9). It is also interesting to note Kelly's further argument that feminism can also analyse the kinds of violence that women commit against children and other women within 'its existing framework', that is, within a repressive model of patriarchy (1996:37). Although these examples are in no way exhaustive, they are, I believe, symptomatic of a broader tendency within the white/western feminist literature on violence to continue to rely upon patriarchy as an overarching conceptual framework for understanding *all* women's experiences of violence. The problem with this approach to difference can no longer be characterised as one of overt neglect: difference *is* recognised in violence literature. Rather, the problem comes to rest upon the more subtle distinction between recognition and reformulation that I raised earlier.

Recognition can only ever be a first step in representing the different experiences that women have of male violence. Certainly, it is essential that the differences between women's experiences are acknowledged and rendered visible before we can even begin to conceptualise and analyse such experiences. But, the responsibility that feminism has to women of all kinds does not end here: recognition is a *necessary* project for feminism but it is not a *sufficient* one. Hester, Kelly and Radford argue that: 'Recognizing differences between women does not preclude the possibility of feminist analysis' (1996:9). I don't disagree. My point, however, is that this does not go far enough. If we recognise difference, we probably need to rethink what we mean by feminist analysis. To recognise the differences, as well as the commonalities, in experience of violence is not the same as actively using these differences to critique and reconstruct the conceptual frameworks through which we account for violence. As a question of power, rather than benign

17 Similar arguments have been made around race and class (Mama 1989; Patel 1997; Southall Black Sisters 1994).

pluralism, difference cannot be simply incorporated into existing explanatory models. Instead, it must interrogate these models. As I have argued above, in relation to violence towards lesbians, the encounters that specific groups of women have with violence may well exceed any model that reduces all forms of violence against women to a singular gendered power relation (whether that power relation is articulated as patriarchy or dominant masculinity). In contrast, reformulation is about delving into the fundamental challenges that differential power relations pose to dominant feminist theories of violence. This is not to say that difference must override all commonalities or demolish all theoretical models. Rather, reformulation explores the tension between sites of difference and sites of commonality. It does not offer a convenient solution to these tensions, but it does refuse to 'deal with' difference by assimilating it into existing models, where these models are grounded in the experiences of heterosexual (or white or middle-class) women.

To assume that the recognition of difference does not require a reformulation of the conceptual frameworks through which we interpret violence is to presume the existence of a coherent demarcation between experience and theory (with difference contained to the former). The empirical experiences of violence cannot be severed from the conceptual tools that we, as academics, use to name and identify such experiences in the first place. If difference has ramifications in the practice of prevention, service provision and law reform, it must also have ramifications for the theoretical frameworks that guide us in analysing violence. When difference is confined to the experiential sphere it may seem as if the field of literature in question has 'dealt with' such difference. But when the implications of that difference are then subsumed under the analytic umbrella of a single power relation - such as gender or patriarchy - the very difference that was initially rendered visible and recognised must struggle to not be submerged again. It may, quite simply, disappear. Unless the knowledge of difference that is evident at the empirical level translates into an interrogation and/or some shifting of theoretical boundaries we are likely to find that our understandings of violence are circumscribed by this ultimately impossible, and politically undesirable, invitation to enact a delineation between experience and theory.

Putting 'the other' into discourse may momentarily function to reverse conventional relations of margin and centre but it does little to displace the oppositional terms which make this reversal necessary. As Spivak (1998) suggests, instead of simply striving to include the voices of the marginalised, the challenge lies in learning to use these voices to critique existing discourse; that is, in rearranging the ground so that it is possible to ask, and see, how certain suppressions allow a particular theory to function as an authoritative narrative. This is not a matter of rejecting a feminist paradigm of gender in the critique of violent behaviour. Indeed, it is difficult to dispute the fact that gender continues to emerge as one of the common denominators in a vast array of violent situations. Rather, it is about examining the ways in which we speak about gender, how we may rearrange the notion of gender so that its ambiguities and incommensurabilities do not get lost in a seamless theorisation of violence against women as a question of patriarchy *alone*.

Concluding Remarks

Difference is about what lies between identities and power relations. Rather than looking at the ways in which one group of women is 'different from' another - which merely maintains the latter group as the benchmark against which the former is marked - we need to represent difference as it relates both to experience and to theory. Accounts of anti-lesbian violence are both different from and similar to accounts of violence towards heterosexual women. The distinctions *between* these experiences make it clear that a conceptual model that continues to reduce all violence against women to a question of gender relations between men and women will fall short of providing an adequate account of anti-lesbian violence. Yet, this is precisely what we tend to do when we limit the significance of sexuality to men's oppression of women. This interpretation effectively ignores the ways in which discourses of sexuality simultaneously privilege heterosexuality and subjugate homosexuality. When considered within the broader feminist literature, the issue of anti-lesbian violence thereby highlights the fact that 'violence against women' as an object of study is premised on the idea that gender embodies sameness at the expense of difference. This premise makes it difficult to articulate the complexity and multiplicity of power relations that produce such violence.

Whilst we need to represent difference at the experiential level, the question remains: what do such representations mean for our formulations of violence at the theoretical level? This is not simply a matter of recognising that identities of sexuality (or race or ethnicity) represent simultaneous power relations that run parallel to gender in the enactment of violence. It is a matter of formulating how these power relations interact with, inflect and shape gender. In other words, how can we reconfigure a gendered account of violence that does not make other differences, other identities, disappear? In the absence of such a formulation we run the risk of inadvertently reinforcing a homogenous theory of violence that, in the final analysis is incapable of accounting for the differences that women embody.

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