Anti-Essentialism in Practice:
Carol Gilligan and Feminist Philosophy

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Third wave anti-essentialist critique has too often been used to dismiss second wave feminist projects. I examine claims that Carol Gilligan's work is "essentialist," and argue that her recent research requires this criticism be rethought. Anti-essentialist feminist method should consist in attention to the relations of power that construct accounts of gendered identity in the course of different forms of empirical enquiry, not in rejecting any general claim about women or girls.

How should feminist philosophers integrate "anti-essentialist" insights into feminist practice? Much contemporary feminist theory obscures this crucial question. Anti-essentialist critique is used to dismiss wholesale certain feminist claims, while many feminist political projects continue to lack the conceptual tools to modify their practice in the light of anti-essentialism. This paper argues that the history of feminist anti-essentialism in part explains the lack of connection between third wave anti-essentialist theory and second wave contributions to feminist political theory and practice. I mean by "second wave" the dominant feminist theories of the 1970s, which brought feminist political movements into academia to challenge the literal and implicit exclusion and derogation of women in the theories and categories of the humanities and social sciences.[1] In the mid-to-late 1980s and into the 1990s this second wave literature has been progressively revised and challenged from within by "third wave" feminists who have both political and philosophical reasons for doubting its adequacy.[2] Some critics caution that to present this revisionism as heralding a new era of feminist philosophy is premature (Nicholson 1997). Certainly these two historical periods are not clearly distinct, not least because many of the conditions that made the third wave possible are found in the second. Nevertheless, these labels are useful to distinguish both the changing

preoccupations of dominant feminist theories and the generational differences between feminist philosophers.

Carol Gilligan's work, and its reception by feminist philosophers, is a case study of a more widespread generational phenomenon. Feminist theorists have often failed to move on from a dismissive "anti-essentialist" critique to a more nuanced, practical engagement with political projects. The first part of this paper delineates criticisms of Gilligan's earlier work for its essentialism, and then interprets her most recent book, *Between Voice and Silence: Women and Girls, Race and Relationship* (co-authored with Jill McLean Taylor and Amy Sullivan) as an attempt, in part, to respond to charges of methodological essentialism (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan, 1995). This book revises Gilligan's original method and thereby escapes those charges of essentialism leveled at her earlier work.

Feminist theorists who claim that Gilligan reifies femininity and draws overly general conclusions about women from the experiences of only a small group, I argue, are often cavalier in their dismissal of her political projects. They fail to recognize both the political value and the nuance of her work. This argument is not intended as a straightforward defense of Gilligan's theses in moral psychology, or of the ethic of care in feminist moral philosophy; indeed, I find much to disagree with in these theories. Instead, it aims to articulate the conditions that would have to obtain for Gilligan's method to evade charges that it is "essentialist." Gilligan meets surprisingly many, although not all, of these conditions. The tendency, then, to dismiss Gilligan's work without reference to the precise grounds on which her methods or conclusions are essentialist needs to be explained. One of the most plausible explanations might be that third wave feminist philosophers' response to Gilligan is overdetermined by our historical circumstances. Entering feminist philosophy at a time when a proliferation of deconstructive theories are in the ascendant, third wavers run the risk of allowing critical analyses of second wave feminist theory to take precedence over more constructive and prag-matic work.

<center>FEMINIST GENERATIONS:
BETWEEN FEMINIST PRACTICE AND ANTI-ESSENTIALISM</center>

A retrospective look at the second wave of feminist philosophers shows that they, mainly white and mainly middle-class, brought feminism into curricula from their political experiences outside the academy. As subsequent critique has amply illustrated, their theories were sometimes blind to difference in ways that reflected the context of their creators and the universities in which they worked. It is at least partly on this basis that such second wave feminist theory has been labeled "essentialist." While a confusingly wide range of meanings are attributed to the epithet—many of which do not make clear why essential-

ism is detrimental to "good" feminist theory or whether essentialism can ever be avoided—the term nevertheless captures certain widely accepted feminist concerns. Thus any feminist theory that is variously determinist, exclusionary, ahistorical; that fails to recognize diversity among women; that falsely generalizes, reifies femininity, or commits any other related methodological sin tends to be dubbed "essentialist" (Martin 1994). The meaning this essay is mainly concerned with is that intended by Elizabeth Spelman: that some feminist theory has presented the identities and experiences of some privileged women as representative of all women, and thereby minimized the political significance of axes of difference among women; especially, in contemporary North America, those of race and class (Spelman 1988). In making overly general claims about women, the arguments run, second wave feminist theory tended to erase women's diversity.

