Sex versus Sexism

For the last decade I have caught myself writing different versions of the same essay about feminism again and again. The topics shifted from one essay to the next, but not each essay's basic argument. Self-satirically at first, I suspected that the problem arose from an occupational hazard, a Freudian-style repetition compulsion to which I had unwittingly succumbed. I was hardly the first academic to find herself rehearsing a similar paper, merely varying a well-worn thesis better discarded long ago. Yet gradually I became convinced that contemporary feminism continues to confront a deeper dilemma than that posed by a tired analytic framework alone.

Even today, the pleasures of sexuality and the pain inflicted by sexism remain stubbornly enmeshed in male-dominated societies like our own; it is difficult to extricate erotic joy from oppressive vulnerability. Although imposed from without, this conundrum may have affected the feminist movement within. During the 1980s and 1990s, a division became apparent within feminist discussions, referred to among feminists, and later in the popular media, as "sex debates" or "sex wars."[1] More precisely, one might describe the problem as a splitting of sex from sexism—an understandable but worrisome tendency, which potentially dilutes the collective power of feminism.

Thus feminist debates, not just my essays about them, have unfolded like variations on a recurrent theme. This theme is the splitting of sex from sexism, a division that makes two valid and related goals seem

mutually exclusive. One feminist goal is the achievement of sexual freedom for women, an aim that reflects feminists' realization that male-dominated societies characteristically exert power by restricting the expression of women's desires. Sexuality has been permissible only with certain partners and in certain forms. Heterosexuality is elevated to a privileged status, of course, a discrimination that affects anyone, male or female, who is perceived to "deviate." Yet, because tied to a system of gendered controls overall, the institutionalization of heterosexuality has had especially damaging effects on women: for example, heterosexual practices have frequently favored men's freedom over women's by condoning double standards of sexual behavior. This bias has meant that a diverse range of women's sexual feelings and preferences—to live with and love other women as lesbians, for example, or to live a bisexual existence that challenges sexual categories usually defined only as binary, or to live alone (whether celibate or while enjoying multiple sexual partners)—are, by contrast, demeaned and discouraged. Because of this history of sexual repression, many feminists feel strongly, and understandably so, that procuring sexual freedom for all women must be a central concern of the feminist movement. This goal of sexual freedom is often pursued through individual defiance: here, sexual practices that challenge traditional constraints become a mode of rebellion and a quite personal politics. To seek and find physical pleasure is believed to be a good, even in a sexist present.[2]

One feminist goal, then, is that women be able to enjoy sexual freedom. Another, just as necessary, is that women be able to attain freedom from sexism. Feminists emphasizing this aim are more likely to discuss the oppressiveness and wide-ranging character of sexism more than the subversive power of sexuality. This political approach tends to take shape in protesting inequitable social practices and challenging the institutional structures of "patriarchy" writ large. Here, feminists express less concern about sexual freedom at an individual level than about the radical transformations required across a wide range of social institutions—in the law, say, or at workplaces—where gendered discrimination takes place. This emphasis includes but tends to point past sexuality: sex itself is less significant than its multifaceted ramifications in terms of power. Through sexuality, a broad array of relationships of dominance and subordination, from the economic to the familial, are maintained because male-dominated societies oppress women overall.[3]

What about these two positions are necessarily in contradiction with one another? On their face, they do not seem mutually exclusive at all,

but intimately connected. In male-dominated societies, sexuality and sexist discriminations are closely entwined though they are not precisely identical: sexist discriminations include, but are not limited to, the sexual. Yet we have already seen that for lesbian and bisexual women, marginalization has historically resulted from this complicated interrelationship. For many heterosexual women, this unhappy marriage between sex and sexism poses a different but also a distinctively troubling dilemma: can women enjoy heterosexual encounters without sexist subordination, and confront sexism without having to renounce heterosexual pleasures? Given this connection, no reason exists in principle why feminists must choose between devoting political attention to sex or to sexism. Indeed, the even more serious problem is precisely those circumstances that lead women to feel as though a rigid pattern has been set in place, leaving little apparent choice *but* to choose. For, as will be seen through five examples that range from the debate about pornography from the 1970s to a current 1990s debate about beauty, a sense of antagonism developed and often persists between feminists along exactly these lines. The sources of these antagonisms are highly complex, involving intellectual disagreements as well as individuals' very differing psychic approaches to personal and political life. Nor can the reasons for recurrent divides be reduced to essentially a matter of women's divergent social backgrounds. Women of varying classes, races, ages, and sexual orientations have found themselves more in sympathy with one side of a particular debate than another. Regarding sadomasochism, for example, agreement has existed among women who are straight, lesbian, or self-identified as bisexual that judgmental attitudes toward consensual exploration of S/M sex is repressive, contradicting the best interests of the feminist movement overall. Other women, across the same range of sexual orientations, have agreed that sadomasochistic sexuality entails a mode of desire that is basically inseparable from the social and psychic effects of male-dominated societies, and therefore poses a problem for feminist politics.

