

An Everyday Feminist: A Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis of Digital Feminist News Media

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Abstract

In tandem with the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies including Twitter and Facebook, there has been a resurgence of online feminist activism. Facilitated by digital feminist news sites, such as Jezebel, Everyday Feminism, and Feministing, feminists are increasingly using digital media to discuss a variety of feminist issues such as sexual harassment and racism. However, even though these sites provide content to millions of readers, they still remain understudied, particularly from a discourse analytical perspective. I argue that the digital feminist news media are key sites for analysing and understanding how the digital news media might be used to discursively resist hegemonic postfeminism and (re)define contemporary feminism. In order to address this research gap, this study employs a range of analytical tools associated with corpus linguistics (CL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). These tools are used to examine the various linguistic and discursive features of a corpus of 75 texts from these digital feminist news sites, and to comparatively analyse these features against those from a corpus comprised of 61 theoretical feminist texts. The findings reveal that the digital feminist news media are dominated by poststructural, social constructionist, and intersectional discourses which constitute fourth-wave feminist ideology. The study also shows how the competitive neoliberal cultural production of the internet may affect the discourses present in the digital feminist news media, as it incentivises individualistic practices such as self-branding. Ultimately, I argue that these news sites are mostly effective at producing counter-hegemonic discourses, but are sometimes obscured by the neoliberal cultural production of the internet which prizes individualism over collective action, and aligns with the postfeminist sensibility which is counterproductive to feminism.

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Attestation of Authorship:

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: 

Date: 07/11/2018

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1. Introduction

“Feminists are everywhere these days” - Valenti, 2014, para. 1

1.0 Overview

This chapter introduces the current study by first examining the convergence of several cultural and technological shifts which have provided the territory for this research, and contextualising the issues at the heart of digital feminist news media production. Following this, previous research within the areas of digital feminist activism, representations of feminism in the news media, and media production are then reviewed, revealing a niche which this study aims to occupy. Finally, a brief overview of this study and the organisation of the subsequent chapters are given.

1.1 Feminist Activism in a Postfeminist Age

In 2014, popular feminist commentator Jessica Valenti penned an article for The Guardian titled *When Everyone is a Feminist, is Anyone?* in which she discussed the increasing popularity of feminism, stating that “it’s suddenly cool to be a feminist” (para. 1). Valenti went on to describe the apparent acceptance of feminism as “a dream come true” (para. 2), but also noted that “the ubiquity of the word in popular culture ... doesn’t guarantee progress on the ground” (para. 17). Her ruminations on the hyper-visibility of feminism echo concerns raised by several media scholars about the contradictory nature of contemporary feminist visibilities. As Gill (2017) describes, there is a “resurgence of interest in feminism, alongside the spectacular visibility of misogyny, racism, homophobia and nationalism” (p. 606). Additionally, Valenti’s article articulates the complexity of contemporary feminism and raises significant questions about the movement’s evolution and how feminist activism might be adapting within this new cultural and political environment.

Historically, feminism has been considered a “dirty word” (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012, p. 416). As many feminist media scholars have found, hegemonic discourses –

propagated most effectively by media industries and popular culture – have typically been anti-feminist (McRobbie, 2009; Mendes, 2011). Much of the discourse surrounding the feminist movement and its proponents conceptualised it as man-hating, anti-family, and excessively radical, and when the movement wasn't being demonised it was either trivialised or forgotten about altogether (Bradley, 2003; Rhode, 1995). However, recent scholarship has documented a shift in popular representations of feminism, perhaps contributing to a more nuanced sensibility. Within this new paradigm, feminism is incorporated and rejected; at once considered cool (Gill, 2016) but also outmoded, and this complex “double entanglement” (McRobbie, 2004, p. 6) is described as postfeminism. Prioritising the neoliberal tenets of individualism, empowerment and choice, postfeminism subsumes many third-wave values. As Gill (2016) notes, magazines and other media outlets have co-opted feminism, “proclaiming (it) as stylish, successful, and youthfully hip” (p. 610). However, postfeminism regularly undermines and expresses hostility towards the gains of second-wave feminism, conceptualising it as obsolete and outdated. As McRobbie (2004) outlines, postfeminism “comprises the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life ... with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations” (pp. 255–256).

In tandem with this apparent shift in the public's consciousness toward a postfeminist sensibility, the presence of feminist activism has sharply increased. The burgeoning presence of feminism is particularly visible online (Pruchniewska, 2017) and is facilitated by digital media and Web 2.0 technologies such as Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook (Keller, 2016; Mendes, 2015). Digital feminist activism takes many forms, and many feminist media scholars have begun to document the multifaceted digital landscape. Keller (2012) examined the use of blogs by young feminists and noted that the practice has led to “new understandings of community, activism, and even feminism itself” (p. 429). A participant of Mendes, Ringrose and Keller's (2018) study which examined the role of hashtag activism in the context of the #MeToo movement discloses that “the first place I heard about feminism was on the internet” (p. 240).

Furthermore, the inception of two major feminist campaigns, The Everyday Sexism Project and SlutWalk were internet-based and both went on to garner international attention from well-established media outlets (Chamberlain, 2017). Both movements centre on challenging cultural norms which are permissive of sexism. SlutWalk began

in 2011 when Heather Jarvis and Sonya Barnett became privy to comments made by a Toronto Police Constable who stated that in order to avoid being sexually assaulted women should stop dressing like ‘sluts.’ Utilising Facebook, Twitter and a dedicated website, Jarvis and Barnett organised a march to protest these remarks and others like it which contribute to a culture of victim-blaming. SlutWalk quickly ballooned into a global protest, facilitating marches of thousands of people in many geographically distant places (Mendes, 2015). Similarly, The Everyday Sexism Project which was created by Laura Bates is an online repository for women to share their everyday experiences of sexism, harassment and abuse. Frustrated with the way women are often silenced when they try to discuss experiences of misogyny, Bates created a website and a Twitter account where women could anonymously make submissions outlining their personal experiences. Ranging from the relatively benign to the sometimes extreme, the archiving process afforded by The Everyday Sexism Project is “allowing insight into widespread female experience, resulting in shifts in perspective from those who might have otherwise been unaware” (Chamberlain, 2017, p. 120).

These phenomena have led many scholars to theorise about the existence of a new wave of feminism (Chamberlain, 2017; Munro, 2013), arguing that this “new surge in activity” (Chamberlain, 2017, p. 107) signifies a fourth wave. The “tightened grip” (Gill, 2017, p. 606) of postfeminism on contemporary life does not negate the potential for a fourth wave to be in effect. Disappointingly, Keller (2016) notes that “despite the increasing recent public attention to feminist politics, postfeminism remains a hegemonic cultural discourse that continues to be influential in public perception of contemporary gender politics” (p. 2). The convergence of these factors creates a complex and often “uneven” (Gill, 2016, p. 615) environment for feminism, and brings into relief the jarring nature of contemporary feminist visibilities that Valenti described in her article. On the one hand, feminist activism facilitated by new media technologies of the internet, has had a certain renaissance. On the other hand feminism is still repudiated, albeit surreptitiously, and structures of patriarchal oppression remain very much intact. To complicate matters further, much of the digital cultural production which feminists employ operates in an environment which embodies a neoliberal ethic and aligns closely with postfeminist values (Pruchniewska, 2017). These factors make research into representations of feminism in an important area of study, particularly when digital media are employed.

1.2 Previous Research

Feminist scholarship has, unsurprisingly, been intensely interested in media practices and how the general public may be informed about feminism through mainstream media. While this remains an important site for informing people about feminism and potentially shaping their opinions of the movement, there are other niche areas in the media landscape that warrant further examination. As Mendes (2015) notes, “the rise of blogs, online, magazines, and social media platforms open up spaces which are increasingly necessary to explore” (p. 2). Additionally, there is a considerable breadth of research which has focused on feminism and other social movements and their relationship with digital media. However, there has been little investigation into digital feminist news sites, some of which are reported to have millions of online visitors (Everyday Feminism, n.d.; Smith, 2017). As both Keller (2012) and Mendes (2015) argue, these news sites which market feminist content are an important component of digital feminist activism. While several studies have examined the way specific feminist campaigns have been discussed on sites such as Jezebel, Everyday Feminism, and Feministing, little research has examined the diverse range of news content on these websites (Carr, 2013; Mendes, 2015). Furthermore, while many studies have examined the advantages of using digital media platforms to carry out feminist activism online, there is still a growing need to understand the effects of neoliberal digital cultural production on digital feminist activism.

1.3 Why Study Digital Feminist News Media?

A focus on representations of feminism in the media is particularly important as it has the ability to change people’s attitudes about the movement (Lind & Salo, 2000). Furthermore, the prevalence of hegemonic postfeminism as discussed above, signifies the importance of counter-hegemonic feminist discourses. The media is a useful site to examine how feminist and postfeminist discourses might be (re)produced as it has a pivotal role in “constructing ideologically motivated versions of reality” (Baker, Gabrielatos, & McEnery, 2013, p. 3). These factors make digital feminist news media a

key area of study in understanding how digital media might be employed by the feminist movement to resist hegemonic postfeminism, and how digital feminist activism might be affected by the neoliberal cultural production of the internet.

Employing media to circulate counter-hegemonic discourses is a well-established tradition within feminism, and digital feminist news sites which lay at the intersection of discursive activism and digital activism are a continuation of this tradition. By examining texts from these sites, the discourses which are manifested in them can be identified. Moreover, discourses both reflect and produce existing ideologies. Therefore, examining texts will provide an understanding of how linguistic choices are made to further certain ideological positions and, in turn, discursively resist hegemonic postfeminism. Several questions might be borne in mind when examining the digital feminist news media such as, what feminist ideologies are most prominent and how are they manifest in discourse? Do the discourses resist hegemonic postfeminism? Are digital feminist news media discourses affected by the neoliberal cultural production of the internet which is “intimately connected” (Gill, 2016, p. 610) to postfeminist values?

Utilising corpus-based critical discourse analysis (Baker et al., 2008; Baker et al., 2013; Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012) this study examines the discourses prevalent within digital feminist news media and compares these to discourses present in theoretical feminist texts, focusing in particular on the way that these discourses articulate different conceptualisations of feminism. The comparison of the digital feminist news media texts with the theoretical feminist texts allows the discourses within the digital feminist news to be located in a historical context, and allows potential ideological shifts and changes in language use across the two sets of texts to be identified. Tools commonly utilised in corpus linguistics (keyness, collocates and concordances) are first used to uncover frequent or statistically significant patterns within the digital feminist news, and signpost areas within the texts which are then examined further using Fairclough’s (1989, 1995a, 1995b) critical discourse analysis framework. Unlike much of the scholarship which has examined representations of feminism in the news media, this study is not a feminist analysis of digital feminist news media. Instead, this study takes a broadly critical “curiosity-based” (Baker & McEnery, 2015, p. 3) approach, and aims to explore both the positive and potentially counterproductive discourses within digital

feminist news media (Toolan, 2002). Drawing on the dialectical-relational approach of Fairclough (1989, 1995a, 1995b) this study conceptualises the discursive events identified within the digital feminist news media as both constituting and constitutive of the particular cultural and technological shifts discussed previously in this chapter.

1.4 Organisation of Chapters

The remaining chapters of this book are divided into eight sections. Chapter 2 provides a review of the existing literature and contextualises this study, first by reviewing the three waves of feminism and providing a detailed description of fourth-wave and postfeminism. It then describes the technological shifts which enabled the creation of digital feminist news media. Finally, four pivotal concepts – discourse, ideology, power and hegemony – are introduced, and this study is positioned within a relatively recent tradition of using corpus tools to assist in analysing these four concepts.

Chapter 3 first provides a methodological overview by further exploring and justifying the combination of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. Then an outline of the data collection process is given which involved the creation of two specialised corpora (the digital feminist news corpus and the feminist theory corpus), and obtaining two pre-existing reference corpora. Finally, a detailed description of the analysis is given which outlines how the quantitative information provided by the corpus tools were used to uncover parts of the texts which were qualitatively analysed. This final section also describes how the qualitative analysis of communicative events and the order of discourse was carried out using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework.

Chapter 4 marks the beginning of the analysis and includes the results of the frequency and keyword analysis of both the digital feminist news corpus and the feminist theory corpus. This stage of the analysis is primarily quantitative, though some initial hypotheses based on the keyword data are used. The results from this section are then used to guide the analysis in the subsequent chapters (5-8).

Chapters 5 through 8 comprise the analysis of communicative events and provide the bulk of the qualitative analysis of this study. Each of these four chapters focuses on a different keyword from the analysis in Chapter 4 (*women*, *gender*, *queer*, and *key*

pronouns). In these chapters, two corpus tools – collocates and concordances – are primarily used to pinpoint salient areas of both corpora which are then analysed using Fairclough's three dimensional framework. Although the digital feminist news corpus is the focal point of this study these chapters often analyse the digital feminist news corpus and the feminist theory corpus concurrently. This allows for similarities and differences between both corpora to be identified. However, Chapter 7 which examines the keyword *queer* solely contains a close analysis of discourses in the digital feminist news corpus. These chapters focus on a range of linguistic phenomena such as metaphor use (Cameron, 2010), lexicalisation (Baker, 2006), patterns of transitivity (Halliday, 1985), and semantic prosody (Stubbs, 1991). The analyses then describe how these linguistic phenomena contribute to the construction of micro and macro-level discourses and ideologies within both corpora by connecting the findings to a wider social context.

Chapter 9 is the concluding chapter of this study. This chapter revisits Fairclough and Chouliaraki's (1999) concept of the order of discourse and provides a discussion on the order of discourse of digital feminist news. Following this, a summary of the findings from both the analysis of communicative events (Chapters 5-8) and the analysis of the order of discourse is given. Finally, limitations of the study are discussed and are divided into three distinct but overlapping components of the study: limitations of combining corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis, limitations of the data used, and limitations of the analysis.

2. Literature Review

“The media’s potential for sparking (or preventing) social change is enormous and thus merits closer inspection.” – Mendes, 2011, p. 2

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter a review of the existing literature provides context for the study by outlining a brief history of feminism and a framework for understanding and discussing the movement in its entirety¹. Following this, scholarly evaluations about the current feminist climate and the possibility of a fourth wave of feminism are discussed. Then, feminism’s employment of traditional media is explored, positioning digital feminist news creation within an already well-established tradition of resisting hegemonic discourses through media-making. Providing a backdrop for the emergence of digital feminist news sites, shifts in the media landscape and how this has led to a burgeoning presence of feminism online are then discussed. Finally, the importance of analysing news media, specifically digital news media, is discussed and this study is situated within the tradition of employing critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics in the analysis of news media.

2.1: A History of Feminist Thought and the Wave Metaphor

The various stages of the feminist movement are sometimes discussed using the metaphor of waves, where each wave is associated with a different period in history and the corresponding viewpoints or conceptualisations of feminist thought. Use of this metaphor has been criticised by numerous scholars, who argue that it ignores the fact that many feminist ideologies are interrelated, that the different waves share many common goals, and that feminism emerged and progressed from many different sources in a non-linear fashion (Chamberlain, 2017). Indeed many scholars identify more specific, and potentially more precise modes of feminism where the waves and their corresponding ideologies are not conceptualised as conflicting or separate from one another. Instead they are characterised as a complex web with many nexuses that cannot

¹ As both the media and theory texts examined in this study were primarily produced in western countries by western authors, the chronology of feminism focuses on the movement’s development in the west, notably North America and Britain.

always be neatly untangled and separated. However as Chamberlain (2017) argues, discarding the wave metaphor altogether disregards the fact that “the movement as a whole has always proliferated with different terms, alternative identities, grassroots movements and subsections” (p. 6). Taking the approach stipulated by Evans and Chamberlain (2015), the limitations and potentials of the wave metaphor should be accepted and a “reflexive and fluid use ... that privileges continuity, inclusivity and multiplicity” (p. 397) can be employed. Throughout this study there is, therefore, an alternation between utilising the wave metaphor to refer to significant moments in feminism more generally, and discussing specific subsets of feminist thought such as liberal feminism, radical feminism and so-on. Returning now to the chronology of feminism, the waves will be discussed individually with particular attention being paid to shifts between the waves, and the influence of specific schools of thought on the development of each wave’s goals.

2.1.1: First-wave Feminism (1840-1920)

There is no true beginning of feminism (Rowbotham, 1972), as texts such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft, 1792) indicate that a preoccupation with feminist ideas existed before the first wave. Despite this there was little to no organised collective momentum until the suffrage movement of the mid-1800. It is because of this that the first wave generally refers to the period between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries when suffrage occurred (Mendes, 2011). Like all feminist waves this movement was fractious, but some of the primary goals were gaining women’s right to vote, own property, sue, and form contracts (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003). Additionally, while some women fought for the abolition of slavery during this period, many white women were still complicit in the practice (Mendes, 2011) and this disjuncture between the experiences of white women and women of colour is still a pivotal issue in feminism today.

2.1.2: Second-wave Feminism (1960-1988)

Following the successes of the suffrage movement, there was a dormant period within feminism until the late 1960s (Mendes, 2011). This “affective temporality” (Chamberlain, 2017, p. 1) evolved in tandem with other major social movements, and saw feminism become a topic of attention once again. Figure-heads such as Gloria

Steinem utilised news networks to disseminate the feminist message (Mendes, 2011), and the movement entered academia in the form of Women's Studies (Lowe & Lowe Benston, 1984). Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which challenged the ways in which restrictive gender roles kept women within the confines of domestic life, is often thought of as a seminal feminist text, reflecting much of the spirit of the second wave. This period of feminism was largely influenced by liberal theory which claimed women's entitlement to basic rights and opportunities as individuals, and was occupied with access to employment and education, reproductive healthcare, and suppressing violence against women. Liberal feminism also rejected biological determinism and the notion that men were naturally superior to women (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003). Under this approach, gender equality is realised through redistributing power by providing equal opportunities to both men and women. This approach drew criticism as many women of colour argued that liberal feminism often centred the concerns of white, heterosexual, middle-class women in their efforts for equal opportunities.

Radical feminism, the second influential component of the second wave, also departed from liberal feminism. Under this paradigm, patriarchy (men's power over women) is seen as the "root of all other forms of oppression" (Mitchell, 1971, as cited in Mendes, 2011, p. 5), rendering all women universally oppressed by men. Radical feminists campaigned heavily against sexual violence, objectification and pornography (Mendes, 2011). According to radical feminists, there are inescapable biological differences between men and women which makes providing equal opportunities a false goal for achieving gender equality. Furthermore they believe that a simple redistribution of power is not sufficient to emancipate women of oppression, and that liberal feminists wrongly accept that "the civic realm and the individual are uncontaminated by patriarchal subordination" (Pateman, 1988, as cited in Graham, 1994, p. 158). Because of its emphasis on biological differences, radical feminism is sometimes discussed as essentialist, meaning that it ascribes fixed traits or essences to the genders, and makes no distinction between the meanings of biological sex and gender. (Mikkola, 2017). Moreover, radical feminism seeks to question and redefine the patriarchal hierarchy which privileges masculinity and subordinates femininity (Mendes, 2011).

The third school of feminist thought which is usually attributed to the second wave is Marxist feminism. Unlike liberal feminism, but in similar fashion to radical feminism, Marxist feminism argues that a wholesale reorganisation of capitalist society is needed

to emancipate women from patriarchal power structures. However, it differs from radical feminism in that class-based oppression is seen as an equally, if not more, important site of the struggle for equality. Although Marxist feminism and its preoccupations with class struggle was visible in Europe during this period, it was “comparatively absent” (Mendes, 2011, p. 5) in the United States.

2.1.3: Third-wave Feminism (1992-2010)

The inception of third-wave feminism is usually dated from 1992, when Rebecca Walker published her essay *Becoming the Third Wave* (Mendes, 2011). The patchwork of ideologies which constitute the third wave are slightly more difficult to pin down than the second wave. This is partly because many of the concerns of the second wave remain relevant and continue to be campaigned for today. However, three major themes which distinguish the third wave from the second can be identified and considered turn. First, many traditionally feminine activities such as wearing makeup and baking which were rejected by the second wave, were reclaimed during the third wave. Within this paradigm, there became a growing sense of wanting to have more freedom to define what it means to be a feminist (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Dicker & Piepmeyer, 2003). Proponents of this wave popularised the notion of the personal as political, and argued against shared political priorities, instead prioritising the autonomy of individual women.

The second theme, which is perhaps in contravention to the more individualistic outlook described above, is that of intersectionality. During the third wave, women of colour challenged the ways in which second-wave feminism had overlooked racism as part of many women’s experiences. These feminists argued against elevating the voices of relatively privileged white, middle-class, heterosexual women over others whose experiences of marginalisation were different. Instead of creating a hierarchy within feminism, where gender-based oppression is at the forefront, a novel way of understanding oppression was conceptualised (Mendes, 2011). Influenced by critical race theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) developed the theory of intersectionality. Intersectionality realises oppression as multiplicitous and interlocking. Within this framework, people experience various forms of oppression based on class, race, ability, gender, and so-on, and these oppressive structures are viewed as being inextricably connected and unable to be delineated from one another. Additionally, the intersectional conceptualisation of oppression meant that patriarchy was no longer understood simply

in terms of men oppressing women. Women could be agents of oppression, and the ways in which men are negatively impacted by patriarchy could be explored.

The final shift which can be extricated from the complexities of third-wave feminism is the influence of queer theory and poststructuralism (Mendes, 2011). Whereas the previous schools of feminist thought had discussed patriarchy in terms of men and women, poststructural and queer theory set to trouble the categories of men and women altogether. Almost diametrically opposed to radical feminism, poststructural feminism takes the position that gender and sex are separate and that gender is not contingent upon sex. Instead, gender is performed, it is neither innate nor fixed (Butler, 1990). Furthermore, queer and poststructural theorists argued that “feminism misses the mark when it relies on the very bifurcation it is trying to correct” (Rudy, 2000, p. 196). This means that since all identities are discursively constructed, feminism should resist naming the subject altogether, as this simply reinforces the binary and hierarchically organised constructions of men and women. Additionally, the discursive construction of two distinct genders reinforces what Butler (1990) refers to as the heterosexual matrix. This matrix privileges heterosexual relationships between typically masculine men and typically feminine women, and troubles identities which exist outside this norm such as gay men. These schools of thought enriched feminism’s understanding of othered identities, and allowed for increased recognition of LGBTQ identities which were often sidelined during the second wave (Mendes, 2011). However, poststructural feminism’s refusal to name the subject has drawn criticism from scholars who argue that it obscures “the rhetorical force of the focus on the universal key problem of a very broad male power over women” (Philips, 2003, as cited in Baker, 2008, p. 251).

2.2: Contemporary Feminism: Fourth-Wave versus Postfeminism

In more recent times - specifically, from 2010 onwards - feminism has undergone a certain reinvigoration, both within and outside of the mainstream. In turn, this has led to scholars discussing the current zeitgeist and theorising about a potential new wave. Gill (2016) argues that “feminism is increasingly signified within the mainstream media as ‘cool’” (p. 613). This renewed interest in feminism has been an area of interest for those

inside and outside of academia, alike. Some have even suggested that the emergence of the internet has heralded new forms of feminist scholarship and activism which has led to the conclusion that the feminist movement is in its fourth iteration (Chamberlain, 2017; Cochrane, 2014; Guillard, 2016; Munro, 2013). There is no general consensus as to what the primary goals and foci of this fourth wave are, however Cochrane (2014) has suggested that the present feminist moment is preoccupied with challenging rape culture², employing humour and irony, with an emphasis on inclusivity and intersectionality. Munro (2013) similarly argues the increased emphasis on and use of intersectionality within the movement is a component of the fourth wave, in addition to a new specialised vocabulary, and privilege-checking³. Furthermore, Chamberlain (2017) argues that the presence of another wave can be identified, not solely by its aims but by a collective sense of urgency and a need to disrupt the status-quo:

(this) sense of widespread feeling is particularly necessary as the social movement is no longer predicated on essentialist identities or uniformity of experience. Both feeling and disruption create the sense of surging and energy, suggested by each new iteration of the wave. (p. 27)

However, the existence of the fourth wave is contested by other scholars who argue that its primary unifying factor is the presence of the internet, which alone is not enough to signify another epochal period in feminism's history (Turley & Fisher, 2018). Others have validated the existence of a fourth wave but resisted defining it in concrete terms as they argue the waves can only be accurately examined and understood retrospectively (Chamberlain, 2017).

This moment of reinvigorated feminist engagement is further complicated by the presence of what some feminist scholars refer to as postfeminism. McRobbie (2004) posits that postfeminism can be characterised by its contradictory amalgamation of feminist and anti-feminist ideas; it at once rejects feminism and selectively enacts it. With close ties to neoliberalism, postfeminism privileges individualism over collective action and prescribes self-surveillance, control, and the pursuit of perfection as the recipe for success and happiness, with little or no attention paid to structural inequalities

² Rape culture can be defined as “a society of environment whose prevailing social attitudes have the effect of normalizing or trivializing sexual assault and abuse” (Rape culture, n.d.)

³ Munro defines privilege-checking as “reminding someone that they cannot and should not speak for others” (p. 24).

(McRobbie, 2015). Within this paradigm, second-wave feminist thought is derided and conceptualised as man-hating, it is insinuated that feminism has either failed or is obsolete and instead there is a focus on seeking new ways of empowering women through the neoliberal tenets of consumption and personal choice (Gill & Scharff, 2011). McRobbie (2009) also notes that this marginalisation of feminism has been most effective within pop culture and the media industry. However, the presence of postfeminism does not necessarily negate the presence of a fourth-wave and vice-versa, as each can exist concurrently. As Chamberlain (2017) writes, “the wave is a moment in which discourse, effect, context, and affect all converge, creating an adaptable and evolving energised period of concerted activism” (p. 8).

