

Chapter 1



THE FEMINISM AND FOUCAULT DEBATE: STAKES, ISSUES, POSITIONS

Feminists disagree about the usefulness of Foucault's work for feminist theory and practice. Some feminists advocate a Foucauldian feminism, while others argue that the underlying assumptions of feminism are antithetical to Foucault's theoretical framework.¹ The question about whether or not Foucault's work is useful for feminism is situated within the larger debate about the compatibility of a postmodern approach with an emancipatory, progressive politics.² Proponents of postmodernism see it as essential to a progressive politics. They claim that traditional notions of political unity, rights, and freedom carry normative implications that foreclose certain questions about who is included in the political process and that this foreclosure may result in systematic exclusion. Proponents of progressive politics, on the other hand, claim that postmodernism undermines the very possibility of a progressive, emancipatory politics mainly because of its rejection of normative concepts.³ In an article entitled, "Why Poststructuralism is a Dead End for Progressive Thought," Barbara Epstein claims, "the underlying assumptions of poststructuralism conflict with the assumptions that are necessary for radical politics."⁴ Epstein is particularly concerned with feminist poststructuralism, which she claims is amoral and "is a campaign against the basic structures of thought and language."⁵ She is not alone in her condemnation of poststructuralism. Many feminists share her concern that postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches are at odds with progressive politics in general and feminist politics in particular. Somer Brodribb says, "Postmodernism exults female oblivion and disconnection; it has no model for the acquisition of knowledge, for making connections, for communication, or for becoming global, which feminism has done and will continue to do."⁶ Most feminist attacks on

postmodernism include the work of Michel Foucault and some single him out as the prime representative of postmodern thought.

Feminists warn against using Foucault in no uncertain terms. Toril Moi, for instance, says, “the price for giving into his [Foucault’s] powerful discourse is nothing less than the depoliticisation of feminism.”⁷ Likewise Nancy Hartsock says, “poststructuralist theories such as those put forward by Michel Foucault fail to provide a theory of power for women.”⁸ And Linda Alcoff cautions that “a wholesale appropriation of Foucault by feminist theorists is unwise.”⁹ Just what is so dangerous for feminists about appropriating Foucault’s theories, one might ask. In general, feminist critics of Foucault fear that his rejection of norms undermines the possibility for feminism as an emancipatory political movement. His rejection of norms, combined with his view that truth and knowledge are always produced within a network of power relations, leads many to accuse Foucault of relativism and nihilism. They also worry that Foucault’s account of subjectivity does not allow for agency and resistance. Critics think his rejection of a unified subject and his view that subjectivity is produced within power relations results in a concept of the subject wholly determined by social forces. A subject incapable of moral or political agency can only result in quietism, critics say. And finally some feminists specifically criticize Foucault’s conception of power.¹⁰ They claim that his conception of “power as everywhere” leaves no way to distinguish the difference in power between the dominators and the dominated. A conception of power that can account for the asymmetry of gendered power relations is essential for feminism. Given this set of reservations about Foucault’s work, why should feminists be interested in Foucault at all?¹¹

Ironically, those who argue that Foucault’s ideas may be useful for feminism focus on many of the same issues as feminist critics of Foucault, such as his rejection of metanarratives and a normative framework, his notion of power, and his critique of traditional philosophical models of subjectivity. In their introduction to the anthology *Feminism and Foucault*, Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby identify four convergences between the theoretical projects of feminism and Foucault; both identify the body as a site of power, both view power as local, both emphasize discourse, and both criticize Western humanism’s privileging of the masculine and its proclamation of universals.¹² Some feminist supporters of Foucault see his anti-humanism, his rejection of metanarratives and universal norms, and his challenge to the notion of a unified subjectivity as necessary steps toward a politics of diversity and inclusion. And many feminists find Foucault’s conception of power as a network, and as operating through discourses, institutions, and practices beneficial for understanding the ways that power operates locally, on the body, and through particular practices.¹³

I shall argue that Foucault’s ideas about the body, power, and subjectivity can provide important theoretical resources for feminists. I focus on the contribution

that Foucault's notion of subjectivity as embodied and historically constituted can make to feminist theory. I address feminist criticisms of Foucault's ideas about norms, subjectivity, the body, identity, and power and demonstrate that useful ideas about social criticism, political practice, and subjectivity can be culled from Foucault's work. Feminist criticisms of Foucault have focused on his genealogical work. I offer a reading of Foucault that addresses these feminist criticisms of his genealogical work and I explore the relationship between his genealogical work and his later work. Feminists have paid relatively little attention to his later work. To remedy this, I pay special attention to Foucault's last books, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume Two* and *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Volume Three*, as well as some essays and interviews. However, unlike other feminist interpretations of Foucault, I see this later work not as a departure from his earlier work or a return to Enlightenment values, but as a continuation of his earlier project to think through a new conception of subjectivity that is embodied and manifests itself through practices. These practices both enable and constrain, and freedom is conceptualized as situated within material, institutional, and disciplinary matrices. I conclude by showing that his idea of practices of the self can be applied to contemporary feminist practices.

