

Individualising the social: Or, whatever happened to male domination?

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Individualising the social: or, whatever happened to male domination?

[July 2003: This paper was delivered at the Australian Women's Studies Association conference in Adelaide, 16-18 April 1998. It was well received. No one had any major objections, and the audience seemed to know what I was talking about.

There was some correspondence with the conference organisers prior to the paper's acceptance, but it seemed to be only a token gesture. They not only accepted the paper for presentation at the conference, they also included it in the refereed Conference Proceedings. My reply to the reviewer's report is included after the paper.]

Abstract: The paper starts with a number of propositions outlining what feminism means for the purposes of my argument, and goes on to give a brief account of what I mean by the ideology of individualism. The body of the paper is devoted to a detailed discussion of one text, Judith Grant's *Fundamental Feminism*, as an exemplary instance of a widespread problem within academic feminism—the deletion of the problematic of male domination. Grant identifies 'Woman', 'experience' and 'personal politics' as the 'core concepts' of feminism, and suggests 'gender' as the solution to the problems entailed by those concepts. I argue that, while these concepts undoubtedly appear throughout feminist writings, any inadequacies in the ways they have been used can be rectified by situating them within the context of the social relations of male supremacy. I also argue that 'gender' is worse than useless for feminist purposes because it is incoherent and because it obliterates the social problem of male domination.

I want to start with a number of propositions which provide the framework and starting point for what I have to say in this paper, but which I am not going to argue for here (having argued them at some length elsewhere) (Thompson, 1991, 1994, 1996). Those propositions are as follows:

- that feminism is a moral and political standpoint;

- that its defining characteristic is its opposition to the meanings, values and reality of male domination;
- that male domination is a social order structured around the principle that only men count as 'human';
- that this is not a problem of men (or women), but a world-taken-for-granted within which anyone can acquiesce or resist;
- that feminism's concern for women is a concern for women's human status under conditions which deny that.

I also want to say something briefly about a phrase I will be using in this paper—the ideology of individualism. By 'ideology', I mean a set of meanings and values which serve to legitimate those social relations of ruling whereby the interests of some prevail at the expense of the interests of others. (One obvious example is the discourse of 'economic rationalism' which rationalises the accumulation of resources in the hands of the few at the expense of the many. Another example is pornography which teaches men how they ought to think of and treat women if men are to be loyal adherents of male supremacy). Ideology is both public and private, both political and personal. It is public and political in the sense that it consists of shared understandings and commonsense knowledge; and it is private and personal in that it operates on the level of the self, as consciousness, desires, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, identities, etc. In the sense in which I am using the term, not all meanings and values are ideological, only those which maintain social domination. In other words, I am using the term 'ideology' in order to open up possibilities for asking the question: 'Who benefits and at whose expense?'

By 'individualism' I mean that form of ideology which denies the existence of relations of ruling by restricting discussion, debate, explanation, etc. solely to facts about individuals. Not all talk about individuals is ideological, only that which can be shown to serve the interests of domination by excluding any possibility of exposing it as domination. Since we are all undoubtedly individuals, this is a particularly seductive form of social control. It locates inordinate powers with the individual, although such powers are grossly unrealistic for all but the favoured few whose interests the system inflates out of all human proportion. At the same time, it disallows any genuine attribution of individual rights and responsibility by blaming

the victims and exonerating the perpetrators. But whether the ideology of individualism holds the victims of oppressive conditions responsible for their own plight, or whether it absolves or glorifies the perpetrators of destructive behaviour, or whether it attributes a disproportionate power to those who have little or none, its distinguishing characteristic is the function it serves in denying the existence of social structures of domination by populating the world only with discrete individuals clumped together into indifferently valued 'groups'.

