Rethinking Power

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This paper argues that feminists have yet to develop a satisfactory account of power. Existing feminist accounts of power tend to have a one-sided emphasis either on power as domination or on power as empowerment. This conceptual one-sidedness must be overcome if feminists are to develop an account complex enough to illuminate women's diverse experiences with power. Such an account is sketched here.

Feminists have talked a great deal about power, so much so that it may seem as if nothing more remains to be said on the topic. This focus is not surprising, given that, as Joan Scott has argued, "gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated" (1988, 45). If Scott is correct, then the feminist critique of gender necessitates a feminist critique of power. However, feminists have yet to develop a satisfactory account of the concept of power. This paper both argues for the need for such an account and offers a conception of power that can meet this need.

Assessing the adequacy of existing feminist accounts of power is no easy task. Although feminists tend to presuppose particular conceptions of power, these conceptions are not always explicitly discussed and defended. Thus, the competing feminist conceptions of power that I will discuss have to be reconstructed out of debates on other topics—pornography, motherhood, marriage, sexual harassment, care, equality, and so on. This reconstructive project yields ideal-typical conceptions of power that have been implicit in various—and sometimes opposing—feminist theories. Although I discuss how the work of individual feminists has exemplified these ideal-typical conceptions, I do so in full realization that they do not always embrace the views I describe in their pure form. Furthermore, because no one theorist fully articulates these ideal-typical conceptions, they do not necessarily map onto the usually accepted (although not uncontested) divisions within feminist theory between, for example, radical feminists, relational feminists, socialist feminists, and so on.

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I argue that feminists have traditionally talked about power in one of two ways: either by focusing on the ways in which men have power over women—that is, on power understood as domination—or by concentrating on the power that women have to act—that is, on power understood as empowerment.[1] The proponents of these ways of thinking about power have been highly critical of each other. Those who focus on women's empowerment, whom I will call *empowerment theorists*, have criticized those who concern themselves with male domination, whom I will call *domination theorists*, for overemphasizing the ways women are victimized.[2] Empowerment theorists contend that we ought to examine the power that women do have, a power some see as grounded in capacities peculiar to women, capacities that have been denigrated and devalued by misogynist cultures, such as the abilities to care, to nurture, and to mother. Domination theorists, on the other hand, criticize empowerment theorists for glorifying practices (like mothering) or traits (like caring and nurturing) that have themselves traditionally been mechanisms of women's oppression.

A further problem with these traditional conceptions of power, the implications of which have not been fully recognized, is that each is one-sided. Empowerment theorists tend to neglect the ways men dominate women; domination theorists, by contrast, tend to neglect the forms of power that women do have. Neither of these one-sided feminist conceptions of power can do justice to the complex ways in which women can be both dominated and empowered at the same time and in the context of one and the same practice, institution, or norm. Each tells only one side of the story.

I have two aims in this paper: first, to establish the necessity of a feminist analysis of power that overcomes the conceptual one-sidedness of existing approaches; and second, to offer a conception of power that will enable us to overcome this one-sidedness. I begin by reconstructing the domination-theoretical and empowerment-theoretical conceptions of power. So as not to suggest that these conceptions exhaust contemporary feminist perspectives on power, I then go on to consider various feminist critiques of these two conceptions. I argue that although these existing critiques have been instructive, they have failed explicitly to isolate as a crucial flaw the one-sidedness of both the domination-theoretical and empowerment-theoretical conceptions of power. Finally, I sketch out a conception of power designed to overcome this one-sidedness.

Domination vs. Empowerment

The domination-theoretical view defines itself in opposition to a conventional view of the nature of gender. This conventional view claims or assumes that the domination of women is a hierarchical system that is laid over natural or innate differences between men and women. In this understanding, differ-

ences between men and women are not in themselves problematic. Instead, what is problematic are the costs and benefits unjustly attached to those differences. The goal then becomes taking away the costs of differences and restoring difference to its unproblematic state. Catharine MacKinnon sums up the conventional view as follows: "on the first day, difference was; on the second day, a division was erected upon it; on the third day, irrational instances of domination arose. Division may be rational or irrational. Dominance either is or seems justified. Difference *is*" (1987, 34). In contrast with this conventional view, domination theory holds that the domination of women is *prior to* differences between men and women, and that an emphasis on difference is introduced after the fact for the purpose of justifying and maintaining that system of dominance. Differences between men and women, then, are simply the reified effects of dominance (1989, 238). As MacKinnon puts it, "difference is the velvet glove on the iron fist of domination. The problem is not that differences are not valued; the problem is that they are defined by power" (1989, 219). If this view is correct, then it is no wonder that significant differences exist between men and women: "I mean, can you imagine elevating one half of a population and denigrating the other half and producing a population in which everyone is the same?" (1987, 37).