2.3: Early Feminist Media Making: Resisting Hegemonic Discourses through Traditional Media

Although feminist praxis has an important oral tradition through the likes of consciousness raising circles, which are “a rhetorical strategy ... deliberately cultivated to enable women to share personal experiences of gender discrimination in conversations and meetings” (Sowards & Renegar, 2004, p. 535), it has also relied on the written form. It employs what Fine (1992) describes as discursive activism which can be defined as “speech or texts that seek to challenge opposing discourses by exposing power relations within these discourses ... and demonstrating the flawed assumptions...of mainstream social discourse” (p. 221). This strategy, Shaw (2012) argues, is an important part of political action and has been an effective way of resisting hegemonic discourses in an environment that derided feminism and deliberately misconstrued its intentions. A considerable breadth of feminist media scholarship has revealed the ways in which traditional western media has conceptualised feminism, its goals and its participants (Bradley, 2003; Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012; Mendes, 2011; Refern & Aune, 2010; Rhode, 1995). Utilising a framing analysis, many earlier studies found that the news media has tended to ignore, trivialise and demonise the feminist movement, while reinforcing stereotypical conceptions of feminists as man-hating, anti-family, and aggressive. Rhode (1995) stipulated that news outlets employed four tactics in their coverage of feminism: demonization, trivialisation, polarisation and emphasis on individual gain over collective empowerment.

Historically, feminists successfully employed many mediums as a way of doing feminist activism and resisting these discursive constructions of feminism within mainstream traditional media. Weida (2015) notes that the subcultural genre of zine-making has often been used by feminists to address “greater political scenes of gender, sexuality, and reproductive rights [and] ... also document the ... realms of personal testimonials and individual experiences” (p. 68). Zines have also served as an important medium for the voices of those marginalised by popular feminism and mainstream news media in general (Weida, 2015), and thus have served as an important genre for resisting hegemonic discourses of racism, classism, and sexism. However, zines are not the only method employed. Feminist organisations such as the National Organisation for Women (NOW) have often relied on press releases to communicate their political aims. As Barnett (2005) argues, this is an important strategy used to positively influence the public’s opinion of feminism as press releases serve to “challenge ideologies or dominant social viewpoints” (p. 342), this genre was used by NOW to “reach a wide audience ... and to reinforce the credibility of its causes” (p. 342).

Although feminist scholarship has repeatedly indicated hostility within traditional mainstream media vis-à-vis the feminist movement and its proponents, more recent analyses show that the tides may be changing. In her study of news reports from 2008, Mendes (2011) found that although feminism is still considered by some to be anti-family, and feminists aggressive and unattractive, these antagonistic frames appear to be dwindling. In their place a postfeminist conceptualisation exists, corroborating McRobbie’s (2004) findings discussed in section 2.2. In tandem with the shift towards postfeminist conceptualisations of feminism in the news comes the emergence of the internet and the ways in which feminist praxis is enacted. These two shifts present their own set of challenges and possibilities for feminist activism.

2.4: Digital Feminist Activism

According to O’Reilly (2007), many feminist scholars have demonstrated the ways in which feminist activism has been transformed by what is sometimes referred to as Web 2.0. Jackson (2018), for example, concluded in her study of young feminist’s participation in digital activism that “digital media feature prominently in the

contemporary feminist landscape” (p. 33). The emergence of this new digital landscape has allowed internet users to no longer just be passive consumers of media, but to participate in and create their own content via social media (Jenkins, 2006). In turn, this has created many new opportunities for feminists to critique, discuss, and mobilise. Additionally, it has created more avenues for discursive activism to be enacted and potentially resist the hegemonic postfeminist discourses which proliferate the mainstream. Although some have questioned the effectiveness of online activism in place of real-life activism (Harris, 2008), others (Baer, 2016; Guillard, 2016) argue that digital media holds enormous capacity for building upon and reshaping feminist discourse and allowing for novel ways of enacting change.

Indeed, many studies have shown the ways in which social media or social networking sites (SNSs) have enabled feminist activists to make positive contributions to the feminist movement. Various scholars have conceptualised these forms of feminist activism by adopting the theoretical framework of counterpublics. Counterpublics are intangible spaces where members of marginalised groups propagate discourses which create interpretations and representations of identities and interests which differ from the hegemonic norm (Fraser, 1990). Analysing the much neglected realm of young women’s engagement with feminism, Jackson (2018) and Keller (2016) both found that young feminists utilise digital media to construct an online feminist identity, which they argue is a political act in and of itself. Using resources found on websites such as Rookie, Huffington Post Women, and Everyday Feminism, the participants of Jackson’s (2018) study shared their knowledge of feminism with others who they perceived to have misgivings about the feminist movement and employed private Facebook groups to discuss issues with other young feminists. Keller (2016) similarly found that young feminists use digital platforms to inform their peers about feminism and to carve out a space where they can discuss the subjectivities of girlhood.

Additionally, Shaw (2012) uses an agonistic model of democracy to examine how feminist bloggers in Australia contribute to discursive activism by “disrupting and undermining hegemonic consensus” (p. 47) that exists in the blogosphere. By critically examining the use of the hashtags #Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #NotYourAsianSidekick, Kuo (2016) exemplified the way in which racialised online publics such as those that exist on Twitter resist hegemonic feminist discourses which often overlook race, and thus “demand attention to race in social movements both

online and off” (p. 505). Kingston Mann (2014) also discussed the potential for digital mediums to amplify voices of those who have traditionally been marginalised, arguing that “such potential is evident in the way that new media ... sites like Twitter and Tumblr, have become important sites of black and other women of color mediamaking” (p. 294).

Although recent studies have made many important contributions to understanding the potentials of employing digital media in feminist activism, Locke, Lawthom and Lyons (2018) note that it is essential to continue examining the effects of digital media and social media platforms as they evolve because this ensures “important and robust debate, as well as considerations around the possibilities and opportunities such platforms provide” (p. 8). In short, technologisation and the advent of Web 2.0 did not just impact feminist activism, but also resulted in broader changes. Of particular importance to this study are the effects these changes have had on the production of news media.

2.5: Changes in the News Media Landscape

Often referred to as the Fourth Estate, the news operates as an important branch of a functioning democratic society. However, it is sometimes naïvely thought of in terms of a mirror, reflecting aspects of society as they exist in the real world. Scholars of journalism and communication studies have repeatedly shown that it can more accurately be understood as a murky construction of reality which is augmented by factors such as sourcing, pressure to fill space and make events newsworthy (Bennett, 2005; Caple & Bednarek, 2016; Mayr, Machin, Bastow, & Abousnnouga, 2008). Nevertheless, news “acts as most people’s main source of information about the world” (Mendes, 2011, p. 2).

In his prescient work *The Medium is the Message*, McLuhan (1964) argued that “the personal and social consequences of any medium...result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology” (p. 1). In relation to the media, Thompson (1990) reiterates this notion, arguing that “mass communication has certain special properties which distinguish it from other

forms of communication and which are partly attributable to the nature of the technologies which it deploys” (as cited in Fairclough, 1995a, p. 36). The rapid transformation of traditional news media driven by the emergence of the internet has brought about changes to news media and the organisations responsible for producing it, this has not only affected the business models of news production but it has also affected content and form in several ways.

In her comparative analysis of genres in traditional and digital news media, Barreto Lé (2017) identified four changes to news media as a result of digitisation: interactivity, non-linearity, multimodality, and information velocity. Interactivity “invites the reader to be the agent” (p. 140), and creates a close proximity between reader and author; non-linearity allows readers to freely navigate and choose the order in which they consume segments of information and create meaning of an event; multimodality is the imbedding of different semiotic modes such as audio-visual elements like videos into a digital news item, and finally, information velocity is the “continuous acceleration of content publication” (p. 146) where news is continually updated in real-time, thus rendering the old news obsolete. Barreto Lé (2017) also links information velocity and the digitisation of the news to the individualisation of societies, where the individual is responsible for maintaining their place in the world through “constant investment in new information, upgrades, and the abandonment of old positions” (p. 147). Furthermore, it is not just consumers of digital news content but the producers who also frequently have to be responsible for their place in, what Pruchniewska (2017) describes as “an increasingly precarious neoliberal economy” (p. 1), of online content production, in which creators rely on the individualistic practice of self-branding in order to gain and maintain an audience.

Echoing a similar sentiment to Mendes (2011), Fairclough (1995a) argues that media texts are a “sensitive barometer for social change, and ... should be seen as valuable material for researching change” (p. 52). Thus far, the literature has alerted to two potentially significant changes which will be borne in mind when examining the feminist news media. The first is a possible ideological shift within the feminist movement itself towards a fourth wave, and competition between fourth-wave feminism and postfeminism. The second is the shift in media production from traditional or print-based media towards digital media.

As demonstrated in section 2.4, digital platforms have opened up significant possibilities for feminist activism, particularly discursive feminist activism. However, the digital news medium is not without its own constraints, which include the imperative to employ self-branding and continually update news content. Thus, the question remains - how might a study of digital feminist news be approached which would allow these potential effects to be taken into account? This question will be addressed in the final two sections of this chapter which examine the critical approach to discourse analysis and its underpinning philosophies, and in turn, briefly examine studies which have carried out critical discourse analysis utilising the tools of corpus linguistics.

2.6: Analysing Media Texts Through a Critical Lens: Discourse, Power, and Ideology

There are many ways of approaching a critical analysis of discourse, ideology and power (Wodak, 2009) and furthermore, within these approaches there are many different conceptualisations of how discourse, ideology, and power operate within society. However, as this study primarily follows the critical approach of Fairclough (1989, 1995a, 1995b), the discussion below will be informed by his approach.

2.6.1: Discourse and Ideology

At the most basic level, critical discourse analysis aims to expose and analyse the (often) opaque structural relationships of dominance, power, and control as they are manifested in language (Wodak, 2009). Under this approach, discourse is viewed as a social practice (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997) because it reflects and (re)produces social relations; acts as a conduit for power relations to be negotiated and performed; and both produces and reflects ideologies within society (Paltridge, 2012). In short, discursive practices have an “ideological effect” (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997, p. 258) and can both mirror existing power dynamics in society and produce them. In contrast with the Marxist approach⁴ to examining ideologies, Fairclough draws on Thompson’s (1990) approach to ideology as “a practice that operates in processes of meaning production in

⁴ Many Marxists are not concerned with analysing how ideologies are structured and articulated, and instead conceive of ideology as “an abstract system of values” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008, p. 66) that secures and maintains social order.

everyday life, whereby meaning is mobilised in order to maintain relations of power” (as cited in Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008, p. 66).

2.6.2: Power

According to Wodak (2009) language can be used to redistribute and subvert power. Fairclough takes a Foucauldian (1977) approach to power in that he conceives of power as a “systemic and constitutive element of society” (as cited in Wodak, 2009, p. 9). Critical discourse takes a problem-oriented approach to discourse in that it aims to uncover power asymmetries as they are manifest in discourse, for example, discourses which contribute to racist ideologies. However, it is important to note that Fairclough (1992) does not conceive of power in solely negative terms, noting that “power does not work negatively by forcefully dominating those who are subject to it” (p. 50). Instead, following Gramsci (1971), ideological dominance is negotiated or consented to and this is where we arrive at the concept of hegemony.

2.6.3: Hegemony and the Orders of Discourse

Hegemony describes the process by which the ruling class maintains power. Drawing on Gramsci, Fairclough (1989, 1993, 2003) conceives of hegemony as “not only dominance but also a process of negotiation out of which emerges a consensus concerning meaning” (as cited in Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008, p. 67). Building on this, Mendes (2011) explains that in order for the ruling class to maintain dominance, they must adjust their ideologies over time and “incorporate some [less radical] aspects of counter-ideologies” (p. 13). The hegemonic ideology of postfeminism could be seen as an example of this, as it embraces a handful of feminist ideals such as women’s empowerment but rejects the notion that structural inequalities continue to exist, leading to the simultaneous acceptance and derision of feminism (McRobbie, 2004).

This concept of negotiation and struggle is a key element in Fairclough’s (1995a, 1995b, 1993) theory of critical discourse analysis and is tethered to his concepts of intertextuality, interdiscursivity and the order of discourse. Fairclough (1995b) notes that orders of discourse are a “domain of potential cultural hegemony, with dominant

groups struggling to assert and maintain particular structuring within and between them” (p. 56). Drawing on Foucault (1971) Fairclough conceptualises the order of discourse as a system consisting of all the different discourses and genres that constitute a specific social domain. The boundaries between the orders of discourse of various domains are permeable, meaning that a particular order is subject to change. However, the ability to incorporate new discourses and genres into orders of discourse is “limited and constrained by the state of hegemonic relations and hegemonic struggle” (Fairclough, 1993, p. 137). Fairclough and Chouliaraki (1999) couple this concept with Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of a field. In short, a field is a domain where different social actors struggle to attain a collective goal and there are various fields within society such as the field of politics (as cited in Fairclough, 1995a). Fairclough and Chouliaraki (1999) argue that the order of discourse is the discursive equivalent of a field in which discourses struggle against one another, reflecting and constituting changes in society. The process by which orders of discourse change and incorporate discourses and genres from other domains is described as interdiscursivity. Interdiscursivity is also a form of intertextuality, which refers to the way in which communicative events draw on existing, historically formed discourses (Crichton, 2010). These elements are then “recontextualised” (Linell, 1998, p. 144) into the text or “communicative event” (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 57), thus restructuring the order of discourse.

2.7: Combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics

Corpus linguistics - the study of large, electronically encoded bodies of naturally occurring language (Baker, 2006) - is uniquely poised to examine digital media. Hunt and Harvey (2015) argue “analysing corpora from the web can ... enable researchers to investigate discourses around contemporary social issues as well as to understand the unique communicative activities mediated by the internet” (p. 135). Recently, the critical approach to analysing discourse, mentioned above, has been successfully used in tandem with corpus linguistics to uncover the ways in which feminism is conceptualised in mainstream news media. Lind and Salo (2002), for example, employed the corpus analysis software *Wordlink*, to examine how the public affairs programs ABC, CNN, NPR, and PBS trivialise and demonise feminism and present feminists as different from

regular women. Furthermore, Jaworska and Krishnamurthy (2012) in their effort to build on this research, also utilised corpus analysis to critically analyse how feminism and feminists are conceptualised in British and German media. Their findings, which were similar to those of Lind and Salo (2002) revealed that the media outlets in both countries tended to portray feminism as something negative. Additionally they found that the movement was framed as irrelevant and outdated.

Fairclough (1989) argues that “the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader, and so forth” (p. 54). This means, for example, that a single media text containing sexist discourses would have little social influence. But repeated erasure of structural issues affecting women, removal of women’s agency, and the demonisation of feminism contribute to powerful, hegemonic discourses of sexism. Since corpus analysis enables the researcher to identify patterns within multiple texts which accumulate to produce certain dominant discourses, taking this approach to analysing media discourse can bring these effects of power into relief, where they otherwise may not have been identified by looking at single texts. This does not just apply to the representation of feminism in the media; this approach has also been employed by Baker et al. (2008) to examine how refugees and asylum seekers are represented in the British media; by Baker and Levon (2015) to show how different types of men are represented in British media; and by Krishnamurthy (1996) to show how the words ethnic, racial, and tribal contribute to racist discourses in the British media.

In summation, while many studies have looked at forms of feminist activism online and the potential for these spaces to provide a place for intersectional politics to take place, very little attention has been paid to the way feminists have married discursive and digital activism in the creation of digital feminist news sites such as Jezebel, Everyday Feminism, Bust, and Feminist Frequency. These sites may provide a new platform for feminists to disseminate information about the movement and its goals in a neoliberal media environment that increasingly espouses postfeminist values. Kingston Mann (2014) notes these new media channels ought to be examined as they may provide unique opportunities for those who have been side-lined from mainstream discourse to reach large audiences.

3. Methods

3.0 Introduction

In broad terms, the aim of this study is to contribute to an understanding of contemporary feminist visibilities in a largely postfeminist digital media landscape. More specifically, the study sets out to explore how self-proclaimed feminist news sites utilise the digital news genre to discursively (re)define contemporary feminism and its goals. This study is therefore driven by the following research questions:

Primary research question:

- How do digital feminist news media conceptualise feminism?

Secondary research questions:

- What are the differences and similarities between the ways feminism is conceptualised in feminist theory as opposed to in digital feminist news media?
- To what extent do conventions of the digital news genre shape the way that feminism is conceptualised in the digital feminist news media?

In order to answer these questions, this study used methods associated with corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis to uncover, analyse and compare discourses that were both obvious and latent within two corpora, one comprised of digital feminist news texts and the other comprised of theoretical feminist texts. The primary focus was on identifying the frequent and statistically significant linguistic phenomena that occurred in the two corpora, in order to illuminate the different underlying ideological beliefs and values that informed the two groups of texts. This, in turn, allowed ideological shifts and generic conventions to be identified through a comparative analysis.

The remainder of this chapter discusses these methods at length by first, providing a methodological overview of corpus-based critical discourse analysis and justification for combining corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. Following this, an explanation of the data collection and corpus building process is given. Then, an outline

of how the corpus-based critical discourse analysis approach was implemented and a reflexive discussion about my position as a researcher concludes the chapter.

3.1 Methodological Overview

The corpus-based approach to critical discourse analysis used to answer these research questions combined both corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. In short, corpus linguistics typically involves using dedicated computer software to calculate frequent and statistically significant linguistic patterns in large collections of texts (Baker, 2006). The software can direct the researcher toward salient linguistic phenomena which might have otherwise taken days or weeks to manually uncover. Critical discourse analysis is the study of ideology and power relations and how they are created and maintained through discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008). This approach, which typically involves a close analysis of a smaller number of texts, provides a framework for uncovering both the emancipatory and oppressive discourses within the digital feminist news texts (Fairclough, 1989, 1995a, 1995b). Before describing in more detail the methods used to carry out the analysis, I will briefly provide an overview of these methods and the notion of a corpus-based critical discourse analysis.

3.1.1 Corpus Linguistics

McEnery and Wilson (1996) broadly define corpus linguistics (hereafter CL) as “the study of language based on examples of real life language use” (p. 1). More specifically, corpora – from the Latin *body* – are large, representative bodies of text which have been electronically encoded. This allows the texts to be loaded into purpose-built computer software which then performs calculations, quickly and accurately revealing linguistic patterns (Baker, 2006). CL has been described as a “powerful methodology” (Baker & McEnery, 2015, p. 1) and is increasingly employed in the study of digitally mediated discourse (Mautner, 2005), thus enabling the investigation of the “unique communicative activities mediated by the internet” (Hunt & Harvey, 2015, p. 135). Moreover, corpora have been used to facilitate critical analyses of texts, concerned with the uncovering of ideologies and power asymmetries (Baker, 2006) and it is this pairing that is of particular importance to this analysis. Importantly, CL has a certain

malleability in that it “is not a monolithic, consensually agreed set of methods and procedures” (McEnery & Hardie, 2012, as cited in Marchi & Taylor, 2018, p. 2). This study follows the corpus-driven paradigm outlined by Baker, et al. (2008) and McEnery and Gabrielatos (2006).

3.1.2 Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis

Like CL, critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA) is not necessarily viewed as a single method of discourse analysis, but as an amalgamation of many different methodologies which have a collective aim to scrutinise and critique the naturalised discourses which maintain power in society (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008). CDA, therefore, is a broad church with various theoretical underpinnings, and while this study has drawn on the social-cognitive approach of van Dijk (2013) and the discourse-historical approach of Wodak (Baker et al., 2008) it is largely informed by the dialectical-relational approach of Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995a, 1995b). Of particular importance to this study is the critical analysis of media texts outlined by Fairclough (1995a), which aims to show “how shifting language and discursive practices in the media constitute social and cultural change” (p. 29).

Before delving further into CDA it may prove useful to discuss the rather nebulous term *discourse*. *Discourse* can be defined as “a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories and statements ... that in some way together produce a particular version of events” (Burr, 1995, as cited in Baker, 2005, p. 3). Taking a social-constructionist view, CDA conceives of discourses not as “merely descriptions of people's beliefs or opinions ... [but] instead they are connected to practices and structures that are lived out in society” (Baker, 2005, pp. 3–4). Furthermore, Fairclough (1995a) conceives of discourse as having a dialectical relationship with social aspects of life in that it is both reflects and produces ideologies and power dynamics within society. According to Fairclough discourse contributes to the construction of identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and meaning (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008). Following Fairclough (2003), this study defines ideology as “representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation” (p. 218).

In order to understand how discourses are manifested within texts, and how these discourses reflect and produce sociocultural practices, Fairclough (1995a) stipulates the use of a two-pronged approach which links micro and macro-linguistic phenomena through the operations of power and ideology (Crichton, 2010). The first component is the analysis of *communicative events* which are defined as any instance of language use, for example a book or article. The second component of the analysis is the *order of discourse* which are all the discourses used in a communicative event (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008). These components and how they were utilised in this study are discussed further in section 3.4.

3.1.3 Corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis

Corpus linguistics tends to be conceptualised as a quantitative method of analysis, which might be considered as conflicting with the social-constructionist approach to language taken in CDA (Baker, 2006). However, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue that there has been shift away from the paradigmatic view of qualitative versus quantitative, toward a “third way” (as cited in Marchi & Taylor, 2018, p. 3) where the method is chosen to suit the research being conducted, leading to the increasing popularity of combining corpus linguistics with CDA. In fact the combination of CDA and CL has been described as a useful methodological synergy (Baker et al., 2008) and a natural match (Hardt-Mautner, 1995), which combines the “quantitative rigour of corpus linguistics with the social perspective of qualitative approaches to discourse analysis” (Marchi & Taylor, 2018, p. 4). Baker (2006) describes the benefits of combining corpus linguistics and critical discourse analyses are as follows:

- Discourses have a *cumulative effect* and as corpus linguistics allows multiple texts to be examined at once, this helps to reveal recurrent discursive patterns otherwise known as majority discourses;
- It also becomes easier to identify *counter-examples*, known as minority discourses;
- The findings can be *triangulated* by testing hypotheses arrived at in the close analysis of texts against findings from the corpus data;

- *Researcher bias* and the so-called cherry-picking of data, one of the major criticisms of CDA, may be reduced by using computational software to identify frequent or statistically significant linguistic themes.
(pp. 10-16)

It is important not to overstate the objectivity of the researcher in corpus-based critical discourse analysis. Corpus linguistics involves subjective decisions which are made with regard to data selection, cut-off points and what data to include in the close analysis stage (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1998). It is therefore important to leave an “audit trail” (Paltridge, 2012, p. 221) detailing and justifying decisions made at the major points in the analysis, which I endeavour to provide in the following sections of this chapter.

3.2 Data

3.2.1 Specialised Corpora

In order to carry out a corpus-based critical discourse analysis to examine how the digital feminist news media conceptualises feminism, and whether this conceptualisation of feminism differs from that of key feminist theoretical texts. I developed two specialised corpora. Specialised corpora are considered to be one of the most useful and important in discourse analysis (Baker, 2006) because they represent specific types of everyday language use. The first corpus is referred to as the digital feminist news corpus (hereafter DFN corpus) and the second corpus is referred to as the feminist theory corpora (hereafter FT corpus). As well as being a specialised corpus, the FT corpus is also diachronic as it is representative of a particular language variety over a period of time (1929-2017) and was used to track linguistic changes over time (Baker, 2006)⁵.

Although the DFN corpus is the focal point of this study, the FT corpus was created for several reasons. Firstly, the results from the analysis of the DFN corpus needed to be situated in relation to a broader social context. As Baker (2006) notes “the use of a

⁵ Marchi and Taylor (2018) note that when using a diachronic corpus to track changes in language use, it is sometimes necessary to split, or separate it into sub-corpora which represent smaller time periods. This was carried out on the FT corpus which was split into sub-corpora which represented the second and third waves. However, both sub-corpora were too small to allow for any significant changes in language use to be tracked, therefore the FT corpus was used in its entirety throughout the study.

diachronic corpus can ... enable researchers to address the criticism that corpus users tend not to take into account the fact that as society changes language changes with it” (p. 29). Secondly, Wodak and Fairclough (1997) and Wodak (2009) argue that discourse cannot be understood without taking context into consideration and therefore discourse should be analysed in perspective with others. Therefore in order to elucidate changes in language use, potential ideological shifts and potential generic conventions, a second specialised, diachronic corpus consisting of theoretical feminist texts, would need to be built. This study therefore aims to integrate this contextual information into the analysis by comparing the results from the DFN corpus against that from the FT corpus.

3.2.2 Size

The DFN corpus consisted of 75 feminist news texts - five from each of the digital feminist news sites. It total it involved 101,796 tokens. The FT corpus consisted of extracts from 61 theoretical feminist texts and 178,387 tokens. There is no general consensus as to how large or small corpora should be. During the corpus building process considerations such as resources, time, and the amount of data that I could reasonably examine were weighed against preferred corpus size (Nelson, 2010). Moreover, when examining more specific areas of language use, the corpus does not necessarily need to be millions of words (Baker, 2006).

3.2.3 Sample

For the purposes of this study the feminist news sites that texts were taken from to build the DFN corpus had to fulfil four criteria: they had to focus on the discussion of current events; have more than five contributors; have an editor/s; and had to either state on the website that they produced feminist content, or have been identified as a feminist news site by others. The theoretical feminist texts selected for the FT corpus has to fulfil two criteria: they had to be a non-fiction text; and had to either state that they were about feminism or be pre-defined by others as a feminist text. Once the parameters of the sample base had been set, a list of digital feminist news sites and a list of theoretical texts which would comprise the corpora was drafted and checked by a third party who had familiarity with the subject matter.