Equally critical to stress, however, is that such differences of opinion over sex or sexism among feminists have been relative, not absolute; many ideas cannot be neatly assigned to one pole or the other. Increasingly, feminist writings are being penned with the express purpose of bridging this divide.[4] In this vein, feminist scholar Wendy Chapkis argues that under the aegis of "sex radical feminism" (the term she uses to designate those feminists who tend to emphasize, in my usage, sex), viewpoints range from those of individuals who believe that any and all

sex is benign to those for whom sexuality can be oppressive unless a "victim" status is explicitly rejected. Under the aegis of "radical feminism" (the term she uses to designate those feminists who tend to emphasize, in my usage, sexism), Chapkis differentiates feminists who believe that all sexual expression for women within male-dominated societies becomes contaminated and those who hold the more common position that embraces sexuality when mutually and lovingly expressed.[5]

Still, as we are about to see, the "sex debates" have not withered away. Even though increasingly challenged by feminist scholars, relative emphases on sex or sexism continue to characterize positions on well-known feminist issues that dominate the political landscape outside, and sometimes also within, the academy. By now, these debates may form a habitual pattern that is difficult to change unless stubbornly confronted again and again, with new feminist approaches building on the contributions of earlier ones. Yet, in the meantime, feminists cannot proceed as though the problem simply does not exist. Any historical tendency to emphasize only two sides is likely to leave a legacy; perhaps the pattern is less likely to repeat in the future the more we can acknowledge its influence in the past. Note, for example, that Chapkis was not able to avoid characterizing two "sides"—again, in her terminology, "sex radical" as opposed to "radical" feminists—at the very same time that she succeeds admirably at introducing considerations of greater complexity, and multiple viewpoints, into her study of contemporary sex work.[6]

But once we are committed to both acknowledging the past and altering the future, doesn't it become possible to reconcile these two goals—sexual freedom and the dismantling of sexist inequities (ranging from the economic to the bodily)—in order that we might attain both? Clearly, we must find a way to address the melding of sex and sexism without splitting ourselves asunder in the process. We must avoid feeding the conservative backlash that has been assailing feminism and other movements over the last few decades, forcing us into a defensive position as we try to maintain prior gains.[7]

The sex versus sexism divide within feminism can also be viewed as a particular manifestation of a general social dilemma—the structure versus agency issue that has been troubling social theorists over the last several decades.[8] Whether the focus is on discrimination by class, race, age, sexual preference, or gender, similar problems confront any social

movement seeking to overcome rigidly persistent relations of dominance and subordination. Given all that has happened in the twentieth century, from the social challenges of the 1960s to the downfall of communism and the globalizing of capital by the 1990s, what should we do? Should we concentrate on transforming institutionalized power structures with weighty influence, such as the state or the media? Or is it wiser to "resist" as individual agents,[9] trying to "subvert" power through personal practices? Alternatively, can we direct our efforts toward both transforming social institutions and asserting individual agency—with each dimension related, but not simply equivalent, to the other?

Feminist theorists have already been slowly but steadily learning to think and feel via *both/and* rather than *either/or* conceptions.[10] The advantage of taking several dimensions into account is not a new idea to feminists; indeed, the insistence on recognizing complexities is one of feminism's most important contributions to social theory.[11] Yet, even if feminists oppose dualistic thinking in *theory,* this commitment may be far more difficult to maintain in political *practice,* amid passionate debates and disagreements about concrete strategies and courses of action. After all, dualistic thinking is deeply entrenched in Western civilization.[12] Either/or dichotomies have indeed become habitual—difficult to elude, even seductively familiar.

