

**What happens when men get involved in feminism?
Contemporary mixed-gender feminist activism in
England**

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Abstract

This thesis engages with debates about men's relationship to feminism through exploring the practice of mixed-gender feminist activism. It focuses on contemporary mixed-gender feminist groups in England and includes four case studies: a feminist discussion group, a student union women's committee, a DIY (do-it-yourself) collective, and a feminist activist group. These groups were studied using a qualitative case study approach, drawing on data from participant observation, interviews and documents.

The thesis explores the groups' political practices, internal dynamics and feminist beliefs. It highlights the diversity in the groups' experiences, suggesting that the effects of men's involvement in feminist groups are varied and context-specific. It also situates the groups within a wider context, showing how they are influenced by existing feminist ideas and other discourses such as the critical study of men and masculinities. Furthermore, it analyses the links between the groups' experiences and practices and the wider sociopolitical context, arguing that a 'postfeminist' context, which can be seen as characterised by ambivalence towards feminism, presents challenges for feminist activists.

This research responds to ongoing debates amongst feminists about whether and how men should be involved in the feminist movement (see, for example Luxton, 1993, Digby, 1998, Bryson, 1999, Elliott, 2008). The central argument of this thesis is that there is no simple answer to these questions. Mixed-gender feminist organising has both potential benefits and limitations in comparison to women's groups and it may be more appropriate in some contexts, or for some tasks, than others. From a feminist perspective, what is important is to understand what may be at stake in including or excluding men from feminist activities and to make decisions about their involvement on this basis. This thesis outlines some of the issues which may be at stake, providing a valuable resource for feminist activists and theorists.

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	7
1 Introduction	8
1.1 Feminism, activism and social movements.....	9
1.2 Background.....	11
1.3 Research questions and aims.....	12
1.4 The study	13
Feminist discussion group	14
Women’s committee	15
DIY collective.....	16
Feminist activist group.....	17
1.5 Thesis structure	18
2 Literature review.....	20
2.1 The ‘man question’ in feminism	20
Men’s engagements with feminism in Britain.....	20
Can men be feminists?.....	22
The politics of naming	25
Men doing feminism	27
What’s a man to do?	30
Research on men and feminism.....	32
2.2 Gender and power	33
Theorising gender	34
Masculinities.....	38
Theorising power.....	42
Gender, power and interaction	44
A framework for investigating mixed-gender feminist groups	53
2.3 The context of contemporary feminist activism	53
Sociopolitical context.....	54
Backlash and postfeminism.....	55
Public attitudes towards feminism	57
Developments in feminism since the second wave	59
New feminisms?	61
Conclusions and implications for the ‘man question’	64
2.4 Chapter conclusions	66
3 Methodology	68
3.1 Methodological approach.....	68
3.2 Locating myself.....	72

3.3	Research design.....	74
3.4	Participant observation	77
	Field relations.....	78
	My role	79
	Fieldnotes.....	81
3.5	The interview process.....	82
3.6	Interviews and interaction	87
	My role	88
	Joint interviews.....	89
	Social identities	91
3.7	Documents	93
3.8	Data analysis	95
3.9	Ethics.....	103
	Informed consent and deception	103
	Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality.....	105
	Harm	108
	Power relations	109
3.10	Conclusions	111
4	Doing feminism: the practice of mixed-gender feminist activism	112
4.1	Feminist discussion group	112
	Setting up the group.....	112
	Mixed-gender consciousness-raising	114
	Benefits and limitations of a mixed-gender group	117
4.2	Women's committee	118
	Group structure	119
	Decision to include men	119
	Mainstreaming feminism?	122
	Effects of the decision to include men	124
4.3	DIY collective	125
	DIY feminism and riot grrrl.....	126
	Queer feminism.....	129
4.4	Feminist activist group	132
	Effects of men's presence	133
	Decision to exclude men	134
	Effects of the decision	137
4.5	Conclusions	138
5	Doing gender: group dynamics and gendered power relations	140
5.1	Feminist discussion group	140

Men's roles	141
Men's attitudes	143
Group dynamics	144
Conclusions.....	151
5.2 Women's committee	152
Men's participation	152
Men's roles and behaviour	154
Group dynamics	158
Effects of men's presence	160
Conclusions.....	163
5.3 DIY collective	164
5.4 Feminist activist group	167
Men's participation and behaviour.....	167
Effects of men's presence	170
5.5 Chapter conclusions	173
6 Feminist beliefs	176
6.1 Men in feminism.....	176
6.2 Why include men?	178
6.3 Men's interests.....	181
6.4 Men's role in feminism	184
The 'men's auxiliary'	185
Working with other men.....	188
Context.....	189
6.5 Women-only space	191
6.6 Defining feminism	200
6.7 Defining gender	204
6.8 Discussion and conclusions.....	206
7 Situating my case studies	208
7.1 Contemporary gender relations	208
7.2 Public attitudes towards gender and feminism.....	210
7.3 Negotiating the terrain of postfeminism.....	214
The effects of stereotypes	214
Political practice	217
Rejecting and reinforcing stereotypes	220
7.4 Local contexts.....	222
Feminist discussion group.....	222
Women's committee.....	223
DIY collective.....	226

Feminist activist group.....	228
Bringing together the macro and the micro	229
7.5 Conclusions	230
8 Discussion and conclusions.....	232
8.1 Research questions	232
What happens in mixed-gender feminist groups?	232
What is at stake in including/excluding men from feminist groups?	234
What is the relationship between feminist beliefs/theories and the practice and experience of mixed-gender feminist activism?	234
How do the experiences and practices of mixed-gender feminist groups relate to the wider social and political context?	236
8.2 Evaluating the thesis.....	237
Achievements of the thesis	237
Limitations of the thesis and possibilities for further research	240
Appendix 1: Details of case studies.....	244
Appendix 2: Initial interview questions for women’s committee.....	245
Appendix 3: Questionnaire for research participants	247
Appendix 4: Questionnaire responses	248
Appendix 5: Interview transcript notation	251
Appendix 6: Codes used at the start of the second round of coding	252
References	254

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1 Introduction

It is crucial that men get active in feminist campaigns and that gender equality initiatives specifically target men. The very future of feminism depends on it (Banyard, 2010, p.234).

Men's relation to feminism is an impossible one (Heath, 1987, p.1).

This thesis engages with debates about men's relationship to feminism through exploring the practice of mixed-gender feminist activism. Whilst there is a history of men supporting British women's struggles for equality (see, for example, John and Eustance, 1997), the 'second-wave' feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s was largely defined as a women's movement and was primarily made up of women's groups (see, for example, Coote and Campbell, 1987). Now, there appear to be a growing number of mixed-gender feminist groups in Britain, which seems to reflect a more general openness amongst feminists to working with men (see, for example, Bindel, 1999, Walter, 1999b, Banyard, 2010). Since these groups represent, to a large extent, a new development in feminist political practice, they merit investigation, and thus they are the subject of this research.

The question of men's relationship to feminism has been, and remains, contentious (see, for example, Jardine and Smith, 1987, Luxton, 1993, Digby, 1998, Bryson, 1999, Goldrick-Jones, 2002, Ashe, 2007, Elliott, 2008). Disputes have ranged from whether men even have the right to call themselves feminists to whether they should attend feminist conferences or participate in events such as 'reclaim the night' marches. Feminists have raised concerns about the potential effects of men's presence on the internal dynamics of feminist groups, suggesting that men tend to dominate and therefore that women may be sidelined or silenced (see, for example, Luxton, 1993, Taylor, 1998, Elliott, 2008). Thus, a key aim of this research is to examine the internal dynamics of mixed-gender feminist groups, to see whether these kinds of problems occur and, if so, how groups respond to them.

However, debates about men in feminism are not just concerned with the practical implications of men's involvement. They also touch on important theoretical and political questions regarding the nature of feminist politics and feminist political identity. For example, Hebert (2007) suggests that a key barrier

to including men in feminism is the idea that feminism 'belongs' to women. This relates to ongoing debates about 'women' as the subject of feminism (see, for example, Butler, 1990, Grant, 1993, Alsop et al., 2002). Therefore, in addition to analysing what happens in mixed-gender feminist groups, this research also explores the beliefs and theoretical understandings associated with mixed-gender feminist activism. One concept that is crucial to feminists (and that requires interrogation) is gender. Debates about men in feminism rest on the ability to categorise certain people as men and women and therefore may serve to reinforce a binary understanding of gender. As I will explain in later chapters, individual gender identities may defy such easy categorisation, complicating the question of men's relationship to feminism through troubling the category 'men'.

The debates about men in feminism outlined above originated in the second-wave feminist movement, yet contemporary feminist activists are working in a very different political context. Some have argued that this 'different historical moment' (Bartky, 1998, p.xii) requires new feminist strategies. For example, Walter (1999b) argues that changes in gender relations over the past 40 years have made it easier for feminist women and men to work together. Thus, this research aims to situate the experiences and activities of mixed-gender feminist groups within a broader context. In this chapter, I will define some key concepts, outline the background to this research, describe my aims and research questions and give an overview of the study, introducing the case studies that form the basis of the research. I will conclude by giving an outline of the thesis as a whole.

1.1 Feminism, activism and social movements

Some of the terms used in this thesis have multiple meanings, so it is important to outline some key concepts at this stage. A major concept in my research is feminism, by which I mean a body of thought and practice that recognises, criticises and seeks to change inequalities based on gender. This encompasses a huge range of theories, practices and projects. Therefore, like many others, I recognise the existence of a plurality of feminisms (see, for example, Delmar, 1986, Lorber, 2010). My research focuses on feminist activism, by which I mean the practices that feminists engage in individually and collectively to try to change society to reduce gender inequality.

Feminism can also be understood as a social movement. Crossley (2002) points out that there are a number of collective social phenomena that are commonly referred to as movements, such as ‘the labour and trade union movements’, ‘nationalist movements’ and ‘the environmental or green movement’ (p.1), but they are so varied that it is difficult to specify precisely what makes a social movement. Similarly, Freeman and Johnson (1999) argue that ‘[p]articipants generally know that they are part of a movement, but movements are so diverse that it is difficult to isolate their common elements and incorporate them into a succinct definition’ (p.1). Thus, sociologists have developed a number of alternative definitions (see Crossley, 2002) and feminists have also defined movements in different ways (see Nash, 2002).

In this thesis I use the term ‘movement’ in two ways. Firstly, I refer to the feminist movement in a very broad sense to suggest a shared project to bring about a transformation in gender relations. This is similar to Blumer’s definition of social movements as ‘collective enterprises to establish a new order of life’ (1946, p.199). It is also akin to Lovenduski and Randall’s (1993) definition of the women’s movement in Britain:

We see it as comprising all those individuals, networks, organisations, ideas, and practices that espouse feminist values and goals. It is a tremendously diverse and fluid phenomenon which cannot be reduced to one approach, idea, or form of activity (p.3).

Unlike Lovenduski and Randall, I use the term ‘feminist movement’ rather than ‘women’s movement’ because my research is about the role of men in feminism, and a women’s movement would seem to exclude men by definition. Furthermore, not all women’s movements (in the sense of mobilisations of women) are necessarily feminist (see Delmar, 1986, Ferree, 2006). Thus, I adopt Ferree’s (2006) distinction:

Organizing women explicitly as women to make social change is what makes a ‘women’s movement.’ It is defined as such because of the *constituency* being organized, not the specific targets of the activists’ change efforts at any particular time. [...]

Activism for the purpose of challenging and changing women’s subordination to men is what defines ‘feminism’. Feminism is a *goal*, a target for social change, a purpose informing activism, not a constituency or a strategy (p.6).

Nevertheless, although it is important to analytically separate feminism and women's movements, empirically there is often overlap as many women's movements are also feminist. Furthermore, in the British context, mobilisations of women in pursuit of feminist goals have historically been referred to as the women's movement (see, for example, Coote and Campbell, 1987, Lovenduski and Randall, 1993, Nash, 2002, Mackay, 2008). Thus, it is not possible to completely disentangle these terms.

As well as referring to the feminist movement in a general sense as a shared project, I also use the concept of a social movement in a more precise sense to refer to specific feminist mobilisations that have occurred in particular times and places (such as the riot grrrl movement of the 1990s or the Women's Liberation Movement that began in the 1960s). Lovenduski and Randall (1993) view the Women's Liberation Movement as a distinct strand within a wider women's movement and Coote and Campbell (1987) see it as a particular phase of feminist activity which lasted from the 1960s to the 1980s and 'represented a peak of intensity and activity in a continuing women's movement' (p.254). I refer to this 'peak' period as the Women's Liberation Movement or second-wave feminism, reflecting the terminology used by activists themselves. Whether contemporary feminist practices constitute a movement in this narrower sense is a matter of debate, an issue that I will explore in the next chapter (see the section on 'Developments in feminism since the second wave').

1.2 Background

The idea for this project developed out of my own experiences of feminist activism. In 2005, I helped to organise a feminist conference in Sheffield. The organising committee included both women and men, and it was taken for granted that men could be involved at every stage of planning and organising the conference if they wanted to be. Indeed, we spent some time thinking about how to encourage men to attend the event and even designed our publicity materials with that in mind. This was my first experience of feminist activism and I found it very positive, so I was surprised when I later encountered feminists who did not think that men should be involved in feminist projects. Through my involvement in activism, I realised that men's involvement in feminism was a contentious issue, which led me to see it as an interesting research topic.

I first explored this topic in my MA dissertation, a study of men's experiences of feminist activism (Baily, 2007). I gathered data from 13 men via qualitative interviews and a qualitative questionnaire. I interviewed five men and 10 men filled in the questionnaire. I analysed how participants understood feminism and whether they identified as feminist, how they became interested in feminism, their involvement in feminist activism, and their reflections on being a man involved in feminism. Most of the men exhibited reflexive awareness of their own (potentially problematic) relationship to feminism, which led me to feel optimistic about men's ability to engage in feminism in a sensitive way. Participants described occasions on which their involvement was beneficial to feminist campaigns, but also circumstances in which their presence could make women feel uncomfortable. This led me to conclude that 'men's involvement in feminism can be problematic or beneficial depending on the circumstances' (Baily, 2007, p.54).

Whilst this research provided interesting insights into men's subjective experiences of feminist activity, I was very conscious of the fact that women's voices were missing from this account. I concluded that:

in relying solely on men's own accounts of their experiences, this research inevitably gives a partial view of their activities. It is therefore important to follow this up with research that includes women's accounts, in order to achieve a more complete picture of men's feminist activities (Baily, 2007, p.56).

Thus, in my PhD research I aim to provide a more rounded picture of men's involvement in feminist activism through speaking to activists of all genders and observing mixed-gender feminist groups.

1.3 Research questions and aims

The concerns highlighted at the beginning of this chapter are reflected in my research questions:

- What happens in mixed-gender feminist groups?
- What is at stake in including/excluding men from feminist groups?
- What is the relationship between feminist beliefs/theories and the practice and experience of mixed-gender feminist activism?

- How do the experiences and practices of mixed-gender feminist groups relate to the wider social and political context?

As well as answering these questions, the research has several additional aims. Firstly, it seeks to document the practices of grassroots-level feminist activists, in order to help write the history of the movement (see Griffin, 1995b). This aim is motivated by the fact that, when I began my research in 2007, I could find few empirical studies of recent feminist activism in the UK (exceptions were Lambert and Parker, 2006, WASS Collective, 2007). Fortunately, in the last few years a number of research projects looking at contemporary feminist practices have been initiated or completed (for example, Dean, 2010, Downes, 2010, Redfern and Aune, 2010, Long, 2011, O'Shea, 2011), but none of these focus on the role of men in contemporary feminism. Therefore, my research will add to this growing body of work, contributing specific insights regarding the role of men.

Secondly, as mentioned above, the question of men's involvement in feminism is a source of ongoing debate. However, much of this is either theoretical (for example, Jardine and Smith, 1987, Digby, 1998) or is based on activists' personal experiences (for example, hooks, 2000, Mohan and Schultz, 2001) rather than on research. Therefore, I shall provide empirical evidence to inform these debates, as well as contributing to the debates myself. Thirdly, I aim to contribute to theorising developments in contemporary British feminism and the practice of feminist politics more generally. Lastly, I aim to provide practical advice for feminists who have to make decisions about the gendered membership of their groups.

1.4 The study

This research was funded by a studentship from the Economic and Social Research Council. I used a qualitative case study methodology, investigating four feminist groups – a feminist discussion group, a student union women's committee, a DIY (do-it-yourself) collective, and a feminist activist group – which I will describe in more detail later in this chapter. I selected groups which were either open to people of all genders or had been so at some point in their history. However, one group which was open to all ended up being women-only in practice, since no men actually got involved. I studied the groups using a mixture of participant observation and semi-structured interviews, plus some

documentary analysis, and analysed the data using an interpretive approach (see Chapter 3 for further details of the research process).

I chose to study grassroots-level, local feminist groups rather than larger organisations, partly because this was the kind of activist setting that I had been involved in and also because I was particularly interested in studying group dynamics in relatively informal settings (although some of the groups do have a degree of formal structure). I was interested in seeing what kinds of power dynamics might develop in the absence of formal structures and roles. I also wanted to explore these dynamics within a voluntary, rather than professional, context and many larger feminist organisations have paid staff.

I consider the groups in my study to be ‘activist’ in the sense that they are actively working to change gendered power relations within society. However, the groups’ activities encompass a range of political practices, some of which are more obviously ‘activist’ than others. I chose groups that I considered to be ‘feminist’ either because they described themselves as such, or because I thought that their aims were feminist in the sense that they sought to challenge women’s oppression or inequality (see Walby, 2011, on the question of defining feminism).

My selection of case studies was partly opportunistic: they were groups that I knew about, knew how to contact and could access geographically. However, I also aimed to ensure variety across the groups in terms of their structure, membership, feminist beliefs, modes of political practice and the position of men in the group (see appendix 1). All of the groups were located in cities in England. Below, I will briefly describe each of the groups. I have changed their names for the purpose of preserving their anonymity.

Feminist discussion group

This group was set up by some members of a profeminist¹ men’s group who wanted to try to do the same kind of consciousness-raising work that they did in the men’s group in a mixed-gender context. The group was always explicitly

¹ Some people think that only women can be feminists and therefore refer to male supporters of feminism as ‘profeminist’. For further discussion of this term, see the section on ‘The politics of naming’ in the next chapter.

open to people of all genders and their meetings focused around the discussion of, and reflection on, personal experiences. The structure of the group was very informal and fluid. Many of the members were also involved with anarchist politics and were committed to democratic modes of organising. Two of the men who set up the group dealt with the administrative aspects of organising meetings, but there were no formal roles within the group. Decisions about what to discuss and how to structure meetings were made collectively from one meeting to the next.

Whilst some early meetings attracted a large number of participants, most of the meetings that I attended included between three and six people (including me) and over time the group faced problems of dwindling participation, with meetings trailing off after about a year. In addition to holding regular meetings, group members communicated with each other via an email discussion list. Many more people participated in online discussions than attended meetings, and even when group meetings began to trail off, there continued to be discussion on the email list, although the frequency of posts to the list also eventually declined over time. I attended 13 group meetings over a period of eight months and interviewed five regular participants.

Women's committee

This group is part of the student union at a university and engages in a range of activities such as campaigning and fundraising. Some of their activities relate to issues on campus (for example, the sale of 'lads' mags' in the student union shop), whilst others tackle broader issues (for example, human rights, violence against women). The committee is part of the governance structure of the student union and comprises up to 12 elected members and two elected women's officers. Only women can be committee members or women's officers but anyone can attend committee meetings. In the past, only women could attend meetings. However, about a year before I conducted my fieldwork, some committee members put forward a motion to the student union to allow men to attend meetings, and students voted in a referendum to approve this motion. Since this time, the meetings have been open to men.

At the time of my fieldwork, the group met every week during term time and meetings were mainly focused around organising events and campaigns. This group had a more formal structure than the others because it was part of the wider structure of the student union. The committee members occupied formal roles such as secretary, press and publicity officers, and representatives of particular groups of women, for example, mature students or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) women. The women's officers generally took on a leading role within the group. The meetings had a formal agenda and minutes and were chaired by one of the women's officers. However, in practice the atmosphere of the meetings was actually very friendly and informal, and discussion frequently diverged from the agenda into other topics of interest, debates, jokes or general conversation. I attended 13 committee meetings over a period of seven months and interviewed 14 people, including committee members and men who were involved with the group. I also observed the group on two other occasions: at a clothes swap that they organised and a stall that they held at a student music festival.

DIY collective

This group described itself as a DIY (do-it-yourself) not-for-profit collective, and also referenced riot grrrl, third-wave feminism and queer politics.² For around two years, they organised events such as gigs and club nights to promote female and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) performers, aiming to address the lack of female and LGBTQ presence in the local DIY music scene and to create spaces in which people of all genders and sexualities could feel comfortable. The group no longer exists but members continue to be active in DIY activities.

The group was explicitly open to people of all genders but only women became active members of the group. Despite the lack of male members, I have included this group in my study because it is still, at least in theory, a mixed group, and the lack of men's involvement is interesting in itself. I was not able to attend any of the group's meetings or witness the process of organising events, but I did attend some of their events, as well as interviewing two group

² I will discuss DIY, queer politics and riot grrrl in Chapter 4, section 4.3. I will explore the idea of third-wave feminism in Chapter 2, in the section entitled 'New feminisms?'

members. The data set from this group is very small, and there are also limitations in using this case study to answer my research questions as there were no men involved in the group, but I feel that it is important to include this group in my study as they represent a different approach to the other groups, both in terms of feminist beliefs and forms of political practice (see appendix 1).

Feminist activist group

This group has existed in various incarnations since the mid-2000s. It was initially women-only, and went through periods of mixed membership, before deciding to become for the most part a women-only group after some members raised concerns about men's involvement. I attended a few group meetings both before and after this decision was taken (although I did not formally conduct participant observation) and interviewed 10 group members a few months later in order to find out why they took the decision and what the effect of it had been. At the time that I conducted my interviews, the group held a women-only meeting every week and an event or meeting open to all genders once a month. The group was funded through a university student union and included quite a few student members, but was open to all women. One member described the various roles of the group as incorporating campaigning, support, friendship and debate.

I initially hesitated about studying this group because my husband had been along to some of their meetings during the time that the group was open to all, at first to see if it would be a good group for me to study and then from his own personal interest. He stopped attending group meetings when I decided to study the group, but I still felt that his involvement could potentially alter what group members would tell me about men in the group and could also place the members in an uncomfortable position. Indeed, when I tried to gain access to the group, one member raised concerns about this issue, suggesting that it would affect the validity of my research.

However, other members agreed to take part in the research and after some reflection I decided to proceed. This was partly because I needed more data to complete my study and partly because of the features of this specific group. In my other case studies, men were either absent (in the case of the DIY

collective) or their involvement appeared to be relatively unproblematic. However, in this group men's involvement became an issue that led to the group becoming largely women-only. Therefore, I thought that it would be good to include this group in my study in order to reflect a wider range of experiences of mixed-gender activism. Although I talked to my husband about his experiences in the group, I did not consider him to be a research participant and his experiences have not really influenced the research, as he only attended a few meetings.

1.5 Thesis structure

Having given a brief overview of the study, I will now outline the structure of the thesis. In the next chapter, I will review the literature that forms the backdrop to this research, examining debates about men's involvement in feminism, different ways of theorising gender and power, and research on gender and power in interaction. I will also explore the social and political context in which contemporary feminist activism takes place. Then, in Chapter 3, I will describe my methodological approach and reflect on the research process, including the development of my research questions, data collection, data analysis, and ethical issues.

The following four chapters derive from the analysis of my data and split into themes that broadly correspond with my research questions. The chapters move progressively outwards from a consideration of internal group practices and dynamics to wider theoretical and political issues. Chapters 4 and 5 address the question of what happens in mixed-gender feminist groups. Chapter 4 explores the practice of mixed-gender feminist activism, whilst Chapter 5 focuses on power dynamics within the groups. Together, these chapters examine the benefits and drawbacks of mixed-gender organising, giving some insight into my second research question, the issue of what is at stake in including or excluding men from feminist groups.

Chapter 6 attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the practice of mixed-gender feminist activism through exploring the feminist beliefs that accompany the groups' practices. It examines group members' beliefs about men's relationship to feminism and the ways in which they conceptualise feminism and

gender. It broadens the focus from the groups themselves to see how they are influenced by wider feminist discourses and addresses my third research question: what is the relationship between feminist beliefs/theories and the practice and experience of mixed-gender feminist activism?

Then, Chapter 7 moves further outwards by situating the groups within a broader social and political context. It examines the impact of both the general contemporary context outlined in Chapter 2 and the specific local contexts of the groups on their activities, and explores the interaction between these macro and micro level contexts. Finally, Chapter 8 draws on all of the preceding material to further reflect on my research questions and to consider the overall implications of the research. It makes the case for a nuanced and contextual understanding of men's relationship to feminism, suggesting that there is no simple answer to the 'man question'. It also evaluates the achievements and limitations of the thesis and considers some possible directions for future research.

2 Literature review

This research stems from debates about the role of men in feminism. Thus, the first section of this literature review will outline the history of men's involvement in feminism in Britain and will then consider some of the key themes of these debates, focusing on the questions of the possibility and the consequences of male feminism, and the appropriate role for men in the feminist movement. It will conclude by considering existing empirical research on (pro)feminist men.³

Debates about men in feminism, and particularly about the impact of men's presence in feminist spaces, rest on particular understandings of the relationship between gender and power. Thus, in the second section, I will discuss feminist and sociological understandings of gender and power and consider how they could be applied to an examination of mixed-gender feminist groups. I will also review existing research on gender and power in interaction.

This research aims not only to investigate the internal dynamics of mixed-gender feminist groups, but also to consider the relationship between the experiences and activities of these groups and the broader sociopolitical context. Therefore, in the third section of the chapter I will consider the context of contemporary feminist activism, in particular considering changes in feminism and in the broader political context since the 'second-wave' feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s. I will end by drawing links between this context and the question of men in feminism.

2.1 The 'man question' in feminism

Men's engagements with feminism in Britain

Men have played a role in supporting Western women's struggles for equality since the late 18th century (Kimmel and Mosmiller, 1992). In the 'first-wave' feminist movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries, men supported campaigns for women's suffrage (John and Eustance, 1997), although some women preferred to organise separately from men (see Sarah, 1982). Men initially participated in conferences and protests in the 'second-wave' Women's

³ For discussion of the term 'profeminist', see the section on 'The politics of naming' later in this chapter.

Liberation Movement in Britain, which emerged in the 1960s, but many women felt that men's presence was disruptive and thus developed a more autonomous women's movement (Coote and Campbell, 1987). For some women, autonomous mobilisation was merely a strategy to enhance the effectiveness of the movement, but for others it was part of a more general attempt to distance themselves from men (Coote and Campbell, 1987).

Nevertheless, some men continued to support the Women's Liberation Movement, for example, by providing crèches at feminist events, campaigning on issues such as childcare and abortion rights, and setting up their own anti-sexist men's groups (Seidler, 1991; see also Hearn, 1987). Bradshaw (1982) suggests that these groups had three main aims: 'to take action against the institutionalised ways in which men oppress women' (p.174), 'to explore ways in which men too are distorted by rigid sex stereotyping' (p.174), and 'to overcome the ways in which they, as individual men, were oppressing individual women' (p.175). Thus, a small 'men's movement' developed in response to the Women's Liberation Movement.

There were two main tendencies within this movement: 'anti-sexism', which focused on challenging male dominance and on support for the Women's and Gay Liberation Movements, and 'men's liberation', which stressed the idea that men as well as women are oppressed by rigid sex roles, and focused on men liberating themselves from these roles.⁴ Many groups combined both of these approaches, for example, the Achilles Heel collective stated:

We do not see a contradiction between men's liberation and men against sexism. [...] [I]t's important *both* to deal with/confront sexist ways of behaving in society and in ourselves, and also to look for different and more positive ways of being as men (1980, reproduced in Seidler, 1991, p.39, emphasis in original).

However, some feminists and more radical (pro)feminist men criticised the 'men's liberation' perspective for diverting attention from women's oppression (see, for example, Ehrlich, 1977, Grimstad and Rennie, 1977, Bradshaw, 1982). The men's movement also led to academic engagement with the subject of men and masculinities and the development of the new field of Men's Studies or

⁴ For discussion of the relationship between these two perspectives, see, for example, Bradshaw (1982), Goldrick-Jones (2002).

Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities (see, for example, Brod, 1987, Hearn and Morgan, 1990, Whitehead, 2002, Hearn, 2004, Connell et al., 2005, Robinson, 2008), which I will discuss later in the chapter (see the sections on 'Men doing feminism' and 'Masculinities').

Since the 1990s, there appears to have been a shift towards a greater acceptance of men within feminism (see, for example, Bindel, 1999, Walter, 1999b, Hanman, 2006, WASS Collective, 2007, Banyard, 2010) and indeed some feminists see men's involvement as a key component of a revitalised feminist politics (Walter, 1999b, Rake, 2006, Banyard, 2010). Whilst some women remain committed to women-only organising (for example, the NUS women's campaign, London Feminist Network), there appear to be a growing number of mixed-gender grassroots feminist groups in the UK (for example, Bristol Feminist Network, OBJECT, Warwick Anti-Sexism Society).⁵ There are also a small number of profeminist men's groups and male-led campaigns such as the White Ribbon Campaign.⁶ Thus, the contemporary feminist landscape includes a mixture of women's, men's and mixed-gender groups and organisations.

Despite this increasing openness towards men's involvement, the question of men's relationship to feminism has been, and remains, contentious (see, for example, Jardine and Smith, 1987, Luxton, 1993, Digby, 1998, Bryson, 1999, Goldrick-Jones, 2002, Ashe, 2007, Elliott, 2008). Debates about men and feminism incorporate a tangle of interrelated theoretical and political questions. Whilst it is difficult to tease these apart, for the purpose of this discussion I will focus on three key issues: the possibility of male feminism, the consequences of male feminism, and the role of men in the feminist movement. I will also consider previous research on men's engagements with feminism.

Can men be feminists?

The meaning of feminism varies historically and cross-culturally (Offen, 1988) and according to different theoretical perspectives (see, for example, Tong,

⁵ The UK Feminista website provides a useful directory of local feminist groups. See <http://ukfeminista.org.uk/take-action/local-groups/>

⁶ The White Ribbon Campaign is a male-led campaign working towards ending violence against women. See <http://www.whiteribbon.ca/>.

1998, Bryson, 1999, Lorber, 2010). Thus, the boundaries of feminism are always contested: 'The question of who is "inside" or "outside" feminism will never be settled once and for all: such definitions remain a matter for concrete political debate' (Moi, 1989, pp.182-83). In relation to the question of whether men can be feminists, the debate rests largely on alternative conceptions of feminism as either 'a way of thinking created by, for, and on behalf of women' (Delmar, 1986, p.27) or a set of ideas and practices that can be adopted by anyone. These two definitions can be seen to represent competing paradigms in feminist thought, 'the identity-paradigm, which argues that women are the subject that grounds feminism, and the action-paradigm, which makes political practice the essence of feminism' (Rubin, 1998, p.308).

One of the main arguments of the identity-paradigm is that feminist identity and consciousness is grounded in female experience (see, for example, Heath, 1987, Kimmel, 1992, Stanley and Wise, 1993, Letherby, 2003), whether this experience is viewed as having a biological or a social foundation (see Ashe, 2004). This presents a clear barrier to men becoming feminist (Ashe, 2004). However, as Ashe points out, such a position relies on a problematic view of men and women as distinct 'epistemic communities' (2004, p.189), presupposing unified categories of 'female experience' and 'male experience'. Feminists have increasingly questioned the notion of a shared women's experience as the basis of feminist politics (see, for example, Spelman, 1990, Mohanty, 1992). Ashe (2004) argues that, whilst feminists have recognised the diversity of women's experiences, in debates about men and feminism they have continued to view men's experiences as unitary and inherently patriarchal (see also Hebert, 2007).

Ashe challenges this view with reference to the work of masculinity theorists (for example, Connell, 1995) who have illustrated the diversity of men's social positioning and experiences, and who have analysed the power dynamics between men, showing that 'certain masculinities are oppressed' (Ashe, 2004, p.193). She also uses a poststructuralist approach to argue that men's experiences do not determine their subjectivities and political positions. Through considering male experience as 'a socially constituted and contested category' (p.190), she shows that the same experiences can be interpreted in different

ways, producing different subjectivities and political effects. She illustrates this through outlining different men's responses to recent changes in men's social position in Western industrialised countries: conservative, liberationist, mythopoetic⁷ and feminist men have all produced different interpretations of the same set of circumstances. She concludes that male experience can produce both feminist and antifeminist effects and is thus not necessarily a barrier to feminism.

Another potential barrier to male feminism is men's interests. Connell (2002, 2005) argues that most men benefit from patriarchy, regardless of their individual behaviour towards women. Connell conceptualises men's advantage as a 'patriarchal dividend' which includes benefits in terms of money and 'authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power, and control over one's own life' (2002, p.142). If men benefit from the current system in these ways, why would they seek to change it? A number of arguments have been advanced to suggest that men's interests are complex and not necessarily purely patriarchal. Firstly, the distribution of the 'patriarchal dividend' to men is uneven, cross-cut by inequalities, such as those of class, race and sexuality (Connell, 2002, 2005). Men do not have equal access to gendered power and privilege and thus do not all have an equal investment in the current gender order.

Secondly, it can be argued that patriarchy harms men. As patriarchy is closely connected with heterosexism, gay men are oppressed by the current gender system (Connell, 2005). The oppression of gay men also 'has a backwash damaging to effeminate or unassertive heterosexuals' (Connell, 1987, p.xiii). Meanwhile, sexist assumptions about appropriate roles for men prevent them from engaging in areas of life traditionally deemed to be 'female', such as parenting and caring work. New (2001) goes so far as to argue that men are oppressed in patriarchal societies in the sense of being systematically mistreated, for example, by being forced into military service and through being

⁷ The mythopoetic men's movement involves men participating in men-only retreats and rituals, in attempts to reconnect with a supposedly authentic masculinity which is deemed to have been lost in modern societies. A key figure in the movement is Robert Bly, whose book *Iron John* (Bly, 1991) has been highly influential. For discussion of the movement, and comparison with other men's movements, see, for example, Messner (1997), Ashe (2007).

punished more harshly by criminal justice systems.⁸ She concludes that men have both conservative interests in maintaining the gender order and emancipatory interests in transforming it. Thirdly, it is important to consider not only men's individual interests but also their relational interests (see Pease, 2002). Many men come to support feminism because of their concern for women who are close to them, whether these are partners, family members, children or friends (Connell, 1987).

Pease (2002), taking a poststructuralist view, argues that men's interests are not directly determined by their social structural location. Instead, men formulate a sense of their interests within the constraints of their structural location and the discourses that are available to them. In a similar manner to Ashe's argument about experience, men's interests can be seen as contested and therefore open to interpretation. Thus, the task of (pro)feminists is 'to articulate notions of nonpatriarchal interests of men' (Pease, 2002, p.172). In conclusion, if we accept the arguments above, neither men's experiences nor men's interests present a *definitive* barrier to male feminism. Nevertheless, there is still dispute about whether or not men should claim the feminist label.

The politics of naming⁹

Some people argue that the word 'feminist' should be reserved for women in order to respect the autonomy of feminism as a women's movement (Snodgrass, 1977b). Male supporters of feminism who adopt this position may call themselves, for example, profeminists (Brod, 1998), pro-feminists (Kimmel, 1992), anti-sexist men (Snodgrass, 1977a, Christian, 1994) or, more recently, feminist allies (Feminist Allies, 2011). For some, the question of naming is linked to the question of whether men can be feminists. For example, Kimmel (1992) argues that men can only be pro-feminists, not feminists, because they do not share 'the felt experience of oppression' (p.3). However, others distinguish between the issues of *being* and *calling oneself* a feminist. Thus,

⁸ Note, however, that New (2001) stresses that recognising the oppression of men 'in no way detracts from the serious and horrible nature of the oppression of women' (p.743). Her analysis should not be confused with that of 'men's liberationists', who argue that men and women are equally oppressed, and 'men's rights' advocates, who may even suggest that men are uniquely oppressed (see Messner, 1997, for an overview of these two movements).

⁹ I have taken this title from Richardson and Robinson (1994).

Brod (1998) sees himself as a feminist but does not advocate men using this label because it can have the connotation of men 'co-opting women's identities and struggles' (p.207).

Similarly, some women who object to the idea of male feminism object more to men claiming the feminist label than to men engaging with feminist theory and politics:

Few feminists would wish to hamper the progress of their work, or deny their 'right' of 'access' to feminist thought; but their insistence on the 'right' to be dubbed 'feminist', rather than 'pro-feminist', or some other term which might indicate their interests in gender remains troubling (Whelehan, 1995, p.189).

Whelehan explains the political and symbolic importance of women retaining the term 'feminist' for themselves:

[W]omen should retain the most significant impact of the term feminism – that it has come to signify a female presence, after centuries of invisibility in very real material as well as ideological terms (1995, p.189).

However, others believe that men should be free to use the term feminist in order to fully include them in the movement. Falkof (2007) asks: 'Why would anyone want to support a cause that refused to admit them?' (p.8). Others argue that men adopting the label feminist signifies strong support for the cause, whereas using another term, such as 'profeminist', suggests distancing oneself from feminism (Brod, 1998). Whilst I do not mind what men call themselves,¹⁰ in order to reflect these debates, I will use the term (pro)feminist in relation to men.

The above discussion shows that debates about what male supporters of feminism should call themselves relate both to theoretical ideas about the nature of feminist identity and to political questions about the consequences of men claiming the feminist label. Whilst, in feminism in particular, theory itself is always political, I will now turn to the more overtly political questions surrounding men's involvement in feminism, moving from a focus on the *possibility* to the *consequences* of male feminism.

¹⁰ For an explanation of my position, see Chapter 1, section 1.2, and Chapter 3, section 3.2.

Men doing feminism

Men's participation in feminist activism has raised many concerns amongst feminists. In mixed-gender groups, some feminists worry about the effect of men's presence on female activists, who may feel uncomfortable in the presence of men, especially if they have experienced male violence (Luxton, 1993). Another concern is that men tend to dominate in mixed groups, which can have the effect of silencing women (Luxton, 1993) and risks diverting the groups' agendas towards male concerns.¹¹ Mohan and Schultz (2001) list a catalogue of sexist behaviours amongst the male volunteers that they worked with, which included failing to listen to women, expecting women to nurture them, verbally attacking female trainers, and making 'inappropriate sexual disclosures that clearly objectify women' (p.29).

Where men have set up their own (pro)feminist groups or organisations, feminists have expressed concern that these will compete with women's organisations for resources (see Luxton, 1993, Goldrick-Jones, 2002). Some (pro)feminist men's groups have responded to this by agreeing not to compete with women's groups for funding (see Luxton, 1993, Goldrick-Jones, 2002, Flood, 2005). Men's groups can also be seen as competitors in terms of gaining media attention. For example, many feminists have criticized the Canadian-based White Ribbon Campaign, which 'almost instantly attracted attention from the media which had systematically ignored and misrepresented feminism' (Luxton, 1993, p.369; see also Goldrick-Jones, 2002). Feminists fear that male activists will achieve greater legitimacy than women (Luxton, 1993). Feminists and (pro)feminists have also highlighted the danger that men's groups may serve to reinforce male privilege (see, for example, Schein, 1977, Bradshaw, 1982, Seidler, 1991), providing a space for male-bonding and criticism of women or focusing on mutual support rather than challenging sexism.¹²

Many feminist criticisms of men's (pro)feminist groups have focussed on the issue of men's accountability to feminism (Luxton, 1993, Goldrick-Jones, 2002).

¹¹ The question of male power in interaction is discussed in further detail in section 2.2.

¹² Most of these criticisms have been made in relation to men's consciousness-raising groups. For discussion of such groups, see, for example, Hornacek (1977), Schein (1977), Tolson (1977), Bradshaw (1982), Seidler (1991), Cambridge Men's Group (1992), Pease (2000).

However, the meaning of accountability is disputed (Mudge, 1997, cited in Goldrick-Jones, 2002), as is the question of to which feminism men should be accountable (Grant, 1997, Flood, 2005). Luxton (1993) argues that, due to the diverse and diffuse nature of the feminist movement, 'there can be no straightforward accountability' (p.366). Instead, 'there is an on-going scrutiny and critical debate by feminists assessing the activities of men's groups and there is also on-going self-examination by the men' (Luxton, 1993, p.366). In addition, there is always a need to balance accountability to feminism with avoiding placing additional demands on feminist activists' time (see, for example, Goldrick-Jones, 2002).

Despite the criticisms outlined above, there are also potential benefits to be gained from including men in feminist activism, and for this reason some feminists have advocated men's involvement in the feminist movement (for example, Schacht and Ewing, 1997, 2004, Walter, 1999b, hooks, 2000, Hebert, 2007, Tarrant, 2009, Banyard, 2010). Firstly, including men in the movement (or in a particular feminist organisation) opens up a wider range of potential activists, giving more opportunity for the movement or organisation to grow. These potential activists may include both men and women, as hooks has argued that excluding men from feminism has also resulted in the exclusion of many women:

Anti-male sentiments have alienated many poor and working-class women, particularly non-white women, from feminist movement. Their life experiences have shown them that they have more in common with men of their race and/or class group than with bourgeois white women (2000, pp.69-70).

Thus, a feminist movement that includes men could also be more attractive to, and representative of, women.

Secondly, some argue that men can contribute to feminism in unique ways, for example, by acting as a 'bridge' between feminist women and men (Schacht and Ewing, 1997, p.169), by 'exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers' (hooks, 2000, p.83) or by contributing their knowledge of male-only environments and male subjectivity (Morgan, 1992, Sterba, 1998). Thirdly, involving men can positively affect the 'message' conveyed by feminist activism. For example, including men can contradict

stereotypes of feminists as 'man-hating' (Lambert and Parker, 2006, WASS Collective, 2007) and can help to counter the marginalisation of feminist issues as 'women's issues', making them 'the concern of the broader community' (Ashe, 2007, p.90).

Lastly, many feminists have argued that feminism will simply not succeed if it does not include men (for example, Bartky, 1998, Banyard, 2010). Both Schacht and Ewing (1997) and Hebert (2007) argue that men need to be included in order for feminism to achieve the 'critical mass' of supporters necessary for widespread social change. Others argue that because men are part of the problem of patriarchy, they must also be part of the solution:

Since men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, they can only be successfully eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole (hooks, 2000, p.83).

Aside from these practical reasons for including men in feminist activism, some feminists also make a moral case for the inclusion of men, arguing that to exclude them contradicts feminist values of equality and inclusiveness (Schacht and Ewing, 2004, Falkof, 2007).

In academia, feminists have expressed concerns about the consequences of male (pro)feminism in relation to men's use of feminist theories (Jardine and Smith, 1987), men's involvement in Women's Studies (Klein, 1989) and the development of two new areas of study, Gender Studies (Modleski, 1991, Richardson and Robinson, 1994) and Men's Studies/Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities (Canaan and Griffin, 1990, Hanmer, 1990, Richardson and Robinson, 1994, Robinson, 2008). Many feminists have been suspicious of men's motives, questioning the timing of their sudden interest in gender (Canaan and Griffin, 1990) and suggesting that men use feminism in an 'instrumental' way (Ashe, 2007, p.77), for example, to further their own careers (Braidotti, 1987, Canaan and Griffin, 1990, Luxton, 1993, Whelehan, 1995) or to attract women (Bryson, 1999), without any concern for feminist politics.

Feminists also fear that male (pro)feminism may be a form of appropriation, 'a way of reasserting control over an area of knowledge in which men have been excluded or marginalised' (Bryson, 1999, p.212). It may serve to depoliticize

feminism (Klein, 1989) and to return men to 'center stage' (Modleski, 1991, p.6), diverting the focus from women's oppression. Given that men still tend to be listened to more than women, Whelehan (1995) wonders whether the result of men's entry into feminism will be that 'the woman's voice will once again be suppressed in favour of the male authoritative one' (p.186).

However, men's interest in feminism can also be seen in a more positive light. Moi (1989) welcomes men's contributions to the growing body of feminist theory:

Feminist theory is not a property to be hoarded among the happy few; I have no desire to see it in short supply. The more feminist theorists there are, the more feminist theory there will be for all of us (p.181).

Furthermore, some theorists suggest that men can make a specific contribution to feminist knowledge by drawing on their experiences as men (for example, Morgan, 1992, Harding, 1998, Hearn, 1998) and through their ability to access male settings (Coltrane, 1994). Thus, overall, men's engagement with feminism offers both possibilities and potential problems.

What's a man to do?

Having discussed the arguments for and against men's involvement in feminism, I will now consider the more specific issue of how men should engage with feminism, according to different perspectives. Many (pro)feminists have argued that male feminism is inherently contradictory, as it involves men attempting to challenge their own dominance (for example, Tolson, 1977, Bradshaw, 1982, Kahane, 1998). This has led to much discussion about men's relationship to feminism and the appropriate role for men in the feminist movement (see, for example, Messner, 1997, Ashe, 2007). On the one hand, Kimmel (1998) argues for a 'men's auxiliary' model, where (pro)feminist men take their lead from, and remain accountable to, feminist women. This position 'acknowledges that this is a revolution of which we are a part, but not the central part, not its most significant part' (p.67). On the other hand, the Achilles Heel collective have argued that men need to take a more proactive role:

We [...] do not agree with men who say that the men's movement as such has no right to exist, except perhaps in a service role in relation to the women's movement. We see this attitude partly as another aspect of the

guilt and self-denial we have been brought up with since birth [...] [I]n its extreme form it becomes another form of being dependent on women, allowing *them* to do all the work in making the changes we need (The Men's Free Press Collective, 1978, reproduced in Seidler, 1991, p.31, emphasis in original).

This highlights the difficulties surrounding the issue of accountability, as mentioned above.

Some men argue for a separate profeminist 'men's movement' (for example, Brod, 1998), whilst others advocate working through existing organisations in alliance with women (Messner, 1997, Connell, 2005). There are also debates about whether or not being a (pro)feminist man requires a complete rejection or simply a reformulation of masculinity. Whilst Stoltenberg (2000) argues that male identity is inherently oppressive and therefore men should reject it by 'refusing to be a man', Brod (1998, p.198) stresses the need for a 'male affirmative' approach, 'a vision of men and of feminism in which their feminism is inseparably linked to their positive view of themselves as men' (see Pease, 2002, for an overview of this debate).

Another set of debates centres on the question of what it means to be a (pro)feminist: what kinds of actions are required? Is it more important to have a grasp of feminist theory, to be involved in public campaigns, or to challenge gender inequality at a personal level through your relationships with women and other men? One of my research participants made a neat comparison between a 'book feminist', who understands feminist theory and women's oppression at an intellectual level, and an 'emotional feminist', who actually applies that knowledge to his own behaviour (Martin, 25, feminist discussion group).¹³ Kahane (1998) argues that it is easier for men to engage with feminism at the shallow level of the 'book feminist' than to develop a deep feminist knowledge that would prompt transformation of their everyday practices, since a shallow engagement with feminism avoids the costs associated with challenging one's own privilege. However, others have pointed to the limitations of pursuing change at the personal level (for example, Segal, 2007). Thus, as Luxton points

¹³ All of the names given for research participants are pseudonyms. I have included participants' ages throughout the thesis because age/generation has been considered to be significant in shaping feminists' beliefs and political strategies, including their feelings about men's involvement in feminism (see section 2.3). For further discussion, see the section on 'Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality' in the next chapter.

out, 'anti-sexist work needs to go on publicly and privately simultaneously' (1993, p.370).

This debate and uncertainty about how (pro)feminist men should proceed stems from different political perspectives, but also seems rooted in men's contradictory relationship to feminism. Given this contradiction and the critiques of men doing feminism outlined in the previous section, men who wish to support feminism find themselves in a difficult position, often having to balance conflicting demands. As Bradshaw (1982) points out, '[t]he line between co-option and sitting back passively, letting us [women], as usual, do all the shit-work, is a very thin one' (p.188). The challenges facing (pro)feminist men are illustrated in Linn Egeberg Holmgren's recent research on radical (pro)feminist men in Sweden (Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn, 2009). Themes of contradiction and inadequacy recurred in these men's discussions, leading Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn to conclude that the male (pro)feminist subject position remains contradictory:

Overall, identifying oneself as a man and also becoming more and more intrigued by feminist questions and masculinity seems to make issues of one's own subject position ambivalent and contradictory. Passing as a (pro)feminist man requires being acknowledged as one by others, yet at the same time expecting to be defined as the problem to be solved. In men's relations to feminism contradictions and problematisations continue. Acting positively in relation to gender equality and feminism often involves men recognising positional dilemmas and ambivalences (2009, p.412).

Thus, men's relationship to feminism is certainly not straightforward. Having outlined the main points in debates about the role of men in feminism, I will now consider existing empirical research on the subject.

Research on men and feminism

Much of the discussion of 'men in feminism' is either theoretical (for example, Jardine and Smith, 1987, Digby, 1998) or is based on activists' own recollections of their experiences (for example, Snodgrass, 1977a, hooks, 2000, Mohan and Schultz, 2001). Whilst these are both important and valid forms of knowledge, social scientific research can add depth to our understanding of men's engagements with feminism. It can produce theories grounded in empirical data and can provide analysis of gender relations in feminist groups

on an ongoing basis, rather than reflection after the fact. It can also take into account the perspectives of different participants, going beyond the point of view of the individual activist. Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn (2009) have identified the need for more empirical studies of men's engagements with feminism.

Research on male (pro)feminists has tended to focus on men's groups (for example, Tolson, 1977, Lichterman, 1989, Pease, 2000, Goldrick-Jones, 2002) or on individual men (for example, Connell, 1990, Christian, 1994, Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn, 2009), rather than the role of men within mixed groups. Given the increasing number of mixed-gender feminist groups in the UK and the concerns that feminists have raised about mixed-gender organising, it is important to study mixed groups in order to understand what may be at stake in involving men in feminism. Some recent studies of feminist groups have touched on the issue of men's involvement (for example, Lambert and Parker, 2006, WASS Collective, 2007, Long, 2011), but this has not been their main focus. Thus, my research makes an original contribution to the literature through focusing on mixed-gender feminist groups.

Debates about men's relationship to feminism rest on particular theoretical assumptions, and different theoretical perspectives will lead to different views on the 'man question' (Luxton, 1993, Bryson, 1999). In this chapter, I have considered two key concepts in the men in feminism debates: the notions of experience and interests. However, I have not yet considered the key concept of *gender*, or the concept of *power*, which Goldrick-Jones (2002) points out is a crucial element in these debates. Therefore, in the next section I will explore these concepts in more detail and will consider how they can be applied to the study of mixed-gender feminist groups. I will also review existing research on gender and power in interaction.

2.2 Gender and power

The question of men's power has been an important part of the debates about men in feminism. The tasks of exposing, explaining and challenging men's power have been a major part of feminist theorising. However, Allen (2005, 2009) argues that feminists have rarely directly addressed the theorisation of

power (exceptions include Davis, 1988, Oldersma and Davis, 1991). Meanwhile, sociological theories of power have generally neglected to consider gender, meaning that theorising the connections between gender and power remains challenging (Oldersma and Davis, 1991). There is not space here to review all of the existing literature on gender and power, both of which form substantial bodies of scholarship.¹⁴ Thus, I have focused on the research and theories which I have found most useful in making sense of my data.

In this section of the chapter, I will begin by explaining my approach to gender and will then consider the more specific concept of masculinities, as research on men and masculinities has been closely interlinked with men's efforts to support feminism. Next, I will explain how I understand the concept of power. After outlining these key terms, I will move on to consider the operation of gender and power at the level of interaction. I will review existing research on gender and power in interaction and will then outline several theoretical approaches that I have used to analyse gendered power in the context of mixed-gender feminist groups.

Theorising gender

Originally used as a grammatical term (see Connell, 2002), the word 'gender' came into use in sociology as a way to differentiate between the social and biological aspects of the differences between men and women:

'Sex' is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. 'Gender' however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Oakley, 1972, p.16).

More recently, however, some theorists have criticised the separation of sex and gender, arguing that it is not possible to distinguish the biological and the cultural (see, for example, Butler, 1990, Hood-Williams, 1996, Hird, 2000).

According to this perspective:

¹⁴ For overviews of sociological and feminist perspectives on gender, see Jackson and Scott (2002), Kimmel (2004), Holmes (2007), Richardson (2008). Overviews of general theories of power can be found in Westwood (2002) and Clegg and Haugaard (2009), and the specific issue of gendered power is addressed by, for example, Davis et al. (1991), Westwood (2002), Whitehead (2002), and Allen (2005, 2009).

the body is not free from social interpretation, but is itself a socially constructed phenomenon. It is through understandings of gender that we interpret and establish meanings for bodily differences that are termed sexual difference (Richardson, 2008, p.7).