The anti-essentialist concern with operations of power within the category "women" exposes the complex political implications of differences between women for feminist practice, understood as any concrete attempt to change conditions of gender oppression. This paper intends to highlight the political vacuity of anti-essentialist gestures that constitute simply an automatic reflex to bring difference to the fore, showing in particular how they undermine Gilligan's work. On the other hand, more nuanced anti-essentialisms that we might apply to Gilligan's theory offer resources for making judgments about the political salience of particular axes of difference among women, and can reveal exclusions and make visible the circulation of power in ways that permit continued practice.

Its neglect of power differences among women notwithstanding, much second wave theory was "essentialist" in ways that enabled feminists to attain highly significant, albeit partial, political goals. Bringing falsely general claims about "women" into contexts where all women are excluded does not constitute an adequate feminist politics, and certainly some second wave feminist theorizing both created and perpetuated overly general claims about women's oppression; in no way should the racist, classist, or heteronormative bases of some of this theory be minimized. Yet the constant reiteration of these problems seems paradoxically to reinforce them even as it decries them. Stressing the shortcomings of this body of theory, furthermore, tends to minimize the extent to which it did form the basis of opposition to conventional sexist political theorizing. For example, arguments that women had been excluded from categories such as "citizens" or "rational beings" constituted initial inroads into academic ignorance of feminist philosophy. This, in turn, created the conditions of possibility for a more thoroughgoing feminist critique of some of those very concepts. Thus essentialism should be recognized as an internal response to the limitations of a particular body of theory, which grew out of a certain practice. This critique can be understood as a necessary corrective, given the growing recognition that academic feminist theorizing, while

marginalized in academia as a whole, was exclusionary and partisan in relation to women even as it presumed to speak for us all.

By contrast, third wave feminists—coming to feminist theory in the last ten years and usually at an early stage in an academic career—have tended to approach essentialism as a "vice in itself"; as primarily representing a lack of intellectual rigor on the part of second wave feminist theorists. We often approach particular authors with the attitude that if essentialism can be discerned in the text, then the theorist's entire project can be discarded (Fuss 1989, xi). As undoubtedly a third wave feminist, I, for one, started my formal education in feminism focusing on issues of diversity; the trope "differences between women" and postmodern feminist readings that articulate philosophical challenges to universalizing or generalizing discourses have been ubiquitous, though too rarely accompanied by consciousness raising around issues of exclusion, racism, and other forms of oppression. Part of this intellectual trend clearly involves the fetishization of the dangers, pitfalls, and evils of essentialism and the demonization of those texts considered "essentialist." Third wave feminists usually learn deconstructive theory before participating (if at all) in feminist activism; thus our penchant for identifying latent essentialism has all too often become critique for its own sake rather than an integral part of an ongoing constructive project (hooks 1990). Deconstructive critique, relentlessly pursued, gives little sense of how to justify generalizations about women. And given the professed interdisciplinarity of feminist studies, the field has shown a puzzling lack of interest in examining how critiques of essentialism might interrelate with various aspects of empirical social research in ways that stress the necessity of continuing with research projects rather than subjecting them to prolonged deconstruction. The problem-space defined by essentialism and anti-essentialism contains genuinely important epistemological and political issues. But many third wave feminists tend to throw the baby of political efficacy out with the bathwater of essentialism.

Nowhere is this trend more apparent than with regard to Carol Gilligan's projects in feminist psychology and politics over the past fifteen years. Gilligan seems quintessentially second wave in her theory, method, and aspirations. She played a central role in bringing feminist analysis into the field of developmental psychology, showing how various models of "human" moral psychological development were actually premised on only one paradigmatic perspective, closely associated with masculine psychology. Her work has been unusually politically informed relative to her field, and increasingly premised on a feminist analysis that emphasizes the empowerment of girls and women (Gilligan, Ward, and Taylor 1988; Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer 1990; Gilligan, Rogers, and Tolman 1991; Brown and Gilligan 1992). Anti-essentialist challenges to Gilligan have been, in some cases, both theoretically sophisticated and politically compelling, bringing out buried assumptions about gender and hidden exclusions that are often crucial correctives. One

cannot help noticing, however, that Gilligan is a feminist deeply concerned with political action. These very concerns motivate her to make claims that leave her open to charges of essentialism. Her theoretical categories, while admittedly unnuanced, provide a basis for feminist analysis and mobilization that is politically problematic at the same time as it is enabling and galvanizing for many feminists working with girls in contexts in which the psychology of gender is undertheorized.

Gilligan is certainly aware of anti-essentialist criticisms, and has responded to them both theoretically and methodologically. This makes her an unusual and instructive figure in the essentialism debates. Many feminist philosophers are content to pursue the theoretical issues subsumed under "essentialism" without giving thought to how they might inflect practice, while many feminist social researchers remain intent on pursuing methodologies that are uncritically second wave. Thus the preoccupation of most of Gilligan's third wave readers with exclusively critical analyses of *In a Different Voice* does a disservice to the increasing nuance and sophistication of her prolific work during the fourteen years since this book's first publication in 1982 (Gilligan 1993).