At this point it may be helpful to provide a brief overview of Foucault's work. Foucault's work is usually divided into three phases: archaeological, genealogical, and ethical. These three approaches roughly correspond to a chronological order of early (archaeological), middle (genealogical), and late (ethical).¹⁴ His archaeologies include *The Birth of the Clinic*, *The Order of Things*, and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Archaeology refers to the method employed by Foucault in these early works. The archaeological method attempts to reveal the unconscious limits of thought and knowledge; it investigates the structures that underlie thought and make particular types of knowledge possible at specific historical moments. These structures that underlie thought are discursive formations that govern what can be said. Foucault calls these discursive formations "epistemes." Archaeology examines how new disciplines emerge and how shifts in understanding occur. For instance, in *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault traces the shift in the medical understanding of diseases from nosological, which relied on categories and essences, to pathological anatomy, which relied on specific, local signs and visible effects of the disease on the body. Archaeology as a method is static because it seeks simply to uncover the structures of rationality that make such shifts in understanding or the emergence of new disciplines possible. The primary object of analysis in the archaeologies is knowledge. Foucault's genealogical works are *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Volume One*. The genealogical method differs from the archaeological method in several ways; it is dynamic, rather than static; it is oriented toward practices as well as discourses; and it introduces a dimension of power. Genealogies are

local and specific histories. But unlike traditional histories, genealogies focus on discontinuities and ruptures, rather than continuities. Because of this focus on discontinuity, Foucault's genealogies challenge the notion of progress. Foucault's genealogies reveal the contingency involved in the development of practices and institutions. For instance, in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault focuses on the changes in the way that criminals are punished; he traces the shift from execution to incarceration. The genealogical method raises questions about how current practices, institutions, and categories came to be the way they are. It is primarily in his genealogical work that Foucault develops his conception of power. His conception of power, which I discuss in detail in chapter two, departs significantly from a traditional notion of power. For Foucault, power is not unilateral; it is not negative; and it is not possessed by an individual or group of individuals. Power can be productive and positive; it is a relationship, not a thing. Although Foucault's genealogies trace the history of specific practices and institutions, many Foucault scholars think that power is the primary theme in the genealogies. As we shall see, Foucault's new conception of power has drawn criticism from some feminists, yet has been useful for other feminist analyses. Most feminist engagement with Foucault focuses on his genealogical, chronologically his middle, work.

Before his untimely death, Foucault's attention turned to ethical issues. Thus, the third phase of his work is usually referred to as his ethical work or his later work. The ethical work includes the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* series, respectively, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, as well as some significant essays and interviews, notably "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress," "The Subject and Power," "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," and "Technologies of the Self."¹⁵ It is widely acknowledged that Foucault's ethical work deals with subjectivity; specifically, it is in this later work that Foucault explores the active constitution of the subject, or what he calls the self's work on the self. Volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality* examine ancient Greek and Roman sexual ethics and social practices. Foucault notes that the principle of the care of the self played a significant role in ancient Greek culture. Care of the self aimed at producing self-mastery and was achieved through a variety of social practices, including meditation, writing, physical activity, truth-telling, and self-examination. Foucault argues that it is through these practices or techniques of the self that ethical subjectivity was constituted in Antiquity. In his later work he also elaborates on his notion of power, making some helpful distinctions between power and domination. Some readers of Foucault believe that the three phases of Foucault's work that I have sketched above reveal inconsistencies in Foucault's ideas. Indeed, the three phases are not only chronologically distinct, but each is marked by a different method: archaeological, genealogical, and ethical and ostensibly a different object: knowledge, power, and the

subject. Although Foucault himself cared little for consistency, believing that one should be transformed through writing, he offers some clues in later interviews about how to interpret his work. He suggests that his work deals with questions about knowledge, power, and the subject not sequentially, but simultaneously. He is, in fact, interested in the relation among them. Moreover, in spite of the different methods used, and the shifts in emphasis from knowledge, to power, to subject, subjectivity is the underlying theme in Foucault's work. His archaeological works challenge the subject of humanism. He shows that the rational unified subject cannot be presupposed, but that instead this idea of subjectivity is a result of particular linguistic practices and discursive formations. Foucault's genealogical works develop his notion of power in relation to subjectivity. He articulates the way that power operates on individuals through social norms, practices, and institutions. And in Foucault's ethical works his preoccupation with subjectivity is quite explicit; there he is concerned with the self's active self-constitution. Foucault himself states that the theme of subjectivity runs throughout his work, and that therefore his work ought not be seen as discontinuous or inconsistent. "My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. My work has dealt with three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects. . . . Thus it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research."¹⁶ In this book I follow Foucault's suggestion, and I provide a reading of his work that focuses on the contributions that he makes to rethinking subjectivity.