The upshot of this view of gender is that women are powerless and men are powerful *as such*, through processes that are coincident with, or that may even precede, the very creation of the terms "man" and "woman." For example, MacKinnon claims that "women/men is a distinction not just of difference, but of power and powerlessness . . . power/powerlessness *is* the sex difference" (1987, 123). Andrea Dworkin likewise accepts this claim of domination theory: "[men's] power is predetermined by gender, by being male" (1987, 126; see also 1979, 49-50). Carole Pateman puts the point somewhat differently: "The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection" (1988, 207). To be masculine is to be free, whereas to be feminine is to be subjected. In the domination-theoretical view, what it means to be a woman is to be powerless, and what it means to be a man is to be powerful.

If men are powerful and women are powerless as such, then the domination relation between men and women will, of necessity, be pervasive—that is to say, it will exist wherever there are people who are socially defined as (that is, gendered) men or women. This means that, in the domination-theoretical view, all men dominate women, and, as a corollary to this view, all women are dominated by men. This does not necessarily mean that all men have the *same kind* of power over all women; domination theorists recognize that, for example, men of color do not generally have access to the same sort of economic power over white women that many white men have been able to exercise. Nevertheless, domination theorists maintain that they do, in some sense, have

power over white women; thus, the claim that all men have power over women is, in their view, justified.

Pateman, for example, claims, "in modern civil society all men are deemed good enough to be women's masters" (1988, 219). Her contention that all men are *capable* of having power over women may seem to imply a weaker version of the domination-theoretical claim that all men do *actually* have power over women. According to Pateman, however, it does not: "the power is still there even if, in any individual case, it is not used" (1988, 158). Men's power consists in their ability to exercise power over women at any time and for any reason; even the most benevolent of men can avail themselves of this power if they so choose. According to Pateman, this is "the form of political right that all men exercise by virtue of being men" (1988, 20). Moreover, by equating femininity with subjection, Pateman indicates that she accepts the corollary to this claim: namely, that all women are dominated by men. As a result, in Pateman's analysis, male domination appears to be pervasive.

MacKinnon also accepts the claim of domination theory that all men have power over women. In response to the question of whether there is a difference between women and men, MacKinnon quips, "Of course there is; the difference is that men have power and women do not" (1987, 51). This is more than mere rhetoric; elsewhere, she writes: "no woman escapes the meaning of being a woman within a gendered social system, and sex inequality is not only pervasive but may be universal (in the sense of never having not been in some form)" (1989, 104-5). Similarly, Dworkin claims that "intercourse occurs in a context of a power relation that is *pervasive and incontrovertible . . . all men have some kinds of power over all women*; and most men have controlling power over what they call their women—the women they fuck" (1987, 125-26, emphasis added).

In addition to claiming that male domination of women is pervasive, domination theorists often assume that domination functions on the model of a dyadic master-subject relation. Nancy Fraser has described this account of domination, which she criticizes Carole Pateman's *Sexual Contract* for adopting, as follows: "Women's subordination is understood first and foremost as the condition of being subject to the direct command of an individual man" (Fraser 1993, 173). Indeed, Pateman acknowledges that "to understand modern patriarchy, . . . it is necessary to keep the contract between master and servant or master and slave firmly in mind" (1988, 37). Pateman's critique of patriarchy is interwoven with her critique of classical social contract theory. In her analysis, the contract that founds patriarchal society is both social and sexual: social in the sense that it provides for the possibility of the legitimate exercise of political rights, and "sexual in the sense of . . . establish[ing] men's political right over women . . . and . . . establishing orderly access by men to women's bodies" (1988, 2). In other words, the social-sexual contract establishes a series of social relations whereby individual men are given the power

to dominate individual women; it thus creates what Pateman calls the "law of male sex-right," which men exercise by sexually subjugating women; that is, by becoming their sexual masters (1988, 182).

MacKinnon and Dworkin likewise embrace this view of domination as a dyadic, master-subject relation. For them, however, it is derived from a critique not of classical contractarianism but of heterosexual intercourse. As MacKinnon puts it, "the social relation between the sexes is organized so that men may dominate and women must submit and this relation is sexual—in fact, is sex" (1987, 3). Similarly, Dworkin claims that "the [sexual] act itself, without more, is the possession. . . . The normal fuck by a normal man is taken to be an act of invasion and ownership undertaken in a mode of predation: colonializing, forceful (manly) or nearly violent; the sexual act that *by its nature* makes her his" (1987, 63, emphasis added). The violence and exploitation inherent in the very nature of heterosexual intercourse provide the impetus and the model for other, less socially acceptable instances of male supremacy, such as pornography, battery, rape, sexual harassment, and so on. In MacKinnon's and Dworkin's accounts, then, heterosexual intercourse, which generally takes place between an individual man and an individual woman, is the paradigm of male domination. Insofar as their accounts of domination are modeled on a dyadic relation, the accounts themselves are best understood as dyadic; that is, as illuminating the relationship between sexual masters and their subjects.[3]

Despite, or perhaps as a result of, their rather pessimistic picture of the domination relations that obtain between men and women, these theorists still believe that women have the capacity to resist male power. Indeed, if they did not believe that women had such a capacity, their discussion of male domination would have no point. Precisely the point is to get women angry enough about their situation to go out and start resisting. However, by claiming that women are powerless and men powerful as such, domination theorists have denied themselves the theoretical resources needed for an adequate conceptualization of women's resistance to oppression. Once power is defined as something that men have and women do not, instances in which women assert their own power over and against forces of domination will be invisible to the domination-theoretical apparatus. Therefore, it is not surprising that MacKinnon claims that female power is "a contradiction in terms, socially speaking" (1987, 53). Having claimed that power belongs to men, MacKinnon—and domination theorists in general—cannot help but view female power as a contradiction in terms.