In some situations, either/or choices are unavoidable: in law, for instance, a decision may have to be made about whether or not to criminalize a particular behavior. Or little room for compromise often exists when deciding which of two competing projects to undertake, especially under conditions of clearly scarce resources of time or money. But sometimes, when circumstances appear to require "either/or" decisions, altering the framework through which the same problem is conceived—for instance, in the above examples, challenging altogether the usually taken-for-granted parameters of legal and budgetary decision-making processes—might have yielded an unforeseen solution. An important challenge for social theory in general, then, is not to erase distinctions altogether—philosophically speaking, this is neither possible nor desirable when dualisms, too, are sometimes based on useful analytic distinctions in language, in life—but to assess where and when distinctions are used to increase human misery rather than to facilitate human happiness.

In the social universe addressed by feminism, of course, specious

and unnecessarily restrictive dualisms—"masculinity" versus "femininity"—have historically been at the heart of gender-based discrimination. And, of late, diverse feminisms have arisen directly in response to well-founded concerns that "either/or" conceptual constructs cannot accurately describe the complex character of actually overlapping social discriminations.[13] All too often a woman facing multiple biases feels compelled to choose between, say, gender- and race-affiliated loyalties when the realities of her life demand a far subtler and more intricate framework in order for it to be satisfactorily described. Similarly, in the widespread "race/class" debate, social scientists have argued for the overriding importance of *either* race-based *or* class-based impediments, although this either/or thinking cannot capture the complexity of *both* dimensions as experienced daily by many people.[14]

It is important to stress that despite its theoretical commitment to challenging restrictive either/or divides, feminism has not been alone in suffering them nevertheless—often unwittingly. Radical social movements in the United States have been characterized by a proclivity toward splitting and splintering: from the Old Left of the 1930s to the New Left of the 1960s, and from civil rights through black power.[15] As individuals and groups have zigzagged between the poles of reform and radicalism, splitting has been more the rule than the exception. Sometimes, leftist groups have split over genuine internal debates, but on other occasions, as for instance in the 1960s under J. Edgar Hoover's direction of the FBI, outside forces have deliberately promoted internal dissension.[16] Similarly, we can see how sex versus sexism debates within feminism may reflect broad cultural influences, yet also be just what they seem: differences of opinion that are democratically expressed, rather than being repressed or denied. In other words, the splitting of sex from sexism in the particular context of feminism probably manifests both the presence of genuinely democratic debate and a surfacing of recurring patterns that in themselves deserve intellectual and political analysis, because they are not logically necessary. Without such an analysis, a dissatisfying choice between either democratic diversity or collective political strength may seem inevitable. But, again, aren't there ways of thinking, feeling, realizing, and eventually reaping the benefits of experiencing both? Why does the framework of debate, here as elsewhere, seem almost predictable? Specifically, is the sex versus sexism framework of debate a symptom of power, of a retrenched powerlessness, or of both?

In the first part of this book I explore why a split between sex and

sexism has repeatedly characterized debates about a number of feminist issues. Chapter 1 looks at conservative backlash and other factors that have impinged on feminism, contributing to the split between sex and sexism. Chapter 2 turns to a problem feminist theory has always faced because of the ambivalent character of gender subordination as it frequently affects relationships between women and men in male-dominated society. This internal challenge, added to the formidable set of obstacles the feminist movement already faced, might have led to the split, even without the vehement antifeminist reactions that emerged from the Reagan era onward. Let me add in advance that most of the book uses the term "male-dominated societies," as above, in a way similar to what was meant by Kate Millett when she defined "patriarchy." In 1969, Kate Millett described patriarchal societies as those in which a preponderance of social power is concentrated in the hands of men: men control key institutions such as "the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance—in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police."[17] By this definition, the social practices of many contemporary industrial societies, including our own, take place within a larger context that indeed at present remains "patriarchally" organized. As R. W. Connell writes about the "facts of the case," women in advanced industrial nations are still found only in the minority at the upper levels of the state; in wages, jobs, and education, women continue overall to encounter discrimination.[18] But I agree with Judith Lorber that the term patriarchy can also often be used in an overly vague and "slippery" fashion. For this reason, I have usually substituted "male-dominated societies" for "patriarchy" in the chapters that follow. Like Lorber in this sense too, however, I have not rejected the term altogether, especially when used to connote discriminatory attitudes and beliefs—that is, what men often do or think that "subordinates or exploits women."[19]