So far I have been using the terms feminism and feminist in a very general way, divided only into feminist critics of Foucault and feminist advocates of Foucault. But as anyone familiar with feminism knows, feminism is a theoretical orientation that includes a wide range of positions and views. Moreover, there are a variety of ways to categorize different feminist approaches. Nonetheless, all feminist theories are political. One author puts it this way: "feminist theory is not one, but many, theories or perspectives and each feminist theory or perspective attempts to describe women's oppression, to explain its causes and consequences, and to prescribe strategies for women's liberation."¹⁷ All feminist theories, then, begin with women's oppression or subordination, and all aim to liberate women from their subordination. Because most feminists who criticize Foucault do so on the basis of what they see as the political implications of his theory, my focus here is on explicitly political feminist theories. A second reason for this focus is that I am interested in the reception of Foucault by North American feminists. Part of what is at stake in debates about the usefulness of Foucault or postmodernism more generally for feminist theory is the direction of feminist theory itself. Some feminists claim that postmodern approaches are merely solipsistic academic exercises in elitist language that divorce theory from practice and have little to do with

women's everyday struggles in the real world. Part of what I hope to do in this book is to demonstrate some overlaps in the concerns and approaches of feminists and Foucault and to show that there are practical applications of Foucault's ideas that promote feminist aims. In order to help sort out the issues and stakes in the Foucault/feminism debate I begin by laying out some important feminist positions. I briefly explicate the assumptions and main points of liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, multicultural feminism, and global feminism.¹⁸ I also briefly discuss the feminist critical social theory approach and the postmodern feminist approach.

Liberal feminism is characterized by its focus on equality. Men and women are thought to have the same rational capacities. On the basis of this, liberal feminists argue that men and women should be treated equally. If women are given the same educational, occupational, and political opportunities as men, the argument goes, they will realize their true potential and no longer be subordinate to men. Associated with Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century and John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill in the nineteenth century, liberal feminism has a long history. Liberal feminism places great importance on rationality, autonomy, and choice. Liberal feminists view reason or rationality as the quintessential characteristic that is fundamental for moral and political autonomy. Women's exclusion from the public sphere, however, may inhibit their capacity to fully develop and exercise their rationality. So, liberal feminists advocate full political participation and legal equality for women. They believe that women's full inclusion in public life will result in equality between men and women. Like traditional liberal political theory, liberal feminism relies on the notion of rights. Liberal feminists advocate working within existing legal, political, and economic institutions. In order to achieve parity for women they appeal to notions such as autonomy, rights, freedom, justice, and equality. One contemporary proponent of liberal feminism is Martha Nussbaum. She explicitly contrasts the liberal feminist position with a view she attributes to Foucault.¹⁹ Nussbaum criticizes French intellectuals for their anemic politics, blaming them for the idea that seditious speech equals political resistance. She contrasts their view to the liberal feminist view that large-scale political and social change will be achieved through the law and mass political movements. She claims that interpretations of Foucault's ideas have led to "the fatalistic idea that we are prisoners of an all-enveloping structure of power, and that real-life reform movements usually end up serving power in new and insidious ways."²⁰ Nussbaum attacks Judith Butler's Foucauldian feminism; she claims that young North American feminists influenced by Butler retreat from politics into quietism. She worries that the ideas of French intellectuals undermine what she calls "old style feminist politics" and its concern with material reality. She thinks that the view of resistance held by French intellectuals is personal and private, and

does not promote legal, institutional, or material change. She faults Butler, and by extension Foucault, for holding a "narrow vision of the possibilities for change."²¹ Nussbaum believes this narrow vision results in pessimism and passivity. Like other feminist critics, she focuses on Foucault's view of power, his notion of the subject, and his rejection of norms.

It is not surprising given Foucault's criticism of the humanistic values that liberalism embodies that liberal feminists would find his work antithetical to their project. Foucault's rejection of universal norms, his suspicion about teleological conceptions of history that imply progress, his rejection of a notion of subjectivity as unified consciousness, and his rejection of the traditional liberal conception of power contradict fundamental tenets of liberalism. In spite of his indictment of humanism and liberalism Foucault recognizes the need for a variety of political practices and strategies, including appeals to human rights and freedom. As I shall demonstrate, Foucault advocates political engagement aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom and he endorses a variety of political strategies.