Thus, many writers now use the term gender to refer to anything that distinguishes men and women (Richardson, 2008), dispensing with the term 'sex' in order to emphasise the socially constructed nature of this distinction. It is this latter understanding of the word 'gender' that I will use in my research.

Gender is a complex, multifaceted concept, as is illustrated by Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott's (2002) definition of the term:

Gender as we define it denotes a hierarchical division between women and men embedded in both social institutions and social practices. Gender is thus a social structural phenomenon but is also produced, negotiated and sustained at the level of everyday interaction. The world we inhabit is always already ordered by gender, yet gender is also embodied and lived by men and women, in local, specific, biographical contexts and is experienced as central to individual identities. Gender thus encompasses the social division and cultural distinction between women and men as well as the characteristics commonly associated with femininity and masculinity (pp.1-2).

This definition shows that gender incorporates power relations, structures, practices, identities, and cultural meanings. Therefore, gender can be understood as an organising principle (see Connell, 2005) that permeates almost every aspect of social life. Jackson and Scott add that gender is further complicated by its interaction with other social structures, such as those of class, race and sexuality.

Gender not only differentiates between men and women, but also constructs and places people into these categories in the first place. Gender as an organising principle is binary, assuming that there are only two possible categories, male and female, and that everyone can fit into them (see, for example, Garfinkel, 1967). This idea of a binary gender system has been challenged on many fronts. To begin with, at the level of the body, intersex people disprove the idea that there are only two genders (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Blackless et al. (2000) argue that the variation in human gendered bodies can best be conceptualised as 'two overlapping bell-shaped curves', rather than two discrete categories (p.163). As Stryker (2006) points out:

[W]hat we typically call the sex of the body, which we imagine to be a uniform quality that uniquely characterises each and every individual whole body, is shown to consist of numerous parts—chromosomal sex, anatomical sex, reproductive sex, morphological sex—that can, and do, form a variety of viable bodily aggregations that number far more than two. The ‘wholeness’ of the body and ‘sameness’ of its sex are themselves revealed to be socially constructed (p.9).

Secondly, systems of gender classification vary historically and cross-culturally, so the binary system is not universal (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Thirdly, at the level of individual identity, binary categories do not capture the full diversity of gender identities (see Hines and Sanger, 2010). For example, people may identify as both male and female, neither of these, somewhere in between, or they may move between genders. Alternatively, their gender identity may have nothing to do with the binary categories, or they may have no gender at all (see, for example, Bettencourt, 2009, Nonbinary.org, 2012b). As I highlighted in Chapter 1, some of my research participants had complex gender identities which did not fit into binary categories, which complicated the task of analysing gendered power relations in the groups that I studied.

Theorists of gender have developed different models to explain how gender is socially constructed and reproduced (for overviews see, for example, Kimmel, 2004, Holmes, 2007). Probably the most sophisticated sociological theory of gender is that developed by Connell (1987, 2002, 2005). Drawing on the work of feminist and gay liberation theorists, she develops a practice-based model of gender that aims to illuminate ‘how gender relations are organised as a going concern’ (1987, p.63). She analyses gender as ‘a structure of social practice’ (2005, p.71), using a dynamic model of structure that views it both as a product of practice and as that which constrains practice (1987).¹⁵ Connell identifies numerous sites of gender practice, from individual personality to institutions and ideology (1987, 2005). Thus, she develops a multilevel model of gender (see Taylor, 1999).

Other theorists have also conceptualised gender as a practice or process. West and Zimmerman (1987), coming from an ethnomethodological perspective, famously developed the concept of ‘doing gender’, suggesting that ‘gender is

¹⁵ Here, Connell is drawing on the ‘dualist’ models of structure and practice developed by Bourdieu and Giddens (see Connell, 1987).

not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort' (p.129). 'Doing gender' is the work of presenting oneself as male or female and of behaving in ways deemed appropriate to that category.

Importantly, doing gender is an interactional process:

In one sense, of course, it is individuals who 'do' gender. But it is a situated doing, carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production. Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.126).

Drawing attention to the work involved in doing gender contests the idea that it is natural. Acts which are deemed to be expressive of male or female identities are shown instead to be productive of these identities (see Richardson, 2008). In this sense, the ethnomethodological approach is similar to Judith Butler's poststructuralist performative theory of gender (see Moloney and Fenstermaker, 2002, Allen, 2009). Like West and Zimmerman, Butler (1990) views gender as a performance. However, she rejects the idea of a pre-existing subject who performs gender. Rather, 'performances [of gender] are *performative* in that they bring into being gendered subjects' (Richardson, 2008, p.12, emphasis in original). Butler explains the concept of performativity as follows:

The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an 'internal' feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures (1999, p.xv).

The idea of gender as a performance might suggest that it is voluntary, but Butler stresses that the performance of gender is regulated by systems of discourse and power. The 'naturalness' of gender is 'constituted through *discursively constrained* performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex' (Butler, 1999, pp.xxviii-xxix, emphasis added). Thus, the performance of gender at an interactional level is linked in to wider discourses and structures. As Holmes (2007, p.59) points out, Butler's theory seems to suggest that gender 'does us' rather than us 'doing gender'.

West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that the process of doing gender is constrained by societal norms – we cannot choose *not* to do gender in a society

which is structured around a division into two gender categories, and we constantly undergo the risk of being 'held to account' for our gendered performances by others. At the same time, by doing gender, we 'simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category' (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.146). Thus, gender is both shaped by, and shapes, interaction. Gender is also constructed through and in relation to other categories such as race and class (Spelman, 1990, West and Fenstermaker, 1995, Holmes, 2007) and sexuality (Butler, 1990, Jackson, 1999, Richardson, 2007), which link to other structures of inequality.

Understanding gender as a system which is continually being (re)produced through the actions of individuals, rather than a fixed structure, allows for individual agency and the possibility of changes in gender relations. West and Zimmerman, despite emphasising the constraints under which individuals do gender, argue that change is possible:

Social movements such as feminism can provide the ideology and impetus to question existing arrangements, and the social support for individuals to explore alternatives to them. Legislative changes, such as that proposed by the Equal Rights Amendment, can also weaken the accountability of conduct to sex category (1987, p.146).

Similarly, Connell suggests that gendered structures are constantly being constituted, rather than simply reproduced, and therefore we must recognise the 'constant possibility that structure will be constituted in a different way' (1987, p.44). Studying social movements is one way to investigate the processes through which gender can be resisted, challenged and changed (Taylor, 1999). In my investigation of mixed-gender feminist groups, I will examine whether the groups are doing gender in ways that challenge and/or reproduce existing gendered power relations. In the next section, I will consider one area of gendered scholarship that has paid particular attention to the question of men's power: the study of masculinities.

Masculinities

As I mentioned earlier, the critical study of men and masculinities developed out of the men's movements of the 1970s. Many early studies focused on the idea of the 'male sex role', drawing on the social role theory of sociologists such as

Talcott Parsons (for overviews, see Whitehead, 2002, Connell, 2005). Whilst functionalist theorists such as Parsons viewed sex roles as complementary and as contributing to a harmonious society, with the advent of second-wave feminism, the 'female sex role' came to be seen as oppressive, and then the burgeoning men's movement began to see the 'male sex role' as similarly limiting (Connell, 2005, pp.23-24). For example, Pleck and Sawyer's (1974) anthology, *Men and Masculinity*, explores how men are socialised into 'the masculine role', the harmful effects of this, and the possibilities of 'men's liberation' from restrictive gender norms.

However, sex role theory has been critiqued, particularly for ignoring power relations. As Carrigan et al. (1985) pointed out:

The result of using the role framework is an abstract view of the *differences* between the sexes and their situations, not a concrete one of the relations between them. [...] The political effect is to highlight the attitudes and pressures that create an artificially rigid *distinction* between men and women and to play down the *power* that men exercise over women (p.580, emphasis in original).

These authors also highlighted the need to consider power relations amongst different groups of men, particularly heterosexual and gay men. Thus, drawing on gay liberation, feminist and psychoanalytic theories, they developed a new framework of a hierarchy of masculinities, which brought into focus power relations between men and women and between different groups of men. This was further elaborated by Connell (1987, 2005).

Connell conceptualises power relations amongst men through the concepts of hegemonic, subordinated, complicit and marginalised masculinities. Connell defines masculinities as 'configurations of gender practice', or 'gender projects' (2005, p.72). She also argues for a relational understanding of masculinities, stating that ' "masculinity" does not exist except in contrast with "femininity" ' (2005, p.68). Hegemonic masculinity is the way of being a man that is most 'culturally exalted' (2005, p.77) in any one place and time, and it serves to legitimise men's dominance over women and the power of some groups of men over others. In its current form in Western cultures, hegemonic masculinity is heterosexual, white, and middle-class; gay men (and some heterosexual men) are subordinated in relation to it, and black and working-class men are

marginalised by it (Connell, 2005). Connell argues that only a few men actually embody hegemonic masculinity, but many others may be complicit with the hegemonic project, since they benefit from the overall domination of men over women. These men support the hegemonic ideal even though they do not conform to it themselves.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been hugely influential in the study of men and masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, Wedgwood, 2009, Messerschmidt, 2012). It has also been the subject of considerable criticism (see, for example, Whitehead, 2002, Hearn, 2004, Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, Beasley, 2008). For example, Whitehead (2002) identifies some problems with the underlying concept of hegemony and also criticises the structuralist underpinnings of Connell's framework. Whitehead also directs the latter criticism at feminist theories of patriarchy and Connell's concept of the gender order, reflecting his own preference for a poststructuralist approach. Whilst I do not agree with Whitehead's blanket dismissal of structuralist theories, he does also raise some salient points about the slipperiness of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, arguing that '[j]ust what hegemonic masculinity actually is [...] is never illuminated' (p.93).

Beasley (2008) also criticises the ambiguity of the concept. She draws on Michael Flood's (2002) analysis to argue that, in Connell's writing, there is a slippage between the meaning of hegemonic masculinity as a political mechanism for legitimating men's domination of women, as a description of dominant forms of manhood, as a reference to actual groups of men, and as the specific characteristics or personality traits associated with those men. Beasley contends that these different meanings of hegemonic masculinity may not coincide empirically. For example:

[A] senior manager in the major accounting firm KPMG Australia [...] and his mates may represent a dominant masculinity in that he wields a widely accepted institutional power and may even perhaps have particular personality traits associated with that dominance, but may not necessarily be the politically legitimating cultural ideal invoked by the term hegemonic masculinity. Accountants—even those with considerable authority—are scarcely deemed the mobilising model of manliness to which all men should aspire (Beasley, 2008, p.90).

Thus, she concludes that 'it is a matter of some importance to be able to distinguish hegemonic from merely dominant men, from actual men or from their specific personality traits' (p.91).

In contrast to Whitehead, Hearn (2004) retains the concept of hegemony but questions the need for the concept of masculinity, arguing that researchers should focus instead on 'the hegemony of men'. This involves examining the construction of the category of men and the categorisation of different types of men, as well as investigating men's practices. In focusing on men rather than masculinities, this approach seems more likely to directly address the question of men's power, although it perhaps de-emphasizes the study of cultural representations and models of men's conduct, which are an important component in the study of men and masculinities.

Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) propose yet another alternative to hegemonic masculinity, advocating a focus on 'manhood acts', the practices through which men 'signify possession of a masculine self' (p.280), rather than masculinities. However, they still talk about a 'hegemonic ideal' which seems akin to hegemonic masculinity: 'The hegemonic ideal pervades the culture and sets a standard against which all manhood acts are measured' (p.286). Thus, their proposal seems to constitute a change of emphasis, rather than a complete alternative to hegemonic masculinity.

In response to these kinds of criticisms, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have defended the concept of hegemonic masculinity, arguing that it should be reformulated rather than rejected. They contend that 20 years of research on men and masculinities has confirmed the existence of multiple patterns of masculinity and hierarchical relations amongst these in numerous settings. They also argue that the concept of hegemony is appropriate for describing power relations between different groups of men, since these relations are often maintained through '[c]ultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalisation, and the marginalisation or delegitimation of alternatives', rather than force (p.846).

In this research project, I am concerned to investigate men's actions within the context of mixed-gender feminist groups, whether these actions are

conceptualised as manhood acts, masculinities, or simply, in Hearn's (2004) words, men's practices. I am primarily interested in whether these practices reproduce or challenge existing gendered power relations, in other words, the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004). However, I recognise that men's actions are carried out in the context of, and in relation to, particular understandings of what it means to be a man, and therefore it seems important to retain the term masculinities to capture this. As Beasley (2008) points out, although conceptual slippage in discussions about hegemonic masculinity is problematic, it reflects the fact that the different meanings of the term cannot be completely disentangled. Masculinities refer to both cultural ideals and men's actual practices, in Whitehead's terms, 'masculinity is *both illusion and reality*' (2002, p.42, emphasis in original), and it is the interaction between the two that is important. Having explored the concepts of gender and masculinities, I will now move on to the question of power.

Theorising power

Within the social sciences, power has been theorised in a myriad of ways.

Haugaard and Clegg (2009) outline some of the key differences in approach:

The intricacies of legitimate versus illegitimate power; of coercion versus authority; of collective systemic versus individual agent specific power; of constitutive power versus power from which there is escape, and of power as autonomy versus constraint, are all aspects of power's many faces which have shaped contemporary perceptions of power in the social sciences (p.2).

Drawing on Wittgenstein's idea of 'family resemblance concepts', Haugaard and Clegg suggest that power does not represent a single phenomenon but rather a cluster of related concepts:

Just as in an extended family, there may be similarities which make each member recognisable as a member, yet there is not a single set of characteristics which all the family have in common (2009, p.4).

From this perspective, no particular understanding of power is right or wrong. Rather, the different approaches are 'conceptual tools' that researchers can use in accordance with what they are trying to find out (Haugaard and Clegg, 2009). Lukes (1974) argues that different conceptions of power reflect particular value-assumptions and political perspectives. Davis (1988) draws on this idea to

suggest that researchers have to choose a theoretical approach that fits with the methodological demands of their study and their own values and worldview. This piece of research aims to analyse gendered power relations in mixed-gender feminist groups. Thus, I need a concept of power that can be applied to gender and that relates to face-to-face interaction.

Allen (2005) argues that feminists have tended to theorise power in one of three ways: as a resource, as domination or as empowerment. In my research, it is the concept of domination that is most relevant, as it is the idea of men's domination of women in general, and within the context of feminist groups, that renders men's involvement in feminism problematic (see next section). However, some feminists have questioned the concept of domination. For example, Gerson and Peiss (1985) suggest that gender relations are characterised not only by domination, but also by processes of negotiation. Davis (1991) argues that a focus on domination limits our scope of vision when investigating gendered power relations:

[I]f we want to investigate power we will be forced to look for it in situations which involve overt and authoritarian forms of control by men over women. This eliminates those instances of interaction between the sexes which are friendly, pleasant or intimate. Since much of the interaction between men and women could be characterised in precisely this way [...] a model of power is clearly required which will enable us to investigate it anywhere. In other words, we need a model of power relations which can also deal with power that is exercised in friendly or intimate encounters (p.81).

Thus, it is perhaps more useful to conceptualise domination as a particular form of power, rather than as the definition of power (Lukes, 2005), and to seek a more flexible definition of power.

An alternative way of thinking about power is simply as a capacity to do something (Allen, 2005). Jenkins (2009) presents a view of power understood as 'efficacy', in other words, 'the capacity of individuals and groups to achieve their own ends and/or frustrate those of others' (p.152). This fairly minimalist view of power offers flexibility, as efficacy may be achieved through a wide range of different methods, such as domination, negotiation, persuasion, and so on. Thus, it fits Davis's requirement that it should allow us to investigate power in different kinds of interactions, including those that are friendly or intimate. With its focus on individual agency, it can easily be applied to the study of face-

to-face interaction, and it fits with the practice-based view of gender outlined above. Jenkins focuses on the resources that actors use to achieve their ends, but my focus is on the process and outcomes of interaction. I consider power as the ability to influence the outcome of social interaction. Now that I have explained my approach to both gender and power, I will bring them together to consider how gender and power work in interaction. I will first consider existing research on this topic and will then explore some different theoretical approaches to understanding power dynamics in mixed-gender feminist groups.

Gender, power and interaction

As mentioned earlier, some feminists have raised concerns about power dynamics in mixed-gender feminist groups. Luxton (1993) summarises the problem as follows:

Many feminists argue that even when men are involved with women in activities intended to promote women's equality, men often slip into authority positions, taking leadership in defining the issues or in determining how to organise. Ironically, many feminists have participated in discussions where men, while talking about the problems of male dominance and patriarchy, hog the conversational space and silence the women as they do so (p.352).

These kinds of problems are also highlighted by a number of other feminists (for example, Taylor, 1998, Mohan and Schultz, 2001). In this section, I will draw on a range of sociological research to consider whether the problems highlighted by Luxton are part of a broader pattern of gendered interaction and will discuss some possible models for understanding these gendered power dynamics.

One area of research which has considered the dynamics of mixed-gender groups is social movement studies. Studies of mixed-gender social movement organisations show that gender inequality in society tends to carry over into social movements (for example, McAdam, 1992, Fonow, 1998, Sasson-Levy and Rapoport, 2003). Gender inequality in movements can manifest itself, for example, in sexist discrimination (McAdam, 1992), a gendered division of labour (Fonow, 1998, Sasson-Levy and Rapoport, 2003) or male domination of discussions (Taylor, 1998, Ostrander, 1999). Research shows that even movements which purport to be feminist (or supportive of feminism) are stratified by gender (Roth, 1998, Taylor, 1998, Ostrander, 1999).

The above research shows both the problems that can arise in mixed-gender groups and the strategies that women have adopted to counteract male domination. For example, women in the Irish pro-choice movement maintained control of the movement through organisational structure (using consensus decision-making and ensuring that women chaired committees) and through their choice of protest tactics, which centred on women's experiences and employed feminine symbols, thus largely excluding men from the protest action (Taylor, 1998). In another example, the female members of ACT UP/LA created a women's caucus in order to gain visibility within the organisation and to ensure that women's issues were not ignored (Roth, 1998). Ostrander (1999) shows that movement organisations can simultaneously challenge and perpetuate gendered and racial inequality. She suggests that the struggle to create solidarity across boundaries of gender and race is an ongoing, dynamic process. Thus, she adds another layer of complexity to the question of power dynamics within feminist groups and her work serves as a useful model for the empirical study of such groups.

Researchers in fields such as sociology, social psychology and linguistics have analysed gendered power in other interactional settings (see, for example, Thorne et al., 1983, Tannen, 1993a, Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999). In a review of existing research, Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) suggest that, in mixed-gender contexts, men are more likely to engage in 'power and prestige behaviours' (p.201) such as talking more,¹⁶ making more task suggestions, and using assertive gestures and speech styles. They are also more influential and more likely to be selected leader in a group. In contrast, they suggest that women are more likely to use tentative and deferential speech styles, for example, using more tag questions, hedges, disclaimers and polite forms of speech.¹⁷ Some researchers have also found that men interrupt women more than the reverse and suggest that men use interruption as a way to assert power in a discussion (West and Zimmerman, 1983), but further research

¹⁶ See also James and Drakich (1993).

¹⁷ A tag question is added to the end of a statement and has the effect of seeking confirmation of the statement. Ng and Bradac (1993) give the following example: 'I liked it, didn't I?' (p.19). Hedges are 'linguistic forms which "dilute" an assertion; for example: *sort of, like, I think, and kind of* (Wareing, 1999, p.77, emphasis in original).

suggests that there is no overall gendered pattern in interruptions (James and Clark, 1993).

Whilst the research cited by Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) appears to support the idea that men tend to dominate in mixed-gender interactions, Tannen (1993b) cautions against drawing such easy conclusions. She suggests that linguistic forms that could be seen as evidence of dominance (for example, interruption, speaking more or raising new topics) can also signal solidarity, depending on the circumstances. Thus, for example, an interruption could be an attempt to wrest the conversational floor from another speaker, or it could indicate enthusiasm and support for the point the speaker is making (see also James and Clark, 1993). Furthermore, according to Tannen, the very same utterance could in fact be polysemic, signifying both dominance and solidarity. Thus, identifying the operation of power in interaction is not an easy task.

Although we need to bear in mind Tannen's caveat, the careful reviews undertaken by James and Drakich (1993) and Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) suggest that there is an overall pattern, that men generally exercise greater power in interaction. From a feminist perspective, it is easy to infer that gendered inequalities in interaction reflect those of the wider social structure. Nevertheless, it is important to consider more closely the processes which link power at the interactional and structural levels in order to understand how gendered power relations are (re)produced and how they might be challenged. Thus, I will consider several theoretical approaches to these links. I will begin by explaining the feminist concept of male privilege and will then consider how this idea can be developed through drawing on the concepts of status, emotion work and disciplinary power.

Male privilege

Discussions about men and feminism frequently feature the idea of *male privilege* (see, for example, Hagan, 1998, Kahane, 1998, Pillow, 2002, Onne, 2008, Tarrant, 2009). This indicates the advantages that men gain from structural gender inequalities in society, which Connell (2002, 2005) refers to as the 'patriarchal dividend'. Male privilege also gives men a sense of entitlement to these advantages (see Kimmel, 1998). In the context of interaction, male privilege means that men are accorded more respect: they are more likely to be

listened to and to have their ideas taken seriously. This is illustrated, for example, in Fishman's (1978) study of conversations between married couples, in which she found that women did much more work to maintain the interaction, yet men exercised control over the topics that were discussed:

Both men and women regarded topics introduced by women as tentative; many of these were quickly dropped. In contrast, topics introduced by the men were treated as topics to be pursued; they were seldom rejected. The women worked harder than the men in interaction because they had less certainty of success. They did much of the unnecessary work of interaction, starting conversations and then working to maintain them (p.404).

Importantly, there are two sides to male privilege. On the one hand, men are more likely to assert themselves. On the other hand, women are more likely to defer to men (see Glick and Fiske, 1999). What might account for these gendered differences in behaviour? I will suggest several different theoretical approaches that could help to explain these dynamics: the concept of *status*, Hochschild's (1979) idea of *emotion work*, and Foucault's (1975/1995) analysis of *disciplinary power*.

Status

Glick and Fiske (1999), in an overview of social psychological research on gender and interaction, use the concept of status to explain inequalities in interaction. They note that:

Status powerfully affects how people interact with others. Compared with status inferiors, high status people tend to initiate interactions, determine the course of conversations, and decide whether greater intimacy is allowed in the relationship [...] [P]eople defer to those of higher status, who then exploit this deference to exert greater control over social interaction (p.373).

They suggest that, since men monopolise high status positions within institutions, this allows them to dominate interactions. Similarly, Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) suggest that '[m]ost interactions between men and women occur in the structural context of roles or status relationships that are unequal' (p.191) and thus, men tend to exercise more power in these interactions. In these cases, it is status, not gender, that accounts for the inequality. However, even in situations in which men and women are 'ostensibly equal', people tend

to defer to men (Glick and Fiske, 1999, p.373), which demonstrates that gender is itself a determinant of status (see Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999).

'Status characteristics theory' or 'expectation states theory' (see Berger et al., 1980) provides an explanation for how status characteristics such as gender, race or class lead to the development of hierarchy within task-focused interaction. This approach argues that people judge their own and others' competence, and thus develop 'performance expectations' about themselves and others, based on status characteristics (James and Drakich, 1993). These expectations then shape their interactional behaviour in self-fulfilling ways (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999). Thus, a high status person will be regarded as more competent than a low status one, and '[c]onsequently the high status individual is not only expected to perform better but is also given more opportunity to perform than the lower status individual' (James and Drakich, 1993, p.286). Status characteristics are relational, which means that a person is judged to have a high status only in comparison to someone of a lower status (James and Drakich, 1993). This means, for example, that gender is not usually a salient status characteristic in a single-sex group.

Gender interacts with other markers of status, whether these are other social divisions or formal roles within a context (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999). Therefore, the salience of gender as a status characteristic, and thus the influence of gender on interaction, will vary depending on the context (see James and Drakich, 1993, Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999). The general ideology of patriarchy means that in most contexts men will be judged to be more competent than women, but in areas that are traditionally feminine, women will be judged to be more competent (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999). This makes feminist activism an interesting case study, since feminism is associated with women, but the realm of politics is generally associated with men (see, for example, Einwohner et al., 2000, Farrar and Warner, 2006). In conclusion, the concept of status provides a clear link between power at the structural and interactional levels. Another concept which can help to explain gendered power dynamics in interaction is *emotion work*.

Emotion work

An important aspect of doing gender concerns the management and display of emotions. In Western cultures, men have been associated with rationality and women with emotionality (James, 1989, Lupton, 1998), and men and women are also expected to display different kinds of emotions:

[I]t has been seen as typical and more appropriate for women rather than men to express such emotions as grief, fear, sentimentality, vulnerability, envy and jealousy. Emotions such as anger, rage, aggressiveness or triumph are less expected or condoned in women compared with men (Lupton, 1998, p.106).

The sociology of emotions, and in particular the concept of *emotion work* or *emotional labour*¹⁸ (see Hochschild, 1979, 2003, James, 1989, Wharton, 2009), can shed some light on this aspect of doing gender and perhaps on gender differences in interaction.

Arlie Hochschild, whose work has been highly influential in this area, describes emotion work as ‘the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling’ (1979, p.561). This may involve evoking, shaping or suppressing feelings. Hochschild (1979) uses the concept of ‘feeling rules’ to illustrate the social dimension of emotions. Situations carry certain expectations or ‘rules’ for appropriate feelings; for example, we are expected to feel sad at a funeral. When individuals find that their emotions do not fit with the ‘feeling rules’ of a situation, they may engage in emotion work to try to change their feelings.

Whilst Hochschild mainly focuses on emotion work that is carried out upon the self, she notes that it can also be performed on other people (1979). Indeed, the two are often connected. For example, in Hochschild’s discussion of the work of flight attendants, she argues that:

[emotional] labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that *produces the proper state of mind in others* – in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place (2003, p.7, emphasis added).

¹⁸ Hochschild uses the term ‘emotional labour’ to refer to the management of feeling in the context of paid work and ‘emotion work’ to describe the same activity done in a private context. Others (for example, James, 1989, Bartky, 1990) use the term ‘emotional labour’ to cover both contexts.

Many researchers have drawn attention to the gendered dimensions of emotion work (for example, James, 1989, Duncombe and Marsden, 1993, Lupton, 1998, Hochschild, 2003, Wharton, 2009, Robinson and Hockey, 2011). It is suggested that women do more emotion work than men, both in paid work and in the private sphere (see James, 1989, Lupton, 1998, Hochschild, 2003). More importantly, it is argued that women and men tend to do different *kinds* of emotion work. Thus, Hochschild suggests that, in the context of paid employment:

women tend to specialise in the flight attendant side of emotional labor, men in the bill collection side of it. [...] Women are more likely to be presented with the task of mastering anger and aggression in the service of 'being nice.' To men, the socially assigned task of aggressing against those that break rules of various sorts creates the private task of mastering fear and vulnerability (2003, p.163).

Hence, women tend to do more of the nurturing, caring type of emotion work, which involves 'affirming, enhancing, and celebrating the well-being and status of others' (Hochschild, 2003, p.165). This is the case not just in the workplace, but also in the context of family and intimate relationships (see Bartky, 1990, Delphy and Leonard, 1992, Duncombe and Marsden, 1993, Lupton, 1998, Hochschild, 2003). Here, the literature on emotional labour converges with that on care work (Wharton, 2009). James argues that women's responsibility for caring is tied to stereotypical ideas about their nature: 'Part of women's caring role is that they are deemed to be "naturally" good at dealing with other people's emotions because they are themselves "naturally" emotional' (1989, p.22).

Gender differences in emotion work are also related to gendered power relations. The 'niceness' performed by women such as flight attendants is a form of deference (Hochschild, 2003) and, as Wharton points out, deference is 'a characteristic demanded of all those in disadvantaged structural positions' (2009, p.152). Feminists have long argued that there is an unfair exchange of emotional support between women and men (see, for example, Ferguson, 1979, Bartky, 1990, Delphy and Leonard, 1992, Duncombe and Marsden, 1993), and some view the expectation that women will support men as a form of exploitation (see Ferguson, 1979, Bartky, 1990, Delphy and Leonard, 1992, McMahon, 1999). Whilst I do not believe that this form of emotion work is inherently exploitative, it clearly has the potential to reproduce gendered power

inequalities. The above discussion suggests that doing gender involves doing emotion work and that, for women, this often involves acting in ways that are caring, deferential or nurturing towards men. Thus, a focus on emotion work could contribute to understanding male privilege in interaction.

Disciplinary power

Foucault's (1975/1995) idea of disciplinary power provides another way of thinking about male privilege. In particular, Foucault's account of how people internalise the effects of power might help to explain why women sometimes act in ways that reproduce their own subordination. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1995), Foucault traces the development in the 18th century of disciplinary forms of power, which seek to catalogue, control and mould individuals, in institutions such as prisons, armies and schools. Disciplinary techniques produce 'docile bodies', that 'may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (1975/1995, p.136). One of the modalities of disciplinary power is the gaze, which is symbolised by Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a design for a perfect prison. Foucault describes the design of the Panopticon:

[A]t the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in the central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery (1975/1995, p.200).

The Panopticon uses visibility as a mode of control. The windows of the central tower are shaded by blinds, so the prison supervisors are never seen, whilst the prisoners are trapped in permanent view. The prisoners do not know when they are actually being observed, but are conscious that they may be observed at any time. This leads them to internalise the gaze of the supervisors and to monitor and adjust their own behaviour. In Foucault's words, the prisoner 'becomes the principle of his own subjection' (1975/1995, p.203).

This idea of self-surveillance and self-discipline has been taken up by feminist theorists to explain women's conformity with apparently oppressive practices.

For example, Bartky (1990) considers the 'disciplinary practices' that produce femininity. These include dieting and exercise, deferential posture and movement, the removal of body hair and the use of make-up. She argues that a woman who pursues these practices 'has become, just as surely as the inmate of Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance' (p.80). Whilst not explicitly referencing Foucault, Gill (2007) discusses the themes of self-surveillance and discipline in her analysis of 'postfeminist media culture'. Gill argues that women are required to discipline not only their bodies but also their inner selves, suggesting that '[i]n a culture saturated by individualistic self-help discourses, the self has become a project to be evaluated, advised, disciplined and improved or brought "into recovery" ' (p.262). Gill notes that these injunctions to improve the self, present in media such as magazines, fiction and television, are directed at women rather than men.

Following on from the work of these feminists, it is my contention that the analysis of gendered disciplinary practices could be expanded to include women's behaviour within conversational interaction. If, for example, women speak less or are silenced in the presence of men, could this be an example of self-monitoring and self-disciplining behaviour? Disciplinary power can induce us to take actions, such as those required to produce femininity, but it can also prevent us from acting, for example, we may remain silent for fear of offending or saying the wrong thing.

Whilst many feminists have drawn on Foucault's work, they have also found reason to criticise it, particularly for its gender blindness (see, for example, Bartky, 1990, Ramazanoğlu, 1993). For example, Bartky comments on *Discipline and Punish*:

Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the 'docile bodies' of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? (1990, p.65).

She concludes that this lack of attention to gender means that Foucault's analysis 'reproduces that sexism which is endemic throughout Western political

theory' (p.65). However, through producing her own account of the disciplinary practices of femininity she effectively produces a feminist reworking of Foucault, showing that his theories, though flawed, can be useful tools for feminists. Thus, like many other feminists, I draw on what I find useful in Foucault's work, whilst rejecting or reformulating other aspects of it.¹⁹ In my case, I find that the idea of disciplinary power provides a useful way of thinking about power relations in interaction, in addition to the other theories that I have discussed.

A framework for investigating mixed-gender feminist groups

As the above discussion shows, my research is informed by a practice-based view of gender which recognises gender as a structure of power relations that is nevertheless constantly constituted through the actions of individuals doing gender. Feminists aim to change this structure and to do gender differently, but some argue that, when men get involved in feminism, there is a risk that established patterns of gender hierarchy will be reproduced, undermining feminist attempts at change. My research on mixed-gender feminist groups aims to find out whether these groups are doing gender in ways that challenge and/or reproduce existing gendered power relations. In analysing the groups' experiences, I have drawn on the concepts of male privilege, status, emotion work and disciplinary power. I have found all of these varied approaches useful in illuminating particular aspects of the groups' dynamics. Whilst a significant proportion of my analysis focuses on the internal dynamics of the groups, I have also found it important to consider the wider context in which the groups are embedded. Thus, in the final section of this literature review, I will outline the context of contemporary feminist activism.

2.3 The context of contemporary feminist activism

The debates about the 'man question' discussed above originated in the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s. Whilst there are debates about whether the second wave has ended (see, for example, Bailey, 1997, Nash, 2002), it is clear that the context of contemporary feminist activism is very different from that of the 1970s. Griffin et al. (1994) argue that, when

¹⁹ There is now a large body of feminist work which critically engages with Foucault. See, for example, Diamond and Quinby (1988), Bartky (1990), Sawicki (1991), McNay (1992), Ramazanoğlu (1993).

considering the history of feminism, 'it is important to see knowledge and action as located in relation to context' (p.3). Thus, in this section I will outline some key features of the context in which contemporary mixed-gender feminist groups are located. I will begin by discussing the broader sociopolitical context in the UK, which is characterised by a degree of feminist progress, persisting gender inequality, neoliberalism and individualisation, and ambivalence towards feminism. I will then go on to discuss changes in feminism since the 1970s, which include the development and diversification of feminist theory, the perceived decline of feminism as a mass movement, changes in the nature of feminist political practice, a possible resurgence of feminist activism, and attempts by younger women to rearticulate feminism. I will also consider the issue of generational conflict within feminism, which has been a key theme in discussions about feminism in recent years (see Henry, 2004). I will conclude by reflecting on the relationship between this historical context and the 'man question' in feminism.

Sociopolitical context

Over the past 40 years in Britain we have experienced significant improvements in women's position, for example, in terms of legal rights, political representation and participation in paid employment (Fawcett Society, 2006), partly as a result of the second-wave feminist movement. We have also arguably experienced cultural changes, such as a loosening of traditional gender roles and the incorporation, to some extent, of feminist ideas into mainstream culture (see, for example, Walter, 1999b). As a result of these changes, many young women now grow up with a sense of confidence and entitlement (Budgeon, 2001, Jowett, 2004). At the same time, inequality persists in many areas (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010).

These developments have taken place alongside wider processes of individualisation within Western societies (see, for example, Giddens, 1991, Beck, 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Sociologists such as Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) argue that individuals have increasingly become freed from traditional structures of work, class, family and gender, and have to reflexively shape their own life courses. Giddens uses the example of a book on 'self-therapy' to illustrate the way in which '[t]he self is seen as a reflexive

project, for which the individual is responsible' (1991, p.75). This dovetails with the rise of neoliberal politics with its focus on free-market economics and an accompanying rhetoric of individual choice and personal responsibility. In this context, the combination of a degree of feminist success and a political shift to the right has led feminism to be problematised, since women's apparently increasing freedom has been used to argue that feminism is obsolete. Feminists have explored these challenges to feminism through the concepts of 'backlash' and 'postfeminism'.

Backlash and postfeminism

Some feminists have argued that the years since the 1980s have been characterised by a 'backlash' against feminism (Faludi, 1992, Whelehan, 2000, Cochrane, 2008). This idea was developed at length by Faludi (1992), who argued that:

the last decade has seen a powerful counter-assault on women's rights, [...] an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women (p.12).

Faludi traces the backlash not only in the realm of politics, but also in the media, advertising and popular culture. The backlash works to undermine feminism by blaming it for women's problems. At times, feminism is also blamed for problems affecting men (see, for example, Lyndon, 1993), often through the idea that feminism has 'gone too far' and that men are now the oppressed group (see Redfern, 2001). Whilst Faludi's work mainly focuses on the US, she also draws on examples from Australia and Britain. Meanwhile, Smyth (1995) reflects on the backlash in Ireland, and Whelehan (2000) and Cochrane (2008) trace the backlash in Britain.

One of the key phenomena attributed to the backlash is the stereotyping and demonising of feminists (see, for example, Smyth, 1995). For instance, Callaghan et al. (1999) argue that:

for the past two decades, the image of feminism purveyed in the UK media has been at best that it is tangential to the lives of contemporary women and at worst that it is mired in bitterness, silliness and anti-male dogma (p.163).

Hinds and Stacey (2001), in a study of British press coverage of feminism, show that the image of the bra-burner is one of the most enduring feminist stereotypes. In their view, it highlights the supposed incompatibility between feminism and femininity and also serves to trivialise the Women's Liberation Movement. Numerous pieces of research demonstrate that people's views of feminism are shaped by such stereotypes (see, for example, Callaghan et al., 1999, RÚdólfsdóttir and Jolliffe, 2008, Scharff, 2010).

As Braithwaite's (2004) close reading of Faludi shows, the term backlash does not simply refer to antifeminism. Instead, it involves 'a more complex series of seemingly mixed messages about feminism and the women's movement, and contemporary women's rights or equality issues' (Braithwaite, 2004, p.21). The backlash both celebrates feminism's achievements, claiming that women have now achieved equality, and blames feminism for women's current problems. As Faludi puts it:

[B]ehind the news, cheerfully and endlessly repeated, that the struggle for women's rights is won, another message flashes. You may be free and equal now, it says to women, but you have never been more miserable (1992, p.1).

A similar ambivalence towards feminism is expressed in the concept of 'postfeminism'. Since the 1980s, this term has proliferated in both media and academic discourse about feminism and gender issues, but its meaning is difficult to pin down (see, for example, Coppock et al., 1995, Gamble, 2001, Hall and Rodriguez, 2003, Braithwaite, 2004, Gill, 2007). In some uses, postfeminism signifies a continuation and transformation of feminism (see, for example, Brooks, 1997). Alternatively, postfeminism has been theorised as part of the backlash against feminism (see, for example, Modleski, 1991, Faludi, 1992, Coppock et al., 1995, McRobbie, 2009). Here, it suggests moving beyond feminism, either because feminism is dead, it is no longer needed, or women (especially younger women) have rejected it (see, for example, Bolotin, 1982, Coppock et al., 1995, McRobbie, 2009, Redfern and Aune, 2010). This is the use of postfeminism most often seen in the mainstream media and popular culture (Brooks, 1997) and thus, it is the definition that is most relevant for exploring the social context of feminist activism.

The concept of postfeminism can be seen to contribute to the 'undoing' of feminism (McRobbie, 2009), but it is more than simply antifeminism (Braithwaite, 2004, Gill, 2007, McRobbie, 2009). Gill argues that a postfeminist sensibility involves the 'entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas' (2007, p.269). In McRobbie's analysis:

post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force (2009, p.12).

A key concept in McRobbie's discussion of postfeminism is the idea (taken from Judith Butler) of a 'double entanglement', in which, at one level, feminism is widely taken into account and transformed into a kind of common sense, whilst at the same time it is 'fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated' (2009, p.12). Thus, postfeminism represents a series of contradictory attitudes towards feminism, which are also to some extent present in the concept of backlash.

Public attitudes towards feminism

It is difficult to gauge overall public attitudes towards feminism in the UK, as there appears to be a lack of quantitative research on this topic. An Ipsos MORI poll conducted in February 2011 found that only 20% of women and 13% of men would describe themselves as a feminist (Ipsos MORI, 2011). Redfern and Aune (2010) are more optimistic in their assessment of the level of support for feminism, citing surveys by *Cosmopolitan* and *Stella* magazines, *Womankind Worldwide* and *Girl Guiding UK*, in which between 25% and 40% of respondents called themselves feminists. However, the Ipsos MORI poll probably provides a more reliable result than these other surveys due to its use of representative sampling. Callaghan et al. (1999) found, in a survey of around 4000 students, that 5% of female students always thought of themselves as feminist, whilst 9% often did, 59% occasionally did and 27% never did. Women aged 36-45 and postgraduate students had the strongest identification with feminism. The survey was conducted in 1996, so the results may now be outdated, but it does suggest that identifying as feminist may not be an 'all or nothing' process, a subtlety that is not explored in the other surveys.

Some qualitative research reveals ambivalent attitudes towards feminism (for example, Edley and Wetherell, 2001, Howard and Tibballs, 2003), reflecting McRobbie's idea of a 'double entanglement', and research on young women and feminism is particularly revealing of the complexities around feminist identification. According to Aapola et al. (2005), it is generally assumed that young women are not interested in feminism, but they claim that this generalisation hides a more complex set of interactions with feminism. For example, young women may support the aims of feminism whilst rejecting the terms 'feminist' or 'feminism' (Budgeon, 2001, Rich, 2005, Rúdólfsdóttir and Jolliffe, 2008). Young women may be put off from identifying as feminist because of negative stereotypes of feminists (Rúdólfsdóttir and Jolliffe, 2008), they may have a narrow view of what it means to be a feminist (Redfern and Aune, 2010), they may locate feminism in the past (Jowett, 2004) or they may be uncomfortable with feminism's record of marginalising black, disabled and working-class women (Aapola et al., 2005).

Researchers suggest that young women's relationship to feminism is structured by heterosexual norms (Scharff, 2010) and by the discourses circulating in the broader culture, such as a neoliberal focus on individual achievement and agency (Rich, 2005, Scharff, 2009). Some feminists suggest that the prevailing 'postfeminist' view that women have achieved equality makes it difficult for young women to articulate experiences of discrimination (Jowett, 2004, Woodward and Woodward, 2009). Other researchers have found that young women *do* recognise and articulate experiences of inequality, but they tend to view these as problems to be addressed through individual actions rather than a collective feminist movement (Budgeon, 2001). Meanwhile, the idea that young women have rejected feminism has been explicitly contested by self-identified younger feminists (see, for example, Findlen, 1995, Walker, 1995, Walter, 1999a, Baumgardner and Richards, 2000), and researchers and journalists have documented young women's activism (for example, Bell, 2007, France and Wiseman, 2007, Cochrane, 2010, Redfern and Aune, 2010, Bell, 2011, Long, 2011).

Developments in feminism since the second wave

Developments in feminist theory since the 1980s have included processes of diversification and deconstruction, which have increasingly questioned the category 'woman' as the subject of feminism (see, for example, Riley, 1988, Butler, 1990, Spelman, 1990). Black feminists have challenged 'mainstream' white feminism, arguing that it does not take into account the experiences of black women and the intersection of race and gender in black women's oppression (see, for example, Carby, 1982, hooks, 1982, Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983). Similarly, other groups such as lesbian, disabled and working-class women have argued that dominant feminist theorisations have excluded their experiences and concerns (see, for example, Rich, 1980, Morris, 1991, Skeggs, 1997 respectively). In addition, as Hines (2008) points out, '*deconstructionist analyses* – poststructuralism, postmodernism, queer theory and transgender studies – have presented key challenges to feminist theory over the past decade' (p.20, emphasis in original).

All these developments have led to an emphasis on diversity and plurality within feminism, so that now 'feminists are increasingly inclined to view womanhood, female identity and female experience as diverse and unstable' (Beasley, 1999, p.33). Lorber (2010) describes these developments as a shift towards 'gender rebellious' feminisms. In contrast to 'gender reform' feminisms, which seek to achieve 'gender balance' in terms of equal access to power and opportunities for women and men (p.10), and 'gender resistance' feminisms, which privilege women's difference and aim to reshape society through foregrounding 'women's voices and perspectives' (p.11), gender rebellious feminisms target 'the binary gendered social order' itself, seeking to 'dismantle gender categories' and 'overturn the gendered social order' (p.12).

Feminist activism has also changed over this time. Many feminists suggest that the British Women's Liberation Movement declined and fragmented from the late 1970s onwards (see, for example, Segal, 1987, Charles, 1993, Lovenduski and Randall, 1993), although others contest this view (for example, Dean, 2010). Most researchers recognise that feminist activities continued into the 1980s and beyond, but there is disagreement as to whether such activities constitute a movement (see, for example, Charles, 1993, Griffin, 1995b,

Bagguley, 2002, Nash, 2002, Mackay, 2008). Lovenduski and Randall (1993) argue that, whilst activism continued in the 1980s and 90s, 'there is no doubt that the visible national feminist movement has declined' (p.359). Gabriele Griffin (1995b) suggests that this decline in visibility may result from changes in the form of feminist activism:

[F]eminist activism is still very much in evidence and perhaps more diverse, far-reaching and impact-achieving than ever before. However, in contrast to the *idea* (as opposed to the *reality*) of the Women's (Liberation) Movement, which implies mass mobilisation [...] in the form of large-scale rallies and demonstrations for example, feminist activism has taken on a multiplicity of forms (p.3, emphasis in original).

This diversification of feminist activism has included the creation of many groups and organisations targeting single issues or representing specific groups of women (see Griffin, 1995a). Other developments include the expansion of Women's Studies (and later Gender Studies) in education (see Warwick and Auchmuty, 1995, Robinson, 1997, Richardson and Robinson, 2008) and feminists' entry into various other institutions, for example, 'political parties, trade unions, voluntary and public sector bodies, local government and state bureaucracies' (Mackay, 2008, p.22). In the 1990s, the riot grrrl movement²⁰ developed new networks and forms of feminist expression amongst young women (Monem, 2007) and, since the early 2000s, the Internet has been an important forum for feminist networking, writing and activism (see, for example, Redfern and Aune, 2010).²¹ Importantly, Nash (2002) suggests that feminism is also evident through women asserting themselves in the 'micro-politics' of everyday life (see also Budgeon, 2001). Thus, contemporary feminist practice takes place across a range of different sites.

Some researchers have pointed to a resurgence in British feminist activity and visibility in the past decade (Dean, 2010, Redfern and Aune, 2010, Long, 2011), with Dean arguing that 'the mid-to late 2000s have witnessed significant increases in influence, visibility and popularity of a range of autonomous feminist practices' (2010, p.1). These include the diverse range of activities

²⁰ I will discuss riot grrrl further in Chapter 4.

²¹ 70.7% of the feminists that Redfern and Aune surveyed tended to agree with the statement 'The Internet has been instrumental to today's feminist movement' (2010, p.235), although this may reflect the comparatively young age of most of their sample.

described above, as well as public protests such as Reclaim The Night²² marches (since 2004), Million Women Rise²³ (since 2008), and the 'SlutWalk' movement in 2011.²⁴ However, Redfern and Aune (2010) suggest that recent feminist activism has not always been recognised, partly because it does not live up to the imagined 'golden age' of feminism in the 1970s. This echoes Griffin's point above about the power of the *idea* of the Women's Liberation Movement, suggesting that the way in which feminism is remembered can be as important as what actually happened. The popular perception (amongst feminists and non-feminists alike) of 1970s feminism as a strong, unified, and radical movement shapes our view of more recent feminist activism, even if this perception obscures the realities of feminism in the 1970s (see Griffin, 1995b, Toynebee, 2002, Dean, 2010, Redfern and Aune, 2010).

New feminisms?

Since the 1990s, there have been several attempts, mainly by younger women, to rearticulate feminism in a way that differs from the second wave. These include Wolf's (1994) 'power feminism', Walter's (1999b) 'new feminism' and Levenson's (2009) 'noughtie girl feminism'. Although there are significant differences between these writers,²⁵ they all advocate a kind of liberal, mainstream feminism and, in a reaction against the perceived excesses of the second wave, seek to include men within feminism and to reconcile feminism and femininity. For example, Levenson claims that 'feminism has changed this millennium – noughtie girls know there's more than one way to be a feminist, and that wearing pink doesn't necessarily rule you out' (2009, p.ix).

²² Reclaim The Night marches were held by women in cities in England (and several other countries) in the 1970s and 80s to protest against rape and male violence and to claim women's right to walk the streets at night in safety. In 2004, the London Feminist Network revived this tradition and has held annual marches in London since that date. Marches have also been held in many other parts of the UK in recent years (see Reclaim the Night, no date).

²³ Million Women Rise is an annual women's march against violence against women held in London (see Million Women Rise, 2012).

²⁴ The 'SlutWalk' movement began in 2011 when a representative of the Toronto police told women that they should 'avoid dressing like sluts' in order to protect themselves from assault. In response, women organised a march to protest against victim-blaming in relation to sexual assault (see BBC News, 2011b). Subsequently, many 'SlutWalks' were held in other cities around the world (see, for example, BBC News, 2011a, BBC News, 2011b, Bell, 2011).

²⁵ In particular, Levenson's is a lightweight and humorous book, largely based on personal anecdotes, whereas the other two books are more substantial and serious. Meanwhile, whilst Wolf seems to suggest that the only thing holding women back is their reluctance to embrace power, Walter pays more attention to structural inequalities.

Another way in which a new approach to feminism has been articulated is through the idea of a 'third wave' (for discussion of this, see, for example, Heywood and Drake, 1997, Zita, 1997, Baumgardner and Richards, 2000, Henry, 2004, Gillis et al., 2007, Dean, 2009, Budgeon, 2011). Broadly speaking, the term third wave is either used to identify specific feminist theories and practices, or it is defined in generational terms as the activity of younger women who grew up after second-wave feminism, although sometimes these meanings overlap. In theoretical terms, the third wave is inspired by postcolonial and poststructuralist critiques of second-wave feminism and 'emphasizes a commitment to a problematization of monolithic or "essentialist" conceptions of female/feminist subjectivity' (Dean, 2009, p.336). It has also been associated with queer theory and politics (see Withers, 2007). Thus, it takes into account many of the developments in feminist theory mentioned earlier. Dean (2009) adds some further content to the meaning of the third wave in Britain, suggesting that:

third wavers are more likely to engage with issues related to popular culture, are less likely to be 'anti-porn' and are (generally) more open to bringing men into a pro-feminist agenda (p.339).

The third wave can also relate to specific forms of political practice, such as a DIY (do-it-yourself) approach focussed on autonomous cultural production, rather than engagement with political institutions (see Withers, 2007).²⁶

In generational terms, the third wave is defined as a group of younger feminists who grew up during or after the second-wave feminist movement and who are sometimes equated with 'generation X' (Henry, 2004). However, some feminists recognise the limitations of defining the third wave simply in terms of the age of its participants. Withers (2007) argues that 'annexing [third wave] feminism to young women [...] alienates large amounts of women from ever participating in third wave activity' (p.2). In her view, in academic discussions of third-wave feminism:

[t]here seems to be a problem of collapsing generation – the *actual age of women* – and the *particular historical conditions faced* by a generation that can constitute a whole range of ages and other identity-like variables (pp.2-3, emphasis in original).

²⁶ I will discuss DIY politics in Chapter 4.

Thus, many prefer to define the third wave in terms of a 'cohort' or 'political generation' (Alfonso and Trigilio, 1997, Withers, 2007). Whittier (1997) defines a 'political generation' as 'being comprised of individuals (of varying ages) who join a social movement during a given wave of protest' (pp.761-62). Each generation 'possesses distinctive characteristics that are shaped by historically specific formative experiences' (p.762). In this sense, then, the third wave can be understood both as a recent cohort of feminist activists and as an approach to feminism that responds to the specific (post-second-wave) context.

All of the above definitions of the third wave have something in common, which is that the third wave is defined, to some extent, in opposition to the second wave (see Bailey, 1997, Henry, 2004). This is also the case with the other recent rearticulations of feminism outlined above. For this reason, these new versions of feminism have prompted criticism for implicitly locating the second wave in the past. For example, Finn MacKay argues:

I've always had a personal problem with the term third wave, because I don't think the second wave is over yet. We are still living in a defensive time of strong backlash against the gains made by the second wave Women's Liberation Movement. What we are doing is still defending those gains and trying to advance the very same goals spelt out then, the seven demands, which we still have not achieved (cited in Dean, 2009, p.346).

New articulations of feminism also include implicit (or sometimes overt) criticism of the second wave. For example, Dean, drawing on his analysis of British feminist organisations The F-Word and London Thirdwave Feminists, suggests that:

the third wave is presented as signalling a generational shift, and also as indicating the emergence of a new and *inclusive* feminist agenda, with the implication that the 'old' feminism was perhaps less inclusive (Dean, 2009, p.339, emphasis in original).

He argues that this can have the problem of reinforcing stereotypes of the second wave:

[T]he characterisation of second wave feminism as domineering, prescriptive and constraining invokes the very same mythical figure of the (hairy, dungaree-clad) feminist invoked in post/anti-feminist discourse (p.347).

The metaphors of 'waves' and 'generations' have been criticised for oversimplifying feminist history (Withers, 2007, Dean, 2009, McRobbie, 2009) and creating unnecessary division amongst feminists (Gillis and Munford, 2004, Purvis, 2004, Dean, 2009). The idea of feminist generations, often expressed through the trope of mothers and daughters (see Henry, 2004), also reiterates a heteronormative model of the family (Purvis, 2004). Nevertheless, these metaphors are widely used in discussions of feminism (see Henry, 2004) and thus form part of the backdrop of contemporary feminist activism.