Part Two continues by bringing the split between sex and sexism into clearer relief by focusing on specific examples, or case studies. Each of the five examples in chapters 3 to 7 are of concern to feminists, incorporating issues about whether women can both enjoy personal sexual freedom and live free from sexist subordination. Nevertheless, each example—concerning pornography, beauty, prostitution, sadomasochism, and violence against women, respectively—illustrates a schism that emerged between considerations of sex and considerations of sexism within contemporary feminism. These issues affect all women similarly

to some extent; at the same time, the problems they pose are experienced differently when factors like class, race, age and sexual preference are also taken into account. But all women stand to gain, or lose, depending on how we treat matters entailing sexual expression in pornographic and commercial imagery (both of which also involve questions about looks), and depending on the attitudes we hold about sadomasochistic practices and sex work. Similarly all women stand to gain, or lose, depending on how we treat matters entailing violence and fear of being assaulted or battered. The law does not yet adequately protect women from the male violence and sexual abuse too often experienced on the streets, at workplaces, or in homes (whether at the hands of fathers or boyfriends, husbands or lovers). Some of the examples that follow apply more directly than others to problems encountered by heterosexual women: beauty, for instance, poses particular dilemmas for women involved with men. At the same time, most cultural imagery produced by magazines, advertisers, and movie studios still objectifies an "ideal" woman's body, creating a standard that represses many kinds of diversity in favor of homogeneity. Such discriminatory cultural ideals (revolving, too, around thinness, blondeness, whiteness, and youth), are sometimes internalized by women, and by men, across sexual orientations. In other examples, a wider relevance across sexual orientations may be more obvious at the same time differences, too, exist. Still, pornography affects women of diverse sexual orientations who may be involved with it as consumers and as sex workers; people who work in prostitution are of differing sexual orientations, as are their customers, and will be affected by widespread social attitudes toward this issue. And debates over sadomasochism have clearly involved those who are straight as well as those who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual.

Because each issue involves both sex and sexism, and in so doing poses dilemmas often relevant to some extent across social categories, the chapters also suggests alternative possible conceptions. Each is concerned with forging more synthetic and complex ways of thinking about specific issues than either/or positions can justify. In particular, each argues beyond a consideration of only structure or only agency. Each asserts, but does not limit itself to, women's rights to bodily and sexual freedoms: the rights to enjoy or create pornography if we so choose; to have reproductive choices; to live as heterosexuals, lesbians, or bisexuals; not to feel constrained by bad/good woman dichotomies and myths about women's sexuality. These rights to sexual freedom need to coexist

with, and are likely unattainable unless conjoined to, protests against institutionalized sexism. For how can we feel sexually or socioeconomically free when so many of our cultural, political, and familial institutions are still structured around sexism and perpetuate it? How can women attain equality unless the rights to both sexual freedom and freedom from sexism are addressed?

In my first example, in chapter 3, I take on the question of legal restrictions on pornography, which has created a passionate dividing line between feminists since the late 1970s. Pornography was the first "sex debate" to preoccupy second-wave American feminists; it is also the oldest, because it is ongoing. "Feminist Offensives," first published in the *Stanford Law Review,* takes as its occasion the publication of Nadine Strossen's *Defending Pornography* (1995). Strossen, then the president of the New York State Civil Liberties Union, was concerned that debates over pornography had not yet been put to rest; she noted with alarm that in 1992, laws against pornography were affirmed by the Canadian Supreme Court. One side of the sex versus sexism divide on this issue is associated most prominently with Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, who since the late 1970s have consistently argued that pornography comprises and reflects institutionalized sexism. Their well-known advocacy of legal restrictions influenced the Canadian Supreme Court in reaching its decision. On the other side are Alice Echols, Ellen Willis, and Carol Vance, among others, who place greater emphasis on issues of sexual freedom and view legal restrictions on pornography as new forms of sexist oppression.[20] Clearly, it is the latter position with which Strossen sympathizes in *Defending Pornography.* The third possibility I suggest in chapter 3 involves *neither* advocating legal censorship of pornography *nor* holding pornography entirely immune to feminist criticism (e.g., that the male dominance of the pornography industry in terms of ownership and profits accords men greater power to shape images and conceptions of sexuality). Thus, I argue in favor of an alternative option that encompasses aspects of both seemingly irreconcilable positions.

Chapter 4 addresses an issue that has only recently begun to separate feminists in a way reminiscent of other sex versus sexism debates: beauty and its ramifications for women and feminism. For instance, questions about whether Madonna is a feminist, or whether cosmetic surgery empowers or entraps women, suggest polarities strikingly reminiscent of earlier examples. Kathy Davis, in *Reshaping the Female Body*

(1995), argues that cosmetic surgery can sometimes bestow feelings of power in women *and* reflect women's collective powerlessness. But she also reports feeling misunderstood by other feminists because of her belief that more complex positions are possible and needed.