The issue of male domination has not received a great deal of attention in the feminist literature. It was certainly there in the beginning of this 'second wave' of feminism (recorded for posterity in such classic texts as: Millett, 1969[1971]; Firestone, 1981[1970]; Atkinson, 1974; Morgan, ed., 1970; Koedt, Levine and Rapone, eds, 1973; Klagsburn, ed., 1973; and Dworkin, 1974). But even there, it did not receive unequivocal recognition as *the* feminist problem. It needed theoretical development, expansion and refinement, but this did not happen. Instead, acknowledgement of male domination as the feminist problematic has virtually disappeared. There are a number of reasons for this. Partly, it is because male domination is often simply taken-for-granted—the possibility that such an idea might require further analysis never arises. Partly, it is because the evidence for the harm done to women is so overwhelming, and so savagely contested (even in the name of feminism itself), that focusing on 'women's oppression' is an immediate and pressing need. Partly, too, it is because feminist theoretical work has been dominated by the academic concerns of careers, contracts, peer assessments, funding authorities, teaching loads and malestream paradigms, an environment within which talk of male domination sits uneasily, to say the least. But partly, the failure to expand and build on the early feminist insights into male domination is due to the surreptitious influence of the ideology of individualism, an influence which remains despite numerous oft-repeated assertions to the effect that feminism adheres to a 'social constructionist' perspective.

In order to illustrate the problem in more detail, I want to discuss yet another book purporting to give an account of what feminism is, while deleting feminism's central

problematic.¹ Judith Grant's *Fundamental Feminism* (1993) is intended as a contribution to the clarification of feminist theory and politics. But in evading the real issue—male domination—she does feminism a disservice. Although she has a number of important and insightful things to say, both in her critique of what has been claimed in the name of feminism and in her suggestions of how to rectify the problems, without the central organising principle of opposition to the social relations of male supremacy her account is at best futile. At worst, it is a distortion of feminist politics in the name of 'feminism' itself.

Her main task is to provide a critique of what she sees as 'the core concepts of feminism', which she characterises as: '(1) "Woman", (2) experience, and (3) personal politics' Grant, 1993: 4). Although she does not explicitly say so, her use of the term 'Woman' (instead of 'women') is presumably intended to imply that the early radical feminist insistence on 'the oppression of women *as women*' was a homogenising construct which ignored differences between and among women. At one point she says that early radical feminism had 'created a stereotypical Woman, a monolithic, abstract being defined only by her source of oppression' (p.31). She said that the category 'Woman' did have a part to play in differentiating a distinctive feminist politics from the male Left in the early 1970s. But subsequently it has been an impediment to the development of feminist theory and politics because, in her view, it has never managed to establish that women do in fact share a common oppression. Attempts to do so, by appealing to a 'female body', childbirth, mothering, or an inherent 'female nature', she argues, are 'ahistorical' and 'essentialist'. Joined with the appeal to 'experience', the category 'Woman' has allowed relatively privileged women to be included within the category of 'the oppressed',² she says, and

1. For some earlier examples, see: Oakley, 1972; Barrett, 1980; Eisenstein, 1984; Segal, 1987; Tong, 1989. Alison Jaggar (1983) does not delete the problematic of male domination altogether, but she tends to see the social problems women face in terms of 'alienation', without identifying male domination as the source of women's alienation.

2. For a more nuanced account of the oppression of even relatively privileged women, and an insight which she has subsequently been accused of never having had, take Andrea Dworkin's discussion in *Woman Hating*:

Most of the women involved in articulating the oppression of women were white and middle class. We spent, even if we did not own and control, enormous sums of money. Because of our participation in the middle-class lifestyle we were the oppressors of other people, our poor white sisters, our Black sisters, our Chicana sisters—and the men who in turn oppressed them. This closely woven fabric of oppression, which is the racist class structure of Amerika today, assured that wherever one stood, it was with at least one foot heavy on the belly of another human being.

disallowed any way of discriminating between differing and conflicting reports of 'women's experience'. It requires the extra, and what she regards as pernicious, concept of 'false consciousness' in order to be able to distinguish feminist from anti-feminist reports of 'experience'. She finds the idea of 'personal politics' troubling because, in the absence of any 'empirically observable institutions of domination' such as capitalism or the state (p.34), everything becomes 'political' and there is no way of conceiving of human relationships in any other terms.