Whole texts were included in the DFN corpus, however in creating the FT corpus it was not possible to include the books in their entirety. Instead, a chapter was chosen randomly from a different point in each text. Similarly, each article in the DFN was chosen at random which inevitably resulted in some of the samples being larger than others.

3.2.4 Representativeness and Balance

In order to gather a representative and balanced sample of the DFN corpus, the articles were chosen at random from different points in time. Balance and representativeness was achieved by “carefully stratifying the corpus ... according to ... domain, time and medium” (Nelson, 2010, p. 60). In the FT corpus I aimed for the corpus to have balance between the different waves of feminism and also be representative of various ideologies within these waves, so I chose a diverse range of theorists. Spanning from 1929-2017, approximately half (29) texts are from 1990 onwards and the rest are prior, meaning around half represent the second wave and the other half represent the third wave. I chose not to include texts from the first wave as this wave is considered “chronologically distant” (Chamberlain, 2017, p. 21) from the other two waves. Additionally, the FT corpus contained texts solely from Anglophone countries, with the majority of the theorists originating are from North America.

3.2.5 Data Entry

Following Baker (2006) the texts in the DFN corpus were cleaned, removing any images, image captions, author’s names and links to other pages, and put into plain text format. The texts in the FT corpus were scanned using Optical Character Recognition (OCR), and cleaned in the same manner as the texts in the DFN corpus. The texts from each corpus was then saved individually and given a file name based on the book title and author, which allowed the source texts to be identified in *WordSmith Tools* (Scott, 2008). The corpora were individually piloted before the analysis to check for mistakes⁶

⁶ The settings in *WordSmith Tools* (Scott, 2008) were adjusted to recognise hyphens and apostrophes, which meant that contractions and hyphenated words were recognised as single words.

(Hardt-Mautner, 1995). The contents of each corpus is detailed in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 below.

Table 3.1: List of theoretical texts comprising the feminist theory corpus in chronological order

Text Title	Author/s (by surname)	Date	Word Count
<i>A Room of One's Own</i>	Woolf, V.	1929	3,974
<i>The Second Sex</i>	de Beauvoir, S.	1949	5,003
<i>The Human Situation: A Feminine View</i>	Saiving, V.	1960	3,830
<i>The Feminine Mystique</i>	Friedan, B.	1963	1,473
<i>SCUM Manifesto</i>	Solanas, V.	1968	7,654
<i>Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female</i>	Beal, F.	1969	1,515
<i>Lesbianism and Feminism</i>	Chase, W.	1969	1,960
<i>The BITCH Manifesto</i>	Freeman, J.	1970	1,633
<i>Race Revolution and Women</i>	Chisholm, S.	1970	2,582
<i>Black Women's Liberation</i>	Newman, P., Williams, M.	1970	3,903
<i>Sexual Politics</i>	Millett, K.	1970	656
<i>The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution</i>	Firestone, S.	1970	1,995
<i>The Female Eunuch</i>	Greer, G.	1970	4,500
<i>The First Sex</i>	Gould Davis, E.	1971	2,662
<i>Woman Hating: A Radical Look at Sexuality</i>	Dworkin, A.	1975	4,203
<i>Against Our Will</i>	Brownmiller, S.	1975	4,381
<i>The Laugh of the Medusa</i>	Cixous, H.	1976	1,920
<i>The Sex Which is Not One</i>	Irigaray L.	1977	1,992
<i>The Erotic as Power</i>	Lorde, A.	1978	1,293
<i>Fat is a Feminist Issue</i>	Orbach, S.	1978	2,175
<i>Woman and Nature</i>	Griffin, S.	1978	2,081
<i>The Double Standard of Aging</i>	Sontag, S.	1979	1,803
<i>The Madwoman in the Attic</i>	Gilbert, S., Gubar, S.	1979	1,717
<i>The Transsexual Empire</i>	Raymond, J.	1979	3,677
<i>Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence</i>	Rich, A.	1980	2,524
<i>Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness</i>	Showalter, E.	1981	3,481
<i>Ain't I a Woman?</i>	hooks, b.	1981	757
<i>Home Girls</i>	Smith, B.	1983	748
<i>Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions</i>	Steinem, G.	1983	1,007
<i>The Man of Reason</i>	Lloyd, G.	1984	5,144
<i>Thinking Sex</i>	Rubin, G.	1984	6,909
<i>If Women Counted</i>	Waring, M.	1988	3,231
<i>Gender Trouble</i>	Butler, J.	1990	2,248
<i>Black Feminist Thought</i>	Hill, P.	1990	1,637
<i>The Sexual Politics of Meat</i>	Adams, C. J.	1990	3,847
<i>The Beauty Myth</i>	Wolf, N.	1990	4,327
<i>Cyborg Manifesto</i>	Haraway, D.	1991	2,642
<i>Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women</i>	Faludi, S.	1991	4,566
<i>The Egg and the Sperm</i>	Martin, E.	1991	1,954
<i>Mapping the Margins</i>	Crenshaw, K.	1991	1,121
<i>Women Who Run With the Wolves</i>	Pinkola Estes, C.	1992	3,440
<i>The Whore Stigma</i>	Pheterson, G.	1993	6,143
<i>Unbearable Weight</i>	Bordo, S.	1993	1,707
<i>Nine Parts of Desire</i>	Brooks, G.	1994	2,436

<i>The White Woman's Other Burden</i>	Jayawardena, K.	1995	3,591
<i>One is Not Born a Woman</i>	Wittig, M.	1997	2,369
<i>Cunt: A Declaration of Independence</i>	Muscio, I.	1998	2,010
<i>Bound and Gagged</i>	Kipnis, L.	1999	5,413
<i>Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self</i>	Brison, S. J.	2002	5,353
<i>Butterfly Politics</i>	MacKinnon, C.A.	2004	3,453
<i>Female Chauvinist Pigs</i>	Levy, A.	2005	2,532
<i>Women and Madness</i>	Chesler, P.	2005	3,548
<i>Sex Object</i>	Valenti, J.	2008	2,723
<i>Bad Feminist</i>	Gay, R.	2014	4,078
<i>Men Explain Things to Me</i>	Solnit, R.	2014	1,477
<i>We Should All Be Feminists</i>	Ngozi Adichie, C.	2014	1,856
<i>Trainwreck</i>	Doyle, S.	2015	3,017
<i>Fight Like a Girl</i>	Ford, C.	2016	1,802
<i>Shrill</i>	West, L.	2016	1,416
<i>Why I am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto</i>	Crispin, J.	2016	2,431
<i>Free Women Free Men</i>	Paglia, C.	2017	2,827

Table 3.2: List of websites where the texts comprising the digital feminist news corpus were retrieved

Feminist News Site	Web Address	Year Founded	Total Word Count
<i>Autostraddle</i>	www.autostraddle.com	2009	15,816
<i>Bitch Media</i>	www.bitchmedia.org	1996	5,520
<i>Black Girl Dangerous</i>	www.bdgblog.org	2011	4,244
<i>Broadly</i>	www.broadly.vice.com	2015	4,255
<i>Brown Girl Magazine</i>	www.browngirlmagazine.com	2008	2,752
<i>Bust</i>	www.bust.com	1993	4,732
<i>Everyday Feminism</i>	www.everydayfeminism.com	2012	10,315
<i>Femalista</i>	www.femalista.com	2011	1,198
<i>Feminist Current</i>	www.feministcurrent.com	2012	6,152
<i>Feminist Frequency</i>	www.feministfrequency.com	2009	7,496
<i>Feministing</i>	www.feministing.com	2004	3,721
<i>Jezebel</i>	www.jezebel.com	2007	14,796
<i>Slutist</i>	www.slutist.com	2013	6,210
<i>The Establishment</i>	www.theestablishment.co	2015	8,096
<i>Villainesse</i>	www.villainesse.com	2015	6,493

3.2.6 General Reference Corpora

In order to calculate the keywords (see section 2.3.2) from the two specialised corpora and facilitate a metaphor analysis, two reference corpora were used in tandem with the FT and DFN corpora. These included the British National Corpus (hereafter BNC) and American National Corpus (hereafter ANC). The BNC consists of 100,000,000 words and uses samples of spoken and written language of British English from the late-

twentieth century. 90% of the BNC corpus consists of written language, while the remaining 10% consists of samples of spoken language and consists of a range of text types including academic texts, periodicals, fictional texts, newspaper texts and magazine texts (Oxford University, 2015). The ANC consists of approximately 11,000,000 words and, like the BNC, uses samples of spoken and written language, designed to be a representative record of contemporary American English. The distribution of genres and size of the ANC is comparable to the BNC. All of the spoken and written language samples are from material produced from 1990 onwards and therefore includes “potentially substantial additional components of materials representing modern English usage” (Ide & Suderman, 2004, p. 1681).

3.3 Methods: Corpus Analysis

In order to carry out the corpus analytical component of the study, frequency, keyword, collocation and concordance tools were used cyclically, following the nine-step process as outlined by Baker et al. (2013, p. 27). In their study Baker et al. (2013) stipulate using the corpus tools to identify sites of interest within the texts and to form initial hypotheses. Then these sites are to be examined in greater depth by using a concordance analysis, the existing hypotheses are either discarded or reformulated, and the new hypotheses are tested by starting the process again. This process was followed throughout the study and involved “a constant movement back and forth between theory and empirical data as necessary” (Wodak, 2001, p. 70).

3.3.1 Frequency Analysis

Frequency analysis simply involves calculating the total number of times a word appears in a corpus, *WordSmith* (Scott, 2008) then organises these words from most frequent to least frequent. As Baker (2006) notes, calculating frequency data is a useful starting point in the analysis of corpora. However, frequency analyses are limited as the data only provides an overview of language use in a corpus, and “can be reductive and generalising” (Baker, 2006, p. 47). Therefore, a simple frequency analysis was used as a starting point in this study, however the keyword data was relied on more heavily and used to guide the close analysis. The frequency analysis of each corpora only examined

the top 20 most frequent words. Additionally, only the top 20 words with highest keyness value were examined in the keyword analysis, and if the collocation analysis produced more than 20 collocates only the strongest 20 were examined. This was necessary in order to maintain “internal consistency” (Baker, 2006, p. 179).

3.3.2 Keyword Analysis

Keyword analysis involves calculating words in a corpus which are more frequent than expected when compared with another reference corpus. Keyword data is an important component of CL and “drives many of the techniques associated with corpus linguistics” (Baker & McEnery, 2015, p. 2). This study utilised keywords to signpost areas of each corpora which warranted a further examination and used these words as “heuristic anchorage points” (Hocking, 2018, p. 50) from which to explore the texts further, and form and test hypotheses. Following Baker (2006) keywords were calculated using the log-likelihood algorithm ($p < 0.000001$)⁷ and only keywords that appeared in a third of all texts were examined further.

3.3.3 Collocates

The concept of collocation comes from the Firthian notion that a word – or unit – acquires meaning from the other units that exist alongside it (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Collocates are words which co-occur at a statistically significant rate. In this study collocates were employed to understand “the association and connotation” (Stubbs, 1996, p. 172) of a keyword, and to narrow down the scope of the concordance analysis (Baker, 2006). There are a range of different algorithms which can be used to calculate concordances and each produce slightly different results. This study employed the MI3 - Mutual Information Cubed - statistic (Daille, 1994; Oakes, 1998) as it reduces low-frequency bias (Bednarek & Caple, 2017) and is “a very useful heuristic” (McEnery, 2006, p. 19). Only words with an MI3 score of 3 or higher were examined (Baker, 2006; McEnery, 2006), and the collocation window was set to 4 to the left and 4 to the right⁸

⁷ This indicates the amount of confidence we have that a word is key due to chance alone, the lower the p value, the more likely it is that this is not just due to chance (Baker, 2006). The P value here is the default in *WordSmith Tools* (Scott, 2008).

⁸ This is indicated within the analysis as the -4/+4 span.

(Sinclair, Jones, & Daley, 2004). These measures were used throughout the study and were not changed⁹.

3.3.4 Concordance

The quantitative findings derived from calculating keywords and collocates are useful, however as Fairclough (2003) notes, their value is limited and need to be used “complemented by more intensive and detailed qualitative textual analysis” (p. 6). In order to carry out a more detailed textual analysis, the concordancer function was used. Concordances, otherwise known as key word in context (KWIC) are a “list of all the occurrences of a particular search term in the corpus, presented within the context that they occur in” (Baker, 2006, p. 71). This function was used primarily to uncover the discourses in both corpora, as it illuminates patterns of language use which can represent particular discourses (Baker, 2006). Additionally, the concordance lines were always expanded in order to examine the source text in its entirety which allowed phenomena such as metaphor use to be identified.

3.4 Methods: Critical Discourse Analysis

As discussed in section 3.1.2, Fairclough (1995a) stipulates a two-pronged approach to analysing discourse. The first stage of this two-pronged approach is the analysis of *communicative events* which consists of three foci: *texts*, *discursive practices* and *sociocultural practices*. These will be discussed separately in turn in the following sections, however it is important to note that they are not discrete and do not always follow in succession of one another in the study.

The *textual analysis* component relied heavily on the corpus tools, namely keywords, collocates and concordances. Once key focal points of the corpora were identified in the keyword analysis, the concordance function was used to examine other linguistic phenomena such as modality, passivation, metaphor, often utilising Hallidayan (1985)

⁹ Where a collocate is mentioned in the analysis the frequency ($n=$) and the strength of the relationship ($MIS=$) is also included. Where collocates are tabulated, the frequency appears in brackets.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL). Then, the accumulation of these micro-level phenomena were linked to the production of macro-level discourses¹⁰.

The analysis of *discursive practices* involved examining how the texts are produced and consumed, and how the texts draw on existing texts and discourses (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008). This was carried out by examining the intertextual and interdiscursive elements of a text. For the purposes of this study intertextuality is defined as “the way that any text overtly draws upon and references other texts, as typically evidenced in the use of quotations and citations” (Hocking, 2018, p. 46). Interdiscursivity is defined as “the way that any text will typically involve the articulation, to varying degrees, of the stylistic, lexico-grammatical, structural, and multimodal conventions of different genres” (Hocking, 2018, p. 46).

Finally, these elements were linked to particular *sociocultural practices* by providing an explanation for “how and why discourses work” (Paltridge, 2012, p. 193). Simply put, the elements of the text/s identified in the previous stages of the analysis were linked to a broader social context. Part of this process also involved the analysis of the *order of discourse*, which is the second stage of Fairclough’s (1995a) two-pronged approach. For the purposes of this study the order of discourse is defined as “a network of social practices in its language aspect, the elements of orders of discourse are ... discourses, genres and styles” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 24). This final stage of the analysis involved identifying all of the discourses within a text/s and explaining how these discourses reflect and reproduce broader social and cultural structures and relations, and moreover, power struggles (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2008). This was carried out by surveying the macro-level discourses which had been identified in Chapters 5-8 and, again, positioning them within a broader social context.

3.5 A Note on Objectivity

Baker (2012) warns of the potential for CDA research to become polemical when the analysis is unduly influenced, unconsciously or otherwise, by the researcher’s own political agenda. However, no research can claim to be totally objective and, as with any study “the identity of the researcher is likely to inform their approach ... different

¹⁰ This study refers to micro/macro and minority/majority discourses. Micro refers to discourse as language, and macro to discourse as ideology – and within the macro-level there are minority (minor/contrasting) and majority (major/dominant) discourses.

researchers are liable to bring with them a set of existing assumptions, agendas, ideologies which may influence their analysis” (Baker, 2005, p. 12). This therefore raises the question, how can CDA be employed in a study which critically engages with text/s, without turning into a polemic? Marchi and Taylor (2018) argue that a reasonable aim would be to replace objectivity with “increased accountability ... maintained through transparency and consistency ... and self-reflexivity” (p. 12).

Throughout this study I have endeavoured to maintain accountability by reporting each stage of the research process, justifying the use of cut-off points and statistical measures, and using those same measures and cut-off points throughout the entirety of the study. Additionally, I have aimed to avoid cherry-picking through the cyclical use of CL tools to test and (re)formulate hypotheses throughout the research process. However, I have not yet addressed the issue of self-reflexivity, and it is therefore necessary for me to reflect on my social situation, subjectivity and politics, and how these may have influenced this study. While this study is not a feminist analysis, it is more than likely that my findings have been influenced by my personal investment in (and knowledge of) feminism.

With respect to my own views, I have engaged with feminism for several years and identify as a feminist. I began to self-identify as a feminist as an undergraduate student and feel that since then, I have become more aware of the structural inequalities that women and other marginalised groups continue to face (Gill, 2017). Initially, the term *feminist* challenged me as I believed it to be outdated and obsolete, a viewpoint that echoes the postfeminist sensibility (McRobbie, 2009). Identifying as a feminist meant critically examining and challenging the beliefs that I previously held, as well as understanding how this point of view was likely informed by my relatively privileged position as a middle-class, Pākehā¹¹, and cisgender woman.

For me, learning about feminism was a process and one which is still in effect. I have spent the past several years engaging with a range of feminist theory including radical feminism, liberal feminism and more recently, intersectionality and poststructural feminism. Unsurprisingly I identify with some theories more than others, though I prefer to take a “dialectical approach” (Henry & Farvid, 2017, p. 115) to feminism as opposed to strictly adhering to one particular school of thought. However, this contact with feminist theory has led me to personally conclude that gender equity cannot be

¹¹ New Zealand European

reached without a more revolutionary approach than that proposed by many liberal feminists. Furthermore, in accordance with Fairclough and Chouliaraki (1999) I take the view that feminism should balance its focus between structural inequalities which disproportionately affect women, while also rejecting essentialist approaches to sex and gender as I believe this simply recapitulates the same hierarchy that feminism is trying to dismantle (Butler, 1990).

In order to maintain self-reflexivity throughout this research process I endeavoured to access many viewpoints in order to inform my analysis. Although as Baker (2005) notes, it is impossible to escape our own biases, I aimed to distance this research from my own held beliefs by asking the question “who benefits?” (Baker et al., 2013, p. 24). Throughout the research process. It is this question that primarily motivated my study, as opposed to what discourses I agreed or disagreed with.

4. Frequency & Keyness

4.0 Introduction

The first stage of the analysis involved gathering frequency and keyword data from the DFN and FT corpora. The creation of a frequency list is a useful starting point as it can provide an overview of language use in a corpus, while a keyword list can indicate the aboutness (Phillips, 1989) of a corpus and help identify salient areas which warrant a closer examination. The first section of this chapter will focus on the frequency analysis. Following this the results from the keyword analysis are examined and the keywords which constitute the analyses in Chapters 5-8 are outlined.

4.1 Frequency Analysis

Table 4.1 below provides a list of the 20 most frequent lexical words in Feminist Theory corpus, while Table 4.2 provides a list of the 20 most frequent lexical words in Digital Feminist News corpus. Baker (2006) recommends focusing primarily on lexical words at this stage of the analysis as these are more likely to reveal the presence of certain discourses than the high frequency grammatical – or function – words. Henceforth, the frequency lists for both corpora only contain lexical words. Further on, however, the scope of the analysis is expanded to include grammatical as well as lexical words, as certain grammatical words are recognised as salient linguistic features in the construction of various discourses within both corpora. The standardised frequency¹² (%) is also included, as this is viewed as best way for making comparisons between two or more corpora of different sizes (McEnery, Xiao & Tono, 2006).

¹² As opposed to simply measuring how many times a word appears in a corpus, standardised frequency measures the number of times a word appears using the same “common base” (McEnery, Xiao & Tono, 2006, p. 53) for all corpora, thus eliminating distortion caused by corpus size. In this case *WordSmith Tools* (Scott, 2008) measured the times one word appears per thousand words.

Table 4.1: The 20 most frequent lexical words in FT corpus

Word	Frequency	Frequency %	ANC Frequency %	BNC Frequency %
<i>women</i>	1,325	0.74	0.03	0.03
<i>woman</i>	559	0.31	0.01	0.02
<i>men</i>	514	0.29	0.02	0.04
<i>female</i>	373	0.21	<0.01	<0.01
<i>male</i>	359	0.2	<0.01	0.01
<i>sexual</i>	352	0.2	<0.01	<0.01
<i>sex</i>	348	0.2	0.01	<0.01
<i>black</i>	311	0.17	0.02	0.02
<i>life</i>	281	0.16	0.05	0.05
<i>man</i>	254	0.14	0.03	0.06
<i>self</i>	242	0.14	0.02	<0.01
<i>own</i>	236	0.13	0.04	0.05
<i>time</i>	220	0.12	0.15	0.16
<i>people</i>	214	0.12	0.13	0.12
<i>work</i>	212	0.12	0.08	0.09
<i>world</i>	204	0.11	0.05	0.05
<i>body</i>	188	0.11	0.01	0.02
<i>women's</i>	163	0.09	<0.01	<0.01
<i>love</i>	162	0.09	0.02	0.02
<i>feminist</i>	159	0.09	<0.01	<0.01

Table 4.2: The 20 most frequent lexical words in the DFN corpus

Word	Frequency	Frequency %	ANC Frequency %	BNC Frequency %
<i>women</i>	516	0.51	0.03	0.03
<i>people</i>	448	0.44	0.13	0.12
<i>men</i>	188	0.18	0.02	0.04
<i>woman</i>	177	0.17	0.01	0.02
<i>trans</i>	173	0.17	<0.01	<0.01
<i>black</i>	171	0.17	0.02	0.02
<i>white</i>	162	0.16	0.03	0.02
<i>work</i>	147	0.14	0.08	0.09
<i>life</i>	133	0.13	0.05	0.05
<i>sex</i>	119	0.12	0.01	<0.01
<i>years</i>	111	0.11	0.09	0.09
<i>care</i>	108	0.11	0.04	0.02
<i>feel</i>	107	0.11	0.02	0.03
<i>own</i>	107	0.11	0.04	0.05
<i>new</i>	103	0.11	0.15	0.13
<i>gender</i>	99	0.1	<0.01	<0.01
<i>death</i>	96	0.09	0.02	0.02
<i>health</i>	91	0.09	0.03	0.02
<i>year</i>	91	0.09	0.08	0.07
<i>hair</i>	89	0.09	<0.01	0.01

As seen in Table 4.1, the top five most frequent lexical words in the FT corpus all pertain to gender - *women*, *woman*, *men*, *female*, and *male*. Similarly as seen in Table 4.2, all but one word in the top five lexical words in the DFN corpus relates to gender - *women*, *men*, *woman*, and *trans*. Additionally, *women* is the most frequent word each corpora, however the raw and standardised frequency is much higher in the FT corpus (0.74%), than it is in the DFN corpus (0.51%). Furthermore, in both corpora the standardised frequency of *men* is less than half the standardised frequency of *women*. This perhaps suggests that while both corpora discuss women more than men, which is in itself unsurprising, the DFN corpus may centre its discussion around other identities more frequently than the FT corpus.

The results of these frequency list are perhaps somewhat unsurprising as we would expect there to be much discussion around gender in feminist texts, particularly issues that relate to women. As a result, these preliminary findings suggest a number of similarities between the corpora in terms of frequency and keywords, and while these are useful to consider, it is also necessary to examine the differences (Baker & McEnery, 2015).

There are several distinctions between the frequency analyses of the DFN and FT corpus that can be identified, which may suggest that the corpora are shaped by differing feminist ideologies. As Stubbs (1969) notes, word choice can illuminate an ideological position. Baker (2005) provides an example of this when he contrasts the use of euphemisms (e.g. *that way inclined*) with slurs (e.g. *faggot*), and reclaimed words (e.g. *queer*), to describe sexual orientation (p. 24). It could be argued then, that the presence of words like *trans*, *white*, and *gender* in the DFN corpus' frequency list - and their absence in the FT corpus' frequency list - might indicate the presence in the respective corpora of different ideological positions.

For example, the presence of the words *gender* and *trans*, an abbreviation of transgender, may indicate that the DFN corpus recognises the gender identities of

people who exist outside of the gender binary¹³, furthermore this might suggest that the texts in the DFN corpus are influenced by poststructural theory which, as discussed in Chapter 2, argues for a distinction between biological sex and gender and additionally conceptualises gender as contingent on social norms. Furthermore, the frequency of the terms *female* and *male* in the FT corpus, which are typically used to refer to biological sex, potentially suggests that the FT corpus does not make a distinction between gender identity and biological sex. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, before the influence of queer and poststructural theory, many feminist theorists did not make a distinction between sex and gender and did not recognise gender as something socially imposed (Palazzani, 2013).

4.2 Keyword Analysis

Table 4.3 below provides a comparison of keywords¹⁴ from the FT corpus and the DFN corpus, referenced against the ANC, the BNC, and against each other. Although frequency analyses are a useful starting point, they also limit the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn since the frequency data only offers a description and not an explanation of language use (Baker, 2006). It is therefore also necessary, as seen in the next stage of the analysis, to develop a keyword list using *WordSmith Tools* (Scott, 2008). This function measures the saliency of words as opposed to simply measuring frequency and is “likely to be more useful in suggesting lexical items that could warrant further examination” (Baker, 2006, p. 125). Henceforth, the results from the keyword analysis will be used to guide the collocation and concordance analyses that appear in the Chapters 5-8. The following sections will individually discuss keywords from both corpora that can be grouped semantically and which were used to guide the textual analysis.

¹³ Gender binarism is the classification of gender identity as either masculine or feminine, along with the maintenance of these identities as distinct and opposing. For example, a traditionally enforced gender binary dictates that men should exhibit masculine traits such as strength, aggression, emotional intelligence; and women should exhibit feminine traits such as passivity, weakness, irrationality. Although many second-wave feminists sought to trouble the assumption that femininity was inferior, poststructural feminists argued that the notion of femininity/masculinity and woman/man be disregarded altogether as it only reinforces this binary (Mendes, 2011).

¹⁴ Negative keywords were not examined in this analysis, therefore when keywords and keyword lists are discussed it is only in reference to positive keywords.