Radical feminism focuses on women's difference from men. Radical feminists note that there are significant and irreducible biological differences between men and women.²² First and foremost is the difference in reproductive capacity; women can bear children, whereas men cannot. While early radical feminists see women's capacity to bear children as a possible impediment to their full liberation, later radical feminists celebrate women's reproductive capacity.²³ Radical feminists associate women's difference from men with more than simply the capacity to bear children; radical feminists focus on the body and issues of sexuality, violence against women, and women's health, as well as reproduction. Radical feminists advocate the development of institutions that meet the needs of women. It was largely due to the influence of radical feminism in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s that institutions such as rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, and women's health centers were founded. Additionally, radical feminists began educational campaigns and protest movements, for instance, against pornography.²⁴ Unlike liberal feminists, radical feminists think that existing institutions must be drastically altered, and that new institutions need to be developed as well, in order for women to overcome their subordination.

In addition to their focus on the body, radical feminists emphasize the importance of language. Of course, nonsexist language goes some way toward promoting parity between women and men, as even liberal feminists would agree. But radical feminists go further; they examine the limits of language for articulating women's experience. Some claim that language itself is phallogentric, a male-constructed system representing men's experience. Thus, to represent women's experience, new words, and perhaps a whole new language, are necessary. Through new words and language women can name their experience. Naming identifies and

makes concrete experiences that were not represented in mainstream culture.²⁵ Radical feminists recognize the power of language, and urge feminists to reclaim and revalue words that have derogatory connotations and devalue women, such as spinster, witch, and hag.²⁶ They believe that language not only describes, but also creates, reality. Words and images are potent transmitters of social and cultural values. Radical feminists believe that all existing institutions, political, legal, economic, social, cultural, and medical, need to be radically transformed. They think that advocating equality between men and women on the basis of sameness will continue to systematically disadvantage women because there are fundamental differences between men and women.²⁷ Radical feminists think that patriarchal power is not merely located in political and legal institutions. Some have written herstories showing how men have usurped women's power, for instance, through the medicalization of birth.²⁸ Men's power over women is not confined to the sphere of politics, law, and the economy, but permeates every aspect of life, including knowledge construction. Patriarchy, the systematic domination of women by men, is the fundamental characteristic of social organization for radical feminism. Radical feminists do believe, like liberal feminists, that women need to have equal access to resources and opportunities in order to overcome their subordination. However, equal access is not enough; the institutions themselves must be changed to account for women's perspectives and experiences. And institutions that specifically serve women's needs must be developed and maintained. For radical feminists the sex/gender system is the fundamental cause of women's oppression.

Radical feminists, too, see their concerns and goals as opposed to a postmodern, poststructuralist, or deconstructionist approach. Again the reasons for this are multiple; postmodern attempts to deconstruct categories conflict with the radical feminist dependence upon sex and gender as fundamental categories of oppression. And postmodern challenges to identity and unity threaten to undermine the concept of woman upon which radical feminism relies. This deconstructive approach fails to provide any direction for the positive changes that radical feminists seek. Finally, radical feminists see postmodern approaches as theoretical abstractions removed from the real-life, everyday struggles of women. According to Somer Brodribb, who offers an extended critique of postmodernism from a radical feminist position, "Foucault's theories of discourse and his theories of power both originate in a notion of self-constructing structures and a conception of the social which has no notion of the individual."²⁹ In spite of radical feminist criticisms of postmodernism, I show that there is some overlap between the concerns of radical feminists and Foucault. Specifically, both reject traditional liberal conceptions of power, both endorse an expanded definition of the political, both focus on material institutions and practices, and both recognize the power of language and representation to shape reality.

Marxist feminists view capitalism rather than patriarchy as the fundamental cause of women's oppression. Adopting the traditional Marxist view that society is structured as a class system, some Marxist feminists view women as a "sex-class." However, there is disagreement within this tradition about how to understand women's position. Because women are distributed throughout economic and social classes (often by virtue of their connection to men), some have argued that it is inaccurate to characterize women as a class and that women are better thought of as an oppressed sex.³⁰ Marxist feminists also question the patriarchal system of marriage that views women as male property. Traditional Marxists associate women's oppression with the capitalist system, increasing industrialization, and the rise of private property. Marxist feminists agree with radical feminists that women are subordinate to men. But they attribute this to the capitalist system of private property, rather than to the sex/gender system itself. For Marxist feminists class oppression is the primary form of oppression; "sexism, like racism, has its roots in the private property system."³¹

Feminist standpoint theory emerged out of Marxist feminism. Nancy Hartsock developed this view in her classic article, "Feminist Standpoint Theory."³² Feminist standpoint theory draws on Marx's notion that the oppressed class functions both within the rules of the oppressor class and within the parameters of the oppressed class and therefore develops a heightened consciousness. Because the oppressed class understands their situation as oppressed, and understands the system as exploitative, they are in a privileged position with respect to knowing the reality of the situation. This epistemic privilege accrues to the oppressed class or marginalized group by virtue of their oppression. Nancy Hartsock adapts this idea of epistemic privilege to women as an oppressed group, and develops the idea of a feminist standpoint. She says, "like the lives of the proletarians according to Marxian theory, women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of the phallographic institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy."³³ Using Marx's category of labor and basing the oppression of women on the sexual division of labor, Hartsock provides a compelling argument for feminist standpoint theory. However, it is precisely this notion of a unified standpoint and women as a unified group that postmodern feminism challenges.