There is no doubt that these three concepts do exist within feminism, and to the extent that they are made the basis of feminist theorising, they can be a problem.³ But it is debatable that they comprise feminism's 'core'. On the contrary, there has also existed another 'core concept' within feminism, and that is the perception that feminism recognises the existence of and opposes the social relations of male domination. This insight is feminism's real core (Thompson, 1994, 1996), that which gives it its distinctive politics and standpoint in relation to the world.

Grant does not ignore the problematic of male domination altogether. (That would be difficult, since it undoubtedly appears in many of the writings she examines). In fact, she uses the term throughout the book. At one point towards the end of the book, she even acknowledges that 'Historically, feminist politics has been defined as that which is concerned with power as it is systematically exercised by males, or in the interests of the masculine and the male' (Grant, 1993: 181). However, she argues away its relevance for feminist theory and politics by interpreting talk about male domination as nothing but the depiction of certain sorts of individuals. It implied, she said, 'the tacit acceptance of male and female natures' which retained 'the form of these traditional categories while merely attempting to reevaluate them' (p.12).

As white, middle-class women, we lived in the house of the oppressor-of-us-all who supported us as he abused us, dressed us as he exploited us, "treasured" us in payment for the many functions we performed. We were the best-fed, best-kept, best-dressed, most willing concubines the world has ever known. We had no dignity and no real freedom, but we did have good health and long lives ... One cannot be free, never, not ever, in an unfree world, and in the course of redefining ... all the institutions which inhabit and order our lives, there is no way to hold onto privilege and comfort. (Dworkin, 1974: 21-3)

3. Elsewhere (Thompson, 1996) I have provided a detailed exposition of some of the problems with defining feminism only in terms of 'women', and with the appeal to 'experience' as a guarantee of feminist politics.

The idea of male supremacy [within early radical feminism] implied a correlative male nature that was power hungry and aggressive enough to account for men's continued and universal oppression of women. Male nature was held responsible for the sorry state of the world, while women's innocence was verified by the fact of her victimization. (Grant, 1993: 23)

But none of the quotations from early radical feminist writings which she uses to support this interpretation made any claims about 'male nature' (except perhaps the last one, which even Grant admits is 'satirical'). Here are the quotations in full:

"The demand for an end to sex roles and male imperialist domination is a real attack on the masculine citadel of war. After all, women don't declare or fight in offensive wars. War is a male institution—as are all other institutions in the society—and war is simply an extension of the colonial policy of the subjection of the female culture and the 'weaker' male cultures". (Burris, 1973: 326)

"the image of woman fostered by cultural media, high and low, then and now, is a marginal and demeaning existence, and one outside the human condition—which is defined as the prerogative of man, the male". (Millett, 1973: 366)

"there is no group other than slaves that has been singled out for such systematic and total exploitation and suppression as the class of women". (Mehrhof and Kearon, 1973: 228)

"The qualities of Man make him unfit for life today ... If females feel some compunctions about eliminating him entirely, Man preserves and zoos might prove a rational alternative". (Warrior, 1969)

What these radical feminist writers are referring to are the meanings and values, institutions and social reality, of male supremacy. To the extent that there is any implication of 'male nature', it is a 'nature' constituted by the social relations of male domination, and hence falls within the realm of ethics, politics and personal responsibility. These writers were not referring to some kind of intrinsic personality characteristics of male individuals, but to social conditions which require people to

see themselves in ways which maintain the social order of male supremacy, and to see that social order as 'natural'. The terminology of 'roles', 'institutions', 'culture', 'class' makes it perfectly clear that what is at issue is not types of individuals, but social arrangements.