Table 4.3: The top 20 keywords in the FT and DFN corpora, when referenced against the ANC, the BNC, and each other¹⁵

FT corpus			DFN corpus		
ANC	BNC	Media	ANC	BNC	Theory
women	women	<i>the</i>	women	<i>trans</i>	you
<i>woman</i>	<i>woman</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>trans</i>	women	I
her	female	female	<i>her</i>	<i>color</i>	<i>trans</i>
she	<i>sexual</i>	<i>which</i>	<i>same</i>	my	<i>people</i>
<i>men</i>	<i>sex</i>	<i>male</i>	<i>woman</i>	<i>feminism</i>	<i>it's</i>
female	<i>male</i>	<i>is</i>	my	gender	your
<i>sexual</i>	<i>self</i>	<i>nature</i>	<i>she</i>	<i>people</i>	<i>don't</i>
<i>male</i>	<i>men</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>feminism</i>	I	I'm
<i>sex</i>	<i>feminist</i>	<i>such</i>	me	<i>woman</i>	me
<i>same</i>	<i>pornography</i>	<i>consciousness</i>	<i>men</i>	<i>sex</i>	my
<i>feminist</i>	<i>black</i>	<i>must</i>	<i>people</i>	<i>feminist</i>	you're
<i>black</i>	<i>women's</i>	<i>pornography</i>	gender	<i>black</i>	<i>really</i>
<i>women's</i>	<i>behaviour</i>	<i>sexual</i>	<i>black</i>	<i>abortion</i>	<i>get</i>
<i>pornography</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>women</i>	<i>feminist</i>	<i>transgender</i>	<i>that's</i>
<i>rape</i>	<i>rape</i>	<i>its</i>	queer	<i>that</i>	<i>care</i>
<i>self</i>	her	<i>self</i>	<i>who</i>	<i>white</i>	<i>about</i>
<i>is</i>	<i>prostitutes</i>	<i>woman</i>	<i>hair</i>	queer	<i>just</i>
<i>prostitutes</i>	<i>culture</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>sex</i>	<i>our</i>	<i>film</i>
herself	<i>consciousness</i>	<i>prostitutes</i>	<i>girls</i>	<i>men</i>	<i>health</i>
<i>consciousness</i>	<i>erotic</i>	<i>prostitute</i>	<i>white</i>	me	<i>color</i>

4.2.1 Gender Identity

Results from the keyword analysis triangulate and extend the initial findings in the frequency analysis which suggested that both corpora discuss women frequently, but that the DFN corpus discusses identities other than man and woman more frequently

¹⁵ The keywords to be examined in the following close analysis in Chapters 5-8 appear here in bold.

than the FT corpus, and that the DFN also recognises identities which exist outside of the gender binary. The results which, in particular, exemplify these initial hypotheses are the high keyness value of *female* in all three key word lists for the FT corpus, and the high keyness value of *people*, *queer*, and *trans* in the DFN corpus. *Trans* appears as one of the top three words in all of the DFN corpus keyword lists and *transgender* is the fourteenth key word in the DFN corpus where the BNC is the reference corpus. As with the frequency list, *female* and *male* do not appear anywhere in the DFN keyword list, however both words appear in all three of the FT keyword lists. Furthermore, *women* still appears in both corpora's keyword lists when the ANC and BNC are used as references, however the word does not appear when the theory and media corpora are referenced against each other. These findings suggest that while both the FT and DFN corpora discuss issues related to women, which is not in itself surprising, the FT corpus may focus more on the differences between men and women and conceptualise gender in a way that is considered essentialist, that is it does not make a distinction between sex and gender. In contrast, the DFN corpus may tend to focus less on differences between men and women, and focus more heavily on transgender subjectivities which have historically been ignored by the first and second wave feminist movement. It is becoming more common to see transgender representation in online and offline media, and as Ekins and King (2006) note, "the most significant change in the telling of [transgender]... stories ... [has been] the rise of the internet" (p. 58).

4.2.2 Racialised Identities

As with the word *women*, the word *black* appears in the keyword lists for both corpora when the BNC and ANC are used as references, but does not appear when the corpora are referenced against each other. This could suggest that both corpora include some discussion of racialised identities. Similarly, the presence of the word *color* in the feminist news media keyword lists, where the BNC and feminist theory are reference corpora, may also allude to discussion of racialised identities¹⁶. However, as Baker (2005) notes, "we should not assume that a word is always used in the same way,

¹⁶ Although *color* likely appears when referenced against the BNC corpus because of the difference between British English and American English spelling conventions, the fact it was a keyword when compared to the FT corpus which mostly consisted of texts using American English conventions indicated that it was still key.

particularly across different genres of text” (p. 159). As two different genres¹⁷ are being compared in this analysis, keyword *black* will have to be investigated further using collocation and concordance analysis. This will be explored further in Chapter 5.

4.2.3 Queer

The presence of *queer* as a keyword in the DFN corpus suggests a focus on sexual orientation. The word *queer* may also indicate a rejection of heteronormativity in the DFN corpus, which further suggests poststructural conceptualisations of feminism. It is important to note here that certain differences in the keyword list may not necessarily be down to an ideological shift but also potential differences in terminology used. As Sherrard (1991) states, “speakers will always be restricted in their ways of using language ... people in the 1950s would not have used *Ms* because such a choice was not available to them” (as cited in Baker, 2005, p. 25). Hence, the absence of the word *prostitute* in the DFN corpus does not necessarily mean that prostitution is not discussed, as instead the term *sex worker* might be used. Similarly, the absence of the word *queer* in the keyword list of the FT corpus does not necessarily mean that a diverse range of sexual orientations are not recognised within the theoretical texts, as *queer* was commonly used as a derogatory term or slur until the early 1990s when it was reclaimed by the LGBTQ community (Rand, 2014). However, other words denoting sexual orientation, such as *gay*, *lesbian*, or *bisexual* do not appear in the feminist theory keyword list, which could indicate heteronormative constructions of sexuality within the FT corpus.

4.2.4 Pronouns

Thus far, finding areas for further analysis has largely been guided by examining lexical words, as suggested by Baker (2006). However, it may also be worth exploring the use of personal pronouns here, as these are prevalent in the keyword lists of both corpora. As seen in Table 4.3, the first-person singular pronouns *I*, *me* and *my* appear as keywords in all three of the DFN corpus keyword lists. Interestingly, the singular first-

¹⁷ Here *genre* is defined “a type of discourse that occurs in a particular setting that has distinctive and recognizable patterns and norms of organisation and structure” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, as cited in Paltridge, 2006, p. 82).

person pronoun *I'm* as well as two second-person pronouns *you*, and *you're*¹⁸ also appear as the keyword list where the FT corpus is used as the reference. This may indicate that discussion of feminist issues in the DFN corpus is centred on personal subjectivities. Furthermore, the repeated use of contractions, which mimic informal spoken interaction might also indicate what Fairclough (2011) refers to as the conversationalisation of public discourses, which expanded on and ultimately subsumed his original concept of synthetic personalisation, whereby authority speakers claim solidarity with their audience.

In contrast, there are no first or second-person pronouns in the FT corpus keyword lists, however the third-person pronouns *she*, *her*, and *herself* do appear where the ANC and BNC are reference corpora. According to Fairclough (1995a) “pronouns ... are worth noting” (p. 145), therefore this suggest the need for further examination of these pronouns in context using collocational and concordance analysis. It is also possible that the differing use of pronouns between both corpora is the result of generic differences. The DFN corpus, for example, is comprised of media texts which can often use colloquial language (Fairclough, 1995a). However, in order to ascertain whether this hypothesis is correct a close analysis is required and these findings will need to be located within a broader social context (Baker & McEnery, 2015). This will occur in Chapter 8.

4.3 Conclusion

As previously mentioned, keywords can effectively act as signposts which point to areas of a text where salient discourses might be discovered (Baker, 2006). However it is necessary to couple keyword analyses with more in-depth textual analysis which can be carried out by using the concordancer function to show the keywords in their original context. In the following four chapters the collocation and concordance functions available in *WordSmith Tools* (Scott, 2008) are used to compare the use of these keywords across the two corpora to identify how they discursively construct different

¹⁸ In this analysis the contraction *you're* is considered as one word

ideological conceptualisations of feminism. Chapter 5 examines the keyword *women* from both corpora, Chapter 6 will compare the use of the keywords *female* (from the FT corpus) and *gender* (from the DFN corpus), Chapter 7 examines the keyword *queer* from the DFN corpus. Finally, Chapter 8 will compare the use of third-person *pronouns* in the FT corpus with the use of first and second-person *pronouns* in the DFN corpus¹⁹.

¹⁹ A cursory analysis of all keywords present in Table 4.3 was carried out to discern what the primary focal points of the collocation and concordance analysis should be. The examination of individual keywords, such as *sex*, *feminist*, *men*, and *black* did not elicit any additional or relevant information to that already gained from looking at the keywords examined in Chapters 5 through 8 and therefore those results are not included in this study.

5. Examining *women* in Context

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter the keyword *women* (FT n=1,325, DFN n=516) is investigated in the context of the texts in which it appears. Women had one of the highest keyness values in both corpora so it was considered a good entry-point for further analysis. By utilising the collocation and concordance functions available in *WordSmith Tools* (Scott, 2008), to elucidate salient lexical and grammatical co-occurrences with *women*, the use of the word *women* in the FT and DFN corpora was compared and contrasted. Since the feminist movement is largely concerned with the oppression of women under patriarchal power structures, it can reasonably be expected that examining how women are discursively constructed in both corpora will uncover the “often opaque” (Fairclough, 1995b, pp. 132–133) feminist ideologies that shape the texts contained in the corpora. To help establish this, Hallidayan SFL, which can identify the way in which ideology is reflected through grammar (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016), is employed. The focus here is on two specific components of SFL. Firstly *patterns of transitivity*, which is part of the ideational metafunction of a text, or in other words, how grammar is used to convey a picture of reality; and *mood*, which is part of the interpersonal metafunction of a text, or the way in which the authors of a text position themselves in relation to their audience (Jacobs, 2010)²⁰. Hallidayan SFL is used in tandem with van Dijk’s (1995, 2000) concept of *self-schema* to establish a framework for understanding how women are *collectivised* and *differentiated* (Baker et al., 2013) from each other and from *men*. This framework focuses on how in-group and out-group relations are discursively constructed and how, in turn, the discursively constructed group relations reflect feminist ideologies. Section 5.1 provides an overview of all the lexical collocates of *women* in both corpora. These results are then used to guide the rest of the analysis. Section 5.2 examines how women are differentiated from each other on the basis of racialised identities, by examining the clusters *white women* and *black women* in context. Section 5.3 and 5.4 examines how *women* are collectivised similarly in both corpora based on an (assumed) shared experience of violence, and how *men* are discursively constructed as aggressors whereas *women* are typically constructed as the

²⁰ These components of Hallidayan SFL are used throughout this study.

passive recipients of violence. Finally, section 5.5 discusses various minority discourses which were identified in both corpora.

5.1 Examining *women* in both corpora

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 below, show the 20 strongest lexical collocates of the node word *women* in the FT and DFN corpus, and demonstrate that both corpora tend to discuss women in relation to identity, political action, and violence.

Table 5.1: The 20 strongest lexical collocates of *women* in the FT corpus within a -4/+4 span categorised into five major thematic groups

Category	Collocates
Identity	
racialised	<i>white, black</i>
age	<i>young, old</i>
class	<i>class</i>
gender/sex	<i>men</i>
ethnicity/nationality	<i>african, american, greek</i>
Violence/crime	<i>forced, victimized, violence, handle</i>
Political action	<i>movement, liberation</i>
Evaluative	<i>against, classical</i>
Occupation	<i>writers, work, working</i>

Table 5.2: The 20 strongest lexical collocates of *women* in the DFN corpus within a -4/+4 span categorised into six major thematic groups

Category	Collocates
Identity	
racialised	<i>white, black, color</i>
age	<i>young</i>
class	<i>middle, class</i>
gender/sex	<i>trans, men, male, girls</i>
ethnicity/nationality	<i>asian</i>
general	<i>people</i>
Violence/crime	<i>murdered, calling</i>
Political action	<i>feminism</i>
Evaluative	<i>against, powerful</i>
Health	<i>pregnant, death</i>
Appearance	<i>thin</i>

Perhaps the most noticeable pattern present in both tables, however, is the strength of the relationship of the node word – *women* – with other identity-based lexical items such as *young*, *white*, and *black*, and *class*. In both corpora these collocates appear most frequently to the left of the node word indicating that they are used as adjectives to describe the identity of *women*. There are, however, subtle differences in the type and number of words used in both corpora to discuss identity. While the FT corpus uses binary formations such as *black/white*, *young/old*, *women/men*, the DFN corpus conceptualises identity through a wider range of adjectives and nouns such as *color* (MI3=16.050), *people* (MI3=9.919), *trans* (MI3=16.855), and *girls* (MI3=13.495). These words indicate a greater emphasis on intersectionality²¹ and representation of a wider range of identities within the DFN corpus, especially identities that exist outside of binary conceptualisations. Furthermore, these words suggest an emphasis on “identity political formations (which) typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context” (Heyes, 2018, para. 1) within both the DFN corpus.

Although the examination of collocates can provide initial insights into language use, it is not possible to know fully how these words are used in the creation of discourses without examining them in context. In order to understand the contexts of these findings several collocates were examined in context using the concordancer function in *WordSmith Tools* (Scott, 2008). Analysing concordance lines is a necessary part of bringing discourses into relief (Baker, 2006). The first collocates with *women* to be examined in context were *white* and *black*.

5.2 Differentiation of *women*: Examining *black women* and *white women* in both corpora

The collocation analysis in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 identified that women are often discussed in relation to racialised identities *white* (DFN MI3 = 15.548, FT MI3 = 14.696), and

²¹ As discussed in Chapter 2, intersectionality is a feminist theory which was informed by critical race theory. Intersectionality theory conceptualises patriarchal oppression as interlocking/intersecting with other forms of oppression including (but not limited to) racism, classism and homophobia. This theory was introduced during third-wave feminism, but scholars have argued that it is also a prominent feature of fourth-wave feminism (Chamberlain, 2017, Munro, 2013).

black (DFN MI3 = 15.070, FT MI3 = 18.810). Because of this it was decided to examine the different verbs that exist in the vicinity²² of the two clusters *white women* and *black women*. According to Baker et al. (2013), it can be useful to examine the language that collectivises and differentiates social groups. Therefore, the focus of this section will be on how each group is collectivised and how they are differentiated from each other. In order to understand the process of collectivisation and differentiation, verbs were of primary interest.

Table 5.3: Verbs used in the vicinity of the clusters *white women* and *black women* in both corpora

DFN corpus	<p><i>black</i> <i>adhere, advocate, refusing, murdered, galvanize, killing, fight, recognizing, loved, receives, modify, fetishized, become, wear</i></p>	<p><i>white</i> <i>disregard, fighting, fit, care, use, rejecting, crying, relied, rate, retreating, wish, discussing, show, claimed, fought, think, dominate</i></p>
FT corpus	<p><i>black</i> <i>assaults, rape, see, accept, realize, forced, oppressed, outnumbered, raised, agrees, transform, caring, articulate, caring, resisted, work, employed, allowed, sacrifice, explore, emerged, builds, submit, coalesce, blame, fighting, lying, enslaved, confined, remained, submit, search, dated, stressed, entered, suckled, stood, exploiting</i></p>	<p><i>white</i> <i>realize, played, occurred, sitting, assaulted, exposed, marry, speak, permits, raping, relegated, exploit, asked, deceive, look, rape</i></p>

In the both corpora, the lexical items *deceive, disregard, fighting, crying, retreating* and *dominate* conceptualise white women’s behaviour as petulant and aggressive and conceptualise these actions as things done habitually This is in contrast to the lexical items *murdered, fetishized, receives, outnumbered, and forced* used to describe things that are done to black women. These lexical items suggest a range of evaluative responses which construct black women as victims or a group that is collectively

²² These were verbs that were identifiable by looking at the truncated concordance lines as they appeared in *WordSmith Tools* (Scott, 2008), and included verbs that existed to the left and right of the clusters *white women* and *black women*.

oppressed. Van Dijk (1995) notes that “if a social group is consistently described as being the responsible agent of negative action ... we may assume that ... [it] adds to the negative portrayal of such a group, and therefore has an ideological basis” (p. 261). From these preliminary findings we might expect *white women* to be conceptualised as the agent in some of these processes. This would reflect the notion expressed by bell hooks (2000) that “white women ... can act as oppressor or be oppressed” (p. 16).

- 1) I am, rather, highlighting the short-sightedness of **white women** crying victimhood while simultaneously victimizing and pushing exclusionary politics (e.g. SWERF and TERF, or racially exclusive feminisms aka white feminism) as their empowerment [...]
- 2) so **white women** dominate the industry of New Age materials with watered down versions of Indian spirituality practices [...]
- 3) the general consensus is that **white women** don’t particularly care about women of color, and this remains true in a transgender context [...]
- 4) no one knows the Black female experience like a Black girl or woman. **Black women** have loved on each other and supported each other throughout our history in America [...]

The absence of quantifiers in all Extracts above, could indicate that generalisations are made about the people represented in the texts (Fairclough, 1995a), which further suggests that *white women* are treated as one homogenous group (Baker et al., 2013) who are separate from *black women* – another homogenous group. This is exemplified in Extracts (1), (2), and (3) as the material (*crying, dominate*) and mental (*care*) processes, are generalised as things that all white women do/think (Halliday, 1985). Similarly in Extract (4) the mental (*knows, loved*) and material (*supported*) processes are generalised as things all *black women* do/think. Additionally, in Extracts (1), (2), and (3) the semantic agent (*white women*) is put before the syntactic subject in each clause, thus constructing white women as the agents of oppression (van Dijk, 2000, p. 55). In Extract (1) it is presupposed that most – if not all –white women *push exclusionary politics...as their empowerment* and victimise themselves. This forms an interesting juxtaposition to Extract (4) where the author states that *Black women have loved on each other and supported each other throughout our history in America*. The absence of modality in both Extracts allows the authors to make categorical assertions, presenting their opinions as fact. Van Dijk (2000) notes that “positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation is a ... characteristic of group conflict and the ways we

interact with opposed groups” (p. 44). Therefore, it might be concluded from these findings that *white women* and *black women* are conceptualised as opposed groups in the both corpora. This is not necessarily surprising because women of colour have criticised the blind-spot in mainstream feminism which ignored racism within and outside of the movement, since the second wave. As Thompson (2002) notes, “WoC [women of colour] and black feminism have considered their social movements as ‘out of time’ with those of the mainstream, white feminism” (as cited in Chamberlain, 2017, p. 156).

Another salient feature of this concordance analysis is the presence of acronyms and the neologism *white feminism* in Extract (1). Here, the author uses the terms SWERF (sex work exclusionary radical feminism) and TERF (trans exclusionary radical feminism) as examples of *exclusionary politics*. The acronym SWERF and TERF are a recurring theme of the DFN corpus and of particular interest here as it has been suggested by Munro (2013) that this new type of specialised lexis is a component of fourth-wave feminism²³. Furthermore, *white feminism*, a relatively new term, is typically used in a pejorative way to describe feminist values that are deemed to centre on the concerns of white, middle-class women, and are thought to lack intersectionality. It is clear from Extract (1) that *white feminism* is associated also with *white women*, therefore it might be inferred that there is an assumption that white women are less likely to incorporate intersectionality into their feminist politics. This is a valid and important critique, as “the attempt to subtract race and class elevates white, middle-class experience into the norm, making it the prototypical experience” (Grillo, 1995, p. 19).

5.2.1 Intersectionality or Essentialism?

One could argue that the authors of the texts in the above section are being racist towards white people. However according to van Dijk (2000), the argument of so-called reverse racism is generally used to discredit people of colour and deny their experiences of oppression. Furthermore, by conceptualising *black women* as a group

²³ As discussed in Chapter 2, fourth-wave feminism is characterised by an emphasis on inclusivity and intersectionality, challenging rape culture, and employing humor and irony to reclaim derogatory terms like *slut* (Cochrane, 2014). Additionally, Munro (2013) argues that this fourth-wave is also characterised by a new lexicon which includes specialised terms such as *SWERF*, *TERF*, *WoC*, and *TPOC*.

solely oppressed by *white women*, and by presupposing that women of colour cannot support politics that oppress each other, the DFN corpus contains evidence of some essentialist assumptions. Several feminist scholars have elucidated the fact that “identitarian models of relationality” (Muñoz, 2006, p. 677) presupposes homogeneity within categories of people. Additionally, Gordon (2016) has argued that intersectionality is sometimes used to imply that nobody from outside a particular group of people will be capable of knowing those people’s experiences. Extract (4) clearly elucidates this sentiment within the DFN corpus. In turn, this may impinge on the ability of feminists to claim solidarity with one another, and take part in collective action. As (Chamberlain) notes, “it is necessary for passages between individual emotion and mass-realised affect to exist” (2017, p. 191). The tension between attending to difference and the partial submersion of difference in favour of solidarity is a recurring theme within the DFN corpus and will be explored further in the following chapters. The next section will now move to examine how *men* are discursively constructed in relation to *women*. *Men* (DFN MI3= 13.826, FT MI3= 17.912) had a strong collocational relationship with *women* in both corpora, additionally the relationship between men and women has been a focal point in feminism. Therefore, an examination of the discursive construction of the collocate *men* might help elucidate feminist ideology within the two corpora.

5.3 Collectivisation of *women* in both corpora

In order to examine the relationship between the words *women* and *men* in both corpora a concordance analysis of collocates with *men* was carried out. This analysis found that *men* collocates with *women* a total of 24 times in the DFN corpus, and a total of 102 times in the FT corpus. As with the previous section, verbs in the vicinity of the men–women collocates from both corpora were then examined. Table 5.4 below indicates that the verbs occurring with the *men-women* cluster in the DFN corpus primarily describe material processes of physical, sexual, and emotional violence (*punished, abused, forced, humiliated, rape*). Similarly, some of the verbs occurring with the *men-women* cluster in the FT corpus also describe material processes that detail violence such as *raped, rape, struggle, drooling, forced, force*. Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 below examine how these material process verbs found in both corpora are used in context.

Table 5.4: Verbs used in the vicinity of the collocate *men* in both corpora

DFN corpus	<i>punished, abused, expected, working, adhere, fought, calling, tell, close, forced, trade, call, vilified, humiliated, giving, rape, expect</i>
FT corpus	<i>resemble, want, regard, relegated, join, menstruate, oppressed, used, turn, created, feel, explains, held, provided, cowed, excluded, look, creation, get, commented, brought, became, raised, forced, need, actualize, experience, share, occur, accept, learn, outnumbered, fuelled, eliminate, votes, beget, deal, rape, surpass, define, use, scream, pouring, creating, torn, force, convince, dividing, given, face, created, involved, realize, struggle, fighting, invited, assuming, refers, promise, left, disappears, finding, keep, refused, wield, naturalize, raping, drooling, exert</i>

5.3.1 Normative Gendered Discourses in the Discussion of Violence

Goatly and Hiradhar note that looking at material processes can uncover who is represented as the most powerful participant in the text (2016, p. 79). As seen below in Extracts (5), (6), and (8) women are constructed as passive participants in both corpora.

5) young girls (and boys) hear rape on the news used to control and degrade. They see trials, **women** vilified and humiliated, **men** walking free, victims treated like vixens [...]

6) white **men** actually expect Asian **women** to live up to the “exotic geisha girl” stereotype of being sexually submissive and docile [...]

7) **women** can call on **men** to stop rape, but it doesn't stop until men choose to change not only ourselves and our attitudes toward sexual entitlement [...]

8) rape can be eradicated, not merely controlled or avoided on an individual basis, but the approach must be long-range and cooperative, and must have the understanding and good will of many **men** as well as **women** [...]

In Extract (5) women are depicted as being *humiliated and vilified* and men are depicted as *walking free*. Of the four Extracts, *women* are only given agency in Extract (7) –

which is realised through the placement of the semantic agent (women) before the semantic subject in the clause (van Dijk, 2000) – when they are *calling on men to stop rape*. Additionally, in Extracts (7) and (8) following the conjunction *but*, men are foreground and therefore given the most agency (Baker, 2006), thus implying that it is men who are violent and women who have violence done to them. The subordinate clause in both Extracts suggests that women can be free from violence, but only if men change their behaviour. This is further realized through the modal auxiliaries *can* and *must* in Extracts (7) and (8) which conceptualise this state of affairs as fact and as something that has not been achieved yet, and additionally imparts a sense of urgency. It could be argued that the gendered discourse of “active man/passive woman” (Sunderland, 2004, p. 91) is being reproduced here. These findings are further supported by examining the collocate *against*, which showed that, through the process of nominalisation (Fairclough, 1989), women were constructed as passive recipients of actions, having things done to them. As an example *violence* was a recurring noun appearing to the left of the cluster *against women*. These findings could be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, the Digital Feminist News and Feminist Theory corpus stereotype men as physically aggressive and dominant, resorting to essentialist notions of gender – notably masculinity – which was dominant in second-wave feminism. However, it could also be argued that the both corpora employ “strategic essentialism” (Landry & MacLean, 1996, p. 214) in order to challenge the processes of socialisation that encourage men to be aggressive and traditionally masculine. In other words, men’s behaviour is “critically exaggerated and made more explicit so that it can be ridiculed” (Baker, 2008, p. 102). The next section examines how this conceptualisation of men’s behaviour can be problematic.