The challenge facing third wave feminist theory lies in the observation that neither interminable deconstruction nor uncritical reification of the category "women" is adequate to the demands of feminist practice. The task we have inherited is to take seriously the commitments entailed in anti-essentialism but to find ways effectively to incorporate them into resistive political projects. Gilligan's *Between Voice and Silence* represents a departure from her earlier work in its explicit consideration of race and class in the context of articulating girls' psychology. Yet Gilligan continues to make strong general claims about gender, as a basis both for important analytical distinctions in psychological development and for feminist political mobilization. The question is, in what ways does Gilligan's method continue to be "essentialist"? What epistemological and political issues does Gilligan struggle with in trying to respond to charges of essentialism? Is this a kind of essentialism that she can avoid, and would its avoidance attenuate or advance her political goals? To answer these questions, a good starting point might be to articulate an example of third wave practice that understands anti-essentialism and political engagement as indispensably allied, rather than inevitably at odds.

GILLIGAN'S PROJECT AND ANTI-ESSENTIALIST CRITICS

Some critics of Gilligan have implied that her essentialism is of a particularly strong kind, claiming that in attributing the "ethic of care" to women she is reinforcing a biologically determinist notion of women's nature. For example, Linda Kerber writes,

> I agree with Gilligan that our culture has long undervalued
> nurturance and that when we measure ethical development by
> norms more attainable by boys than by girls our definition of
> norms is probably biased. But by emphasizing the biological
> basis of distinctive behaviour . . . Gilligan permits her readers
> to conclude that women's alleged affinity for "relationships of
> care" is both biologically natural and a good thing. (Kerber
> 1986, 309)

Gilligan displayed an early commitment to object relations theory and made
use of Nancy Chodorow's work (Chodorow 1978). While *In A Different Voice*
may be insufficiently explicit about the origins of gendered moral voices, at no
point does Gilligan explicitly or implicitly argue that they are biological
features of either men or women. She adopts a social constructionist model
and makes quite clear that these different voices are learned, albeit at a very
young age.

A second more legitimate and interesting set of criticisms is that Gilligan is
essentialist by virtue of her use of overly general categories. As Fraser and
Nicholson put it,

> by constructing a female countermodel, [Gilligan] invited the
> same charge of false generalization she had herself raised
> against Kohlberg, although now from other perspectives such
> as class, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. Gilligan's dis-
> claimers notwithstanding, to the extent that she described
> women's moral development in terms of a different voice; to
> the extent that she did not specify which women, under
> which specific historical circumstances have spoken with
> the voice in question; and to the extent that she grounded
> her analysis in the explicitly cross-cultural framework of
> Nancy Chodorow, her model remained essentialist. (Fraser
> and Nicholson 1990, 33)

Gilligan is apt to use broad general categories ("women," "Western culture,"
and so on). These categories are inclined to erase historically, culturally, and
politically salient differences among their respective members. Critics have
observed that this tendency to generalize does not stress (but, it should be
noted, does not necessarily deny) the socially constructed and necessarily
local, temporally specific, and diverse nature of gender. These generalizations
are not only philosophically undesirable because of their failure to contextu-
alize; they are also undesirable because they are false. If feminists were to
investigate the experiences of women and girls of color, working-class and poor
women and girls, and so on, they would find that the model Gilligan first
proposed is a less useful explanatory framework for the experiences of these

"others." Thus many anti-essentialist criticisms are methodological. They come from social psychologists, who argue that Gilligan's two paradigms of moral thinking are present in both male and female "subjects"; that Gilligan's samples are too small; and that her analysis unself-consciously describes a category "women" without critically examining the narrowness of her subject groups, the significant sociopolitical differences between women, or whether certain groups of men under conditions of oppression might not also systematically deploy an ethic of care (Larrabee 1993). By using in her original research women who are mainly white, mainly heterosexual, and mainly middle-class, her critics claim, Gilligan constructs an avowedly gendered model of moral development based only on a small group of dominant women. To the extent that the ethic of care is coextensive with "women's moral voice," that voice is most typical of a white, heterosexual, middle-class woman in the United States of the 1980s, and furthermore is perhaps heard only in certain limited moral situations.