Grant's argument depends on interpreting male supremacy as a set of pre-given personal characteristics, instead of as a social system of shared understandings about what it means to be female or male. Her argument tacitly accuses these early radical feminist writings of the ideology of individualism, that is, the belief that only individuals exist, that 'society' is nothing but a collection of discrete individuals with all their attributes already in place. Grant assumes that references to male domination must inevitably entail, in the words of Alison Jaggar, that 'human individuals [exist] in abstraction from any social circumstances ... that human individuals are ontologically prior to society ... [and] are the basic constituents out of which social groups are composed' (Jaggar, 1983: 28-9).

But it is Grant herself, rather than those she criticises, who displays a covert reliance on ideological individualism. For example, in her criticisms of the work of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon she states: 'Their thesis, in attempting to affix blame to men and the male, proffers an exceedingly narrow vision of women's choice, voice, and freedom' (Grant, 1993: 80). Her arguments demonstrate a marked obliviousness to the possibility of reading the work of Dworkin and MacKinnon as *social* critique, as an exposure of what male sexuality means and how it is valued in male supremacist terms. She is equally oblivious to the possibility that knowing this increases women's choices rather than diminishing them, since it presents women with an alternative view of reality they are unlikely to encounter anywhere else. She seems incapable of seeing social structures, that is, those meanings and values which operate by default, behind the backs of individuals as it were, until and unless we develop the capacity to recognise them for what they are. Despite her discussion of 'gender' in terms of social structures (see below), she does not apply that analysis to her reading of the writings of Dworkin and MacKinnon. Instead, she sees in them nothing but individuals—'men' with the personal attributes of lust, a will to power and blameworthy behaviour, and 'women' who were free to choose and speak out until Dworkin and MacKinnon came along and tried to stop them.

This is, of course, absurd, but it is entailed by the logic of individualism. If the social order has vanished from sight, all that remains is a series of individuals; and since the social order exists nonetheless, either it is interpreted as nothing but the characteristics, attitudes or behaviours of individuals, or it is denied altogether by attributing unrealistic powers to the individual. It is Dworkin's and MacKinnon's anti-pornography legislation which, in Grant's view, supposedly constitutes their attempt to prevent women exercising their 'freedom of choice'. Grant objects to this legislation on the ground that it 'would limit female consent', because of its explicit exclusions of what can be legally construed as 'consent' to the making of pornography. Grant comments: 'The potential legal rule [defined by the exclusions] would have made it impossible for a woman to consent even by signing a contract and receiving money—the essence of freedom and power in liberal capitalist relations' (pp.86-7).

While Grant is right about this 'essence', she appears to find it, and the social relations it upholds, so unproblematic as to constitute part of her argument *against* the legislation. But what counts as 'freedom and power' within liberal capitalism is not at all unproblematic. Liberalism starts from the foundational premise that individuals are already inherently 'free and equal', all evidence to the contrary being either ignored, or reinterpreted as 'freedom and equality' nonetheless, or as 'natural' attributes of individuals, or as private preferences; while capitalism is nothing if not hierarchical, exploitative and oppressive. What counts as 'freedom and power' under these conditions is highly unlikely to be any such thing for significant sections of the population. In that case, it is not Dworkin's and MacKinnon's anti-pornography legislation which 'limits women's consent', but those social conditions which ensure that women do in fact have little choice in the matter. Grant's account attributes both Dworkin and MacKinnon, *and* the women who participate in the making of pornography, with a social power which passes the bounds of belief. Her account takes liberal capitalism at its word, and displays an uncritical acceptance of its ideological self-justifications—everyone is already 'free and equal' and the only impediment to the exercise of those personal characteristics is the bad behaviour of other individuals. Her account renders invisible those social structures of

domination which organise the world to the detriment of most of the people most of the time.

Grant is not alone in this. Her book is only one of a long line of similar arguments which have resulted in the virtual silencing of the early radical feminist insight that behind the oppression of women lie the social arrangements of male domination.⁴ What has been posited in the place of male domination as the central problematic of feminist theory and politics is 'gender'. Grant's book is no exception. Having pointed to the inadequacies of grounding feminist theory in 'Woman' and 'experience', she asks: 'why not turn our attention to the structure of gender itself?'