5.3.2 Heteronormativity in the Discussion of Sexual Violence

As well as potentially contributing to essentialist discourses which are manifested through the conceptualisation of men as sexual aggressors and women as passive recipients of this aggression, the habitual framing of sexual violence around men and women in both corpora might also reproduce the ideology of heteronormativity. Although discourses of heteronormativity have historically been prevalent within feminism - particularly during the second wave - many queer and poststructuralist feminists argue that heteronormative conceptualisations of gender are counterproductive

to feminism's goals. This is because as well as contributing to the erasure of people whose sexual orientations do not fit within heterosexuality, Butler (1990) argues that heteronormativity is inextricably linked to the maintenance of oppressive gender norms which feminism should aim to challenge²⁴. Nagel (2003) defines heteronormativity as "the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and ... that all social institutions ... are built around a heterosexual model of male/female social relations" (pp. 49–50). The notions that women are passive and men aggressive belong to a class of underlying assumptions that enforce heterosexuality as the norm. This is enforced by at once, maintaining hegemonic masculinity by overgeneralizing (van Dijk, 2000) men's behaviour as sexually aggressive and repeatedly depicting women as passive. Additionally, in Extract (5) the nameless *victims* are said to be treated like *vixens*, a word which is typically associated with female sexuality, which again, suggests that the author has presupposed situations of sexual violence to always involve women as victims and men as perpetrators. Additionally, these normative gendered discourses which conceptualise women as perpetual victims of men is in contravention with intersectional feminism which conceptualises power as "flowing omni-directionally in a net or web-like fashion, suggesting that powerlessness is no longer experienced by all women all the time" (Baxter, 2003, as cited in Baker, 2008, p. 108).

In order to see if the discourses identified in the sections above can be found in other parts of the corpora the analysis was expanded to include grammatical collocates of *women*. Although researchers tend to focus primarily on lexical items, grammatical items can be useful to examine as they "form recurrent lexico-grammatical patterns (or chunks) that can specify or modify the meaning of a word" (Sinclair, 1991, as cited in Jaworska and Krishnamurthy, 2012, p. 415). Closely related to collocation is the concept of colligation which refers to the co-occurrence of lexical and grammatical items (Stubbs, 2002). An analysis of the grammatical collocates, or colligates, might be used to illuminate discourses just as lexical collocates can. This takes place in the following sections which examine the colligates of *women* in both corpora.

²⁴ Heteronormativity will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7 which examined the keyword *queer*

5.4 Further Evidence of Collectivisation of *women*

Table 5.5 below indicates that the strongest colligate of *women* in both corpora is the preposition *of* (DFN MI3= 17.908, FT MI3= 20.741), so it was decided to begin the analysis with an examination of this colligate. Sinclair (1991) notes that *of* typically occurs with nouns to form nominal groups which indicate a measure or attribute. As the preposition *of* occurred to the left of the node word, the cluster *of women* was examined and collocates to the left of the pattern analysed.

Table 5.5: The 20 strongest lexical and grammatical collocates of *women* in both corpora within a -4/+4 span

DFN corpus	<i>of</i> (147), <i>and</i> (155), <i>to</i> (127), <i>trans</i> (47), <i>the</i> (133), <i>are</i> (73), <i>color</i> (29), <i>in</i> (82), <i>white</i> (34), <i>who</i> (47), <i>young</i> (23), <i>for</i> (56), <i>black</i> (31), <i>other</i> (32), <i>that</i> (63), <i>against</i> (19), <i>feminism</i> (18), <i>men</i> (24), <i>these</i> (21), <i>girls</i> (17)
FT corpus	<i>of</i> (439), <i>the</i> (487), <i>to</i> (296), <i>are</i> (179), <i>and</i> (279), <i>that</i> (217), <i>black</i> (102), <i>in</i> (205), <i>men</i> (98), <i>for</i> (139), <i>for</i> (139), <i>who</i> (89), <i>were</i> (77), <i>as</i> (107), <i>have</i> (78), <i>a</i> (123), <i>not</i> (75), <i>their</i> (66), <i>by</i> (67), <i>be</i> (60), <i>white</i> (30)

5.4.1 *Of women: The Nominalisation and Passivisation of Violence Against women*

A cursory concordance analysis of the cluster *of women* revealed that both corpora frequently used lexical items that denote violence and domination, such as *deaths*, *harassment*, and *exploitation*, when discussing women. These findings were similar to those identified in the concordance analysis of the collocate *men*. Extracts (9-11) below, are from both corpora and illustrate this in context.

9) requiring vaginal exams as a condition of employment is nothing short of state-sanctioned rape **of women** [...]

10) I can't stand that white trans women use it as their day to decontextualize, co-opt, and practically consume the deaths **of trans women** of color in order to put themselves at the centre of trans oppression [...]

11) taboos around menstruation and other forms of vaginal bleeding endangers the health **of women** and girls around the world [...]

In Extracts (9) and (10) the material processes of *rape* and *death* have been nominalised, and in Extract (11) the process of endangering women is passivised, thus allowing the actor in all clauses to be omitted from the processes. Fairclough (1995a) notes that nominalisation – the process of turning a verb into a nominal form – typically has ideological motivations. Because tense is not included, these nominal forms impart with them a sense of timelessness and permanence about a given situation. It could be interpreted that the *state sanctioned rape*, *death* and *endangering* in the Extracts above, are conceptualised as processes that happen constantly, therefore resisting the hegemonic discourse of postfeminism which conceptualise feminism as obsolete and gender equality as being met. Noun phrases also denote an “existential presupposition” (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016, p. 88), therefore it is difficult to deny the phenomenon/action, this is further realised through the absence of modality in all Extracts. Apart from the hedges *nothing short* (9) and *practically* (10) all Extracts regard the state of affairs as fact and incontestable. This concordance analysis reveals that, just as they were conceptualised in relation to men, women in general are conceptualised as passive recipients of violence in both corpora.

As previously discussed, *of* is often used to form nominal groups indicating a measure of something. The use of quantifiers such as *dozens*, *hundreds*, *many*, *mass*, *millions* and *majority*, when talking about women was a recurring pattern in both corpora. An immediately identifiable quality of these quantifiers is that they are generalised (*millions*, *majority*, *mass*) and hyperbolic, used to discuss a large number of women in general terms. Van Dijk (2000) notes that hyperboles are “semantic rhetorical devices for the enhancement of meaning” (p. 73). They are used, in this case, to make generalisations about large groups of women. In the DFN corpus, these hyperbolic generalisations work together with the normalisation of violence against women and furthermore, it could be argued that these elements combine to exemplify the oppression of women as something widespread, continual and a universal experience of all women. In this context generalisations can also be seen as an example of “strategic essentialism” (Landry & MacLean, 1996, p. 214). Although it was suggested in section 5.2 that the DFN corpus takes an intersectional approach to feminism - one which discourages

making generalisations about the experiences of all women, strategic essentialism might be used here to challenge violence against women and rape culture. Cochrane (2014) argues that challenging rape culture is a primary focus of fourth-wave feminism.

5.4.2 *Women are*: Nominalisation and Passivisation of Oppression of *women*

Another salient colligate of women in both corpora was the determiner *are* (DFN MI3= 16.662, FT MI3= 19.247). Since *are* most frequently appeared to the right of the node word in both corpora, the cluster *women are* was examined in the concordance analysis. Examining the processes of transitivity (Halliday, 1985) in statements containing the cluster *women are*, revealed that both corpora use existential processes to make generalisations about women and how they experience oppression Extracts (12-14).

12) so many different kinds of **women are** excluded from the boundaries of acceptable and respectable and legitimate womanhood [...]

13) as if power is in accepting a culture in which **women are** second-class citizens, in which misogyny and workplace harassment and rape are the norm [...]

14) **women are** a captive people, ruled by foreigners; that women must fight a war, if necessary, to achieve the right of self-government and self-determination that men take for granted as their natural right [...]

The Extracts above also provide further evidence of the use of nominalisation and passivisation which position women as passive recipients of oppression. Foremost, the absence of modality in Extracts (12) and (13) and the example of deontic modality *must* in Extract (14) suggest that the authors position themselves as an authority, with the ability to make what categorical assertions (Fairclough, 1995a) about the ways in which women are oppressed, with a high degree of certainty. *Are*, which is the third-person plural present form of the auxiliary verb *be*, is a common linking verb used to connect a subject to additional information about that subject. In the Extracts above, *are* is used to make definitive, generalised statements about *women* and how they are oppressed. As with the examination of *of women* previously detailed in section 5.4.1 *women* are represented as passive recipients of actions. Women are represented in a similar way in Extracts (15) and (16) where the processes of treating women like *second class citizens* and holding them *captive* is nominalised. Hodge and Kress (1979) note that frequent

nominalisation turns concrete events and situations as abstract phenomena (as cited in Fairclough, 1995a). The repeated nominalisation of the physical domination of women in both corpora may serve to make generalisation about the ways women are oppressed under patriarchy.

5.4.3 *Women are*: Further Evidence of Heteronormativity in the Discussion of Violence Against *women*

Although the agents were mostly omitted in both corpora when the oppression of women was discussed, there were a few instances where the agents are included in these processes. This is evidenced in Extracts (15) and (16) below.

15) **women are** raped and sexually violated by their friends, their dates, their fathers, their bosses, their boyfriends and their priests [...]

16) about three **women** a day **are** murdered by spouses, by ex-spouses in this country. It's one of the main causes of death in the United States [...]

As Extracts (15) and (16) demonstrate, when the actors were named they were always men (*fathers, bosses, boyfriends*). In Extract (16), the actor *spouse* is used and while *spouse* is a gender-neutral term, it could be argued that the inferential meaning of *spouses* and *ex-spouses* in this context is that they are men. In these Extracts women are constructed as goals (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2004) in passive sentence constructions. The finding that men are conceptualised as sexually aggressive, and women are conceptualised as passive recipients mirror those found in the concordance analysis of *men* in both corpora in sections 5.3.1, where, it is inferred that men are the perpetrators of violence against women. In addition to this, sexual violence is often discussed in terms of women and men in Extracts (15) and (16), where men are depicted in a typically (hegemonic) masculine sense as aggressive, whereas women are ascribed the (hegemonic) feminine attribute of passivity. This conceptualisation of heterosexual relations was also identified in section 5.3.1.

5.5 Minority Discourses

The previous sections noted the ways in which women are similarly collectivised and differentiated in both corpora. Women are typically collectivised based on their assumed shared experiences of violence which is discursively constructed as perpetrated by men, and differentiated from one another based on their racialised identities. However, the concordance analyses also revealed several minority discourses (Baker, 2006) in the DFN and FT corpora, which were different to those already discussed. These minority discourses are examined below.

5.5.1 Liberal Feminism in the FT Corpus

A pattern which alluded to differences between the FT and DFN corpora was the association of *women* in the FT corpus with issues of underrepresentation and exclusion. Lexical items such as *invisibility*, *absence*, *seclusion*, *contributions*, *relegation*, *class* and *opportunities* appeared frequently, which suggests that the FT corpus is preoccupied with women having equal opportunities to men and women's representation in public spheres outside of the domestic. However, these lexical items did not appear anywhere in the DFN corpus. The lexical items *absence* and *opportunities* in the FT corpus are shown in context below.

17) the **absence of women** as department heads of universities, of the presence of male directors in girls' schools [...]

18) I introduced legislation concerning the equal employment **opportunities of women**. At that time I pointed out that there were three and a half million more women than men in America but that women held only two percent of the managerial positions [...]

This focus on representation and equal-opportunity is one of the primary tenets of third-wave liberal feminism which argues that women are entitled to access to options, and that access to options are frequently and unfairly restricted due to economic deprivation, sexist stereotyping and discrimination within the workplace (Baer, 2016). These terms, however, appeared nowhere in the DFN corpus, where the concordance analysis showed that women were generally only discussed in terms of physical harm enacted at an interpersonal level. The absence of liberal feminist conceptualisations in the DFN corpus may be explained by the fact that this conceptualisation of feminism has been

regularly criticised for prioritising the concerns of relatively privileged, oft white middle-class, women - an approach which is at-odds with the intersectional feminism found in the DFN corpus. The liberal feminist preoccupation with equal employment opportunities (Extract 18) is sometimes termed “Lean-In” feminism or “Corporate” feminism (Livingston, 2016), and as Fraser (2013) argues, entering the workforce has not been liberatory for women as many women still work in precarious and oppressive working jobs.

5.5.2 Traces of Essentialism in the FT Corpus

A second minority discourse which revealed differences between the DFN and FT conceptualisations of feminism was manifested in the presence of the lexical items *nature*, *natures*, *condition* and *sex-role*. These lexical items did not appear in the DFN corpus but did appear in the FT corpus, and an example can be seen below.

19) we should, then, expect some oddities in any attempt to apply the relations of recognition between Hegelian selves and others to understanding the **condition of women**

As seen in Extract (19), being a woman is described as a *condition*, which suggests that the FT corpus conceptualises the identity of women in terms of an internal, fixed and stable part of their internal selves. This is an important feature of the FT corpus which will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

5.5.3 Traces of Postfeminism in the DFN Corpus

The final minority discourse which will be discussed in this chapter is the potential presence of postfeminism in the DFN corpus. This discourse was identified in the concordance analysis of *women are*, where it was found that an article in the DFN corpus discussed the supposedly emancipatory process of getting a *boob job*.

20) **women are** bracing for a wider manner of ways in which we will be attacked for our body choices...while it might seem banal compared to reproductive freedom and

racial inequality in America, the **boob job** is one more way in which women can control what happens to “us” regardless of how “they” feel about it [...]

It could be argued that the lexicalisation in Extract (20) *choices*, and *control* belong to a broader neoliberal lexicon and contribute to discourses that feminist scholars have identified as being part of postfeminism (Gill, 2017; McRobbie, 2009). Neoliberal postfeminist discourses can be further identified in Extract (20)’s foregrounding of the terms *reproductive freedom* and *racial inequality*, followed by *boob job* in the subordinate clause, as it suggests that the author in this Extract is likening the effect of altering one's appearance to that of having reproductive rights and racial equality. Positioning plastic surgery as liberatory exemplifies what McRobbie (2009) calls the reterritorialization of patriarchal power, where women self-regulate their bodies and are covertly encouraged to make themselves the ideal, individual neoliberal subject under the guise of personal choice. Additionally, the use of the pronouns *us* and *they* which feature in scare brackets and refer to the common pronoun pair *us* vs. *them* (van Dijk, 2000) are used to create an in- and out- group, where it is argued that women might be free from oppression imposed on them by the out-group, simply by getting a breast augmentation.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter it was demonstrated that both corpora take a similar approach to collectivising and differentiating *women*. Section 5.2 revealed that both corpora differentiate women based on their racialised identities, notably *black women* and *white women*. The differentiating discourses identified in the DFN and FT corpus allude to intersectional conceptualisations of feminism which emphasises differences between women and aims to recognise multiple axes of oppression. Intersectionality offers a more comprehensive understanding of oppression as it takes into account other irreducible factors such as class, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, intersectionality does not overgeneralise women as a group solely and oppressed by men, and recognises that women can also be agents of oppression. However, intersectionality can sometimes slide into essentialism when it is used to argue that people of one identity cannot understand those with another identity, and when it assumed innate homogeneity between these atomised identity groups. Section 5.3 revealed that women are often

collectivised in both corpora based on their (assumed) shared experiences of violence. The collectivising discourses are manifest in the passivisation and nominalisation of violence which positions *women* as passive recipients. Additionally, *women* are differentiated from *men* as men are typically positioned as actors, notably as sexual aggressors. I argue that this discourse is an example of strategic essentialism which allows the authors in texts from both corpora to make generalisations about women, in order to challenge aspects of patriarchal oppression such as rape culture (Cochrane, 2014). However, the use of strategic essentialism in the discussion of sexual violence may also contribute to heteronormativity which, as many queer and poststructuralist feminist have argued, is counterproductive to feminism's goals. The collectivisation and differentiation of *women* identified in this chapter exemplifies an ongoing tension within feminism between reclaiming women's selfhood and addressing systematic subordination (Willett, Anderson, & Meyers, 2016). The next chapter will further examine how gender is conceptualised in both corpora and how the majority and minority discourses identified in this chapter are present elsewhere.

6. Examining *gender* in Context

6.0 Introduction

Chapter 5 identified how *women* are collectivised in both corpora based on their assumed shared experiences of violence at the hands of men. It additionally identified how the DFN corpus typically differentiates between women based on other aspects of their identity. The aim in this chapter is to use a concordance analysis to comparatively analyse the way gender is conceptualised in both corpora. Given the focus on gender in feminist discourse it is expected that gender will be central to both the DFN and FT corpora, the focus on gender was alluded to in the keyword analysis which identified the word *gender*, and terms such as *female* and *male* had high keyness values. As Kimmel (2000) argues “gender is one of the central organising principles around which social life revolves,” (as cited in Baker, 2008, p. 4) and, arguably, feminism’s primary occupation is troubling the often taken-for-granted principles and assumptions which underpin this organising. The first section of this chapter will provide an overview of the various theories which have historically influenced the conceptualisation of gender within feminism. Following this, a concordance analysis in both corpora reveals that gender is often constructed in the DFN and FT corpus through the use of metaphor, and that a noticeable shift in the notion of gender can be identified in the DFN corpus.

6.1 Overview: The Difference Between Gender and Sex

According to Baker (2008), gender and sex are “slippery terms to define” (p. 3) because their definitions and usages have changed over time. Furthermore, the way in which both terms are conceptualised is often contingent upon different philosophical underpinnings. However, for the purposes of this discussion I follow Baker’s (2008) recent definition of *sex* as “the biological distinction between males and females ... [that people] are assigned ... based on their reproductive organs” (p. 3). *Gender*, on the other hand, will be defined as “the differences between male and female behaviour that are agreed on by members of a particular society” (p. 4). As discussed in Chapter 2, the influence of poststructural and queer theory during third-wave feminism lead to a radical transformation in the understanding of the categories of woman/man, and male/female, categorisation which held (and still holds) central importance within

feminist theory. Previously, during the second wave, much feminist theory made no distinction between gender and sex. Within this paradigm, gender was essentialised, meaning that it was considered to be contingent upon biological sex, the result was that the terms *gender* and *sex*, along with *female* and *woman*, were often used interchangeably and inconsistently (Baker, 2008). Furthermore, within this paradigm patriarchal oppression could be dismantled by altering the hierarchy that privileged masculinity over femininity, and which “provided rationale for keeping women in the private [domestic] sphere” (Mendes, 2011, p. 14).

During the 1990s, however, the influence of two distinct but overlapping theories challenged this previously held conceptualisation of gender and sex. Most importantly, these theories argued for a distinction to be made between the two terms, and noted that gender is not contingent upon biological sex. The social-constructionist perspective of gender is opposed to the essentialist notion – discussed above – that femininity is inherent in those who are born with female reproductive organs. Instead there are no pre-existent qualities of the female identity; it is contingent on such phenomena as time and cultural norms, and arbitrarily imposed by society at large (Mikkola, 2017). This notion is echoed in the oft-cited quote from Simone de Beauvoir that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (1949/2010, p. 301).

Judith Butler, a preeminent scholar of poststructuralist feminist theory argues that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender ... identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be in its results” (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Furthermore, as poststructural theorists conceive of identities as being discursively constructed (Butler, 1990, 1993), they argue that the terms *woman* and *man* should be avoided altogether as it continues to reify the existence of gender differences. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, the term *woman* continues to hold importance in contemporary feminism, particularly in the discussion of violence against women.

6.2 The Conceptualisation of Gender and Sex in Both Corpora

In order to understand the ways in which both corpora might discursively construct gender and/or sex, I decided to compare the discursive constructions of *female* (in the FT corpus) with the discursive construction of the keyword *gender* (in the DFN corpus). It was not possible to compare the use of *female* in both corpora because *female* occurred too infrequently in the DFN corpus. Therefore, I chose to compare the use of *gender* (n=99) in the DFN corpus, with the use of *female* (n=373) in the FT corpus. In order to examine the two words a concordance analysis was carried out. Similar to the analysis of *women* in Chapter 5, this involved a general analysis of the concordance lines utilising SFL.

6.2.1 Examining *female* in the FT Corpus

To explore whether or not the FT corpus makes a distinction between sex and gender and how this contributes to discursive constructions of gender, concordance lines with *female* in the FT corpus were examined:

- 1) The new supply of sexually available women, a physical relocation of **female** guilt was needed at once [...]
- 2) Footbinding functioned as the Cerberus of morality and ensured **female** chastity in a nation of women who literally could not “run around” [...]
- 3) Big bosses don’t like the true texts of **women-female**-sexed texts [...]

Extracts (1), (2), and (3) above, demonstrate *women* and *female* are used interchangeably to denote both sex and gender. In Extracts (1) and (2), for example, *female guilt* and *female chastity* are ascribed to being a woman, and in Extract (3) it is inferred that being a woman is characterised as being *female-sexed* or biologically female. Baker (2008) notes that “while sex refers to male/female binary, gender has been traditionally thought to operate as a masculine/feminine binary ... linked to societal expectations and mores” (p. 4). Therefore, from these findings in the Extracts above it can be deduced that by conflating the feminine or *female* with *women*, the FT corpus does not make a distinction between sex and gender. This approach can be described as essentialist because femininity is conceptualised as something that you are

born with, something innate and unchanging (Mikkola, 2017). With this in mind, the concordance lines of gender in the DFN corpus were then examined.

6.2.2 Examining *gender* in the DFN Corpus

In addition to the absence of the words *male* and *female* in the DFN corpus' keyword list, the presence of certain words also alludes to a differing conceptualisation of gender and sex than those found in the FT corpus. Firstly, the high keyness value of the word *trans*, *transgender* and the gender-neutral term *people* suggests that the DFN corpus accommodates for those who do not fit within the gender binary discussed by Baker (2008) above. Extracts (4-6) below, illustrate the ways in which the DFN corpus conceptualises gender:

- 4) We need to allow people to push past **gender** stereotypes without being forced [...]
- 5) If we start to say that anyone who refuses or isn't able to perform **gender** in the way society teaches them to is "trans," we assume that the **gender** binary is real [...]
- 6) A male co-worker who is younger, less educated and less experienced than me makes more money than me simply because he belongs to the penis-owning **gender** [...]

Examining the patterns of transitivity (Halliday, 1985) in Extracts (4) and (5) revealed that through the verbal (*say*), material (*allow*), and mental (*assume*) processes in both Extracts, normative gender roles are constructed and reinforced at an interpersonal level by the things people say, assume, and allow or don't allow. The actor in both Extracts is *we*, the inclusive use of the plural first-person pronoun characterises the process of enforcing these gendered roles as something that is omnipresent and done by everyone, and something that must be collectively resisted. According to Fairclough (1995a), the inclusive form of *we* is a salient feature of political discourse which functions to simultaneously claim solidarity with the audience and position the author as an authority with the ability to speak on behalf of society as a whole. Additionally, this pronoun is part of what Fairclough (1995a) refers to as the "lifeworld discourse" (p. 181), and is an important feature of the DFN corpus which will be discussed further in the examination of key pronouns in Chapter 8. These elements exemplify the view that gender is imposed by external rather than innate factors and thus reveals the latent existence of social-constructionism in the DFN corpus.

Lexicalisation is another important feature in all Extracts. The term *penis-owning gender* in Extract (6) complicates the presence of social-constructionist discourses in the DFN corpus because here, the author seems to conflate sex (having male sex-organs) with gender. However, saying *penis owning* instead of *male gender* suggests that the author is not assuming everyone who has male sex-organs identifies as a man. Additionally the metaphorical verbal processes *push past* and *perform* in Extracts (4) and (5) respectively, characterise gender as something that is external to the self and can therefore be rejected, which could be argued as exemplifying a poststructuralist approach to gender. The use of metaphor in the discussion of *gender* and *female* was prevalent in both corpora, therefore it was decided to examine these metaphors further.

6.3 Analysing Metaphors

This section has been motivated by two methodological recommendations. Firstly Baker's (2006) suggestion that the examination of all concordance lines of a word can reveal new results that may not have been previously identified, and secondly Deignan and Semino's (2010) suggestion that if the specialised corpora are small enough it can be useful to conduct a manual search for metaphors. Taking these recommendations into account, all concordance lines of *female* and *gender* were examined individually and by hand in order to explore the occurrence and use of metaphors associated with these items in both corpora. Analysing metaphors can be useful in uncovering the ideologies in discourse as they "reveal something of the speaker's emotions, attitudes and values (Cameron, 2010, p.7)," which do not usually exist in plain sight. Furthermore, "different metaphors imply different ways of dealing with things:" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 120), so we may be able to understand how each corpus realises gender equity by looking at the types of metaphors used.

Although a certain level of subjectivity will always be present in metaphor identification, the two-stage method prescribed by Charteris-Black (2004) was used in order to ensure as much validity as possible. First, a close reading of the texts identified the metaphor keywords or vehicles²⁵ (Goatly, 2002). To identify these I drew on the operationalised definition of metaphor employed by Cameron and Maslen (2010) which is "two meanings of a word or phrase that are incongruous in some way and a transfer

²⁵ Metaphor vehicles are the realisation of linguistic metaphor in text.

of meaning ... that enables the incongruous word or phrase to be made sense of” (p. 103). Then the use of the vehicle terms in the DFN and FT corpora were compared with their use in the BNC and ANC reference corpora. Following this, the metaphors were grouped according to their respective semantic relationships (Skorczynska & Deignan, 2006).

6.3.1 Essentialist Discourses in the FT Corpus

Table 6.1 below, which details the metaphors used (vehicle) and the domain from which that term generally occurs (source domain), reveals that the FT corpus conceptualises femininity (and by extension, gender identity) as being “intrapsychic” (Gleason, as cited in Baker, 2008, p. 11). An intrapsychic identity is fixed, stable and intrinsic to our being, and is realised in the feminist theory corpus through the use of existential metaphors such as *built-inside* and religious metaphors like *soul*.