Yet domination theorists continue to talk about women's resistance to power, even though they think that women do not, strictly speaking, have power. For example, Pateman claims that our understanding of the social-sexual contract "is only possible because women (and some men) have resisted and criticized patriarchal relations since the seventeenth century" (1988, 15).

Similarly, MacKinnon enjoins her readers to "take the unknowable more seriously than anyone ever has, because most women have died without a trace; but *invent the capacity to act*, because otherwise women will continue to" (1987, 9, emphasis added). Ultimately, however, all that domination theorists can tell us about the power that women do have, about our capacity to act, is that in the face of pervasive and incontrovertible domination, we must invent that capacity. Unfortunately, because of its one-sided emphasis on domination, that conception of power cannot offer the theoretical resources that might help us envision such an invention.

While empowerment theorists recognize that men have power over women in patriarchal societies, they choose to focus on a different sort of power: women's power to transform themselves, others, and the world. Empowerment theorists begin by noticing that women have special skills and traits that misogynist cultures have devalued. In particular, they claim that women place a greater emphasis on care and on the maintenance of relationships with others. They go on to argue that this "care perspective" provides the basis for a unique and beneficial understanding of power in which power is viewed as the capacity to transform and empower oneself and others. In their view, this understanding of power should serve as the basis for feminist revisionings of society.

The notion that women place a greater emphasis on care than men do was definitively presented by Carol Gilligan, whose research uncovered a putative difference in the moral development of highly educated men and women in the United States: whereas the men tended to be more concerned with autonomy, individuation, and justice, some of the women tended to be oriented instead toward responsibility to and concern for others.[4] Other empowerment theorists, building on Gilligan's work, have zeroed in on the mother-child relationship as the most important for understanding women's supposedly unique skills and traits. Both Sara Ruddick and Virginia Held maintain that the skills of preserving, nurturing, and empowering children, which are integral to the practice of mothering, can be the basis for a new feminist understanding of social interaction.[5]

For the purposes of this essay, the important claim made by empowerment theorists is that these maternal and care perspectives can provide the basis for a new way to think about power. This empowerment-theoretical revisioning of power is reflected, once again, in Gilligan's work. Gilligan notes that attainment of the highest stage of moral development, where such development is understood in terms of care (rather than autonomy)—the stage where one learns to integrate care for oneself with care for others—is accompanied by a sense of empowerment. Thus, she claims that one of her subjects who had reached this stage had thereby gained "an acknowledgment of her own power and worth" (1982, 93). She describes another subject in a similar way: "No

longer feeling so powerless, exploited, alone, and endangered, Betty feels more in control" (1982, 114).

Held finds the basis for a new understanding of power specifically in the experience of women who are mothers. "The capacity to give birth and to nurture and empower could be the basis for new and more humanly promising conceptions than the ones that now prevail of power, empowerment, and growth" (Held 1993, 137). Such new conceptions would replace the old male conception, according to which power is "the power to cause others to submit to one's will, the power that led men to seek hierarchical control and . . . contractual restraints" (1993, 136). In other words, in Held's view, the old, unpromising, male conception of power as domination—the conception embraced by domination theorists—ought to be replaced by a new, promising, maternal conception of power.

However, the question remains, what kind of conception of power emerges out of women's or mothers' experience? According to Ruddick, to have power as mothers experience it is "to have the individual strength or the collective resources to pursue one's pleasures and projects" (1989, 37). Sarah Lucia Hoagland echoes this point: the power that women experience, which Hoagland calls "power-from-within," "is the power of ability, of choice and engagement. It is creative; and hence it is an affecting and transforming power, but not a controlling power" (1988, 118). In other words, in the empowerment-theoretical view, power is a capacity or creative ability that individuals have to do something, rather than a dominance that is wielded over others. This conception of power is a positive one: rather than equating power with domination or control, this conception sees power as the capacity or ability to pursue certain life projects. Held makes a similar point: "The power of a mothering person to empower others, to foster transformative growth, is a different sort of power from that of a stronger sword or a dominant will" (1993, 209). According to empowerment theorists, power is a capacity, but not just any capacity; it is the capacity to transform and empower oneself and others.