Marxist feminism predominated in the United States in the late 1960s. Like radical feminists, Marxist feminists believed that traditional institutions needed to be radically restructured. The institution most in need of change was, of course, the economy. In addition to the issue of transforming the economy in general, Marxist feminists spearheaded the "Housework for Wages" campaign, highlighting the fact that the economy depends upon women's unpaid domestic labor.

Marxist feminism subsumes questions about women and sexual oppression under a critique of capitalism and economic oppression.

Foucault explicitly criticizes Marxism for its singular focus on the economy. Moreover, he rejects the notion of historical progress underlying Marx's theory. Marxist feminists see Foucault's focus on the local, specific, and concrete as inadequate for explaining class oppression and the subordination of women. Hartssock criticizes Foucault's notion of power as unable to account for pervasive, systematic asymmetries of power. But there are some points of overlap between the concerns of Marxist feminists and Foucault. In spite of Foucault's criticisms of Marxism, he integrates issues of class and economic concerns into his historical analyses. I argue that his notion of power can account for systematic asymmetry, and consequently structural oppression. And Foucault's commitment to anti-domination and social change are apparent in his genealogical work; this commitment is shared by Marxist feminists.

Socialist feminists integrate the Marxist feminist focus on the economy with the radical feminist focus on sex.³⁴ They do not subsume sex oppression under capitalism like Marxist feminists do. Nor do socialist feminists privilege sex and gender to the exclusion of economic concerns. Socialist feminists believe that both Marxist and feminist analyses are necessary to overcome women's oppression. In Heidi Hartmann's classic article, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards A More Progressive Union," she says, "... the categories of Marxism are sex-blind. Only a specifically feminist analysis reveals the systemic character of relations between men and women. Yet feminist analysis by itself is inadequate because it has been blind to history and insufficiently materialist."³⁵ Socialist feminists focus on the material base of social relations and the ways that it creates and maintains patriarchy. Like radical feminists, socialist feminists are concerned with issues of sexuality and the body, such as reproductive issues and issues regarding violence against women. But they see these issues, and patriarchy itself, entwined with economic issues. Furthermore, socialist feminists claim that women's liberation is an unrealizable goal in a capitalist society because capitalism is structured around maintaining specific sex roles, a traditional definition of the family, and women's unpaid domestic and reproductive labor. Socialist feminists think that traditional economic and social institutions need to be transformed, e.g., the family and the capitalist economic system. They view these economic and social institutions as the basis for the patriarchal system. In fact, socialist feminists view the sexual division of labor as helping to create and maintain gender, by perpetuating a gendered division of labor. As Hartmann says, "The strict division of labor by sex, a social invention common to all known societies, creates two very separate genders and a need for men and women to get together for economic reasons."³⁶ The sexual division of labor takes place both within the home and in the

public sector. In the domestic sphere the sexual division of labor includes reproductive work such as bearing and rearing children and other household tasks, such as shopping, cooking, and cleaning. In the public sphere, the sexual division of labor includes divisions along traditional gender lines, such as more men in manual labor jobs that require heavy lifting, and more women in the service sector and in secretarial office work, so-called pink collar jobs. The sexual division of labor creates and reinforces gender differences. These gender differences are perpetuated through a multitude of social relations—heterosexual marriage; traditional family arrangements, including women as primary caretakers of children; women's economic dependence on men; and the state. Socialist feminism calls for a change in the sexual division of labor and the social relations supported by such a division. They urge feminists to engage in a double assault on both capitalism and patriarchy.³⁷ Socialist feminism's integrative approach improves upon the singular focus of both radical feminism and Marxist feminism. However, insufficient attention is paid to other systematic oppressions, such as those based on ethnicity, culture, race, and sexual orientation.³⁸

Socialist feminists echo the concerns of Marxist feminists with respect to Foucault's ideas. They argue that his focus on local institutions inhibits large-scale structural analysis. Socialist feminists are also concerned that Foucault's notion of power does not account for systematic inequalities, such as class inequality or gender inequality. And they claim that Foucault's conception of the subject does not allow for agency or resistance. I draw out the connection between structural change and individual change that is implicit in Foucault's work. I demonstrate that far from being in opposition, large-scale social change and individual transformation rely on one another. Thus, rather than undermining socialist feminism Foucault's ideas can complement and enhance a socialist feminist position.

