



- \* Encourage me to consider and learn from the experiences of others, as I learn how environments and experiences shape the way each of us thinks and acts.
- \* Help me challenge the adequacy of male-centered science and social science based on theories that so often have mislabeled or ignored the varied and persistent material conditions of women's lives. I want analytical tools to make gender politics more visible to myself and others.
- \* Help me work, with others, on constructive social change in meaningful, healthy, and useful political practices.

Theories in academe usually come from faculty mentors, intellectual interests and training—and personal experiences. Charlene Spretnak writes about the process through which our understandings of the world can grow through an “embodied epistemology” (Spretnak 1991, 149). There is, of course, no universal woman, women's experience, or women's movement. Any feminist theory needs to deal with diversity and divisions, including such hierarchies as class, race, age, sexual orientation. Years ago, Sandra Harding warned against trying to ground feminism in a single political-philosophical theory (1986, 664). Decades ago, The Combahee River Collective (1983) pointed out that white women in the U.S. have made little effort to understand and lessen racism in our own thinking.

Muted group theory resonates with many, including many women and men of color; I know this from the messages I receive from students and others. For many, the theory is real and compelling. It helps explain what's going on in a way that is easily understood, believable, and useful. (In fact, I often think the muted group theory is too easily “understood.” Often students do not explore beyond the brief description of the theory offered in textbooks.) So the interest in the theory continues. Yet, among those feminists who would label themselves as theorists and researchers, there does not seem to be a lot of explicit interest in muted group theory outside communication research. However, I do not think that this is because it is closely considered and then rejected as not being of value. Very similar concepts are often talked about under other names and descriptions.

Just a couple examples: Marilyn Frye has written, “[W]omen's existence is both absolutely necessary to and irresolvably problematic for the dominant reality” as the unseen “background” whose labors ensure the seamless performances of those whose identity is “foreground” (1983, 166-67). She uses the metaphor of the stage, with the stagehands, women, as those who work in the background while the men (primarily Anglo, economically affluent, Christian, heterosexual) repeatedly enact a fictionalized reality naturalized through its repetition. Jennifer Hornsby writes, “The use of language as it is passed down to her can seem to falsify a woman's experience, and present an obstacle to discussing it

authentically. Women have been described as ‘silenced’ (Hornsby 2000, 88). She cites Tillie Olsen's discussions of silence (1978), and Catherine MacKinnon's (1987) claim that “pornography silences women.” So, is there still a need for the muted group theory?

### **Is the muted theory now outdated?**

Has it lost its oomph? Where is the radical, and sheer joy of discovery and defiance? In the 1970s and 1980s the muted group theory challenged the status quo, of academe at least. While many women reading and discussing the theory thought it made sense of their own lives, many other academics thought it wasn't proper—theoretically and politically. It certainly wasn't like any of the theories in introductory communication texts then. It was pretty radical.

If the muted group theory now isn't as exciting as it once seemed, this is due in part to its success and the success of theories and actions related to it. Shirley and Edwin Ardener suggested that there are “dominant modes of expression in any society which have been generated by the dominant structure within it” (E. Ardener 1975, 20). They wrote that women, due to their structural places in society, have different models of reality. Their perspectives are “muted” because they do not form part of the dominant communication system of the society. These days many people say about this, “Yeah. And?”

So the theory isn't as daring and exciting as it once was. In addition, feminist defiance now seems more muted. There is not as much against the grain transgressive behavior on campuses and U.S. communities. So, is the muted group theory really outdated or....?

### **Is our focus on the latest in academic theorizing limiting our imagination and understanding?**

It is informative to read the “old” feminist work from the 1970s and 1980s in the U.S. (Leathwood 2004, 456) and many other countries, and to see just how radical many of the writings and actions of feminists remain to our eyes and ears. We certainly should not ignore or throw out this theorizing without a lot of deep consideration. Often in academe, many of us have a tendency to make past writings seem simplistic and ineffective, in order to promote the newness and excitement of our new ideas. Often the presentation of the older ideas are false or incomplete. (E.g., there was a lot of critical discussion of difference and identity in the 1970s, but one wouldn't also get a sense of this from contemporary feminist theorizing.) Diana Leonard (2000) cautions that, since the 1980s, feminists have grown up with “just a caricature” of what was achieved by earlier feminism. I join the others who encourage us all to go back and look at the work of earlier theorists and activists. (See discussion of this in, for example, McLaughlin 2003; Rowland and Klein 1996; Stanley and Wise 2000). Many

feminists have offered us a rich variety of adventuresome, creative, and profound ideas. In inspecting and respecting their work, we can interrogate their ideas, consider the insights of women of many experiences, and build on their contributions.