Thomas Wartenberg has raised a potential problem with this feminist conception, which he labels "the transformative use of power" (1990, 187). Wartenberg characterizes the empowerment theorists' view in the following way: "although women are not socially dominant—they lack power-over—they do have special skills and abilities that have been ignored or devalued by traditional valuations but that enable them to act in important and valuable ways—they have power-to" (1990, 187). However, Wartenberg contends that these feminists have an inadequate understanding of their own conception of power. He argues that the power women experience "involves the *power* that women have *over* other social agents [for example, children]; however, it is a use of power-over for a purpose other than social *domination*" (1990, 187). Thus, Wartenberg claims that women's power is not a fundamentally different

sort of power than domination. On the contrary, he contends that *both* women's transformative power *and* men's dominating power are instances of having power over another; the only difference between the two is that the former is a benevolent and the latter a malevolent use of such power.

One way for empowerment theorists to respond to this problem is simply to deny the claim that women's transformative power is actually wielded over others. Thus, for instance, Held claims that "the mothering person seeks to *empower* the child to act responsibly; she neither wants to 'wield' power [over the child] nor to defend herself against the power 'wielded' by the child" (1993, 209). Held's implication that mothers never want to wield power over their children strikes me as being too strong. However, it is possible to grant Wartenberg's claim that women's transformative and empowering use of power does sometimes involve having power over others, and nevertheless to maintain that it involves a fundamentally different sort of power as well. We may conclude that women's experience with power involves both wielding power over others (particularly children) and empowering self and others. If this is the case, then we do not have to follow Wartenberg in claiming that empowerment theorists misunderstand the nature of the power they are describing. However, his critique does signal the need for us to complicate our conception of the relationship between power-over, domination, and empowerment, and the role that each plays in women's lives.

The lack of a nuanced account of the conceptual relationship between domination and empowerment gives rise to a further difficulty with the empowerment-theoretical view. This view is derived from an account of "feminine" practices and traits that have, to a great extent, been constituted as feminine by misogynistic cultures. For instance, at least part of the reason that women tend to be more concerned about relationships is that we have been told we ought to concern ourselves with relationships. This is not to say that caring, nurturing, and mothering are wholly determined by misogyny; women have, of course, played an important and active role in defining and inculcating these practices. Nevertheless, it is problematic for feminists to valorize practices and traits that have been defined as feminine in the context of, and with the aim of upholding, male dominance. When empowerment theorists place a positive value on these practices, they leave these problems unresolved. In the end, although their emphasis on empowerment is helpful for its illumination of the power that women do have, this one-sided emphasis also obscures the ways women's power is developed in and through a dialectical relationship with male domination. The empowerment-theoretical view, too, is one-sided.

Domination vs. Empowerment: Feminist Critiques

The two feminist conceptions of power just elaborated do not, of course, encompass all the current feminist perspectives on the matter. Many feminists have been highly critical of each of those two conceptions. I shall focus here on several critiques which can be seen as representative of a larger body of critical literature.

Nancy Fraser has criticized the radical feminist version of the domination-theoretical understanding of power on the grounds that it is too dyadic and insufficiently structural. According to Fraser, the view that male dominance is best characterized as a master-subject relationship provides an inaccurate picture of women's subordination: "gender inequality is today being transformed by a shift from dyadic relations of mastery and subjection to more impersonal structural mechanisms that are lived through more fluid cultural forms" (1993, 180). Conceiving of domination on a dyadic model thus fails to make sense of the complex structural mechanisms that both reinforce and provide the opportunity for subverting women's subordination.

Elizabeth Spelman, by contrast, focuses on how such theorists understand the pervasiveness of male dominance. According to Spelman, to say that all men have power over all women "makes it look as if my relationship to the bank vice president I am asking for a loan is just like my relationship to the man who empties my wastebasket at the office each night; similarly, it makes it look as if their relationship to me is no different from their relationship to the woman who cleans the halls of the administration building" (1989, 186). Spelman's worry is that the blanket claim that all men have power over all women obscures the racism and class oppression that are interwoven with and integral to the subordination of women. To say that all men have power over all women is, in her view, to ignore the difference that difference makes with respect to such power.

As noted above, domination theorists do not argue that all men have the same kind of power over all women; they acknowledge that racial, ethnic, and class differences help to determine what kind of power particular men will be able to wield over particular women. Nevertheless, Spelman's point is on target: simply saying that different men have access to different kinds of power is a far cry from attempting to understand and illuminate the nature of those differences. Domination theorists still think it is possible to talk about "women as women," a stance that, Spelman correctly points out, "has the effect of making certain women rather than others paradigmatic examples of 'women'—namely, those women who seem to have a gender identity untainted (I use the word advisedly) by racial or class identity" (1989, 186). By failing to thematize fully the differences among women and among men, domination theorists fail to understand fully women's subordination.

Feminists have criticized empowerment theorists on somewhat different grounds. For example, Susan Moller Okin has questioned the claim that women are predisposed to be more concerned with care, nurturing, and relationships, as opposed to universal justice and autonomy. She argues, "there is certainly no evidence—nor could there be, in such a gender-structured society—for concluding that women are somehow naturally more inclined toward contextuality and away from universalism in their moral thinking, a false concept that unfortunately reinforces the old stereotypes that justify separate spheres" (1989, 15). In Okin's view, there is no way to know whether women are more concerned with care and relationships because that is woman's nature or because that is how our gender has been socially and culturally constructed. Empowerment theorists make the mistake of assuming a derivation from nature when a derivation from social construction seems at least as likely, if not more so.