Conclusions and implications for the 'man question'

The above discussion shows that contemporary feminist activists are operating in a climate characterised by competing, and often contradictory, discourses about feminism and gender relations. Narratives of feminist progress sit alongside the recognition of continuing gender inequality, and accounts of the death or decline of feminism coexist with claims of its resurgence (see Dean, 2010). A wide variety of feminist, antifeminist and postfeminist discourses all circulate, which perhaps explains the ambivalence towards feminism found in some research on public perceptions of feminism or on young women and feminism. This context poses numerous challenges for feminists. They have to justify their activities in the face of postfeminist claims that equality has been achieved, and they also have to contend with negative stereotypes which may shape people's responses to their actions (see, for example, WASS Collective, 2007). The prevailing political climate, with its individualist ethos, also makes it difficult for feminists to articulate structural inequalities and to advocate collective solutions to problems. On a positive note, developments in feminist theory and practice in recent years mean that contemporary feminists have a huge range of theoretical and political repertoires and tools to draw on, but the existence of a diverse range of feminisms can also create tension if different activists subscribe to different versions of feminism, whether or not this is expressed in generational terms.

It is important to consider the connections between this context and the 'man question' in feminism. Alongside the changes in feminist theory and practice discussed above, another important development has been the increasing willingness of feminists to work together with men (see, for example, Bindel,

1999, WASS Collective, 2007, Banyard, 2010). This may reflect changes in gender relations in the past 40 years, which some argue have made working with men more plausible. For example, Walter (1999b) suggests that:

Young women now have the privilege of being able to form relationships with men who have grappled with the ideas of feminism as a natural part of their adolescent and adult development. [...] Women in the seventies did not have the luxury of frequently meeting men who took feminist ideas more or less for granted (p.155).

Changes in feminist theory may also have had an impact, particularly 'gender rebellious' approaches which seek to dismantle gender categories (see Lorber, 2010). The influence of queer and transgender theory and politics has led many feminist groups to adopt a welcoming attitude towards people of all genders, including men. This is evident, for example, in the description of Leeds-based queer third-wave activist group Manifesta:

Manifesta aims to create supportive and inclusive spaces for the self-expression of people of all genders and sexualities. To challenge sexist, homophobic, and transphobic attitudes through the organisation and promotion of cultural, social, artistic and political activities. To promote a DIY ethic to encourage the participation of a diverse range of groups and individuals working towards these aims (Manifesta, 2007).

Many feminists express the idea that different tactics are required at different points in time. In the contemporary context, it could be argued that much of the hard work of developing feminist consciousness and theory, which needed to be done in a women-only context, has already been done. Thus, Bartky suggests that the 'separatist moment' has passed:

[Y]ounger feminists appear not to have the same need for separation of the genders that feminists of my generation needed so badly. [...] We are at a different historical moment now: many of the insights that my feminist generation wrested with such difficulty out of the confusion of our lives, insights that needed a protective space in which to come to consciousness and then to word, are now accepted by younger feminists as obvious, even self-evident (1998, p.xii).

Others suggest that persisting gender inequality requires us to broaden the scope of feminism. For example, Hebert (2007) argues that:

After decades – and, in many locales, centuries – of feminist writing and activism, masculinism remain stubbornly entrenched. Empowering individual women through building a sense of personal efficacy and independence may be possible in the absence of attention to men, but

transforming the social structures that sanction and sustain masculinism and its damaging manifestations is not (p.41).

Another reason for reaching out to men at this historical moment is as a way to reclaim and reinvigorate feminism in an era of antifeminist backlash. Thus, Rake (2006) has argued that:

We need to harness the beginnings of a third wave of feminism. A unified movement must include those who feminism has failed to reach in the past, such as men, many ethnic minority women, working-class women, and young women. It is only together that we can reclaim the f-word.

Lastly, as indicated in the quotes from Walter and Bartky above, it appears that younger women are generally more comfortable with the idea of men's involvement in feminism. This may be due to their own experiences with men, the influence of the discourses of backlash and postfeminism, their desire to carve out their own feminism, or a reaction against the perceived excesses of second-wave feminism. Thus, it may be that the context of contemporary feminist activism offers greater possibilities for the inclusion of men in feminism, and it is certainly important to consider this broader context when studying mixed-gender feminist groups.

2.4 Chapter conclusions

In this chapter, I have summarised the literature which forms the backdrop to my research. The rationale for this study stems from the continuing debates about men's relationship to feminism, which have encompassed issues such as the role of experience in feminist identity, the nature of men's power and interests within the gender order, the significance of men claiming the label 'feminist', the consequences of men's participation in activism and academic feminism, and the appropriate role of men in the feminist movement. Whilst these issues have been vigorously debated, there is a need for more empirical research on men's engagements with feminism, particularly in the context of mixed-gender groups. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to these debates through providing empirical data on the experiences and practices of mixed-gender feminist groups.

In particular, I aim to address feminist concerns about the impact of men's involvement on the internal dynamics of feminist groups. Research on gender

and interaction suggests that men tend to exercise greater power and influence in mixed-gender contexts. I have suggested that the concepts of male privilege, status, emotion work and disciplinary power may help to explain this. Drawing on a practice-based view of gender, I will consider the ways in which feminist groups challenge and/or reproduce patriarchal gender relations in interaction.

This study is also framed by a broader context, which includes developments in feminist theory and practice, which are themselves situated within changing sociopolitical conditions. All of these developments have implications for the 'man question' in feminism. An important aim of my study is to analyse feminist experiences and practices in relation to this context, linking what is happening inside the groups to what is happening outside. Thus, I am responding to Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn's call for 'complex, nuanced and situated understandings of men's relation to feminism, theoretically, analytically and politically' (2009, p.415). In the next chapter, I will explain my methodological approach and the process of conducting the research.

3 Methodology

This research aims to investigate the experiences and practices of mixed-gender feminist groups in order to contribute to ongoing debates about the role of men in feminism and, specifically, to answer the research questions set out in Chapter 1. Having outlined the background to the research in the previous two chapters, here I will provide a reflexive account of how this research was conducted. I will begin by outlining my overall methodological approach, which is informed by interpretivist sociology and feminism. In line with a reflexive feminist approach, I will then locate myself in relation to my research, highlighting the experiences and perspectives that I bring to the research. Following this, I will explain the research process, describing the research design, data collection methods and the process of data analysis. I will also consider the ethical issues encountered during the research.

3.1 Methodological approach

My overall methodological perspective has been informed by interpretivist and feminist approaches to social research. I share with interpretivist sociologists a concern for 'understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it' (Schwandt, 1998, p.221) and believe that such understanding is gained through a process of interpretation. I also recognise that the people that I am studying create their own interpretations of the world, and thus my research consists of 'interpretations of interpretations' (Usher, 1996, p.18). I cannot claim to produce a definitive account of the groups that I am studying; rather I aim to produce a credible interpretation.

My research combines the interpretivist concern for subjective understanding with the critical approach of feminism. Discussions about what it means to do feminist research have been ongoing since the 1970s (see, for example, Harding, 1987a, Stanley and Wise, 1990, Reinharz, 1992, Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002, Hesse-Biber and Leckenby, 2004, Harding and Norberg, 2005b, Hesse-Biber, 2007). The question of what makes research feminist remains open for debate, but writers such as Harding (1987b), Reinharz (1992), and Hesse-Biber and Leckenby (2004) have drawn out some common themes in feminist research. These include 'asking new questions' (Harding, 1987b,

Hesse-Biber and Leckenby, 2004), the use of feminist theory, a concern with power relationships in the research process and for the wellbeing of research participants, an emphasis on reflexivity, a focus on women's experiences, and the aim of creating positive social change. Sampson et al. (2008) point out that some of these aspects of feminist research have shaped the practice of qualitative research more generally:

[F]eminist researchers have made an influential contribution to the development of research techniques that have led researchers to become more reflexive, more conscious of power relationships and responsibilities in research, and more sensitive to arguments about knowledge, how it is 'created', endorsed or identified, and by whom (p.921).

Feminism inflects my own research in numerous ways. To begin with, it informs my theoretical and political perspective, so a critical focus on gender and how this relates to power runs throughout my research. Secondly, I aim to produce knowledge which is useful for feminist activists. Thirdly, my epistemological approach has been shaped by the work of feminist theorists, as explained below.

Through their critiques of the androcentric bias of traditional academic disciplines, feminists have drawn attention to the social context of knowledge production and its impact on the knowledge that is produced (see, for example, Harding, 1986, 1987b, 1991, Smith, 1987, Haraway, 1988, Stanley, 1997). They have pointed out that knowledge is 'grounded in the "point of view" of those producing it' (Stanley, 1997, p.204). Therefore, all knowledge is 'perspective-bound and partial' (Usher, 1996, p.18). This means that it is not possible to obtain a complete view of the social world, as we can only view it from our position within it, not from some 'Archimedean' point 'external to any particular position in society' (Smith, 1987, p.71).

Whilst this challenges the traditional Enlightenment view of objective knowledge, it does not mean that knowledge is merely subjective or that all knowledge claims are equally valid. Hawkesworth (1989) argues that it is possible 'to distinguish between partial views (the inescapable condition of human cognition) and false beliefs, superstitions, irrebuttable presumptions, willful distortions' (p.555), so it is still possible to create and to identify better and worse (partial, situated) accounts of the social world. Furthermore, as

Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) argue, feminists 'are under moral and political pressure to choose between competing accounts of reality' (p.56). Therefore, a relativist approach to knowledge is 'inconsistent with feminist politics and ethics' (p.57). Thus, I take up Hawkesworth's (1989) call for a 'critical feminist epistemology' which steers a path between foundationalism and relativism:

Keenly aware of the complexity of all knowledge claims, it must defend the adoption of a minimalist standard of rationality that requires that belief be apportioned to evidence and that no assertion be immune from critical assessment (p.556).

However, I would add some more criteria to Hawkesworth's 'minimalist standard', drawing on the insights of feminist standpoint theorists. If knowledge is shaped by the social situation in which it is produced, then:

in order to produce knowledge that is 'accountable' (Stanley, 1997), the conditions of production of knowledge, as well as the claims that it advances, need to be available for scrutiny (Baily, 2009a, p.2).

This involves 'locating the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter' (Harding, 1987b, p.8). For example:

the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint. [...] Thus the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests (Harding, 1987b, p.9).

Stanley (1997) builds on the work of Harding and others to argue that scrutiny of the researcher and their social location needs to be combined with a transparent account of the research process. She argues that '[i]t is not possible adequately to account for "the researcher" and the situated knowledge they produce without pinpointing more precisely the different activities involved in "research" ' (pp.214-15). Therefore, in order to produce 'accountable feminist knowledge', we need to pay attention to issues of methodology as well as epistemology. Stanley identifies several 'key elements' of accountability: the 'provision of retrievable data', the 'detailed specification of the analytic procedures involved', and 'the in-depth discussion of the interpretive acts that produce "findings" and "conclusions" ' (1997, p.216). Stanley's advice seems

particularly pertinent given the frequent criticism of the lack of transparency in qualitative research (see, for example, Bryman and Burgess, 1994).

In this chapter, I will attempt to give a reflexive account of the research process, in order to go some way towards Stanley's ideal of producing 'accountable feminist knowledge'. However, reflexive writing is not without its problems. Firstly, producing a completely transparent account of the research process is impossible. Simply due to constraints of space (even in a 90,000 word thesis!), it is not possible to record every detail of the research process, such as every decision that was taken, every interaction with participants or every new idea that arose. Even if space were available, as Vidich and Lyman point out, accounts of research cannot replicate the process itself:

The data gathering process can never be described in its totality because these 'tales of the field' are themselves part of an ongoing social process that in its minute-by-minute and day-to-day experience defies recapitulation (2000, p.38).

Furthermore, some aspects of the research process may be obscure to the researcher. Whilst feminists such as Harding have advocated bringing into view the assumptions that shape the research, becoming aware of such assumptions is extremely difficult. As Clark points out:

Even the most critical reflective position will always be one's subjective analysis of one's own subjective position and practice. It will, in itself, be limited by the very same limitations and biases of the respective position (2009, p.10).

A related point made by Clark is that reflexive accounts generally only represent the point of view of the researcher and thus may bolster their dominant position in relation to research participants. Meanwhile, Finlay (2002) warns that researchers may get lost in the 'infinite regress' of self-analysis 'at the expense of focusing on the research participants and developing understanding' (p.212). Reflexive writing also affects the relationship between the researcher and the reader. Seale (1999) suggests that researchers' 'confessional tales' may act in a 'fallibilistic' way, opening up the research process to scrutiny, or alternatively they may serve to enhance the writers' claims to authority (see also Finlay, 2002).

However, the above criticisms do not imply that researchers should not reflect on the research process, but simply that they should be clear about the purposes of reflection and the effects that this may have. At the risk of infinite regress, it is important to be reflexive about reflexivity! Taking these considerations on board, this thesis aims to reflect on the research process in a way that enhances the transparency of my research. In this chapter (and indeed throughout the thesis), I will attempt to provide a reflexive and open account of the research process in order to allow the reader to assess the validity of my conclusions. I will begin by 'locating myself' within the research through outlining my political perspective and considering my relationship to my topic of study.

3.2 Locating myself

According to feminist standpoint theorists, knowledge is not only 'partial' in the sense of being incomplete, but also in the sense of being 'not impartial' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002, p.66). Thus, feminists have denied the possibility (and the desirability) of a value-neutral social science and have often conducted research that is explicitly politically engaged (see, for example, Harding and Norberg, 2005a). Feminist research is sometimes described as being politically '*for women*' (Harding, 1987b, p.8, Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002, p.16).

It would be difficult to characterise my research as 'for women', since this would presuppose a distinct set of women's interests, a problem which has been intensely debated by feminists (see, for example, Jónasdóttir, 1988, Bryson, 1999). However, in my view, it is 'for feminism' as it aims to analyse and evaluate feminist practices in order to contribute to the development of feminism. I am not studying feminist activism as a detached outsider, but as someone who considers herself to be a feminist and who has experience as an activist. I do not say this to claim a privileged status as an 'insider', but to reflect on my relationship to the subject of my research: I approach feminism not purely as an object of academic curiosity, but as a movement in which I am politically and emotionally invested.

Since feminism is a huge and contested terrain of theory and practice, I will attempt to locate myself more precisely within the feminist landscape. I do not identify with any particular 'school' of feminism, such as liberal, radical, socialist, third-wave, and so on (and indeed there are problems with categorising feminism in terms of 'schools' or 'waves'²⁷). I probably draw on many or all of these different versions of feminism at different times or in relation to different issues. In addition, my feminist perspective is evolving all the time and indeed has changed over the course of this research. However, there are some key aspects of my encounter with feminism which have shaped my perspective and thus, my approach to the research.

Firstly, I was born in 1980, so I grew up in the wake of second-wave feminism. Whilst I do not particularly identify as a 'young', 'new' or 'third-wave' feminist,²⁸ my feminism is clearly shaped by the intersection of my own life course with that of the feminist movement (see Lister, 2005). Since my life has undeniably been shaped by the effects of the second-wave movement, I feel a huge sense of admiration and gratitude towards the women who participated in it. At the same time, as I did not experience second-wave feminism myself, I am inevitably somewhat distanced from it. Secondly, as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, married, British woman, I am clearly privileged in many areas, and this shapes the kinds of feminist issues, theories and practices with which I identify. Although I try to remain alert to the ways in which feminist theories and practices can exclude certain groups of women (and men), it is all too easy for me, as a privileged woman, to ignore these exclusions.

As I explained in Chapter 1, my first experience of feminist activism was in helping to organise a mixed-gender feminist conference in Sheffield, and I also volunteered at subsequent conferences.²⁹ Later, I was a member of the women's committee at my student union, a women-only group. We raised money for women's health charities and campaigned on issues such as

²⁷ See, for example, Stacey (1993), Richardson (2000) and Hines (2008) for criticisms of the 'big three' (liberal/socialist/radical) categorisation in feminism. For critiques of the 'wave' metaphor, see, for example, Bailey (1997), Gillis and Munford (2004), Purvis (2004), Withers (2007).

²⁸ See the section headed 'New feminisms?' in Chapter 2 for discussion of the generational dynamics within feminism.

²⁹ See <http://femconferences.org.uk/index.html>.

abortion rights and women's representation within the student union. I have also campaigned on issues related to violence against women with Sheffield Women In Black, another women-only group.

Although I became interested in feminism through activism, most of my current knowledge of feminism has been learnt in an academic context. My feminism is informed by areas such as feminist theory, sociology, and the critical study of men and masculinities, as much as by the issues facing women 'on the ground'. At present, I spend much more of my time on research than activism, so I could probably be considered an 'academic feminist'. However, I do not wish to set up a false dichotomy between academia and activism, as clearly one can be involved in both, and feminist research and teaching can themselves be considered forms of activism (see, for example, Evans, 1983, Griffin et al., 1994, Warwick and Auchmuty, 1995).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly in this context, I feel that I should outline my views on men's relationship to feminism. I began my research with the assumption that men can be feminists, or at least that they can make a useful contribution to feminism. This point of view is probably a result of my age/generation, my personal interactions with men and my experiences of feminist activism. My views on the issue have evolved throughout the research, yet I retain the basic belief that men can be feminists, and I do not feel uncomfortable with them using this label. However, as the preceding chapter shows, this is not to say that men's relationship to feminism is straightforward.

This brief overview of my feminist perspective outlines some of the beliefs and experiences that I bring to this research. Having given an overview of my methodological and political standpoint, I will now go on to describe the research process. As I have already explained the origins of the project and outlined my research questions in Chapter 1, I will begin here with the research design.

3.3 Research design

My interpretivist methodology, focused on developing subjective understanding, led me to favour a qualitative approach. I decided to use a case study design to explore the question of what happens in mixed-gender feminist groups, as I

wanted to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of such groups' experiences and practices. I chose to include several case studies in order to combine in-depth study, capturing the unique features of each group, with the possibility of comparison across groups. I ended up studying four mixed-gender feminist groups, which I briefly described in Chapter 1: a feminist discussion group, a student union women's committee, a DIY collective and a feminist activist group.

The strengths of a case study approach include the ability to 'study complex phenomena within their contexts' (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p.544), to collect rich, detailed data, and to gain a holistic understanding of a context or phenomenon (see, for example, Berg, 2007). Focussing on a small number of cases may enable a researcher to 'capture various nuances, patterns, and more latent elements that other research approaches overlook' (Berg, 2007, p.254). The main weakness of a case study approach is the difficulty of generalising findings to other settings (see, for example, Bryman, 1988, Berg, 2007). However, Platt (1988) argues that often:

criticisms of case studies as a basis for 'generalization' use ideas of representative sampling, appropriate only for estimating the prevalence of a characteristic in a population, to dismiss their adequacy for making contributions to theoretical explanation (p.17).

Thus, she argues that logical, if not statistical, generalisation is possible in case study research. For example, case studies can be used to disprove or amend general theories, they can be carefully selected in order to be representative of a wider range of cases, or they can demonstrate the existence of phenomena which may also be present in other contexts (Platt, 1988).

Furthermore, generalisation is not the only valid outcome of case study research (Platt, 1988, Stake, 1998). Stake (1998) distinguishes between *intrinsic* case study research, in which the researcher is concerned to understand the particular case in itself, and *instrumental* case study research, in which a case is used to shed light on a broader issue (p.88). My own research contains elements of both of these approaches: I am interested in each feminist group in itself, but also as a representative of the broader category of mixed-gender feminist groups. Thus, I do seek to produce insights which may be generalisable beyond my specific case studies, but this generalisation is in the

realm of possibility rather than certainty: I describe experiences and processes which may (or may not) occur in other groups. In Chapter 8, I will discuss the extent to which my findings may be applicable to other settings.

Baxter and Jack (2008) point out that another key strength of a case study approach is the use of a variety of data sources. I decided to use a combination of participant observation and interviews (plus a small amount of other supporting sources) to collect data on my case studies. I chose to use more than one method of data collection in order to examine the same groups and situations from different perspectives. Participant observation allowed me to investigate the practices of mixed-gender feminist groups and the gendered interactions within these groups, whilst interviews enabled me to explore participants' subjective experiences of the groups and to get an insight into their feminist beliefs. I also used documents (such as emails, minutes and publicity materials) to aid my overall understanding of the groups and to see how groups represented themselves to each other and to outsiders (see Atkinson and Coffey, 2004). Baxter and Jack argue that the convergence of different data sources during analysis 'adds strength to the findings as various strands of data are braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case' (2008, p.554). Furthermore, using a combination of methods helps to offset the limitations of each one.

I originally intended to conduct periods of participant observation and to carry out interviews with all of the case study groups. This approach worked with the feminist discussion group and the women's committee. I attended 13 meetings of the feminist discussion group and in the women's committee I observed 13 meetings and two events (a clothes swap that they organised and a stall that they held at a student music festival). However, in the other two groups, I was unable to access group meetings to conduct participant observation. Therefore, in the DIY collective and feminist activist group, I mainly collected interview data from individual members, supplemented by one or two occasions on which I informally observed their activities. I attended three events organised by the DIY collective: two gigs and a spoken word evening. I attended three meetings of the feminist activist group and also one of their social events, but I did not

formally conduct participant observation in these settings; instead, I used them to get to know group members and to recruit interviewees.

My lack of observational data for the DIY collective and feminist activist group obviously affects how I analysed their activities. My analysis of group dynamics in these case studies is based entirely on group members' own recollections, as I was not able to observe these interactions myself. This means that the analysis is much less detailed and does not benefit from the combination of different data sources described above. The lack of observational data also means that in these case studies I have made more use of documents to help me to understand the groups' feminist beliefs and practices. I will reflect more on the limits of my data set in Chapter 8. In the next four sections, I will discuss the data collection methods used in this study: participant observation, interviews and documents.

3.4 Participant observation

Ethnographic or observational methods have been considered particularly useful for, amongst other things, studying social processes and relationships (Jorgensen, 1989), so I felt that participant observation was the best method for investigating the practices of mixed-gender feminist groups and the gendered power relations within these groups. Another strength of participant observation is the ability to examine social interactions in context (Reinharz, 1992, Bryman, 2004). This fits well with the emphasis on gaining holistic understanding embedded in my case study approach. Furthermore, Lichterman (1998) argues that participant observation is particularly useful in the study of social movements, since it allows the researcher to access the 'implicit meanings' which underpin activism, but which may not be revealed in social movement groups' public statements or in interviews. For all these reasons, this method seemed highly appropriate to the aims and subject matter of my research. As mentioned above, I mainly used participant observation in the feminist discussion group and the women's committee, so this discussion will primarily focus on those two case studies. There are three aspects of participant observation that I will discuss: relationships with participants, my role in the research settings, and the process of producing data as fieldnotes.

Field relations

The interactive nature of participant observation means that relationships with research participants are of crucial importance. Many methods texts discuss the process of managing these relationships, from gaining access to the research setting and building rapport to maintaining trust, avoiding 'over-identification' with participants, dealing with hostility and leaving the field (see, for example, Jorgensen, 1989, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, Lofland and Lofland, 1995). From a practical perspective, these relationships are something to be *managed* in order to produce viable data. From a more reflexive standpoint, field relations are not only a means of gaining access to data, but also constitute data in themselves. It is important to reflect on how they impact on the research and to consider what they reveal about the research setting.

I did not experience any particular difficulties in gaining access to or managing field relations in the feminist discussion group and the women's committee. In both groups, I arrived as a stranger and gradually built up familiarity with participants and came to feel more comfortable with them over time. However, I found that I developed rapport with some people more quickly than with others. In the feminist discussion group, I found it easy to talk to one man, Martin (25), right from the start, and I often chatted to him after meetings. He also invited me to his house on two occasions. I thought that it was important to reflect on why I developed rapport more easily with Martin, and this led me to some interesting reflections on my own feminism. I concluded that:

maybe I feel more comfortable talking to men than women about feminism as with women I feel more of a sense of competition about our feminism. It's not so much that I want to prove myself to be the 'best' feminist, but women with different feminist views to my own are more of a threat to my feminist beliefs; they are more likely to undermine and cause me to doubt my beliefs, because as women I think (for me) they in some way carry more legitimacy as feminists. (Adapted from fieldnotes)

As well as revealing some of my assumptions about feminism, my rapport with Martin may also have shaped my analysis of his role in the group. As I got on well with him and the other men in the group, I felt somewhat reluctant to criticise them in my analysis.

In the women's committee, I got to know the women's officers (Susie, 23, and Karen, 20) best, as they were the 'gatekeepers' through whom I accessed the group. I initially contacted them asking to research the group and I exchanged a few emails with them and also met them before attending a group meeting. They also tended to manage my presence in the group, for example, introducing me to new members and helping me to arrange interviews. It is possible that, as a result of this, my impressions of the group were, initially at least, largely shaped by the views of the women's officers.

My role

Participant observation involves simultaneously participating in and analysing social action. Many researchers have commented on the interplay between these two activities and the difficulties of fulfilling the dual roles of participant and researcher (for example, Gold, 1958, Gans, 1982). I have found Gans's typology, which distinguishes between different kinds of emotional relationships between researcher and participants, useful in understanding my own roles and actions 'in the field'. Gans (1982, p.54) outlines three different roles:

- the *total participant* is 'completely emotionally involved in a social situation' and only becomes a researcher again afterwards;
- the *researcher participant* 'participates in a social situation but is personally only partially involved, so that he can function as a researcher';
- the *total researcher* 'observes without any personal involvement in the situation under study'.

In my research, I moved between different roles at different times and in different research settings. On the whole, I was more of a total participant in the feminist discussion group and more detached in the women's committee, due to the nature of the two groups:

At the women's committee meeting I am pretty much a complete observer as I can't really usefully contribute to many of their discussions, which generally focus on activities they are planning. There is lots of jargon (for example, names of groups, people, buildings, publications, places, room numbers, etc.) which I don't understand and which makes me feel more distanced. Although they sometimes chat about what they have been up to, the main discussion is task-focused.

In contrast, the feminist discussion group is focused on discussion for the purpose of sharing/learning [...] and involves discussion of personal feelings and experiences. I have got involved in the discussion there to a certain extent [...], partly because I enjoyed it, found it beneficial or interesting, and partly because I think I would feel silly just sitting and watching/listening. It just feels right to participate. I think I also feel slightly obliged to participate, especially when there are only a few people in meetings, in order to help the group to function. I feel that if I don't participate they are effectively losing another member. (Fieldnotes)

When attending events organised by the DIY collective, I participated as an audience member. In some ways, this made me more of a participant than a researcher, since I was just like any other audience member. Yet, in emotional terms, I was more distanced than in the other groups, as my attendance did not involve close interaction with participants. Conducting observation in a relatively public space felt more anonymous and indeed most of those present were not aware of my research.

My role differed over time as well as across research settings. In the feminist discussion group, I always participated in discussions, but at the beginning my involvement was fairly passive. As time went on, I became more confident and more active in the discussions, although one of my interviewees, Angela, still saw me as 'this sort of person that hasn't completely participated'. This was not a criticism, but simply an observation that she made during our interview. Although I was far more of a pure observer in the women's committee, in my final visit to the women's committee I became more of an active participant, as I helped them out on a stall that they were holding at a student music festival.

The roles that I played in the groups have important implications for the production and analysis of data. In the women's committee, I never contributed to group discussions, except to talk about my research, so my presence had very little influence on what happened in the meetings. Similarly, as an anonymous member of the crowd in the DIY collective, my presence probably barely registered with others. In the feminist discussion group, however, I was an active participant in discussions and therefore contributed to shaping them. My role within the groups also affected the kinds of data that I collected. In both the feminist discussion group and the women's committee I produced data based on observations of other group members, but in the feminist discussion group I also derived significant aspects of my analysis from my feelings and

experiences as a participant in the group. For example, my analyses of the group's consciousness-raising practices and of the group structure and dynamics partly derive from my own experience of participating in their discussions.

Fieldnotes

I recorded my observations and experiences during fieldwork as fieldnotes. I generally made brief 'jotted notes' during the period of participant observation and then wrote up more detailed 'full fieldnotes' afterwards (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). I usually noted down who was present, where they were sat in the room and what they were wearing. During the meetings that I observed, I mostly paid attention to what was said and by whom, and the dynamics of the discussion, for example, the amount that different people spoke, the tone of the discussion and any interruptions. Occasionally, I also noted people's posture or movements. My notes typically include a chronological account of what happened at the meeting or event that I attended, plus a summary of some general features of the event relevant to my research questions (such as group dynamics, meeting structure, performance of gender). Here is an example of one such summary:

Overall, my impressions of the meeting were that it was quite informal, fluid in terms of structure/direction of discussion, involved talking about some very personal experiences and issues – which I think showed that there was a level of trust in the group. It was quite a calm meeting. There were times when people joked and chatted about more light-hearted things, and at other times it was more serious, but it was never a heated debate like in many other political meetings I have attended! I guess the style of the discussion was exploratory rather than critical / combative / argumentative / debating. There wasn't a chair or a procedure for turn-taking or for speaking. I think people just spoke when they wanted to – just like in a normal conversation. People tended to wait for a space in the conversation before talking. (Fieldnotes, feminist discussion group)

I also recorded my own actions and feelings during the periods of observation and my reflections on what I had observed. Sometimes, I have added to the notes reflections that I made or information that I acquired after the event.

The creation of my fieldnotes was an active, multi-stage process and thus, they cannot be read as a simple transparent reflection of the settings in which I participated. As Emerson et al. (2001) point out, fieldnotes are a form of

representation which reconstitutes the social world in a different form. The results are never simply a 'mirror' or accurate account of reality (Van Maanen, 1988, Emerson et al., 2001). Firstly, fieldnotes are inevitably selective (Emerson et al., 2001), since it is not possible to capture every aspect of a social situation. Secondly, even if the aim of fieldnotes is descriptive, the very act of description involves 'active processes of interpretation and sense-making' (Emerson et al., 2001, p.353), so it is not possible to provide a 'neutral' or 'objective' description of the social setting in question. Thirdly, fieldnotes are shaped by the constraints and conventions of language (see Van Maanen, 1988, Atkinson, 1992). Thus, I consider my fieldnotes to be an *approximation* of the social reality that I experienced in mixed-gender feminist groups. They are the remnants of social experience that has been filtered through memory, interpretive frames and language. Nevertheless, they are far more reliable than my own memories of the settings. An alternative to making notes would have been to make audio or video recordings of the groups. I decided against this approach as I thought that group members might consider it too intrusive. However, in retrospect, it would have greatly enhanced my ability to analyse group dynamics, allowing me to capture more of the intricacies of interaction.

Whilst it is difficult to describe in full the process of participant observation (see Vidich and Lyman, 2000), I have reflected on three key elements of my use of the method: my relationships with participants, my role as a researcher, and the production of data in the form of fieldnotes. All of these have had an impact on my analysis of the groups in my study. To complement my observational data, I used interviews to find out about group members' subjective experiences and beliefs, as qualitative interviews are seen to 'yield rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings' (May, 2001, p.120). In the next two sections, I will first describe the process of conducting interviews and will then reflect on the interactional nature of interviews.

3.5 The interview process

Research interviews can be placed on a continuum according to their level of structure, ranging from standardised survey interviews to unstructured interviews (Matthews and Ross, 2010). I chose to conduct semi-structured

interviews, which meant that I had a set of questions which I used to structure each interview but I did not always ask them in the same order or using exactly the same words, and I sometimes introduced further questions to follow up areas of interest that arose during the interviews. This approach allowed a degree of flexibility whilst also ensuring comparability across interviews.

In terms of selecting interviewees, I tried to interview as many members of, or people connected with, each group as possible within the time constraints of my research. I was particularly concerned to interview both men and women and to interview people with a range of viewpoints. In the feminist discussion group, the DIY collective and the feminist activist group, all of the people that I interviewed were current or former group members. In the women's committee, I interviewed women who were or had been committee members, plus men who had attended committee meetings. Most of the interviews were conducted with individual people, but two of the women's committee interviews were joint interviews. The number of interviews conducted was as follows:

Case study	Feminist discussion group	Women's committee	DIY collective	Feminist activist group	Total
No. of interviews conducted	5	12	2	10	29
No. of people interviewed	5	14	2	10	31

I developed interview questions from my research questions (which at the time were focused on gender relations in mixed-gender feminist groups; see section 3.8 for further information). The main topics covered were participants' experiences in the group, their views of the group, their feelings about men's involvement in the group, their feelings and beliefs about feminism and about the role of men in feminism. I developed slightly different sets of questions for men and women (see appendix 2) and for members of the different groups, simply because of the groups' different histories and membership policies. Thus, in the women's committee I asked about the decision to include men and the effects of this decision, whilst in the feminist activist group I asked about the decision to largely exclude men and the effects of this. These questions were obviously not relevant to the other groups. I have included my initial list of

questions for the women's committee in appendix 2; I have not included the lists of questions for the other groups as they were very similar.

Over time, I added new questions, which developed from points that came up during interviews or from conversations with my supervisors. Two important questions that I added were about participants' interactions with men or women outside of the group and about the role of feminism in their everyday lives. When conducting interviews with the DIY collective, I found that I had to adapt my questions quite significantly to make them appropriate to the group, since the activities of this group were quite different from the others'. There were also instances where I had to adapt my questions in response to particular individuals. For example, I had planned to ask Sam (feminist discussion group, age unknown) about (his) experiences as a man in the group, but (he) stated that (he) did not really identify as a man, which forced me to reconsider my interview questions and also my understanding of gender.

Sam described (his) sex as male and (his) gender as genderfluid.³⁰ I have struggled to think about how best to understand and represent Sam's gender identity in this text. I have chosen the pseudonym Sam because the name is androgynous, although in real life Sam uses a male name. Although Sam does not identify as a man, I believe that other group members (as well as me) identified (him) as such. Therefore, I suggest that Sam's *social gender identity* is male, or, in West and Zimmerman's (1987) terms, (he) is assigned to the male 'sex category', even though (his) *personal gender identity* is more fluid. For this reason (and since Sam did not express a preference with regard to the use of pronouns), I have decided to use male pronouns rather than gender-neutral pronouns to describe Sam, but have placed these in brackets to indicate that they only describe the social aspect of Sam's gender identity. I have used the same approach to describe a participant in the feminist activist group, Chris

³⁰ As the name suggests, genderfluid or gender fluid implies changing or moving between gender identities (see, for example, Bettencourt, 2009, Nonbinary.org, 2012a). Whilst Sam did not explain what (he) understood by the term, (he) had earlier described (his) experience of gender to me as follows:

As far as I can figure out, for me gender is something which changes all the time, [...] so it's not like uh, I dunno how people see it as a constant thing, for me it's more like a mood or anything else like that, so. And also, I dunno, I don't really see it as an exclusive thing, so it's not one or another, [...] it's a combinational [thing]...

(22), who also seems to have a social identity as a man and an individual gender identity that is more complex.

In addition to asking questions, I also asked participants to fill in a short questionnaire to gather some background information about them (see appendix 3). I tried to make the questions open-ended where possible, to allow participants to define their own identities. For the women's committee, I added questions about participants' university course, year of study, and when they joined the committee. I began by asking participants to fill in the questionnaire before the interview, but later decided that since the questionnaire asked about personal information, participants would probably feel more comfortable completing it at the end of the interview, once we had built up some familiarity. I also noticed that the process of filling in the form often generated some interesting discussion, so I began leaving my recorder running whilst participants filled in the form. Sometimes participants mused aloud about how best to answer the questions, told me that they were not sure how to answer a question, or qualified their answer. This gave me a more nuanced picture of their social identity and also showed the ways in which identity categories (and the process of categorisation) can be problematic. Indeed, Sam said that (he) did not know how to answer any of the questions, thus challenging the whole purpose of the questionnaire.

Appendix 4 shows the demographic data gathered from the questionnaire. I had originally intended to use this information as part of my data analysis, as I wanted to see whether factors such as class or ethnicity were significant in shaping group dynamics. However, there was no obvious connection between these characteristics and power relations in the groups. Furthermore, I decided to focus on analysing gendered power relations in the groups since these are most pertinent to debates about men in feminism. Therefore, I did not explore the other aspects of participants' identities further. I have not included demographic information for individual participants in the appendix and have not generally done so in the thesis, since it could potentially compromise participants' anonymity. I will discuss this decision further in the section on 'Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality'. In the appendix, I have grouped the questionnaire responses into categories in order to summarise and present the

data more clearly. However, I have also included individual responses where these differ significantly from the category titles.

I conducted all of the interviews face-to-face, in places such as the buildings or rooms in which the groups met, participants' homes, cafés, and meeting rooms at my university. I generally began the interview by briefly explaining the research and the purpose of the interview, then asking participants to read an information sheet and sign a consent form. I also asked them if they minded the interview being recorded, and nobody objected to this. Interviews lasted up to 75 minutes and, after most of them, I recorded some details of the experience in written interview notes. These range in length from a few lines to two pages and include information on topics such as the venue, background noise, body language, how I conducted the interview, my feelings, my impressions of the interviewee, and any methodological issues that were raised. This additional information can be considered part of the interview data, or what Wengraf calls the 'hard facts of interview interaction' (2001, p.10, note 4).

I recorded almost all of the interviews, using a digital voice recorder. I did not record my interview with Imogen (18, women's committee) because I thought that the venue (a student bar) would be too noisy. Instead, I made brief handwritten notes, which I later wrote up. All but one of the recorded interviews were transcribed. There was one interview from the feminist activist group which I decided not to transcribe as it turned out not to be very relevant to the research: the participant had only been involved in the group for a short time several years ago and had not been involved in the recent period which was the focus of my research.

Transcription involves interpretation and decision-making on the part of the transcriber – it is not merely a technical process (Oliver et al., 2005, Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). I took a largely naturalistic approach to transcription (see Oliver et al., 2005), attempting to capture as much detail of the interaction as possible, but I did not include as much detail as is used in linguistic analysis.³¹

³¹ I transcribed words verbatim and included partial words and 'response tokens' (Oliver et al., 2005) such as 'mm', 'yeah' and 'mm-hm'. I also noted pauses and 'involuntary vocalizations' such as laughter and sighing, although I tended not to include vocalizations which did not affect the meaning of the speech or reveal anything about the speaker's mood, such as coughs and sneezes. At times, I also noted non-verbal behaviours such as gestures, but only where I could remember these from the interview context. I did not generally note down background noise

However, when I came to write the thesis, I decided that not all of this information was necessary and that sometimes it made participants' words difficult to read. Therefore, in the thesis I have used a more denaturalized style which aims to convey participants' meanings rather than their exact utterances (see Oliver et al., 2005). There is no universal standard style of transcription (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), so I set up my own system of notation (see appendix 5).

I planned to do all the transcriptions myself, but found that the process was slower and more physically demanding than I expected.³² Two friends offered to help transcribe the interviews and thus, two interviews were entirely transcribed by someone else and one was partially transcribed by someone else. I gave my friends guidelines on my transcription style, but nonetheless found that their transcripts had a slightly different character, for example, one transcriber included more descriptions of tone and expression than I did. I checked the transcripts that others produced against the recordings and amended them somewhat to fit with what I heard and with my own style of transcription. However, I did not remove the additional descriptions, as I thought that these could be useful in interpreting the transcripts. Therefore, rather than trying to standardise the transcripts completely, I tried to remain aware of the different interpretational practices of the transcribers and to take this into account during data analysis. I did not plan to show the transcripts to interviewees, but one person asked to see her transcript, so I sent it to her.

3.6 Interviews and interaction

Researchers have increasingly come to see, and to analyse, interviews as sites of social interaction (see, for example, Holstein and Gubrium, 2004, Miller and Glassner, 2004, Silverman, 2007, Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). According to this perspective, an interview is not simply a 'pipeline for transporting knowledge', but rather 'a social encounter in which knowledge is actively constructed' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004, p.141). There is much debate about

unless it affected or interrupted the interview, although I have sometimes commented on background noise in my interview notes.

³² I experienced pain in my arms and hands which prevented me from typing for more than about one hour per day. Later, this developed into a complete inability to type, so much of the data analysis and production of the thesis was conducted with the aid of a support worker.

the implications of this for the kinds of knowledge that can be produced from interview research (see, for example, Miller and Glassner, 2004, Hammersley, 2008). From a radical constructionist standpoint, the nature of the interview as a social encounter means that 'no knowledge about a reality that is "out there" in the social world can be obtained from the interview' (Miller and Glassner, 2004, p.125). However, I agree with Miller and Glassner (2004) and Hammersley (2008) that such extreme scepticism is unwarranted. Whilst interviews do not provide a transparent window to the world outside or into participants' minds, they can still give us some insight into social realities and subjectivities. Nevertheless, moving from the interview data to the world beyond the interview always requires making assumptions (Wengraf, 2001).

Viewing the interview as a social encounter widens the scope of analysis. It can involve taking into account the active role of both interviewer and interviewee in producing the interview data (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004), the context in which the interview takes place, the cultural ideas and stories which influence how people talk (Miller and Glassner, 2004), and the social identities and histories of the participants (Robinson et al., 2007). Following these insights, I thought that it was important to reflect on some of the interactional elements of my own interviews to consider how these might impact on the data and analyses produced. Whilst the interactional dimensions of interviews are complex and difficult to account for, I have chosen to focus on three issues which struck me when conducting and reflecting on my interviews. These are my role in the interview, the difference between individual and joint interviews, and the impact of social identities such as age and gender.

My role

As a researcher, I played a large role in directing the interviews; my questions shaped most of the discussion. My interviewing approach was focused on listening and on finding out interviewees' own perspectives and views; I rarely commented or gave my own point of view unless a participant asked me what I thought. Oakley (1990) has advocated reciprocity in the interview situation in order to minimise the power dynamics between researcher and interviewee. I did not specifically invite questions from my interviewees, but if they did ask me any questions, like Oakley, I responded as fully and honestly as I could. Several

interviewees asked me what I thought about men in feminism, what I had found out so far in the research or what I thought about their group, either during the 'official' interview or afterwards. During participant observation, I also discussed my research with participants on several occasions. I tried to share my thoughts honestly, yet tactfully. These conversations may have had an impact on participants' own thoughts and feelings about the groups and/or on what they chose to tell me in the interviews.

My style of interviewing changed over time as I became more experienced. One of my initial interviews was quite chaotic in terms of structure, probably because I did not prepare sufficiently and did not give myself a clear structure to follow. After this, I became more organised and the interviews were more clearly structured. At first, I felt that I needed to ask every question on my list, even if the topic had already been covered, but as I became more experienced, I became more relaxed and allowed the interviews to flow more naturally. I decided that, as long as the main topics were covered, it did not matter if I did not ask every single question. Thus, some of the later interviews felt more like ordinary conversations.

Joint interviews

One of the most important factors in the interview was the number of people present. Most of the interviews were conducted one-to-one, but I conducted two joint interviews in the women's committee, producing some interesting dynamics and data. I reflected on this in my interview notes:

Interviewed both Maria (19) and Ann (19) together. [...] I was glad that I had chosen to interview them together as sometimes they responded to each other's points so I think I probably got more information from them than if I had interviewed them separately. It was also interesting to see where their experiences or thoughts resonated with each other.

However, joint interviews also posed some dilemmas:

I felt that Maria talked more and quite often she talked first and I worried a bit that maybe I didn't give Ann enough of a chance to speak. If I followed up on a comment made by one of them (and I felt that maybe I did this more with Maria), I felt that I was perhaps being unfair as I felt that in some way I needed to give them both equal time to speak. I think that Maria tended to speak for longer and I didn't want to cut her off so I let her say what she wanted to say but sometimes, especially towards the end when I

knew that we would soon have to vacate the room, I was conscious of time and wanted her to hurry up so that I could get Ann's response or move on to the next question. (Interview notes)

Thus, whilst in some ways joint interviews produced more data, as interviewees sparked off each other, there are other aspects of interviewees' thoughts and experiences which perhaps went unsaid, particularly when one person tended to dominate the discussion. Joint interviews also highlighted the co-construction of knowledge in the interview situation (see Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), as sometimes interviewees influenced each other, developed a joint argument or even finished each other's sentences. For example, in the following excerpt, women's officers Susie (23) and Karen (20) discuss why they think the women's committee should be led by women. Without wishing to conduct an in-depth analysis here, this excerpt shows the way in which Susie and Karen jointly express and develop the idea that women's experience of discrimination is significant and justifies their leadership of the group:

JB: [D]'you think that's important, for it to be led by women?

Karen: Um at this moment in time I do. I hopefully foresee a time when it won't be. I hope, I foresee a time when it'll be sexual equality, (Susie: mm) but um, yeah, I mean it's sad that I still have to say this but I do think it has to be woman-led because I can't think of, I can think of lots of male feminists but I can't think of any that would ever call themselves that and I think that's really sad. Um, so yeah I think it's important because at the end of the day women are still a minority and [...] I still think also there's more subtle things that you pick up from being a woman which you perhaps don't as a man, as in behaviour towards him and even the most little things. And I think, I think it's much more, easier to observe them and sort of get frustrated about them.

Susie: Yeah. I think, yeah I agree, I think it has to be a kind of, is a movement, a women's movement, I think, you know, I would love more men to be involved but I think in principle it ought to be women's led just because that's the way it is, like I would be involved in LGBT campaigning, but I would not expect to lead it because I haven't experienced...

Karen: Experienced, all it's experiencing it, like {Susie: yeah} racial equality [campaigning], I wouldn't expect someone who was, you know, white and British and had massive British lineage, because I don't think you can ever experience the kind of like petty behaviour, the little things that you pick up when they're personal, so...

Susie: I mean you can read about it {Karen: and...} and understand it as much as you like but it's, it's not the same really, and I don't, well personally I, I wouldn't feel justified in leading, in actively like leading a

movement group or something if I was not directly, um {Karen: yeah}, what's the word I'm looking for, you know, experienced in that like...

Karen: Yeah, 'cause, when you look at everyone in this group, everyone's had a turning point when some, something's happened to them which has triggered them to be a feminist or like, someone's got frustrated about a particular issue [...] and they've been like guided by this principle throughout their life from that moment onwards. So I think that's quite, quite important.

Because of the co-construction of meaning that took place, when writing about joint interviews, it has sometimes been difficult to decide who to attribute ideas to. Occasionally, I have attributed statements made by one person to both interviewees as the ideas resulted from a conversation.

The co-construction of meaning obviously also took place in the interaction between me and my interviewees, but the examples tended not to be so obvious, as I did not generally speak much during the interviews. One example comes from my interview with Angela (48, feminist discussion group), when she asked me what I thought about the group and then responded to my comments:

JB: I think before I started doing my fieldwork I'd done a lot of reading about the topic of men in feminism and quite a lot of that was quite negative and {Angela: mm} feminists talking about the problems they'd had with men, {Angela: mm} and so then I think I went into it kind of expecting the men to be dominating, and then

Angela: Yeah, yeah

JB: I didn't really feel like they were.

Angela: No they were nice men weren't they, they were sort of soft men.

Social identities

Robinson et al. (2007) highlight the importance of the researcher's and interviewee's social identities and backgrounds in the interview:

Since the research interview is a social situation where both interviewee and interviewer participate as social beings, each brings to it their own identities, experiences and implicit assumptions about the other. These constitute the means by which they negotiate and interpret their social encounter (p.182).

They reflexively explore the production of knowledge across similarities and differences of age, gender and social class, concluding that the interview is a

process in which 'layers of difference and commonality are continuously being negotiated' (p.192). I have tried to reflect on how such differences and similarities played out in my own research, although it is difficult to identify the precise impact of social identities.

Although several researchers have commented on the influence of gender in the interview process (for example, Williams and Heikes, 1993, Arendell, 1997, Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2002, Broom et al., 2009), this is not something that I particularly noticed in my own interviews. However, I did notice that age seemed to make a difference to my feelings and actions in the interview. For example, when interviewing older women, I worried that they might find some of my questions silly. I think I felt that, as more experienced feminists, they would be in a stronger position to criticise my research. Also, when interviewing an older member of the feminist activist group (Cath, 52), I was anxious about asking her about her interactions with men, and I realised that this reflected my own assumptions about different generations of feminists:

I felt a bit anxious about asking her about her interactions with men in case she thought this was too personal or in case she had had bad experiences with men and this might therefore upset her. This could have been the case with any of my interviewees yet I didn't worry about this with other people I spoke to. Do I assume that younger women are less likely to have been abused by men? Or am I making assumptions about different generations of feminists – do I think that younger feminists are less likely to become active because of personal experiences of abuse/inequality than those of the 'second-wave' generation? (Adapted from interview notes)

I also wondered how she might perceive me across the difference of age, especially as the interview involved discussion of the relationship between age/generation and feminism:

She talked quite a lot about the differences between her experiences and those of the younger women in the group, and about the differences in her experiences of feminist groups over the years, and about the ways in which feminism has changed. I don't know whether she positioned me alongside (or amongst) the younger women in the group or if she saw me differently because I'm a researcher. I wonder if she made any assumptions about my feminism because of my age. [...] Maybe she was less openly critical of younger feminists than she would have been with another woman her age? Maybe she had to explain things to me that she could assume that a feminist of her age would know and share. (Interview notes)

My interviewees' perceptions of me and my research no doubt shaped what they said in interviews, but I do not think, in most cases, this would cause them to conceal anything or significantly alter what they said. However, in the feminist activist group, the knowledge that one of the men who participated in the group was my husband (see Chapter 1, section 1.4) may have affected how interviewees talked about the group, perhaps leading them to soften any criticism of the men in the group. I do not believe that this invalidates my research, but is simply something that I have to take into account in my analysis.

3.7 Documents

I made some use of documents produced by the groups to supplement my observational and interview data. Although I have not analysed these to the same extent as my interview data and fieldnotes, they have fed into my developing understanding of the groups. Scott (1990) suggests that researchers can either use documents as *resources* to find out information about something else or as *topics*, social products to be analysed in their own right, although he stresses that these two uses are interdependent. In this research, I have used documents in both of these ways, and I have tried to take into account not only their content, but also their purpose and the contexts in which they were produced and used (see Scott, 1990, Prior, 2003, Atkinson and Coffey, 2004, Flick, 2009). I have made use of these sources in various ways: to jog my memory about events that I attended, to compare with my own records of meetings, to get more information on groups' beliefs and political practices, and to see how the groups represent themselves internally and externally (on the latter point, see Atkinson and Coffey, 2004). Below, I will briefly outline how I used documents in each of the case studies.

In the feminist discussion group, emails were an important source of information for me. I initially found out about the group from an email which announced their first meeting. In this message, the group founders explained why they set up the group and what they envisaged its purpose to be, so this gave me some insight into their approach to feminist politics, as well as their expectations for the group. Once the group was established, an email discussion list was set up which enabled group members to communicate with each other outside of

meetings. I subscribed to this list and the online discussions gave me further insight into participants' beliefs, as well as giving me access to the thoughts of some group members who did not attend meetings. Sometimes, members posted their own notes of the meetings to the list or circulated them via email, so I was able to compare these with my own fieldnotes and also use them to gain information about meetings that I missed.

I have not quoted directly from emails in order to respect participants' privacy. The boundaries of public and private space are blurred in online interaction (Waskul and Douglass, 1996), so many researchers advise that it is important to consider the *perception* of privacy in online communications when using them for research purposes (King, 1996, Waskul and Douglass, 1996, Sixsmith and Murray, 2001). Emails sent to the discussion list can only be seen by other members of the list, so I assumed that participants would consider the list to be a private space. However, although I have not quoted from any emails, I have used them to develop my understanding and analysis of the group, and I have on occasion made reference to the content of emails.

When studying the women's committee, I was able to use official documents such as agendas and minutes of meetings as a resource for writing and checking my fieldnotes and to find out about meetings that I missed. In addition, the women's officers sent me some minutes from past meetings before I began studying the group, so these provided further examples of the group's activities. I also got some information about the committee from their website. I joined the women's committee's email distribution list and Facebook group and, although I have not directly analysed or quoted from these sources, the content and tone of emails and Facebook discussions has shaped my understanding of the group. In particular, the friendly, affectionate and jokey tone of emails added to my sense of the committee as a friendly, informal group.

As the DIY collective yielded little observational or interview data, documents played a significant role in my analysis of this group. Documents produced by the group, such as flyers, booklets, a website and a Facebook page, listed their activities and showed how the group presented themselves to outsiders. This gave me some insight into how members perceived (and wanted others to perceive) the group's purpose, image and political perspective. In a similar

manner, I drew on flyers, leaflets and the website of the feminist activist group to gain more information about their campaigns and activities, and to see how they expressed the group's purpose and feminist perspective. I was also a member of the group's email distribution list, which was a further source of information about their activities and campaigns. I will now move on from discussing methods of data collection to describe the process of data analysis.

3.8 Data analysis

Analysis tends to be the most mystified and least well documented aspect of social research (see, for example, Bryman and Burgess, 1994). Spencer et al. (2003) argue that whilst in recent years there has been more discussion amongst researchers about analysis, there are still aspects of the process that remain obscure:

[W]hile such accounts explain how to sift, label, order or even reduce qualitative data, many stop short of explaining how classification or explanation is achieved or how theories or hypotheses are generated. In other words, there is now much greater visibility about how qualitative data analysis is 'managed' but rather less about the intellectual processes involved in 'generating findings' from the evidence collected (pp.199-200).