**Can we take the very unAmerican (or unmodern) stance of thinking that we do not necessarily have better questions, ideas, answers, solutions than all those who have come before?**

Can we think of ourselves as related to, and students of, many other generations? Can we learn from their experiences and words? Can we learn anything useful today from looking at the force of the various prohibitions against women speaking in various locations, to various people-- and the creativity with which they have responded to such proscriptions? (See, for example, analysis of the rhetoric of women through the 19th and 20th centuries, Campbell 1989).

It might be a real surprise for many people to learn that the "strong-minded women" publishing in the 1860s have a lot to say to us about a lot of "contemporary issues" such as false generics; the constant labeling of women's speech as different and inferior to men's; the belittling use of terms of endearment such as "doll" and "angel"; the restrictions on women's voices in "public" places; the exclusive language of the churches; the double standard of sexual activity; the "disgrace" of Harvard and Yale in their treatment of women; street harassment; rape; wife beatings; the danger to women of the military; the bondage of fashion; equal pay for equal work; and the arrest of prostitutes but not of the men visiting them. In words they described as "hard as cannonballs," they criticized the "Noodledom" and the "Mandom" that laughs at independent women, and the "mischievous words" such as *white* and *male* used in legal documents. Their word coinages and their critique of the form and content of men's talk often seems very fresh (and, alas, still very radical) today. For example, they advised women to "honor their own names and then keep them" whether married or unmarried. (See Rakow and Kramarae 1991; Russo and Kramarae 1991.)

Those of us interested in the muted group theory can see that more than 100 years ago, women were talking about the different perspectives of women and men because of their different experiences. They were talking about the assumed primacy of men's vision and the danger it poses to everyone. And they were often doing it with great insight, visionary passion, invention, and humor.

Because the work of these earlier strong-minded women was not carried forward in traditional analyses and bibliographies, Betty Friedan didn't know about them and so had to write of the "problem with no name." Edwin Ardener wrote of "The Problem." The strong-minded women of the 19th century had many descriptive names for the many related problems they experienced.

Thanks to the work of many feminist historians, we now at least know the names of some of these women, yet we seldom extend our reading and thinking about our history and culture beyond the time and publications of our own adulthood. It's an exclusion that limits our imagination and understanding.

When we are looking for the theory and practice to guide our social revolution, we need to search for and mine our feminist past. Today, in thinking about how we speak, many academics are more likely to make reference to Aristotle and Plato of Greek antiquity than to the many women who during the past 150 years have focused on who speaks about what, when, where and why and with what consequences. *They* dared to speak and write, but their voices have since been muted.

**Has language and communication study lost its importance in feminist theorizing?**

In 1994 bell hooks wrote: "Recent discussions of diversity and multiculturalism tend to downplay or ignore the questions of language" (173). During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, language critiquing was very important to feminist ideology. Linguistic reform was important for our thinking about ourselves, our culture, and possibilities for change. The representations and images of women and men were scrutinized and critiqued, and alternatives offered. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, criticisms of the sexist and racist language used by dominant individuals, groups, and institutions gave way to projects of locating and understanding differences within the category of "women," a word which has been broken open with discussions of representations, self-identity, and lived experience.

Many recent books of feminist theory have pages of discussions of body, desire, difference, sexuality, globalization, queerness, postcolonialism, pleasure, identity, and gender---but relatively few explicit discussions of the ways language and communication practices impose restrictions, and offer some solutions, to social problems.

Interest in destabilizing many key terms (e.g., of sexual differences) continues, but seemingly mostly as efforts to sort out meanings. Stated much too simply, while there was once heavy critique of the language of the "oppressors," now there is much reflection among feminists about being bodies in the world. (Of course, academic feminists have always been involved in many projects. But I mention here some of the most publicized theoretical debates.<sup>2</sup>)

Knowledge remains language-based. But lately there isn't as much interest in what social injustices are reflected by language, what is missing in language, and how it can be reworked.<sup>3</sup> This has implications for how much interest in muted group theory that we can expect from feminist theorists.