This criticism, however, does not quite stick to the empowerment theorists examined above. For example, by focusing on the *practice* of mothering, a practice in which many women engage and which they acknowledge has been socially constructed, Ruddick and Held avoid making any claims whatsoever about woman's nature. A similar problem arises nevertheless: these empowerment theorists valorize a practice that has taken shape in the context of women's subordination. While we do not have to go so far as to agree with MacKinnon that to affirm such practices "means to affirm the qualities and characteristics of powerlessness" (1987, 39), such practices clearly seem to have, at best, mixed implications. Thus, Okin's worry that empowerment-theoretical views will unknowingly smuggle in patriarchal assumptions about women's proper roles and nature seems justified, even if her accusation of essentialism is ungrounded.

Feminists have offered insightful and important criticisms of the domination-theoretical and empowerment-theoretical conceptions of power. An adequate feminist theory of power will need to take these sorts of criticisms into account; it will need to be sufficiently structural, to conceptualize the intersection of racism and class oppression with sexism, and to be anti-essentialist. Furthermore, it will need to elucidate both the power men have over women and the power women have, and to do so in a way that integrates these two aspects of power.

Domination and Empowerment: An Integrative Approach

Thus far, I have argued that domination theorists and empowerment theorists each present one-sided conceptions of power. Why is the one-sidedness of these analyses problematic? Perhaps domination and empowerment theorists could simply insist that they are talking about different things and leave it at that. If they are simply talking about different things, then it might make no

difference that they come up with different understandings of power. We might, indeed, expect them to have different understandings of power, given the differences in their projects.

The one-sidedness of these conceptions of power is problematic for two reasons. First, looking only at one of these aspects of power at a time—either the power men have over women or the power women have—obscures the other forms of oppression that are intertwined with women's subordination (see Spelman 1989, 140-41). To say that the power that grows out of women's experience is positive, creative, and transformative implies that some women do not exercise power by dominating others. To claim that women are powerless as such, as domination theorists do, likewise denies the power that some women can exercise over others. Women's use of power is not necessarily benevolent; we are not unable or unwilling to use our power to hurt others simply because we are women; many women have access to power over other women by virtue of their race, class, and/or sexual orientation. Conceptions of power that have a one-sided focus either on male domination or on female empowerment miss the integral roles that some women play in the subordination of others, and the ways that different women are differently empowered by particular practices. To account for these phenomena, feminists need a varied, nuanced conception of power that avoids one-sidedness.

Second, a one-sided approach renders each conception of power incapable of making sense of the complex and multifarious power relations in which women find themselves, wherein they can be both dominated and empowered at the same time and in the context of the same norm, institution, or practice. Mothers, for example, can experience empowerment through the practice of transforming, nurturing, and empowering their children, while at the same time being subject to the power of male domination in the guise of a male-dominated medical profession, oppressive or abusive husbands, and structural disadvantage in the labor market and the political sphere.[6] Because their view of power implies that female power is a contradiction in terms, domination theorists fail to see the power of mothers as true power. Although empowerment theorists recognize that mothers are socially powerless, they fail to comprehend the full effects of male dominance. Because each of these conceptions is partially blind to the significance of the other, each is incapable of fully illuminating women's complex experience with power. Feminists, therefore, need a theory of power that integrates these two theoretical moments, a theory sufficiently conceptually complex to illuminate the multifarious relations of power that feminists seek both to critique and to transform.

How can feminists arrive at such an integrative analysis of power? We might begin by asking ourselves a question posed by Steven Lukes: "What interests us when we are interested in power?" (1986, 17). He contends that the conception of power that one eventually adopts will be to some extent predetermined by the interest that one has in studying power in the first place.

This is particularly true, I think, with regard to feminist theorizing about power. Insofar as feminists are interested in studying power, our particular interest is in understanding, critiquing, and ultimately overturning a complex set of power relations. Thus, a feminist analysis of power should begin by considering a variation on Lukes's question: "What interests feminists when we are interested in power?"

Feminists bring at least three particular interests to a study of power, two of which have already been discussed. The first is our interest in understanding the ways men dominate women. Furthermore, the exposure of the racial and class bias of much of feminist theory has signaled a need for feminists to think seriously about how some women dominate others on the basis of their race, class, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation.[7] Feminist theory needs to illuminate a complex and interrelated array of systems of domination—including sexism, racism, heterosexism, and class oppression, to name only the most conspicuous dimensions. These related concerns require a feminist theory of power to shed light on the concept of domination more generally.