The few published critiques of Gilligan's later work have returned to these arguments. For example, Judith Stacey criticizes Gilligan's "Joining the Resistance: Psychology, Politics, Girls and Women" for its indiscriminate use of humanist, universalist categories (Gilligan 1990; Stacey 1990). In particular, Stacey suggests that Gilligan presents a transhistorical, transcultural, and context-free account of female adolescence. While these charges seem somewhat overstated, the reader is indeed struck by Gilligan's failure even to gesture toward the concerns of feminists of color and postmodern critics. By omitting mention of the race of the girls she interviews, Stacey points out, Gilligan leaves the reader to assume that they are white. This seems to be an essentializing move of the kind Spelman criticizes: white girls are simply girls"—except when they are girls of color, a difference barely worth mentioning (Spelman 1988, 133-59). It is remarkable that the cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds of the girls interviewed are alluded to only in a footnote, and then with no indication of how this information might be relevant to the research process. Stacey furthermore rereads Gilligan's "muted attention" to social class in light of her own class autobiography, arguing that what Gilligan interprets as a gendered adolescent crisis in "Anna," one of her participants, can also be read as an ambivalent experience of social class.

Although Gilligan's critics have often treated her work rather reductively—reading her work casually and uncharitably only to attack it—these criticisms of *In A Different Voice* are significant: they pinpoint epistemological issues related to generalization, contextualism, and pluralism, and they speak to methodological concerns about how inequalities of power foster essentializing research programs (Spelman 1988; Minow and Spelman 1990). Still, the very familiarity of these criticisms has bred a certain contempt for Gilligan—the arch essentialist—and this has caused moral and political philosophers to dismiss her work as both inadequately theorized and insufficiently feminist.

Few feminist theorists have looked to Gilligan's more recent work for insight into essentialism and social research paradigms or for any performative response to her critics, despite the ever-burgeoning social science scholarship that applies the ethic of care to a variety of praxes and policy issues, from feminist jurisprudence to nursing, pedagogy, and political organizing (e.g., Minow 1990, Cooper 1989, Noddings 1994, Leidner 1991).

The most effective method for reading work like Gilligan's requires feminists to examine how generalizations are used; not to reject the use of generality altogether, but to ask what is enabled and what excluded in the context in question. Without Gilligan's generalizations, we would be left to depend on psychological theories that ignore girls' narratives or rate them as second-class. Her early second wave interventions stressed that girls' voices had not been listened to; thus the political salience of Gilligan's project lay in creating a space for girls to be heard. Having identified unanticipated characteristics of certain girls' and women's voices in her early studies, Gilligan clearly approaches her later research fields with a set of preconceptions that may or may not adequately interpret the voices of "different" girls. If anti-essentialist insight is applied to this work, it should surely not be merely in the form of a set of criticisms, an interminable deconstruction, but as a viable alternative method, with similar feminist goals of empowerment. Generalizations about the experiences of girls, furthermore, should not be rejected a priori. Forms of anti-essentialism skeptical of the possibility of generalization seem to undercut all feminist enquiry into women's lives (Bordo 1993). Thus the imperative facing anti-essentialist feminism is not whether to make generalizations, but how to make them.

Gilligan's own response to the philosophical criticisms of *In A Different Voice* has been brief (e.g., Gilligan 1986). She claims that her argument is interpretive and is based on narrative counterexamples to those examples favored by dominant psychological theories, not on generalizable or statistical claims. She unabashedly puts gender at the center of understanding relationships and adolescent crisis, although she allows that girls' and women's experiences are shaped in contexts of other axes of difference. Gilligan does not deny that some men use the ethic of care in thinking about moral problems, or that the ethic is shaped by conditions of oppression. She does not simply describe a universal and "essential feminine," but instead delineates a resistant and critical ethical perspective that challenges womanly self-sacrifice and unqualified caring and struggles to incorporate a self-protective attitude with the desire for relationship with others. Indeed, in her later work she is increasingly explicit about how patriarchal oppression creates the necessary conditions for female crises of connection, and she construes her research as an explicitly feminist intervention.

Since she completed the work on which *In A Different Voice* was founded, Gilligan and her collaborators have focused on qualitative research with

adolescent girls in the United States. They claim that girls' crises and dilemmas offer not only a window on the systemic disempowerment of girls in "Western culture" but also potential strategies and techniques for resolving generic human problems. Although in some ways this work turns away from the ethical decisionmaking that was a central theme of *In A Different Voice*, it continues to ask critical questions about gender bias in psychological theory and about the value and meaning of interpersonal connection and relationship.

Gilligan's rich and evocative portrayal of girls' adolescent dilemmas, and her methodological discussion, are an invaluable contribution to feminist practice and a potential framework for "action research" aimed, as the title of one ongoing research project indicates, at "strengthening healthy resistance and courage in girls" (Gilligan 1990) The significance of her contribution lies in providing a framework for understanding female adolescent psychology that is, first, not merely an amendment to existing research on boys, and second, avowedly feminist Gilligan repeatedly stresses that adolescent girls have simply not been much studied; she attempts to explain why adolescence is the seedbed of female trauma and to document, within a theoretical framework, the processes of disempowerment that will plague girls throughout their lives.