When I began this research, I aimed to respond to Stanley's (1997) call for 'accountable feminist knowledge' through making explicit the ways in which I came to my conclusions. However, I found that it is not always possible to pinpoint precisely how or why particular ideas arose. In addition, it is difficult, simply due to the limitations of space, to describe the process of analysis in full. Therefore, I will focus on describing key milestones. I will begin with an outline of my analytical approach, followed by a 'natural history' (Silverman, 2005) of the analytic process.

My overall analytical approach was broadly interpretive, in the sense of focusing on the meaning rather than the linguistic aspects of data (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) and going beyond a 'literal' reading of the data (Mason, 2002, p.149). It combined deductive and inductive elements, since I was partly guided by my existing research questions and implicit hypotheses, but also tried to remain open to new ideas arising from the data. Thus, my research contains what Wengraf calls inductivist and deductivist 'moments' (2001, pp.2-3). I used

coding to organise the data thematically and then compared data from different sources to help answer my research questions.

Qualitative researchers frequently state that data analysis is not a separate phase but is ongoing throughout the research process (for example, Bryman and Burgess, 1994, Spencer et al., 2003). For Bryman and Burgess, 'research design, data collection and analysis are simultaneous and continuous processes' (1994, p.217). In my own research, I did not begin the formal process of data analysis until I had almost finished collecting my data, but, as Spencer et al. (2003) point out, 'the pathways to forming ideas to pursue, phenomena to capture, theories to test begins [sic] right at the start of a research study and ends [sic] while writing up the results' (p.199). Therefore, I will attempt to trace the development of ideas in my own work over time.

At first, my research was focused more on men than on mixed-gender feminist groups. I wanted to find out why men got involved in feminism and the effects of their involvement, with the aim of generating advice for feminists on how to integrate men into their activities. I was also interested in generational differences amongst feminists in terms of their views about the 'man question', so I planned to conduct research with activists of different ages. My initial research questions were as follows:

- What is the role of men within mixed-gender feminist organisations? What do men contribute to feminist organising? What problems (if any) are associated with men's involvement?
- Why do men get involved in feminist activism? What factors enable/prevent men's involvement? What could be done to further their involvement?
- Does the involvement of men in the young(er) feminist movement in Britain represent a generational difference in feminist attitudes towards men and/or men's attitudes towards feminism? If so, what might be the cause of such differences?

During the first year of the research, in which I reviewed literature on various topics relating to gender and feminism, I came to feel that looking at differences between feminists of different ages, in addition to examining the gender dynamics in mixed-gender feminist groups, was too much to do in one research project, so I decided to focus purely on gender relations in mixed-gender

groups. Through my reading (for example, Garfinkel, 1967, Goffman, 1977, Kessler and McKenna, 1978, West and Zimmerman, 1987), I also became interested in the social construction of gender and decided to make this a focus of my research. I developed a conceptual framework which posited three aspects of gender –difference, norms and power relations – and I planned to explore the extent to which these were challenged and/or reproduced in the groups in my study. This approach was influenced by Ostrander's (1999) research on '[g]ender and race in a pro-feminist, progressive, mixed-gender, mixed-race organization', in which she demonstrates that movement organisations can simultaneously challenge and perpetuate gendered and racial inequality. At the end of my first year, I drew up the following research questions:

Main question: What happens when men get involved in feminist activism?

Subsidiary questions (which will contribute to answering the main question):

- How do men and women interact in mixed-gender feminist activist groups?
- What are the power relations in the groups (with particular regard to gender)?
- How, if at all, are gender norms/differences/power relations (re)produced in the groups?
- How, if at all, are gender norms/differences/power relations challenged in the groups?
- What factors influence the (re)production and/or challenging of gender norms/differences/power relations in the groups?

Broader questions that could follow from these:

- What do the answers to the above questions suggest about the (re)production of gender?
- What do they suggest about the role of men in feminism?

This focus on the social construction of gender informed much of my early analysis, although the process of data collection and initial analysis led me to change my focus and research questions again, as I will explain.

Whilst engaged in data collection, I was informally analysing my data, for example, by making interpretive comments in my fieldnotes. Through participant observation, I began to get a general feel of 'what was happening' in the feminist discussion group and the women's committee, and when I conducted interviews I was struck by particularly interesting or revealing statements and spotted emerging themes. During this phase of the research, I produced some preliminary analyses for conference papers, based on data from the feminist discussion group and the women's committee. These included discussion of the social construction of gender, but also dealt with topics such as feminism and the wider political context, thus going beyond the remit of my research questions at that time. These analyses were developed through reflecting on the data that I had collected up to that point, but they largely focused on a few key quotes or sections, rather than attempting a systematic analysis of the data. Nevertheless, some of the ideas that I developed at this stage have influenced my later analysis.

For example, an early paper (Baily, 2009b) attempted to link gender relations and the performance of gender in the women's committee to the contemporary political and social context. These insights followed directly from connections made by interviewees between their own practices and the wider context. For example:

I think the one trait that feminists all have, is that they've gotta be very assertive and I think that comes through in the meetings. The problem is I think [...] because feminism still has such connotations in today's society, that you do have to be a very strong and forceful character to stand up for that kind of thing. So I would say that everyone in this meeting was of quite a forceful character [...] you know everyone's got no issue with putting opinions forward, and I think that when a boy comes in the meeting, literally no-one notices because they're all pretty strong-minded people at the end of the day. (Karen, 20, women's committee)

This early interview got me thinking about the relationship between gender, feminism, and the wider political context, a theme that would remain central to my analysis. In a slightly later paper (Baily, 2009c), I focused on changes in feminism over time and developed the idea of mixed-gender consciousness-raising (in the feminist discussion group) as a distinct form of political practice, another idea which has fed into my later analysis.

The 'official' process of data analysis began when I started coding my data. I thought that coding would help me to get a systematic overview of the data, to go beyond an 'impressionistic view' (Mason, 2002, p.152; see also Rubin and Rubin, 2005), and that it would enable me to compare similar themes and topics across different data sources. The first round of coding consisted of 'open coding' in the sense that I developed codes as I went along rather than starting with a prepared list of codes (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). However, many of my codes derived from interview questions, research questions or themes that I identified during fieldwork, thus, coding was not a purely inductive process.

Coding served to summarise the data (see Huberman and Miles, 1998, on data reduction) and to identify recurring themes. After coding each interview, I listed the main codes that I had used, and after coding all of the interviews in each case study, I wrote a list of the main codes used in that study. At the end of this first phase, the codes were largely clustered around the following broad themes: the groups (for example, group structure, group dynamics), men in the groups (for example, men's role, men's behaviour) and feminism (for example, feminist beliefs, definition of feminism). Other themes included life outside the groups (for example, interactions with men/women), the broader political context, gender, and other social divisions (for example, class, race, age). Whilst interviews were coded thematically, I developed a different coding system for fieldnotes, which covered both the content and the dynamics of group discussions, as well as methodological considerations and details of the fieldwork settings.

When I had almost finished the first round of coding, I discussed my research questions with my supervisor and revised them into the following:

- What happens in mixed-gender feminist groups?
- What is at stake in including/excluding men from feminist groups?
- What is the relationship between feminist beliefs/theories and the practice and experience of mixed-gender feminist activism?
- How do the experiences and practices of mixed-gender feminist groups relate to the wider social and political context?

These new research questions incorporated more of the important themes in my research than the previous ones and allowed me to make use of more of my data. As well as widening the scope of my research, these new questions reflected a shift in my thinking about the 'man question' in feminism. My interactions with my data had demonstrated the complexity of gendered interactions in mixed-gender groups, denying any simple answer to the question: 'what happens when men get involved in feminism?' Therefore, it seemed more appropriate to ask instead 'what is at stake' in the debate about men in feminism or in the decision to include men in any particular feminist space.

Once I had worked through all of the data, I decided to review my coding. The first round of coding had produced a proliferation of codes, so I compared the lists of codes from each case study and tried to boil them down into a simplified coding framework (appendix 6). I then aimed to apply this consistently across all of the case studies. Over a period of almost a year, I coded all of the data for a second time. This round of coding was more focused than the last, as I tried to only code things which were relevant to my research questions. Although I started off using the framework that I had developed, over time I added new codes as I found new themes that I wanted to highlight in the data. The downside to coding over such a long period of time is that this probably reduced the consistency of my coding. However, I never saw coding as the end point of analysis but rather as a means to bring together 'slices' of data to facilitate further analysis (Mason, 2002). Therefore, whilst consistency was important, it was not central to my analysis.

I chose to use a computer program, NVivo 8, to aid the process of coding and analysis. I chose NVivo because I had had some training in using it, I had used it before, and it was cheaply available at my university. NVivo greatly facilitated the process of data analysis, allowing me to store and manage large amounts of data and to quickly retrieve coded segments of data. However, this facility may also have shaped my analysis. As Mason (2002) comments, qualitative data analysis software tends to facilitate cross-sectional indexing (i.e. coding) of data, rather than more holistic analytic approaches. Although I decided that I wanted to use a coding approach before I started using the software, the

software may have pushed me further down the route of a cross-sectional (rather than holistic) analysis of my sources. Furthermore, the use of NVivo exacerbated the problem, inherent in coding approaches, of fragmenting the data, as it was easier to display and analyse the coded chunks of data in isolation from their original context. This is not to suggest that the coding approach is invalid, but simply that a different analytic strategy would have revealed different things about my data.

At the same time as coding the data, I was also developing more ideas about it. Preliminary analyses of two case studies, focusing on gender and group dynamics, led me to view gender relations as multilayered and sometimes contradictory. However, I felt that I lacked a theoretical understanding of power, which limited my analysis of group dynamics. I conducted a literature review on gender and power, but I still struggled to find theories that fitted with my data.

Once I had finished coding all of the data for a second time, I went back to the data and tried to analyse it more systematically. I pulled together the sections of data that related to each research question or to particular aspects of a research question. For example, codes such as 'men's behaviour', 'presence of men' or 'gender dynamics' could all relate to the question of what happens in mixed-gender groups in terms of gender dynamics. I brought together data relating to the same themes, questions or substantive topics from different sources and perspectives, in order to try to gain an overall picture of what was happening in each group or to compare perspectives across groups. Where different participants agreed with each other or with my observations, this confirmed my analysis. For example, in the feminist discussion group, participants highlighted a specific incident as an example of good practice in the group, a moment which I myself had felt to be transformative. This led me to label it as a 'key moment'. Where different sources contradicted each other, this could also be revealing. For example, from my observations in the women's committee, there seemed to be a consensus in the group on feminist issues such as sex work. However, interviews revealed divergent views that participants did not always feel comfortable expressing in meetings, which gave me some insight into power dynamics within the group. My analysis proceeded through looking at similarities and differences between participants'

perspectives or between observational and interview data, exploring and attempting to account for these.³³

Although this phase of analysis was mainly focused on interrogating, interpreting and writing about the data, it also involved some coding, as I developed new categories within the existing codes. At this stage, my engagement with the literature also helped to shape my interpretations. In Chapter 5, even after reviewing some literature on gender and power, I struggled to analyse power relations within the groups. It was only after a second phase of literature reviewing, plus discussion with my supervisors, that I hit upon the concepts of emotion work (Hochschild, 1979) and disciplinary power (Foucault, 1975/1995) as tools for making sense of my data. These new concepts allowed me to reformulate my analysis to develop a more satisfactory account of group dynamics. In Chapter 6, when analysing participants' feminist beliefs, I drew on literature about men's relationship to feminism, particularly Fidelma Ashe's (2007) analysis of profeminism as a new social movement, and on long-standing feminist debates about women's experience and the idea of women as the subject of feminism (see, for example, Butler, 1990, Grant, 1993). In Chapter 7, when considering the relationship between feminist groups and the wider political context, I found the concepts of backlash and postfeminism invaluable, and I was also strongly influenced by Jonathan Dean's (2010) discussion of generational dynamics within feminism.

When describing this latter stage of the research, it is very difficult to account for the development of particular ideas, as this was an extremely productive time with new ideas arising frequently out of my engagements with the data and the interaction of the data with my existing theoretical knowledge and new encounters with the literature. Here, I am unable to meet Stanley's requirement to lay bare 'the interpretive acts that produce "findings" and "conclusions" ' (1997, p.216). Nevertheless, I hope that the logic of my analysis will become clear in the following chapters, even if I am unable to account for every stage of the analytic process.

³³ In the case studies where I did not conduct participant observation at meetings, I could obviously only compare different participants' accounts.

3.9 Ethics

The research posed ethical as well as methodological challenges. My approach to research ethics was informed by the guidelines produced by the British Sociological Association (2002), the Economic and Social Research Council (2005) and the University of Sheffield (2006). I will focus my discussion of ethics on four key areas: informed consent and deception; privacy, anonymity and confidentiality; avoiding harm; and power relations.

Informed consent and deception

Gaining informed consent from research participants is generally considered to be 'central to ethical research practice' (Wiles et al., 2007, para.1.1). I adopted a fairly formal approach to gaining consent, distributing information sheets and asking participants to sign consent forms. I sought consent to conduct participant observation and interviews separately.

In the feminist discussion group and the women's committee, where I conducted significant periods of participant observation, I initially approached the groups (rather than individuals), attended a meeting, gave out information about the research and gave participants some time to consider whether to participate in the research, before asking them to sign consent forms at a future meeting. In the women's committee, the group took a joint decision to participate in the research (although I still asked individuals to sign consent forms), but in the feminist discussion group, due to the more fluid nature of the group, the decision was taken by each individual. In both cases, as the membership of the groups changed over time, I had to seek consent from new members as they arrived.

In the feminist discussion group, there was one person who did not wish to sign a consent form due to concerns about confidentiality, but who verbally agreed to participate in the research. I decided that it was more ethically sensitive to accept her verbal agreement than to force her to sign a form. There was also one individual in the feminist discussion group who did not wish to participate in the research, so I did not make any notes about this person. However, this is not an entirely satisfactory solution, as McKenzie argues that 'to write out

individuals from the research would be an impossible task because their impact on the data direct or indirect would be difficult to isolate' (2009, para.5.6).

I did not gain consent from everyone in the settings that I studied. I only asked regular members of the groups to consent to participant observation, as it did not seem worth asking people who came along for a single meeting, or who came in and out of the room during a meeting, to sign a form. I also did not gain informed consent when conducting observation in more public settings, for example, when observing gigs put on by the DIY collective (see McKenzie, 2009, for discussion of this). With regard to interviews, the process of gaining consent was more straightforward. I arranged interviews with individuals and then asked them to read an information sheet and sign a consent form before starting the interview. This included gaining their consent for the interview to be recorded and for the data to be archived.

Even where participants sign consent forms, there are limits to informed consent (see Wiles et al., 2007, McKenzie, 2009). Firstly, informed consent is based on the principle of individual autonomy (Israel and Hay, 2006), yet this model does not apply well when researching groups, since individuals may be influenced by others or feel pressurised by the group to participate. In the feminist discussion group, I was faced with the dilemma of one individual refusing to participate in the research whilst the rest of the group agreed to it. Conversely, in the DIY collective and the feminist activist group, I gained the consent of particular individuals to conduct interviews, but it could be argued that I needed to get consent from the group as a whole, since the subject of the research is the group and thus all members of the group are affected by the research, even if they choose not to participate in it. This is of particular concern in the feminist activist group, since one member expressed reservations about the research (see Chapter 1, section 1.4).

Secondly, informed consent implies that participants should be provided with complete information about the aims and process of the research, yet it may not be possible to provide such information at the beginning of a research project (Wiles et al., 2007). In qualitative research in particular, the project may develop in unexpected ways. Therefore, at the beginning of the research, participants 'cannot know to what they are consenting' (Wiles et al., 2007, para.3.13). For

this reason, many researchers and ethics guidelines emphasise the importance of viewing consent as an ongoing process, rather than a one-off event (see, for example, British Sociological Association, 2002, Wiles et al., 2007). Although I frequently mentioned my research during the periods of participant observation, I did not update participants on the development and changing nature of the research and did not really make an effort to maintain consent on an ongoing basis, so this is something that I could have paid more attention to.

Whilst the above issues trouble the concept of informed consent in my research, I do not think that they constitute serious ethical breaches. However, there is one aspect of the research which is more problematic. As mentioned previously (Chapter 1, section 1.4), my husband attended some meetings of the feminist activist group in the months before I began researching the group, and when I spoke about my research at a group meeting, one member raised concerns about this, suggesting that it would affect the validity of the research. Since the issue had been raised at the meeting, I assumed that everyone in the group knew about my husband's involvement in the group. Despite this, when I came to interview participants, it became clear during our discussions that some of them were not aware of my husband's involvement in the group. When this happened, I failed to inform participants of the fact of my husband's involvement, to avoid the potential awkwardness that this could cause for both me and my interviewee.

It is possible that knowledge of his involvement in the group would have affected what participants chose to share in the interview or even their decision to be interviewed at all. Therefore, after some careful reflection, I decided to contact those participants who may have lacked full knowledge about the research and to seek retrospective consent to use the interview data. I emailed participants copies of their interview transcripts, explained the situation and asked them to confirm whether they wanted to continue to participate in the research. All of these participants gave their consent for me to use the data.

Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

In conducting this research, I was guided by the principle that '[t]he anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be

respected' (British Sociological Association, 2002, p.5), and I assured participants that data would be treated as confidential and would be anonymised prior to publication. I made an effort to uphold these assurances, but maintaining confidentiality proved more difficult than I had initially anticipated.

I stored the data as securely as possible and for the most part I was the only person to see the data. The only exceptions to this were when I discussed some anonymised fieldnotes with my supervisor, when two people helped me to transcribe some interviews and when several support workers helped with the process of data analysis, as an injury prevented me from doing it myself. I explained to the people who helped me the confidential nature of the data and asked them to sign confidentiality agreements.

Aside from secure storage of data, my main strategy for protecting confidentiality was to anonymise research participants. I have replaced participants' names with pseudonyms and have generally not included any extra information about them, except where this is relevant to my analysis. An exception to this is that I have included participants' ages throughout the thesis. This is because, as I discussed in my literature review, age/generation has been considered to be significant in shaping feminists' beliefs and political strategies, including their views about men's involvement in feminism (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). I have written participants' ages as they described them in their interviews or questionnaires. Some participants did not fill in questionnaires, so their ages are unknown to me.

Initially I had assumed that providing pseudonyms for research participants would suffice to protect their identities, but I soon realised that, given the small size of the groups in my study, I would also need to anonymise the groups. Thus, I have used descriptions rather than the names of the groups and have removed any identifying information, such as the cities in which they are located. This means that I have had to remove quite a lot of contextual information which could have added to my description and analysis of the groups and given readers a deeper insight into their experiences. I have also had to avoid quoting directly from documents produced by the groups where

this could compromise the groups' anonymity. This is particularly a problem with online documents due to the searchable nature of online data.

In relation to both groups and individuals, there is a tension between providing contextual information and protecting participants' anonymity. In this thesis, I emphasise the importance of individual variation and context in understanding mixed-gender feminist activism. Thus, the removal of personal and contextual information to some extent compromises my arguments. Nevertheless, having promised participants anonymity, I felt that I had an obligation to ensure this.

However, despite the measures outlined above, there are limits to the anonymity that I have been able to provide, which I should have made clear to participants. Whilst preserving the anonymity of participants from strangers is fairly easy, it is much more difficult to disguise participants from people who may know them, such as other feminist activists, who are among the target audience for my research. It would also be virtually impossible to disguise group members from each other, which raises the possibility of harm to participants (see next section). Therefore, in retrospect, the idea of providing complete anonymity for participants in this study was unrealistic.

Respecting confidentiality also entailed considering the content of the data and whether a participant would be likely to want it to be disclosed to others, even in an anonymised form. Kirsch (2005) warns that the friendliness of an interview situation may lead respondents to reveal private information that they would not want to be published:

Appreciating the undivided attention, sincere interest, and warmth shown by skillful interviewers [...], participants can easily reveal intimate details about their lives that they may later regret having shared. [...] Participants may forget – or repress – the knowledge that what they are sharing is being recorded and will later be analyzed and published in some form or another (pp.2164-65).

Similarly, in the context of participant observation, participants may easily forget that they are being observed, and indeed researchers generally want them to forget this in order to minimise researcher effects and to gain the data needed for their study (see Gans, 1982, Bourgois, 2007). This is particularly pertinent in relation to the feminist discussion group, as the group encouraged the discussion of personal experiences and carried its own expectations of

confidentiality. Thus, in addition to gaining informed consent from participants, I tried to deal with data 'in such a manner as not to compromise the personal dignity of the participant or to infringe upon their right to privacy' (University of Sheffield, 2009, p.1). This involved carefully selecting which data to include in public presentations of my research.

Harm

I sought to avoid harming research participants (and others) at all stages of the research, and I also had to consider the potential impact of the publication of the research and the potential use of my data by other researchers, since it may be archived (see British Sociological Association, 2002). During my fieldwork, I did not feel that conducting participant observation harmed participants in any way, as I simply observed and participated in the groups' normal activities. Neither did I anticipate that my interviews would cause any distress to participants, as they did not concern particularly sensitive or painful topics. However, as Kirsch (2005) points out, it is not always possible to predict how respondents will react, and sometimes even the most 'seemingly innocuous' questions can lead interviewees to painful memories or reflections (p.2164). Fortunately, none of my participants appeared to suffer significant distress during the interviews, but there were some occasions where my questions inadvertently prompted somewhat painful reflections. For example:

[W]hen I asked Maddy (24) about how other people viewed her involvement in the women's committee, I was thinking of people outside the committee, e.g. friends, who she did mention, but she also talked about what the other members of the committee thought about her, which I hadn't intended to ask about – she interpreted my question in a way that nobody else had. I hope that she didn't find it too painful or intrusive answering this question as she speculated that maybe other people on the committee don't really want her there or don't value her perspective. I had never considered this and it made me feel quite sad for her. (Interview notes).

At the stage of writing and publishing the research, there is potential for participants to experience discomfort as a result of what is written about them. This could result from my own interpretations of their behaviour or comments made by other participants. In writing this thesis, I have had to balance the dual demands of presenting a thorough, honest and critical account of the groups that I studied and avoiding unnecessary harm to participants. In addition to

considering the feelings of individuals, I also have to consider the ongoing relationships between participants and how these may be affected by the research, since research represents 'an intervention into a system of relationships' (Stacey, 1988, p.21). I have tried to avoid creating tension between participants (in some cases in groups where the issue of men's involvement is already a source of tension) by trying to gather, represent and understand the full range of viewpoints in each group and by highlighting similarities as well as differences between them.

In thinking about the publication of this research, I have also had to consider the potential impact of the research on the wider feminist movement. Whilst I hope that the research will be a useful resource for feminists, there is also potential for it to be used to justify certain practices, such as either including men or excluding them from feminist spaces. At a time when a significant number of feminists believe that '[w]omen-only spaces are under threat and should be defended' (Redfern and Aune, 2010, p.236), I do not wish to contribute to this threat. Therefore, I have tried to write about politically sensitive issues in a fair and responsible manner, for example, by representing a range of viewpoints.

Such issues are also of concern when considering the use of my archived data by other researchers. One participant asked about the process of data archiving and raised the issue that any other person using the data would be seeing them out of context. She was clearly uncomfortable at the prospect of the data being used in this way. I attempted to reassure her that anyone using the data would be sensitive to this and that probably the only other people who would be interested in the data would be other feminists. However, I had to admit that I had no control over who might use the data or what they might do with it. This is one of the risks associated with data archiving (see, for example, Parry and Mauthner, 2004).

Power relations

Feminist researchers have widened the scope of research ethics by attending to broader issues of power in the research process (see, for example, Smith, 1987, Stacey, 1988, Kirsch, 1999, Hesse-Biber and Leckenby, 2004, Harding and Norberg, 2005a). Whilst some have aimed to develop more egalitarian

relationships with participants (for example, Oakley, 1990), others have argued that developing close, empathetic relationships with participants actually opens them up to greater exploitation by the researcher, given that power relations cannot be eradicated (Stacey, 1988, Kirsch, 2005). In my own research I was friendly towards participants, but did not go out of my way to cultivate close relationships with them or to involve them in the processes of research. I remained in control of the research, although this does not mean that participants were entirely passive. Olesen (2005) comments that '[i]n a certain sense, participants are always "doing" research, for they, along with researchers, construct the meanings that are interpreted and turned into "findings" ' (p.255). Thus, I recognise that my research is in many ways a collaborative project, but one which I have largely directed.

Issues of power are relevant not only during fieldwork but also in the writing of research. Here, feminists have been concerned with issues of voice and representation (Kirsch, 1999, Lather, 2001, Olesen, 2005). The desire of early feminist researchers to 'find and express women's voices' (Olesen, 2005, p.252) has been complicated by critiques of the politics of representation and of the possibility of 'giving voice' to others (see, for example, Alcoff, 1991, Lather, 2001, Olesen, 2005). Dorothy Smith maintains that the relationships between researchers and participants are 'always ambiguous', since 'we are going to take what we have learned from them and make use of it in contexts in which they do not speak' (1987, p.218).

Whilst I recognise that there are inherent problems in analysing, interpreting and presenting the words and lives of others, and that I exercise power in doing this, in this particular research project the power dynamics are somewhat minimised due to the fact that my research subjects are activists. I do not seek to speak on behalf of the feminist activists in my study, as they can and do speak for themselves. Many of my research participants have publicly expressed their views (on feminism and other issues) through media such as zines, blogs, email discussion lists and student newspapers, or through various forms of activism. Therefore, my relationship with participants is less problematic than in many studies, as they have a greater opportunity to talk back to the research. I see this research as part of an ongoing conversation

amongst feminists, rather than an attempt to give an authoritative account. I plan to disseminate my research amongst feminist activists, including the research participants, and I hope that this will stimulate discussion and perhaps lead to further research.

3.10 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have provided a reflexive account of the research process in order to aid the reader in judging the quality of my research and to provide a context for the chapters that follow. I have outlined my overall methodological approach, the assumptions and beliefs that informed the research, and the development of the research through the processes of research design, data collection and analysis. I have also discussed some of the methodological and ethical issues encountered during the research process. I have reflected on some of the strengths and weaknesses of my methodology and research methods, but I will evaluate these more thoroughly in Chapter 8.

In the next four chapters, I will discuss my interpretations of my data, beginning with a focus on what happens in mixed-gender feminist groups (Chapters 4 and 5), followed by a consideration of the beliefs that accompany their practices (Chapter 6), and finally an analysis of the links between the experiences and practices of the groups and the wider social and political context (Chapter 7). In these chapters, I will aim to produce an 'open' account (see Stanley and Wise, 2008), clearly setting out my arguments and, where possible, including the evidence on which they are based. However, it has not always been practical to include 'retrievable data' in the text, and therefore I do not claim to fully meet Stanley and Wise's criteria for the production of 'accountable feminist knowledge' (Stanley, 1997, Stanley and Wise, 2006). Rather, the concepts of accountability and transparency have provided a general orientation for my work.

4 Doing feminism: the practice of mixed-gender feminist activism

Whilst there are many books and articles debating men's relationship to feminism (for example, Jardine and Smith, 1987, Digby, 1998, Bryson, 1999, Elliott, 2008), there are fewer empirical studies on this topic. In this chapter and the next, I aim to contribute to ongoing debates about the 'man question' through examining what happens in mixed-gender feminist groups. As discussed in Chapter 3, this research uses a multiple case study approach, focusing on four feminist groups: a feminist discussion group, a student union women's committee, a DIY collective and a feminist activist group. In this chapter, I will give an overview of the four groups' experiences and political practices, exploring their approaches to feminism, their modes of political practice, how they made decisions about their gendered membership, and their experiences as mixed-gender groups. I will argue that the ways in which the groups were organised reflect two different models of men's relationship to feminism: a 'men's auxiliary' model, in which men take their lead from feminist women (see Kimmel, 1998), and an 'equal partners' approach, in which men and women participate in feminist activities on an equal basis. Through analysing the groups' activities and experiences, I will reflect on some of the potential benefits and limitations of mixed-gender organising. Then, in Chapter 5, I will examine the groups' experiences more closely by focusing in detail on group dynamics. I will analyse each case study in turn.

4.1 Feminist discussion group

Setting up the group

This group was set up by three members of a profeminist men's group who wanted to see if they could do the same kind of consciousness-raising work that they did in the men's group in a mixed-gender context. They stated that they wanted to create a dialogue about gender politics between people of all genders and to create a space in which people could talk openly about their own gendered experiences, including perpetuating oppression and being oppressed. They aimed to bring a feminist perspective to these discussions. James (30)

explained how the idea to set up the mixed group came out of his recognition of the limitations of men's groups. He was influenced by a friend who:

got really critical about [...] men-only groups, and you know basically [said] that like inherently [...] a group of men talking about feminism was bound to become some sort of, um, a group where like, that would create like solidarity between men, and, the focus would be lost quite quickly and that like men would get together to forgive each other being sexist and, you know to tap on their shoulder and say 'oh it's ok, it's ok'.

This reflects the concerns of other (pro)feminists that men's groups may become spaces for mutual support and male bonding rather than challenging sexism (see, for example, Schein, 1977).

The men also felt that they were limited in only speaking to other men and that they could learn from talking to people with different gendered experiences:

[W]e all [...] wanted to continue the men's group because we still felt that there was a lot of value in having a space where people had some similarities in terms of their gender background, the way they were brought up, the way they were taught to think and the way they were socialised [...], so that creates a sort of safe space, in one sense, to talk about some of the things we're less proud of I suppose (laughing) about our, our kind of gendered experience and that sort of thing, but we also felt that there was lots missing because we were all men and that there was a lot to be gained from seeing a completely different point of view or set of points of view by having a mixed group. (Martin, 25)

The group was always explicitly open to people of all genders, with the aim of being inclusive and bringing together a diverse range of people. As Martin explained:

[W]e didn't wanna specifically make an assumption or make it sound like we thought there were just two genders, um, and we wanted to encourage people of all genders to come along and to talk about their gendered experience. (Martin)

This group aimed to include people of different genders on an equal basis, which I call an 'equal partners' approach to mixed-gender feminism. The involvement of people of different genders was central to the group's purpose, which I have described as mixed-gender consciousness-raising.

Mixed-gender consciousness-raising

Consciousness-raising was an important part of the second-wave Women's Liberation Movement (see, for example, Sarahchild, ca.1978, Philpott, 1982, Rowbotham, 1989). Rowe (1982) explains the process as follows:

Women began to meet in small groups in 1969 to talk about their lives. The process of exchanging experience was called consciousness-raising. It enabled women to see that attitudes and feelings were shared, not simply confined to the individual, and from there a group could draw out connections between their common experience and women's social conditions (p.541).

Whilst in the Women's Liberation Movement women developed feminist understanding through the discussion of *shared* experiences, the feminist discussion group aimed to develop feminist understanding through the discussion of *different* gendered experiences. Although the format was different, the feminist discussion group shared with second-wave feminists an emphasis on the value of experiential knowledge. As Martin (25) explained:

[T]here's [...] a sort of experiential knowledge that you have because you also experienced [...] things and you kind of, you know it 'cause it happened to you rather than you know it 'cause someone told you or you read it in a book, um, and that kind of knowledge is really important, uh, and powerful, [...] and it's one of the reasons why a mixed group is so useful 'cause you have people with very different experiential knowledge and you learn from each other.

Compare this to Sarahchild's (ca.1978, para.10) discussion of the origins of consciousness-raising in the American Women's Liberation Movement:

In the end the group decided to raise its consciousness by studying women's lives by topics like childhood, jobs, motherhood, etc. We'd do any outside reading we wanted to and thought was important. But our starting point for discussion, as well as our test of the accuracy of what any of the books said, would be the actual experience we had in these areas.

The concept of *gendered experience* was fundamental to the feminist discussion group and is a theme that I will explore further in Chapter 6.

During the time that I studied the group, they met every two weeks for about two hours at a time and meetings focused on the discussion of personal gendered experiences on topics such as homophobia, romance, our parents, and home life. Although the group mainly focused on sharing personal experiences,

discussion often strayed onto other topics to do with gender and feminism, and some meetings were also organised around more general topics such as gender and language. Sometimes, discussion was structured so that we would take it in turns to speak about our own experiences or thoughts on the topic for a fixed amount of time whilst everyone else listened; at other times, the discussion was more free-flowing. Some early meetings attracted lots of participants, but most of the meetings that I attended included between three and six people.

The benefit of being a mixed-gender group was in the possibility of learning from other people's different gendered experiences. For some people, this was quite a transformative process. For example, when I asked Sam (age unknown) about (his) experiences in the group, (he) said: 'it changed me quite a bit actually'.³⁴ (He) said that the group discussions had given (him) lots of new ideas to think about and later said that learning about different people's experiences could challenge your preconceptions:

JB: Um, so do you kind of feel like [...] gender doesn't matter or do you feel like [...] each person's gender would kind of mean that they had something different to offer [to the group]?

Sam: I think it *does* matter, it *does* matter, that's why I sort of liked when we had more diversity [in the group] because we had Tom I think was [a] trans man and then we had some gay men, we had different women and, um, different types of men, [...] and that was much more interesting, because, I think it *does* matter because people can sort of challenge the preconceptions then and it's not just something that you read about, it's a person who's sitting in front of you who's telling you actually 'no, what you're saying doesn't make sense'. Um, it makes [it] more difficult to come up with a philosophy but it's better because [...] at least you don't come up with something which is useless.

Others found the group less transformative but nonetheless useful. For example, Sophie (40-55) thought that the mixed-gender group was good for 'fact-finding', in the sense of finding out about men's thoughts and experiences and having an opportunity to ask them questions. James (30) pointed out that in the men's group they sometimes found themselves wondering what things were like for women, and in the mixed group they had the opportunity to ask and to find out about women's perspective.

³⁴ See Chapter 3 (section 3.5) for discussion of how I have chosen to represent Sam's gender identity.

Whilst those who set up the group were committed to consciousness-raising via discussion of individual experiences, others had different expectations for the group. For example, some people wanted to discuss feminist theory or feminist texts, or to engage in activism. These conflicting expectations led to some dissatisfaction about the group amongst certain members. For example, Angela (48) did not particularly like discussing personal experiences and feelings:

I did feel that it would've been nice [to have] done more specific reading and brought it in and that didn't really happen, it all seemed to be like 'how's your week been?' and that sort of (laughing) irritated me that thing, it was all sort of like all nice and, you know, 'how's your week been?', 'how are you feeling?' and it's like well I have a therapist for that [...] so I don't really wanna come to a feminist group and say how I'm feeling because that's not what it was meant to be about for me, I would've liked it if we'd had you know, had a [...] bit of reading that we could've got our teeth into, maybe a short piece or an article that we could come back and then had a bit of a discussion on and that didn't really happen.

The men who set up the group (Martin, 25, and James, 30) had quite strong expectations of how it would work. As Martin noted:

I suppose I did have some expectations about the way people would talk about things, in terms of personal things or you know important things, emotional things um, that people would get to a stage where they could, um, talk about their own life in a critical way and an honest way, uh, we were clear from the beginning that we wanted it [...] to have that focus and not to end up purely discussing sort of theoretical abstract feminist concepts but to keep the focus on the personal.

They recounted positive experiences when this seemed to happen, but also disappointment when the group did not meet their expectations. They both recalled a particularly powerful moment when a woman asked the men directly about rape and sexual harassment. As James explained:

[S]he asked this question one day that was, uh, really embarrassing but you know like quite powerful in a way, she asked all the men, um, do you think, you know, how often do you think if it was OK in this society, how often do you think you would sort of [sexually assault] a woman in the street? [...] and I dunno, I think there was a really uh [...], a really good discussion after that and some really personal stuff came out, um, so that was really good I thought.

I also felt that this was a transformative moment and it seemed to be an example of genuine consciousness-raising. However, overall, James seemed to

be disappointed with the group and he eventually left because it was not working as he expected:

I mean I had my expectations in this group, and my expectations were to try to do very similar work [to what] I was doing in the men's group, which was talking about really intimate stuff, uh, with you know [...] like an anti-sexist angle and, you know with a feminist approach, um, and I felt that no-one really was doing that in the group and there was either really theoretical talk about feminism or personal discussion about intimate stuff but that wasn't linked with gender stuff and [...] I mean the things weren't getting mixed basically and I wasn't really getting anything from it.

James and Martin largely organised the group for ten months and then stepped down from doing this, which I think reflected this sense of disappointment. To some extent, I shared this perspective because, although I enjoyed group discussions, they did not always feel like consciousness-raising to me. This is reflected in my fieldnotes:

In terms of my own feelings about the meeting, I enjoyed it and found it interesting hearing about other people's experiences. I did wonder how much just talking about our experiences can really be transformative (if this is what the group is aiming for). It didn't really feel like consciousness-raising (again, if this is what the group is trying to do) but it did involve reflecting on our experiences, comparing them with those of others and trying to think how these experiences shaped our experience/understanding of gender. I'm just not sure if we did come to any important new understandings about gender through doing this (I don't feel that I did, but it may be different for other members of the group). There is a kind of therapeutic benefit from talking about your own experiences I think, but again I don't know if therapy is the aim of the group. I don't know if they just want to meet up and chat or if there is some more political or personal transformative aim. (Adapted from fieldnotes)

Overall, this experiment in mixed-gender consciousness-raising had mixed results. Whilst some members found the group a useful forum for discussion or even an important learning experience, others were disappointed.

Benefits and limitations of a mixed-gender group

As mentioned above, the main benefit of being a mixed-gender group was in the possibility of learning from other people's gendered experiences. Another advantage was that some people came along who did not like the idea of going to a women's or a men's group. In addition, the group was open to people who did not fit into the usual binary gender categories, and some people who

identified as genderqueer³⁵ came along to some early meetings. On the other hand, being a mixed group also brought limitations, as some people were not comfortable discussing certain topics in a mixed context. Martin said that 'there's some stuff that I definitely find it easier to talk about with men only'. Sophie (40-55) also noted that there were some things that she could only discuss with other women:

[T]he level of sort of appreciation of negativity about you know women's position comes far more out into the open when it's just women, that when men are there it's very difficult to complain about men, you know, because if you're gonna upset a man there, you know he might feel 'well I'm trying, [...] don't they appreciate, I'm really trying' and if he is, it's not fair to him, you see, for him to experience you know rejection, if he's really trying, 'cause you know we want men to try. But there are all kinds of things that could alienate them.

For both of these participants, the presumption of some degree of shared experience with people of their own gender meant that they could talk more freely than in a mixed group. Martin said that he felt able to speak openly about quite uncomfortable experiences in the men's group, even with people he had not met before, because of 'feeling like they'll basically get it, they'll know what I mean'. Again, this highlights the importance of the concept of gendered experience. There is an assumption that men and women have distinct sets of experiences, that they form 'two separate epistemic communities' (Ashe, 2004, p.189). However, neither of the participants above believed that these limitations invalidated mixed-gender groups. They simply thought that mixed groups have different purposes and possibilities from men's and women's groups. Thus, the experiences of this group suggest that mixed groups and single-gender groups are complementary: they each offer opportunities for different kinds of consciousness-raising.

4.2 Women's committee

The women's committee is part of the student union at a university. They address issues of sexism on campus and organise campaigns on wider feminist issues in order to raise awareness amongst students. They can also act as a

³⁵ Roxie (2011) collects together a range of definitions of the term genderqueer, noting that '[s]ome common themes are being outside, between, or rejecting the male/female, man/woman binary'. For discussion of the meaning of the word 'queer' more generally, see the section on 'Queer feminism' later in this chapter.

point of contact for individual students who experience gender-based discrimination or harassment. During the time that I studied the group, their activities included campaigning against the sale of 'lads' mags' in the student union shop, a campaign against sexual harassment of female students, organising a talk on women and human rights, publishing a book of anonymous sexual experiences, and holding a clothes swap to raise money for charity.

Group structure

The committee is made up of up to 12 elected members and two elected women's officers, all of whom have to identify as women. The women's officers are officers of the student union and provide a link between the women's committee and the governance structures of the union. New women's officers and committee members are elected each year, so when I began my fieldwork the women's officers were Susie (23) and Karen (20), who were replaced by Fay (21) and Rose (20) during the course of my study. One former women's officer, Maddy (24), was also a committee member. The group met every week during term time and any student could attend their meetings. In the past, only women could attend committee meetings, but about a year before I conducted my fieldwork the group opened up their meetings to men.

This group represents quite a different model of mixed-gender activism from the previous case study. Women's leadership is enshrined in the group structure, as only women can become women's officers or committee members. This positions men in a supporting role, similar to the 'men's auxiliary' model of men in feminism outlined by Kimmel (1998), in which (pro)feminist men take their lead from, and remain accountable to, feminist women. In addition, the group has retained the name women's committee, which seems to impart a sense of it belonging to women, an issue that I will discuss more in the next chapter.

Decision to include men

The change to the group's meetings began when a previous women's officer, Jane, allowed a man to attend committee meetings. This contravened the student union constitution, so she put forward a motion to change the constitution to allow men to attend meetings. The committee at the time were divided over this, and some members campaigned for and others against the

motion. Following a student union general meeting, students voted on the motion and it was passed. As Jane was no longer a member of the committee at the time of my research, I was unable to ask her why she put forward the motion. However, other committee members gave their versions of events.

There seemed to be several reasons for allowing men to attend the meetings. Firstly, it would enable more people to get involved with the group's campaigns, and secondly, it would make the group more transparent:

I think it was about kind of involvement and also kind of about transparency in a way as well, because I think people saw, you know, it's women's committee, it's a women's-only meeting, so it's just a group of women in a room bitching about whatever. But by making this decision to say no, men can come if they have a genuine interest, then I think that was, [...] it was quite a good way of kind of making it seem more of an open thing, we're not just this kind of closed group. (Susie, 23)

Another theme that emerged was concern about the group's image. Fay (21) thought that allowing men to join would help to 'neutralise the argument that we were kind of elitist or that we were campaigning for equality but we weren't being equal'. Maddy (24) felt that, through opening up the committee to men, Jane was aiming to make the committee more palatable:

[Jane and I] never really saw eye to eye in terms of the way that we imagined the women's committee functioning, the purpose of women's committee, um. I was always of the view that it should be strongly campaigning kind of by women for women and I thought it should kind of be more, not aggressive but be more assertive perhaps about things going on on campus, whereas I think she imagined that it should be more about, that we shouldn't be angry feminists and that we should you know kind of tone down being angry about things because that would make us more palatable to people on campus, to men on campus particularly, because they all thought we were crazy hairy lesbians obviously.

It seemed that Jane started a process of mainstreaming the committee, which was continued by the next women's officers, Susie and Karen, and that allowing men to attend meetings was part of this process. As the comments above suggest, this process involved an effort to manage the committee's image in the light of negative perceptions of the group and of feminism more generally, an issue that I will explore further in Chapter 7.

In her ethnographic research with feminist campaign group OBJECT, Long (2011) argued that:

a discourse of pragmatism tended to dominate considerations of men's role in feminism: it was felt that because society is composed of women and men, it was necessary to involve men in challenging sexism (p.144).

The reasons given above for involving men in the women's committee may echo this 'discourse of pragmatism', but some group members also expressed a political or moral commitment to including men. For example, Susie stated that the motion to allow men to attend meetings was influenced by the view that 'men should be able to be involved in feminism if they wish to be'.

Maddy opposed the motion because she felt that women-only spaces were important:

[T]o me it just seemed so obvious that [...] if there's decisions to be made about the women's movement, about the liberation of women, it should be women making the decisions for themselves. [I]t's about self-representation, which is the whole point of having a women's officer in the first place, to ensure that there's a female representative on the students' union.

This concept of self-representation, which I will explore further in Chapter 6, is crucial in debates about men's relationship to feminism. However, others contested the need for women-only space. For example, Fay said:

[T]here was a lot of talk about it being like a women's only safe space and I can understand that, but actually I think that if someone came to me and Rose and said you know, something awful has happened to me, this wouldn't be an appropriate space anyway to talk about it, it's not a self-help group.

Susie and Karen made the same argument: a committee is not a welfare group and not the place where people would share personal experiences. This shows that the question of men's involvement is linked to the perceived purpose of the group.

Interestingly, Maddy focuses on self-representation, whereas the critics of women-only space focus on the idea of a safe space in which women can talk about their problems. Maddy did mention the idea of providing a safe space at another point in the interview, but this was not the main reason why she wanted the group to be women-only. As I will discuss further in Chapter 6, I believe that many of the women in the group actually did support the principle of self-representation to some extent but did not see men's attendance at meetings as

compromising this. In Chapter 6, I will also explore the concept of safe space in more detail, suggesting that different activists employ this term in different ways, with consequences for their views about women-only groups. Although the committee were initially split roughly half and half over the question of men's involvement, at the time that I conducted my research, most of the members supported the decision to include men. Of the women that I interviewed, only Maddy was unhappy that the motion had been passed.

Mainstreaming feminism?

The debate over men's involvement seemed to crystallise a distinction between two different approaches to feminist organising. Maddy suggested that:

it kind of became a division between you know 'old school' feminism so to speak, about being women-only and about providing a safe space, um and kind of 'postfeminism', like the new feminism where it's, you know, kind of Sex and the City feminism if you like and it just kind of divided into those two camps.

When Susie and Karen were elected as women's officers, they continued to take the committee in this 'new feminist' direction, aiming for a more 'softly softly' approach, in contrast to previous committee members who Karen described as 'very militantly feminist'. Susie and Karen identified with the idea of a new feminism to some extent (although I imagine that they would be angry at being designated 'Sex and the City' feminists!):

Karen: I think there are two divisions of feminism at the moment, there's the (Susie: mm) old school type and there's the new school type. And I remember my friend referred to me today as, a quote, 'a cool feminist', (Susie laughs) so she obviously sees me as a different type of feminist, {Susie: yeah} but...

Susie: Well I think it's kind of more kind of people see feminist as the kind of old school radical feminist and then to be enlightened that people might exist who don't conform to that {Karen: mm}, somehow you're some kind of new kind of feminist, like. But, I guess it's quite a diverse kind of political ideal anyway isn't it? There's loads of different people who would define themselves as feminists and lots of different types of feminists and all that kind of thing so, I think it's just people who don't know about it, um, encountering people who they would see to be kind of you know just like them (Karen: yeah) who would also say 'I'm a feminist', so.

Karen: Yeah, 'cause I always associate new feminism or our type of feminism with more power. I always think that we've got more power to change things if people understand it and respect it more (Susie: mm), so

that's why I make such an effort to be, you know, emphasise that I'm not a conventional one and that it's just the principles that are important {Susie: yeah}.

In positing a distinction between 'old school' and 'new' feminism, the above participants reflect ongoing discussions about generational change within feminism (see, for example, Henry, 2004, Pollitt, 2010). The idea of a new feminism echoes Natasha Walter's popular book, *The New Feminism* (1999b), and Karen's association of 'our type of feminism' with 'more power' also evokes Naomi Wolf's 'power feminism' (1994). Both of these writers are critical of what they perceive as the extremes of second-wave feminism and advocate a return to a more liberal, mainstream feminism.

In some ways, Susie and Karen reflect the more conciliatory approach of Walter and Wolf through adopting a more pragmatic approach to campaigning and seeking to include men in their activities. However, in terms of their feminist beliefs and their campaigns, such as protesting the sale of 'lads' mags' in the student union shop, they draw on (second-wave) radical feminist critiques of the objectification of women. For example, Karen said, 'I think what's so annoying at the moment is how acceptable it is in an everyday basis for women to be treated like objects or in a degrading manner.' Thus, if anything, Susie and Karen's position is closer to the one adopted by Walter in *Living Dolls* (2010), in which she critiques her earlier work and outlines her concerns about a 'hypersexual culture' (p.5) that equates female success with femininity and sex appeal.

Susie and Karen felt that they pursued similar objectives to previous committee members but simply adopted a different style of campaigning. Thus, they combined a strong critique of the current gender order with a pragmatic approach to achieving their aims. This kind of strategic approach has been noted in research on other mixed-gender feminist groups such as OBJECT (see Long, 2011) and the Warwick Anti-Sexism Society (WASS) (see Lambert and Parker, 2006, WASS Collective, 2007). Describing this form of practice as 'new' feminism is not particularly helpful, since different participants use this term in different ways, as do feminist writers (compare, for example, Walter, 1999b, Whelehan, 2000, Redfern and Aune, 2010). The different meanings ascribed to 'new' and 'old' feminism by different participants suggest that these terms do

not refer to actual feminist beliefs and practices; rather, they are rhetorical devices that enable participants to position themselves in relation to other perceived feminisms and to justify their own positions. Nevertheless, these rhetorical moves do help to identify the tensions within the women's committee (and within contemporary feminism more generally) between different feminist approaches.

Effects of the decision to include men

Although men had previously complained about being excluded from committee meetings, once the meetings were opened up to them, few men actually attended.³⁶ This suggests that men's desire to be included stemmed more from a sense of entitlement (see Kimmel, 1998) than a genuine desire to get involved in feminist activism. However, Fay thought that the decision to open up meetings to men was beneficial, as it enabled her to hold men to account for their lack of participation:

I knew that a lot of my male friends kind of went (putting on cross/upset man's voice) 'oh women's committee, I'm a feminist but you wouldn't let me come along and help' and I could turn round and go 'yeah I could' and now I turn around and say that to them and go 'but look, you haven't turned up, what does that show about your commitment to this?'

Another benefit of the decision was that it facilitated working with other groups, such as the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) committee, as the women's committee could invite men along to meetings to discuss ideas. During my fieldwork, the student union LGBT officer (who was a man) attended several meetings, both to share news of what the LGBT committee were doing and to help organise joint activities with the women's committee. Several women mentioned that men could bring a different perspective or different opinions to the group; in particular, they could give an insight into how male students might react to their campaigns and activities. Some people also felt that male input helped to balance discussions.

In addition, some women suggested that the decision to include men changed the image of the committee. In Fay's view, it enabled them to be seen as 'a lot less kind of elitist and a lot less scary as well', which made it easier to recruit

³⁶ I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

new members. Maddy speculated that the committee might be seen as less threatening and less political than in the past, and that this might explain why more people were involved than in previous years, although in her view this was also due to the women's officers who had worked hard to make the committee more accessible. On the other hand, she felt that in some ways the committee had less impact:

[T]he committee isn't perhaps as dynamic as it once was or it doesn't have as much impact maybe because it's not women-only and it's not, to my mind it's not making that statement saying that women should have a women-only space, um, it's doing campaigns and it's, it's doing things but I don't think it's quite as, um, influential on campus anymore.

This contrasts with the views of Susie and Karen, who thought that the committee was more respected than in the past. However, when considering how the committee's image had changed over time, it was difficult to separate out the effects of men's inclusion from the more general process of mainstreaming described earlier.

Overall, the women's committee represents a fairly positive example of involving men in feminist activism. Although the proposal to allow men to attend meetings caused considerable division and strife in the committee at the time of the vote, since that time, men's involvement in the group appears to have worked well. Even Maddy, who was very apprehensive about the decision to include men, admitted that the effects were not as bad as she had expected:

I guess... after... saying that now the women's committee allows men to come I mean it's, even though I was um a bit daunted and a bit apprehensive about how it would be, I think fundamentally that we still do have a women's committee and a women's officer is the most important thing and it seems to have been negotiated quite well in terms of the way men have been involved in women's committee, um, and whilst I still think fundamentally there should be a women's only committee, just, um, I just think there should be on the students' union, it's not been as bad as I thought it would be at all.

4.3 DIY collective

This group described itself as a DIY not-for-profit collective and also referenced riot grrrl, third-wave feminism and queer politics. The group responded to a perceived lack of female and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and

queer) presence in the local DIY music scene.³⁷ They aimed to give a platform to female and LGBTQ performers and to create a safe space in which everyone could enjoy their music. They organised events such as gigs, club nights and a spoken word evening. Ruth (23) explained why she set up the group, outlining her commitment to a DIY feminist approach:

[F]or me [feminism is] about choice and it's about providing people with choice and letting them know that they have choices and power in their own lives. Um, it's just like self-empowerment, and I think DIY's the best way to express that so the kind of link between the riot grrrl scene and DIY kind of punk and community and stuff like that, um, that's why I set up [the group] because like I'd seen it in practice in [other cities], um, and really wanted a place to go where I could kind of feel comfortable, enjoy myself and meet other people that felt the same way because up until then I'd met them on the Internet.

DIY feminism and riot grrrl

Downes (2007) describes DIY (do-it-yourself) as an ethic of counter-cultural production that she traces back to the Situationist International, and which has been taken up by various social movements and subcultures since the 1960s. DIY politics aims to bring about social change through everyday practices of cultural production and subversion. As Nina Nijsten says:

DIY feminism is about everyone doing feminism ourselves and making changes, however small they may seem at first sight. It means not waiting for others, for 'professionals' or politicians, to make the world more women-friendly and to solve problems related to sexism (quoted in Chidgey, 2009, para.2).