The second interest is in understanding the power that women do have; that is, feminine empowerment. This need to theorize the power that women retain in spite of masculine domination often manifests itself in a concern with a more specific type of empowerment; namely, resistance. If the interest in empowerment corresponds to the concern with the power that women exercise in spite of male domination, then the interest in resistance corresponds with feminists' concern with the power that women can wield to oppose male domination. In other words, whereas the feminist interest in empowerment arises out of the need to theorize the power that women have *regardless of* the power that men have over us, the interest in resistance emerges from the need to understand the power that women exercise *as a response to* male domination.

The third interest feminist theorists bring to the discussion of power comes in the wake of charges that the mainstream feminist movement has marginalized women of color, lesbians, and working-class women. We must be able to think about the kind of power that diverse women can exercise collectively when we work together to define, and strive to achieve, feminist aims. We have an interest in theorizing the kind of collective power that can bridge the diversity of women who make up the feminist movement. This interest in collective power also arises out of our need to understand how feminists can build coalitions with other social movements, such as the racial equality movement, the gay rights movement, or new labor movements. In short, we need a theory of power that can conceptualize solidarity.

In sum, feminists need an account of power that can make sense of masculine domination; feminine empowerment and its more specific form, resistance; and feminist solidarity and coalition building. Yet these different sorts of power relations do not all fall under the same sense of the general term

"power." Rather, each of them represents a particular modality of power. Our interest in male domination is in the particular kinds of power that men are able to exercise *over* women. Our interest in empowerment and resistance is in the power women have *to* act in spite of or as a response to male domination. Our interest in solidarity and coalition building is in the power that women exercise *with* each other and with men in allied social movements. Feminists' diverse interests in the study of power give rise to three basic senses of "power" which our account will have to illuminate: power-over, power-to, and power-with. Before we can arrive at a conception that will allow us to think of domination, empowerment-resistance, and solidarity-coalition building together as instances of power—and more important, analyze these instances in their interrelatedness—we must first consider each of these different senses of the term "power" in itself.

Power-over

I define "power-over" as the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way. This definition is a modified version of Wartenberg's definition of power-over: "A social agent A has *power over* another social agent B if and only if A strategically constrains B's action-environment" (1990, 85). I have omitted "strategically" from my definition of power-over because it implies that those who have power over others have that power intentionally.[8] The difficulty with an account that sees power-over as the result of A's strategy or intentions is that it ignores the ways one can, as Lukes puts it, "have or exercise power without deliberately seeking to do so, in routine or unconsidered ways, without grasping the effects [one] can or do[es] bring about" (1986, 1). It is particularly important for feminists to define power-over without reference to strategies or intentions, because much of the power that is relevant to feminist theory is held or exercised "in routine or unconsidered ways" by people who do not necessarily deliberately intend to do so.[9]

One aspect of my definition of power-over needs clarification: the phrase "in a nontrivial way." In some cases, an agent constrains the choices of another in ways that we would hesitate to call exercises of power-over. If Chris and Amy each have a craving for chocolate, and Amy eats the last brownie in the house, then she has constrained Chris's options for fulfilling his chocolate craving. In a broad spectrum of cases, this constraint seems too trivial to consider an instance of power-over. However, if Amy is well fed and Chris severely malnourished, then taking the last brownie could well be viewed as an exercise of power-over. There is no general rule here; the claim that an actor or set of actors has power over another or others will depend to some extent on the context.

Although domination represents one kind of power-over, the terms "domination" and "power-over" cannot be simply synonymous. We can easily think of situations in which one agent has power over another, but which we would be hesitant to call instances of domination. For example, a basketball coach has a certain amount of power over her players: she constrains their options as basketball players in nontrivial ways by deciding what will happen at practice, who will play which position, who will start the game, and so on. However, we would hesitate to say that being a coach necessarily involves dominating one's players, although some coaches may use their position in this way. On the contrary, coaches are there to help their players develop new skills, increase their confidence, and, if all goes well, experience the pleasure of victory in competition.[10] Each of these goals points to a use of power over others that is for their benefit, and that does not seem to capture what feminists mean by domination. Therefore, "power-over" must be a broader concept than "domination." Furthermore, this example indicates that the former can be distinguished from the latter by means of a normative criterion: coaching is not an instance of domination because the power the coach has over her players is exercised for their benefit, rather than for their disadvantage. Thus, domination is defined with reference to a normative criterion as well: domination entails the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices of another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way and in a way that works to the others' disadvantage (on this point, see Wartenberg 1990, 118; Lukes 1974, 36). Domination thus becomes a particular application of power understood as power-over.

Power-to

Empowerment and resistance cannot be understood best as instances of power-over; rather, these terms describe the capacity of an agent to act in spite of or in response to the power wielded over her by others. As discussed above, most empowerment theorists consider their understanding of empowerment explicitly to contradict the "male" definition of power as a dominating and controlling power over others. Nor is the notion of resistance fully illuminated by power-over as defined here; although particular instances of resistance may take the form of placing constraints on the options of the would-be aggressor, resistance seems fundamentally to involve asserting one's capacity to act in the face of another agent's domination.