With this postulation of 'gender', it might be assumed that Grant has thereby avoided individualism. 'Gender', she says, 'is a relatively autonomous, hegemonic, ideological structure that divides the world hierarchically into two mythical genders, and which reinforces itself through an elaborate system of rules and punishments enforced in all aspects of life' (Grant, 1993: 161). She goes on to say that, as ideology, 'gender' is 'the lived relation between people and the world'. It presents itself as natural, voluntary and common sense. It is largely maintained through 'consent to the principles that sustain it', although it also entails sanctions for punishing those who transgress its unspoken but commonly understood rules (pp.163-4).

It is the recognition of this 'oppressive structure of gender', Grant argues, which constitutes a 'feminist lens'. This is 'a self-consciously political perspective' through which to view 'human experiences' and give them 'new meaning' (pp.178-9). This 'feminist lens' is not enough in and of itself for feminist politics—it must be combined with a willingness to act as well. But it does solve the problems involved in basing a feminist politics on 'Woman' or 'experience', in Grant's view, since it provides a way of interpreting experience, and of distinguishing feminists from other women. It also allows for the notion of 'personal politics' to be retained, although 'it is not safe to say that everything is political all the time'. It must be remembered that 'things are politicized in contexts', and that 'politics, personal or

4. For a detailed critique of one form taken by these arguments, the 'essentialism' accusation levelled against radical—deemed 'cultural'—feminism, see: Thompson, 1991.

otherwise, is an activity necessarily connected to something outside myself' (pp.181-2). She concludes by suggesting that

The aim of feminist politics is the end of gender and the creation of new human beings who are self-determining and fully participate in the development of their own constantly evolving subjectivity. We could think of this as a feminist humanist vision. (Grant, 1993: 183)

But using the term 'gender' does not really escape individualism. Although the 'sex/gender distinction' was intended to emphasise that feminism's political focus is directed towards social reality (rather than nature or biology), 'gender' does not identify with sufficient precision the nature of the social problem exposed by feminism. Its meaning is too indeterminate. It is most frequently used as nothing more than a synonym for 'sex'. Sometimes that referent includes the existence of two sexes, male and female, but more often than not the 'sex' which is 'gender' is only the female one, while men continue to be seen as the 'human' norm. As a consequence, 'gender' can be (and it often is) used to evade the political problem of the social relations of male supremacy, and we are left once again with nothing but individuals because the social relations have been elided.

Grant's 'feminist humanist vision' cannot even be conceived until and unless the chief barrier to its realisation—the ideological principle that only men count as 'human'—is recognised. Instead of the politically unlocatable term 'gender', it is perfectly possible to interpret *male domination* as a 'hegemonic, ideological structure' and a 'lived relation between people and the world', 'which reinforces itself through an elaborate system of rules and punishments enforced in all aspects of life', and which is largely maintained through 'consent to the principles that sustain it'. Indeed, it is essential to do so, if the chief barrier to 'the creation of new human beings'—male monopolisation of 'human' status—is to be challenged and opposed. The aim of feminist politics is not the end of 'gender', but the end of the social relations of male supremacy.

Grant's postulation of 'gender' does not serve the function she outlines for it. She says that 'gender' is 'by definition an inequitable system'. But given the fuzziness of its meaning and the ease with which it can be used to deny social relations of ruling,