A key influence on contemporary DIY feminism is the riot grrrl movement of the 1990s (Downes, 2007, Chidgey, 2009). Riot grrrl was a feminist youth movement that grew out of the DIY/punk music scenes in Olympia (Washington) and Washington, DC. It centred on female musicians who challenged the male-dominated DIY music scene, wrote songs that addressed women's experiences, and encouraged other girls and women to get involved in music-making. However, riot grrrl was about more than music. Riot grrrls produced zines³⁸ (see Leonard, 1998, Chidgey, 2007), formed groups,

³⁷ I will discuss the ways in which the group responded to the local context of their city in more detail in Chapter 7.

³⁸ Zines (or fanzines) are independent, self-published texts which are inexpensively produced (usually photocopied) on a small scale by individuals or small groups of people (Leonard, 1998).

organised workshops, and developed a network of female friendship and solidarity. Riot grrrl rearticulated feminism in response to the concerns of young women:

Riot grrrl rewrote feminism and activism into a punk rock rebellion and youth-centred voice that was felt to be missing from forms of feminism available in the 1990s. Feminism was seen to be addressing the concerns of older, middle-class, heterosexual and educated women and riot grrrl was seen to be a re-working of feminism to work through the needs, desires and issues in the situations specific to young girls and women in 1990s America (Downes, 2007, p.26).

Riot grrrl involved new forms of feminist self-presentation, recuperating the term 'girl' and embracing 'girliness' (Bayton, 1998, p.75). It also involved new forms of political practice, focusing on DIY cultural activism rather than 'traditional' forms of protest such as marches and rallies (Downes, 2007), although the creation of feminist culture has antecedents in the 1970s Women's Liberation Movements (Bayton, 1998, Downes, 2007).

The DIY collective were clearly influenced by riot grrrl, particularly in their focus on music and promoting female musicians, and they referred to it in some of their publicity materials. For example, one of their leaflets said, '[the group] is proud to call itself a Riot Grrrl chapter, a Queer Friendly, Grrrl collective etc.' They also sometimes played riot grrrl music at their events. However, one of the group members, Abi (23), also had some reservations about riot grrrl:

I love riot grrrl and I think it was brilliant what happened but I don't think it's like a framework of what kind of should be like 'this is how girls should do DIY and punk rock' 'cause I don't, I think there was a lot wrong with it and so I kind of like, I know like that name's kind of easy to use on what we do with it but I kind of like, I don't like the term so much, I like, I use it but I'd rather just see it as like girls doing DIY and I'd like to think that like every girl is a feminist and is interested in that and you know is doing kind of these things for the right reasons and hoping to kind of change perceptions and influence like younger girls and that kind of thing.

Abi's main criticism of riot grrrl was that it excluded men:

[T]hat's where I think it faltered in the 90s in that it was so, like, it wasn't encouraging guys to kind of get involved so much, it was very much an assault on (laughing) like, on men in DIY and punk and like, [...] I guess

Leonard argues that the low production costs involved allow 'those with minimal wealth, such as children, to have a public voice' and their independent character provides an 'alternative discourse' to the mainstream press (p.105).

like it needs that but I think if [...] opinions could be changed it needs to be, more, [...] well less like ghettoising yourselves and that kind of thing.

As I will discuss later, the DIY collective sought to involve men in their activities.

Chidgey (2007, 2009) highlights the importance of alternative media such as zines within the riot grrrl and DIY feminist movements as a way of networking and sharing ideas. Both of the women that I interviewed produced their own zines and Ruth in particular emphasised the importance of sharing ideas and inspiring others:

I think it's nice when you speak to younger people who will get in touch with me, especially off the back of the zine because it's all about influences and it's, like, [...] I don't really feel like it's me personally, I feel like the zine provides so many different stories of so many types of people that you're bound to identify with at least a few you know and, I just think it's, you know the people that get back to me are usually like 'I didn't realise' and I think that's really important and people don't realise that there's, there's feminism out there, there's riot grrrl out there, there's all these things that they could do that are actually really accessible, that don't cost money that, you know that don't require textbook intelligence and, yeah, I think that that's the thing, generally positive reaction to stuff like that.

From Ruth's descriptions, I envisaged DIY feminism as a kind of chain reaction in which the actions of one person can inspire others to get active and DIY cultural products can prompt others to become producers themselves. Ruth stated that, 'there's nothing better [...] that anybody could probably say to me than, you know "I read your zine and now I've made a zine", like it's so simple'. Both of my interviewees seemed to position themselves as part of an ongoing cycle in which older feminists (who were themselves inspired by riot grrrl or feminism) reach out to younger girls:

[M]y feminism and everything that I do is all because of like when I was a kid I always think back to all of my friends that I had growing up that have since had children or gone into doing stuff with their lives that you know they could've done so much more and don't realise they have choices or don't have the confidence to, you know to make the choices that they have and things like that and I just think, I'm always concerned with like the 15-year-old girls of the world who, you know, if I can maybe do something to provide a space for them to realise and have their life changed the way that mine was, that's what I aim to do so that for me is why I set [the group] up. (Ruth)

Queer feminism

As well as a DIY approach, another important feature of the group was the combination of feminist and queer politics. Queer is a notoriously difficult term to define. It can be used as a noun, an adjective, or a verb (Hall, 2003, Morland and Willox, 2005, Giffney, 2009) and may signify, for example, 'an identity category, an anti-identitarian position, a politics, a methodology and an academic discipline' (Giffney, 2009, p.2). However, certain themes have come to be associated with queer theory and politics, such as identity and normativity (see Giffney, 2009), transgression (see Richardson, 2000), and coalition (see Shepard and Hayduk, 2002).

Richardson (2000) locates the development of queer theory and politics in the shift from the identity-based feminist, lesbian and gay liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s, which emphasised 'the establishment of positive lesbian and gay identities in the political process of coming out' (p.36), to new theoretical and political approaches to sexuality which highlighted the 'fragmentation and fluidity' (p.36) of identity and aimed to deconstruct identity categories, particularly the hetero/homosexual binary. As Donald Hall (2003) puts it, queer is 'to abrade the classifications, to sit athwart conventional categories or traverse several' (p.13). He adds:

Queer - the adjective - means that there is no easy answer to the question ['What are you?'], no single word, no simple slot into which complex personalities, behaviours, desires, abilities, and ambitions can be placed (p.13).

Queer also involves resistance to 'the normal' (Richardson, 2000, Hall, 2003), the discourses and structures that normalise some identities and practices and marginalise or pathologise others. It stands in opposition to both heteronormative culture and 'homonormativity, lesbian and gay assimilationism to the so-called hetero norm' (Giffney, 2009, p.5). Thus, queer politics has been associated with transgression, rather than assimilation (Richardson, 2000).

Queer politics constitutes a shift from identity-based, interest group politics to a broader, coalition politics, which links different social struggles (Shepard and Hayduk, 2002). Many specifically queer modes of activism developed in response to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. In the United States, the

growing number of AIDS deaths and the lack of political action to tackle the crisis led to a sense of urgency and the need for a new type of activism (Hall, 2003). The crisis also brought together different oppressed groups affected by the disease and highlighted the interconnections between different forms of oppression. Shepard and Hayduk (2002, p.103) argue that '[t]hroughout the 1990s AIDS activists had to acknowledge that AIDS was spread as much by racism, sexism, and the class system as by homophobia'. In response to these conditions, groups such as the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) engaged in radical, direct action tactics, such as 'office occupations, road blockades, and demonstrations at international AIDS conferences and the headquarters of government bureaucracies' (Highleyman, 2002, p.107).

The connection between queer theory's deconstruction of identity and coalition politics is illustrated in this description of third-wave, queer feminism by Withers:

The thrust of the third wave is through queering spaces, identities and culture so that we can move out of a single issue politics (that is unable to see connections between different types of oppressions and liberations) into a more inclusive form of politics that has the potential [to] encompass all forms of life that exist on the planet (also signalling the exit from anthropocentric thought). This is the result of queer's conceptual capacity to accommodate complexity, and allow for multiplicity and difference (2007, p.10).

Although there have been some tensions between queer theory and feminism, there are also points of convergence (see Richardson et al., 2006), and Downes (2010) highlights the development of queer feminisms in recent years:

In activist circles across Europe it has become increasingly commonplace to collapse queer and feminist ideas to produce documents that herald a new queer feminism invested in queering the meanings of 'men', 'women', 'girl', 'boy', 'femininity', 'masculinity' and 'feminism' (p.29).

In her research on British 'DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance', Downes outlines three dimensions of queer feminism:

(i) a desire to disrupt static identity categories of gender, sexuality and feminism, (ii) a critique of neo-liberal normalisation discourse within political movements and consumer culture, and (iii) a tactic of cultural politics to shift activism beyond conventionally legitimised and traditionally recognised channels (2010, p.187).

Thus, for Downes, a DIY approach (using cultural politics and challenging consumer culture) is a key part of queer feminism. Here, the meaning of queer as a verb is relevant. As Withers pointed out above, queer feminism involves 'queering spaces, identities and culture' (2007, p.10).

Queer politics was an integral part of the DIY collective, reflected in their attempts to create safe spaces for people of all genders and sexualities, to provide an alternative to the existing gay scene, and to promote artists of diverse sexualities and those who embraced queer politics. As well as riot grrrl, the group associated itself with the genre of queercore, which Downes (2010) defines as a queer music (sub)culture that was entwined with, yet distinct from, riot grrrl and that 'radically questioned heterocentric dominant culture and challenged homonormative models of lesbian and gay identity' (p.59).

Abi seemed to view queer politics as more central to the group's aims than feminism:

JB: [H]ave you always seen kind of...um...like [the DIY collective] as being a specifically feminist thing or?

Abi: Um, I think it's, um... I guess so, that and, like, I guess...I kind of see it as more of a like politically queer kind of thing of like just like outsiders I guess, and I guess, yeah I guess I see it as like the feminist thing.

Abi's association of queer politics with 'outsiders' reflects the idea of resisting normativity discussed above. As Richardson (2000) points out, queer concerns 'all those desires and interests that are marginalised and excluded in the straight and main stream. Queers are united in opposition to disciplining normalising forces' (p.41).

For Ruth, the combination of feminism and queer politics implied a gender inclusive feminism:

JB: [D]id you see [the DIY collective] as being a feminist group?

Ruth: Yeah, completely. [...] I mean feminist, yeah, and also [...] queer politics was kind of hand in hand with it because, I mean, I would never say to someone because they were male, they were transgender or anything like that, I wouldn't be, you know, like the word feminism as such can be kind of inclusive.

At times, the group identified itself with third-wave feminism, which was also perceived as being gender inclusive, a view that is echoed by Withers (2007, p.9), who states: 'In theoretical idealism, Third wave feminism is a queer feminism, which is a (gender) inclusive feminism'. Thus, in this group, the ideas of DIY, queer, and third-wave feminism all overlap (see also Withers, 2007, Downes, 2010).

In line with their queer/third-wave approach, the collective was explicitly open to people of all genders, and the vast majority of their events were also open to all. The only exception was a women-only zine workshop held by a travelling zine troop that the collective hosted. Abi commented that she felt uncomfortable about this:

I kind of had a bit of, issues with that 'cause I felt [it] was really unfair and... like I wasn't really interested in kind of isolating people and not really kind of integrating everyone into something.

Overall, both in the documents created by the group and in interviews, group members repeatedly stated their desire to include people of all genders. However, only women actually got involved in the collective.

4.4 Feminist activist group

The final case study is the feminist activist group, which carried out a range of campaigning and other activities. One of their leaflets described the purpose of the group as being 'for feminist activism, discussion and friendship'. The group campaigned on issues such as the gender pay gap, exploitation of women in the sex industry, and the sale of 'Playboy' children's merchandise in local shops. They did not subscribe to a particular version of feminism, which they made explicit in one of their leaflets:

[The feminist activist group] is open to all viewpoints. We feel it is important to debate controversial issues and are open [to] all perspectives. The group does not adopt positions on issues and group members are free to participate in or sit out of discussions and campaigns as they see fit.

This group started out as a student group but later broadened its membership beyond the university.³⁹ At the time that I conducted my research, the group

³⁹ This is a different university from the one at which the women's committee was based.

was still funded by the student union at the university and students dealt with the administrative side of the group, but they made a particular effort to encourage non-students and older women to attend. Because of the union funding, some members nominally occupied roles such as chair, treasurer and secretary, but in fact the group was run in quite an informal, egalitarian way.

The group was initially women-only and had changed its gendered membership several times throughout its history. At the time that I began my fieldwork, it was open to people of all genders. However, a few months later, some members of the group expressed that they were uncomfortable with men present and the group decided to make their weekly meetings women-only, with one event or meeting open to all each month. I attended a few group meetings both before and after this decision was taken (although I did not formally conduct participant observation) and interviewed group members a few months later in order to find out why they took the decision and how it had affected the group. I will begin by outlining the effects of men's presence in the group and will then move on to discuss the decision to exclude men and the effects of this decision.

Effects of men's presence

All but one of the women that I interviewed felt that men's presence made a difference in the group. Many of them suggested that it could affect the group's atmosphere and dynamics, which I will discuss in the next chapter, but it could also have an impact on the group's activities. Several members commented that it was difficult or inappropriate to discuss sensitive topics such as rape, body image or sexuality with men present. For this reason, the group sometimes arranged women-only sessions for such discussions at the time when the group was open to all. On the other hand, men could contribute new ideas or a different perspective. For example, Claire (21) thought that their input was helpful in assessing different campaigning tactics:

[I]t was nice to have their input, especially about activism [...], well, I mean anyone's input is useful, um, but especially interesting to have the men's because they were a little bit removed from it in a way that I don't think the women were and, well it's a bit like anything isn't it, it's like any form of politics, if you get too bound up in it you forget that [...] other people aren't quite like you.

Men's presence also had an impact when they were out campaigning, as Tracey (24) pointed out:

[C]ertain campaigns you know it's great for men to get involved and you know do just the same as we are, although other campaigns that we've done, for instance when we've gone out and done say campaigns around domestic abuse, we've found it's been very difficult because you want [...] to create the kind of atmosphere where people are able to come and talk to you and that might not be as easy for people to do if there's men in the group.

Tracey also argued that men's involvement could affect the purpose of the group:

[A]s well as sort of the actual dynamics of the group it kind of changes what the group can be about and is strongly related to what the purposes of the group are and what it wants to achieve.

She saw the purposes of the group as campaigning, support, friendship, and debate, and thought that all of these could be affected in different ways by men's presence.

Lastly, men's presence affected the group membership in the sense that it influenced who felt comfortable coming to the group. As mentioned above, the group was started by students, but over time they broadened their membership beyond the university. In general, older women and non-students seemed less comfortable at the prospect of a mixed group. Thus, men's presence came into conflict with the group's efforts to broaden their membership.

Decision to exclude men

Zoe (22) explained how the group came to the decision to become largely women-only:

[F]or quite a long time there were no men involved in [the group], like we'd always said, y'know, men are welcome, but... no-one had wanted to come, and then suddenly we had two or three guys come along and it did, it did shift the dynamic of the group, and there were a couple of people in particular who felt very uncomfortable and said [...] can we talk about this and try and... find a way that we can work it out, so that everyone feels comfortable. And we had this *horrible* meeting, [...] we drew up a list of options of being women-only, open to everyone, sometimes... men [allowed], y'know, a whole big long list and all went through them, and (pause) eventually came to the decision that we would be mostly women-

only and then men welcome, kind of... social events and campaigns and anything, y'know, on a kind of ad hoc basis.

Another reason for the decision was that some other women who wanted to join the group did not want to attend a mixed group:

[O]ne of the women [in the group] who works with women who've been victims of sexual abuse, [...] a couple of people she knew had wanted to come but they felt deeply uncomfortable about there being men there, which then started to affect that woman's perception of men being there. (Ellie, 21)

The group was mainly made up of women aged 18-25, plus a couple of older women, and it was the older women who raised concerns about men's involvement. One of them, Cath (52), gave several reasons why she did not want men to attend: she valued and personally preferred women-only space, she felt uncomfortable discussing certain topics in men's presence, and she was concerned that other women that she tried to recruit did not want to attend a mixed group. She was also wary of the typical dynamics that arise in mixed-gender contexts, explaining that 'my experience has generally been that in feminist groups that men are involved in the agenda gets really really skewed'. Thus, she echoed the concerns of other feminists about the gendered power dynamics of mixed-gender groups (see, for example, Luxton, 1993).

Other members of the group were committed to including men and disagreed with the decision. This was generally because they wanted the group to be inclusive and thought that it was important for men to be involved in feminism. For example, Julie (19) argued:

I thought that it was a bit of a, kind of, backwards step in the cause, just, 'cause I think that, y'know, fair enough if before they made a lot of progress with just women, now you need to involve men, because it's not just feminism, it's egalitarianism, more, for me anyway, so, it needs to have men on board if you're gonna make real progress.

Joanne's (24) view was linked to her idea of the purpose of the group:

I don't think that we should exclude anyone from the group and um [...] I don't really agree with the argument that it would mean that people who'd been raped or abused by men in the home, um, wouldn't come, I don't think that's a good argument against having men in the group because it's not a support group for victims of domestic abuse.

In between these two positions were the women who made the decision and stuck by it (Tracey, 24, Ellie, 21, and Zoe, 22). They wanted the group to be as inclusive as possible but were faced with a choice between including men and including a wider range of women. They explained that they came to the decision that, as a feminist group, their priority was to include as many women as possible. All three made remarkably similar arguments. For example, Tracey said:

[O]nce it became, um, sort of a choice between either um, that you were always going to be shutting out some people but if it was a choice between not being open to men or not being open to those women who didn't feel able to be there with the men then I felt that as a feminist group it was our job to you know provide that space for the women who wouldn't be able to get that anywhere else.

Thus, their decision was rooted in a view of feminism as a movement whose primary aim is supporting women. Those who opposed the decision linked this to their own, alternative, conceptions of feminism, for example, in Julie's comment above and in the following quotes:

[I]t just seems weird to exclude men when feminism should surely be trying to change how masculinity and femininity are both constructed in society. (Joanne, 24)

I kind of got involved with feminism because it was one of the few places I was told that my genitalia didn't matter, and it's a bit upsetting to realise that actually it does, it's just the other way round. (Claire, 21)⁴⁰

Chris (22), a person who was identified by others as a man but did not claim this identity (him)self, was excluded by the group's decision.⁴¹ (He) was obviously unhappy about it, but recognised that it was not (his) decision to take, stating that, 'as a decision you know it's [...] not any of my business, I mean I don't think it should be up to men to decide the rules of a feminist group'. This suggests that (he) subscribes to the 'men's auxiliary' model of men's role in feminism.

⁴⁰ I will explore participants' definitions of feminism further in Chapter 6.

⁴¹ See Chapter 3 (section 3.5) for discussion of how I have chosen to represent Chris's gender identity.

Effects of the decision

The comments above show that opinions in the group were strongly divided over the issue of men's involvement, and the decision to largely exclude men did cause some tension in the group. The decision did not seem to have a significant effect on the group dynamics, but it did affect who was able to attend and also who felt welcome or comfortable in the group. Some members who were uncomfortable in men's presence (and who had been planning to leave the group) subsequently became more involved. However, another member stopped attending as she disagreed with the decision. Also, some women who had previously expressed an interest in the group but did not want to attend a mixed group did not subsequently turn up. This angered Claire:

[O]ne of the reasons that we became women-only or you know as good as women-only was because um one of the [group members] knew some women who had expressed interest in the group but didn't want to come to a mixed meeting and I guess I thought that, OK so we'd lose [...] one silent man and one talkative man [...] but we might gain some really interesting women, but they never turned up, um, so it was a bit disappointing actually, [...] it felt like we'd lost good people for nothing really.

Tracey thought that the decision made it easier to advertise for new members, particularly outside the university, as it tended to be older women that wanted to be in a women-only group. Thus, the decision has made the group more welcoming for some people and less so for others.

The person who has been most affected is Chris, who is a good friend of many members. (He) stated that (he) missed the social aspect of the group and the opportunity to learn about feminist issues. The events that were open to all tended to be social events so (he) felt that (he) missed out on the 'real discussion worthy stuff', 'the big feminist stuff'. Chris's exclusion seems particularly poignant and perhaps ironic given (his) dissociation from male identity and traditional masculinity. (He) had lost a space in which (he) could feel more comfortable in terms of gender. Some of the group members recognised this. For example, Helen (24) said, 'the issue is that there's guys like Chris and guys that don't fit into typical masculinity and they need somewhere to go and feminism is [...], it should be a place for them'. Yet, at the same time, she recognised the need to create a safe space for women.

This case study demonstrates some of the difficulties that can arise in mixed-gender feminist groups and clearly shows what can be at stake in a decision about group membership. It shows that it is not always easy to put the ideal of inclusivity into practice, since including one group may exclude another. Thus, dealing with the issue of men's involvement can be a painful process. Significantly, members' opinions about men's involvement in the group linked to their definitions of feminism and their views of the purpose of the group.

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter illustrates the diversity of mixed-gender feminist groups, both in terms of their political practices and their experiences. However, one theme that cut across the case studies was that, with the exception of the feminist discussion group, few men actually got involved in the groups. No men joined the DIY collective and, in the women's committee and feminist activist group, men were significantly outnumbered by women (see the next chapter for further discussion). In the feminist discussion group, the gender balance was more equal, but James pointed out that this was possibly because the people who set up and organised the group were men, so they were present at almost every meeting. Thus, having a group that is open to all genders does not guarantee that men will get involved.

This chapter also gives some insight into how different models of men's relationship to feminism work in practice. In particular, I have identified two broad approaches: the 'men's auxiliary' model, which views men in a supporting role in relation to women, and the 'equal partners' model, which involves men and women occupying similar roles. These broad categorisations inevitably obscure some of the subtleties of the groups' positions, and should be treated as 'ideal types', tools for analysis, rather than precise descriptions. The women's committee formalised a 'men's auxiliary' model as men could attend meetings but not become committee members. This guaranteed women's leadership of the group. The feminist discussion group and DIY collective represented more of an 'equal partners' model, as they did not identify specific roles or positions for men and women within their groups. The feminist activist group worked on an equal partners model at the start of my research, but shifted to a men's auxiliary model when they chose to exclude men from the

majority of their meetings. Indeed, the new configuration of the group was a stronger version of the men's auxiliary model than the women's committee, as men were not only positioned in a supporting role but were in fact excluded from most of the group's activities.

In this chapter, I have also begun to outline some of the potential benefits and limitations of mixed-gender organising and to highlight some of the issues which may be at stake when making decisions about a feminist group's gendered membership. My research suggests that the gender composition of a group may have an impact on who feels comfortable attending (as well as who is allowed to attend), on the topics that can be discussed, on campaigning activities, and on the group's image. It is also closely linked to a group's purpose and modes of political practice: a mixed group may be good for some purposes and not others. Thus, there are many factors to take into account when making decisions about the gendered membership of a group. One aspect of the groups that I have not discussed here is group dynamics, as I thought that a detailed analysis of group dynamics merited a chapter of its own. Therefore, this will be the subject of the next chapter.

5 Doing gender: group dynamics and gendered power relations

Many feminists argue that even when men are involved with women in activities intended to promote women's equality, men often slip into authority positions, taking leadership in defining the issues or in determining how to organize. Ironically, many feminists have participated in discussions where men, while talking about the problems of male dominance and patriarchy, hog the conversational space and silence the women as they do so (Luxton, 1993, p.352).

As this quote illustrates, one of the issues that has been raised by feminists in relation to men and feminism is the effect of men's presence on the internal dynamics of feminist groups. In this chapter, I will address this issue by examining what happens in mixed-gender feminist groups in terms of group dynamics. I will analyse each case study in turn, considering the extent to which group interactions reproduced and/or challenged gendered power relations. I will draw on various theoretical approaches to gender and power to help make sense of group dynamics and will reflect on how best to conceptualise power in the context of feminist groups.

5.1 Feminist discussion group

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the feminist discussion group was set up by three members of a profeminist men's group who wanted to try out the kind of consciousness-raising work they had done in the men's group in a mixed context. Roughly equal numbers of men and women participated in the group and some genderqueer people also attended some of the early meetings. Also, as mentioned before, one participant, Sam (age unknown), who I thought of as a man, later told me that (he) did not identify as such. (He) described (his) sex as male and (his) gender as genderfluid (see Chapter 3, section 3.5). My analysis of gendered power relations in this group is based on participant observation at 13 group meetings and interviews with five group members. The key issues that I will consider are men's roles in the group, men's attitudes, and group dynamics.

Men's roles

The division of labour in a social movement group can be both a reflection and a source of power inequalities (see, for example, Sasson-Levy and Rapoport, 2003). Therefore, I thought that it was important to investigate the roles undertaken by different group members. As I indicated above, the feminist discussion group was set up by members of a profeminist men's group, and two of these men (Martin, 25, and James, 30) largely organised the group for the first ten months. They carried out organisational tasks such as booking rooms and sending out emails to remind people about meetings, and other participants recognised their role as organisers:

JB: [W]ithin the group [...], did you think that kind of the men and women had sort of different roles within the group or the same roles?

Angela (48): Uh... it was difficult 'cause it was actually the two men who tended to be running (laughing) [it] there which was interesting. They were the ones that were sort of deciding what we were doing and uh, I mean I don't think they, I think they were open to other people doing it, but it just seemed that they'd taken on that role 'cause they started it didn't they I think.

To some extent, Martin and James also took on an organising role within the meetings, for example, starting off the discussion, taking minutes, or managing structured aspects of the discussion. However, they did not decide topics for discussion or how meetings would be structured. In the first few meetings, different people took it in turns to draw up an agenda. Later, the topics for discussion were decided collectively at the end of one meeting or the start of the next, and the structure of the meeting was usually agreed on the day. Other roles in the group were shared fairly equally amongst participants, regardless of gender. For example, one of the rooms in which we met had an open fire and at different meetings different people chopped wood and made up the fire. Different people also made cups of tea for the group, or brought food to share.

At the very first meeting of the group, when talking about what to discuss at the next meeting, someone said that it was important for the men who had organised the meeting to take a backseat and make it clear that they were not leading the group. The men made some attempts to do this, but were not entirely successful in shaking off their organising role. James and Martin were

certainly aware of the potential problems of men setting up a mixed feminist group, suggesting that they were familiar with feminist critiques of men doing feminism (see, for example, Leonard, 1982, Luxton, 1993, Goldrick-Jones, 2002). Martin said that 'at the start we were very aware of being a group of men initiating this mixed group and [...] just the obvious power dynamics that that might imply'. The men made some attempts to hand over control of the group. For example, after the initial meeting, different people drew up agendas for each of the next few meetings. Also, in an email sent out after the first meeting, Martin asked if anyone wanted to take over or to share the job of checking the group's emails. However, I presume that nobody volunteered as he and James continued to do this.

Some of James and Martin's comments suggested that they were reluctant to be in charge, yet they felt that the group would not run itself and so they needed to make things happen (Fieldnotes).⁴² Despite their reluctance, the two men organised the group for the first ten months of its existence. After this, they sent round an email explaining that they were stepping down from organising the meetings and asking for somebody else to take this on. I stopped attending meetings at this point so I am not entirely sure how the group developed afterwards. Two other members, Sophie (40-55) and Sam (age unknown), organised meetings over the following few months and Sam set up an online group to facilitate this. I think that the meetings stopped after about three months, although people continued discussions over the group's email list.

The above discussion shows that, whilst some tasks were shared out between group members, the role of organising meetings was largely undertaken by Martin and James. Some of the organising work that they carried out involved 'behind-the-scenes' administrative and logistical activities, which may be regarded as low status (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport, 2003). However, as noted above, they also seemed to be regarded as being 'in charge' of the meetings, which suggests that their organising role granted them a certain status within the group.

⁴² I have no indication of why other members were reluctant to take on organising roles within the group.

Men's attitudes

In an analysis of gender in workplace interactions, Patricia Yancey Martin (2006) differentiates between reflexive and non-reflexive enactments of gender and suggests that the latter are more common:

People routinely practice gender without being reflexive about it and without consciously intending to do so. They know they are doing something but often they are less than fully aware of the gender in their actions (p.260).

This explains why 'well-intentioned, "good people" practice gender in ways that do harm' (p.255). Supporters of feminism often regard developing a reflexive awareness of one's own gendered practices (particularly if one is a man) as an important part of challenging gender inequality (for example, Kahane, 1998, Pease, 2010).

The men in the feminist discussion group demonstrated a high level of reflexivity. They seemed to be very aware of group dynamics and to some extent made a conscious effort not to dominate. Martin pointed out that they had this in mind when they set up the group:

[W]e were all clear that when we started a mixed group we didn't want to behave as stereotypical, you know, er entitled males who would expect everyone to listen to them and, you know, take their ideas more seriously and all those sorts of things.

Thus, the men who set up the group were influenced by the feminist concept of male privilege (see, for example, Onne, 2008, Rubenstein, 2008, Tarrant, 2009, Pease, 2010).

Sam also explained that (he) made an effort not to dominate the conversation, but this was more due to concerns about power dynamics in general, rather than gender dynamics in particular. (He) recounted an experience which had led (him) to develop a reflexive awareness of (his) own practices:

JB: [D]o you generally feel kind of, um, confident to [...] speak in the meetings or to say what you think?

Sam: (Exhales/laughs) That depends really, because yes I feel confident to speak, but at the same time I try not to speak too much (laughs), and [...] it's kinda like, (exhales), it's weird trying to figure out whether I really have something to say. It was actually taping the meetings, I was at [another

group] [...], I was taping one meeting and then I had to re-record it on the computer and I would listen to myself interrupt people and it was like 'oh my god that's embarrassing' and actually since then I'm trying to sometimes sort of, you know, shut up and let other people speak, [...] but then it sometimes does go the other way, but it, once again, it's not about [the feminist discussion group], it's just in general trying to figure out the balance between just dominating the conversation and on the other hand not saying something when you wanna speak.

Despite their efforts, both Martin and Sam noted that they did not think about these things all the time. In particular, whilst they were very self-conscious when the group was first set up, they became less so over time:

I think as time's gone on it's not been such a big thing in my mind, kind of worrying about just how much time I spend speaking in the meeting and those sorts of things [...] I suppose, uh, in more recent meetings there have probably been times where, um I haven't sort of checked myself as much as I would have and I've kind of maybe, I dunno talked for longer or something like that. (Martin)

This indicates the difficulty of practising gender reflexively at all times, even for someone who has developed a reflexive self-awareness and is committed to creating more egalitarian gender relationships. Whilst the above comments show that the men and Sam aimed to avoid exercising too much power in the group, in the next section I will assess whether they succeeded in this aim.

Group dynamics

Analysing gendered power dynamics in the group is a difficult task, since power can operate on many different levels. When I began the research, I was focused on the idea of power as domination. From this perspective, there was little evidence of power relations in the group. However, as Davis (1991) notes, power can be exercised in interactions which are friendly or pleasant, as well as those involving coercion or repression. Therefore, a more subtle and multifaceted analysis of power is required. I will begin by discussing participants' overall perceptions of group dynamics and will then discuss several different dimensions of group dynamics which could indicate power relations in the group: taking and making space in discussions, time spent talking, directing the discussion, and influence.

Participants' views of group dynamics

When I asked participants about the dynamics of the group, none of them thought that men had dominated completely. Sophie, Angela and Sam had not noticed any domination. For example, Sam said:

[D]uring the meetings themselves, I feel that yeah, I haven't seen anything like somebody getting dominated really, or that there is huge inequality. I mean, there is probably different dynamics between different individuals but I haven't seen that much gender-based stuff.

In fact, Angela felt that the men were a bit 'too soft':

I actually thought the men were really nice and you know like I said they were a little bit, perhaps a little bit too soft and, you know, probably because they were sort of also didn't want to tread on feet in that subject.

This perhaps reflects the men's efforts not to dominate, mentioned above.

James and Martin gave a mixed picture. James thought that men dominated the meetings on some occasions, but at other times it was more balanced:

I think in some meetings, not all of them, yeah Martin and me were dominating, I think, clearly, uh, not only in terms of because we were organising and also because people were expecting us to organise, but also in terms of the amount of talking and like maybe you know um, sort of, leading the conversation, um, yeah, that happened, clearly [...] [I]n other times, uh (exhales)... I mean, I remember other meetings where our input was quite... I mean it was [...] I was seeing the thing a bit more equal.

Martin commented that both men and women in the group sometimes acted in dominating ways:

[T]here were quite a few meetings where [a particular woman], well, yeah, she was, er, she wouldn't always wait for a convenient time to talk, would sometimes just sort of say what she wanted to say, um, and sometimes it seemed like it was kind of whatever was in her head rather than something that was directly related to what other people were talking about, um, which in some ways, I would see as sort of stereotypical male behaviour (laughs), of kind of, expecting people to, well, they'd be interested in whatever it is that's in your head at the time and not necessarily being [...] a good listener, um, so there [have] definitely been, um, examples on both sides I think of kind of dominant personalities, uh, sort of, not taking over the group, but kind of being dominant (short laugh).

From my own experience of the meetings, I would agree with James and Martin's analysis that men dominated the discussion in some meetings but not others.

The fact that James and Martin acted as organisers complicates the analysis of gender dynamics in the group. James commented that, in terms of group dynamics, it was difficult to disentangle his identity as a man from his role as an organiser:

[I]t's difficult [...] to separate the dynamic of the group and the fact that we were Martin and me organisers, uh and, you know how, how much things would have been different if the organisers were women, and if that would have made them more prominent during the conversations or not, um, so yeah I'm not sure.

This provides some support for 'expectation states' theory, which argues that status is the key determinant of power in task-focused interaction, and that different markers of status (in this case, group role and gender) combine to shape group dynamics within a particular context (see Berger et al., 1980, Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999). However, this theory may not completely explain the interaction between group role and gender in this case. Expectation states theory envisages different markers of status being added or subtracted in a rather mechanistic way to produce 'aggregated expectation states' (Berger et al., 1980, p.488), in other words, expectations about a person's competence, which determine their position in a status hierarchy. Yet, it may be that an organising role and male gender identity are not just added together to produce higher status, but that the two actually shape and reinforce each other, as leadership roles are themselves coded as masculine (see Whitehead, 2002, Collinson and Hearn, 2005). James himself suggested this when I asked him how he felt about being a man in the group:

I think the way I was mostly feeling as a man was because I was an organiser and that gave me some sort of special position, [...] which is quite, you know, so that, [...] that would mix with my position as a man.

This suggests complex interactions between leadership, masculinity, and power.

This overview of group dynamics, based on participants' perspectives and my own initial impressions of the group, gives a mixed picture: some participants

thought there was no domination in the group, whilst others thought that men dominated on some occasions. However, as discussed above, the concept of domination is somewhat limiting as a basis for understanding power relations. Furthermore, James's comments above suggest that there are different ways of understanding domination, and different aspects of group dynamics which may indicate power relations, such as who organises, who leads the conversation, and how much different people talk. Therefore, I will now consider some different dimensions of group dynamics in more detail.

Taking and making space

There were very few instances of overt domination in the group, in the sense of aggressive or coercive behaviour. These comments from my fieldnotes give a flavour of what the group dynamics were generally like:

[W]hen one person was speaking, the others tended to listen attentively. This gave the impression that everyone's opinions and experiences were taken seriously and considered and valued. At some times the pace quickened and people talked over each other a bit, but most of the meeting was quite calm and reflective in tone.

There were some instances in which people interrupted each other and also some moments where I felt that a particular person was dominating or someone was being ignored. On the other hand, there were also occasions on which people apologised for talking a lot, invited others to speak, or checked that they had finished what they wanted to say. Thus, there were examples both of people making space for themselves in the discussion and making space for others. There were no clear gendered patterns in either of these tendencies.

Time spent talking

A number of studies have found that men tend to talk more than women in mixed-gender contexts (James and Drakich, 1993). Some (pro)feminists have also highlighted this as a potential problem in activist groups (for example, Moyer and Tuttle, 1977, Luxton, 1993, Crass, 2008). As James noted above, there were some meetings in which the men seemed to talk for longer than other people. James also suggested that he and Martin talked more about intimate personal experiences:

I'm trying to think about, [...] about who was actually sharing intimate things and if there was a bit of a gender bias in that, um... I dunno, um... [...] I think Martin and me are quite, uh, prone to talk about intimate stuff quickly, uh and, so yeah, I'm a bit wondering if we weren't taking a bit the space for that, I mean in the group but, yeah I dunno.

This may seem surprising given the stereotype of men's emotional inexpressivity (for discussion of this, see Robinson and Hockey, 2011), but it probably reflected the fact that the men were used to sharing personal experiences in the men's group and that they were committed to the practice of consciousness-raising.

Men sharing their experiences could involve self-critique. In one meeting I noted that:

I think the men did talk for quite a lot of the time, especially Sam and Martin. But I felt this was good as a lot of the time they were reflecting quite critically on their experiences as men and for example the role homophobia played in their lives.

This shows that it is important to consider the content as well as the amount of talk when analysing gendered power relations in the group. As mentioned earlier, reflexivity can be seen as an important component in challenging inequality, and Martin (2006) points out that people often only reflect on gendered practice after-the-fact. Thus, reflecting back on past experiences may be an important way of developing a critical consciousness and changing one's gendered practices, an approach which has been at the core of many (pro)feminist men's consciousness-raising groups (see, for example, Hornacek, 1977).

Directing

Another possible indicator of power dynamics in the group is who directed (or attempted to direct) the discussion, either in terms of the topic or style of discussion. I found that Martin did this more than anyone. As I mentioned above, Martin and James often directed the structured aspects of the discussion. In addition, as discussed in the previous chapter, they had quite a strong sense of how they wanted the meetings to work, and I thought that sometimes they tried to nudge the group in that direction. For example, in one meeting when we were having a general discussion, Martin said: 'I'm just

thinking, how can we make the conversation more relevant to our experiences?' In another meeting, he brought us back to the main topic of discussion after we had gone off on a tangent.

However, Martin also mentioned occasions in which he deliberately did not intervene, even though he thought the discussion was going off in the wrong direction, which is another example of him acting reflexively:

[T]here was a few meetings where I was frustrated that people seemed to be kind of happily talking about certain things but that they weren't really related to gender or feminism or sexual politics at all and [...] I didn't wanna sort of jump in and impose my suggestions (laughing slightly) or whatever on the situation and say 'oh I really think we should really talk about this and not that', um, for various reasons I suppose, partly because of the sort of gender power dynamics of a man kind of taking control of the group and partly because of not wanting there to be any sort of leader of the group or wanting it to be sort of self-managing and self-governing and people decide between themselves what they wanna discuss.

In addition, the men's attempts to shape the meetings did not always succeed. For example, in one meeting Martin suggested talking about how we were feeling, but this was rejected by Angela.

The work of directing the *topic* of conversation was more evenly spread amongst different people. In one meeting, it seemed that much of the discussion focused on men and that the men in the group directed the discussion onto men's experiences. However, there were also examples in meetings of women quite assertively directing the discussion onto their own experiences or interests. One particularly striking moment in the group (which I discussed in the previous chapter) was when a woman asked the men directly about rape and sexual harassment. This was an example of a woman both directing the discussion and also challenging the men.

Influence

The last possible measure of power dynamics in the group is whose suggestions (for example, for topics, styles of discussion or activities) got taken up. This is one of the factors that other researchers have used to measure power and status in interaction (see Berger et al., 1980, Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999). When I looked at explicit decision-making processes in the group, for example, when they were deciding on a topic for the next meeting, there did

not seem to be a clear pattern in terms of whose ideas got taken up. Different people seemed to have a relatively equal influence. However, when I looked at the group's activities as a whole, it was clear that James and Martin, as the group's founders, had an important role in shaping the group's aims, structure and practices. Whilst they did not necessarily have a strong influence on what was discussed in a particular meeting, their ideas formed a framework for the group in terms of what it was aiming to achieve and how it was supposed to work.

Martin joked that the motivation for setting up the group was selfish: 'I think we set it up 'cause, quite selfishly really, we wanted [...] to experience what that would be like to use that sort of consciousness-raising model but in a mixed group'. Whilst I do not wish to suggest that this was the case, there is a sense in which the group was set up in response to these men's desires and interests. A more cynical feminist could therefore suggest that this group serves the interests of men. On the other hand, setting up the group could be seen as an attempt by the men to make themselves accountable to women, a recurring theme in discussions of men in feminism (see, for example, Luxton, 1993, Grant, 1997, Goldrick-Jones, 2002). Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, James said that, for him, the desire to set up a mixed group came out of discussions about the limitations of men's groups.

Although Martin and James, as group founders and organisers, largely set the tone for group meetings, they did not have complete control, and at times the group diverged from their expectations. For example, discussions did not always focus on individual experiences and in one later meeting we had a discussion about an article that Sam had circulated. This lack of control was also illustrated by the fact that Martin and James eventually disengaged from the group, with James explicitly saying that he left because the group was not meeting his expectations (see Chapter 4). Therefore, although Martin and James had a large role in shaping the group, other members also influenced how it developed.

Conclusions

The above discussion illustrates the difficulty of analysing gendered power in interaction. Different aspects of group dynamics revealed different patterns, and there were also differences between the dynamics of individual meetings and the longer term dynamics of the group's practices over time. Furthermore, gender combined with other factors, such as group roles and individual personalities, to shape group dynamics in complex ways. This shows that it is important to understand power as multilayered and not reducible to a single factor (on the latter point, see Davis, 1988). Therefore, status may be a more useful concept than gender in explaining group dynamics (see Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999). My analysis also supports Davis's (1991) view that a conception of power as domination or coercion is too restrictive. In this case study, even though the men were 'soft', they nevertheless had a strong influence in the group, which seems to confirm Davis's (1988, 1991) contention that power can be exercised even in friendly interactions.

Overall, this group presented a mixed picture in terms of gender dynamics. There were some aspects of the group which reproduced gender inequalities, such as the men dominating some discussions and the fact that it was men who set up and played leading roles in the group. However, there were also ways in which inequality was challenged: the men's reflexivity and conscious efforts not to dominate, women asserting themselves, the group challenging the gender binary (as discussed in the previous chapter), and participants reflecting critically on their own gendered experiences during the discussions. This echoes Ostrander's (1999) identification of 'competing and contradictory patterns' (p.640) when examining gendered and racialised power dynamics in a social movement organisation.

Men clearly had a strong influence in this group, but whether or not this is viewed as a problem depends on one's feminist perspective. Those who adopt a 'men's auxiliary' model of men's role in feminism may feel that it is inappropriate for men to initiate and organise a mixed-gender feminist group, but those who view men as equal partners in the feminist movement may not see this as problematic.

5.2 Women's committee

The women's committee, previously a women-only group, opened up their meetings to men in the year before I began my fieldwork. In the previous chapter, I discussed some of the effects of this decision. Here, I will add to that by considering the effects of men's involvement on group dynamics. I will focus on the following themes: men's participation, men's roles and behaviour, group dynamics, and the effects of men's presence. My analysis draws on both participant observation and interviews.

Men's participation

The women reported that since the meetings had been opened up to men, few men had actually attended; no more than two or three men attended at any one time and they were always significantly outnumbered by women. My own experience of the group confirmed this. Of the 13 meetings that I attended, men were only present at four. On these occasions, there were between nine and 13 women present and one or two men. One man had previously attended quite often, but was less of a regular participant at the time of my research.

Doug (19), a man peripherally involved in the group, explained why he had not got more involved:

JB: [H]ow would you kind of describe your experience when you have been to the meetings?

Doug: Um, it's interesting, um, but at the same time I feel a bit sort of reluctant to kind of contribute, um. Uh (exhales 'phhh'), I think, as for the reasons for it I think mostly because I see it as a women's committee, um, if [...] it was a committee for badminton players you wouldn't get people who went along who weren't badminton players, [...] I dunno, if it was a feminist society I think possibly more men would go but, the fact it's called a women's committee [...], I suppose that's my main reason for not sort of actively coming each week.

JB: Mm-hm. So you feel it's kind of not really your, it's not really a committee for you in a way?

Doug: No, 'cause like [...] (laughs/exhales) I'd describe myself as a feminist but I wouldn't say I'm a woman so (laughs), yeah.

Darren (20) also speculated that the name of the committee could discourage men from attending:

[T]here are a couple of men who came in fresher's week or the week after and haven't been since, uh, and I don't think it's because they were [...] laughed at by their friends or whatever, but I know they were, um, there are a few people who've been like 'you know oh yeah, I said to my housemate that I'm going to women's committee and he laughed at me' and it's like well, you know, [...] I don't see why, and I think part of it is because it is still [...] called women's committee and often, you know the name itself implies that it is just a committee for women, not for women's issues, um, and so, you know if it was called gender equality committee and it was only the women that could stand or vote in it, then it would be less intimidating to men.

The above comments suggest that the name of the committee (understandably) conveyed a strong sense of the group belonging to women. They also tell us something about how these men conceptualise the relationship between feminism and women, a subject that has been a source of much debate amongst feminists (see, for example, Delmar, 1986, Butler, 1990, Grant, 1993), and which I will discuss further in Chapter 6. In differentiating between a women's committee and a 'feminist society' or 'gender equality committee', these participants appear to support the distinction between women's movements and feminism advocated by Ferree (2006), which I discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.1). It is interesting that, whilst these men view a women's committee as the province of women, they do not view a feminist group in the same way. They do not see feminism as 'belonging' to women, an idea which, according to Hebert (2007), characterises much discussion of men's relationship to feminism.

Whilst Doug's comments show one reason why men may not engage with the committee, the perception that it is not a place for them, Darren suggests another reason for men's absence: the risk of stigma and ridicule from other men. The fact that men are teased for attending what appears to be 'a committee for women' reflects the insight of many feminists and masculinity theorists that male identity is predicated on a rejection of femininity (Kimmel, 1994, Adams and Coltrane, 2005, Segal, 2007). Whilst Darren thought that a 'gender equality committee' would be less off-putting for men, some researchers suggest that identifying oneself with feminism or gender equality can also be stigmatising for men (Kimmel, 1998, Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn, 2009). As Kimmel argues, '[m]en do stand to lose something by supporting feminism—our standing in the world of men' (1998, p.67). Another man, who had

supported some of the committee's campaigns, did not come to meetings because he thought that men should not be allowed to attend. This suggests that he held a 'men's auxiliary' view of men's relationship to feminism (see Chapter 4) and also saw the value of women-only spaces, an issue that I will discuss in the next chapter. Therefore, there were a number of possible reasons for the low level of male involvement in the group.

Men's roles and behaviour

Some of the women commented that men were more likely to help out with campaigns and events rather than attending committee meetings. Therefore, there was something of a gendered division of labour in the group, with men generally playing a supporting role in the committee's activities, in a reverse of the traditional gendered division of labour (see Sasson-Levy and Rapoport, 2003, for an example of this). The women explained that when men did attend meetings, they tended to be very quiet. Women's officers Susie (23) and Karen (20) offered an explanation for this: because it was a women's committee and men were in the minority, men felt intimidated and not quite sure whether they should be there or what they should say:

Susie: I think the instances where we have had the odd man come, um

Karen: They've felt intimidated and it's obvious.

Susie: Yeah, you can tell they've felt a bit intimidated, which, I can, you know, I felt intimidated when I first came to my first meeting (Karen: yeah), but I guess for them it's a bit different, 'cause I suppose for some of them, they've got this feeling of, you know, maybe this isn't my thing to be involved in, if you see what I mean.

Karen: Yeah, I mean I don't think it's even that they disagree or about what they're saying, I think it's just 'cause they're literally one maybe two boys in the meetings and that they feel like a minority. I don't [think] it's that they disagree or that we're making them feel uncomfortable, I think it's more that they feel like, like they're embarrassed to be here because maybe they shouldn't be. It's like when you go to a meeting and you're always worried it's gonna be a closed committee meeting and you're the one sat there who's not a member {Susie: mm}. I think it's more that feeling.

Susie: Yeah. And I think sometimes it's a case of maybe they don't necessarily want to offer their opinion because they're a bit worried maybe it's the slightly wrong opinion and maybe people will turn around (Karen: mm) and be annoyed.

Doug's comments above seem to support this explanation.

If men censor themselves in the women's committee, this suggests the operation of a kind of disciplinary power, in which a prisoner 'becomes the principle of his own subjection' (Foucault, 1975/1995, p.203). Whilst, in everyday interaction, being a man can be a source of status and privilege, in a feminist context, and particularly a women's committee, male identity is potentially stigmatising. As Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn note:

'Normal' within the context of the feminist movement is being defined as a woman and thereby being the subject of subordination in a patriarchal social structure, whereas 'male gender' or being a man – the subject and object of critique – indicates deviance (2009, p.408).

As I will discuss later in the chapter, disciplinary power sometimes works to silence women in mixed-gender contexts, but it can also work in reverse, with men remaining silent, either because of a commitment to a 'men's auxiliary' role within feminism or because, as Karen and Susie suggest, they feel slightly out of place and intimidated in a group that is designed for and run by women.

Whilst most of the men who attended meetings were quiet, Darren was a more vocal participant, although he was apparently less talkative in the women's committee than in other contexts. Fay (21) commented that his input was valuable:

[W]hen Darren does come he tends to talk quite a lot but that is also 'cause he knows an awful lot, like he's done, he's on a lot of committees and stuff, so when he comes he can often give really helpful input.

On the whole, the women seemed positive about his involvement, but there were a couple of occasions on which he was criticised. In one meeting, a woman complained that he always offered help but did not actually do anything. In an interview, another woman expressed concern about something that he had said:

Darren, um, he said something once, [...] he was annoyed that women's committee was called a feminist organisation, he said women's committee is for women, it's not feminist, and I felt a bit offended that he thought that he could say something like that, because for a man to go into a women's organisation that we do see as feminist and say it's not feminist seems like he's in the room but doesn't like being in a feminist group, I felt a bit funny with. (Joy, 19)

This story suggests that Darren was not as self-conscious as Doug and had no qualms about putting forward his own view of what the women's committee was about, even where this contradicted the women's own perceptions. It also illustrates Joy's views about men in feminism: she clearly felt that it was not men's place to decide what a women's group was about, implying the 'men's auxiliary' model of men in feminism discussed in the previous chapter.

Somewhat confusingly, when I interviewed Darren, he said that he *did* think the women's committee was feminist, but his comments indicate a sense of confidence and entitlement to define what the women's committee and feminism are about (particularly through his reference to the 'proper definition' of feminism), which is also apparent in Joy's story:

JB: [D]'you think of the women's committee as a feminist group?

Darren: Yeah. But I think you have to, it would be like saying, um, you know, is the racial equality group focussing on racial equality? The women's committee fundamentally has, its job is to look at sexual inequality, so it is by definition feminism, [...] you can define feminism however you want but if you're looking at the proper definition of feminism, i.e., um... [...] if there was a feminist committee it would be looking at ways in which men and women are unequal and trying to address those issues and that's what women's committee does so, so yes definitely.

I only attended one meeting at which Darren was present and, on this occasion, I did find some of his actions problematic. He seemed to take up both physical and verbal space in the meeting:

I was quite struck by Darren's behaviour and presence. When he came in he sat down and then immediately put his elbow on the table next to him and rested his head on his hand as if he was tired or bored. He often sat with his chair tipped up on two legs and he moved around quite a lot (although stayed sitting down). He seemed to take up quite a lot of space in the way he sat.

I also felt that he seemed quite confident to speak up and sometimes spoke over others (although everyone did this) and sometimes I felt his comments weren't that relevant. (Fieldnotes)

Henley (1977) argues that both relaxed posture and taking up space are signs of status, and occupying space is also associated with men and masculinity (Henley, 1977, Bartky, 1990, Morgan, 1993). Thus, Darren seemed to be doing gender in a non-reflexive way (see Martin, 2006) and, through claiming space, he enacted male power and privilege.

However, I recognise that my interpretation of his actions was to some extent shaped by my own expectations of him and my consciousness of his gender:

I think I was very aware of him being there as he was the only man and also because people have talked about him a lot but I had never met him until today. So I think I probably noticed his movements and behaviour more than that of anyone else and perhaps I was also more inclined to interpret his behaviour in a gendered way, e.g. to think 'he's sitting like a man', 'he's talking loudly and over others like a man'. (Fieldnotes)

Yet, it was not just his manner that troubled me, but one of his comments during a discussion about a campaign against sexual harassment:

They were discussing the problem that some men think that when a woman says no she means yes. I think everyone agreed that this was a problem. Darren said something like: 'The real problem is that some women *do do* that – they say no when they mean yes'. Some of the women said (something like) 'A problem for who? A problem for you, do you mean?' (directed at Darren). (Fieldnotes)

I thought that it was quite insensitive of Darren to come along to a feminist group and say that women are the problem. His comments suggested that he was viewing this scenario from a man's point of view rather than trying to see the women's point of view, and by saying 'the *real* problem is...' he implied that his perspective was more valid than that put forward by the women (a dynamic that was also evident in his interview when he talked about the 'proper' definition of feminism, discussed earlier). This seems to be a classic example of male privilege in action. However, he did not manage to impose his interpretation on the group; the women came back at him with a joke and then continued the discussion. Therefore, this could be read as an example of women resisting male privilege.