Table 6.1 Vehicle terms used to describe *female* in the FT corpus

Source Domain	Vehicle
Spirituality/Religion (7):	<i>mortal, numen, piety, exodus, soul, souls, transcendence, transcends</i>
Language (1):	<i>punctuated</i>
Existentialism (4):	<i>built inside, profoundly, truly</i>
Other (2):	<i>power, credulousness</i>

It is common for secular feminist discourse to employ religious metaphors, as they “promote or express fundamental aspects of human nature” (Talbert-Wettler, 1995, p. 80). These metaphors exemplify the second-wave notions of an essential womanhood – the notion that being a woman is defined by our biological sex, and is something that is inherent in our very nature (Mikkola, 2017). Essentialism also “presupposes gender realism in that feminist politics is said to be mobilized around women as a group ... where membership in this group is fixed by some condition, experience or feature that women supposedly share and that defines their gender” (Mikkola, 2017, para. 25). Specific vehicles such as *numen* and *piety* evoke imagery of worship and other vehicles

such as *power* and *profoundly*, conceptualise femininity as something that should be celebrated, thus counteracting the hegemonic masculinist discourses (Davies & Gannon, 2005) which privilege masculinity over femininity. These metaphors may also be employed to equalise the ostensible differences women and men. Overall, the metaphor vehicles associated with the word *female* in the FT corpus impart a positive semantic prosody²⁶ (Stubbs, 2001).

6.3.2 Poststructuralist and Social-constructionist Discourses in the DFN Corpus

Table 6.2 below shows that, the conceptualisation of *gender* in the DFN corpus were almost diametrically opposed to the way in which *female* is conceptualised in the FT corpus. There is a “climate of negativity” (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012, p. 424) around the word *gender*, furthermore the sense that gender is something external and oppressive is cultivated through the metaphors of tradition, which conceptualise gender and something which is cumbersome and archaic.

Table 6.2 Vehicle terms used to describe *gender* in the DNF corpus

Source Domain	Vehicle
Spirituality/Religion (1):	<i>transcended</i>
Clothing (2):	<i>fitting into, restrictive</i>
Rebellion/revolution (4):	<i>defy, defying, push past, confront, liberation</i>
Tradition (2):	<i>rigid, conforming</i>
Other (2):	<i>surrounding, straddling</i>

Additionally, the metaphor of clothing, through the use of words like *fitting-into*, and *restrictive* is particularly effective as it solidifies the poststructuralist notion that gender is a performance; it is something that can be tried on and discarded, it is purely superficial and entirely separate from our corporeal selves. *Straddling* also denotes that it is something with two sides or binaries. The use of the rebellion metaphor suggests that gender is something that is oppressive and should be resisted. This concept of

²⁶ The terms discourse prosody and semantic prosody are sometimes used interchangeably, however McEnery and Hardie (2012) write that “words or phrases are said to have a negative or positive semantic prosody if they typically co-occur with units that have a negative or positive meaning” (p. 135).

rebellion and revolution is closely related to the metaphor of war, which, especially in America, has been widely used in mainstream political discourse (Howe, 1988). However, there are subtle differences; a war is typically thought of as something that happens between two or more major actors, whereas a rebellion is an overthrowing of the status-quo by a smaller group of insurgents. This metaphor characterises the fight to do away with gender as something which is not just participated in by women but any minority group might take part, which is exemplified below, in Extract (7):

7) Both men and women alike are punished harshly for defying **gender** norms [...]

The absence of quantifiers in Extract (7) conceptualises men and women as a homogenous group which allows for generalisations to be made about who experiences oppression and how (Fairclough, 1995a); a linguistic feature that was also prevalent in Chapter 5. The cumulative effect of these metaphors results in a negative semantic prosody of *gender* in the DFN corpus. This negative conceptualisation of gender corresponds to Butler's (1990) sentiment that gender should be deconstructed because the maintenance of the categories men and women only serves to reify the differences between them, and therefore justify the hierarchisation which feminism is aiming to dismantle. Furthermore, by looking at the use of metaphors (*defy*, *confront*) in context below also reveals how they contribute to social-constructionist discourse within the DFN corpus:

8) I've been taunted for daring to **defy** gender and heteronormative standards [...]

9) Embracing the hair I've always wanted has forced me to **confront** our society's rigid gender roles [...]

Extracts (8) and (9) reiterate the findings from the concordance analysis of *gender* which occurred earlier in this chapter. Goatly and Hiradhar (2016) note that "past principle clauses can achieve the same omission as passivisation" (p. 87), the past principle 'I've been taunted' (8), and 'has forced me' (9) conceptualises the people in these Extracts as passive and gender roles as socially ascribed. The absence of modality also creates a declarative mood which conceptualises this as something, again, incontestable. By omitting the agent in both Extracts the oppression is maintained and enforced by society at large. It is incontestably engrained in wider society. Finally, in Extract (9), the inclusive form of the first-person plural possessive determiner *our* is

used, again this is a feature of the lifeworld discourse discussed earlier in this chapter. Based on the findings of this metaphor analysis it could be deduced that the DFN corpus approaches the concept of gender from the two different, but related, theoretical standpoints of poststructuralism and social constructionism, and moreover rejects the essentialist conceptualisation of gender.

6.4 Conclusion

From these findings it can be concluded that, while the Feminist Theory corpus conceptualises femininity as something that corresponds to gender, and aims to re-conceptualise the notions of femininity as inferior to masculinity, the Digital Feminist News corpus challenges the idea of femininity and masculinity and argues for a deconstruction of gender altogether. The latter approach could be viewed as emancipatory because as it is often argued that the maintenance of the gender binary is a necessary function of patriarchal oppression, which consistently reinforces male dominance and the “heterosexual matrix”²⁷ (Butler, 1990, p. 5). Therefore, challenging gendered notions of what it means to be a woman or a man could help address the assumptions surrounding accepted gendered norms, dismantle heteronormativity, and encourage recognition that women and men are not homogenous groups. This could also help realise the different forms of oppression or privilege individual people might experience, based on a number of factors. Conversely, it could be argued that by eschewing ourselves from the signifiers of woman and man, which render the subjects stable and recognisable, we also might unwittingly privilege individualism over collective action.

Philips (2003) argues that while recognising the differences between individual women has been an important component of feminism, the urgency and necessity of collective action is sometimes lost when difference or diversity are emphasised. She notes that “the rhetorical force of the focus on the universal key problem of a very broad male

²⁷ Butler (1990) defines the heterosexual matrix as the oppositionally and hierarchically defined genders with corresponding sexes – masculine man, and feminine woman – that are rigidly enforced through compulsory heterosexuality. Anything that subverts heterosexuality must be made sense of within the context of the matrix. Which is why, for example, gay men are often considered to be effeminate because of their attraction to other men, and lesbians considered masculine or butch.

power over women ... has not regained centre stage” (p. 260). Butler has been criticised for not envisaging “mass movements or resistance or campaigns for political reform, only personal acts carried out by a small number of knowing actors” (Baker, 2008, p. 77). These findings broadly exemplify a tension between individualism and inclusivity which is a salient and re-emerging feature of the DFN corpus that will be explored further in the following chapter which examines the use of the keyword *queer* in the DFN corpus in context.

7. Examining *queer* in Context

7.0 Introduction

Chapter 6 examined the use of metaphor in both corpora and found that there was a shift from essentialist conceptualisations of *gender* in the Feminist Theory corpus, to prominent poststructuralist and social-constructionist ideologies in the Digital Feminist News corpus. Additionally, it showed that the DFN corpus argues for the deconstruction of gender and views the notion of sexual difference as oppressive. This chapter moves to an analytical focus on the keyword *queer* (n=43)²⁸ which had a high keyness value in the DFN corpus. The analysis of *queer* occurs immediately after the analysis of *gender* in Chapter 6 because, as Baker (2008) notes, “the interaction between gender and sexuality...has saliency that is worth highlighting and investigating in detail” (p. 8). As discussed in Chapter 4, *queer* was used as a slur but it has since been reclaimed by the LGBTQ community. The use of the term *queer* is significant as it is not only a signal of solidarity between marginalised identities (Croom, 2013), but it indicates “a shift to a model in which identities are more self-consciously historicized, seen as contingent products of particular genealogies rather than enduring or essential natural kinds” (Heyes, 2018, para. 25). Therefore it might be argued that the keyness of the term *queer*, along with the ideological values identified in Chapter 6 as shaping the texts of the DFN corpus, indicates a paradigm shift toward a rejection of the binary and mutually dependent categories of male/female along with the collapsing of the boundaries between heterosexual/homosexual and gay/lesbian. Halperin (1995) states, “queer is ... whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant ... it is an identity without an essence” (p. 62).

Following Baker and Levon (2015), the analysis of *queer* in this chapter was carried out by examining the concordance lines of all the instances of the keyword, as there were only ten collocates and they were all grammatical. The first section of this analysis examines how *queer* is used across texts within the DFN corpus. Following this the use of acronyms in the vicinity of *queer* is examined to show how these construct identity as

²⁸ *Queer* did not appear as a key word in the FT corpus and therefore it is only examined in context within the DFN corpus

intersecting and multifarious, and finally a minority discourse which opposes the queering of identities is examined.

7.1 Deconstructing Identities

Lexicalisation is an important component of discourse analysis as it has the ability to reveal certain discourses (Baker, 2006). The presence of the keyword *queer* (n=43) in the DFN corpus as opposed to the words *lesbian* (n=46) and *gay* (n=51) which appear in the feminist theory corpus, may indicate a shift away from binary conceptualisations of gender and sex, and an incorporation of “insights of poststructuralism about the difficulties in ascribing any essence ... to identity” (Pickett, 2018, para. 33). The use of *queer* in the DFN corpus appears in context in Extracts (1-3) below:

- 1) Good intentions don’t get rid of the sting a **queer** person might feel when someone says “gay” as an insult [...]
- 2) I really like **queer** BDSM. Sometimes I’ll have my combat boots on for a session. It depends on what kind of gender and **queerness** I’m feeling that day [...]
- 3) In the media, there are no representations of enriching **queer** Muslim masculinities, and **queer** Muslim femininity is completely erased, or endangered [...]

In the above Extracts, *queer* is used as a hypernym (Baker, 2008) to denote any identities that are considered outside the hegemonic normal. In Extract (1), for example, *queer* is used as an adjective to describe an aspect central to a person’s identity, whereas in Extract (2), it is used to describe an act (*BDSM*) and used in the nominal sense as *queerness*. In Extract (2) *gender* and *queerness* are discussed in the subordinate clause, which conflates wearing *combat boots* – an item of typically masculine clothing – with gender identity and *queerness*. In this sense, *gender* and *queerness* are conceptualised, not as an intrinsic aspect of identity but something that can change depending on what someone wears (*combat boots*) or what someone engages in (*BDSM*). By this standard, any woman that dresses in a masculine way or man that dresses in a feminine way – regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation – could be considered *queer*.

This conceptualisation of *queer* aligns with the notion that gender and sexual identity as something are socially constructed and performed. However, Baker (2008) argues that

considering gender as something that can be “tried on” (p. 77) by, for example, wearing combat boots is an incorrect assumption and creates a consumerist understanding of gender (Butler, 1993).

Additionally, the author in Extract (3) discusses *queer masculinities* and *femininities*. If *queer* denotes that which is not essential, then queer masculinity – or femininity – is somewhat of an oxymoron. In this context *queer* could refer to appearance, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Seidman (1993) argues that this is a potential downfall of the term, as “the refusal for queer theory to name the subject ... could result in denying differences by either submerging them in an undifferentiated oppositional mass or by blocking the development of individual and social differences through the ... imperative to remain undifferentiated” (p. 196). So, although *queer* is a useful and potentially liberating term, as it doesn’t contribute to the erasure of any marginalised identities, the opaque meanings of *queer* in the Extracts above could result in a creation of this so-called oppositional mass.

7.2 Intersecting Identities

Another salient finding of the concordance analysis of *queer* revealed several specialised terms which regularly appear in the vicinity of this word. This specialised lexicon includes words such as *femme* (n=17), and *cis* (n=23), and also sometimes exist in the form of acronyms like *TPOC* (n=11), *DFAB* (n=1), *QTPOC* (n=1)²⁹. Munro (2013) argues that these terms are a feature of fourth-wave feminism and “are invaluable given the 140-character limit imposed by Twitter, and lend themselves to the practice of hashtagging” (p. 25). Although acronymic abbreviations have been identified as common aspects of written as well as spoken discourse, Ketcham (2011) argues that the use of acronyms have proliferated within internet discourse, and no longer represent organisations or places, but also novel phrases, thus “creating part of a specialized lexicon of the online conversant” (p. 25). Extracts from the DFN corpus, containing these specialised terms in context are reproduced below:

4) Trans people, especially **TPOC**, have enough to worry about without losing their health care [...]

²⁹ *TPOC* is an acronym of the term Transgender Person of Colour, *DFAB* is an acronym of the term Designated Female at Birth, and *QTPOC* is an acronym of the term Queer Transgender Person of Colour.

5) Zoe, a **femme genderqueer** parent, had an intense bout of dysphoria shortly after giving birth [...]

6) Samudzi, a **cisgender queer** Black woman [says] “we have a responsibility as cis folks to do the work to dismantle these systems of domination that we are beneficiaries of and that we’re complicit in” [...]

In Extracts (4-6) above, the identity of all the subjects is foregrounded (van Dijk, 1995), and thus marking identity as significant. In Extract (4) *TPOC* (trans people of colour) are discursively constructed as a group separate from other transgender people, the adverb *especially* suggests that transgender people of colour face a number of hurdles additional to those experienced by other transgender people. The relational clause *have enough to worry about* and the absence of modality also makes this a categorical assertion by presenting this state of affairs as common sense, and presupposes that all transgender people face similar issues. As Nash (2013) notes, this is sometimes problematic as “the focus on representing various categories of people presupposes innate homogeneity in each category” (as cited in Gordon, 2016, p. 347).

All Extracts employ over-lexicalisation in discussing the identity of the person who is being interviewed for the article – *femme genderqueer parent*, *cisgender queer Black woman*. Similar to lexicalisation, over-lexicalisation can be defined as “the provision of a large number of synonymous or near-synonymous terms for communication of some specialized area of experience” (Fowler & Kress, 1979, p. 211). In all Extracts, the foregrounding and over-lexicalisation of categorised identities is also used to legitimise the hierarchisation of voices (Fairclough, 1995a) in each of the texts. Here the experiences of the “ordinary people” (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 11) such as *Zoe, the femme genderqueer parent*, and *Samudzi, the cisgender queer Black woman* are regularly hierarchised over other voices that appear in the texts which might have traditionally been hierarchised, such as institutional experts. This act of hierarchisation gives priority to the voices and experiences of the individual ordinary people. Furthermore, this foregrounding of identity and hierarchisation of the voices of particular identity groups positions minority identities as authorities, who are able to make assertions about their own identity group. For example, the inclusive form of *we* used in Samudzi’s quote is used to create solidarity with other *cisgender/queer/Black women*, and the

foregrounding of her identity legitimises her ability to make imperatives statements such as *we have a responsibility* and, categorical assertions such as *we're complicit in*.

Additionally, Extracts (4-6) represent the combination of colloquial and official discourses which were present throughout each of the texts, and are a key feature of the DFN corpus as a whole. Extract (4) uses fairly conversational language *trans people have enough to worry about*, whereas Extracts (5) and (6) use formal, technical terms such as *dysphoria*, *systems of domination*, and *beneficiaries*. By using this technical terminology the authors of the DFN texts are positioning the audience as people who are already familiar with feminism and notably intersectional and poststructuralist conceptualisations of feminism. Fairclough (2003) also notes that “all forms of fellowship, community and solidarity depend upon meanings which are shared and can be taken as given” (p. 55). Therefore the use of such technical language could foster a sense of solidarity between the author/s and reader/s, however, Baker (2008) also warns that postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches should be wary of recapitulating the hierarchy it intends to dismantle by using inaccessible language. Without an explanation of what these terms mean the author/s may also unwittingly create in and out-groups of those who understand the terminology and those who do not.

Moreover, the use of terms like *TPOC*, *femme genderqueer*, and *cisgender queer* identified above, is somewhat antithetical to the findings previously discussed in this chapter, where *queer* was discussed as an all-encompassing term emphasising the importance of inclusivity. Instead, these terms reify difference in the form of acronyms, resulting in highly atomised groups organised purely on the basis of identity. For this reason Baker (2008) notes “it could be argued that identity politics ... and queer theory are therefore opposed to each other” (p. 196).

7.2.1 Differences between Identities

While broad, generalising categories have the ability to essentialise subjects, Baker (2008) conceives of a way in which attention to difference within groups of people may also become a proxy for individualism and recreating a “new ... hierarchy, whereby people who possess multiple identities that are subordinated or marginalised in some way are now validated or prioritised ... over those whose identities are closer to the norm” (p. 219). As seen below in Extract (7) from the DFN corpus, the article takes a

polemical approach to defining feminism and problematizing certain feminist ideologies:

7) It is a “feminism” that forces me, a **cis queer black** woman to subsume my unique experiences [...]

The second-person pronoun *my* followed by the adjective *unique* suggests that because of the author’s identity her experiences are not the same as anyone who is not cisgender, queer, or black. The present-tense verb *forces* gives a degree of permanence to the state of the oppressive nature of this kind of feminism, it is “habitual” (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016, p. 68) and therefore reveals the sentiment that it will be difficult to achieve solidarity because it is likely to continue being oppressive and also imparts connotations that feminist ideology which does not adequately recognise difference as oppressive. However, assuming that feminism which doesn’t recognise specific differences between individuals will always be oppressive makes it difficult to conceive of a united movement built on solidarity as there will always have to be some sort of denial of difference in coming together for a common cause. Another notable feature of the Extract above is the use of scare-quotes around the word feminism. Fairclough (1992) notes that scare-quotes are sometimes employed to distance the author from a certain ideological position or to express doubt about the legitimacy of a claim. By employing them here the author is implying that certain feminist ideologies aren’t legitimate or at least not a feminism that the author would subscribe to.

Another text which made use of the word *queer* also accessed similar discourses. Extracts (8) and (9) are concordance lines reproduced from the same article:

8) As **queer Muslims**, we have a duty to dismantle the script of our representation and become the role models we ourselves never had. A genuine commitment to community wellbeing demands that we do better, and that we are challenging bigotry wherever it appears [...]

9) white people are notoriously quick to jump to Islamophobic [sic] assumptions about us [...]

In both Extracts identity is being foreground in a similar fashion to the Extracts in section 7.2. Although both Extracts make use of identity-related terms, the lexicalisation is slightly different. In Extract (8) the relatively specific term *queer Muslims* is used, whereas in Extract (9) the very broad and generalising term *white people* is used. The exclusive use of the pronouns *we*, *us* and *our* in both Extracts are used to discursively construct *queer Muslims* as a group distinctly separate from *white people*. These pronouns belong to the lifeworld discourse (Fairclough, 1995a) which discursively constructs people as having a shared life world. Additionally, by claiming themselves as a queer Muslim, the author positions themselves as having a relationship of solidarity and authority with the audience. This legitimises the author's ability to make categorical assertions about the behaviour of *white people*, who *jumping to Islamophobic assumptions*; and about the *duty* that other *queer Muslims* have to *dismantle the script*. The declarative mood in both Extracts also echoes the findings in section 7.2 where the authors used their identity as a way of giving themselves credibility and authority. The emphasis on difference between women, particularly between racialised or religious identities exemplifies Butler's sentiment that within feminism "the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms" (Butler, 1990, p. 1). Additionally, the emphasis on discourses of identity within the DFN corpus exemplifies a growing tension between deconstructing identities and reifying them, leading to tensions between solidarity and individualism. As Mohanty (2013) argues, "postmodern scepticism applied to intersectionality [results in a theory] ... that emphasizes difference over commonality, coalition, and contestation" (p. 974).

7.3 Minority Discourse: Against Queer

Chamberlain (2017) argues that the use of irony "can be simultaneously powerful and problematic" (p. 140), as its success depends on the context and the person producing the utterance. In Extract (10) below, where queer is used to denote something negative, the author is responding to claims made by another author on a different feminist news site called *The Establishment*.

10) Whereas feminism has said gender, under patriarchy, is something we should reject, not embrace, today's **queer** movement has positioned gender as fun and liberatory [...]

This text begins with a direct quote from the original article in which the author asks “how can the queerest generation ever still believe in gender roles?” By positioning the intertextual element of the original text first, the author is implying that the answer to this question is common sense and the audience is expected to see the flaws in the question straight away. This allows the author to “polemicize with” (Bakhtin, 1986, as cited in Fairclough, 2003, p. 42) the author of the original article and also justifies her response to the article, which comes next. She writes, ‘if that question seems jaw-droppingly lacking in self-awareness, congratulations: you have been paying attention.’ This is similar to the genre of advertising where the old information is given first and the new is given after (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). By organising the text like this the queer movement is positioned as oppositional to feminism, instead of a component of it, which is a sentiment reiterated throughout the text and further exemplified in Extract (5) from the DFN corpus below:

11) Truscheit’s big mistake is to look towards yet another anti-feminist, liberal movement for a solution to patriarchy: **queer** politics. While Truscheit blames “mainstream gays” for not “questioning gender,” she lets the trans movement off the hook [...]

By arguing that ‘she [the author of the original article] lets the trans movement off the hook,’ the author is associating being transgender with a political movement. Several times in the article the author also refers to ‘transgenderism,’ a term that suggests being transgender is not a real identity – or perhaps not an identity at all. This notion is largely used to discriminate against transgender people, and the conflation of an identity with an ideology or set of beliefs is similar to Baker’s (2005) findings that homosexuality is sometimes discussed in terms of sexual acts and not as an identity. Furthermore, this constitutes an either/or approach where it is implied that feminism cannot achieve its goals by recognising the experiences of cisgender and transgender people in a patriarchal society, we can only recognise one or the other³⁰. In the closing sentence of the article, the author writes, of a remedy for combatting patriarchal oppression; “our sisters have the answer.” The familial metaphor of sisters suggests that women are a

³⁰ Chamberlain (2017) notes that within the fourth-wave “there has been a surge in dissonance between cisgender and trans feminism [and] while focus on both trans issues and feminism within this current wave has wider benefits for both social movements, the interaction between the two is fraught” (p. 190).

united group, connected by their shared oppression under patriarchy. This approach is typical of radical feminism, where women are constituted “simply as victims of male oppression” (Baxter, 2003, p. 10).

7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, notably in section 7.1, it has been shown that, similar to the findings in Chapter 6, the DFN corpus is dominated by poststructural and social-constructionist ideology, manifest in discourses which argue for the deconstruction of the socially contingent, hierarchically organised and binarily divided categories of male/female, masculine/feminine, and gay/straight. Challenging this binary is important, because it is the maintenance and policing of the boundaries which dictate acceptable sexual and gender expressions, and this in turn maintains hegemonic identities, notably hegemonic masculinity (Baker, 2008). However, perhaps in contravention to poststructuralist ideology, this chapter also identified that the DFN corpus seeks to reify atomised identities and the differences between them. Exemplified in section 7.2, the use of acronyms such as *TPOC*, and the consistent foregrounding of identity emphasise, and in some cases, oversimplify differences between large groups of people which are assumed to have innate homogeneity. This is consistent with findings in Chapter 5 which examined the discursive construction of the racialised identities of *white women* and *black women*.

It could be argued that in these instances the authors are employing strategic essentialism or “heterogeneous commonality” (Collins 1998, as cited in Phipps, 2016, p. 314) in order to discuss the experiences of racism, transphobia, or Islamophobia that might be experienced across many people from one identity group. For example, in section 7.2 *trans people* are discussed as a homogenous group, allowing the author to make generalisations about the disparities in healthcare between cisgender and transgender people. Moreover, Chamberlain notes that “there is an intensification of the differences and divides within and without feminism,” and that this newfound interest in the feminist movement has “made the differences between WoC [women of colour] and white women more pronounced.” (2017, p. 190).

However, Brown (1995) also warns against the dangers of *ressentiment*, which can be explained as the politicising of identity which “enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics” (Brown 1995, p. 74). Furthermore Brown argues that identity politics sometimes reinforces the “wounded attachments” (p. 74), in that it is aiming to sever and that it should be premised on solidarity rather than exclusion. Baker (2008) argues for an approach that takes both differences and similarities into account, rather than imposing an either/or dichotomy, and acknowledges that this approach “stands well within the both/and philosophy of post-modernism” (p. 258). The forthcoming and final chapter of this analysis moves to examine the use of pronouns in both corpora. Following the final component of the analysis of key words, the findings from Chapters 5-8 are consolidated and situated within a broader social context.

8. Examining *pronouns* in Context

8.0 Introduction

The previous chapters of this analysis examined the keywords *women*, *gender*, and *queer* and identified that women are typically collectivised based on their (assumed) shared experiences of violence at the hands of men. These chapters also identified a shift from essentialist and homogenising ideologies in the FT corpus, toward intersectional and poststructural feminist ideologies within the DFN corpus. The discourses which construct the poststructural and intersectional ideologies emphasise identity and differences between groups of women and indicate that “the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms” (Butler, 1990, p. 1). This chapter, which is the final chapter in this analysis, will now move to examine the pronouns which appeared in the keyword lists of both corpora. The keyword analysis in Chapter 4 revealed that, in the DFN corpus, the first and second-person pronouns *I*, *I’m*, *me*, *my*, *you*, *your*, and *you’re*, all had a high keyness value. In contrast, third-person pronouns *she*, *her* and *herself*, had a high keyness value in the FT corpus. This chapter begins by calculating collocates of the third-person pronouns in the FT corpus and then examines these collocates in context. This reveals that these pronouns are used to make generalisations about women and often essentialises them, a discourse which corresponds to the previous findings from the examination of the FT corpus. Following this, the pronouns in the DFN corpus are examined, again by calculating the collocates of individual pronouns and examining them in context. The analysis of the pronouns in the DFN corpus revealed intersectional ideology, importantly it also revealed discourses of self-branding, personal choice and self-disclosure, which contribute to postfeminist ideology.