A feminist critical theory approach has some similarities to a socialist feminist approach; they both rely on a Marxist, historical materialist framework. Critical social theory extends and adapts Marxist theory to account for cultural and technological innovations. The best-known contemporary proponent of critical social theory is Jürgen Habermas. Like Habermas, feminist critical social theorists examine a wide range of social institutions including, but not limited to, economic institutions. Economic, political, legal, educational, and other social institutions structure our individual and collective lives. Feminist critical social theorists add a gender analysis to critical social theory, raising questions about women's place in these social institutions. Issues of women's status, as well as the sexual division of labor, and issues of family structure and responsibilities for child care are highlighted by feminist critical theorists. They focus on institutional change and reform, appealing to notions of justice, freedom, and rights. Similarly to the other feminist positions discussed thus far, feminist critical social theorists view the

postmodern position as a threat to feminism. Seyla Benhabib, a contemporary feminist critical social theorist, warns, "The postmodernist position(s) thought through to their conclusions may eliminate not only the specificity of feminist theory but place in question the very emancipatory ideals of the women's movements altogether."³⁹ Benhabib credits postmodernism for focusing on the excluded and marginal, noting that Foucault's genealogies are histories of the disenfranchised. She also notes that Foucault's notions of surveillance and discipline illuminate some unsavory aspects of contemporary political life. However, Benhabib shares the view of other feminist critics of Foucault that his work leaves little room for agency and resistance. She says, "for Michel Foucault there is no history of the victims but only a history of the construction of victimization . . . for Foucault every act of resistance is but another manifestation of an omnipresent discourse–power complex. . . ."⁴⁰ Although feminist critical social theorists acknowledge that Foucault's concepts of power, discipline, and surveillance aptly describe some aspects of contemporary society, they are hesitant to endorse postmodernism or to embrace Foucault's ideas more fully.

Multicultural feminism attempts to address the neglect of race, ethnicity, and culture evident in previous feminist approaches. Although some of these other approaches can accommodate these issues, multicultural feminism focuses on issues of race, culture and ethnicity. Like socialist feminism, multicultural feminism is an integrative approach that analyzes the ways in which oppression is interactive and specific, rather than additive. Gender identity is formed within the context of specific racial, cultural, and ethnic identities. Multicultural feminists point out the ways that by ignoring or minimizing the question of race other feminist approaches assume a white perspective. Multicultural feminists urge white feminists to recognize the bias in mainstream feminist theorizing, and to prioritize issues of race, ethnicity, and culture. Arguing that oppressions are interlocking and interactive rather than separate and discrete, multicultural feminists articulate the ways that gender, sexual orientation, and class are mediated by race, ethnicity, and culture. The approach of multicultural feminists takes into account various forms of oppression and the specificity of women's experience. Multicultural feminism examines the structural aspect of oppressions and the particularity of identity; it challenges the implicit norms and monistic models of identity implicit in earlier feminist theories.

Some multicultural feminists find postmodern theory useful for challenging universal norms and applaud it for its focus on difference rather than sameness. They find that the emphasis on local practices and subjugated knowledges gives voice to the marginalized and less powerful. This encourages attention to the experiences and lives of women of color who have been marginalized not only in mainstream society, but also within feminism itself. Yet some feminists concerned

with issues of race question the relevance of postmodern theory and its ability to deal with the concrete, material realities of race and sex oppression. In her classic article, "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian expresses her reservations about postmodern literary criticism. "My fear is that when theory is not rooted in practice, it becomes prescriptive, exclusive, elitist."⁴¹ Wary of theory that universalizes and overlooks particularity, multicultural feminists believe that theory must be rooted in practice and should account for the diverse experiences of women of different racial, ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds.

Global feminism extends feminist analyses beyond their often limited focus on industrialized countries in the Western world. Global feminism aims to include the issues of women worldwide. A global feminist perspective includes an analysis of the structural oppressions based on class, gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity mentioned earlier, but recognizes the historical and social realities of colonialism and imperialism. A postcolonial or imperialist perspective examines the impact of transnational capital and its effect on both the economy and culture, especially on so-called "developing countries."⁴² The broader perspective of global feminism includes issues such as religion and nationality. A global feminist view takes into account both interconnections and the diversity of women's subordination. Within global feminism there are divergent approaches to analyzing women's subordination. Some global feminists who explore issues of transnational capital, cultural imperialism, representation, and identity have found postmodern theory useful. Other global feminists who take an empirical approach or who are concerned with universal rights object to the relativistic stance associated with postmodernism.

Each of the feminist approaches discussed so far has an explicitly political orientation. The primary concern is to overcome women's subordination. In spite of the various, and sometimes conflicting, assumptions of the feminist positions I have discussed, there are commonalities among them. First, because feminism is a social and political movement devoted to overcoming women's subordination, feminist theory should provide resources for social and political change. These resources can include tools for critical analysis, and positive programs for change. Implicit in this first commitment are two other important feminist commitments; that there should be a relationship between theory and practice and that theory needs to be relevant to experience. Both of these criteria are necessary for feminist theory to effect social and political change; it must be relevant to the actual, concrete lives of real women. It should be able both to inform and reflect our experience. Correlatively, feminist theory should arise from practice rather than being imposed on it. When feminist theory fails to take into account material practices and the concrete lives of women, it risks becoming an empty exercise in elitist language. Finally, feminism is committed to inclusiveness, equality, and democracy.