At the heart of this particular debate is uncertainty about how feminists ought to respond to the persistence of beauty expectations. Should we be against such expectations because of sexism and its relationship to discrimination based on "looks" (a typical feminist belief about this topic)? Or does opposition to beauty expectations make women feel guilty about "looking good" (a pleasure to which we should all be entitled)? It makes little sense to judge women for worrying about weight or for turning to cosmetic surgery in a world where sexist and ageist discrimination—often based on looks—has remained commonplace. How can we ask women not to manage in the best way possible under conditions that have not yet been transformed so that other choices are available? But perhaps here too a third position can be entertained, in which we both avoid condemning strategic practices of individual women and at the same time vigorously protest the sexist beauty system as we know it.

What is becoming apparent is that there may be a cost to feminism as we lengthen our list of recurrent divides. And this cost is that *as we splinter among ourselves, sexism may be emboldened in its strength and ability to perpetuate and re-create itself.* We may be weakening our ability to fight back, to turn what Susan Faludi so brilliantly deemed "backlash" on itself. We may become more embroiled in disagreeing among ourselves than in confronting society, in effect recycling sexism. It is also important to be wary about *appearances* of greater change than is actually occurring at deeply rooted psychic and social levels. Transformations may be both significant and yet more superficial than feminists once hoped, and than both women and men deserve.

In chapter 5 I reflect on not only feminism but also sociology, and on relationships between intellectual observers and the intellectually observed. These issues are examined in the context of another issue over which feminists have split: sex work. Prostitution seems to pose an either/or legal dilemma similar to that posed by pornography: should feminists favor the decriminalization of prostitution or concur with its present illegal status? On one side are pro-sex feminists, who believe that sex work can and should be rendered legitimate, and sex workers themselves, whose writings testify to pleasure and pride in their occupation. On the other side are feminists who (somewhat like MacKinnon

and Dworkin on pornography) stress prostitution's connection with the oppressive and compulsory character of patriarchal societies.

Once again, I argue for a third possible position. For admitting that the larger social context in which prostitution takes place needs to be transformed (especially since large numbers of women report turning to sex work for economic reasons) does not mean that sex work should remain criminalized and delegitimized. The ongoing criminalization of prostitution reinforces for both sexes the bad/good woman dichotomies that are characteristic of sexist societies. Moreover, it perpetuates a situation in which women are often endangered by laboring with no available legal or medical protections. Moving past the limitations of either/or conceptions can bring theoretical and political advantages to both sides of this apparently unbridgeable feminist divide.

Chapter 6 returns to another well-known "sex debate," one that first exploded in the aftermath of a controversial conference on sexuality held at Barnard College in April 1982. The disagreement revolved around interpretations of sadomasochistic sexual desires as experienced by women across diverse sexual orientations. Again, feminists tended to divide according to whether they stressed sex or sexism. On one side were Gayle Rubin, Pat Califia, and other feminists who argued that freedom to practice sadomasochistic sexuality was a necessary component of ensuring sexual freedom in general. On the other side were feminists such as those who contributed to a volume starkly entitled *Against Sadomasochism* (1982), who linked sadomasochistic desires with gendered relationships structured around experiences of dominance and subordination; thus, being "against sadomasochism" meant being against gendered oppression.[21]

The essay published here, which is based on my book *Sadomasochism in Everyday Life* (1992), views this debate as another case study in the splitting of sex from sexism. I argue that we can both avoid judging individuals and acknowledge that the structure of many social relationships—not just overtly sexual relationships—exposes us to sadomasochistic dynamics. A sadomasochistic psychology is not limited to a few marginal individuals; rather, it is common in our society, given the character of capitalist and other social relations. We are constantly exposed to relationships organized around lines of dominance and subordination, particularly those structured by racism, sexism, age, and class. Such dynamics often define gendered intimacy (even if not overtly sadomasochistic) as well as relationships at the workplace or within educational institutions. Thus, it is absurd to saddle women (or men) with

guilt about sadomasochistic desires when societal sadomasochism shapes our social psychology. Like previous chapters, this essay searches for an alternative way of thinking that avoids repressing legitimate consensual desires of individuals while not letting society off the hook.