The study of language is both more serious and less central than it was 30 years ago. While there are many

current books that focus on the terminology of feminist theory, with intense explorations of such terms as gender, sex, gay, queer, heterosexuality, identity, body, and difference, at least in U.S. academic feminism there is not as much mucking about with the language. Some words are contested, but few words are created. Current academic writing about contested terms is more likely to stay within institutional methods of deconstruction and politics. Many of our concerns are now less revolutionary and much more institutionalized. There is less talk these days about the magic of, and discomfort with, the words we use, and less talk about alternative ways of communicating. While people in communication studies continue to closely inspect language usage and forms of communication, this study no longer is considered a core concern of feminists in all disciplines. There do not seem to be many groups of Gloriously Growling Guerilla Girls inside academe these days.

We might want to revisit and refresh our conversations about our language and communication. In talking about a vital activity of the women's movement, Dorothy Smith (2004) writes about the importance of women's getting together as women, speaking together as women, and discovering dimensions of "our" experience that had no previous expressions or explanations (265). In this context, "women" is, she writes, particularly nonexclusive and open-ended, always subject to the disruption of women who enter speaking from difference experiences (265). Although power relationships will always operate, they operate within common situated and political structures. Many women share many common problems, if not a common outlook (McLaughlin 2003, 68). A critical reconsideration of the muted group theory suggests that gender conceptions are still worthy of being taken seriously but it does not require an assumption that all the differences are between women's and men's experiences.

#### **Does muted group theory differ from standpoint theory?**

The interest, in standpoint theory, of the ways that politics, culture, and language function as "prisonhouses" of "conventional" knowledge, is closely related to the interest in muted group theory. The linkages between the theories can be seen when looking at some central standpoint arguments:

- \* Societal hierarchies include divisions of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and class.
- \* The resulting sexual division of labor means that women and men are likely to have different understandings of the world.
- \* People in privileged positions do not acknowledge the processes that place them in their position and have a vested interest in not seeing those processes.

- \* The viewpoints of marginalized people reveal the bias of the privileged positions.
- \* Recognizing and understanding the problems of the marginalized can help resolve major social problems and create a better society for everyone.
- \* There is no view from nowhere, no neutral observers. (See the discussion in McLaughlin 2003, 56, 60-61; and Wood, this issue.)

One way muted group theory and standpoint theory differ is in the point of view involved. The muted group theorist is likely to look out on the social landscape and see/hear the groups she then describes. The standpoint theorist is more apt to listen to the labels individuals use to describe their places in society. Both theories are concerned about labels and language use and exclusion, although the uses of muted group theory are often more directly focused on the ways women's and men's world views are reflected or not in the language and at the amount and types of speech practices of women and men.

Neither muted group theory nor standpoint theory suggest that any individual or group has the only truth, but both argue for the importance of challenging and providing alternatives to dominant explanations of the way the world works. As one writer, drawing on the work on Black feminist standpoint perspectives by Patricia Hill Collins and others, warns, "Challenges to oppressive ideas about the inferiority of Black people are unlikely to come from the dominant modes of thought which produced the ideas in the first place" (McLaughlin 2003, 64).

#### **What about the questions of essentialism?**

How can we use the muted group theory yet avoid the mistaken generalizations about people and language, wherever the errors have come from--intent, sloppy thinking and talking, ignorance, ethnocentrism....?

While the muted group theory grows out of and respects cultural differences of many sorts, some users of the theory may rather too easily neglect the complexities of gender, class, and race domination. Some people using the theory have boxed oppression within discrete, binary categories, e.g., women/men; AfricanAmericans/EuroAmericans. A focus only on the categories of women and men, or white and non-white, for example, is simplistic and ignores other forms of struggle, as women of color, in particular, have made very clear during the past decades. Universalistic, ahistorical categories are not useful in promoting alternative ways of seeing the world and our places in it. Differences need to be considered in many, changing ways--- including as experience, as social relations, as subjectivity and as identity (Brah 1992).