By identifying a different way of thinking about relationships and moral dilemmas, and by telling a rich story about a time of crisis and impasse in the lives of (some) adolescent girls, Gilligan and her colleagues offer a framework for understanding the undertheorized feminist commonplace that all girls struggle psychologically in patriarchal societies. They argue that this struggle itself has produced ways of understanding connection to others that are systematically devalued and undermined by patriarchy, and that meet their most serious challenge at the time of female adolescence. By retaining until early adulthood the strong sense of connection with others that boys lose as young children, girls initially manage to avoid the processes of dissociation that are distinctively masculine pathologies and that have, according to Gilligan and other theorists who have put object relations theory or the ethic of care to feminist uses, negative ethical and political implications (Di Stefano 1991; Ruddick 1989).

BETWEEN VOICE AND SILENCE

In this context, the recent publication of *Between Voice and Silence* raises an interesting set of questions about the ability of a social researcher, engaged in fieldwork of various kinds, effectively to respond to charges of essentialism. No doubt Gilligan has taken the label "essentialist," and its political connotations of racism and exclusion, to heart

> Tensions within feminism over the last twenty years have
> become heightened over the question of difference. Women
> who are white and privileged have been criticized by both black
> and white women and called "essentialist" for speaking about
> gender without also addressing race, class, cultural and sexual
> differences among women. It is a mark of a racist and class-
> driven society that those who are in a dominant position can
> easily remain blind to the experience of subordinates and
> others and thereby to the reality of their own domination,
> and this blindness extends to women as well. At the same
> time, women often hold a higher standard for other women
> and are more forgiving of men. The implication that women
> must speak of everything or keep silent is one of the many
> constraints on women's voices that characterize and main-
> tain a patriarchal society and culture. (Taylor, Gilligan, and
> Sullivan 1995, 7)

Is the choice to "speak of everything or keep silent" a false dichotomy? Must
feminists either fruitlessly struggle with the infinite complexities of political
identity or give up the fight altogether? Although Gilligan makes useful
contributions to our ability to bring anti-essentialism to bear on the practical
politics of feminist method, she struggles to implement fully the epistemolog-
ical and political concerns of a sophisticated anti-essentialism.

Between Voice and Silence continues Gilligan's original projects in the con-
text of her growing feminist political concerns with race and class differences
among women. This time, Gilligan's group of participants consists of twenty-
six "working-class or poor" girls, of African-, Caribbean-, Latina, Portuguese,
Irish-, and Italian-American backgrounds. Gilligan's method is still repeated,
open-ended dyadic interviewing. The interviewer then listens to the interview
transcripts according to the voice-centered method most recently formalized
by Brown and Gilligan in their "Listener's Guide" (1992). During the first
hearing, the interviewer notes the narrative content and direction of the
interviewee; during the second, she listens for the self—"for the voice of the
'I' speaking in this relationship", on the third and fourth playbacks, she attends
to the way the interviewee talks about relationships. Throughout their discus-
sion Brown and Gilligan stress the political nature of this method: "Our
responsive Listener's Guide, in attending to realities of race, class, and sex (who
is speaking, in what body, telling what story of relationship—from whose
perspective, in what societal and cultural frameworks?), is therefore also a
resisting Listener's Guide, that is, a feminist method" (Brown and Gilligan
1992, 29. Emphasis in original)

The content of the interviews differs from previous studies in that specific
questions about race were eventually included, whereas none had been present

before. The researchers, furthermore, participated in a series of retreats designed to examine women's relationships across racial difference. The retreats, we are told, involved eleven women—five black, five white, and one Latina—and entailed profound and painful examination of the differences and commonalities between them. Thus the research context is, compared with analogous projects, striking in the depth of its commitment to addressing the relational understandings of the researchers with regard to racial difference.

How do Gilligan's theses about girls' adolescent crises fare when narratives are collected from working-class girls of color? The interviews, perhaps unsurprisingly, did reveal differences between girls of different racial and class backgrounds in their discussions of the interview topics. For example:

> What Ruby does not share with most of the girls from more privileged settings is the pressure to meet idealized images of femininity that many begin to face at this time. Concerns about not expressing anger or hurting other people's feelings, which become prominent from early adolescence onward among many girls from middle-class backgrounds, are not issues for Ruby. When she discusses conflicts or dilemmas, for example, she speaks about fairness, respect, and care, yet she does not excessively deliberate over whether or not she has hurt someone else's feelings. (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 43)