this is by no means obvious. In contrast, the term 'male domination' identifies what is at stake immediately and unequivocally (as long, that is, as it is read as a social system, and not trivialised and distorted by being interpreted as a set of male personality characteristics). She also says that 'gender' is 'reinforced at the level of states, capitalism, and throughout the international community', but offers no evidence or argumentation in support of this contention. The examples she gives in this context would be more accurately identified as instances of male domination rather than of 'gender', although she carefully deletes the male supremacist interests, referring to 'battering' instead of male violence against women, to 'reproductive freedom' rather than women taking the control of their reproductive capacities into their own hands and out of the control of male dominated institutions, and to 'child abuse' rather than male sexual abuse of children (p.181). It is also unclear how she can justify claiming an 'international community' for 'gender', while at the same time denying any such claim to the radical feminist exposure of male domination, by accusing radical feminism of 'positing an almost mystical, invisible, transhistorical, cross-cultural political system' (p.38). How is it that 'gender' is (truly) 'international', while male domination is (falsely) 'transhistorical' and 'cross-cultural'? The semantic content of each of these claims is the same—both imply a kind of universal existence of the relevant phenomena. Both assert that feminism has a universal relevance (in the sense that it cannot be confined to any particular group of women, geographical area, historical period, or sphere of human existence). Why is one right and the other wrong? Grant does not say. The distinction she draws is purely terminological—'gender' is referred to in seemingly neutral, but in fact, approving terms, while male domination is referred to pejoratively. The real difference between them—that male domination names the enemy clearly, while 'gender' does not—is never addressed.

Grant is perfectly correct in pointing out that feminism is centrally concerned with women. She is also correct in pointing out that this has its limitations. The reasons she gives for these limitations, however, are less than satisfactory. It is unhelpful to refer to feminism's concern for women with the term 'Woman' (with a capital 'W' and the archetypal singular) since this term does not in fact appear in feminist writings (except in critical appraisals of malestream stereotyping of women). Instead, the constant reference point is 'women'. This focus of attention is both necessary—since it provided feminism with its starting point and continues to

provide its anchor to the real world—and problematic. As Grant quite rightly points out, women differ in the ways they are socially situated, there is nothing in the simple fact of being female which would lead to finding a common cause among women, and women's reporting of their experiences is not necessarily feminist. But substituting 'gender' for 'women' is meaningless at best; at worst, it is anti-feminist. It is meaningless because it is incoherent. The distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' was originally devised in order to emphasise the point that feminism was concerned with the realm of the social, and not with anything natural or biological. But by separating 'sex' out from 'gender' and confining the social to 'gender', the distinction implicitly reinforced the idea that 'sex' was not social, that is, that it was still natural and biological. This conclusion is hardly congruent with a feminist social constructionist perspective. Moreover, by occupying the whole of the space of feminism's subject matter, 'gender' is anti-feminist because it operates as a euphemistic, and ideological, exclusion of any recognition of the main enemy, male domination.⁵

The problematic aspect of feminism's concern with 'women' is that it is too often focused on a socially empty category just waiting to be filled with any particularity whatsoever. It is abstracted from the social relations of male domination, and interpreted instead as a concern with women per se. The social relations which cause the problems for women vanish from sight, and all we are left with is a set of individuals identified only through the attribute of femaleness. Since femaleness is not in and of itself an adequate basis for shared understandings and a common cause, it is hardly surprising that 'feminism' has fragmented into a myriad of competing and conflicting female 'identities'.

If instead, we acknowledge the existence of male domination, we can acknowledge, too, that women do share something in common—a claim for a human status in opposition to those social conditions which deny that status to women. We can also argue that this feminist claim is in men's interests too, since domination is in no one's best interests. The dominator is dehumanised in the same instant and to the same extent that he dehumanises. What form a genuine human status might take is an

5. For more detailed accounts of what is wrong with 'gender', see: Gatens, 1983; Thompson, 1989; Thompson, 1991; Thompson, 1996.

open question, to be answered by people in their own lives wherever they are situated and whatever they see as their own interests, a choice limited only by the feminist realisation that women cannot be fully human (or men genuinely human) while the meanings and values of male supremacy remain unchallenged.

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The peer review process

[July 2002: The main points in the reviewer's report are discussed in my response below]

Department of Social Inquiry
University of Adelaide
South Australia—5005
6.3.1998

Dear [...],

Here is a revised version of my paper, 'Individualising the Social', submitted for consideration for the Proceedings of the Seventh Australian Women's Studies Association Conference.