8.1 Pronoun use in the FT corpus: Homogenous Group Definition

Table 8.1 lists the 20 strongest collocates of *she* (n=1,039), *her* (n=1,113) and *herself* (n=126) in the FT corpus within a -4/+4 span and includes both lexical and grammatical collocates.

Table 8.1: The 20 strongest collocates of *she*, *her* and *herself* within a -4/+4 span in the FT corpus

she	<i>is (244), the (292), her (138), to (224), herself (55), that (145), a (167), was (100), and (170), in (137), had (62), has (63), not (73), of (112), if (44), does (29), for (63), maybe (16), feels (17), said (28)</i>
her	<i>to (350), and (256), she (138), of (245), in (180), the (248), own (69), husband (34), a (136), for (95), that (103), is (106), was (70), with (72), body (40), from (63), life (37), as (55), on (45), not (46)</i>
herself	<i>she (55), to (46), in (24), and (26), of (26), the (30), woman (11), is (18), a (19), within (5), must (6), but (9), without (5), for (11), that (12), her (9), as (10), through (5), about (6), has (6)</i>

These pronouns are typically used cataphorically and anaphorically to refer to *women* as a singular, homogenous group within the FT corpus. As seen in Extracts (1-6) below, the pronouns in the FT corpus are typically used to discuss women.

- 1) Applied to sex, he is the government, **she is** the governed [...]
- 2) Sex is the refuge of the mindless. And the more mindless the woman, the more deeply embedded in the male culture, in short, the nicer **she is**, the more sexual she is. The nicest women in our ‘society’ are raving sex maniacs [...]
- 3) Woman lives **her own** desire only as the expectation that she may at last come to possess an equivalent of the male organ. Yet all this appears quite foreign to her own pleasure, unless it remains within the dominant phallic economy [...]
- 4) This is the root of **her own** oppression as a woman. Bitches are not only oppressed as women, they are oppressed for not being like women [...]

In Extracts (1-4) the use of the present-tense auxiliary verb *is*, which is also the strongest collocate of the node word *she* (MI3=19.791), is used to position the author as an authority with the ability to make categorical assertions. The unmodalised statements such as *she is the governed*, *sex is the refuge of the mindless*, and *this is the root of her own oppression*, create a declarative mood and conceptualise these statements as fact.

The lack of first or second person pronouns (such as those found in the DFN corpus) also allows the authors to assume the position of omniscient or all-knowing narrator.

5) A woman's body is one of the few culturally accepted ways a **woman** has to express **herself** and yet the scope of this expression is limited by a contradiction [...]

6) Arrogance might have had something to do with the war, but this syndrome is a war that nearly every woman faces every day, a war **within herself** too, a belief in her superfluity [...]

Lexicalisation is also an important feature in Extracts (1-6) above. The use of the word *women* in Extracts (2-6) demonstrates that in the FT corpus, patriarchal oppression is typically conceptualised as something done to women. Additionally, the authors discuss women's oppression in relational processes, which conceptualise all women as united based upon their shared experiences of patriarchal power structures, these relational processes are depicted as a lack of sexual autonomy (*expression is limited by a contradiction*), pressure to conform to sexist ideals of femininity (*a war within herself*), and objectification (*she is the governed*).

These findings suggest that the feminist theory corpus has adopted what is described as a meta-narrative approach³¹. This meta-narrative conceptualisation of feminism, which sometimes makes essentialist assumptions about women, is associated with the second-wave and has been critiqued by many feminists who argue that this approach ignores women from different racialised identities, classes, sexual orientations and gender identities and instead suggest a poststructuralist or postmodernist approach to feminism (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990). However, some have also pointed out that the poststructuralist approach to feminism should be cautious not to replace the "desire for totality ... with an equally totalizing desire for contextualism, pluralism and heterogeneity" (McNay, 1992, p. 130). These findings reiterate the findings from the analyses of the FT corpus in the previous chapters, which indicated that the FT corpus generally conceptualises women as a single group, and this is in contrast to the

³¹ The meta-narrative approach can be characterised by the discursive construction of women as a singular, homogenous group, and women's oppression as universally implemented by patriarchy. Feminists have criticised this approach for making "assumptions of universal female dependence and confinement to the domestic sphere, as false extrapolations from the experience of the white, middle-class, heterosexual women who dominated the beginnings of the second wave" (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990, p. 33).

discourses present in the DFN corpus, which tends to focus on multiple identities and individual subjectivities.

8.2 Pronoun use in the DFN corpus: Negative Self-definition

Following the analysis of third-person pronouns in the FT corpus, the analysis subsequently moved on to examining pronouns in the digital feminist news media. In this subsection, the pronouns with the highest keyness value, *I* (n=1,428) and *I'm* (n=141), are examined. Fairclough (1995a) notes that “a person is always constructed in relations to others” (p. 180), and two collocates of *I* and *I'm* in Table 8.2 below, allude to the way the authors of the digital feminist news media construct themselves in this way. Notably, the strongest collocate of *I'm* is the negative particle *not* (MI3=15.286) which appears *n*=30 times to the right of the node word. The seventh collocate of *I* is *don't* (MI3=18.125) which appears *n*=89 times to the right of the node word.

Table 8.2: The 20 strongest collocates of *I'm* and *I* within a -4/+4 span in the DFN corpus

I'm	<i>not</i> (31), <i>going</i> (11), <i>to</i> (32), <i>a</i> (28), <i>I</i> (24), <i>that</i> (12), <i>happy</i> (5), <i>lucky</i> (5), <i>just</i> (10), <i>doing</i> (6), <i>and</i> (22), <i>sure</i> (5), <i>but</i> (10), <i>for</i> (12), <i>of</i> (16), <i>good</i> (5), <i>like</i> (7), <i>you</i> (9), <i>the</i> (16), <i>so</i> (7)
I	<i>was</i> (186), <i>that</i> (245), <i>think</i> (105), <i>to</i> (270), <i>am</i> (75), <i>my</i> (136), <i>don't</i> (96), <i>a</i> (199), <i>and</i> (220), <i>the</i> (220), <i>know</i> (67), <i>have</i> (96), <i>but</i> (88), <i>thought</i> (35), <i>want</i> (50), <i>when</i> (67), <i>had</i> (56), <i>learned</i> (34), <i>in</i> (106), <i>wanted</i> (31)

Extracts (7-9) below from the DFN corpus, containing the clusters *I'm not* and *I don't* provides further insights into how the authors discuss themselves:

7) **I'm not** like other girls because I'm hairy (and I suck at removing it!) [...]

8) I couldn't care less what men want from my figure or not. **I'm not** here for that, **I'm not** alive for that purpose [...]

- 9) As a feminist, I feel that this is really empowering but at the same time there's a lot of ways in which it's not. I have to be very complicit with things that **I'm not** comfortable with and I make that choice deliberately [...]
- 10) **I don't** let insecurity handle my life [...]

Extracts (7-10) reveal that when the authors discussed themselves, they talked about their bodies, primarily; the pressure they feel to maintain grooming habits (7); not conforming to men's expectations (8) and (10), and expressing the cognitive dissonance between enjoying sex-work and doing things that they consider degrading (9). The author in Extract (8) creates a declarative mood, and thus positions herself as an authority, by using unhedged and unmodalised statements. The statement *I'm not*, appears twice in the same sentence and involves two consecutive forms of categorical assertion. Here, the author discusses how she has learned not to care about what men think of her body and has thus become immune to the heterosexual male gaze. Stating *I couldn't care less*, the author conceptualises the rejection of oppressive beauty standards as an individual pursuit; something that can be resisted by an individual and has no connection to structural inequalities. Similarly in Extract (10) the author states that she doesn't *let* insecurity affect her, a statement which presupposes that insecurity is simply a state of mind which can be resisted if you try hard enough. This echoes the liberal feminist notions of power feminism as conceptualised by Naomi Wolf (1993), in which she argues that women's emancipation from patriarchal power structures are within reach and can be achieved if we reject, what she calls victim feminism. Victim feminism is defined as "when a woman seeks power through an identity of powerlessness" (as cited in Hains, 2009, p. 95). However, none of the authors in these Extracts discuss the cause of their pressure or insecurity as part of broader cultural and structural inequalities and pressures, such as the pressure for women to fit into normative feminine ideals (Gill, 2017). Therefore, I argue that these discourses contribute to postfeminist ideology.

Additionally, in Extracts (7) and (9) the authors construct a sense of self-reflexivity, possibly as a way to avoid criticism from their audience. In Extract (7) the author confesses that she is not like other girls who are good at performing their feminine identity. She goes on to discuss her desire to resist oppressive beauty standards by

flouting them, but also wanting to succumb to those standards, she ultimately concedes saying that it is her personal choice to do so. The author in Extract (9) addresses the tension between performing acts that make her uncomfortable and doing sex-work which she describes as *empowering*. Initially, the author positions herself as agentless; this degree of passivation (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016) is maintained by using the modal auxiliary *have*. Due to the lack of attribution, there is also a level of ambiguity around who is making her do these things, thus making the fact that she has to do these things as irrefutable. However, she then goes on to contradict this position, using the unhedged statement *I make that choice deliberately*, in essence saying that she is choosing to not have a choice. In the Extracts above, patriarchal oppression is conceptualised as something which manifests itself within the corporeal. The authors of texts in the DFN corpus texts regularly employ negative self-definition in constructing themselves as individuals who have managed to overcome certain oppressive beauty standards through self-regulation. Feminist commentator Jia Tolentino argues that this “delineation of political identity by what you are not ... it’s exacerbated by the internet, which revolves around brand-building and feelings of superiority” (2015, para. 27).

8.2.1 Minority Discourse: Feminism as the Cause of Oppression

Interestingly, concordance analysis of *I’m not* also revealed that the gender-based oppression raised by these authors is sometimes attributed to the feminist movements itself. This was a minority discourse, however, and only appeared in one text. In Extract (11) below, the author is discussing a movement that became popular on the internet called *Women Against Feminism*³²:

11) Unfortunately this time, we are our own oppressors. And, no, **I’m not** saying that I personally agree with these women or what they have to say [...]

The author’s use of active voice in the first sentence of Extract (11) and the present-tense verb *are* creates a declarative mood and conceptualises her opinion as fact and something that cannot be contested. Perhaps anticipating a negative response from the audience, she then goes on to defend her position by reiterating that she doesn’t

³² *Women Against Feminism* is an internet-based movement that began on Tumblr and grew in popularity when it spread to Twitter under the hashtag #womenagainstfeminism (BBC Trending, 2014).

personally agree with the movement. When the concordance line was expanded it was also revealed that the author used the metaphor of war, a trope common in the popular media's conceptualisations of feminism, to describe the proponents of the two opposed movements as *dividing the camps*, and that *Women Against Feminism creates a war*. Jaworska and Krishnamurthy (2012) write that this has been previously used to imbue feminist movement with negative connotations by characterising it as militant and fractious, where a lot of infighting occurs. Additionally, the characterisation of the feminist movement as something important, but also precarious and aggressive might indicate the double entanglement (McRobbie, 2009) of postfeminism, which at once embraces and rejects the feminism.

8.3 Self-disclosure in the DFN Corpus

An interesting pattern which emerged from the collocation analysis of the first-person pronoun *I* in the DFN corpus was the presence of the simple past-tense verbs *was* (MI3=19.399), *thought* (MI3=16.187), and *learned* (MI3=15.775). McEnery & Hardie (2012) stipulate that “a word collocates not only with some meaningful lexical items but also, or even instead, with some grammatical markers or grammatical categories” (p. 130). Therefore it was decided to examine the clusters *I was*, *I thought* and *I learned*, in context. As seen in Extracts (12-14), the concordance lines also revealed similar discourses of self-regulation and self-actualisation as found in section 8.2:

- 12) When **I was** 11, I had a really terrible goal: to be perfect [...]
- 13) There were so many times when **I thought** I could not finish this [...]
- 14) **I learned** to dump pretty much all my moral beliefs into three buckets “tree-hugging hippie,” “angry feminist,” and “social justice warrior” [...]

All Extracts exemplify what Fairclough (1995a) discusses as “self assessment in a confessional mode” (p. 92) in that the authors use past-tense verbs to discuss themselves and their personal growth. For example, expanding the concordance line in Extract (13) revealed that the author was discussing a dance she had to perform and how she overcame her anxiety before the performance. The Extract falls under a subheading within the article, titled *Secret to Success*, after which the author quotes her dance teacher who taught her as stating “success is stumbling from failure to failure with no

loss in enthusiasm”. Extracts (12-14) also show that some of the articles discuss more general and less overtly political personal journeys, such as learning to embrace imperfections (12), and learning to have more conviction in one’s beliefs (14). The detailing of personal journeys also suggests that the digital feminist news genre is interdiscursively linked to the personal journal weblog genre, which regularly employ self-disclosure and introspection (Siles, 2012). Furthermore, the disclosure of personal information about the author might make them more relatable.

As with the findings from the concordance analysis of *I* and *I’m*, the ability to become fully actualised is conceptualised as something that happens within the individual and does not require collective action. By including generalised personal experiences, the author may be attempting to build and maintain a relationship with their audience, who are in turn positioned as confidants to the author’s personal journeys. This is also confirmed by Jaworska and Krishnamurthy (2012), who state that the “focus on self-transformation ... encouraging women to believe they can meet all the challenges of modern life just by improving themselves” (p. 404) mars the endeavour for collective resistance. According to Banet-Weiser (2012), self-disclosure is also part of cultivating the postfeminist subject, in what she calls the knowledge is power trope theorised by Michele Lazar:

... confessional culture depends on the exposure of the self ... one’s private life is a central feature of popular entertainment and immaterial labour, the work on the self, affect, and emotion is the primary form of labor within the practice of self-branding. (p. 78).

Furthermore, the above concordance lines shown in sections 8.2, 8.2.1, and the current section, illustrate how the resistance of patriarchal oppression is conceptualised as an individual pursuit – as opposed to the collective reform of external power structures – where one can choose not to let insecurity or men’s expectations hold them back. In addition to this, the wider feminist movement itself is conceptualised as something oppressive and perilous. McRobbie (2009) argues that in a postfeminist culture, patriarchal power is reterritorialised in women’s bodies, where they are covertly encouraged make themselves the ideal individualised neoliberal subject by self-

regulating under the guise of personal choice. Banet-Weiser (2012) also argues that within the context of brand culture, “empowerment aimed for is most often personal and individual, not one that emerges from collective struggle or civic participation” (p .17). So, while it is important to recognise women as autonomous – indeed, studies have shown the conceptualisation of women as perpetual victims to be actively harmful (Talbot, 2007) – the discourses surrounding choice in this instance have brought into relief traces of postfeminist discourses, which do not necessarily serve to emancipate women from patriarchal power structures.

8.4 Intersectionality and Marginalised Voices

The second group of pronouns in the DFN corpus that were examined were *me* ($n=383$) and *my* ($n=570$). As seen in Table 8.3 below, most collocates of *me* are grammatical units, whereas the collocates of *my* included some lexical units, notably ones that relate to the corporeal self, such as *hair* (MI3=14.761), *body* (MI3=13.904), and *head* (MI3=13.413). This chapter begins by looking at this pattern in context.

Table 8.3: The 20 strongest collocates of *me* and *my* within a -4/+4 span in the DFN corpus

me	<i>to</i> (142), <i>for</i> (59), <i>told</i> (25), <i>that</i> (63), <i>and</i> (76), <i>they</i> (39), <i>my</i> (38), <i>it</i> (41), <i>a</i> (51), <i>the</i> (60), <i>tell</i> (14), <i>I</i> (40), <i>gave</i> (9), <i>she</i> (23), <i>makes</i> (11), <i>let</i> (10), <i>he</i> (17), <i>was</i> (24), <i>with</i> (23), <i>of</i> (35)
my	<i>I</i> (136), <i>and</i> (134), <i>to</i> (117), <i>in</i> (88), <i>of</i> (94), <i>the</i> (93), <i>own</i> (27), <i>hair</i> (24), <i>me</i> (37), <i>that</i> (59), <i>was</i> (40), <i>husband</i> (14), <i>body</i> (18), <i>on</i> (37), <i>friends</i> (16), <i>mom</i> (10), <i>with</i> (37), <i>life</i> (21), <i>head</i> (13), <i>job</i> (14)

Extracts (15-17) below show the concordances of these collocates in context:

15) My most frequent frustrating encounters with white people are with white women... to white women touching **my hair** or my body “complimentarily” [...]

16) This radical feminist shibboleth makes me see red. **My body** is not the source of my oppression [...]

17) I am the beneficiary of this biomedical system that marginalizes trans people and makes **my cis body** a superior body [...]

18) I imagined instilling in my little girls radical Black feminist teachings that would help them navigate an anti-Black woman world, including: Fuck you, pay **me, the** art of breaking white people's fingers when they touch you without permission [...]

The absence of modality in the Extracts above *are with white women, my body is not, I am the beneficiary* characterises the statements as fact and the authors as authoritative voices, although they are told from the perspective of one person. Interestingly, in Extracts (15) and (16) the authors make use of official discourse such as *shibboleth*, *beneficiary*, and *biomedical system*, which could be argued further position them as an authoritative voices. The lexicalisation in Extracts (15) and (18) of *white women* and *white people* indicates a discourse similar to that which was found in Chapter 5, which examined how the racialised identities of *white women* and *black women* were constructed within the DFN corpus. Furthermore, Extract (18) reveals tensions between various groups of women, particularly based in their racialised identities (Chamberlain, 2017) and extends the findings from Chapter 6 that which examined how *white women* and *black women* were differentiated.

Baker (2006) notes that examining the author of a text is sometimes just as important as examining the text itself. The author in Extract (16) identifies herself in the text as a *cis woman* who has a *transmasculine spouse*, and argues that she is uniquely positioned to critique the lack of gender-neutral language in reproductive healthcare because *I have intimate personal experience with the medical realities of pregnancy...the setting was hostile to my partner's genderqueer identity*. Similarly, the author of Extract (15) identifies herself as a *cis queer black woman*. In these texts, identity is foregrounded and over-lexicalisation is employed when discussing various aspects of their identity such as age and gender. This finding echoes the findings from Chapter 5 and particularly Chapter 7, which suggested that the identity of the author or interviewees who feature in the texts of the DFN corpus, are typically foregrounded and used to legitimise the author's authority to make categorical assertions. Expanding the concordance lines of the Extracts above also revealed that the voices of ordinary people, such as *a 22-year-old queer, trans, mixed-race nightlife performer*, and *a 24-year-old*

writer and PhD student in medical sociology, are hierarchised in a similar way to those identified in Chapter 7.

As in Chapter 7, these heirarchisation of voices and the detailing of personal experience in Extracts (15-18) embody an intersectional conceptualisation of feminism and, in contrast to the discourses found in the FT corpus in section 8.1, rejects the essentialist approach of classifying women as a single homogenous group. Furthermore, by frequently using the possessive pronoun *my*, the authors frame the discussion in the texts around their own subjectivities, which avoid making generalisations about the experiences of others. Again, this approach also embodies intersectional and poststructural ideologies, which centres personal subjectivities over generalisations which have the ability to ‘speak’ for other women, an approach which was criticised by many third-wave feminists for centring the concerns of white, middle-class women (Mendes, 2011, p. 7).

8.5 Individual Choice as a Feminist Act

The examination of concordances of *me* and *my* in context also revealed the neoliberal discourse of choice. In tandem with negative self-definition (section, 8.2) and self-disclosure (8.3) these discourse of choice conceptualises feminism as individualistic and embodies the postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2017). Extracts (19) and (20) exemplify the discourse of choice in the DFN corpus:

19) Plenty of people have voiced their opinions about **my body** choices [...]

20) **My** project will be detoxing my **own** shame rather than tamping it down or projecting scorn on to others [...]

In Extract (19) the author is discussing her decision to get a breast augmentation - an Extract from the same source text, which was reproduced in Chapter 5. Both texts make use of the word *choice*, a term which is part of the neoliberal rhetoric of individualism and agency, which Gill (2017) argues is a key component of postfeminism. Additionally, by using the collective noun *people* at the beginning of the clause the author in Extract (19) is positioning anyone with a dissenting voice against plastic surgery as judgmental, and conceptualises disagreement as something oppressive.

Similarly in Extract (20) the author, although not discussing something they have done personally, is publically making a commitment to not judge other people and to conceptualise judgment or disagreement as a manifestation of internalised shame. Interestingly, the author uses words such as *detoxing*, *shame*, and *scorn* which allude to the moral and religious. The use of the word *detoxing* is particularly interesting here. By conceptualising disagreement as toxic, the author evokes the well-known religious motif of purification (Preston & Ritter, 2012). Additionally, *shame* and *scorn*, also positions dissenters as moralistic, and characterises any disagreement as oppressive. Thus, the use of these words together reinforces the idea that gender equality is, again, an individual pursuit which can be satisfied through a kind of asceticism, and centres personal choice as the ultimate form of emancipation. By positioning themselves as non-judgmental the authors in both Extracts characterise themselves favourably in a “neoliberal framework that ... holds dear ... individualism” (Vavrus, 2012, p. 231).

8.6 Positioning the Author as an Authority

This chapter, which examines the final three key pronouns in the DFN corpus, suggests that when discussing themselves, the authors regularly discuss others too. In this final section, collocates of *you* ($n=716$), *your* ($n=241$) and *you're* ($n=105$) are examined to discern how the audience is conceptualised by the authors of the digital feminist news media texts and how the author positions themselves in relation to the audience.

Table 8.4: The 20 strongest collocates of *you*, *your* and *you're* within a -4/+4 span in the DFN corpus

you	<i>if</i> (91), <i>to</i> (189), <i>are</i> (90), <i>that</i> (113), <i>do</i> (59), <i>can</i> (56), <i>a</i> (110), <i>the</i> (132), <i>have</i> (65), <i>know</i> (41), <i>you</i> (45), <i>and</i> (99), <i>will</i> (39), <i>what</i> (44), <i>tell</i> (23), <i>don't</i> (35), <i>if</i> (56), <i>yourself</i> (17), <i>be</i> (42), <i>think</i> (26)
your	<i>you</i> (45), <i>to</i> (54), <i>and</i> (44), <i>own</i> (14), <i>of</i> (39), <i>the</i> (43), <i>life</i> (13), <i>is</i> (23), <i>what</i> (15), <i>wear</i> (6), <i>a</i> (26), <i>doctors</i> (5), <i>in</i> (23), <i>loved</i> (6), <i>if</i> (13), <i>that</i> (22), <i>on</i> (15), <i>with</i> (15), <i>find</i> (6), <i>into</i> (9)
you're	<i>supposed</i> (9), <i>if</i> (23), <i>to</i> (35), <i>doing</i> (9), <i>not</i> (18), <i>a</i> (23), <i>sure</i> (5), <i>that</i> (18), <i>right</i> (6), <i>enough</i> (5), <i>and</i> (18), <i>when</i> (8), <i>like</i> (8), <i>your</i> (7), <i>so</i> (8), <i>going</i> (5), <i>make</i> (5), <i>because</i> (6), <i>people</i> (7), <i>be</i> (7)

As seen in Table 8.4, *you* colligates frequently with verbs³³ *do* (MI3=16.841), *don't* (MI3=14.753) and *be* (MI3=14.175), as well as the modal auxiliary *can* (MI3=16.504). The concordance analysis revealed that the pronoun *you* is generally used indefinitely to “claim membership of a shared lifeworld” (Fairclough 1995a, p. 181) and to position the author as an authority, who has the ability to make certain claims because of the lifeworld that they share with their audience. This can be seen in Extract (21) below:

21) In case someone wants to #NotAllWhiteTransWomen at me, I suggest **you don't** [...]

The operator verb *don't* in Extract (21) positions the author as an authority with the right to give directives to the audience. Although a degree of modality is maintained through the use of the word *suggest*, it is implied that there will be consequences if they do and thus creates a threatening tone. Here there is a clear tension between “an authoritative relationship with the audience, and a relationship of solidarity” (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 181). Extract (22) for the DFN corpus demonstrates something similar:

22) Feminism isn't about doing what **you're supposed** to do [...]

23) It is possible to believe in **your own** politics and not expect other people to echo you [...]

The author in Extract (22) above also positions themselves as an authority by making evaluative claims about what feminism is and by using expressive modality to present her opinion as fact. According to the author, feminism not about accepting the status-quo, however what actually defines the movement and its goals is still left ambiguous. This is similar to the findings in section 8.2 which looked at the pronouns *I* and *I'm*, and identified where the authors used negative self-definition to discuss their ideological positioning. Here the author is using a declarative mood, to position the audience members as understudies and the author as the teacher (Fairclough, 1989). Extract (23) shows a slightly different approach, the author does not make claims about what feminism is or is not. Instead the author encourages the audience to accept other points of view. There are two consecutive forms of modulation in Extract (23) through the use

³³ Here, the verbs were identified and manually classified using a concordance analysis to examine their use in context.

of *it is possible* and *not expect*, where she uses expressive modality to, again, present her argument as fact. These findings suggests that there is a tension between being authoritative and persuasive in the DFN corpus, and also suggests that many of the authors in the DFN corpus position themselves as “morally authoritative” (White, 2003, p. 262).

Richardson (2004) describes news media as an “argumentative discourse genre” (as cited in Baker et al., 2013, p. 3) which could explain the level of authority these authors give themselves to make categorical or bare assertions. This largely monoglossic (Bakhtin, 1981), or single-voiced assertive style feature of the DFN corpus is manifest in “unhedged claims ... located in the textual voice’s single, autonomous and isolated subjecthood, and as not in tension with, or contradistinction to, any alternative position or positions” (White, 2003, p. 263).