Gilligan is quick to stress that "difference" should not be interpreted as "lack," implying that these girls' contributions to the researchers' understandings will be less useful: "We will struggle in this book with the word *different*, mainly to hold it apart from its common mistranslation, 'deficient.' Our group of twenty-six girls was so informative in part because of the cultural and racial differences among them. . . . Difference, in our understanding here, is the essence of relationship; it is not a code word for race or class or lower status" (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 2). The authors thus recognize the danger of establishing a white, middle-class norm from which "different" girls will deviate, and instead cast racial and class differences as always necessarily relational (Minow 1990). The project, however, implicitly rests on the assumption that whatever the differences between girls of different class and race backgrounds, these differences exist in the context of more significant similarities: "Amid the diversity of race and ethnicity in this study, these spontaneous narratives describe aspects of these relationships that remain insistent across differences, aspects that form an unambiguous and powerful template for meaningful relationships between women and girls" (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 118). The authors rightly contest the false dichotomy that different women must be either hopelessly opaque to each other or assimilated into sameness, both in feminist theorizing and in forming political alliances. The conclusions Gilligan draws about the experiences of

different girls seem to hinge on the claim that they will experience the same kind of relational impasse at adolescence, but that it may well be worse for girls of color and working-class girls than for their white or privileged counterparts, and that it will certainly have more negative consequences. Despite these differences, Gilligan's original explanatory model for crises of connection remains the same, taking the same basic form for all girls in Western patriarchal culture, although the context and consequences differ. How should we understand this ambiguous, generalizing account of gender?

ANTI-ESSENTIALISM AND FEMINIST METHODS

Given that few philosophical analyses of Gilligan make mention of her work beyond *In A Different Voice* and that surprisingly little of the original feminist philosophical critique of Gilligan remains after *Between Voice and Silence*, third wave feminists have yet to assess Gilligan's performative response to the challenge that her research and her theory are "essentialist." This paper argues that Gilligan continues to make overly general claims about girls through her failure fully to acknowledge relations of power in the research process. Anti-essentialism is useful here in identifying the internal mechanisms of different feminist methods through which relatively powerful women reinscribe their own political identities in their feminist theories. If Gilligan were to have developed a more extensive critique of these mechanisms, and alternative methods, her theory could be revised in ways that would not eliminate relations of power, but would create a less exclusive—and hence less essentialist—account of girls' psychology.

Gilligan rejects the charge that she is making dichotomous universal claims about girls and boys, and argues that her interpretive method merely sketches alternative ways of conceptualizing relationship rather than fixing a gendered schism (Gilligan 1986; Brown and Gilligan 1992). The homogeneity of Gilligan's initial samples, furthermore, does not presuppose any kind of essentialism, including the danger of falsely generalizing from the experiences of a select group of girls to all girls. It could even be the case that girls' experiences at adolescence are sufficiently similar that the transfer of a model based on one group of girls to another group is unproblematic, and that the experiences of "different" girls merely provide more varied examples of the same general phenomenon (Martin 1994). Nevertheless, both the epistemology and the methodology informing the interviews, particularly the processes that generate general descriptions of female adolescent crisis, are still a concern. To avoid essentialism, Gilligan needs to interrogate further the relevance to the research process of the identities of the interviewers, their relation to the girls they interview, the epistemological significance of the "interpretive community," the influence of the interviewing method itself on the research findings, and the ways differences may or may not emerge in the research process.

This is not to suggest that Gilligan simply assumes that there are facts about girls waiting to be discovered and described in reality's "preferred idiom" (Geertz 1988), or that she is inattentive to how her own preconceptions have shaped her past enquiry. She straightforwardly acknowledges that her method plays a central role in generating and shaping her theoretical conclusions, and recognizes that power is central to the context of interpretation (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 27-38). But Gilligan's method does predispose the investigator to elide or overlook how race, class, and other salient group differences shape processes of theory construction. This seems representative of those shortcomings second wave feminists often exhibit in trying to respond to third wave anti-essentialist critique. "Difference" is often incorporated into second wave feminist projects in a formulaic way, placing disproportionate emphasis on formal inclusion (adding participants from "other" social groups, for example) and less on examining the deeper methodological implications of anti-essentialist criticisms. Fully to understand how Gilligan's epistemological framework has changed between her early work and the recognition (especially in *Between Voice and Silence* but anticipated elsewhere) that her inherited method may be inadequate to the demands of third wave feminism is too large a project for this paper. Here I want briefly to give credit to how Gilligan's method actually has evolved to recognize more explicitly the power of the investigators to elide difference. Then I will turn to three specific examples in *Between Voice and Silence*. These examples are presented to explore the question, How might the research method encourage the investigators to ignore how the girls are different, from each other and from them?