In the meetings that I attended, there was one other man, Mark (age unknown), who actively contributed to discussions. He was the student union LGBT officer and worked with the women's officers to organise some joint events. Like Darren, he joined in a discussion about the campaign against sexual harassment. The group were trying to come up with a catchy name for the campaign but found this difficult. They discussed who the campaign should be aimed at, what the message should be and the tone of the message. At one point, Mark pointed out that some women like to be groped and Fay said to him mock-angrily, 'You're the only man here and you're telling us that women like to

be groped' (Fieldnotes). On the face of it, this seems very similar to Darren's comment above which I found so problematic. A man appears to be minimising sexual harassment by claiming that women like it. However, somehow Mark's comment did not trouble me in the same way. I felt that he was attempting to reflect the diversity of women's experiences and desires, rather than viewing women as the problem. For whatever reason, my 'twinge-ometer' (Kleinman, 2007, p.2) did not go off.⁴³

Group dynamics

I have described the men's behaviour above, but how did this contribute to the overall gendered power dynamics of the group? Whilst men were mostly absent or silent (with the exception of Mark and Darren), the women were generally very confident and talkative. I noticed this at the first meeting that I attended:

I was struck by the confidence of many of the women. There were about 12 women and one man present (and another man from the LGBT committee came in for one item). The man who attended the entire meeting was silent throughout, whilst I think every woman spoke (although some more than others). The women's officers led the meeting and were very vocal and confident but several other confident people regularly spoke up too. At times the discussion was quite raucous, with lots of people talking over each other [...]

I was also struck by the women's confidence in talking about things from quite a strong/critical feminist perspective, e.g. their disapproval of 'lads' mags', lap dancing clubs, etc. [...] Also they openly said things that could possibly be perceived as 'anti-man' in the presence of a man (e.g. dismissing all men's magazines as degrading/objectifying and talking about men who own lap dancing clubs in disparaging terms). [...] There didn't seem to be any 'toning down' of their anger for the benefit of the man present. (Adapted from fieldnotes)

This was typical of the group dynamics at all of the meetings that I attended.

Thus, even when men did get involved in the discussions (as in the examples of Darren and Mark above), the women held sway. When considering the overall direction of the group, Maddy (24) also suggested that women were in control:

I think it's women who should make the decisions about what the women's committee does, um, and I was worried that having a lot of men present at

⁴³ Kleinman (2007) uses this term to describe 'an alarm that would go off when I sensed that something wasn't quite right in a situation' (p.2). She links this to Jaggar's idea of 'outlaw emotions': 'our "gut-level" awareness that we are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice or danger' (Jaggar, 1989, p.161, cited in Kleinman, 2007, p.2).

the committee would change that, but it hasn't seemed [to have] changed it so much.

It is also important to consider power relations amongst women in the group. The women's officers chaired meetings and also usually spoke the most. Their role seemed to grant them authority within the group. However, as the fieldnotes above show, there were often lively discussions with many people joining in, and several participants commented on the openness and friendliness of the group. For example, Darren (20) said:

I can't think of anybody that hasn't contributed significantly to discussion in women's committee, um, and that's very rare in committee meetings. You usually get three very vocal people and a few people who chip in, um, whereas I think there'll be one or two [in the women's committee], but usually they're the people who know a lot about whatever is being discussed, um which is often the women's officer, um, and very often it's just an open discussion in which everybody speaks equally and it's a rare and fantastic thing I think.

Nevertheless, on some topics there were limits to discussion. There was an assumed consensus on particular issues which could lead to alternative viewpoints being silenced. Joy (19) described this process:

JB: Is there anything you don't like about [the committee]?

Joy: Um, some things aren't really debated about properly. [...] [S]omebody brought up something about how porn, um, just [oppresses], and suddenly everybody just unanimously agreed that it oppresses women and I thought there's actually a feminist issue to be brought up here, and it's one of those things that we could debate about, because, you get into a really dodgy area in places like about where you start to treat women in a sexist way, and we've talked about it before, we talked about it on a social, and I said that if women like porn, surely that means that it's not as straightforward as it's men looking at abused women and another girl said that women like porn because they're raised to think that they should like it because it pleases men and I thought well that's just placing women in another vulnerable passive position, so some things I think, we could argue about more and do proper organised debates and join up with [the debating society] and stuff, would be good.

JB: Mm-hm. [...] [D]id you feel like it was difficult to put across your point of view on that or?

Joy: Yeah, I did then, I don't normally, I'm normally quite argumentative, but I did then, because it was, there was no response, it wasn't welcomed, but generally, discussion's open, generally.

Some committee members suggested that the committee's stance on men's role in the group (that they should be allowed to attend but not become committee members) had a similarly hegemonic status.

These examples of power relations amongst women show that gender is not the only factor that shapes group dynamics. Group roles are significant, with the women's officers occupying particularly powerful positions. Certain feminist perspectives may also be dominant or subordinate, although it is not clear from my data why this is the case. For example, the view that pornography is oppressive may predominate in the group simply because large numbers of group members, or perhaps influential members such as the women's officers, share this belief, or it may reflect the influence of this viewpoint within the wider feminist movement. Long (2011) charts the re-emergence of feminist anti-pornography activism within the context of a wider resurgence of feminist activism in the UK in the 2000s and suggests that an anti-porn stance is increasingly visible within the wider movement, although she cautions that 'it is too early to say whether anti-porn feminist perspectives have indeed achieved a "hegemonic position" within the broader resurgent movement' (p.105). Thus, it may be that external factors have an influence on internal group dynamics, as well as internal factors such as group roles.

Effects of men's presence

I asked all of the women that I interviewed whether it made a difference when men attended the meetings. About half of them felt that it did not. Karen (20) attributed this to the character of the women in the group:

I think the one trait that feminists all have, is that they've gotta be very assertive and I think that comes through in the meetings. The problem is I think, I think because feminism still has such connotations in today's society, that you do have to be a very strong and forceful character to stand up for that kind of thing. So I would say that everyone in this meeting was of quite a forceful character. [...] [E]veryone's got no issue with putting opinions [...] forward, and I think that when a boy comes in the meeting, literally no-one notices because they're all pretty strong-minded people at the end of the day.

It is interesting that Karen links the women's actions to the wider social context in terms of contemporary attitudes towards feminism. In Chapter 7, I will explore the impact of this context on all of the groups.

Amanda (age unknown) thought that men's presence did not make a difference because only a few men attended meetings and also noted that the women's committee felt different from other mixed-gender settings because it was a feminist group:

JB: [D]'you think it makes a difference when men attend the meetings?

Amanda: Um, no I don't think so. I think it might do if there was, if there was more men, but sometimes we have like two or three we've had before and it's fine 'cause there's still like more females than males, and also just the fact that you know that it's, what the group is for, it's for like, it's a feminist group and it's women's committee so you know that the men that are there it's, they're there for that reason, it's not the same as talking in like a seminar group or something.

Some women suggested that other aspects of group dynamics were more important than gender. For example, Alice (20) thought that there were more disagreements between the women than between her and the men and Fay (21) said that it often felt awkward when new people joined, regardless of their gender.

However, almost half of the women thought that men's presence did make some difference. Joy (19) noted that she was less talkative when her boyfriend attended a meeting, although generally she thought that most people were just as assertive when a man was present. Rose (20) said that men's presence affected the casual chat before the meeting but not the meeting itself. She talked about men's presence in quite strong terms, stating that 'you can tell when a guy's there, it's been like overpowering and... not [...] in a bad sense but you can tell there's a male presence in the room.'

Eve (20) felt that when men attended it could affect what the women said:

JB: [D]'you think it makes a difference when men attend the meetings to when it's just women?

Eve: I think it might do yeah. I mean like today [there were] two men present and although they, you know, they didn't really say *that* much, I think people probably are a bit more careful about their wording and things like that, I dunno, I think it definitely has an impact in people's responses to different things.

Interestingly, she thought that men's presence had an impact even when the men did not say very much. This suggests that men's presence is as important

as their specific behaviour and also shows that, when analysing gendered power relations, we need to examine women's feelings and behaviour as well as men's. Eve's suggestion that women were more careful about what they said in men's presence implies a process of self-censorship that echoes Foucault's (1975/1995) concept of disciplinary power.

This process is also suggested in Maddy's (24) comments. In her view, men's presence had quite strong effects:

It may be that I was overly sensitive but I am more uncomfortable when men are in committee, I don't feel as comfortable at all, but that's probably because I'm much more sensitive to it and I find that men tend to, there seems to be a kind of deferral to them, even if there's only one man in the room, he tends to be um, [...] when he speaks you know people don't speak over him and he seems to be given, people seem to defer to him. Like there was a few conversations we've had when there's been women in the meeting talking and then they've kind of turned maybe for affirmation or to kind of say 'oh, is that OK?', kind of, and, I'm not sure if I'm being overly sensitive and that's not actually what's happening but there does seem to be a certain dominance when men are at the meeting and when men speak at the meeting which I think makes the whole meeting a bit less equal.

In describing the way in which gendered inequality is (re)produced in the group, Maddy emphasises women's behaviour rather than men's: it is women's deferral to men that gives men power. Again, this shows the importance of looking at women's actions as well as men's, as argued by Gerson and Peiss:

A major contribution of scholarship on gender has been the analysis of *domination* in explaining the subordinate position of women. [...] Although this analysis is essential for understanding the dynamics of gender arrangements, it nevertheless has an inherent conceptual shortcoming. Regardless of the theoretical orientation, the assumption is made that women are passive victims of a system of power or domination. While women are not responsible for their own oppression and exploitation, at the same time they are not fully passive either [...]. We need to explore the various ways women participate in setting up, maintaining, and altering the system of gender relations (1985, pp.321-22, emphasis in original).

Maddy admits that her perspective may be shaped by the fact that she disagreed with the decision to open up committee meetings to men. This raises the question of whether members' perceptions of group dynamics are mediated by their feminist beliefs. Many researchers have suggested that we do not observe or experience the world directly, free from preconceptions (for example,

Sayer, 1984, Scott, 1992). If the different participants in my study hold different feminist perspectives, for example, regarding the role of men in feminism (see Chapter 6), this may explain why they produced different interpretations of the group's dynamics. My own interpretation of what happened in the group is also obviously shaped by my own feminist perspective.

Conclusions

On the whole, the committee seemed to challenge traditional gender dynamics: most of the men were very quiet and most of the women were loud and confident. On the occasions when men acted in privileged ways, the women seemed well equipped to deal with this: they dismissed inappropriate comments with confidence and humour. Men did not appear to have significantly influenced group decisions or activities; therefore, the control of the group remained firmly in the hands of the women. The reasons for this seemed to be the low level of male participation, the group structure (which formalised women's leadership), and the strong character of the women involved. The fact that the group retained the name women's committee also appears to be significant: this signalled the group's purpose and focus and may have discouraged men from attending or from acting in privileged ways when they did attend.

Although men did not have a significant influence within the group, their presence may have subtly altered group dynamics, affecting what women said, how much they spoke, or perhaps eliciting deference from them, and thus reproducing gender inequality. I have suggested that Foucault's (1975/1995) concept of disciplinary power is useful in explaining women's actions in this context. It may also help to explain why some men did not contribute more to committee meetings.

As in the previous case study, my analysis of the women's committee has shown the importance of other factors, as well as gender, in determining group dynamics. In particular, as in the feminist discussion group, leadership roles were significant in shaping group dynamics. Therefore, once again, status may be a more useful concept than gender for explaining group dynamics (see Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999).

5.3 DIY collective

My ability to analyse gender relations in this group is limited, partly because I only have a small amount of data, and also because only women were involved in the group. However, it is still possible to look at the group's experiences of working with men and participants' feelings about the effects of men's presence. Furthermore, it is useful to examine group dynamics even when men are not present. In this group, I did not conduct participant observation at group meetings, so I was not able to witness group interactions at first hand. Therefore, this section focuses on the subjective experiences of group members as expressed in interviews.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the DIY collective was always explicitly open to people of all genders, but only women got involved. Abi (23) commented that she tried to get some of her male friends involved, but without success. However, although no men were part of the collective, they were not entirely absent from the group's activities. The group worked with men in organising some events and some of these men also came along to group meetings, but more as 'a social thing' (Abi) than to get involved in the collective. Both interviewees seemed positive about these experiences of working with men. Even though the men did not necessarily share their interest in feminism, the groups worked together well:

[W]e worked with [a DIY collective], um, who are all males, and we worked with [another collective] who are male, um, put on joint events and that was like, it wasn't particularly like 'let's get together and put a feminist event on', we did a [regional] pride benefit with [the second collective], which is obviously, you know, benefiting queer communities and stuff like that, um, and like, I dunno [...], as I say it was never really like, I don't feel like that made it [...] unfeminist but at the same time it didn't really add anything else to it, it just kind of fit really well, it was just like mutual friends with a mutual feeling of we believe in a common thing you know, it [...] wasn't like overtly politicised or anything like that, it was just like this money's gonna go to this, let's get some cool bands down, let's make as much money as we can and that's cool (Ruth, 23).

Men were also present at the group's events, both as performers and audience members. Although one of the group's aims was to give a platform to female performers, they stated on their website that they would not necessarily exclude all-male bands and would not book bands just because they included women.

The two gigs that I attended included female and male band members, although all of the DJs who played between bands were women. Another event that I attended, a spoken word night, had an all-female line-up.

Both of my interviewees thought that men's presence in a setting does make a difference. They both agreed that it could feel good to be in an all-female environment, but they would not organise women-only events themselves as they thought that it was important to be inclusive. Abi commented that being in an all-female environment was a safe place and could feel more comfortable, and that 'you feel [...] stronger I guess in a pack of girls', but she also disagreed with women-only events because 'life isn't like that' and therefore 'it's really backwards to create these little bubbles'. She thought that it was wrong to judge someone by their gender and she preferred to have a whole range of people together.

Ruth was more enthusiastic about women-only spaces:

I feel like it can be really amazing if you're in a completely all-female environment. I feel like, at a show, if you turn round and you know that everybody else is female or, like, being on [this tour], everyone is female that's performing and everyone's female in the van, and like it is really nice and [...] I don't really know how to describe it, it is nice and you know, it's so great to be around so many inspiring females.

She added that it feels safe and empowering. However, she would not organise a women-only event herself:

I do feel you know it's really great to have all-female things but at the same time I'd never, I'd never like set an event up that was all-female, 'cause that is sexist and [...] I'm not about that at all, I don't support that.

Although there were no men in the group, there were still some difficulties with group dynamics. Abi linked this to the collective structure of the group:

Yeah it started off as like a real [...] collective, there was like a lot of girls involved, um, and it kind of, I guess personalities clash, what people want from it. We kind of, we tried to have it as a collective where everyone was, there was no kind of person in charge. I think that's where it faltered really 'cause I think there needs to be a hierarchy in that kind of, [...] I think with collectives, I think there needs to be kind of a very strong idea of a kind of look of it and an idea of what you're gonna achieve, because otherwise, like [...] at the time Ruth had very different ideas from me of what I wanted to do.

Other problems that Abi identified included difficulty in making decisions and dwindling participation at meetings:

[I]n the beginning we were gonna do like this monthly club night and then other stuff on top and try and do other gigs and events and like craft clubs, that kind of thing, and it just kind of was like no-one really took charge, to kind of go 'right we're doing this now' and everyone had a lot of ideas and... then... kind of the meetings would kind of dissolve into just every week it was just like me, Ruth and Hannah and we were like friends anyway.

Abi also mentioned that other DIY collectives had had similar difficulties with collective methods of organising. These experiences recall Freeman's famous critique of collective organising, 'The tyranny of structurelessness' (no date). Freeman suggests that power structures will inevitably develop in any group and that the lack of a formal structure may make it more difficult to become aware of and to manage these power relations. She suggests that groups are dominated by informal elites who are groups of friends:

Elites are nothing more, and nothing less, than groups of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities. [...] These friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels [...]. Because people are friends, because they usually share the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don't (Freeman, no date, 'The nature of elitism', para.2).

Perhaps Abi, Ruth and Hannah formed such an elite in the DIY collective. Freeman also suggests that unstructured groups are generally not very good at getting things done, which again reflects Abi's account of the DIY collective.

This group's experiences show once again that gender is not the only important factor in group dynamics. As many feminists have pointed out, women-only groups are not immune from problems. For example, Reagon (2000) analyses the exclusionary dynamics which can operate in women-only spaces, in which the term 'women' effectively signifies white women, and Dell'Olio (1970) describes the ostracism of successful or assertive women in the New York women's movement. In the DIY collective, it appeared to be group structure (or rather the lack of structure), individual personalities, and different views about the group's aims and activities that caused problems in the group, rather than men.

5.4 Feminist activist group

As previously mentioned, this group was mixed at one time but then decided to become largely women-only. In the previous chapter, I discussed the reasons behind this decision and its effects on the group. Here, I will focus on the period when men were able to attend the group and will discuss participants' perceptions of group dynamics and the effects of men's involvement. As in the previous case study, I was not able to conduct participant observation in this group, so this analysis is based on interview data. The themes that I will discuss are men's participation and behaviour, and the effects of men's presence.

Men's participation and behaviour

Participants said that there had only ever been a few men involved in the group at any one time and that most of them had been quiet. Claire (21) suggested that most of the men who attended the group were quite sensitive, for example, they understood that there were some topics that women preferred to discuss on their own. She said that, if a difficult topic came up, they could ask the men to leave:

[I]t was quite easy to say [to the men] 'look just, this isn't the best time but maybe we'll see you for a drink afterwards' or whatever, and they seemed happy enough with that.

As Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn point out, respecting women's spaces is one of the ways in which men can 'pass' as (pro)feminist (2009). Therefore, in this respect, the men in the group seemed to live up to the requirements of a 'good' (pro)feminist.⁴⁴

One of the most regular male participants was Chris (22), who, as previously mentioned, did not actually identify as a man. However, (he) seemed to be identified as a man by others in the group and in wider society. My impression of Chris, both from meetings and from conducting an interview, was that (he) was very shy and quiet, and (he) seemed reflexively aware of (his) own

⁴⁴ As discussed in Chapter 2 (in the section headed 'What's a man to do?'), there are different views on what is required to be a (pro)feminist as a man. Kahane (1998) sketches out some possible requirements, as well as focusing on common pitfalls facing (pro)feminist men. Others have developed more comprehensive checklists or guidelines (for example, Onne, 2008, Rubenstein, 2008, Karnythia, 2009). Karnythia and Rubenstein both include respecting minority (in this case women's) spaces in their lists.

behaviour and its potential impact on others. Before attending the group, (he) emailed to check if the group was open to all genders, and (he) said that in the group (he) tended to listen most of the time and only spoke when (he) felt (he) had something to contribute. Other participants confirmed my impression of (him):

Chris is such a sort of sweet unassuming guy and he is completely supportive and he doesn't, you know he doesn't come with all the sort of typical male privilege and any kind of domineering thing. (Helen, 24)

Perhaps because of (his) own discomfort with male gender identity and gender norms, Chris seemed acutely aware of (his) gender and demonstrated a high degree of reflexivity about (his) position in a feminist group:

JB: [H]ow've you kind of felt um being a man within a feminist group? [...] [D]you feel sort of conscious of your gender or?

Chris: Um, yeah I think you've got to be really because um, like pretty much everyone else is going to be so I've got to be as well. Um, but you know I kind of feel that way around people in general, I mean women specifically but people in general I've just like, it's something I've always got to keep in mind that, um, people are always going to have these preconceptions of me um just from one glance at me and determining my sex and they're gonna like determine a bunch of other things all instantly and um, so you know I feel like I've got to be very careful and especially in a feminist group I've got to, you know, be very careful and... um, try not to joke around so much because in case it might seem like I'm making light of the situation or, um...

Whilst most of the men in the group were quiet, there was also at least one male participant who was more vocal, which some group members found uncomfortable. As Claire explained:

[I]n the one debate that he got involved in, he had some really good things to say, um... but it was a very odd meeting because he did talk a lot and you could see people, if he'd been a woman and he'd talked a lot, it wouldn't have got the same reaction, but you could just tell people were getting itchy about it because (putting on angry voice) 'we're a feminist group and this is a man and he's talking, how dare he talk in a feminist group?' um, so it's a bit, it was a bit odd, um... not that it seemed to stop him.

It is important to note that Claire herself did not mind this man talking a lot, as she agreed with his ideas, and in her tone of voice she mocked the idea that men should not speak in a feminist meeting. However, she perceived that it made others in the group feel uncomfortable. Her last comment ('not that it

seemed to stop him') suggests that this man was not very self-aware or concerned about gendered power dynamics. In contrast to Chris, he was practising gender in a non-reflexive way (see Martin, 2006).

Interestingly, as Claire goes on to describe what happened in this meeting, she refers to the effects of male privilege which mean that men are heard more than women (see, for example, Mohan and Schultz, 2001, Crass, 2008⁴⁵). She hypothesised that this affected people's perceptions of men's behaviour and group dynamics:

I was quite loud in that meeting, quite vocal, as well, um, but I think [...] it's hard to say because I don't know how other people saw it, but I wouldn't be surprised if people started to [...], because I agreed with the guy that was talking a lot, I wouldn't be surprised if people attributed my noise to him 'cause that does happen sometimes [...] you know [...] you've got two voices working in tandem, they're both agreeing with each other and one of them's a man, you're gonna think that the man is talking, so, I reckon they probably thought that he was talking more than he was and I think / *think* he was talking more than he was actually as well, just because I agreed with him.

This highlights the difficulty of analysing group dynamics. In relation to the women's committee, I suggested that participants' feminist perspectives, particularly their views about men's role in feminism, may have shaped their experience and analysis of group dynamics. Here, Claire suggests that patriarchal gender norms, which privilege men's voices, may also shape participants' perceptions of group interactions. This troubles the idea of experience as the grounds for knowledge (see Scott, 1992) and reflects Stanley and Wise's (2006) idea of a 'fractured ontological base', whereby differently situated people will develop different views of 'the facts'.

In summary, it seems that most of the men involved in the group practised gender in counter-hegemonic ways, in the sense of both challenging hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) and the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004). However, there were some occasions on which men behaved more assertively, which could be seen as an expression of male power and privilege, and which some women found troubling. None of the participants explicitly complained about

⁴⁵ These authors recount experiences in which men's words were taken more seriously than women's. The dynamic that Claire describes is slightly different, but seems to reflect a similar process of people paying more attention to men's than women's words.

men's behaviour in the group, although it is possible that they withheld criticism due to the fact that my husband had participated in the group (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 3).

For one group member, Cath (52), the behaviour of the specific men in the group was not as important as the typical ways in which men and women behave in mixed contexts:

Cath: [M]y experience has generally been that in feminist groups that men are involved in the agenda gets really really skewed and because of the, it's not about competence, it's not about confidence, it's not about any of those things but because of the kind of gendered and hierarchical nature of interpersonal relationships as well as you know social relationships what I think fairly typically happens [is] that either women get silenced or silence themselves or become deferential or caring or whatever.

[...]

JB: [H]ave you felt that that's what it was like in [the group]?

Cath: I don't know whether it was like that but I think the potential was always there [...] And I suppose in a way I didn't, I didn't want to have to be thinking about you know guarding against that really, um. I mean I can think of probably times when maybe the discussion's been... dominated by a couple of people and maybe one of those was a bloke, but [...] I don't know whether, I mean that might've happened anyway given the nature of the discussion, but I think the potential is always there.

Cath recognised that men dominated at times, but this was less important for her than their potential to dominate. In her view, the fact that there was always the potential for gendered power dynamics to arise meant that these dynamics had to be actively managed and therefore she felt more comfortable in an all-women context where she did not have to worry about this. It is interesting that Cath refers to the role of both women and men in reproducing gendered power relations: women can either 'get silenced' or 'silence themselves'. The latter process reflects Foucault's idea of disciplinary power, which I discussed in relation to the women's committee.

Effects of men's presence

All except one woman thought that men's presence had some effect in the group, although many also mentioned that the extent of the effect varied according to factors such as the individuals involved, the number of men

present, men's behaviour, group members' previous experiences, and the topic of discussion. Claire did not believe that men's presence made a difference because:

we always made time for women-only things anyway so if there was a particularly triggering subject we did that as a women-only thing and that was fine, um, so the meetings that the guys were present for, they were kind of already alright for men to be present for 'cause that's how we'd organised it.

However, in recognising that there are some subjects that can be discussed in a mixed group and some that cannot, she tacitly suggests that men's presence does in fact make a difference.

A couple of people said that men's presence created tension or a more uncomfortable atmosphere in the group. For example:

JB: [D]'you feel like... it makes a difference when men attend meetings?

Julie (19): I think... there was noticeably kind of a frostier atmosphere. [...] I appreciate that some older members of the group might feel a little bit, I dunno, apprehensive or kind of overwhelmed if there are men in the group, and, certain issues I can appreciate [...], certain people wouldn't want to discuss them in front of men, um, but for the majority of the group I don't think there was much of a problem.

Several people commented that men's presence could affect women's behaviour: quieter or less confident women were less likely to talk when men were there:

[T]he dynamic is definitely different when there aren't men there, it's a lot more informal and [...] people who don't speak normally are a lot happier to talk whereas when men are there, there are definitely some of the membership who won't speak or become very very shy so. It does affect a little bit but, I think, because we've always had a heavy female membership it's never really come to the fore, it's only occasionally kind of noticed that people's behaviour changed. (Ellie, 21)

As in the women's committee, this could be seen as an example of self-censorship, the operation of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1975/1995). As Cath commented above, even if women are not silenced by men, they may 'silence themselves'.

Ellie added that men's presence could make women more careful about what they said:

I think people catch themselves when they're talking. There's been a couple of times women will make generalisations they'll be like 'oh but not you', um, which always happens, but especially round issues like, um, like sexual harassment and things, like when there were more men, a couple of the men [...] got very upset because they thought we were kind of personally attacking their behaviour when we were having, like, discussions about how you know it's horrible to get unwanted attention, and a few people do become quite defensive.

This shows that it may not always be easy to discuss issues of sexism in a mixed context, as men may feel under attack and become defensive (a dynamic that has been discussed by many (pro)feminists, such as Crass, 2008, Rubenstein, 2008). It also suggests that women may adjust their own behaviour to avoid upsetting men, which could be seen as another example of disciplinary power at work.

Another way of analysing this situation is through the lens of *emotion work* or *emotional labour* (see Hochschild, 1979, 2003, James, 1989). As discussed in Chapter 2, many feminists have emphasised the gendered dimensions of emotion work, and some have particularly highlighted the expectation that women will care for men (for example, Bartky, 1990). It is possible that this expectation carries over into feminist groups, explaining why some women make an effort not to upset men. Another example of caring for men was given by Helen:

[T]here was one meeting a guy came to which is when we had quite a few members and... I dunno I felt [...] yeah I did kind of feel [...] that I was making too much of an effort with him to make sure he felt comfortable which kind of goes against what I actually think I should be doing.

Feminists have highlighted this type of 'invisible work' (Daniels, 1987), which involves managing social relationships and other people's feelings. This work is frequently carried out by women, whether in the context of the family, volunteer work, or paid employment (see Daniels, 1987, James, 1989). Daniels (1987) suggests that women are expected to do this work, they become skilled at it through frequent practice, and thus it becomes habitual. Therefore, attending to men's feelings in the group may be a way in which women are practising gender non-reflexively (see Martin, 2006). Cath's comments in the previous section about women becoming 'deferential' or 'caring' hint at the idea of emotion work, and the examples discussed above suggest that the 'typical'

dynamics identified by Cath (in the previous section) did occur in this group on some occasions.

5.5 Chapter conclusions

This chapter took as its starting point the idea (expressed by Luxton, 1993) that men tend to dominate in mixed-gender feminist groups. Through an analysis of participants' accounts and, where available, my own observational data, I have explored the extent to which this happened in my case study groups. As in the previous chapter, there was significant variation between the groups, which suggests that the impact of men's involvement on group dynamics is context-specific. However, despite this variation, several key insights emerged.

Firstly, my analysis points to the complexity of analysing gendered power relations in social movement groups. There are many different dimensions of group dynamics, and power may operate differently at different levels, for example, when comparing individual meetings to group processes over time. Thus, we need to be aware that power is multilayered and may operate in complex and contradictory ways (Ostrander, 1999). Another complication is that gender is often intertwined with other factors, such as group roles and individual personalities, making it difficult to isolate the effects of gender. This supports Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin's contention that 'the interactional conduct of gender is always enmeshed in other identities and activities. It cannot be observed in a pure, unentangled form' (1999, p.193).

Furthermore, in attending to power dynamics amongst women (in the women's committee and the DIY collective), this research shows that gender is clearly not the only important factor in shaping group dynamics: group structure, group roles, individual personalities, and members' beliefs also made a difference. There are also many other potential sources of power and status that I did not explore, such as class and race, which may have interacted with gender in shaping group dynamics.⁴⁶ Therefore, it may make more sense to focus on status (see James and Drakich, 1993, Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999) or

⁴⁶ In Chapter 8, I will discuss my reasons for focusing on gender rather than other social divisions and will consider the implications of this.

power (Davis, 1988) in general, rather than gender in particular, when analysing group dynamics.

The complexity of individual gender identity also complicated my analysis. The presence in my research of two people who were identified as men by others but who did not claim this identity themselves obviously complicates the issue of 'men in feminism', since the question of who is a man is no longer clear. This points to the limitations of a binary model of gender (see, for example, Hines and Sanger, 2010), both for analysing gendered interactions and for thinking about men's relationship to feminism (see also Hale, 1998, Rubin, 1998).

Despite these difficulties, I do feel able to draw some broad conclusions about the effects of men's involvement in mixed-gender feminist groups. My research suggests that men's presence and behaviour can have an impact on group dynamics, although this is context-dependent and not entirely predictable. Sometimes men acted in the ways highlighted by Luxton (1993), for example, spending lots of time talking or attempting to impose their own point of view on the group, but this was by no means the prevailing pattern of men's actions. Most of the men involved in the groups were quiet and respectful and several exhibited reflexivity about their gendered identity, their own behaviour and its potential impact on others. Thus, the idea that men dominate in mixed groups is clearly too simplistic.

Nevertheless, another important conclusion was that men's presence may affect group dynamics regardless of how men themselves behave. Here, Foucault's (1975/1995) concept of disciplinary power and feminist research on emotion work (for example, Daniels, 1987, James, 1989, Hochschild, 2003) are useful for understanding the ways in which women may adjust their own behaviour in men's presence, sometimes in ways which reproduce gendered power relations. This reinforces the need to examine the ways in which women as well as men may challenge or reinforce existing gendered power relations and to consider the subtle and invisible ways in which power may operate as well as overt processes of domination or coercion (see Gerson and Peiss, 1985, Davis, 1991). It also means that feminists need to be aware that even the nicest, most well-intentioned and well-behaved (pro)feminist men may affect the dynamics of a feminist group simply by their presence. Lastly, this research

suggests that other factors may mediate the influence of men's presence, such as the number of men and women in a group, the individual personalities of those involved, or the group structure.

This chapter, along with the previous one, has given an insight into what happens in mixed-gender feminist groups, through exploring the groups' practices and their experiences. As I indicated at various points in Chapter 4, the different practices and experiences of these groups, and the individuals within them, are linked to particular understandings of feminism and of men's relationship to feminism. In the next chapter, I will develop this idea further through examining participants' feminist beliefs and relating these to the wider landscape of feminist theory and practice.

6 Feminist beliefs

This chapter explores the connections between feminist theory and practice through examining participants' feminist beliefs. Many feminists have highlighted the integral relationship between feminist theory and practice, for example, Griffin et al. (1994) draw attention to 'the crucial links between feminist theorising and practice, whereby practice informs theory, theory informs practice, in an ongoing spiral' (p.2). There were differences in the extent to which my research participants formally engaged with feminist theory, but even where participants did not do this explicitly, their practices as activists were implicitly informed by theories, in the sense of particular understandings of the nature of gender, feminism, and gendered power relations.

I will begin by exploring participants' beliefs about men's relationship to feminism (sections 6.1-6.5), and in doing this I will refine the models of men's relationship to feminism that I developed in Chapter 4. I will then go on to discuss participants' understandings of two important concepts: feminism and gender. Throughout the chapter, I will show the links between participants' beliefs and wider discourses, including feminism, masculinity studies, queer theory and transgender studies. Whilst the previous chapters were focused on the feminist groups, in this chapter I will mainly examine the beliefs of individuals rather than groups, as there was significant variation within each group on many of the issues concerned, as well as themes that cut across different groups. Thus, the chapter will be structured thematically rather than by case study.

6.1 Men in feminism

Almost all of the participants expressed the view that men can and should be involved in feminism. This is perhaps not surprising, as all of the groups that I studied have been open to men joining at some point. However, even those who opposed men's involvement in their groups (Maddy in the women's committee and Cath in the feminist activist group) were not averse to men's involvement in feminism more generally. For example, Maddy (24) commented, in relation to her opposition to the proposal to allow men to attend meetings:

I think people [...] got a bit defensive and took that in you know 'men don't have a place in feminism' and 'all women are against men' but it wasn't that at all, I mean we did try, we had open meetings, um, when I was Women's Officer, where anyone, even people who weren't members of the committee could come, um and then the rest of the time any woman on campus could come, but I just felt it was really important to have a space, the only space really, the only committee on campus that was women-only, and that was really really important to me.

Similarly, Cath (52) argued for the importance of women-only spaces without wishing to exclude men from feminism altogether:

I'm not a separatist [...] I'm not [...] against joint campaigns and all the rest of it, um, but I think for me there was very clearly an issue about the importance of having women-only spaces for certain feminists.

The only person who expressed a slightly different view was Martin (25, feminist discussion group), who thought that men's work towards gender justice was very important, but it was not the same as feminism:

I would call myself a profeminist rather than a feminist, uh. I think that generally I do have more sympathy with the idea of feminism as [...] a women's movement or something like that [...] [M]en calling themselves feminists doesn't sort of sit well with me, um, for various reasons and whilst I also have a lot of sympathy with the idea that sort of feminism is for everyone and [...] it's people against patriarchy or something like that, um, and I certainly think that, you know, men changing men's ideas and reaching men and those sorts of things are vitally important for the feminist project and that maybe profeminist men doing certain work or whatever can help that project, uh, I'm not sure that I think that those men are feminists or that [...] they're doing feminism, I think it's something a bit different.

This echoes the position of male writers such as Snodgrass (1977b) and Kimmel (1998) who prefer to call themselves 'profeminist' or 'anti-sexist' (rather than feminist), in order to respect the autonomy of feminism as a women's movement. It also reflects the idea of 'profeminism' as a distinct movement or project, as analysed, for example, by Ashe (2007). Ashe sees profeminism as a form of identity politics which is concerned with men's identities and their connections to gendered power relations and which supports feminism by 'problematizing traditional male identities' (p.14). In a similar manner, Brod (1998) views profeminism as 'the developing feminist politics of, by, and for men' (p.208). However, as highlighted above, the vast majority of participants

felt that men should be included in feminism. In the next section, I will consider the reasons for this.

6.2 Why include men?

A number of participants stated that it was important for men to get involved in feminism, and various reasons were given for this. Several participants expressed the view that men's involvement was needed in order for feminism to progress. For example:

I think if feminism remains women-only then it won't progress enough in society, it will become very easy to stereotype and that will become even more entrenched, whereas if [...] it's broader than that, I think there's hope for it to move forward and hopefully just become a kind of common sense norm that everyone ascribes to. (Ellie, 21, feminist activist group)

This reflects the view of feminist writers such as Schacht and Ewing (1997), Bartky (1998), Hebert (2007) and Banyard (2010) that feminism will not succeed without engaging men.

In the women's committee, Ann (19) and Maria (19) suggested that dialogue is needed between oppressed and oppressor groups in order for the dominant group to understand what needs to change. In this respect, they drew parallels between the women's committee and the racial equality committee in the student union. As women and members of minority ethnic groups, they wanted to engage with men and white people:

Maria: [White people's] input's needed [in the racial equality committee] because [...] they truly honestly don't know [...] what it feels like, they'll never know what it feels like to be discriminated against and I think that they'll have a lot more respect and a lot more... [...] I don't know the word, [...] consciousness? if they, if they listened to a person and they talked about these issues in a room, you know what I mean {Ann: yeah} and um you definitely get a [...] lot less racism that way, from understanding and through dialogue.

Ann agreed and later added that 'exactly the same goes' for the women's committee and men. In this analysis, it is precisely because men and white people are part of the problems of gender and race inequality that they need to be included in the movements to overcome those inequalities. As Maria said, if you leave out white people, 'you take away the people who need to hear it the most'. This reflects bell hooks's argument for including men in feminist struggle:

Since men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, they can only be successfully eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole (2000, p.83).

However, Maddy (24, women's committee) seemed to contest the idea that men's involvement is needed in order for feminism to succeed. Whilst she did not object to men's involvement in feminism, she did not like the idea of 'deferring' to men in the sense of saying 'we can't do this without you' or 'you have to do feminism for us'.

Others discussed more specific ways in which men can contribute to feminism. As mentioned in Chapter 4, participants in the women's committee and the feminist activist group suggested that men could bring a different point of view to feminist groups based on their own gendered experiences, and some participants felt that this alternative viewpoint could help to balance discussions or to maintain perspective. For example, Ann and Maria (women's committee) said:

Ann: I think [men's involvement is] important because you know, [...] you lose sort of perspective sometimes if you just sit in a room full of feminists all the time and talk about feminist issues, pretty soon it's just sort of spirals and, you know, we're OK because obviously we only meet for an hour every week, and so we'll go out then and like talk to the real world, but I think during that hour, I think it would be very um useful and um prudent for us maybe even, to have like a male opinion or, not a male opinion but just... {Maria: input} input, you know.

There were also ways in which men were perceived to have a particular influence. Some participants highlighted that men occupy positions of power (for example, in Parliament) which enable them to enact positive change. Meanwhile, Martin (25, feminist discussion group) and Ruth (23, DIY collective) thought that men's involvement in feminist protests could lead them to have a greater impact. For example, if men protested outside the Playboy store or a strip club, they would gain more media attention and would not be dismissed in the same way that women would be. In the past, some men's (pro)feminist activities have indeed gained greater media recognition than women's projects (see, for example, Mohan and Schultz, 2001, Goldrick-Jones, 2002), so there is some evidence to support Martin and Ruth's supposition.

Darren (20) and Joy (19) (women's committee) suggested that men are listened to more than women and therefore men's voices would lead people to take feminism more seriously. This is an aspect of male privilege that is highlighted by many feminists (for example, Tarrant, 2009). As Mohan and Schultz point out:

There is a 'text-book' illustration of this type of oppression where a person from a marginalized group has something to say, and a person with power doesn't hear them. Then another person with power restates the same idea and all of [a] sudden, it's heard by everyone in the room (2001, p.26).

Some (pro)feminists advocate using this privilege to benefit feminism (for example, Ravarino, 2008, Tarrant, 2009). However, Helen (24, feminist discussion group) strongly objected to this kind of argument:

The one thing I don't like and I can't remember where I last came across this is where people argue that we need men involved because people listen to men and if men say something then that'll get listened to, which is true, but they're listening to them because they're a man so the actual foundation, everything they're saying is male privilege and males being more respected in society than women and I think we need to you know [...] I think most [...] successful social movements have come from the people who are trying to liberate themselves and eventually they do get listened to and I think that's, that's really important.

Here, Helen raises the importance of women's self-representation, an issue that I will discuss further in section 6.4.

A strongly recurring theme was that men's involvement could affect how feminism is seen by others, for example, by challenging stereotypes, showing that feminist issues affect everyone or making feminism seem less 'extreme':

I think that men have a massively important part to play and I think that when people like Bill Bailey or whoever say 'yeah actually I'm a feminist [...], then people who previously had the stigma of you know 'oh all feminists are lesbians' or 'all feminists are butch, um, football playing women' and then you know you get someone step up and say 'you know I'm a feminist' that they wouldn't expect, um, then it would change things. (Darren, 20, women's committee)

I think [men's involvement is] important in terms of [...] encouraging the acceptance of feminism and you know showing people that it, the issues do affect everyone. (Tracey, 24, feminist activist group)

[Y]ou probably need to have men involved so that it doesn't seem as, like, as an extremism as well, because if it's just this thing that one group of

people are kind of striving for, then it won't really be taken as seriously as if it's a general consensus within society that this, that and the other needs to be changed. (Eve, 20, women's committee)

The kinds of stereotypes outlined above and the idea of feminism as extremism can cause problems for feminists and, whilst participants here are discussing how others see the groups, it is important to consider the extent to which they themselves may have absorbed negative discourses about feminism. This is an issue that I will discuss further, along with a more general consideration of the image of feminism, in the next chapter.

Several participants suggested that men's visible involvement in feminist groups and activities could encourage other men to get involved or to engage with feminism. For example, Ruth (23, DIY collective) noted that:

to have a band that's overtly feminist like Bikini Kill, to have a guy in the band isn't like, doesn't make them any kind of worse, it, for me it's like, all the guys could be like 'well there's a guy in the band, in an overtly feminist band, that's OK to be feminist, like, this is cool, I can do it too, it's not an issue, I don't have to feel challenged by feminism, I don't have to feel pushed out by it, I can be a part of it' and I think that's good as well for representation.

Some participants also felt that it could encourage more women to get involved. Thus, men's involvement could potentially make feminism more appealing.

Lastly, some argued for men's involvement in feminism on moral grounds. For example, Susie (23) said that one of the reasons for opening up the women's committee meetings to men was the idea that 'men should be able to be involved in feminism if they wish to be' and Fay (21, women's committee) argued that men should not be excluded from feminist groups when they wanted to help. Thus, the reasons that participants gave for the inclusion of men in feminism were quite diverse and, as in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, included both practical and moral considerations (see the section on 'Men doing feminism' in Chapter 2).

6.3 Men's interests

Participants' understandings of men's interests may help to explain their support for men's involvement in feminism. Participants did not seem to see men's and women's interests as inherently contradictory, as may be found in some feminist

accounts (for example, Redstockings, 1970, The Trouble & Strife Collective, 1983/2010), and none of them mentioned men's interests in maintaining the current gender order, which Connell has conceptualised as a 'patriarchal dividend' (2002, 2005). Furthermore, some participants explicitly mentioned that patriarchy harms men as well as women, which implies that men also stand to benefit from feminism. For example, Rose (20, women's committee) said:

I think guys do face, even though we face sort of like gender inequality in the sense, like social sense and also like, um, politically, economically and stuff, I think guys have it really hard in terms of social like, this like idea that boys need to be macho all the time, you know what I mean, and like the arty like weedy boys get picked on at school and stuff, so I do think it's, like a, a flip.

James (30, feminist discussion group) explained that one of the ways in which men can contribute to feminism is in 'challenging masculine values', which can help men as well as women:

[T]he idea we had with the men's group is trying to do a zine that would be about feminism is good for men in a way that, yeah you know like challenging all the competition values and the fact that, you know [...], it's not OK to, um, to share your feelings or your emotion[s] or [...] why you always have to be responsible or to be strong or to be the breadwinner, you know these sort of [...] stereotypes that, that actually, yeah, don't necessarily make you really happy, they give you [...] a lot of power and a good position but um, [...] challenging that isn't just useful to sort of [...] help [women's] liberation, but it is [...] I see it as really good for men as well.

These participants reflect ideas developed in the profeminist men's movement and in critical studies of men and masculinities about the ways in which the current gender order impacts on men. Thus, Rose echoes the view in the masculinities literature that some men are marginalised or subordinated in relation to others (see Connell, 2005), and both participants support the idea that living up to hegemonic masculine norms is harmful for men (see, for example, Pleck and Sawyer, 1974, Seidler, 1997). James points out that traditional masculine roles give men power as well as being potentially restrictive. Thus, he seems to agree with Kimmel's view that '[m]en's pain is caused by men's power' (1998, p.64; see also Kaufman, 1994). Overall, both participants support the view that men stand to benefit from feminism. As Kimmel argues:

men should want to support feminist reforms: not only because of an ethical imperative [...] but also because men will live happier and healthier lives, with better relations with the women, men, and children in their lives if they do (1998, p.59).

Lambert and Parker also noted the influence of the discourses of profeminism and critical studies of men and masculinities in their research with members of a mixed-gender student feminist group, the Warwick Anti-Sexism Society (WASS):

What distinguishes the approach adopted by WASS is that it is theoretically embedded in the combined insights of feminism and the critical men's studies tradition [...]. What emerged as particularly significant for us was the ways in which many of the students' concerns to engage the active inclusion of men [in the group] came about as a result of their academic work around gender, sexualities and, in particular, masculinities (2006, pp.476-77).

They go on to say that the 'take-home message' for many students from the study of masculinities 'appears to be that men as well as women have much to "benefit" from a rejection of patriarchy' (p.479). Although the participants in my study had not necessarily engaged with this literature, they seemed to share these ideas, which suggests that the study of men and masculinities has influenced feminist thinking and practice. This is particularly interesting given that some theorists have argued that feminists generally neglect to take into account the insights of masculinity studies regarding differences and power relations amongst men and instead continue to view men as monolithic and oppressive (Ashe, 2004, Hebert, 2007).

As well as recognising that men are harmed by patriarchy, some participants saw this harm as a starting point for engaging men in gender politics. In discussing men's role in feminism, Martin (25, feminist discussion group) said:

[T]here's loads of things that could be focused on in terms of educational stuff, you know, um, profeminist men in schools, outreach type stuff I suppose, um and [...] other stuff to do with, um, supporting men and looking after men who are kind of, uh, damaged by and don't like their roles within patriarchy, and I think it's you know, often overlooked that patriarchy is really shit for men as well (laughs) and that um it's clearly not as shit as it is for women but I think [...] there's a certain amount of political work that could be done in the area of like reaching all the men who are dissatisfied with their lot.

Indeed, in the feminist activist group, Chris (22) had partly been drawn to feminism by (his) own discomfort with gender norms and (his) experience of gender-based oppression:

I've not like faced any discrimination for being a woman or whatever but, um, I have like faced discrimination for like not meeting like, not measuring up to male standards... so um, and you know, so that's like one of the things why like gender stuff's always interested me.

The literature suggests that other (pro)feminists have had similar experiences (see, for example, WASS Collective, 2007). Again, the participants quoted above show the influence of profeminism, which, according to Ashe, 'emerged as a form of politics that viewed men's identities as sites for political engagement in gender politics' (2007, p.13). Participants' comments show the combined influence of the 'anti-sexist' and 'men's liberation' tendencies within the profeminist men's movement, whereby dismantling patriarchy is linked to challenging traditional male identities and thus potentially liberating men from restrictive gender norms (for discussion, see, for example, Goldrick-Jones, 2002, Ashe, 2007).

The idea that men are harmed by patriarchy may help to explain my participants' willingness to include men in feminism. Whilst only a few of them explicitly discussed men's interests in relation to feminism, as I have indicated above, none of them appeared to see men's and women's interests as inherently conflicting. Like Tarrant (2009), the activists in my study appeared to reject a zero-sum model of power, in which any gains for women must be losses for men. As Bryson (1999) points out, the idea that feminism can benefit everyone is likely to lead feminists to see men as potential allies, which may partly account for the widely held view amongst my interviewees that men should be part of the feminist movement.

6.4 Men's role in feminism

Whilst participants generally agreed that men should be involved in feminism, they differed in terms of the role that they envisaged for men in the movement. A significant number of participants felt that men should be in a supporting role, reflecting the 'men's auxiliary' model discussed in Chapter 4, although others reflected the 'equal partners' approach. Some envisaged men's role as primarily

working with other men, and some felt that men's role would change depending on context. Meanwhile, some participants suggested things that men *could* do, rather than (or as well as) emphasising what they *should* do. Below, I will outline these various perspectives.

The 'men's auxiliary'

A majority of interviewees in the women's committee and the feminist activist group suggested that men should occupy a supporting role, or emphasised the importance of women's leadership, either within feminist groups or within the movement as a whole. For example, Claire (21, feminist activist group) said that men's role in the group is 'emphatically not to lead it', or, in other words, 'shut the fuck up and listen'. Meanwhile, Tracey (24, feminist activist group) said:

I think the main thing is... that I don't think we're at a stage yet, even though it would be quite easy to think we are in terms of you know how far we've come, where we need men to be leading things for instance in say talks or conferences that kind of thing, so I think, um, involvement is important but just I think it would be very easy to slip back into sort of leadership roles and I think we still need to sort of actively work against that.

These comments appear to support the 'men's auxiliary' model of men's (pro)feminist engagement discussed in Chapter 4, in which men remain accountable to feminist women (see Kimmel, 1998). For many people, this model was linked to the concept of women's self-determination or self-empowerment. For example:

I do think [men's role] should be a more supportive role, because [...] one of the things you're trying to get round is... society, dominated by men, telling women what they should and shouldn't do, so [...] in a feminist world that obviously doesn't make sense; you've gotta have women deciding for themselves what they want [...] and men then supporting that. (Zoe, 22, feminist activist group)

This is a common viewpoint amongst feminists, expressed, for example, by feminist blogger Michelle (2008):

[O]nly women know what is best for women. Liberatory, revolutionary politics need to be originated by those seeking liberation/revolution, who experience oppression/subordination, not by those who belong to the privileged group.

Sometimes, the rationale for women's leadership or self-representation was linked to women's experiences of gender-based oppression. Susie (23) and Karen (20) (women's committee), like Michelle, felt that movements should be led by the people who experience oppression. They believed that oppressed groups have access to a specific form of experiential knowledge which gives them insight into discrimination. Karen commented:

I think it's important [for the committee to be led by women] because at the end of the day women are still a minority and [...] I still think also there's more subtle things that you pick up from being a woman which you perhaps don't as a man, as in behaviour towards him and even the most little things. And I think, [...] it's much more, easier to observe them and sort of get frustrated about them.

This reflects the 'identity-paradigm' identified by Henry Rubin (1998), in which feminism is grounded in female experience. This position is expressed, for example, by Stanley and Wise (1993, p.32):

We reject the idea that men can be feminists because we argue that what is essential to 'being feminist' is the possession of 'feminist consciousness'. And we see feminist consciousness as rooted in the concrete, practical and everyday experience of being, and being treated as, a woman.

Susie and Karen do not completely subscribe to the identity-paradigm, as they believe that men *can* be feminists, but they do think that women's experiences place them in a privileged position in relation to feminism. Thus, the concept of women's experience is used to differentiate women as a group from men as a group and to allocate them particular roles within the feminist movement.

In fact, the concept of gendered experience was important in all of the groups in various ways. For example, as I discussed in Chapter 4, the feminist discussion group was based on the idea of sharing different gendered experiences. The importance that participants ascribed to the concept of gendered experience is not surprising, as the notion of 'women's experience' has played a fundamental role in feminist thinking (see, for example, Grant, 1993, Ashe, 2004). Alsop et al. (2002, p.222) argue that identity-based movements such as feminism are based on the idea that there are identifiable groups of people with shared experiences who can organise around a collective identity. This identity-based approach:

presumes a commonality amongst women. It assumes that, even if women are divided according to ethnicity, class, age, and so on, there is still some sameness based on gender, some common ground or experiences to unite them (Alsop et al., 2002, p.223).

This idea is implicit in Susie and Karen's reference to women's experiences and is more explicit in the following quote from Sophie (40-55, feminist discussion group):

[I]t's not as if there's an automatic sympathy [in a women's group] because there are bound to be women that you might not get on with, that's gonna happen, but that doesn't matter because the whole sort of umbrella of being just women together will sort it out anyway, even if there are personality differences.

As Ashe (2004) points out, the idea of women's shared experience as the basis for feminist politics has been widely criticised (see, for example, Mohanty, 1992, Grant, 1993, hooks, 2000), precisely because it tends to obscure differences between women in terms of race, class, and other dimensions of power. For example, hooks (2000, p.4) writes, in a critique of feminist writer Leah Fritz:

While it is evident that many women suffer from sexist tyranny, there is little indication that this forges 'a common bond among all women.' There is much evidence substantiating the reality that race and class identity creates differences in quality of life, social status, and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share—differences that are rarely transcended.

My research shows that, despite these criticisms, the concept of shared gendered experience remains an important conceptual tool for some activists.

Whilst many participants shared the 'men's auxiliary' approach described above, Joanne (24, feminist activist group) thought that both men and women could play leading roles within feminism:

I think it would be better if [...] men were integrated into the feminist movement so that there were no exclusive male or female groups, um, and I think they could take maybe some leading roles, although obviously women should also lead.