Thus, feminist theory should be accessible to as many women as possible. Although there are important differences among the liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, critical social theorist, multicultural, and global feminist positions, all recognize the structural aspect of oppression, and each successive approach integrates additional axes of oppression resulting in a complex and variegated approach for understanding the impact of oppression on women's lives in all their diversity and complexity. The last two approaches, multicultural and global feminism, challenge some implicit normative assumptions about who is included in the scope of feminist theorizing.

Postmodern feminism raises similar issues about the normative function of a singular, unified concept of identity, and who is included in the scope of feminist theorizing.⁴³ Although often criticized for being apolitical, some postmodern feminists claim that an approach that challenges traditional norms and unified models of identity is essential for a progressive politics. The schism between postmodern feminists, many of whom draw extensively on the work of Michel Foucault, and the explicitly political feminist approaches sketched out above is the issue that underlies the rest of this book. Feminist critics of Foucault staunchly deny that his work can be useful for emancipatory politics, including feminist politics. Despite this dismissal, some feminists who use or apply Foucault for feminist purposes find that his work can be politically useful. My aim is to explore these tensions among feminists, and between feminists and Foucault. I argue that Foucault's work provides resources to articulate a notion of subjectivity that is embodied, and constituted historically and through social relations; and that this embodied, social self is capable of moral and political agency.⁴⁴ I pay particular attention to Foucault's genealogical works and his later work on ethics and the self. The rest of this chapter provides an overview of the feminist debate about Foucault.

There is no agreement among feminists about the usefulness of Foucault's work for feminist theory and practice. I will divide feminist engagement with Foucault into roughly four groups: staunch critics; moderate critics; those who use, extend or apply aspects of Foucault's project but with serious reservations about his overall project; and Foucauldian feminists who take up central aspects of Foucault's work or apply a Foucauldian framework with only minor reservations or criticisms.⁴⁵ Staunch critics take Foucault to task on at least one aspect of his work, for instance, his conception of power, his notion of subjectivity, or his lack of a normative framework. They argue that Foucault and feminism are antithetical and caution feminists against using Foucault. Moderate critics think that one or more aspects of Foucault's work may be useful for feminism, but that other aspects are at odds with the aims of feminism. Extenders draw on Foucault's work and apply it to women's experience. This has been especially useful to illuminate bodily aspects of women's oppression using Foucault's concepts of disciplines, biopower,

power, and social norms. Finally, feminist Foucauldians adopt Foucault's major ideas for feminist purposes or to apply to feminist issues.

Feminist critics of Foucault, both staunch and moderate, tend to focus on his conception of the subject, his rejection of norms, and his notion of power. I discuss feminist objections to Foucault's lack of a normative framework in chapter 2, and explicate his notion of power in order to try to remedy a widespread misreading of it. In chapter 3, I address feminist concerns with Foucault's notion of the subject. Some feminists accuse Foucault of abolishing the subject, while others charge that he offers only a passive, overdetermined subject incapable of moral or political agency. I demonstrate that Foucault rejects a specific notion of the subject, that of Modern philosophy and that he offers instead an understanding of the subject as socially and historically constituted and embodied. I counter critics' claims that the subject in Foucault's later works is individualistic and merely aesthetic. I argue that the social, relational, embodied subject embedded in specific cultural and institutional practices found in Foucault's work is compatible with feminist aims.

In chapter 4, I explicate Foucault's notion of the body. Feminists have accused Foucault of androcentrism because he pays no attention to gender-specific disciplinary practices or the impact sexual difference might have on formulating a theory of the body. In spite of Foucault's androcentrism, feminists have successfully extended Foucault's work to illuminate specifically feminine disciplinary practices. I also address the criticism that Foucault implicitly relies on a natural body. I argue that Foucault's notion of the body is multilayered. He does not deny the materiality of the body. But neither does the body's materiality exist outside a disciplinary framework—in terms of both knowledge and practices. The understandings of our bodies available to us are shaped by these disciplinary grids and interpretative frameworks. Moreover, as embodied selves we are situated in the world in relation to a variety of social practices that shape not only our understandings of our bodies, but the materiality of our bodies.