In Gilligan's previous studies, the emphasis on voice was unidirectional, with "the interviewer" an unnamed and undescribed presence—the medium for generic questions. The function of patriarchal oppression and power dynamics *in the context of the research itself* to shape girls' articulations of their attitudes toward morality and relationships was left virtually unexplored. In *Between Voice and Silence*, by contrast, the interviewers are sometimes named, and occasionally their relation to the participant is theorized in some way. For example,

> Anita's response [as an African-American girl to a white interviewer] taps into the central question in all psychological research—can one understand another whose life experience is different? She rejects the "you can't understand anything" position with respect to racial difference, but she also suggests that the interviewer's understanding of "this stuff" is limited because of her racial difference. "This stuff" has a number of possible meanings, and as Anita elaborates further, many of them are related to race and racism. (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 35)

The authors raise new concerns about how interviews are shaped by the presence of different interviewers; they recognize that the tone and content of the participant's speech will change depending on who poses the questions, and that this change will be linked to differences of race and class: "The question 'Who is listening?' now became an integral part of our voice-centered, relational method—integral to our understanding of both voice and relationship. We realized that our previous emphasis on 'Who is speaking?' reflected in part our own and our research participants' class and cultural location" (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 3).

It is not only in the interview itself that race and class differences influence the generation and interpretation of speech. In analyzing her research findings, Gilligan enlarges the "interpretive community" to include more women of color, concluding that this change has deepened and diversified the group's understanding of the girls. For example, Anita's interviewer and other members of the interpretive community have very different understandings of her situation. Jill, her white interviewer, interprets her outspoken and forthright manner as both psychologically resilient and politically resistant compared to norms of femininity. But Pam and Janie, two African-American readers, were dismayed by Anita, finding her "brash, opinionated, cocky and just a pain" (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 37). Their interpretation of Anita's words was still politically feminist, but in their view, her "statements could be heard as excessively assertive and unyielding, almost belligerent, an example of 'resistance for survival,' a reaction against destructive elements in her social world and in the larger sociopolitical context of the United States," rather than as desirably assertive and self-confident (1995, 38). Here is a positive example of reflexivity in Gilligan's work, which allows her to escape the generic anti-essentialist criticism that she fails formally to include women of color in the process of interpretation, or that she fails to attach any epistemological significance to this inclusion.

So what is the problem? First, Gilligan seems to assume that girls who resist connection with their interviewers are manifesting an unhealthy form of resistance, dissociating from relationship in pathological ways. When the researchers perceive the girls' voices to be unauthentic, they seldom connect this lack of authenticity explicitly to the research context, but instead attribute it to a more general malaise in the girls' lives. The researchers thus adopt an epistemically privileged (though ambiguous) position outside the domain of relationship. This position is made possible not by ignoring differences of identity or experience between interviewee and interviewer per se, but by failing to analyze the interviewers' power, partly by virtue of these very differences, over the girls. Gilligan has a keen sense of the ways girls exhibit resistance when they negotiate relationships with friends, mothers, teachers, and so on. But she seems less insightful about the forms of resistance girls may evince toward her own research.

Gilligan's generalizations serve particular purposes by highlighting certain aspects of girls' experiences across difference. Because these generalizations purportedly constitute the truth about girls, however, Gilligan faces no episte-mological imperative to recognize their contingency, and tends to gloss over the particular cases that do not conform so neatly to the general theory. This is both a methodological and a practical problem: the tendency of dominant-group feminists to overlook difference is exacerbated by a method that does not adequately interrogate how it constructs a uniform female identity.

The second problem is that Gilligan has always used interviewing as her primary method, and she continues to do so in *Between Voice and Silence*. Some of the foregoing problems become magnified, however, in the context of dyadic forms of enquiry. In particular, "difference," while overtly conceptualized as relational rather than fixed, is nevertheless constituted within a relationship between two people rather than being negotiated in a larger group. Gilligan often understates how not only "difference" per se but also the power embed-ded in differences might shape girls' responses to questions from older women in positions of authority, often of a different race, and always of a different class (in terms of present status if not background). There is a peculiar disjunction between the testimonial prose, literary references, and emotionally evocative discussions of women joining together across difference that characterize much of the text, and the glimpses into the interviews themselves, where the researchers follow "interview protocols." The valuable insight that an inter-pretive community can contribute to understanding the girls' responses seems curiously restricted to the later stages of the research. Gilligan is far less cavalier than many other feminist researchers about identification, trust, and rapport between feminist interviewer and female participant. Still, she seems to assume that the interpretive community will be able to uncover those different standpoints she now acknowledges are necessary for a full picture of girls' psychologies simply by listening to the fixed results of a dyadic interview conducted in a single, power-laden context.

Third, Gilligan has taken anti-essentialist critique seriously enough to identify particular axes of difference that need to be emphasized in her revised method. In *Between Voice and Silence*, race and class are those important axes of difference, which had been previously glossed over. But are these the only differences that shape girls' experience of adolescence? Gilligan seems to acknowledge that they are not.