This reflects more of an 'equal partners' model of men's engagement (see Chapter 4). Darren (20, women's committee) did not see men and women as having different roles within feminism, which also suggests an equal partners approach:

I think different people have different roles. [...] If you are a feminist then ultimately you believe that there are very little differences between men and women, um, and to say you know 'oh my role is to do such and such because I'm a man' would be kind of stupid, but [...] there will always be people that are experts in certain areas.

Thus, Darren suggested that roles within a feminist group would depend on an individual's particular knowledge and skills, rather than their gender.

Sam (age unknown, feminist discussion group) thought that women would probably take on a leading role in any feminist movement, but did not argue this from a normative perspective:

JB: [W]ithin a kind of gender liberation movement or a feminist movement that was inclusive, [...] d'you think kind of women should lead that movement or d'you think just men and women should participate in it equally, or...

Sam: Well I think, in that movement, [...] not by excluding men but by the nature of [it], I think there will be, I dunno, depending what you mean by word leadership probably (pause). [...] I would think it would be more, [...] it would be predominantly female, predominantly [women] in today's society. Why? Because it's easier for a female or for a woman to see the discrimination, domination that's happening, so in that sense yes, not by sort of passing a rule that, you know, women will be in [a] position of power, but just by the nature of what's happening.

Interestingly, Sam draws on the concept of gendered experience to support this point of view. (His) suggestion that women are more able to see discrimination and gendered power relations is similar to the argument put forward by Susie and Karen earlier. (He) went on to say that women would predominate in the movement because of their experiences and the fact that it is 'easier, sort of, if you have personal experience, to talk about it rather than talk about something which is somebody else's personal experience, something you read about'. Thus, like Susie and Karen, (he) highlighted the value of experiential knowledge.

Working with other men

Another prescriptive role that was put forward by participants was that men should work with other men. This was articulated by Helen (24, feminist activist group):

[F]or me like, men's role in feminism is supportive and is in challenging masculinity and dealing with issues related to men and male violence against women. I mean I think [...] the White Ribbon Campaign are awesome, like that they, you know, they're not tagging onto a women's group, [...] they're doing their own thing, they're challenging what they can see is a problem with masculinity and with men and I think that's, I think that's men's role.

This quote reflects the view of profeminism as a separate movement or project and also the idea that profeminist practice involves the interrogation of male identities and masculinities, as highlighted by Ashe (2007).

As mentioned earlier, James (30) and Martin (25) (feminist discussion group) also emphasised the importance of men working with other men, although they did not think that this was the only thing that men could or should do. James said that an important role for men was 'challenging themselves [...] and challenging each other but also sort of being ready to be challenged by women and by other men'. This meant being able to listen to criticism of their behaviour without becoming defensive. Another role suggested by James that related directly to men was 'challenging masculine values', which I discussed in the previous section (6.3). Meanwhile, Martin emphasised the kind of educational and outreach work that profeminist men could do with other men.

Context

For some participants, men's roles would depend on context. Sophie (40-55, feminist discussion group) suggested that men's and women's roles might differ in different areas of feminist practice:

JB: [D]'you think men and women like have an equal role in feminism or d'you think it should be led by women or...

Sophie: Um, an equal role in feminism, I suppose [...] they have an equal responsibility, um, and [...] they have to, you know, I suppose be open to education about it, um, I mean you know women had to protest and fight for the vote and that sort of thing and you do have to persist and keep on going, you know with lots of things, um, so I guess when it comes to the sort of, the platform of politics, um, you know men do have to be very strident about it too in, you know making sure there are, you know, [...] rape crisis centres, you know, for women, trying to, to de-establish um, you know the legitimacy of prostitution and safeguarding, you know, women who are involved in it, and trying to find other lifestyles for them, and then I suppose you know being open to education, you know about how to be happy with ourselves, our bodies, you know, and negotiative sexual

relationships that don't, you know, sort of involve, [...] the usual sort of iconic sexual behaviour that most women don't want [...] [S]o I would say that they have an equal responsibility but women need to feel strong together in educating them and, and they need the support from men, you know, who are already sort of elucidated by that as well.

Sophie begins by talking about men and women having equal responsibility for pursuing feminist aims, but then she goes on to talk about women educating men, suggesting that they occupy different positions in relation to feminist knowledge. Thus, it seems that in some areas (for example, political campaigning) men can take on similar roles to women, but in the area of developing egalitarian sexual relationships, women are in the role of teachers and men of learners. Therefore, men's and women's roles depend on the specific area of feminist practice in question.

Zoe (22) and Tracey (24) (feminist activist group) also suggested that men's role would vary depending on context. Whilst they both agreed that men should not take on leadership roles, they thought that men's precise role would vary according to the particular campaign they were undertaking. They felt that in general it was good for men to get involved in campaigns, for example, collecting signatures for a petition, but if they were campaigning on a sensitive topic like rape or domestic violence, men's presence might not be appropriate. This adds to the point made in previous chapters that the impact of men's involvement in feminist activism is context-specific.

Lastly, some participants did not give a prescriptive account of men's role in feminism but instead suggested specific things that men could do, such as joining in with feminist protests, providing childcare at feminist events, talking to their male friends about feminist issues, or campaigning on issues that affect them directly, such as paternity leave. Thus, overall, participants' discussions of men's role in feminism included a mixture of normative and non-normative approaches. Whilst many participants thought that men should occupy a supporting role within feminism, some felt that it would be acceptable for men to take on prominent or even leading roles within the movement. A number of participants highlighted the tasks that men could undertake specifically *as men*, which often included working with other men and, for some participants, this was the primary role for (pro)feminist men. However, some did not see men and

women as having distinct roles and, furthermore, some participants suggested that men's role could change depending on context.

6.5 Women-only space

Another issue on which there was disagreement amongst participants was whether or not women-only groups and spaces were justified or necessary. In Chapter 4, I briefly discussed some of the arguments that were made around the inclusion or exclusion of men in the women's committee and the feminist activist group. Here, I would like to examine the issue of women's versus mixed groups in greater detail, focusing more on general principles and underlying theories and thus broadening out from the question of men's involvement in specific groups.

The strongest argument against women-only groups was given by Sam (age unknown, feminist discussion group). (He) believed that they were fundamentally antithetical to the values of gender equality, commenting that: 'I don't understand how [...] somebody can work for an equal society through non-equal organising way[s]'. (He) also suggested that women-only groups are 'discriminating the other way round'. In the women's committee, Imogen (18) made a somewhat similar argument when she suggested that it would be hypocritical to exclude men from the group that was campaigning for equality. For these participants, women-only groups contravened the principle of equality. However, Helen (24, feminist activist group) gave an alternative perspective based on a different understanding of equality. Referring to the women's committee's decision to include men, she said:

I just don't see why you need a man on that committee at all, I think it's completely bizarre and I think the arguments about it's, you know, we're promoting equality so we have to have men there, it's ridiculous, it's not, equality isn't about everyone being the same, it's about ensuring that everyone is able to have equal access to power and, well, everything in society and sometimes that means privileging different groups and sometimes that means allowing those groups a platform that isn't affected by what is the dominant voice which is the male voice.

This reflects Kettle's (2007) analysis of discourses around gender representation officers⁴⁷ at universities, in which the concept of equality was

⁴⁷ Such as women's, men's or equality officers.

crucial and different students used different definitions of equality to justify their diverse positions:

The main attribute proponents are trying to claim for themselves is that their solution will most effectively achieve 'equality'. Thus those who advocate just women's officers [as opposed to women's and men's officers] focus on achieving equality in the long term in order to justify using one form of inequality to challenge another. Conversely, those who oppose this position claim that the differential treatment of women works against the concept of gender equality. In both cases advocates explicitly support 'equal rights', and position themselves against a constructed opponent who does not understand the 'true' notion of equality (Kettle, 2007, p.55).

This shows one of the ways in which discussions about men in feminism are underpinned by particular understandings of specific concepts, a theme that I will explore throughout the chapter.

The participants in the DIY collective also expressed qualms about women-only groups and events, although they did not display such strong hostility as Sam. As mentioned in the previous chapter, both Ruth (23) and Abi (23) said that women-only groups or spaces could feel great, but they would not organise women-only events themselves as they aim to be inclusive. Abi also suggested that women-only events or other safe spaces simply create 'bubbles' and may amount to preaching to the converted, as shown in the following two excerpts:

I think that's where kind of like the UK riot grrrl stuff kind of falters sometimes [...], that's where I think it faltered in the 90s in that it was so, like, it wasn't encouraging guys to kind of get involved so much, it was very much an assault on (laughing) like, on men in DIY and punk and like, [...] I guess like it needs that but I think if [...] opinions could be changed it needs to be, more, [...] well less like ghettoising yourselves and that kind of thing, that's what I really struggle with like when I go to stuff around the country that other people are putting on, I don't feel like it's [...] changing anyone's opinions 'cause it's kind of like preaching to the converted.

I think with [women-only groups] there's also problems because like life isn't like that, you're not constantly surrounded by women that are interested in the same kind of things I am or like queer people, it's like life isn't like that and [...] I think it's really backwards to create these little bubbles. I guess it's kind of good in a way where it's like you're in a safe place and if that's what you wanna do then that's fine, but I'd sooner kind of have like a whole range of people together.

Her comments suggest that it is important to engage with a wide range of people, including men, in order to bring about positive change. Her description

of safe or comfortable spaces is similar to Reagon's (2000) concept of 'home'. For Reagon, 'home' is a barred room, a place that feels safe but is also restrictive, that can 'become a nurturing place or a very destructive place' (p.344). Reagon suggests that home is needed as a safe place to retreat to, but you cannot stay there permanently: you have to leave the closed room and engage in the dangerous work of coalition with other people who may be very different from you. Whilst Reagon primarily used the metaphor of home to discuss black women's exclusion from (white) feminist spaces, it also seems to be an apt metaphor for discussing women-only spaces and men's relationship to feminism.

Other participants who preferred the idea of mixed feminist groups to women's groups included Joanne (24, feminist activist group) and Darren (20, women's committee). Joanne thought that it would be better if men were integrated into the feminist movement, rather than having separate women's and men's groups, and Darren thought that 'all women's committees should have either male discussion, male participation, or male representation, at some level' because feminists need to engage with men in order to bring about change, and they cannot do this without any discussion at the committee level.

Those who argued in favour of women-only groups gave various reasons for this. Firstly, there was the principle of self-representation, which I have already discussed in relation to men's role in feminism. This was articulated very clearly by Maddy (24, women's committee) when she defended her desire for the group to be women-only:

I mean it's not just a personal preference that I feel more comfortable talking about feminism in front of women and, um, you know perhaps if there were lots of men there [...] they would feel defensive or you'd have to justify yourself, I just think in principle, [...] I think it's women who should make the decisions about what the women's committee does.

Interestingly, some other participants in the women's committee similarly valued self-representation, but did not believe that it necessitated a women-only group. Some committee members defended women's leadership of the group on the grounds of self-representation, but still argued that men should be allowed to attend meetings. For example, Alice (20) explained why she did not think men should be allowed to become committee members:

I think they definitely should come to meetings, um, and I want there to be more men that come to meetings but I think as a committee like similarly to like racial equality like I think you should have like, [...] I dunno how to describe it, [...] like in cliché terms like the oppressed people should emancipate themselves.

Thus, for Alice (and some others in the committee), self-emancipation could be achieved within a mixed group as long as women directed the group. It may be that self-representation had different meanings for different people, that for Maddy it meant autonomous, women-only organising, whereas for Alice it simply meant women setting the agenda, or it may be that they were both concerned with women setting the terms of their own liberation, but that Maddy was simply more sceptical about the possibility of women being able to do that in a mixed context. Once again, my data show that seemingly straightforward feminist concepts may take on subtle differences in meaning when they are employed by activists.

Martin (25, feminist discussion group) linked the issue of self-representation with the question of how members of dominant groups tend to think and act:

[I]f you think of say white people involved in the civil rights movement in America [...] clearly there were some ways in which, you know, white people's support for equal rights was really important and other ways in which, um, self-organisation and self-determination of the kind of oppressed group is absolutely core and key, and almost needs to be done away from the oppressive group, who are sort of you know in terms of [...] their mind, their way of thinking and stuff almost always really, even unintentionally, unhelpful and oppressive and crap.

This reflects Patricia Yancey Martin's (2006) insight, discussed in the previous chapter, that 'good people' can do harm by practising gender in a non-reflexive way (p.255). This issue of the ways in which dominant group members tend to behave was one of the reasons which Cath (52, feminist activist group) gave to justify women-only groups (see Chapters 4 and 5). Angela (48, feminist discussion group) also recognised that these kinds of dynamics could be a problem and therefore that women-only groups could be needed in certain circumstances, even though overall she preferred mixed groups:

I'm really not interested in separatism. I understand why it exists, I mean I was talking to an Italian girl at a party recently, [...] and she was saying that in Italy they had to have separatist groups because it was just so macho

there that they couldn't have a group where men could [...] participate, but I don't feel in England that's the case.

This raises the important point that different feminist strategies may be needed in different social contexts.

Others argued for women-only spaces on the grounds that they themselves or other women are more comfortable without men present. For example, Helen (24, feminist activist group) said:

I do feel like personally I behave differently when men are around and [...] I still have a sort of backwards thing that I need to show off and impress and [...] I don't like that, I like being with all women so I can just, I don't know, I find it more relaxing, I think a lot of other women do as well.

This reflects the concept of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1975/1995) discussed in Chapter 5: the process whereby women adjust their own behaviour in response to men's presence.

Others suggested that women-only spaces were needed to discuss certain topics, a theme that was touched on in Chapter 4. For example, Cath (52, feminist activist group) said:

[W]hat proportion of women have experienced rape and domestic violence? Well OK rape might be one of the things you might talk about in a women's group. In some way I don't care how understanding or empathic or politically aware our male colleagues are, you know, I am not gonna comfortably talk about those things in that sort of forum and I wouldn't expect any other woman to do [it].

Claire (21, feminist activist group) also expressed this view, but for her this problem could be solved through organising occasional women-only meetings or asking men to leave if the discussion became particularly sensitive, rather than creating a women-only group.

Sometimes, when discussing these issues, participants focused on the idea of women-only groups as safe spaces. Nobody explicitly defined this term, but it seemed to be used in two ways. In some accounts, 'safe space' simply referred to a space in which women would feel comfortable, particularly those women who would not be comfortable in men's presence. For example, Ellie (21, feminist activist group) said:

[A] few of the women who were coming, um, expressed kind of privately outside the meetings they were finding it difficult when men were there and also, um, one of the women who works with women who've been victims of sexual abuse, [...] a couple of people she knew had wanted to come but they felt deeply uncomfortable about there being men there, which then started to affect that woman's perception of men being there, so it kind of became [...], like there was an inherent tension between wanting men to be involved but also wanting there to be a safe space for women in [the city] because it was the only feminist group.

For others, safe space referred more specifically to a place in which women would be able to talk about experiences of violence or oppression. This is implied in the following quote from Fay (21, women's committee):

[T]here was a lot of talk about [the committee] being like a women's only safe space and I can understand that, but actually I think that if someone came to me and Rose and said you know, something awful has happened to me, this wouldn't be an appropriate space anyway to talk about it, it's not a self-help group.

These different interpretations of the concept of safe space had implications for decisions about group membership. As shown in the quote above, Fay suggests that since the committee is not an appropriate place to discuss distressing personal experiences, this negates the need for a safe space and therefore the need for the group to be women-only. Her narrower interpretation of safe space makes it easier to dismiss the idea and, with it, the importance of a women-only group.

A clear theme that emerges here, and one that I touched on in Chapter 4, is that the gendered membership of a group is closely linked to the group's purpose. In the quote above, Fay suggested that the group did not need to be women-only because it was not a support group, and Susie (23) and Karen (20) made a similar argument. In the feminist activist group, Joanne (24) also argued that the group did not need to be women-only because it was not a support group (see Chapter 4). Still on the theme of group purpose, several participants suggested that mixed and women-only groups could fulfil different functions. For example:

I think it depends what the groups are aiming to do really, I mean [...] if it is a consciousness-raising, gender-questioning type kind of group then I think to do that as a mixed group is really good, I think it's good to learn what [...] other genders feel they've been socialised like and what they have to deal with and we can help each other challenging that, but I think if it's more of a, you know like ours was to start with it is more of a women [trying to] find

our place and find our voice and deal with all this anger and frustration and personal issues, I think that's, I think having an all-women group for that is really supportive, I think that's really positive. (Helen, 24, feminist activist group)

[U]ltimately you want everyone to be a feminist so you need men involved, but I think there does need to be a role for women's only groups, um, but more on the kind of like safe space offering kind of discussion groups, um and ideally I think kind of in every city there should be two groups like one for women's only that offers safe space, uh offers kind of women-only-led campaigning and more of a (exhales) it sounds really clichéd but more of [a] kind of empowerment role and then a mixed group that just tries to kind of get the ideas out there. (Ellie, 21, feminist activist group)

Thus, for some participants, mixed and women's groups could be complementary strategies. As mentioned previously, almost all of the participants thought that men should be involved in feminism in some way; thus, even those who argued for the importance of women-only groups envisaged them existing alongside other types of feminist groups and activities. Some participants also felt that there was a place for men's groups and, again, saw these as existing alongside and complementing mixed and women's groups.

Overall, the different opinions that participants held about women-only groups reflected different feminist perspectives and different understandings of key concepts such as equality, self-representation and safe space. In some cases, participants' own experiences with men also helped to shape their opinions. As Luxton (1993) points out:

Women bring to feminist politics their own individual experiences of men. Some have a history of loving intimacy with men so that they are comfortable in the presence of men. Others who have direct experience of violence at the hands of men find that the presence of any man triggers those past horrible memories. Even women who live intimately with men they deeply love have unpredictably contradictory feelings about those men (p.349).

She goes on to say that '[w]omen bring those feelings into the women's movement, sometimes consciously, often unconsciously, and such feelings enter the dynamics of feminist politics' (p.350).

I asked female participants about their own interactions with men outside of the feminist groups. In some instances, particular experiences with men had shaped participants' views of men in feminism. For example, Angela (48,

feminist discussion group) said that an early experience of a violent relationship led her to have an aversion to men:

I think actually at one time I actually did have an aversion to men, I think it was after being in a very violent relationship when I was quite young, [...] so therefore I actually decided I didn't really like men that much and for a period I was quite anti-men, um, and I s'pose yeah so then things I read just fed into that because I think at that time there was quite a lot of um, you know feminist books that were more in that direction, were more extreme, um, you know like sort of Andrea Dworkin type stuff.

However, a later encounter with a feminist man led her to a more positive view of men:

[T]hat experience made me sort of change in, you know that not all men are bastards, there are nice men and, and I suppose that's why I've got space, I don't really believe in separatism and I do still believe in challenging and not letting men get away with stuff and, you know so that [...] things can be better, and the more that I think women do that, the better.

As her quotes indicate, her feelings about men influenced the types of feminism that she was interested in and her views about men in feminism.

Cath (52, feminist activist group) had a whole range of experiences with men, from working in a male-dominated institution and dealing with abusive men in her work, to close and positive relationships with male friends, family members and her partner. Her professional experiences of working with men (as well as her previous experience of mixed-gender feminist groups, discussed in Chapter 5) made her aware of the kind of power dynamics that can develop in a mixed-gender context. This fed into her preference for women-only groups:

[B]ecause of [my] work in sexual violence... I've been lucky enough to be able to work with men who are interested in the issues of sexual violence, [...] who've been up for the sort of discussions that you need to have to work comfortably and safely in the arena of sexual violence. [...] [I]n the past I've had really good professional relationships with men who've if you like committed themselves to working collaboratively and, (exhales) what's the word, in a very anti-oppressive way, [...] but the dynamic of wanting to take control has always crept in so again [...], I go back to that thing, it's always had to be managed to some extent and been consciously thought through.

She was concerned that in the feminist activist group they had not discussed the group dynamics in the way that she was used to doing at work, but she also

preferred to be in a women's group because it meant that she did not have to worry about those dynamics.

In other cases, personal experiences with men did not seem to fit with participants' political perspectives. For example, Joanne (24, feminist activist group) did not have much contact with men and generally seemed to prefer women's company, but argued for men to be included in the feminist activist group:

[A]ctually I don't have many male friends which makes it seem a bit strange that I'm arguing for men to be in the group, um, but no (laughs) I live in a very feminine environment, um, I have a girlfriend, [...] most of my friends are straight women, um, I have maybe one gay male friend who I don't see that much and some male acquaintances, um, and I actually feel more comfortable in seminars with female seminar tutors and I wouldn't really like a male supervisor for my dissertation, but (laughing slightly/smiling) I don't dislike men, um, and I get on with men who aren't stereotypically laddish.

Thus, personal experiences with men did not determine participants' political views, but could help to shape them in some cases.

Above, I have briefly outlined the different perspectives on men and feminism expressed by participants. They generally shared the view that men should be involved in feminism, but differed in terms of how they viewed men's role within feminism and in their opinions about women-only groups. This analysis allows me to refine the different models of men's relationship to feminism put forward in Chapter 4. It shows that participants differed in their beliefs about men's relationship to feminism not only in terms of the relative position of men and women within the movement (i.e. the 'men's auxiliary' versus 'equal partners' models), but also in the extent to which they viewed men as having a unique role (often focused on working with other men) as opposed to contributing more generally to feminism, and in terms of whether or not women-only groups are needed. This supports the idea put forward in my literature review, inspired by Bryson (1999), that the 'man question' in feminism is in fact a series of interlinked questions. It also builds on the work of theorists such as Ashe (2007) and Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn (2009), who have sought to explore the nuances of men's different positionings in relation to feminism. I will now move on to consider how participants conceptualised feminism itself.

6.6 Defining feminism

Participants defined feminism in many different ways, for example, in terms of issues or concerns, aims, a way of thinking, or particular practices. Many stressed the diversity or breadth of feminism, recognising a multiplicity of feminisms. This emphasis on diversity and plurality is now a common theme in feminist writing (see, for example, Lister, 2005, Hines, 2008, Lorber, 2010). Some commented that the meaning of feminism could change over time or according to context, and some saw feminism as connected to a wider set of beliefs or political struggles. There is not space to discuss all of these issues here, but I mention them to illustrate the complexity of the concept of feminism.

Here, I am particularly concerned to examine the extent to which participants defined feminism in relation to women. This analysis is informed by theoretical debates about the relationship between women and feminism (see, for example, Delmar, 1986, Riley, 1988, Butler, 1990, Spelman, 1990, Grant, 1993, Rubin, 1998). Although it may at first seem obvious, feminism's relationship to women has been a source of considerable debate. Many theorists have questioned the idea that there is a straightforward link between feminism and women's identities, experiences, interests, or actions (see, for example, Delmar, 1986, Jónasdóttir, 1988, Butler, 1990, Grant, 1993, Ferree, 2006). Others have challenged the usefulness of the category 'woman' itself (for example, Riley, 1988, Butler, 1990). In the light of these developments, I will explore how participants understood feminism in relation to women.

When participants talked about the aims of feminism, there was a distinction between a focus on helping women and a more general focus on gender. Whilst most participants associated feminism with women in some way, a significant number defined feminism as a movement or ideology concerned with gender inequality or gendered norms more generally, sometimes suggesting that feminism should deal with issues that affect men as well as women. For example:

I think the term like feminism kind of puts people off and kinda confuses people but I think it's generally about like kind of liberation and gender equality in general [...], like obviously it is women's committee but I think like we should be open, like I think feminism should be about like if men

face discrimination as well it's like breaking down gender stereotypes in general. (Alice, 20, women's committee)

[I]t's about ensuring women [...], well and men, well, [it's] about everyone in the world being able to live their lives as they want to in a way that is free and positive and that doesn't negatively impact on other people and I think probably one of the most important things is to make sure that that definition includes gay women and it includes trans women and it includes disabled women and includes looking at men and how masculinity affects men because I think, you know one of the biggest problems is the gender binary and gender stereotypes and the way that affects men and women and the way we interact because of those stereotypes and 'cause of our understanding of gender, and I think you know feminism can help everyone basically in different ways by enabling everyone to live their lives without discrimination, free basically. (Helen, 24, feminist activist group)

Other participants' definitions of feminism did not explicitly include men's concerns but did not mention women either. For example, Abi (23, DIY collective) simply said that feminism is about fairness, whilst James (30, feminist discussion group) said that it means 'the destruction of gender roles' and 'the end of [...] sexism and the end of sexist violence'.

Those who shared this broad view of feminism tended to see the aim of feminism as supporting gender equality and/or challenging gender norms and stereotypes, as is illustrated in Alice's comments above. Some went further than this in suggesting that feminism involves challenging gender itself. This was evident in Helen's comments above about the problems of the gender binary and even more explicit in Joanne's (24, feminist activist group) definition:

JB: [W]hat does kind of feminism or being a feminist mean to you?

Joanne: Um, I suppose it means challenging [...] constructions of gender identity that create inequalities between men and women, but I suppose that means challenging the notion of gender itself and of sexual identity, so I suppose maybe my ideas are a bit nearer to queer theory than some other forms of feminism.

Thus, whilst other participants subscribed to a 'gender reform' model of feminism, these two participants fit into Lorber's (2010) description of 'gender rebellious' feminisms, which seek to dismantle gender itself.

In contrast to the above views, the majority of participants did mention women in their descriptions of feminism. For example, Joy (19, women's committee) associated feminism with a focus on women, suggesting that it means 'looking

at the role of women and seeing it politically'. Ruth (23, DIY collective) said that feminism was about supporting women and Martin (25, feminist discussion group) said that it was about 'emancipating women from patriarchy'. Meanwhile, Fay (21, women's committee) saw feminism as involving valuing women and the feminine as well as achieving equality:

[Feminism] has like a dual role because I think it's about like equalising men and women but I also then think it's about recognising the importance of women and [...] I think the danger in feminism is that sometimes we think to be equal to men we have to turn into men, and I think that actually we should say that [...] concepts that were seen as feminine are actually beneficial to the whole of society and that men should be encouraged to display those concepts as well.

Thus, she combines 'equality' and 'difference' feminisms, or Lorber's (2010) 'gender reform' and 'gender resistance' approaches.

One might expect that the definition of feminism in terms of either a focus on women or on wider concerns would map onto participants' different views about men's relationship to feminism, for example, in terms of men's role or the legitimacy of women-only groups. However, this was not always the case. In some instances, participants made it clear that a broad view of feminism led them to favour mixed-gender groups. For example, Rose (20, women's committee) linked the idea that feminism is about gender equality to the fact that she likes men to attend committee meetings:

I know initially the movement was um to liberate women but [...] I think it's just about gender equality and gender role you know what I mean, so I do really appreciate it when guys come.

Also, as I explained in Chapter 4, the views that members of the feminist activist group held about men's inclusion in the group appeared to link to their perceptions of the aims of feminism.

However, it is noticeable that Helen (24, feminist activist group) emphasised the importance of a broad and inclusive feminism (see above), but she was also one of the strongest advocates of women-only groups and also prioritised women within the groups that she was involved in:

[W]hen it comes to a mixed-gender group, my priority is to make the women feel comfortable and to ensure that the women are getting the most of it that they can, [...] if it's a mixed group and men wanna join then

that's fine but, I don't feel like, when I'm doing a lot of work with it, I don't feel like my priority is [...] their priorities.

This shows that participants were not necessarily concerned *either* with gender equality in general *or* with women, but could be interested in both. Indeed, some participants who viewed feminism as addressing gender inequality in general noted that it would still, in effect, mainly focus on women due to their position in the gender order. For example, Chris (22, feminist activist group) said:

[I]t would be nice if [the group] was sort of like about gender in a broader view which, which frankly would cover like mostly women anyway and also, um, like gay and bisexual men and then also like a tiny little bit for straight men as well so honestly I don't think that would be too much of a difference because we do already cover like women, um, including like bisexual and gay women so I don't think it would be much of a jump because either way whatever you do with it, it would be focussed mostly on women.

Interestingly, some participants felt that the meaning of feminism had changed over time, shifting from a focus on women to gender more generally. This is evident in Rose's comment above that feminism was initially about liberating women but now it is 'just about gender equality and gender role'. Others anticipated or hoped that this shift would happen in the future:

I think at the moment feminism is still largely about women's rights but as I said hopefully you know that will change and it will become more about, um, gender equality and equality in general. (Tracey, 24, feminist activist group)

This parallels the shift within academia from Women's Studies to Gender Studies (see, for example, Modleski, 1991, Richardson and Robinson, 1994). It also seems to fit in with the idea discussed earlier that involving men is seen as part of feminism progressing (see section 6.2), an idea that is also apparent in some feminist literature. For example, when outlining her vision of a 'new feminism', Walter says:

It is time [...] to move on from the hostile years, when women's anger erupted and men felt alienated from the equality movement. Now, feminism belongs to men as well as to women (1999b, pp.152-53).

Another way in which the groups reflected changes in feminism over time was in their conceptualisation of gender.

6.7 Defining gender

Hines (2008, p.20) argues that 'deconstructionist' approaches to theorising gender, including queer theory and transgender studies, have had a significant influence on feminism in recent years. Similarly, Lorber (2010) charts the development in the 1990s of 'gender rebellious feminisms', which seek to 'dismantle gender categories' and 'overturn the gendered social order' (p.12). Other researchers have shown how these approaches have influenced feminist activism: Downes (2010) and Withers (2010) highlight recent examples of queer and trans-positive feminist activism in the UK. To various degrees, the groups in my study showed the influence of queer and transgender politics, particularly in the ways in which they theorised gender.

The DIY collective was the only group that explicitly identified itself with queer politics (see Chapter 4). However, the other groups also demonstrated the influence of queer and other deconstructionist approaches. In the feminist discussion group, several participants expressed an interest in queer theory and politics. In one meeting, they had a discussion about queer theory and the abolition of the whole concept of gender identity, and one participant, who worked in academia, sent round an email explaining queer theory. In addition, the group explicitly went beyond a binary construction of gender both in its name and its rationale (as discussed in Chapter 4).

In contrast, on the face of it, the women's committee reinforced a traditional binary view of gender, as its very existence depended on the identity 'woman'. However, the definition of 'woman' employed by the committee was quite broad. The committee stated that it was open to self-defining women, which suggests a desire to ensure that trans women feel welcome, and which implies a more flexible view of sex and gender than the 'natural attitude' that one is born either male or female and retains that identity for life (Garfinkel, 1967, p.122). Furthermore, committee members supported intersex- and trans-friendly policies put forward by the LGBT committee to the student union, such as changing the 'sex' field on forms to 'gender' and the provision of unisex toilets. Members were also critical of opponents of these policies. All of this suggests that the committee could see beyond binary gender.

The feminist activist group also used a broad view of gender in determining its membership, declaring that it was open to ‘women who identify as women’. Individual group members held a range of views on gender. Joanne (24) was influenced by queer theory, as shown in her comment (in the previous section) that feminism involves ‘challenging the notion of gender itself’. Tracey (24) was also interested in queer theory but did not fully embrace it:

I’m really interested in sort of queer and that kind of debate but at the moment I wouldn’t describe myself as being actively [...] using queer theory because I think that while there is discrimination against a certain person you have to actively label people [...] in order to be able to fight for their corner.

This reflects the tension between deconstruction and ‘identity politics’ within contemporary feminist thought and practice (see, for example, Alsop et al., 2002, Lister, 2005). As Beasley remarks:

[W]ithout some recognition of women’s social and political positioning as distinct from that of men—that is, some employment of the notion of women as a distinguishable group—it is hard to imagine any meaning for feminism as a theory/politics of change (1999, p.34).

The feminist activist group held a discussion on transgender issues, showing the influence of transgender politics. However, this proved to be a divisive issue, as evidenced in Cath’s (52) comments:

I mean one of the discussions we had [...] was about... trans and I remember the discussion not because, I think it was a really important discussion, but [...] I mean I was angry because what I thought was Julie Bindel was being pilloried and she was, she was wrong, [...] I think she was offensive in what she said about trans and I know there was a celebrated article^[48] and she’s kind of apologised since then, but what I heard was Julie Bindel being rubbished, and I actually thought all the stuff that [...] people like Julie Bindel [have] done to campaign around issues like rape and sexual violence and then I remember thinking [...] and probably, you know, cheesed off a few of the women there, but you know I actually thought to myself and said in the world out there, you know there are women who are exposed to domestic violence, there are women who are struggling to bring up children, childcare is appalling, people are, you know people don’t have access to healthcare, and that’s just, that’s just here, so I’ve kind of just thought you know we need to get, they’re the kind of core and underpinning issues and we need to spend a bit more time talking about those.

⁴⁸ Bindel (2004).

The fact that the discussion about transgender issues was quite difficult suggests that different group members had different understandings of gender, with some perhaps more influenced by deconstructionist approaches than others. It also reflects the fact that the inclusion of transgender people within feminist spaces remains a source of contention within British feminist politics (see, for example, Withers, 2010, Filar, 2011).

In highlighting the ways in which the groups look beyond the gender binary, I do not suggest that they challenge this binary all the time. In fact, both in interviews and in group discussions, participants often made use of categories such as 'men' and 'women', usually in ways that tended to reinforce these categories. I would argue that this reflects the (near) impossibility of avoiding 'doing gender' in a society that is based around a binary gender division (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Nonetheless, the fact that some groups and participants (at least in theory) embraced a broader definition of gender shows the influence of recent developments in feminist theory which have seen a shift towards a 'gender rebellious' approach (Lorber, 2010).

6.8 Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored participants' beliefs about men's relationship to feminism, as well as some aspects of their more general feminist beliefs. Whilst the vast majority of participants felt that men should be included in feminism, there were disagreements amongst them about the precise way in which men should be integrated. Participants differed in terms of the role that they envisaged for men within the movement and in their views about the legitimacy of women-only groups. This highlights the diversity of perspectives within each group as well as between them. It also serves to bring out the nuances of different points of view, even amongst those who support men's involvement in feminism.

This analysis shows how participants' views are underpinned by particular understandings of specific concepts, such as equality, safe space and self-representation. Through examining the different ways in which these concepts were used, I have helped to develop a more nuanced picture of existing feminist concepts. I have also shown how disagreements sometimes stem from different

interpretations of key concepts, which suggests that in order to progress debates about the 'man question', feminists may need to examine more closely the assumptions that underpin their arguments. An important theme that arose was that men stood to benefit from feminism as well as women, suggesting that participants did not see men's and women's interests as inherently contradictory. This view is also perhaps reflected in the fact that a significant number of participants defined feminism as a movement concerned with gender equality in general, rather than a focus on women. Another important theme was the influence of queer and transgender perspectives on the groups' understandings of gender, reflecting recent developments in feminist theory and politics.

As well as exploring the nuances of individual participants' views, this chapter highlights the importance of particular concepts, such as the notion of gendered experience, for activists. It also demonstrates the influence of particular discourses, such as the critical study of men and masculinities, queer theory and transgender politics. More generally, it locates the beliefs and practices of my research participants within a broader landscape of feminist thought and practice. It shows how they are influenced by existing feminist discourses and also how they contribute to the ongoing project of feminism. Thus, it begins to contextualise their thoughts and actions. In the next chapter, I will further contextualise my case studies through exploring the links between the feminist groups and the wider social and political context of England in the early 21st century.

7 Situating my case studies

In the preceding chapters, I have explored the internal workings of the feminist groups, their feminist beliefs and practices, and I have begun to link these to wider feminist discourses. I now want to look further outwards to situate the groups within a broader social and political context. In particular, I will draw on the ideas of ‘backlash’ and ‘postfeminism’ discussed in Chapter 2 to analyse the contemporary political context in terms of gender relations and attitudes towards feminism. In the first part of the chapter, I outline the main features of this context, and I then move on to explore how it impacts on participants as individuals and on the feminist groups. Next, I will consider the influence of the specific local context of each feminist group, exploring how these local contexts shaped the groups’ experiences and mediated the effects of the broader political climate.

7.1 Contemporary gender relations

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the current context of feminist activism in Britain has been shaped by a degree of feminist progress, persisting inequality, and ambivalence towards feminism. As you might expect, participants identified continuing gender inequality in Britain and more widely. Some participants recognised progress that had been made in particular areas; Karen (20, women’s committee), for example, highlighted the progress that women have made in education over the past 100 years, but several participants also commented that there is still a lot of work to do. For example, Angela (48, feminist discussion group) said:

I just find that women are, you know tend to be villainized in lots of ways that men aren’t, you know we’re still not getting the same wages so, I mean, how anybody could say that feminism, we don’t need it today when all the wages are not the same. How many women in government? How many women in politics? You know um, all those things, in so many areas, I think you know we still have a lot of work to do so, um, I just don’t think that you know the battle has been you know finished, I think it’s still going on and, so I’m surprised. The women that sort of say they’re not a feminist I find it really strange, I don’t know how you could be a [woman] and not be a feminist.

Cath (52, feminist activist group) went as far as to say that 'we need feminism more than ever now' and linked this to the current political and economic context, mentioning the recession and global issues.

Some participants highlighted specific aspects of contemporary society and culture which concerned them. Susie (23) and Karen (20) (women's committee) were angry about the sexualisation of women and Cath (feminist activist group) made a similar point, suggesting that women actually have less sexual freedom at present than in the past:

[T]here's something about the choices that [...] some women make to kind of dress in a certain way or you know behave sexually in particular ways and I'm not sure that they're real choices, I think what's happened is [...] we've been told that you know we've got it all now and that anything is possible and what I think happens is, some women have just taken on the kind of mantle of whether it's laddish behaviour or completely indiscriminate reckless behaviour [...] [W]here I think we're at is we, women fought for freedom from rape and sexual violence and to make sexual choices [...] I think we're back in the trap, I think women are actually very very constrained at the moment in terms of sexual choices and sexual identity, choices about sexual behaviour. I actually think what we've done we've somehow come through the good stuff and come out gone out the other side and fallen into a bit of a pit.

These comments echo the concerns of many feminist activists and writers about the influence of the sex industry and the sexualised portrayal of women (for example, Levy, 2005, Banyard, 2010, Walter, 2010, OBJECT, 2011).⁴⁹ In her research on feminist anti-pornography activism, Long (2011) draws on social movement theory to argue that this context can have a mobilising effect:

[T]he process of pornification and the increasing accommodation of the porn industry within mainstream economic and even political structures [...] can be seen as a constraint on women's freedom, but it is this very constraint which, through provoking increasing unease, distress and concern amongst women [...] has also generated a new wave of activism (p.82).

This seemed to be the case for some of my participants.

⁴⁹ It is important to note that not all feminists share these concerns or frame them in the same way. There were different views amongst my research participants on these issues, with some participants describing themselves as pro-sex/sex positive, which implies a different approach to issues around women's sexuality and the sex industry (see, for example, Vance, 1992).

Other issues raised by participants included the gender pay gap, women's lack of political representation, and the negative portrayal of women in popular culture such as films. Thus, they generally agreed with Banyard's argument in *The Equality Illusion* (2010) that, despite widespread assertions that 'feminism has achieved its aims' (p.1), inequality persists in many areas.

7.2 Public attitudes towards gender and feminism

Whilst participants were concerned about ongoing inequality, they felt that many people outside of the feminist groups were unaware of this inequality and therefore did not see the need for feminism, as suggested in Angela's comment above. This fits in with the idea of 'postfeminism', a term which suggests, amongst other things, a decline in support for feminism (Hall and Rodriguez, 2003) and the idea that equality has been achieved and therefore feminism is no longer needed (McRobbie, 2009). Thus, several people commented on the need to reassert the value and relevance of feminism. Ellie (21, feminist activist group) said that 'part of my feminism is definitely about challenging the kind of complacency that is I think creeping into common perceptions where people think it's not an issue any more'. Amanda (age unknown, women's committee) described the purpose of the women's committee as follows:

Um, I think, part of it is to, I don't know to raise the issue of feminism and kind of show that it's still relevant, because a lot of people kind of dismiss it, um, and point out to people where inequalities are, um, as well as campaigning for change, just to like highlight where inequalities still exist.

In the women's committee, several participants stated that feminism is seen as less important than other liberation movements. For example:

[I]t really annoys me when people will, won't come up to you and say 'I can't believe you're a civil rights activist' but they'll come up to you and say 'I can't believe you're a feminist'. (Karen, 20)

[N]o-one questions whether or not there should be an LGBT committee, no-one questions whether or not there should be a racial equality committee, [...] but people always question why there should be a women's committee. (Rose, 20)

Fay (21) noticed the same pattern and thought that people were more afraid of being labelled racist or homophobic than misogynistic. This is somewhat similar

to Howard and Tibballs's (2003) research, in which they found that people saw sex inequality as less important than other issues.

Angela (48, feminist discussion group) said that people seem to have forgotten the meaning of feminism and Alice (20, women's committee) stated: 'I think the term feminism kind of puts people off and kinda confuses people'. Participants also commented that not many people identify as feminists and sometimes specifically highlighted that young women do not identify as feminists. For example, Susie (23, women's committee) noted that 'there does seem to be quite a minority of people of our kind of age who would say "yeah, I'm a feminist", um which is really frustrating'. This reflects another aspect of postfeminism, the notion that young women have rejected feminism (see, for example, Bolotin, 1982, Hall and Rodriguez, 2003).

This pattern of feminist disidentification (see Henry, 2004, Scharff, 2009, Dean, 2010) sometimes conforms to the 'I'm not a feminist, but...' model identified by researchers such as Griffin (1989), in which people express support for feminist aims but do not identify as feminist (see also Budgeon, 2001, Rich, 2005, Rúdólfsdóttir and Jolliffe, 2008). For example:

[P]eople are incredibly incredibly unwilling to admit they're feminists, but then they'll be like 'oh, I don't like lads' mags', you know? And like this, it's got such negative connotations and it really annoys me. (Karen, 20, women's committee)

I get quite angry with my friends who are like 'I'm not a feminist, but I believe in this and this and this', and you're like 'what's the shame attached to this word?' (Fay, 21, women's committee)

This seems to support McRobbie's (2009) idea of a 'double entanglement', which includes 'the existence of feminism as at some level transformed into a form of Gramscian common sense, while also fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated' (p.12).

Some participants also highlighted the barriers to identifying as a feminist for young women. For example, Julie (19, feminist activist group) said:

I think a lot of girls that I know kind of harbour feminist feelings but just feel that there's, they're not brave enough, if you know what I mean, to come out as a feminist, so it's, it's just, I guess it's a matter of how much you care about it, whether you come out [as] it.

Julie's reference to 'coming out', a phrase usually associated with revealing a potentially stigmatising sexual or gendered identity in a heteronormative, transphobic society, suggests that being a feminist is also a potentially stigmatising identity. It may also reflect the fact that, since feminism is frequently associated with lesbianism (Scharff, 2010), identifying as a feminist may lead to having one's sexuality called into question (see, for example, Lambert and Parker, 2006).

Joy (19, women's committee) suggested that female students do not feel able to speak out about sexual harassment:

I've spoken to my female friends about, I dunno, being groped in clubs and stuff and it's something that they don't like, but I think a lot of girls are afraid to say they don't like it because when men do things like that, it's generally the rugby team and they're really drunk and *they* find it fun so girls kind of feel like they should show that they don't mind as much. It's really hard for girls to admit that they're feminist because you get a lot of stigma, I've had a lot of stigma at uni about it.

Meanwhile, Susie (23) and Karen (20) (women's committee) thought that young women had to develop a degree of confidence before they could openly express views which differed from mainstream opinion. These experiences reflect the analyses of feminists such as McRobbie (2009) and Woodward and Woodward (2009), who have written about young women's silence. McRobbie proposes the existence of a new 'sexual contract' in which women are offered freedom and empowerment, but at the cost of abandoning feminism:

[T]he new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern sophisticated girl. Indeed this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom (2009, p.18).

Coming from a slightly different angle, Woodward and Woodward (2009) suggest that, without a knowledge of feminism, young women lack the language to describe uncomfortable experiences, such as being viewed as a sexual object. They suggest that young women are suffering from a new 'problem with no name' which parallels the dissatisfaction that Friedan identified amongst 1950s housewives.

Many participants mentioned pervasive negative connotations and stereotypes of feminism. For example:

Some girls are the most hostile to it more than anything like they don't understand they seem to think like, [...] [it] just sort of has a stigma of like you have to be like angry and hate men (laughing). (Alice, 20, women's committee)

I'm coming round to the point of view, which is not something I'm happy with, that it's actually almost better not to tell people [that I'm a feminist] and to [...] try and change their attitudes subtly because there's such a backlash against being in feminist groups, it just, it comes with a horrible set of assumptions that even [...] people who know you quite well still can't divorce the fact that you're not that stereotype, they still try and mash the two together, which is, just, I just think it's so sad for feminism, [...] because this stereotype is just growing and growing, rather than diminishing. (Ellie, 21, feminist activist group)

Other researchers have documented similar negative perceptions of feminists (for example, Callaghan et al., 1999, Gough and Peace, 2000, Howard and Tibballs, 2003, Scharff, 2010), which support the idea of a 'backlash' against feminism (Faludi, 1992).

However, some participants were more positive about the way in which feminism is viewed. For example, Darren (20, women's committee) said:

I think the vast vast majority of people are feminist, I don't think you'll find many people who you go to and say you know 'do you think men and women should be equal?' and they say 'oh no, no men should be superior'.

It is important to note that Darren was using a very minimal definition of feminism which simply involved viewing men and women as of equal value but did not exclude the idea of seeing them as having separate roles. Nevertheless, his comments support the idea of a widespread acceptance of feminist values, as witnessed in the 'I'm not a feminist, but...' phenomenon and McRobbie's (2009) idea of feminism as common sense.

Whilst Ellie (in the quote above) suggested that stereotypes are deeply entrenched, others thought that it was possible to challenge them, for example, through talking to their friends about their feminism. Helen (24, feminist activist group) said:

I like to sort of... let people know I'm a feminist without being like (putting on loud voice) 'I'm a feminist and I think this' so I, you know I'll talk about I write for [a feminist website] or you know I've done this and that and, because I think if people just see that you're a normal person you can get

on with who jokes around, who has fun, and you're a feminist, then they just, it just sort of dispels any myths about feminists.

In conclusion, participants' comments support the idea of a backlash against feminism to some extent. Many of them highlighted negative stereotypes of feminists and some were more optimistic than others about the possibility of challenging these. Overall, at the very least we can say that these activists are operating in a climate characterised by ambivalence towards feminism, which is suggested by the term 'postfeminism' (see Chapter 2). In the next section, I will consider the effects of this climate on the experiences and practices of the participants.

7.3 Negotiating the terrain of postfeminism

What is it like to be a feminist activist in the current climate? I will suggest that the context outlined above (particularly negative connotations of feminism and stereotypes) affects participants' own relationships with feminism, their experiences as activists and their political practices. Significantly, it may also shape their own understanding of feminism.

The effects of stereotypes

In terms of their personal relationship to feminism, some participants commented that they first had to overcome the negative image of feminism before identifying as a feminist. For example:

JB: I guess you do, you would think of yourself as a feminist.

Rose (20, women's committee): Yeah and that was really funny I never used to, like I was one of the people who used to associate feminism with like, I just think lots of strong women, like, they believed in what was right and stuff, but like feminism was such a tainted word for me that, it was actually only really when I got involved in women's committee, I was like 'hell yeah, I'm a feminist'.

Similarly, Zoe (22, feminist activist group) commented:

[I]t wasn't really until I understood what it [feminism] meant that I did [identify as a feminist] and got past the stereotypes and things like that and was like 'oh, actually, this is a good thing!'

Negative perceptions and stereotypes of feminism mediated participants' interactions with people outside their feminist groups, as Susie (23, women's committee) explained:

[I]n conversation with people, you know, it's never, like if you ever say you're a feminist, it's never like curiosity, you know 'why do you think that?', it's, like, people always seem to get straight on the attack about it, like, as if, you know, the word feminist means they automatically know exactly what you think, and it's all the old stereotypes pulled out again and all that kind of thing and, yeah, as a committee and as kind of women's officers, yeah I think we do get it a bit and people are just like you know 'oh, women's committee making a fuss about nothing again' and all this kind of thing. Um, which does annoy me 'cause it's, people are just so unwilling to even give your point the time of day because feminist is you know, dirty word really isn't it.

This has consequences for the groups' political effectiveness. As Susie highlights, people are often unwilling to listen to the women's committee and quick to dismiss them. This echoes research on another student group, the Warwick Anti-Sexism Society (WASS), who found that 'stereotypes of feminism prompt negative responses to the group, rather than judgement being based on any informed understanding of what WASS aims to achieve' (WASS Collective, 2007, para.1.2). Susie also suggested that the negative image of feminism could discourage men from getting involved:

I mean personally yeah I'd like more men to be involved in feminism, um, but yeah, as it stands right now, they're not really because I think it's still seen as something that's a bit kind of 'out there' politically.

In this somewhat hostile context, group members' gendered self-presentation was particularly significant. Susie (women's committee) said:

[T]his seems like a really superficial comment, but I think the fact that we don't, and most of the committee don't, seem like stereotypical feminists, I think that in itself goes a way to kind of legitimising a bit more.

Whilst Susie does not explain what a stereotypical feminist is like, Scharff's (2010) research suggests that the stereotypical feminist is seen as unfeminine, man-hating and lesbian; in other words, she contravenes norms of heterosexual femininity. This is supported by Karen's (20) comments that a former committee member was 'a very typical feminist, like shaved head, er, bisexual'.⁵⁰ In

⁵⁰ As I will discuss later, Susie and Karen's reiteration of these stereotypes may suggest that they have been influenced by negative portrayals of feminism in contemporary society.

contrast to these stereotypes, the women's committee gained legitimacy through their more conventional performance of femininity.

These dynamics are not unique to the women's committee. Returning again to the example of WASS:

For female WASS members, self-conscious performances of emphasised heterosexual femininity were inextricably interwoven with their attempts to be inclusive, and make feminism and gender activism a plausible consideration for as large a number of women and men as possible (Lambert and Parker, 2006, p.476).

Lambert and Parker see this as a recurrent feature in feminist history, arguing that 'attempts to minimise rejection through the management of dress and behaviour have been a persistent feature of feminists' struggle for acceptance' (p.476). For the women's committee, behaving, in Susie's words, just like 'most of the other girls on campus' was not a deliberate or conscious strategy, but it nevertheless helped to legitimise them as feminists.

The 'postfeminist' context can also have consequences for participants at a personal level. For example, identifying as a feminist can cause tension with friends or can be a lonely experience. Fay (21, women's committee) said: 'I would like it if my friends kind of thought that what I was doing was worthwhile (laughing) which sometimes I'm not sure they do'. Zoe (22, feminist activist group) had mixed experiences with her friends:

[A] lot of my friends, in [this city], are supportive and would consider themselves feminists [...] but also I've got quite a lot of friends and other people that are kind of like supportive, but they don't necessarily agree, and... *that* can be quite... awkward, [...] like I've had a couple of instances with friends from school and stuff where I'm talking to them about what we do and they're like, they don't really understand [...] why I do it, or, y'know really what feminism means or anything like that, and that's led to some awkward moments, like (mimics self) 'I'm not judging you or your life; I'm judging the system' [...], that kind of thing, which... [...] well I find it frustrating 'cause I just want them all to understand and be like, feel the same as me, but obviously... not everyone does, so, but, yeah, most people are kind of... supportive even if they don't agree.

Redfern and Aune's (2010) survey of UK feminists suggests that negative responses to feminism are part of a wider pattern: 63% of the women and 41% of the men surveyed had experienced negative consequences as a result of being a feminist. However, not all of my participants experienced negative

responses to their feminism. Most gave a mixed picture and some people had quite positive experiences. For example, Tracey (24, feminist activist group) commented that:

it varies quite a lot, I have some people that think it's ridiculous, um, and that it's... not necessarily a waste of time but that there's a lot of other [...] issues that I should be thinking about and [I] get a lot of people wanting to wind me up about it, [...] um, I have some really good conversations with some people about it, I think it's actually, in terms of my career for instance I've done quite well out of it because I've [...] happened to be lucky in terms of supervisors and job interviews that I've found people who were interested in me being involved in these things and you know wanted to talk to me about it and seen [it as] sort of being a sort of good point of my character and so in that respect I think it's really helped me.

Therefore, whilst negative responses were a fairly common theme, I do not want to overemphasise this.

Based on participants' accounts, I would describe the contemporary context in terms of postfeminism rather than backlash, because it seems to be characterised by ambivalence towards feminism rather than outright hostility (although there are still examples of that). McRobbie's (2009) analysis of *The Aftermath of Feminism* is useful in making sense of this context, particularly her idea of a 'double entanglement', in which some aspects of feminism are taken into account whilst others are repudiated. However, her overall emphasis is on the repudiation of feminism and her outlook often seems unrelentingly bleak. As Dean remarks, 'McRobbie is curiously emphatic in her denial that feminist politics is afforded any space in mainstream public discourse' (2010, p.20). The mixed experiences of my participants lead me, like Dean, to adopt a slightly more optimistic assessment of the contemporary gender order. Nevertheless, the above discussion shows that the 'postfeminist' context influences participants' own relationships with feminism and their interactions with others, both in the context of activism and in everyday life. In the next section, I will look at how the groups responded to this.