Thank you for your comments. I hope I have made my argument clearer as a consequence. I was not, however, able to incorporate all of them for the following reasons:

1. I have tried to state the framework within which I am arguing as succinctly as possible at the beginning of the paper. It is not possible to go into too much detail, since my purpose is to apply that framework to a particular case. Since I have argued for that framework at length elsewhere, I do not want to repeat myself here. I have provided the reader with references to be followed up if required.
2. I have indeed chosen Grant's text as an example of a wider phenomenon, and I say so.
3. In relation to your reference to Joan Eveline's paper, she and I are certainly talking about the same thing. That is hardly surprising since we are both talking feminism—that is my point about male domination being the social problem feminism is grappling with. (Indeed, Eveline herself uses the term 'male domination' and its equivalents throughout her paper). There are, however, a couple of differences between her paper and mine. In the first place, I don't see opposing male domination as one strategy among many, but as the defining characteristic of feminism, however various the forms that opposition might take. In that sense, I disagree that there are many 'feminisms'. (Interestingly, Eveline herself drops the terminology of 'feminisms' at some point in her paper, and continues by referring to 'feminism' in

the singular). Opposition to male domination is what marks feminism off from non-feminist and anti-feminist discourses about 'women', a task of vital importance under current conditions where too often anti-feminism is being paraded as feminism itself, vide the works of such as Camille Paglia and Katie Roiphe, and many a lucubration in the daily press and the glossy magazines. Defining feminism in terms of opposition to male domination is also a way of by-passing some of the paralysing traps of defining it only in terms of 'women'. (See the reference to my thesis cited in the paper).

In the second place, I prefer the terminology of 'male domination' to 'men's advantage' since the former is a more comprehensive term. 'Men's advantage' does not really explain, for example, how it is that men can feel justified in abusing women. It does explain the silence about and misnaming of that abuse—it is to men's advantage that the perpetrators not be named, vide Eveline's discussion of the Swedish terminology which translates as 'women's violence', and the terminology common in English of 'domestic' or 'family' violence or 'battered women'. But it doesn't make much sense to talk about abusing women as an advantage for men. In contrast, talking about male domination, seen as those social relations which operate on the principle that only men count as 'human', promises to expose more clearly the systematic reasons why men feel justified in abusing women. Because women are seen as not fully, or not at all, human, they can be seen as men's possessions, as things existing only for men's use and pleasure, and hence as lacking any right not to be abused, i.e. any right to safety and security of person. While from one point of view, it might be seen as men's advantage to be able to use and abuse other human beings, from another standpoint it is gravely to their disadvantage since it is a corruption of any genuine humanity. Inhumanity is to no one's advantage, including the dominators, however brutally they may defend their prerogatives. I agree with Eveline that feminism needs to focus more often on the ways in which men benefit, and to be more cautious about social policy strategies intended to redress women's disadvantages. But I still think that talking in terms of male domination is more accurate and appropriate (although even more likely to meet with resistance in the area of social policy).

4. Re your comment about white supremacy: It seems to me that you are asking for a token gesture since it is irrelevant to my argument. I am reluctant to engage in token gestures on this issue because it is too important for that. I discussed the connection between racism and male supremacy at some length in my thesis, arguing that the link is dehumanisation. I do not want to rehearse those arguments here, and I am the first to admit that they are by no means definitive or conclusive. Suffice it to say for the moment that I tend to agree with the early radical feminist argument (more recently restated by Gerda Lerner in *The Creation of Patriarchy*) that the original form of domination is the domination of women by men, although I disagree with the way in which this is located in history (or pre-history). Rather, I see it as an aspect of socialisation into the meanings and values of male supremacy, and its 'origin' at the beginning of each individual life. Once that first form of dehumanisation is set in place, it becomes the norm (although it must always be remembered that domination is not the only form of social relations possible, even under conditions where domination prevails). There is more work to be done on this, but this paper is not the place to do it.

Once again, thank you for your comments.

All the best,

Denise Thompson