If we understand empowerment and resistance in this way, then we can see that they are not completely captured by the term "power-over." The feminist interest in empowerment and resistance accordingly requires that we understand power in a second sense: the sense of power-to. I define "power-to" as the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends.[11] According to this definition, the terms "empowerment" and "power-to" are roughly synon-

ymous. Feminists are interested in empowerment because we are interested in how members of subordinated groups retain the power to act despite their subordination; more particularly, in our own ability to attain certain ends in spite of male domination. This is an interest in power understood as power-to.

However, "power-to" or "empowerment" cannot be considered equivalent to "resistance." Just as I can assert my power to act as a response to a system of domination, I can conceivably assert my power to act by dominating others, not simply by resisting. In the same way that domination represents a particular application of power-over, resistance represents a particular application of power-to or empowerment. We can define resistance as the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends that serve to subvert domination. In order to accommodate the feminist interest in resistance, our definition must cover power-to, as well.

Power-with

To satisfy the feminist interest in solidarity, our definition will also have to include a third sense of power. Feminists are interested in solidarity because we have an interest in understanding the kind of collective power that binds the feminist movement together and allies it with other social movements in such a way that we can formulate and achieve our goals. I take it that the goal of the feminist movement is not to put women in a position to exact, at long last, our revenge for the suffering we have endured under male domination. Thus, it does not make sense to view the solidarity that enables the feminist movement to formulate and achieve its objectives as merely an instance of power-over.[12] Rather, the goal is a kind of collective empowerment. Because solidarity represents a collective empowerment, it is not completely described by power-to, as I have defined it. If solidarity cannot be viewed as a type of either power-over or power-to, feminists require a third sense of power; namely, power-with.

Power-with is the sense that informs Hannah Arendt's definition of power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" (1969, 44). Understood in this way, power is a collective ability based on the receptivity and reciprocity that characterize relations among members of the collectivity.[13] These aspects of power-with can be summed up in the following definition: the ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of a common or shared end or series of ends.

However, "solidarity" and "power-with" cannot be equivalent terms. For example, a military group that is unjustly exercising power over a population by imposing martial law can be said to have power-with. Indeed, that collective power-with may well be what allows the military to maintain its position of dominance. Yet this does not completely correspond with the kind of sisterhood in which feminists are interested. Thus, just as we concluded that

domination is a particular instance of power-over and resistance a particular instance of power-to, solidarity should be understood as a particular use to which power-with can be put. With that in mind, I define solidarity as the ability of a collectivity to act together for the shared or common purpose of overturning a system of domination.

Having started with what interests feminists when we are interested in power, we have arrived at three desiderata for a general definition of power: it will have to include power-over, power-to, and power-with. To satisfy these desiderata, our definition of power will have to be quite broad. Thus, I will define power simply as the ability or capacity of an actor or set of actors to act. This rather broad definition has two benefits. First, it easily includes all three of the senses of power that I have delineated. Power-over is the ability or capacity to act in such a way as to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors; power-to is the individual ability or capacity to act so as to attain some end; and power-with is the collective ability or capacity to act together so as to attain some common or shared end. Because it can include power-over, power-to, and power-with, our definition can accommodate feminists' interests in understanding domination, resistance, and solidarity. Second, this definition accords with the etymology of the term: "power" is derived from the Latin *potere* and the French *pouvoir*, both of which mean *to be able*.

Defining power in this way, however, does have its drawbacks, the most significant of which is that it differs from the way many social and political theorists define it. Many theorists equate power with only one of the three senses that I have delineated, usually power-over.[14] But although my definition does not capture all the aspects of standard usage, it is better suited than others to the interests that feminists bring to the study of power. If we want to satisfy those interests, we have to define power in such a way.

Another potential objection to defining power in this way is that it seems to privilege one of the three senses of power that I have distinguished, power-to. If power is defined as the ability or capacity to act, then it is barely distinguishable from power-to, which is defined as the individual ability or capacity to act so as to attain some end. I have argued that power cannot simply be understood as empowerment, as power-to; yet my own definition seems to understand power in precisely that way. Thus, it seems that I have sided with the empowerment theorists after all. But that is not the case.

My argument against both the empowerment and domination theorists is that each presents a one-sided view of power. It has never been my contention that the empowerment theorists have a wholly incorrect understanding of power; I claim only that their understanding is incomplete because they tend to view their conception of power *in opposition to* the view held by the domination theorists (see, for example, Held 1993, 209). I contend that it

makes no sense to think of these two conceptions of power as opposed to one another. Having power-over presupposes having power-to: in order to have power over another, one must have the capacity or ability to act in such a way as to attain some end. Similarly, having power-with presupposes having power-to: power understood as the collective capacity to act so as to attain some shared end obviously presupposes power understood as the individual capacity to act so as to attain some end. Although power-to is perhaps the most basic of the three senses I have delineated, it is not opposed to either power-over or power-with.