However, Maria Lugones (1991) and Marilyn Frye (2000) caution that claiming theoretical concern about essentialism may be a cover for worries about difficult, direct, and responsible engagement with women of color.

As they argue, calling "anti-essentialism" a cure for racism, sexism and ethnocentrism in feminist theorizing may foreclose the needed investigation and analysis of the kinds of generalizations, errors and mistakes involved.

Further, our accusations of feminist theories as essentialist often portray our most groundbreaking, intellectual "mothers" as merely unsophisticated, simplistic, and way, way passé. As Marilyn Frye (2000) points out, when we make those easy accusations we add to the historical process of burying some of the most creative women thinkers, who have helped us, as feminists, get to our current questions and critiques (55). We need to go back to original sources to see that most feminist theorists, including those using the muted group theory, have recognized that women are not a homogeneous mass.

**Does muted group theory deal adequately with the complexities of gender, class, and race domination—i.e., with all the networks within the networks?**

No, but what theory does? Who knows and can adequately explain the complexities? No one, which is why we call them complexities. However, most feminist theorists are trying. The popular presentation of gender and language research is something else. Gender relations and tensions are easier (seemingly less sensitive) for most media personnel to deal with than are race or class relations and tensions.

For example, the two-culture approach to "gender troubles" continues to receive a lot of attention in the "popular media." We've all heard the simple generalizations from talk show hosts. Many people don't want to deal with power issues or actual situations. The "two, separate but equal, cultures" explanation is an easy, comfortable one for them. So, they argue, of course there are "misunderstandings" when speakers of these two cultures come together.

Not so, suggests the muted group theory. When power differentials are present "misunderstandings between cultures" won't do as an explanation. Yet there's been a problem even with much of our more nuanced discussions when race and gender become moribund categories. I'm not sure that the muted group theory helps us a lot in thinking about the shifts in groups and identities that each of us makes all the time. These days, most of us know, and know to say, that identity is never unitary and is seldom consistent. And that it is often imposed, not chosen.

We can say this, but how do we express this knowledge in our theorizing and other actions? For example, Evelyn Hammonds asks the following Difficult and Critical Questions:

...if the sexualities of black women have been shaped by silence, erasure, and invisibility in dominant discourses, then are black lesbian sexualities doubly silenced? What methodologies

are available to read and understand this perceived void and gauge its direct and indirect effects on that which is visible? (2002, 261)

Women of color and lesbian feminists have suggested that the "multiple jeopardy" of their lives raises serious questions about the validity of any generalizations based on gender. If gender is always meshed with race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation, when what framework that isolates gender is of any value (Hawkesworth 2000, 142-143)?<sup>4</sup>

These musings and thinking about the future of muted group theory lead to even further questions, which need to be explored as we move ahead since our time and space for query here are inevitably limited. Among those questions are the following:

**How can (if it can) muted group theory help us attend more to matters of class? In what ways can muted group theory encourage and assist us in understanding the relationship of mutedness and large economic structures?**

**When we use muted group theory, do we name the "oppressed" but not the "oppressors"? Inferring but not stating the agent may be an act of self-protection. However, fixing names to the ones we call "oppressors" may be necessary in order to have clear discussions about the perceived source of problems and remedies. (See discussion in Salem 1980.**

**Have we been specific enough about the types of "obstacles", "power", "dominance," and "repression"?**

**What language do we use in talking and writing about the theory? Do many of us use "safe," "high," "man-made" academic language?**

**When we talk about "languages" do we try to understand the spaces between and among lexicon; syntax; language; dialects? Between what is written and what is spoken?**

**What about nonverbals? Can we use the muted group theory to help us discuss the many ways we communicate or "talk behind backs"?**

**How is the muted group theory related to the communities of practice analytical framework and ideas about change?**

As the framework is elaborated by Penny Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (1992), studying the informal and institutionalized practices in a community acknowledges that people speak out of aspects of identity that include age, ethnicity and social status—as well as the gender expectations that wash around us locally and beyond. This

framework encourages us to see the practices of a community as not static but subject to contestation and change (Walsh 2001, 206). In this way it usefully expands the basic principles of the muted group theory.