Chapter 7 is based on a talk first given in the wake of the 1993 publication of Katie Roiphe's book *The Morning After,* which suggested that too much feminist attention has been accorded to the issue of violence against women (although her own linking of violence against women with "sex debates" may have brought her book much attention). For the most part, second-wave feminists associated violence against women with sexism, and certainly not with sex; in fact, many have worked assiduously in the 1980s and 1990s to redefine rape as an act of violence, not of sex. Other issues of violence against women, such as battering and incest, have likewise been explicitly connected with gendered power. Nevertheless, some feminists began to question whether too much emphasis was being placed on rape, as high-profile cases, such as those of William Kennedy Smith and Mike Tyson, reached unprecedented levels of mass-mediated public awareness. It was in this context that Roiphe suggested that some incidents of alleged violence reflect the ambiguities and sometimes even the pleasures of sexual play more than the structures of sexism. Roiphe charged further that feminists treat as omnipotent the issue of violence against women, seeing it everywhere and in the process making essentialist assumptions about the brutish nature of men (as well as the delicate character of women, who need protection)—that is, that feminism has veered too far toward "victim feminism."

But that position itself—ironically, given Roiphe's contrary intentions—creates another either/or division. With little statistical documentation, Roiphe simply dismisses a great deal of evidence that shows violence against women to be disturbingly common. More important, one does not have to deny women's experiences with violence to acknowledge that sexual ambiguities also sometimes exist (although the ambiguous situations Roiphe highlights appear to be statistically rare in rape cases). Roiphe does make astute and interesting points, and it is important to guard against the essentialist assumptions that sometimes slip into feminism (as into other areas). But in raising important issues, she unnecessarily attacks the greater legitimacy finally accorded the issue of violence against women, threatening to erode feminist arguments rather than simply revising them. For this reason, her book is itself a

symptom of backlash. In chapter 7 I again argue for a third position, one that acknowledges the urgency of addressing women's experiences with violence but also leaves room for a discussion of women's rape fantasies—without nurturing the "blame the victim" ideology feminists have struggled so hard to uproot.

In Part Three, I return full circle to questions of backlash and historical context as I reflect on the future. Chapter 8 raises the complicated issue of how gender and class interrelate in creating social stratification, and whether feminism's most ambitious goals and dreams could conceivably be met within an unchanged capitalist context. This essay is dedicated to a former student who was interested in why J. Edgar Hoover, while targeting other New Left movements of the 1960s, did not think feminism worth bothering with: what was it about feminism that Hoover perceived to be so unthreatening?

The final chapter, based on a 1991 *Village Voice* editorial in which I proposed the term "third-wave feminism,"[22] calls for both feminism and feminisms, for proceeding—politically and intellectually, with our minds as well as our bodies and hearts—on several fronts *simultaneously.* It calls for renewed enthusiasm built around hopes for recognizing the interests and needs of *all* women, across classes, races, ages, and sexual orientations. More men than before, realizing that the strictures of masculinity distort their lives, may also wish to participate. A third wave of feminism needs to be far more inclusive than was the second, without sacrificing the political self-confidence and theoretical boldness of the women who came before us. It is essential to place both commonalities between women who are affected by ongoing structures of gender and the equally legitimate differences between them at the core of third-wave feminism, determining both its strategies and its dreams.

The danger of continuing to split sex from sexism is in sapping our precious collective strength. My goal in calling attention to a recurrent dilemma between feminists is not to add to the forces of backlash (still alive and well at the turn of a new century) but to assist, however slightly, in the revitalization of a social movement in which I strongly believe, one that cannot be declared obsolescent. Sexuality has long been at the heart of gendered analyses; issues of sexuality like those debated within second-wave feminism cannot simply be dismissed, since they continue to affect most women. For example, reproductive rights, including freedom from sterilization abuse, have not yet been

assured for women of all classes and races. Issues outside the realm of sexuality also confront us, such as class-based assaults on single mothers and on welfare, and ongoing racism and its complex effects. Thus, we have not been accorded the luxury of being able to ignore either problems directly related to sexuality *or* other important issues that are only indirectly connected with sexuality. There is neither time nor necessity to pit our needs for sexual freedom against our efforts to dismantle sexism in its multiple incarnations. Somehow, however difficult and challenging, a third-wave feminism needs to move beyond a defensive position, to refocus the attention now divided between sex and sexism, to respect and grow beyond our differences if we are to proceed with the realization of earlier feminist hopes and recent feminist dreams.