This conceptual interrelatedness brings out an important aspect of this account of power. Power-over, power-to, and power-with are not best understood as distinct types or forms of power; rather, they represent analytically distinguishable features of a situation. All features may be present in one interaction: an action that involves power-with, which presupposes power-to, may also be used as a means to achieving power over others. For example, in the struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment, a group of actors worked together with the shared goal of the passage of an Amendment that, had it passed, would have constrained the options of those who might discriminate against women. These women engaged in individual acts of resistance and collective expressions of feminist solidarity whose aim was to subvert male domination. But this aim could only be achieved by legally constraining the options of those who would discriminate against women on the basis of sex—that is, by an exercise of power-over. Existing feminist accounts of power, because of their conceptual one-sidedness, do not provide the necessary tools for understanding the complex power relations in an example such as this. The conception of power offered here, however, gives feminist theorists a set of analytical concepts that can help us start to make sense of such complex power relations.

NOTES

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1. By labeling feminists in this way, I do not mean to suggest that "power-over" is synonymous with "domination." Instead, I see domination as a particular application of power-over. However, because domination theorists equate "power," "power-over," and "domination," I will use these terms interchangeably at this point in my discussion. Let me stress also that the distinction I am drawing here is between *traditional* conceptions of power. Some of the existing feminist literature on power, for example, work inspired by Michel Foucault, does not fit neatly into either of these two categories. For my

assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a Foucaultian-feminist account of power, see Allen 1996.

2. Thomas Wartenberg uses the label "feminist theorists of domination" to describe a similar position (1990, 186).

3. This understanding is evinced by one of the more memorable images employed by both Dworkin and MacKinnon, the image that portrays male power as a foot placed firmly on women's necks. As Dworkin says: "I want real change, an end to the social power of men over women; more starkly, his boot off my neck" (1979, xxxvii). Consider also the following remark from MacKinnon, made in the context of a debate with Phyllis Schlafly: "I'm saying her [Schlafly's] analysis of her own experience is wrong. Their foot is on her neck, too, and I, for one, am willing to give her this chance to change her mind (1987, 30). See also MacKinnon's remark, referring to Carol Gilligan's claim that women speak "in a different voice" when it comes to ethical and moral choices, "Take your foot off our necks, then we will hear in what tongue women speak" (1987, 45). As controversial as it may seem, this image is quite appropriate to the domination-theoretical understanding of power. In this theory, power is the domination that individual men wield over individual women, aptly exemplified by the image of the male master standing triumphantly over his prone female subject, his boot on her neck, holding her in place.

4. As influential as Gilligan's work has been, it is important to note that subsequent studies have failed to vindicate completely her thesis about moral development and gender. See, e.g., the works cited in Okin (1989, 188-89, n. 29) and by Jane Mansbridge (1993, 381-82, n. 32).

5. To be sure, both Ruddick and Held acknowledge that men can be mothers; mothering is a social practice, not a natural ability, and a mother is simply one who has primary responsibility for nurturing and caring for children and thus is not necessarily a woman (Ruddick 1989, 17; Held 1993, 197-98). However, because most mothers are women, and because maternal thinking arises out of motherhood as a practice, most maternal thinkers are women. As a result, these empowerment theorists are describing a perspective that is, for the most part, still specific to women.

6. Okin argues further that women are disadvantaged by the very anticipation of motherhood. Recognizing that motherhood and highly demanding careers do not mix well, girls who expect to be mothers at some point in their lives lower their career expectations accordingly (1989, 142-46).

7. For an extended account of this problem, see Spelman (1989).

8. Wartenberg, by contrast, explicitly argues that power must be defined with reference to intentional concepts. See 1990, 62-65.

9. Not only is male power over women exercised by men who do not deliberately intend to do so, but I would also argue that it is exercised by men who deliberately intend *not* to do so. This is because, whatever their intentions are, they still act within a set of cultural, institutional, and structural relations of power that work to women's disadvantage. The same might be said of the power exercised by, for instance, white women, despite their intentions. Wartenberg recognizes this aspect of male domination but does not seem to recognize that his definition of power as strategic is in tension with this recognition. See 1990, 155-57.

10. Coaching would thus be an instance of what Wartenberg calls "transformative power." See 1990, chaps. 9, 10. The other instances of transformative power he discusses are teaching, parenting, and therapy.

11. Here I follow Connolly's characterization of "power-to." See 1983, 86-7.

12. I say "merely" here because achieving a kind of power-over those who are in a position of dominance and would like to remain there may be one goal of the feminist movement. In some cases, feminists may have to use power over others to achieve the kind of changes that we strive to achieve. On this point, see Mansbridge 1994.

13. For these aspects of power-with, see Mary Parker Follett (1942, 95-116).

14. Exceptions include: C.B. Macpherson, who argues that political theorists need to investigate both power-over and power-to; and Jane Mansbridge, whose definition of power as "the actual or potential causal relation between the interests of an actor or a set of actors and the outcome itself" includes both power-over and power-to. See Macpherson (1973) and Mansbridge (1994, 55).

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