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has identified two intersectional and postfeminist conceptualisations of feminism. As examined in section 8.4, the Digital Feminist News corpus contains discourses about identity and this is used by the authors to position their own subjectivity as important through the use of personal narratives about the ways in which they experience oppression. Mendes (2011) has argued that “softer news genres open up the possibility for change as they do not require journalists to follow [masculine] conventions of objectivity, balance or the need for a diverse range of sources” (p. 164–165). As a result, this enables the digital feminist news media to include a more diverse range of voices and perspectives, in an political environment that still largely contains solipsistic discourses of the White, heterosexual and cis-gendered (Vavrus, 2012). These intersectional discourses were also identified in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Additionally, in comparison to the essentialist discourses identified in the Feminist Theory corpus, these intersectional discourses indicate a shift away from the universal category of *woman*, toward a feminism which accounts for differences between groups of people and how they experience oppression.

Furthermore, this chapter identified the presence of the discourse of self-disclosure, and the discourse of choice which through their focus on the individual, construct a postfeminist ideology; something which is counterproductive to the feminist movement. Pruchniewska (2017) writes that while the internet has created new avenues for feminist activism and expression, content creators operate in an increasingly precarious environment where neoliberal market forces prevail. This often means that those who work in creative industries – including the media industry – work on a freelance basis rather than as a permanent employee, and therefore rely on self-branding and self-promotion in order to succeed. Many creators of feminist content “must adhere to this individualistic logic of self-branding” (p. 2) which in turn creates a tension between collective feminist goals and postfeminism which prioritises autonomy, choice and individual responsibility.

The forthcoming and final chapter of this study reviews all the macro-level discourses identified in Chapters 5-8 and examines them by using Fairclough (1995a) and Fairclough and Chouliaraki’s (1999) concept of the order of discourse. These discourses are consolidated and connected and then positioned within a broader social context which aims to explain the social conditions which have led to the presence of these discourses in the DFN corpus and how these affect and are affected by the social world.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

9.0 Introduction

As demonstrated in Chapters 5-8, an examination of the keywords *women*, *gender*, *queer* and key *pronouns* in the Digital Feminist News corpus provided focal points for the analysis of the digital feminist news texts. Furthermore, an analysis of the corresponding keywords in the Feminist Theory corpus allowed for comparisons to be made between the two corpora, as well as the mapping of shifts in language use. The comparative analyses revealed a bricolage of micro and macro-level discourses within the DFN corpus. It is the configuration of these individual macro-level discourses which provide the basis for this discussion, which utilises Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995b) framework of the *order of discourse*. Henceforth, this concluding chapter will begin by re-examining Fairclough's theory of orders of discourse. Following that, the collective macro-level discourses revealed in Chapters 5-8 are reviewed and positioned within a broader socio-cultural context. Finally, the implications of these findings and the limitations of implementing a corpus-based approach to critical discourse analysis are addressed.

9.1 The Order of Discourse of Digital Feminist News

At the beginning of this study I posed the question, how is feminism conceptualised in digital feminist news? In exploring the answer to this question, two separate foci were considered. The first being potential ideological shifts within feminism (Chamberlain, 2017) and the second, being the impact that the conventions of the digital news media genre might have on contemporary conceptualisations of feminism. In the final chapter of this study I now revisit these two foci, and through Fairclough's framework of the *order of discourse*, set out to discuss how these factors have shaped conceptualisations of feminism.

9.1.1 Revisiting the Order of Discourse

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, a central tenet of Fairclough's (1989, 1995a, 1995b) approach to CDA is an analysis of the *order of discourse*. In Fairclough's (1995a) view, when analysing discourse it is necessary to include an "alternation between twin, complementary focuses" (p. 56), these twin foci are referred to as *communicative events*, and the *order of discourse*. Fairclough and Chouliaraki (1999) describe the order of discourse, a term adapted from Foucault (1971), as "a socially structured articulation of discursive practices [including both genres and discourses] which constitutes the discursive facet of the social order of a social field, such as politics, media or education" (p. 114). The close analysis of keywords in Chapters 5-8 aimed to fulfil the analysis of communicative events of the texts, utilising Fairclough's three-dimensional framework – *text, discourse practice, sociocultural practice*. This concluding chapter will now move to the second of the twin foci, which examines the order of discourse of the DFN corpus and aims to attend to the social and cultural "contextual matrix" (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 50) which constitutes and is constituted by the discursive practices of digital feminist news. The following sections will attend to the individual macro-discourses present - *the public colloquial discourse, the discourse of authenticity, the discourse of experience, the discourse of identity, and the discourse of choice* - in the social field of digital feminist news in turn, and then an example will be given to demonstrate how these discourses work synergistically within the digital feminist news.

9.2 Public colloquial Discourse:

The *public colloquial discourse* (Leech, 1966) is manifest in a several linguistic features in the DFN corpus. Notably, in the presence of lifeworld discourse (Fairclough, 1995a) such as the inclusive from of *we*, and the indefinite use of *you*, which, in Chapter 4, features as one of the word with the highest keyness value in the DFN corpus. This discourse is also manifest in the heirarchisation of voices, wherein experiences of ordinary people (*a nightlife performer, a medical student, an Afro-Latina TPOC*) are reported in direct speech and given priority over other voices. And finally, in the interdiscursive hybridisation of official and conversational discourses, a feature particularly noticeable in Chapters 6 and 7, where technical jargon such as *biomedical*

system, femme genderqueer, gender binary; is regularly combined with colloquial, conversational language.

This hybridisation of conversational and official discourses is exemplary of the phenomena which Fairclough (1995a) refers to as the conversationalisation of discourse, a phenomena in which media have tried to “bridge the gap between the public conditions of media production and the private conditions of consumption” (p. 37) by evolving a new language. Conversationalisation has led to, what Fairclough (1995a) describes as “cultural democratization” (p. 13), and is a consequence of the “two tensions” (p. 10) which affect media language in contemporary social life. These are the tension between public and private, and the tension between information and entertainment which he refers to as the “marketization of discourse” (p. 10). These two phenomena exemplify the reorganisation of boundaries between discourses of various fields and institutions within late capitalist society, where social relations favour ordinary people over traditional authority and consumers over producers.

9.3 Discourse of *authenticity*:

As discussed above, another discourse which is attributable to the technology deployed in the dissemination of digital feminist news is the *discourse of authenticity* (Pruchniewska, 2017). According to Pruchniewska, many creators of digital feminist content are employed on a freelance basis, working in an “increasingly precarious neoliberal environment” (p. 1), which has “come to be the new standard in the entrepreneurialised labour market of the knowledge economy” (Gandini, 2016, p. 33). Within this oft precarious job market, reputation-building is central to accruing the social capital necessary to being successful. In the context of digital feminist content creation, presenting oneself as authentic is integral to maintaining a solid reputation (Pruchniewska, 2017), and according to Banet-Weiser (2013), “one not only has to brand oneself as authentic but literally has to *be* authentic” (p. 80). Although related to more recent economic and technologic developments, the discourse of authenticity has its formations during the 1970s and 1980s when niche marketing emerged in tandem with identity politics, making authenticity a “desirable market category” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 30). In the DFN corpus, the discourse of authenticity is closely related to linguistic systems of authority, where the absence of modality and regular employment of a single-voiced assertive style (White, 2003) positions the author as an authoritative

voice, with the appropriate experience and knowledge-base to make categorical assertions. The discourse of authenticity is often realised through the public disclosure of the author's political and ideological values, a feature which is exemplified in Chapter 8. In this chapter the authors employ negative self-definition, or denounce other feminism's which are deemed inauthentic (Pruchniewska, 2017) as way of delineating their politics from others' (Tolentino, 2015). Fairclough (1993) notes that, self-promotion is an omnipresent aspect of social life under late capitalism as is increasingly "becoming part-and-parcel of self-identity" (p. 142).

9.4 Discourse of *experience*:

Closely tied to the discourse of authenticity is the *discourse of experience* (Phipps, 2016). According to Siles (2012) the discourse of experience is interdiscursively linked to the personal weblog genre. Feminism has long been interested in the subjectivities of women, hence the adage 'the personal is political.' However, within the context of a knowledge-based economy, the concept of self-disclosure is increasingly employed as a way of curating authenticity. Banet-Weiser (2012) notes that, "the detailing of one's everyday life for other's consumption [gives audiences] a complete view of one's 'authentic' self" (p. 60). Furthermore, Phipps (2016) argues that:

experience is a form of capital invested to generate feeling and make political gains. This politics is quintessentially neoliberal, abstracting experience from its social context and deploying it in a competitive discursive arena in which historical dynamics, social contexts and structural power relations are obscured ... the dialectic between oppression and empowerment ... plays out over the 'authentic' experience. (p. 312)

I argue that within this context, the discourse of experience is utilised in the DFN corpus to both necessitate the accretion of social capital and discuss personal subjectivities, and it is necessary to make a distinction between the two. Regarding the discussion of personal subjectivities, Chapters 5, 6, and 7 illustrate how the discourse of experience was employed in conjunction with the discourse of identity – which I discuss below – to describe experiences unique to particular groups of women. The *discourse of experience* and the *discourse of identity* are, in part, employed in the DFN corpus to

resist the subsuming of differences between women and exemplify a (largely) intersectional approach to feminism which aims to attend to the experiences of women at different intersections of race, class, ability and so-on. This is a salient feature of the DFN corpus and will be discussed at length in the following section. The *discourse of experience* is also employed to curate the authentic self, this can be seen in Chapter 8 where the authors described processes of self-actualisation, prioritising individual agency, responsibility and choice over collective action. This discourse is problematic within a feminist context as it embraces the “rhetoric of individualism” (Pruchniewska, 2017, p. 2) which is a large component of postfeminist discourse (Gill, 2017; McRobbie, 2009).

9.5 Discourse of *identity*:

The penultimate discourse identified in this discussion is the *discourse of identity*. Unlike the discourse of conversation and the discourse of authenticity, the discourse of identity is constituted by – and constitutes – ideological shifts within the feminist movement itself. The discourse of identity is a major component of the order of discourse of digital feminist news, and this is made obvious by the overwhelming presence of identity-related keywords such as *trans*, *gender*, *queer*, *woman*, and *man*, and the repeated foregrounding of identity evident in Chapters 6 and 7. Furthermore, it is not simply the quantity of identity-related words that are significant, but the type of word used. As the comparative analyses revealed, there is a significant difference in the way identity is conceptualised in both corpora which signify ideological shifts. The conceptualisation of identity in digital feminist news is informed by poststructuralism and social constructionism which stresses the irreducibility of identities to a single essentialised subject. In contrast to this, the feminist theory frequently conceptualised identity as innate, fixed and stable – a feature which was particularly evident in the metaphor analysis in Chapter 7. Additionally, the discourse of identity is utilised to highlight differences between women who, as evidenced in Chapter 5, are only treated as a homogenous group in discussions surrounding sexual and physical violence.

In addition to this, the conceptualisation of identity as multifarious is exemplified in the digital feminist news by the use of specialised acronyms such as *TPOC* and *QPOC* and the combining of discourses of identity with the discourses of experience. This

intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) approach works “in tandem with postmodern insistence on fluidity and variety” (Gordon, 2016, p. 354). It could therefore be argued that these elements combined signal a shift towards what scholars have defined as fourth-wave feminism³⁴ (Chamberlain, 2017; Munro, 2013). This approach typically emphasises the differences between women and resists essentialising them. However, as evidenced in Chapters 6 and 7, intersectionality can sometimes turn to essentialist assumptions and, as some scholars have argued, the over-stress on difference may deprive feminism of the ability to cohere around critiques of patriarchal oppression (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990).

9.6 Discourse of *choice*

The *discourse of choice* (Gill, 2017) is the last in the order of discourse of digital feminist news. This discourse was identified in Chapters 5 and 8 though, reassuringly, this discourse does not dominate the DFN corpus like the fourth-wave discourses of identity do. According to Gill (2017) the discourse of choice is closely linked to the reinforcement of normative femininity and is a “core feature” (p. 607) of postfeminism which prioritises autonomy, agency and individualism over collective action and structural change. The context in which the discourse of choice is typically used in the digital feminist news is in relation to the body, specifically, to justify altering appearances by plastic surgery and shaving to remove body hair. Using the discourse of choice in this way is emblematic of what McRobbie (2009) calls the reterritorialisation of patriarchy in women’s bodies, through increased surveillance on women and how they perform normative femininity. The recontextualisation of the neoliberal lexicon into feminist discourse indicates just how pervasive postfeminism is and the “unevenness” (Gill, 2017, p. 611) of feminist visibilities.

9.7 The Order of Discourse in Situ

The discourses in the order of discourse of digital feminist news, as described above, are constantly changing and overlapping with one another. Therefore, a single discourse

³⁴ Although radical feminism, liberal feminism, and Marxist feminism were identified in the DFN corpus these appeared as minority discourses. Their lack of presence also indicated how much the DFN corpus was dominated by fourth-wave conceptualisations of feminism.

is not enough to constitute digital feminist news. Instead, these discourses in the order of discourse intersect with each other and work together to articulate different conceptualisations of feminism. By examining an extended reproduction of an article from the DFN corpus, the interdiscursive blend of the discourse of choice, identity, authenticity and experience and how they work synergistically can be demonstrated. The extract below is taken from an article titled *My Plastic Surgery Is Feminist As Fuck* (sic):

- 1 I'm formerly guilty of doing this: I am guilty of making excuses to justify my decisions [...]
- 2 My dear fellow feminists, let's cool it on the respectability politics, ey?
- 3 I'm only concerned about someone's decorative choices if it disrupts their life, or someone else's [...]
- 4 any person who was born with a vagina probably has experienced trauma due to their gender [...]
- 5 "It's not natural," types the SWERF/TERF/Fedora [...]

The public colloquial discourse is apparent in Line (2) where the author employs conversational language such as *let's cool it* and *ey?* It is also emphasised in the use of first-person pronouns *I'm* and *my*, which appear in Lines (1-3); both of these pronouns appeared in the keyword list of the DFN corpus. The discourse of experience is manifest in Line (1) where the author discloses that she is *formerly guilty* of justifying her decisions. By conceptualising it as something that happened in the past, the author is suggesting that she has learned not to care what others think of her decisions anymore through a process of self-actualisation. The foregrounding of this self-disclosure facilitates the *discourse of authenticity* and gives the author the authority to make the imperative statement "let's cool it with the respectability politics." This discourse is actualised through the author stating her own personal ideologies, which involves the discourse of choice (*someone's decorative choices*), and negative self-definition (*SWERF/TERF/Fedora*), which she uses to disassociate herself from other feminist ideologies. Though less present in this Extract, the discourse of identity is evident in Line (5) in which the author makes generalisations about the *trauma* experienced by *people born with a vagina*. Although the hedge *probably* reduces the author's level of authoritativeness, she draws on her own identity as a woman and the knowledge she has gained through her experiences as a woman, to make her argument more convincing.

9.8 Summary and Implications of Key Findings

The analysis of communicative events in Chapters 5-8 and the analysis of the order of discourse in the current chapter, suggest that digital feminist news is constituted by (and constitutes) both an ideological shift within feminism, and by the conventions of the digital news genre. The effect of the precarious neoliberal market environment of digital news on the digital feminist news is made visible by the colonisation (Fairclough, 1995b) of digital feminist news by the individualistic ethos of self-branding. This discourse constitutes and is constituted by momentous social and economic shifts in late modernity, specifically the transition to a knowledge-based economy (Gandini, 2016). As Pruchniewska (2017) notes, these social and economic shifts present challenges for feminist content creators in negotiating between the collective goals of the feminist movement and the individualist, postfeminist ethos of the digital environment. Alongside this, the public colloquial discourse, although not an effect of the neoliberal environment, also represents changes in late-modern life, specifically the reorganisation of traditional social and institutional boundaries and “cultural democratization” (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 13).

Ideological shifts within feminism are articulated through the (often intersecting) discourses of choice, identity, and experience. In particular, the discourse of choice, exemplifies the continuing prominence of postfeminism in feminist visibilities. Some scholars have argued that the “new cultural prominence” (Gill, 2017, p. 611) of feminism – notably fourth-wave feminism – has disrupted postfeminism, therefore rendering the term redundant (Retallack, Ringrose, & Lawrence, 2016). However, in agreeance with Gill (2017) and McRobbie (2004), I argue that although the digital feminist news is dominated by fourth-wave conceptualisations of feminism, the recontextualisation of choice within digital feminist news indicates that postfeminism continues to hold relevance.

Indeed, the interdiscursive blend of the discourses of identity and experience generally constitute a fourth-wave (Chamberlain, 2017; Munro, 2012) conceptualisation of feminism which emphasises the fluid and intersecting nature of identity and oppression. By resisting essentialism these discourses aim to attend to differences between groups

of people, notably women, and indicate the potential within digital feminist news to amplify voices which have traditionally been marginalised (Kingston Mann, 2014). However, this conceptualisation of feminism sometimes reinforces essentialist assumptions. As Phipps (2016) observes, “if experience is capital, it can only be invested in particular currencies, which polarises narratives and suppresses the possibilities in between” (p. 313). Furthermore, this tension is one of the primary findings of this study which is the ongoing negotiation between naming the subject and the deconstruction of the subject, and the parallel negotiation between solidarity and individual action. Fairclough and Chouliaraki (1999) argue that both can be achieved:

[A] critical synthesis of the postmodern decentring of essential identities and a feminist commitment to radical politics can provide the basis for a powerful social theory which overcomes the limitations of the two, leading to political projects based on alliances and on working and dialoguing across difference. (p. 91)

In an environment that prizes individualism over achieving collective common goals, the ability to dialogue across difference may be hindered as it has the ability to create silos. Additionally, this finding raises significant questions about how dialoguing across difference might be necessitated, not only within the context of digital feminist news, but in other social dimensions.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the majority of research done on the representation of feminism in the media has focused on mainstream media (Bradley, 2003; Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012; Mendes, 2011; Refern & Aune, 2010; Rhode, 1995). While this research has been invaluable in illuminating the problematic ways in which feminism is often derided or totally ignored, there is presently very little research into how niche feminist news sites are also contributing to feminist visibilities in a media context. Furthermore, many of these studies did not utilise CL or CDA in their analyses. In taking an approach which utilises both CL and CDA, I have aimed to contribute to a more complete understanding of feminist visibilities in the news. Considering digital feminist news as form of discourse which both constitutes and is constitutive of the social world, allowed the effects of the social and economic environment on the discourses to be taken into account. Furthermore, employing corpora to facilitate a comparative analysis between digital feminist news texts and theoretical feminist texts

gave historical context and allowed shifts in language use, and therefore discourses and ideologies, to be examined and revealed. Additionally, taking a curiosity-based approach (Baker & McEnery, 2015) to CDA allowed me to investigate the positive and negative aspects of the texts (Toolan, 2002). There are, however, several limitations which relate to data collection and data analysis. In the following, and final, section I will return to the corpus-based approach to CDA and its limitations, then I will separately discuss issues of data collection and analysis.

9.9 Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this study which relate to different elements of the research process, these will be dealt with individually in the concluding section of this study. First, some concerns related to implementing a corpus-based critical discourse analysis will be discussed, following this, limitations arising from the data collection and data analysis components are reflected upon and suggestions for further research are made.

9.9.1 A Corpus-based Approach to CDA

CL and CDA have their respective strengths and weaknesses; the hope is that both techniques are used in a way which plays on their respective strengths, while complementing the weaknesses of the approaches when applied separately (Baker et al., 2008). However there are still limitations, even when the two are implemented together. Widdowson (2004) argues that in undertaking CDA, the analysts own political agenda and ideologies can unduly influence the research process, which can lead to analysts only seeking out findings which confirm their pre-held beliefs. The “bottom-up” (Baker & Levon, 2015, p. 222) or data-driven approach taken by corpus linguists can help guard against some of the cherry-picking arguments that CDA garners. However, it is important not to overstate the objectivity of a corpus-based approach (Baker, 2006). Various decisions were made during the research process which likely affected my findings. First, when implementing a corpus-based approach, the analyst must make subjective decisions regarding cut-off points and statistical measures. In Chapter 3, I outlined which measures and cut-off points are used for purposes of transparency and, where possible, justified these decisions by following other researchers. However, there is still research needed around cut-off points and statistical measures, and there is no

universal agreement about which is most appropriate (Baker, 2006). Where I could not draw from pre-existing research, the decisions regarding cut-off-points were typically made with a focus on expediency and reducing the amount of data to make it more manageable, which undoubtedly affected the scope of my research.

Similarly, because of time and word limit constraints, I could not include the findings from all the keyword analyses I carried out and therefore had to make decisions about what findings to foreground and which to leave out. Anataki, Billig, Edwards, and Potter (2003) warn against “under-analysis through summary” (p. 1) in which the analyst simply discusses the descriptive data without considering and linking the findings to the wider, social, political or historical contexts. However, these “so-what” (Baker & Levon, 2015, p. 232) findings often contribute to the validity and reliability of the analysts hypotheses. Additionally, researchers who have pre-existing knowledge of the society in which the texts come from may be more likely to overlook such findings (Baker & Levon, 2015). I aimed to maintain a certain level of reflexivity about how my pre-existing knowledge of feminism might influence which findings I decided to include or exclude. However, it involved a balancing act between including information which may not have surprised me but contributed to the validity of my analysis, and including everything which I considered novel and interesting.

9.9.2 Data Collection

There are two primary limitations which relate to the data collected and utilised for this analysis. Firstly, this analysis did not examine modalities such as pictures or videos, which regularly appeared imbedded in the articles used for the DFN corpus. The texts in this corpus contain information that is, to an extent, decontextualized; removed from other semiotic modes which all contribute to the texts. This omission is relatively significant as Kress (2005) notes that valued modes change through history and we are now watching conventional writing give way to image. The second limitation of this study relates to the production of the texts used to compile both corpora. Most of the texts which feature in the FT corpus were produced by English-speaking North American authors. Similarly, many of the news sites from which the DFN corpus was compiled are North American-based. While it could be argued that the texts from both corpora are read worldwide and therefore have influence outside of the Western world,

this research is still limited to offering a distinctly Western feminist perspective. This is also a criticism of the CDA paradigm, as Bloomaert (2005) argues, “there is no reason to restrict critical analyses of discourse to highly integrated, Late Modern and post-industrial, densely semiotised First-World societies” (p. 35, as cited in Baker, 2006).

9.9.3 Data Analysis

As discussed in Chapter 3, I have not aimed to provide completely objective findings, and as demonstrated at the beginning of this section I have made subjective decisions related to the data analysis. In order to “fully engage within the remit of CDA [the analyst must] go beyond a mere descriptive account ... the political biases of the analyst must come into play” (Baker, 2012, p. 253). Therefore, it is likely that not everyone will agree with my findings (Baker et al., 2013). This is to be expected to an extent. However, it is important to note that the perspective of the audience and the creator of these texts were not taken into account in this analysis. These perspectives are vital in the meaning-making process, and as Crichton (2010) notes, Fairclough’s approach to CDA has a tendency to marginalise the perceptions of the creators and consumers of texts. Fairclough (2003) himself argues that there is no final reading of a text.

9.10 Conclusion

Since the inception of Web 2.0 technologies, feminist activism has flourished online. Additionally, the internet has provided novel avenues for feminists to carry out their activism, particularly discursive activism (Keller, 2016; Mendes, 2015). The potential for the internet to unite feminists from geographically distant places and to propel the activities of the feminist movement into the mainstream consciousness is evidenced in movements such as The Everyday Sexism Project and SlutWalk. Digital feminist news sites are also a key component of digital feminist activism and they provide content to audiences of millions. These modes of feminist activism, which address issues such as sexual harassment and racism are particularly important given that postfeminism continues to maintain hegemony. Hegemonic postfeminism is a complex double entanglement that at once accepts and rejects feminism, characterising it as cool but also outdated and obsolete (Gill, 2017; McRobbie, 2009). Postfeminism also subsumes the

neoliberal tenets of individualism and choice, while rejecting collective action and failing to attend to structural inequities that give rise to patriarchal oppression. Moreover, the resurgence of feminist activism and feminist visibilities in a postfeminist culture creates an environment that is often uneven and jarring (Gill, 2017).

While the internet has become a central component of contemporary feminist activism, the digital cultural production of the internet aligns more closely with postfeminist values as it incentivises individualistic practices such as self-branding. Utilising tools associated with CL and CDA allowed me to investigate this uneven environment and how both postfeminist and feminist ideologies might be manifest in discourse. When I began this study I was not expecting to find postfeminist ideology within the digital feminist news media, however this was identified several times and was (re)produced in the neoliberal discourse of choice, negative self-definition and self-actualisation. The texts, where these discourses were identified, sometimes characterised the feminist movements and its proponents as aggressive and oppressive. Furthermore, one particular text conceptualised plastic surgery as liberatory and likened getting a breast augmentation to the emancipation fought for by the civil rights movement. I argue that these discourses are counterproductive to feminism as they do not take structural inequities into account and encourage individual choice over collective action. Intersectional discourses were identified which exemplified an approach to feminism which takes into account overlapping systems of oppression. The texts in which these discourses were found discussed the ways in which structural and institutional oppression is maintained through issues such as the lack of appropriate healthcare available to transgender people. These intersectional discourses illuminate the inequities that different women continue to face, and offer a comprehensive view of patriarchal oppression. However, I also argue that the individualistic, neoliberal cultural production of the internet also has the ability to affect these intersectional discourses by creating silos, which make it difficult to dialogue across difference and achieve solidarity (Fairclough & Chouliaraki, 1999). The heightened focus on the individual within the digital feminist news media is troubling, as collective action is a necessary component of feminist activism, and moreover, any political movement.

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