### **Does the muted group theory encourage talk of victimization?**

I would suggest that used simplistically, it could. However, it has often been used to encourage us to search for many kinds of resistance, defiance. For me, the theory and related theories, along with some fortunate access to publishers, led me to work with many others on a feminist dictionary and a feminist encyclopedia. Part of that work was illustrating how the construction and maintenance of gendered inequality has led many "victims" to many acts of resistance.

### **Are we too ready to hear similarities in the silence and mutedness across groups and situations? Or too ready to equate silence and mutedness?**

This issue of silence is one of those fraught with complexity. For some it is "to be broken, shattered, shredded; . . . through which one must pass in order to join one's voice..." to others (Yamamoto, 1993, 131). For others silence may involve culturally appropriate interaction. Silence isn't always a problem to be "solved," although it *is* something to be understood. Silence is not only a result of oppression, nor is it synonymous with passivity. It can be alive with possibilities and welcomed (Stone 2002, 16-41). There is the silence that provides meditative clarity; a gift from all the noises of urban life; a time of respect for ourselves; a feeling of connectedness when experienced with others; a rest from the imperative and compulsion to speak. And it can also be a protection that should not be pried away by well-wishing others.

Silence is as complex as speech.

bell hooks has written about how being pushed to the margins and recognizing that *can* lead to a self-determined voice, at least over a period of time. She initially learned to "talk a talk that was itself a silence" and experienced intense confusion in her efforts to speak and write (1989, 6-7). As she points out, silence can be a protective, necessary, and proper response. More recently she has written about the "broken voice" of many African Americans, pointing out that when you "hear the broken voice you also hear the pain contained within that brokenness—a speech of suffering; often it's that sound nobody wants to hear" (2004, 153). However, she continues by writing that marginality is more than deprivation, it is also the site of radical possibility, of resistance (156).

### **How global is the muted group theory? And is muted group theory useful when studying globalization?**

(See Hellinger and Bussmann 2001 for a wide-ranging discussion of labeling-meaning systems, problems and transformations in many languages and cultures.)

To say that race and gender are relational and dynamic categories, involved in local, national, and global power is easy. But beyond that . . . is difficult.

Most of us English speakers don't read the work of feminists and other activists writing in other languages, even if translations are available. Those feminists who speak several languages, and those who feel the global dominance of English, often speak particularly meaningfully of the colonizing forces of a dominant language group. English has come to be the language of worldwide commerce, with the muting of voices/perspectives in other languages in many situations. Current questions and discussions of identity in U.S. feminism usually do not seem to have an immediate link to global economic and environment issues.

Today we need once again to collectively figure out how to empower more participants around the world. Who is speaking and writing about women's rights, citizenship and political representation? Further, whose interpretive voices are heard, whose voices are muted or silenced?

### **What would a revised muted group theory look like?**

One of my questions here would be: How organic, how whole, can we make our theories? Muted group theory certainly is made to deal with many kinds of human hierarchies and domination. But it doesn't seem immediately valuable in helping us with our increasing, if dragging, sensibility that our environments are not "natural" adversaries of humans, and that humans are only a member, a very enmeshed member (along with trees, salmon, creeks, newts), of this universe.

On one level we know that all life is connected. But separation is a widely practiced illusion, one that many of us are good at and one that aids in the creation of sexism and racism. Letting go of the "us and them" mentality and all the ways we hold ourselves separate is quite a task. Theories can help us challenge established practices, in part by listening to those who see assumptions where most of us see only what is a given.

Poet and theorist Adrienne Rich gives us earthy advice:

Theory—the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees—theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain clouds and returns to the earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth. (1986, 213-214)

In sum, the muted group theory is one resource that has provided assistance for many people, in guiding some of our thoughts and actions about communication. It has been used to make gender and race politics more visible