Political practice

Prevailing views of feminism shaped the groups' political practices as well as their experiences. In the women's committee in particular, many participants were conscious of the group's image and sought to actively manage it. For

example, in a discussion about what they wanted to achieve as a group, committee members commented that they needed to change people's perceptions of the committee, to have positive advertising as well as negative, as feminism has such a bad press, and to highlight to staff and students at the university that there were still issues they had to fight on, as people questioned the need for a women's committee. Rose added that feminism is tainted (Fieldnotes).

As I discussed in Chapter 4, women's officers Susie (23) and Karen (20) adopted a deliberate strategy to change the image of the women's committee in contrast to previous members whom they saw as 'very militantly feminist', which they thought gave the group 'a stereotypical feel'. As I mentioned earlier, Susie and Karen's understanding of 'stereotypical' feminism may reflect the influence of backlash discourses, an issue that I will explore further in the next section. Susie described their approach as follows:

[R]ather than kind of bulldoze in, we're really angry, it's kind of more kind of softly softly you know. Because often, just in general day-to-day life, that way of dealing with people is more likely to provide a result than if you get really angry.

Karen added that 'as soon as you get angry, all you do is build up that image of being a stropky feminist', so they were clearly aware that they would be judged against this stereotype.

As mentioned earlier, the stereotypical feminist is someone who does not conform to norms of femininity. As Lupton (1998) points out, in Western cultures, gendered 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979) mean that women are not expected to feel or express anger:

[I]t has been seen as typical and more appropriate for women rather than men to express such emotions as grief, fear, sentimentality, vulnerability, envy and jealousy. Emotions such as anger, rage, aggressiveness or triumph are less expected or condoned in women compared with men (Lupton, 1998, p.106).

From the way that they passionately talked about feminist issues, both within the interview and in committee meetings, it was clear that Susie and Karen were in fact angry about many things, but when it came to the public face of the committee, they took care not to present themselves as angry. Long (2011)

found that the campaign group OBJECT had a similar approach to managing anger and, interestingly, notes the difference between this approach and that of second-wave feminists:

This concern to avoid being perceived as 'angry' distinguishes OBJECT from radical feminists of the second wave, who embraced the term 'angry' with slogans such as 'Angry Wimmin' and 'We're not beautiful, we're not ugly, we're ANGRY'. For second wave feminists, it was important to reject stereotypes of femininity that dictated that anger was an unfeminine emotion (p.199).

The decision to include men in the women's committee could also be seen as an attempt to challenge feminist stereotypes. As Joy (19) explained:

I think there's still the stereotype of the hairy screeching feminist complaining she's not married or something and when men get involved it makes other men take it more seriously and it does make women take it more seriously.

This recalls Scharff's (2010) research and the idea of the feminist as unfeminine and unattractive. Ellie (21) found that men's involvement had a similar effect when she set up a branch of the Fawcett Society, which later merged with the feminist activist group:

Ellie: when I [was trying to] set up the Fawcett Society I kind of made sure that there was an active presence of men in the group so that people felt um, you know knew it was a gender-balanced feminist group and it did really impact on a lot of people who joined, like they actually mentioned the fact that because there was a man there they felt a lot more welcome, so...

JB: (interrupting) And was that, was that other men who said that or women who said that?

Ellie: Yeah, well both, uh a lot of women said, you know, they really liked the fact that men were involved and it made it a lot more approachable 'cause it immediately countered the feminist stereotype of just angry women, so it was quite (laughing slightly) useful I suppose.

This strategy has also been adopted by other activist groups such as the aforementioned WASS (see Lambert and Parker, 2006, WASS Collective, 2007), and in debates about men's involvement in feminism, the possibility of challenging stereotypes is often put forward as an argument for including men (see, for example, Falkof, 2007). Therefore, the political climate in which activists operate is inextricably linked to the 'man question', and the decision to include men in feminist activities must be understood and analysed in relation to

this context. Including men in feminist activities may be a pragmatic strategy to make feminism more appealing in a 'postfeminist' era (Lambert and Parker, 2006, WASS Collective, 2007).

Rejecting and reinforcing stereotypes

Sometimes participants sought to distance themselves from feminist stereotypes rhetorically as well as through their actions. Analysing how participants talk about feminist stereotypes shows that at times they reinforce these stereotypes even as they seek to challenge them. These moments give an insight into how participants may have absorbed some of the negative images of feminism circulating in the media (see, for example, Hinds and Stacey, 2001). This recalls my earlier point that negative discourses about feminism shape participants' own encounters with feminism. For example, Ann (19, women's committee) commented that:

[I]t's nice to see a women's committee that sort of breaks free of the mould of the stereotypical feminist, which I suspect many women's committees do but you know you just never see it. Um, you know, [...] we're not sitting around plotting how to, you know, like bring about a huge social revolution where women rule or anything like that, we're just we're talking about real practical ways in which we can get, like, equality and female empowerment, things like this. I think that's really good.

For me, it seems hard to imagine a women's committee, or indeed any feminist organisation, that does not have equality and female empowerment amongst its aims. Thus, it seems odd that Ann finds this noteworthy. Whilst she distances the women's committee from the stereotype of feminism as being about women taking over, she does nothing to challenge the stereotype and, indeed, implies that groups do exist that have this as their aim. This suggests to me that her view of feminism is to some extent shaped by backlash discourses.

A similar effect is produced in Susie (23) and Karen's (20) discussions of 'stereotypical feminists', which I touched on earlier. Karen thought that in the past the committee 'had a lot more of a stereotypical feel rather than a principled feel'. She argued that the way that the committee went about things 'made them look quite stereotypical and you know, people didn't really [...] take into account the principle behind it'. She presented her feminism as being about principles, including equality, and she explained that she makes an effort to

'emphasise that I'm not a conventional [feminist] and that it's just the principles that are important'. Whilst there is clearly a pragmatic logic in her approach, which suggests that outsiders will be more willing to engage with the principles of feminism if they are not put off by the image of the group, the way in which she contrasts 'conventional' feminism and 'principles' troubles me. The implication is that conventional feminism is not about principles, which seems at odds with the entire notion of feminism. She seems to suggest that stereotypical feminism is more about style than substance.

In addition, in stressing that she is not a conventional feminist, she suggests that this is not a desirable identity. Thus, her position implies a repudiation of, or disidentification with, what she perceives as 'conventional' (and what might be understood as second-wave) feminism (see Dean, 2010, pp.157-160). Dean uses these terms to describe the position of some self-identified third-wave feminists who contribute to the F-Word feminist website. He argues that some articulations of third-wave subjectivity involve a disidentification with second-wave feminism that is 'partly complicit with dominant post-/anti-feminist discourses' (2010, p.159), as it invokes the same negative stereotypes of second-wave feminism as these more conservative discourses. I suggest that a similar process is at work in my participants' attempts to distance themselves from stereotypes of feminism.

In the examples analysed above, there is a kind of parallel to the 'I'm not a feminist, but...' discourse which takes the form of 'I am a feminist, but...' (see Lambert and Parker, 2006), or perhaps 'I'm not a conventional feminist, but...'. This approach is clearly influenced by the contemporary context and the prevalence of backlash discourses which present negative stereotypes of feminism. It is a position that at once challenges these discourses, by arguing that not all feminists fit the stereotype, and also draws on them in invoking the figure of the stereotypical feminist. Thus, these participants are working both within and against the backlash.

In contrast, Claire (21, feminist activist group) invokes feminist stereotypes in a much more affectionate way:

JB: So, would you call yourself or d'you think of yourself as a feminist?

Claire: Uh yes because it's the smallest label, um, and you know it helps that I do have the hairy legs and the hairy armpits and what-d'you-ma-call-it.

Whilst she pokes fun at the stereotype of the hairy feminist, she embraces rather than distances herself from it. She seems proud, or at the very least not ashamed, to be a hairy feminist.

In conclusion, it seems clear to me that the contemporary context in which feminist activists are operating influences them in both conscious and unconscious ways. They may respond directly to negative perceptions of feminists in their political strategies, but a more subtle and perhaps less conscious influence is also evident in the ways in which they think and talk about feminism. This underlines the importance of analysing their activities within a broader context.

7.4 Local contexts

Whilst all of the groups were affected by the broad patterns outlined above, their experiences were also shaped by the specific local contexts of their activities. For the feminist discussion group, this was an activist milieu and the city in which it was located; for the women's committee, it was the university campus and the institutions of the university and students' union; for the DIY collective, it was the DIY music scene and the city in which they were working; and for the feminist activist group, it was both the city and the university with which the group was connected. These contexts brought their own constraints and opportunities, and they also mediated the effects of the broader context outlined above.

Feminist discussion group

The feminist discussion group's meetings were held in a social centre run by volunteers who came from an anarchist political tradition. The centre provides a space for groups and projects working towards radical social change. Also, many of the group's participants were involved in anarchist or other forms of political activism outside of the group. For these reasons, I would argue that the group is situated within an activist or 'alternative' milieu. James (30) commented

that being a part of this community made him more aware of gender in everyday life:

I mean I have feminism much more spontaneously in my head sometimes [than awareness of racism], um... and yeah and [...] the fact that [...] I'm in the men's group and uh, the men I'm hanging out with are usually quite sensitive to all of that, uh, and I'm in this activist sort of scene so um, it also helps to, being reminded of a lot of things, so yeah, it's quite present.

It is difficult to identify exactly how this context impacted on the group, but one participant on the mailing list commented that they did not get involved in the group because they felt that it was too controversial in terms of its connections to anarchism, and they also found it too academic.

The group's geographical location was also significant. It was situated in a large city and drew participants from a wide area. Most participants had to use public transport to attend meetings and on several occasions people commented that they could not attend due to the time or cost involved in travelling. Many people participated in discussions on the email list but never attended meetings because of the timing or location of the meetings. Thus, the geographical location may partly explain why the group had a relatively small membership and struggled to sustain itself for more than a year.

Women's committee

The women's committee is part of the student union at a university, and its location within these two institutions is significant in terms of shaping the experience and practices of the group. For a start, the women's committee represents female students, and thus its work involves responding directly to issues on campus, such as sexist advertising, reports in the student media, or the sale of 'lads' mags' in the student union shop. Some of the committee's campaigns, such as a campaign against sexual harassment, were based on the experiences of female students. However, interestingly, Joy (19) thought that this campaign would not be popular amongst female students, even though it focuses on an issue that affects them directly:

Joy: [L]oads of feedback I've had is that women's committee focused on stuff that's really irrelevant for women and instead they should focus on genital mutilation and rape overseas and I think maybe the 'don't touch' campaign is gonna be seen in that way.

JB: What seen as not really relevant?

Joy: Not really relevant.

JB: OK

Joy: It's important to highlight {JB: mm}, but immediately when women's committee do things people don't listen, and I think it could be better to do bigger, more world-wide serious [campaigns], I know it's a very important issue, but you have to get people willing to kind of listen before you can say it I think.

When I asked her more about this, she went on to say (as discussed in section 7.2) that female students do not like being groped, but are afraid to complain about it.

Women's potential resistance to this campaign raises the obvious difficulty that not all female students share the views of the women's committee which seeks to act on their behalf. This reflects the deeper problem of feminism's relationship to women (see, for example, Delmar, 1986, Grant, 1993): feminists claim to act in women's interests, but the nature of these interests is contested (Jónasdóttir, 1988, Grant, 1993). Women's interests may differ according to social divisions such as race, class, and age, or according to their political perspectives or personal preferences. What one woman finds oppressive may not be experienced as such by others.⁵¹ Thus, Grant (1993) argues that '[w]hat we really mean by the phrase "women's interests" is the interests of women as *feminists read them*' (p.103, emphasis added).

The committee was also influenced by the political climate of the university. On the one hand, the university is perceived as a liberal space compared to the 'real world' outside. For example, Ann (19) had been involved in activism in another city, supporting new immigrants from Africa, and in her view this campaign had a greater sense of urgency than the activities of the women's committee:

I felt like the sort of danger and the repercussions of that were a lot closer to home, in that you know... university's quite a liberal place and I don't necessarily feel that I'm discriminated against on the grounds of my gender or my sexuality, um, or even my race,^[52] but in [the city], you know, it's the

⁵¹ Feminist debates around pornography are a clear example of this (see, for example, Bryson, 1999, Cornell, 2000).

⁵² Ann identified as black and bisexual.

real world, it's gritty and, um, you know things are actively happening, you know you actively get denied employment for whatever reason [...] and like a lot of things went down that made it kind of imperative for me to get involved in that, I felt like I couldn't not, you know, whereas I value these committees a lot, you know [the student union] LGBT committee and women's committee and racial equality [committee], but, I don't think that campus as a whole would descend into sort of social dynamic chaos if they didn't function quite the way [they should].

On the other hand, participants commented that there was little support for feminism amongst students. Fay (21) said that, in a lecture on feminism, most of the students seemed to hold anti-feminist views, and Joy (19) felt that there was a stigma attached to being a feminist. Maddy (24) said that there had been numerous attempts to get rid of the women's officer positions,⁵³ and Imogen (18) said that in the past some people had tried to set up a men's society because they claimed that the women's committee was discriminatory. This suggests that there is a lack of understanding, or a lack of support, amongst students for the principle of women's self-representation, which was important to many committee members (see Chapter 6).⁵⁴ As I mentioned earlier (in the section on 'Political practice'), the women's committee were more concerned than the other groups about their image, which perhaps reflects the fact that students are a difficult constituency to appeal to. Maybe the fact that the university is a relatively liberal space means that students remain unaware of discrimination and thus do not see the need for feminism.⁵⁵

The committee is also affected by the politics of the student union. The fact that the student union's democratic structure includes representation for women in the form of the women's officers and women's committee shows that feminist principles are to some extent embedded in the organisation, although, as Maddy points out, this representation frequently comes under threat. The union also has a pro-choice policy and a pro-choice fund to help students with the costs of an abortion or childcare, again showing a feminist influence. However, the committee does not get much financial support from the student union in

⁵³ This is a common experience in student unions in the UK.

⁵⁴ For further discussion of this, see Kettle's (2007) research, which explores the arguments around the provision of 'gender representation officers' (for example, women's, men's and equality officers) in student unions.

⁵⁵ For discussions of students' relationship to feminism, see, for example, Callaghan et al. (1999), Gough and Peace (2000), Lambert and Parker (2006), WASS Collective (2007), Woodward and Woodward (2009).

comparison to other groups, so this limits the extent of its activities.

Furthermore, the women's officers found that the attitudes of other union officers and activists towards feminism were mixed:

JB: [H]ave you kind of felt that, um, there's been kind of resistance to the committee and [...] have you like encountered kind of criticism as women's officers?

Karen: Yeah, I mean, um, like even I think we brought up the issue of the lads' mags in [...] [a student union meeting], um, a few weeks ago, and I remember one of the other officers, who was a girl, sighing really loudly about it, and (Susie: Rolling her eyes) just little things like that, [...] you know that's another woman doing that. Um, and, like I say, whenever I mention to anyone [that I'm a feminist], usually, you know, quite a lot of abuse, um (Susie: yeah). [...] [B]ut, you know, saying that, like the legislation we've put forward has always received a positive um response. Like, this time last year, I put forward a motion about sexist advertising on campus which linked it to this marketing policy. That passed by an overwhelming majority, so, you know people weren't averse to stopping sexist advertising, um, but still on a more personal level I think people have got misconceptions.

Nevertheless, Karen (20) and Susie (23) commented that the student union was more open to feminism than in the past due to the work of the previous union president, who was a feminist. Darren (20), who was very active in the student union, sensed that fewer women than men were involved in the union, although he seemed to think that overall it was quite good at addressing women's issues. In conclusion, the committee was directly affected by the institution of the student union, in terms of funding and support for policies, but the committee's activities were also shaped by the broader politics of the student union and university.

DIY collective

This group's experiences and practices were shaped by the city in which they were working. Ruth (23) explained that she set up the group because she did not identify with the existing feminist groups in the city:

I'm from [nearby town] and I moved to [the city] um to do uni and there was obviously nothing in [my home town] remotely feminist (laughing/um) and then, in [the city] I didn't feel like there was either, well until I really looked around and then I saw there were a few things but I didn't, like for me, I'm not, [...] well, interested to a degree obviously but I'm not, I don't really identify much with second-wave feminism or anything like that kind of

postfeminism and [stuff] I think, for me, it's, my feminism and the things that I'm interested in, it's more DIY.

The group were working within the context of the local DIY music scene, in which they felt that women and LGBTQ people were marginalised both as performers and audience members. In one of their leaflets, they stated that:

We acknowledge the lack of female and queer presence in the mainstream and also in the DIY scene. We're here to carve our mark into [the city] and re-address the gender balance, showcasing the finest in grrrl and queer oriented and influenced musicians and artists.

Abi (23) explained that a key aim of the group, as well as showcasing female and LGBTQ artists, was to provide a safe space in which everyone could feel welcome, as other parts of the DIY scene could feel quite alienating:

JB: So it's sort of important to, you sort of [trying to] create a safe space for maybe people who don't feel comfortable in other spaces?

Abi: Yeah that's what we kind of wanted to do 'cause, [...] like I don't feel like that so much but I know Ruth doesn't feel so comfortable in like a 'guy rock' kind of thing, and we both look quite, like, femme-y, I guess, which is like kind of acceptable, [...] like in [society in] general like in DIY in general, but a lot of our friends kind of like aren't so like that, like a lot of like genderqueer, like trans, like a lot more flamboyantly dressed or people that don't just dress like 'punk rock' and [...] we really wanted to create, or like women that didn't feel comfortable in like a really like macho environment, and we really wanted like people to come and like be able to go see live music, be able to go buy a zine if they wanted, have a dance, have a disco, where it wasn't like, you didn't feel... like you shouldn't be there, I guess.

Abi thought that the DIY scene in the city was quite cliquy and also noted that few women were involved. In addition, she found that it was hard to get an audience for their events in the city:

I think in [this city] [...], it's a real shame that like more people aren't open to like different kinds of music and there's a real like, I've found like since like [the DIY collective] doesn't do so much in [the city] like people come up to me and like before I started doing gigs on my own, like 'oh why aren't you doing gigs?' [...] [T]hey're mostly kind of people that didn't turn up or that would complain about like paying more than three quid for a gig, that kind of thing. [...] like they're people that don't do DIY, they don't understand that you can't do that, if, like, if you've gotta pay like a band from London or something and hire a venue out and get all this other stuff, like you can't do it and I think in [this city] it's a real shame there's like this whole like 'it's not punk' like mentality kind of thing and I think with [the DIY collective] me and Ruth weren't really going for that, we were going for a

different audience and I don't know if that audience is even there in [this city].

Thus, the local context both provided an impetus for the group's activities, as they attempted to provide a feminist and queer-oriented presence in the city's music scene, and affected their experience, as they found it difficult to attract people to their gigs. Both Abi and Ruth commented that the experience of the group had in some ways been amazing but had also been very hard work, and at times it was disheartening when people did not seem interested in what they were doing. Ruth summed it up well:

JB: [W]hat was the kind of experience of running [the group] like?

Ruth: Hard (laughs). I mean, it was amazing and [...] I kind of feel like I should do it because I know, like on paper and when you talk about it it's like, it's good and I know it's good and, you know, we get a lot of good feedback, but at the same time [...], it's a lot for you to decide to do something on your own and I think, you know, DIY is something that is so unpredictable and it can be so disheartening and can be so upsetting, um, but [...] you run the risk and you learn and I think that's, that's kind of the beauty of it in a way.

Feminist activist group

As the feminist activist group was based in a student union but also had a membership beyond the university, both the university and the city were significant in terms of shaping the group's experiences. As discussed above (in section 7.2), many participants suggested that people outside their groups were unaware of continuing gender inequality, and Ellie (21) thought that this was a particular problem within the relatively privileged space of the university:

[I]t's so easy at university to think that no-one faces any discrimination and I think unless you come from a background where you've actually witnessed it or you know someone who's witnessed it, it's so easy to think it's just all a myth that's constructed because women are angry.

In her view, this lack of awareness was evidenced in the fact that there were frequent attempts to get rid of the role of women's officer at the student union. This echoes points made in relation to the women's committee about the university as a liberal space and about student resistance to feminism. At the same time, running the group through the student union had some practical advantages: it provided them with funding (which is always a major issue for

campaigning groups) and other benefits such as the ability to book rooms at the university.

The context of the city also had an impact on the group's experiences and actions. The fact that they were the only feminist group in the city made the decision about whether or not to exclude men all the more difficult:

[T]here was an inherent tension between wanting men to be involved but also wanting there to be a safe space for women in [the city] because it was the only feminist group. (Ellie)

It also meant that group members had to continue working together and to deal with conflict in the group, especially over the question of men's involvement:

[T]he last thing feminism needs is more splits. We've barely got enough people for one working group but [...] you can't just stomp off in a fit because someone said something that you don't agree with, you've gotta get on because there's only one feminist group, that's it for miles and yeah and [there are] people contributing on the website who can't even get to [the group], they just wanted to do something, so, it'd be a bit sad to break it all up. (Claire, 21)

Thus, the geographical location of the group meant that the stakes were higher when making decisions about their gendered membership.

Bringing together the macro and the micro

The local contexts described above each brought their own particular challenges and opportunities, and they also mediated the effects of the wider context outlined earlier in the chapter, as support for and resistance to feminism played out differently in specific local contexts. In particular, concerns about the negative image of feminism were stronger in some groups than others. From the experiences of the women's committee and the feminist activist group, universities appear to be a challenging context for feminists as there is a degree of resistance to feminism amongst students. This may be due to the relatively privileged background of students or to their age group (predominantly 18-21 years old). As most students are quite young, they will have grown up in a 'postfeminist' age and are therefore perhaps more susceptible to the idea that equality has been achieved. On the other hand, the groups' experiences also showed that universities can facilitate feminist activity, as student unions may

provide funding and support for activism or may institutionalise women's representation through women's committees or women's officer positions.

The challenge faced by the DIY collective was not so much resistance to feminism as a lack of interest in the kinds of music and events that they were putting on, although they did occasionally encounter the 'postfeminist' argument that equality has now been achieved and therefore feminism is not needed. Whilst some members of the feminist discussion group noted that people outside the group were not necessarily sympathetic to feminism, they did not express the same concerns about the group's public image as, for example, the women's committee. This may be due to their location within an activist milieu in which feminism was perhaps more widely accepted than in mainstream society. The group's purpose may also have made a difference: as a discussion group, rather than a campaigning group attempting to influence others, they did not need to be as concerned about the public face of the group. Therefore, whilst all of the groups were located within a 'postfeminist' context, this impacted on each of the groups differently, according to their aims and specific local contexts.

7.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have attempted to situate the activities of the groups, through showing the links between their experiences and the local and broader contexts in which they operate. I suggest that they are influenced by an overarching context of feminist progress, continuing gender inequality and ambivalence towards feminism, which is captured in the concept of postfeminism. They are also affected by their local contexts, in terms of geographical location, institutions, and the constituencies with which they work. These macro and micro level contexts interact to shape each group's experiences. Linking back to the central problematic of my thesis, I believe that these varied contexts need to be taken into account when analysing the practices of mixed-gender feminist activism and in wider debates about the 'man question' in feminism.

This chapter helps to explain the diverse experiences and strategies of the groups (see Chapters 4 and 5) through showing how they are each shaped by, and respond to, specific local circumstances. Through exploring the wider social context in which all of the groups are embedded, it also demonstrates some of

the challenges facing contemporary feminist activists, such as the idea that equality has been achieved. Furthermore, it helps to explain mixed-gender feminist activism, since the decision to include men in feminist activities may be a response to aspects of the wider context, for example, negative stereotypes of feminists. It builds on the previous chapters to further complicate the 'man question' in feminism, showing once again that the experiences and practices of mixed-gender feminist groups are varied and context-specific.

8 Discussion and conclusions

In this thesis, I set out to explore the experiences and practices of mixed-gender feminist groups. I was motivated to conduct this research because I noticed that the question of men's relationship to feminism was a source of contention amongst feminists and yet there is little empirical research on men's involvement in feminist activism, particularly in the context of mixed-gender groups. I was guided by the following research questions:

- What happens in mixed-gender feminist groups?
- What is at stake in including/excluding men from feminist groups?
- What is the relationship between feminist beliefs/theories and the practice and experience of mixed-gender feminist activism?
- How do the experiences and practices of mixed-gender feminist groups relate to the wider social and political context?

In this chapter, I will draw on the preceding chapters to address these questions and to summarise the main findings of the thesis. I will then go on to evaluate the thesis, taking into account whether I met my aims, the contribution of the thesis to existing research and practice, and its limitations. I will also reflect on the possibilities that it suggests for future research.

8.1 Research questions

What happens in mixed-gender feminist groups?

The four groups that I have studied give some insight into what can happen in mixed-gender feminist groups. In particular, they illustrate the diversity of mixed-gender feminist activism. The groups employed a range of political practices, such as consciousness-raising, campaigning, awareness-raising and cultural activism. They also differed in terms of how they incorporated men into their activities. I identified two broad approaches to men's involvement: a 'men's auxiliary' model, in which women take the lead and men occupy a supporting role, and an 'equal partners' approach, in which men and women play an equal role. As well as differences in the groups' political approaches, there were significant differences in their experiences. In the DIY collective, no men actually got involved, whilst the women's committee and feminist activist group

attracted small numbers of men, and the feminist discussion group was initiated by men. The feminist discussion group and women's committee appeared to work quite well as mixed-gender groups, but the feminist activist group experienced more problems and decided to become largely women-only.

One of the issues that I particularly wanted to investigate was the effect of men's presence on group dynamics, as numerous feminists have pointed out that men tend to dominate in mixed-gender contexts (see, for example, Luxton, 1993, Schacht and Ewing, 2004). Analysing power relations in the groups was difficult, because different dimensions of group dynamics sometimes revealed different patterns. Also, gender was not the only factor that influenced group dynamics, and sometimes it was difficult to disentangle gender from other factors, such as group roles or individual personalities. This led me to conceptualise power as multilayered and to conclude that it may be more useful to focus on status or power in general, rather than gender in particular, when analysing group dynamics. Whilst fortunately I observed few instances of overt domination in the groups, I found that men's presence still had an effect on group dynamics. Significantly, this could happen regardless of individual men's behaviour: the simple fact of men's presence led some women to feel and act differently. I argued that Foucault's (1975/1995) concept of disciplinary power and feminist analyses of emotion work (for example, Daniels, 1987, James, 1989, Bartky, 1990, Hochschild, 2003) could help to explain this pattern.

The fact that experiences varied quite significantly between the groups shows that the effect of men's presence on feminist groups is context-dependent. At the level of the individual, factors such as women's own experiences with men, different feminist beliefs, and social divisions such as age may all affect how women experience mixed-gender groups. At the level of the group, the impact of men's involvement may depend on factors such as the number of men and women present, the group's purpose, structure and methods of political practice. All of this suggests that it is difficult to generalise about what happens in mixed-gender feminist groups.

What is at stake in including/excluding men from feminist groups?

The case studies illustrate numerous potential advantages and disadvantages of mixed-gender feminist organising. The above section shows how the gender composition of a group may affect members' feelings and group dynamics. It may also impact on the topics that can be discussed, the group's political practices, and the image of the group. Lastly, the membership policy of a group has an impact on who feels comfortable attending, as well as who is allowed to attend. For example, in the feminist activist group, older women seemed to prefer being in a women's group. This shows that there are many issues that may be at stake, and therefore many factors to take into account, when making decisions about the gendered membership of a group. It is also important to consider the purpose of the group: mixed groups or single-gender groups may be better for some purposes than others.

My research focuses on what is at stake for the groups themselves and the individuals involved. However, when analysing men's involvement in feminism, it is also important to consider the possible effects on the wider feminist movement and on society more generally. Does mixed-gender activism affect the meaning of feminism, the direction of the movement, or its impact on wider society? My small-scale study only touches on these questions. Therefore, as I will discuss later, more research is needed to explore what is at stake in mixed-gender feminism more broadly.

What is the relationship between feminist beliefs/theories and the practice and experience of mixed-gender feminist activism?

The different groups and individuals in my study held a range of different views, for example, in terms of how they conceptualised feminism, so there is not a single set of feminist beliefs or theories associated with mixed-gender feminist activism. However, there was a widely shared belief amongst participants that men should be involved in feminism, either because participants felt that it was morally right to include them or because men's involvement was seen to benefit feminism. A number of participants also suggested that feminism can help men, and some conceptualised feminism as a movement to address gender inequality in general, including men's concerns, rather than a movement

focused on women. Therefore, many participants expressed the ideas that, in Sterba's (1998) words, men are good for feminism and feminism is good for men. I suggested that these beliefs may be underpinned by a particular understanding of the nature of gendered power relations which recognises that the current gender order harms or limits men as well as women and that men's and women's interests are not directly conflicting. This idea shows the influence of the profeminist men's movements of the 1970s and the critical study of men and masculinities which grew out of these movements (for example, Connell, 2005).

Whilst participants generally agreed that men should be involved in feminism, they differed regarding men's role in the movement and the necessity of women-only groups. Above, I identified two models of men's involvement in feminism (a 'men's auxiliary' approach and an 'equal partners' approach), and these were also linked to particular feminist ideas. The men's auxiliary approach was generally underpinned by the principle of self-representation, the view that women, who are oppressed on the grounds of their gender, should take the lead in challenging that oppression. This idea was often linked to women's experience of oppression, which highlights the importance of the concept of gendered experience for some activists. Different views about men's role in feminism were also often underpinned by different understandings of specific concepts, such as equality, self-representation or safe space. Other important influences were queer theory and transgender politics, which shaped participants' understandings of gender and the groups' membership policies.

As well as shaping participants' and groups' approaches to men in feminism, feminist beliefs could also influence how participants experienced mixed-gender feminist groups. In the women's committee, Maddy pointed out that her commitment to women-only organising may have influenced her view of group dynamics, making her more sensitive to the effects of men's presence. This may also have been the case for other participants and may help to explain why different people sometimes produced conflicting accounts of group dynamics.

As I discussed in Chapter 6, feminists have highlighted the reciprocal relationship between feminist theory and practice (see, for example, Griffin et al., 1994). Thus, there were also ways in which the experience of activism could

shape participants' beliefs. For example, Sam developed new understandings about gender from hearing about other people's gendered experiences in the feminist discussion group. Meanwhile, Cath (feminist activist group) had developed the idea that men tend to dominate in mixed-gender contexts from her previous experiences of mixed-gender activism.

How do the experiences and practices of mixed-gender feminist groups relate to the wider social and political context?

I argued in Chapter 7 that all of the groups are situated within a 'postfeminist' political context characterised by a degree of feminist progress, continuing gender inequality and ambivalence towards feminism. This context can affect the groups' experiences and in turn shape their political practices as, for example, they may seek to overcome negative stereotypes of feminism. In this challenging context, including men in their activities may be a strategy to overcome stereotypes and to make feminism more appealing. The postfeminist context can also impact on individual participants in their everyday interactions and relationships, and in terms of their own understanding of feminism. I suggested that, whilst activists worked to challenge negative discourses about feminism, some participants may also have been influenced by these discourses.

However, not all of the groups were affected by this wider context in the same way, due to the differences in their specific local circumstances. Differences in the groups' political strategies, constituencies and geographical locations brought their own particular opportunities and challenges, and the local and broader contexts intersected to shape the experiences of each group in unique ways. Once again, this emphasises the diversity amongst the groups and the context-specific nature of their experiences.

Drawing together the research questions, the main argument of this thesis is that there is no simple answer to the 'man question' in feminism. The experiences of mixed-gender feminist groups vary according to the groups' aims, their modes of political practice, the ways in which they are structured, the numbers of men present, the characteristics of the individuals involved, and the wider contexts in which the groups are located. This means that it is difficult to

generalise about the effects of men's involvement in feminist activism. However, this research has revealed some of the potential benefits and limitations of mixed-gender feminist organising and therefore has begun to outline what may be at stake when including men in feminist activities. I hope that this information will help feminists to make decisions about whether (and how) to include men in their own activities, based on their own local circumstances, aims and political beliefs. As Hebert (2007) argues:

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' model for engaging men in feminist politics. Rather, successful strategies will need to be mindful of the varying political, economic, and socio-cultural dynamics at play, and be locally led rather than externally imposed (p.42).

8.2 Evaluating the thesis

In Chapter 1, I outlined my aims in conducting this research: to document the practices of feminist activists in order to help write the history of feminism; to provide empirical research to contribute to debates about men's relationship to feminism; to contribute to theorising developments in contemporary British feminism and the practice of feminist politics more generally; and to provide practical advice for feminists on mixed-gender activism. In Chapter 3, I also described another aim: to create a transparent and reflexive account of the research, in line with Stanley and Wise's criteria for the production of 'accountable feminist knowledge' (Stanley, 1997, Stanley and Wise, 2006). In the remainder of this chapter, I will assess whether I have achieved these aims and will evaluate the contribution that this thesis makes to existing feminist knowledge.

Achievements of the thesis

As my research aims suggest, I consider empirical research on social movements to be important as a means of both documenting and analysing the practices of activists. When I began this research project in 2007, I felt that there was a lack of empirical research on recent feminist activism in Britain. Whilst more research has been conducted in the past few years (for example, Dean, 2010, Downes, 2010, Redfern and Aune, 2010, Long, 2011, O'Shea, 2011), this thesis adds to this growing body of knowledge and also brings a unique focus on mixed-gender activism and the question of men's involvement

in feminism. Other researchers have touched on this issue (for example, Lambert and Parker, 2006, WASS Collective, 2007, Long, 2011), but my research explores this question in greater depth. Therefore, it makes an original contribution to knowledge regarding contemporary British feminism.

This study also adds to the existing body of empirical research on men's engagements with feminism (see, for example, Tolson, 1977, Lichterman, 1989, Connell, 1990, Christian, 1994, Pease, 2000, Goldrick-Jones, 2002, Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn, 2009). As I highlighted in Chapter 2, this work has generally focused on individual men or men's groups rather than mixed groups, so, again, my research represents an original contribution through its focus on mixed-gender groups.

As well as providing new empirical data, this thesis also develops theoretical insights in several areas. Firstly, it contributes to theorising men's relationship to feminism. It builds on the work of writers such as Ashe (2007) and Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn (2009) in exploring the different ways in which (pro)feminist men can be positioned in relation to feminism, and it also shows how different models of men's relationship to feminism can work in practice. It provides detailed insight into the potential power dynamics in mixed-gender feminist groups, responding to feminists' concerns about male domination in mixed settings (see, for example, Luxton, 1993). Furthermore, in exploring participants' beliefs about men's relationship to feminism, it brings out the nuances of different positions, suggesting that the 'man question' in feminism is actually a series of interrelated questions (see Bryson, 1999). It also shows some of the beliefs and assumptions which underpin these positions.

Secondly, my research contributes to theorising contemporary feminist practice more generally. It helps us to understand the links between feminist theory and practice, showing how feminist activism relates to wider feminist discourses and to other bodies of knowledge, such as queer theory, transgender studies, and the critical study of men and masculinities. It also helps to develop a more nuanced understanding of established feminist concepts, such as self-representation and safe space, through showing how these are used by activists. Additionally, it shows the impact of the wider social context on contemporary feminism, helping to develop a historically situated account of

feminist practice (see Griffin et al., 1994). In doing this, it also develops the concepts of backlash and postfeminism through showing how these are manifested in everyday experiences and interactions.

Thirdly, this research contributes to understanding gendered power dynamics in social movement groups and reflects on how best to conceptualise power in this context. It highlights the complexities of analysing gendered power in interaction and argues that power needs to be understood as multilayered. To some extent, this reflects Ostrander's (1999) analysis of 'competing and contradictory patterns' (p.640) of gendered and racialised power in a social movement organisation. My research applies Martin's (2006) concepts of *reflexive* and *non-reflexive* enactments of gender, Foucault's (1975/1995) idea of *disciplinary power* and the concept of *emotion work* (see Hochschild, 1979, 2003) to a social movement context. These are tools that other feminists and social movement researchers may find useful in analysing gendered power relations amongst activists.

In addition to its theoretical contributions, my research also has practical implications. It outlines some of the possible benefits and drawbacks of mixed-gender organising and illustrates different ways of integrating men into feminist politics. It shows some of the ways in which male privilege may operate in feminist groups, but also demonstrates ways in which this can be challenged (see also Roth, 1998, Taylor, 1998, Ostrander, 1999), for example, through women's leadership of the group (in the women's committee). This information could help feminists to decide whether and how to integrate men into their activities and how to manage group dynamics. It may also be useful for other social movement or voluntary groups who are concerned about gender and group dynamics. Therefore, I hope to share my findings with activists as well as other researchers.

Overall, I believe that this research meets the aims set out in Chapter 1 and goes some way towards meeting my aim of producing a transparent account of the research process. Whilst I have written a fairly detailed and reflexive account of the research, as I indicated in Chapter 3, I have struggled to write about the process of analysis and to explain how I came to my conclusions. Also, I have not always been able to provide 'retrievable data' to support my

arguments. Therefore, I have not been able to fully comply with Stanley and Wise's (2006) criteria for transparency. However, these problems may reflect the limits of reflexivity (discussed in Chapter 3) as well as my own limitations as a writer.

Limitations of the thesis and possibilities for further research

This thesis is limited in some ways by the amount and type of data that I collected. Whilst I developed a strong research design combining participant observation and interviews, I was not able to collect all of this data from all of the groups. In the DIY collective and the feminist activist group, I was not able to conduct participant observation at group meetings, so my analysis of these groups is largely based on interview data. This means that my analysis of group dynamics in these two groups is fairly limited, as I had to rely on retrospective accounts, rather than being able to observe group interactions as they happened. In the DIY collective, the lack of data was further compounded by the fact that I was only able to interview two people, so this case study ended up being very small. However, as I argued in Chapter 1, this case study adds to the research through providing an example of a different type of activism (in this case DIY cultural activism) and a different approach to feminism through its explicitly queer feminist perspective.

My analysis of the feminist discussion group and the women's committee was limited by the fact that I did not make recordings of the meetings that I attended. I decided not to do this because I thought that participants would find it too intrusive, but it means that I lost much of the detail of interaction, which in turn limited my analysis of group dynamics and power relations. Thus, this research provides an overview of power relations in the four different case studies, and the range and diversity of the case studies is a strength of the research, but it lacks the depth that could have been obtained by focusing on a smaller number of cases or collecting more detailed data.

Another potential limitation comes from the research design. Case study research always poses questions about transferability: the extent to which findings may be applicable in other settings. A key message of this research is that the experiences of mixed-gender feminist groups vary according to context,

so it is unlikely that other feminist groups would have exactly the same experiences. However, there may be some aspects of the groups' experiences which are relevant to other feminist groups. For example, my analysis of the effects of the wider 'postfeminist' political context may also apply to other groups. Indeed, researchers have shown that other feminist activists have had similar experiences, for example, in dealing with negative perceptions of feminism (for example, Lambert and Parker, 2006, Long, 2011). Furthermore, analysing what can happen in mixed-gender feminist groups helps us to understand what may be at stake when other feminist groups make decisions about their gendered membership, even if the outcomes of those decisions cannot be predicted. As Platt (1988, p.11) points out:

A single case can undoubtedly demonstrate that its features are possible and, hence, may also exist in other cases and, even if they do not, must be taken into account in the formulation of general propositions.

In terms of the scope of the thesis, I feel that there are three main limitations. Firstly, my analysis of group dynamics has focused on gendered power, and I am aware that there are many other dimensions of power, such as class and race, that I have not explored. I took a conscious decision to focus on gender because this research is rooted in debates about men's relationship to feminism, in which power relations between men and women are a key concern.⁵⁶ However, as I concluded in Chapter 5, gender is frequently intertwined with other aspects of group dynamics, thus, an analysis that focuses purely on gender is necessarily incomplete. Therefore, one way in which this research could be enhanced and expanded would be to examine the interconnections between gender and other dimensions of power within mixed-gender feminist groups.

Secondly, my analysis is focused on the case studies themselves and, on reflection, I could have contextualised the groups more within the wider feminist movement. In Long's (2011) study of contemporary feminist anti-pornography activism, she conducted a mapping exercise, charting anti-pornography activism across the country, as well as analysing two case studies of feminist

⁵⁶ My choice of focus has also been shaped by my own positioning within structures of power. It is a mark of my privilege as a white, middle-class woman that I felt able to separate gender from other dimensions of power and that I took the decision to focus solely on gender.

groups. This allowed her to assess the status of anti-pornography activism within the wider feminist movement. A similar mapping exercise of mixed-gender feminist activism could help to assess the prevalence of mixed-gender groups and their relation to the wider feminist movement. Therefore, this would be another useful way to develop this research further.

Thirdly, my research only investigates the perspectives of activists themselves and not the people that they interact with. Some social movement researchers argue that gender mediates the interactions between social movement participants and those outside the movement (Einwohner, 1999, Einwohner et al., 2000). Einwohner et al. argue that:

in all movements, participants, targets, and/or third parties construct and manipulate gendered meanings and identities, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This process, we suggest, affects movements' legitimacy and potential outcomes (2000, p.684).

Therefore, it would be very interesting to explore how the gendered membership of a feminist group affects their interactions with others. Several participants in my study thought that men's involvement could affect the image of a group or the success of a campaign. For example, Ruth (23, DIY collective) and Martin (25, feminist discussion group) speculated that men protesting outside a strip club or the Playboy shop would gain more media attention and be taken more seriously than women doing the same thing. At times, these kinds of assumptions provided the rationale for involving men in feminist activity, so it is important to find out if they are justified. Thus, in order to fully assess the impact of men's involvement in feminist activity, it is necessary to consider the influence of their presence on those outside the movement, as well as on activists themselves.

My research has also raised other issues that could benefit from further research. I have argued that mixed-gender feminist groups represent a recent development in British feminist politics, reflecting a more general willingness of feminists to work together with men (see, for example, Bindel, 1999, Walter, 1999b, Banyard, 2010). Many of my research participants echoed this view, seeing working together with men as a current or future phase in the development of feminism. In Chapter 2, I suggested some possible reasons for this changing attitude towards men and feminism (such as changes in gender

relations over the past 40 years), but it would be useful to explore this shift in greater detail, to find out how and why attitudes have changed, in order to situate mixed-gender activism more firmly within a historical context and to develop our understanding of recent feminist history.

A related point that came up in my research is that age/generation can, in some cases, make a difference to feminists' beliefs about men's relationship to feminism (see also Bartky, 1998, Walter, 1999b). Thus, it would be useful to explore whether this reflects a wider pattern amongst feminists and, if so, how and why age makes a difference. This could contribute to existing research on social movements and the idea of 'political generations' (for example, Whittier, 1997), helping to develop a deeper understanding of the interactions between individual experience, sociopolitical context, social movements, and individuals' political beliefs. It would also be important to explore what the implications of any generational differences might be for intergenerational feminist activism.

My research also highlights the connections between feminism and other movements and bodies of knowledge, such as transgender and queer politics and the critical study of men and masculinities. Other researchers have also explored these interconnections (see, for example, Downes, 2010, on queer feminism, Withers, 2010, on feminism and transgender politics, and Lambert and Parker, 2006, on the influence of the study of men and masculinities). However, it would be useful to explore these connections further, to investigate the possibilities and tensions brought about by the convergence of different forms of gender politics.

I began this thesis with two quotes that illustrate the debates surrounding men's relationship to feminism. I have not resolved these debates, but I hope that this research can feed into them. I have argued that there is no simple answer to the 'man question' in feminism. Instead, what are required are 'complex, nuanced and situated understandings of men's relation to feminism, theoretically, analytically and politically' (Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn, 2009, p.415). I have provided one such understanding here, but more are needed in order to illuminate the complexities of men's relationship to feminism.

Appendix 1: Details of case studies

Case study	Type of feminism	Structure	Membership	Position of men	Political practice	Data collected
Feminist discussion group	Not specified	Informal	Open to all	Open to all genders throughout its existence.	Discussion / consciousness-raising.	Participant observation at 13 meetings over eight months; five interviews.
Women's committee	Not specified	Formal. Part of student union democratic structure.	Students. Women-only committee but men can attend meetings.	Previously women-only. Now men can attend meetings.	Campaigning; organising events; raising issues through student union.	Participant observation at 13 meetings and two events over seven months; 14 interviews.
DIY collective	Queer / Third-wave	Informal	Open to all	Open to all genders throughout its existence, but only women have got involved.	Organising DIY cultural events (for example, gigs).	Participant observation at three public events; two interviews.
Feminist activist group	Not specified	Informal. Some formal positions due to funding requirements (funded by student union).	Open to all but significant student membership. Most meetings are women-only; some mixed meetings / events.	Changes in gendered make-up over the years. Recently decided to become largely women-only after a period of being open to all.	Discussion; campaigning; organising events.	Attended a few meetings but did not formally conduct participant observation; 10 interviews.

Appendix 2: Initial interview questions for women's committee

Questions for women	Questions for men
<p>History of involvement in women's committee</p> <p>How long have you been involved in the women's committee?</p> <p>How/why did you get involved?</p> <p>How did you get interested in feminism/gender issues?</p> <p>Were you involved before the committee became open to men? If so:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">What did you think at the time about the possibility of opening up the committee to men? Did you campaign for/against this?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Do you think the committee has changed since men were allowed to attend? In what ways is it similar/different?</p>	<p>History of involvement in women's committee</p> <p>How long have you been involved in the women's committee?</p> <p>How/why did you get involved?</p> <p>How did you get interested in feminism/gender issues?</p> <p>If you have stopped attending, why did you do so?</p>
<p>Experience of women's committee</p> <p>How would you describe your general experience of the women's committee? Can you recall any positive experiences? Can you think of any negative experiences?</p> <p>Do you think it makes a difference when men attend the meetings? If yes – in what way is it different?</p> <p>Have you been involved in any other similar groups? How does your experience in the women's committee compare to your experience in other groups?</p> <p>What do other people (e.g. your friends) think about you attending the women's committee?</p>	<p>Experience of women's committee</p> <p>How would you describe your general experience of the women's committee? Can you recall any positive experiences? Can you think of any negative experiences?</p> <p>Have you been involved in any other similar groups? How does your experience in the women's committee compare to your experience in other groups?</p>

<p>Role of men in the committee</p> <p>How do you feel about men being allowed to attend meetings?</p> <p>What do you see as men's role in the group/at meetings? Is this the same/different to the role of the women in the group?</p> <p>What do you think about the role of men in feminism in general?</p>	<p>Role of men in the committee</p> <p>What have been your experiences as a man at the women's committee?</p> <p>What do you see as your role in the group/at meetings? Is this the same/different to the role of the women in the group?</p> <p>What do you think about the role of men in feminism in general?</p> <p>What do other people (e.g. your friends) think about you attending the women's committee?</p>
<p>Women's committee</p> <p>What do you consider to be the aims/purpose of the women's committee?</p>	<p>Women's committee</p> <p>What do you consider to be the aims/purpose of the women's committee?</p>
<p>Feminism</p> <p>Do you think of the women's committee as a feminist group?</p> <p>Do you think of yourself/would you describe yourself as a feminist?</p> <p>What does the word feminist mean to you?</p>	<p>Feminism</p> <p>Do you think of the women's committee as a feminist group?</p> <p>Do you think of yourself/would you describe yourself as a feminist?</p> <p>What does the word feminist mean to you?</p>
<p>Additional topics for interviews with women's officers</p> <p>Decision to open the committee to men – ask about the process and how and why the decision was made.</p> <p>Structure and purpose of the committee.</p> <p>Their roles as women's officers.</p>	

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for research participants

It would be helpful for me if you could provide some background information about yourself. However, you do not need to answer every question. If there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, just leave the spaces blank. All information will be treated as confidential.

1) Age _____

2) Gender _____

3) How would you describe your class background?

4) How would you describe your ethnicity?

5) How would you describe your sexual orientation?

6) Do you consider yourself to have a disability? _____

Appendix 4: Questionnaire responses

Age

	Feminist discussion group	Women's committee	DIY collective	Feminist activist group
18-24	0	13	1	8
25-34	2	0	0	0
35-44	0	0	0	0
45-54	1	0	0	1
Other responses	1	0	0	0

Other responses:

- Between 40-55

Gender

	Feminist discussion group	Women's committee	DIY collective	Feminist activist group
Female	2	11	1	7
Male	2	2	0	0
Other responses	0	0	0	2

Other responses:

- Tomgirl
- Gender

How would you describe your class background?

	Feminist discussion group	Women's committee	DIY collective	Feminist activist group
Lower-middle-class	2	3	0	0
Middle-class	2	9	0	6
Working-class	0	1	0	2
Other responses	0	0	1	1

Middle-class includes:

- I am currently unemployed, have studied extensively to Masters level, and have always thought of myself as middle class
- Single-parent, middle-middle class

Working-class includes:

- Working class (but had Sky TV and holidays)

Other responses (DIY collective):

- Working class – lower middle class – aspiring?

Other responses (feminist activist group):

- Working class area, middle class education and upbringing

How would you describe your ethnicity?

	Feminist discussion group	Women's committee	DIY collective	Feminist activist group
Black	0	1	0	0
Black African	0	1	0	0
Mixed	1	2	0	1
White	1	1	0	2
White British	2	7	1	6
White other	0	1	0	0

White category includes 'Very white'.

White British includes 'White born in the UK'.

Mixed includes:

- white/arab mixed
- Filipino-Caucasian
- Mum is Moroccan Jewish, Dad is white French
- Mixed, white and indian

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

	Feminist discussion group	Women's committee	DIY collective	Feminist activist group
Bisexual	1	2	0	2
Heterosexual/ Straight	0	11	0	2
Pansexual	0	0	0	1
Queer	0	0	1	0
Other responses	3	0	0	3
No response	0	0	0	1

Other responses (feminist discussion group):

- Heterosexual but open to future loving relationships with both males and females

- Bi-curious, mainly heterosexual, confused
- heterosexual / possibly bisexual

Other responses (feminist activist group):

- don't like to label, but not straight!
- bisexual ish
- I like women a lot

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

	Feminist discussion group	Women's committee	DIY collective	Feminist activist group
Dyslexia	1	0	0	0
Slightly short-sighted?	0	0	0	1
No	3	7	1	8
Question not included	0	6	0	0

Questions for women's committee only

Level and year of study

	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year
Undergraduate	6	4	2
Postgraduate	1	0	0

Courses: Archaeology, Astrophysics, English Literature, English and Related Literature, History, History of Art x2, History and Politics, Philosophy x2, Philosophy and Politics, Politics and Economics, Women's Studies.

Length of time involved in women's committee (at the time of the interview)

Less than 6 months	3
6-12 months	5
12-18 months	3
18-24 months	1
Over 2 years	1

Appendix 5: Interview transcript notation

(JB: <u>....</u>) P: <u>.....</u>	Underlining indicates overlapping speech.
{JB:}	Curly brackets indicate interjections. This is where one person is talking and then another person speaks a few words without interrupting the overall flow of the other person's speech. There is no actual overlap of sounds.
(laughing)	This shows an action that accompanied speech or describes the manner of speaking.
[city]	Square brackets are used to indicate changes that I have made to the transcript for the purpose of anonymity or clarity.
[...]	This indicates sections of the transcript that have been omitted.
??? or (?)	This shows that I could not work out what was being said.
...	Short pause.
(pause)	Longer pause.

Appendix 6: Codes used at the start of the second round of coding

Group	Feminism*
Change over time	Becoming interested in feminism
Comparison with other groups	Black feminism
Decision to be a mixed group	Comparison with other movements
Different opinions	Feminism - negative connotations
Dynamics	Feminism in everyday life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body language • Decision-making • Directing • Gender dynamics 	Feminist beliefs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body image • Objectification • Porn • Positive discrimination
Email	Men in feminism
Expectations	Old vs. new feminism
Experience of group	Stereotypes
Feelings about the group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative aspects of group • Positive aspects of group 	Young women (and feminism)
Future	Political context*
Image	City
Is the group feminist?	Student Union
Joining group	University
Key moments	Political practice*
Leaving group	Campaigns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual harassment campaign
Limits	Vagina Monologues
Membership	Social divisions and identities*
Participation	Age
Purpose	Class
Roles	Disability
Setting up group	Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender definition • Gender identity • Gender norms • Gender performance
Structure	Nationality
Men in group*	Race
Darren	Sexuality
Decision to exclude men <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of decision 	
Decision to include men <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of decision 	
Experience as a man in the group	
Men's behaviour	
Men's participation	
Men's presence	
Men's roles	
Women's presence	

Methodology*

Ethics
Field relations
My actions
My feelings

Other codes

Attitudes towards men
Benefits of mixed-gender group
Experience
Heterosexism
Humour
Involvement in other groups
Personal change
Politics
Queer theory and politics
Reflexivity
Relations with men or women
Response of others (to groups or individuals)

*These headings also served as codes in their own right.

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