In chapter 5, I demonstrate how normative categories can operate in ways that limit and exclude. First, I discuss this with respect to the identity politics debate in feminism. Then I demonstrate how normative categories operate at the level of the body by examining historical and contemporary treatment of intersexed persons. Finally, I examine the issue of bisexuality to show how normative categories are maintained by a system of social norms that regulate sex and sexual orientation. In chapter 6, I discuss Foucault's ethical works focusing on the techniques of the self. These techniques of the self aim at maintaining and transforming identity. For Foucault, practices of the self are characterized by an articulation, either through writing, speech, or bodily practices. Practices of the self are always done with reference to a particular goal. I suggest that consciousness-raising can

be viewed as a feminist practice of the self. I discuss the way that consciousness-raising as a practice of the self promotes both individual and collective transformation. I suggest that Foucault's conception of social norms articulates an important mediating structure between individual identity and social, political, and legal institutions. This link between individual identity and social institutions means that self-transformation is not simply an individual personal goal, but must involve structural social and political change. This overlap of the ethical and the political and the conception of the self as embodied and socially constituted are, I believe, important theoretical resources for contemporary feminism.

At the time of this writing, there are three anthologies that deal with the relationship between feminism and Foucault.⁴⁶ No single male philosopher since Marx has gained this much attention from feminists. There was no question about the political usefulness of Marx, although feminists worried about the subordination of the woman question to the issue of class. The stakes for feminist engagement with Foucault are even higher. The central question for feminists is whether Foucault undermines the possibility of an emancipatory politics altogether. Feminist passions run deep about both the promises and the perils of Foucault's work. The anthologies that explore the relationship between feminism and Foucault provide a mapping of the terrain of this debate. Although all three explore the relationship between Foucault and feminism, the subtitles are revealing. The earliest collection, *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, is the most positive about the contribution that Foucault's work can make to feminist theory. *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism* emphasizes the tensions between the two. The third collection, *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, is split between negative and positive evaluations. It begins with two influential critiques of Foucault, by Nancy Hartsock and Nancy Fraser. While these critiques set the tone for much of the feminist reception of Foucault, the rest of the essays explore some of the positive contributions that Foucault can make to feminist theory, as well as the limitations of applying Foucault's ideas to feminism. Each volume as a whole provides a different perspective on the question of the relationship between Foucault's work and feminism.

Sorting out the relationship between feminism and Foucault is no easy task. Feminists have revolutionized traditional philosophical conceptions of knowledge and the self. Moreover, they have challenged long-standing distinctions between mind/body, culture/nature, and public/private. Foucault, too, challenges many traditional philosophical ideas, especially his idea of power-knowledge, his conception of the self, and his challenge to universal norms. In spite of their common challenge to many of the central ideas in traditional philosophy, Foucault and feminism exist in uneasy tension at best. While some aspects of feminism challenge traditional philosophical ideas, other aspects of feminism or different feminist

approaches adopt traditional philosophical ideas. Thus, Foucault serves as a challenge to these feminist positions.⁴⁷ Caroline Ramazanoglu notes this complex relationship between feminism and Foucault: "Foucault's ideas on power, knowledge, the self and sexuality, for example, are not compatible with feminist ideas in any simple way, and suggest considerable problems in feminist uses of these terms." Nonetheless, she continues, "Feminism cannot afford to ignore Foucault, because the problems he addresses and the criticisms he makes of existing theories and their political consequences identify problems in and for feminism."⁴⁸ Indeed, Foucault's work has implications for a range of topics important to feminists, including issues of methodology, methods of historical investigation, and conceptions of the body, knowledge, power, identity, sexuality, subjectivity, ethics, and politics. Echoing Ramazanoglu's claim that feminists cannot afford to ignore Foucault, Susan Hekman says, "Neither his detractors nor his defenders question that Foucault's perspective provides a challenge for feminism."⁴⁹

Not only does Foucault present a challenge for feminism in terms of redefining central philosophical ideas, but feminism presents a challenge for Foucault. His almost total neglect of gender, women's issues, feminism, and sexual specificity leads some to question the relevance of his work for feminists. Feminists accuse Foucault of being gender-blind and androcentric. Surprisingly, for all his talk about sexuality, Foucault neglects the issue of sexual difference. He is charged with gender-blindness because even in his discussion of bodies he does not make distinctions between male and female bodies or between feminine and masculine disciplinary practices. He is accused of androcentrism because when he does get specific about sexual difference, for instance, in his discussion of the formation of the ethical subject, he focuses on the male subject. In spite of his undeniable androcentrism, I argue that Foucault's work provides important theoretical resources for feminism.

One way to judge whether or not a theory or theorist is useful for feminism is to assess it in terms of feminism's core commitments discussed earlier: (1) resources for political and social change to end the subordination of women, (2) relationship between theory and practice, (3) relevance to experience, and (4) accessibility. In the following pages I hope to provide an accessible account of Foucault's work, and to demonstrate its practical relevance. I contend that Foucault provides a notion of the subject that is useful to feminists, and that his account of social norms provides an important link between individual experience and social change.