and to highlight some reasons and potential solutions for the disarray and violence many of us see all around. Theories can be enabling, but they can also be harmful, so they need to be chosen and used carefully. We need to ask healthy dangerous questions of our theories.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Because some students are confused by the “Muted” in Muted Group Theory, I have tried some other labels. With a playful nod to Shirley Ardener, I mention several of them here.  
Muffling Action Theory: Muffling as in deadening sounds, or making obscure. But it sounds too car-repair-ish. Maybe Muffled Group Theory.  
The Hushing Theory: Hushing as in quieting. But it sounds too library-based.  
Voiced-Over Theory: Voiced-over as in covered up. But it sounds as if the theory is voiced-over.  
Smothered Voices Theory: As in concealed, suppressed, extinguished. And smothered includes an “other”. But it sounds a bit like mushroom sauce over potatoes.  
Stifled Group Theory: As in interrupted, cut off, limited by the exercise of power or control. Calls up some Archie Bunker images, but it seems to work.
- <sup>2</sup> Of course, interest in the power and possibility of language continues in many places, particularly by those in communication and philosophy. Influential theorists such as Luce Irigaray continue

to revise and thicken their analysis of language in terms of cultural change. (See, for example, Deutscher [2002].) Judith Butler (2001) takes the current academic debates about the terms “sex” and “gender” into a discussion of their current uses and effects in international politics. Sharon Marcus writes of rape “as a scripted interaction that takes place in language” (2002,172); she argues that the grammar of violence identifies women as objects of violence and of property (175).

- <sup>3</sup> This is not to ignore the important reclaiming of such previously derogatory labels such as bitch, ho’, black, nigger, and queer (see Chen 2001, 241-243). bell hooks (2004) writes about her continued use of “old codes, words like ‘struggle, marginality, resistance’,” knowing that they are no longer popular or “cool” but knowing that they evoke and affirm important political legacies, and that they can be renewed and given new meanings (159).
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, Elena Stone’s 2002 account of voice and silence, as she sought out and listened to “ordinary people” saying “extraordinary things” about their experience and knowledge. See also Joanna Kadi (2000) who writes, “Puh-lease. Everybody in my neighborhood...grasped the idea [of multiple realities] with no problem. We lived it. We had our reality, the bosses had theirs, and we understood them both. Theorists like W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about double consciousness, whereby African Americans are aware of their own reality as well as that of white people, at the turn of the [last] century” (334). She goes on to say that academic theorists don’t attribute these ideas to people of color or the working-class people who have lived and understood them for centuries. Instead, academics steal these ideas and clothe them in language so inaccessible that only a few can discuss them (334).



## Feminist Standpoint Theory and Muted Group Theory: Commonalities and Divergences

Julia T. Wood

### Origins of Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory is one theory in the group of standpoint theories. Others focus on standpoints defined by, for instance, race-ethnicity and sexual orientation. It was not until the 1980s that feminist standpoint theory was developed and named by feminist social scientists working primarily in sociology and political theory. The first stage of theorizing included work by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins (1986), Donna Haraway (1988, 1997), Sandra Harding, (1991, 1993), Nancy Hartsock (1983), Hiliary Rose (1983), and Dorothy Smith (1987).

Like all standpoint theories, feminist standpoint theory is indebted to Marxist analysis. Just as Marxist theorizing examines how capitalism naturalizes bourgeois and proletariat class divisions, so does feminist standpoint theory analyze how patriarchy naturalizes male and female divisions, making it seem natural, right, unremarkable that women are subordinate to men. Feminist standpoint theory draws especially on the Marxist claim that the work we do—the activities in which we engage—shape our identities and consciousness and, by extension, our knowledge. Just as Marxist analysis starts from the material conditions of the proletariat, feminist standpoint starts from the material conditions of women’s lives.

For feminist standpoint theory, a key claim is that women’s lives are systematically and structurally different from the men’s lives and, that that these differences produce different (and differently complete) knowledges. To a significant extent, then, social location shapes the social, symbolic, and material conditions and insights common to a group of people.

### From Social Location to Feminist Standpoint

That claim is a necessary basis for feminist standpoint theory, but it does not specifically get us to the key concept of standpoint. It highlights women’s social location and claims that their social location shapes women’s lives in material, as well as social and symbolic, ways. This asserts only that social locations shape lives and, specifically, that women’s social location shapes their lives in ways distinct from men’s lives. But social location is not standpoint. A standpoint is achieved—earned through critical reflection on power relations and through engaging in the struggle required to construct an oppositional stance. Being a woman does not necessarily confer a feminist standpoint. Because social location and standpoint are so frequently conflated, let me emphasize the distinction one more time: A feminist standpoint grows out of (that is, it is *shaped by*, rather than essentially given) the social location of women’s lives.

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