> A narrative account is produced interactively, depending not only on the questions of the interviewer and the experiences of the narrator, but also on the "social location" of both. Hence, any telling of "a story" may be affected by race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, religious background, personal history, character—an infinite list of possible factors

> that form the scaffolding of relationships between people. (Tay-
> lor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 14)

Which of these "infinite" possible differences will be significant emerges in the course of empirical enquiry. Of course, it is a methodological commonplace that every investigator must always enter into any project with preconceptions that, at least initially, privilege some axes of difference over others. The most serious anti-essentialist challenge in this case lies in recognizing the contingency of those emphasized differences and remaining open to the possibility that previously recondite axes of difference will emerge. This challenge can best be met by recognizing how power operates to make difference invisible to the powerful—in this case, to the researchers (Spelman 1988). Gilligan's agenda is not sufficiently flexible in this way; the girls have to fit into the "right" differences or risk being misheard.

It is surprising, for example, that Gilligan's text makes no mention of lesbian or bisexual adolescent experiences, especially given that the book contains an entire chapter on sexuality. A note to chapter 5, however, worth quoting in full, offers the following vignette:

> When Lilian's interviewer began the questions about sexual interest and sexual decision-making, *As teenagers, boys and girls have to make decisions a lot of times when they are going out with someone . . .*, Lilian asked, "With a boy?" Her interviewer confirmed this: *Yes, with a boy. Can you describe when you had to make a decision in that relationship?* "Not really, no." *Do you go out with boys?* "No." *Not really?* "No." Lilian's interviewer again tries to ask about sexual decision-making, to which Lilian first responds, "I don't know. I don't know. . . I'm sort of lost," and then, "I understand what you're saying. I'm just sort of, I'm trying to think . . . I really don't go out with boys. I get along with boys as good friends, we're basically good friends." *I was thinking more kind of in an intimate relationship with someone, with a boy . . . just a situation with a boy where you had to make a sexual decision?* "I don't know, I'd rather not talk about it." *You'd rather not.* "If you don't mind." Then perhaps in an effort to focus her interviewer's efforts elsewhere, Lilian asks, *"Would you like a piece of gum?"* Although the interview protocol was designed so that questions about sexual interest and experience could apply to either sex, Lilian's interviewer in tenth grade unfortunately lapsed into the general cultural assumption of heterosexuality and asked specifically about boys, thus closing off any possibility of more discussion. (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 221, n. 3)

On first reading, I was torn between admiration for the authors' intellectual honesty in including an embarrassing admission that could easily have been left out, and deep disappointment that the only breakdown of heteronormativity in a girl's narrative had to be relegated to a footnote. It seems clear from this incident that, unsurprisingly, there are undercurrents of girls' lives and aspects of their experiences that are not revealed in the interviews. What conditions make it possible to erase "non-conformist" sexuality in the context of a method that purports to be sensitive both to differences and to silence?

Gilligan concludes, rightly, that an enlarged interpretive community, acting both as gatherers and interpreters of narratives, would offer more insights into the differences and silences that characterize the girls' speech. Part of the solution to problems like that manifested in Lilian's interview must be to prepare researchers to enter the research context with specific injunctions about difference in mind. As the authors acknowledge, dominant cultural assumptions will tend to render some differences invisible (other examples, including racism, sexual abuse, and class taboo, are provided in the main text). The imperative to recognize axes of power and their effect on the construction of identity, however, cannot be premised only on the mantra of gender, race, and class; it also requires an understanding of the mechanisms that make some axes of difference more or less visible. Thus it would seem that the research group should not simply continually add more members, from different social groups, in order to maximize objectivity (although having just one openly lesbian researcher might well have altered the unself-consciously heteronormative understanding of sexuality presented in chapter 4).[4] Instead the epistemological and methodological challenges articulated here are pre-requisites for an analysis of power that lends flexibility to the research process by continually interrogating its context and categories.

One way of developing these criticisms, as a principled anti-essentialist, would be to say that there are no legitimate generalizations about girls' psychology. Girls' complex identities are necessarily negotiated in and through specific contexts, discourses of power, and infinite axes of difference. One kind of anti-essentialist could therefore construct an argument for Gilligan's hope-less naiveté in building an uncompromisingly universal picture of girls' realities through such unrefined methodological tools. This picture contains many criticisms that Gilligan would do well to explore. Nevertheless, this is still the kind of critique that, standing alone, merely etiolates the political usefulness of Gilligan's project. So how might third wave anti-essentialist feminism be used to make constructive suggestions that develop rather than deplete the political resources available in empowering adolescent girls? How can we do justice to the complexity of difference and power in research at the same time as we construct accounts of girls' lives that are a strong basis for policy development and political intervention? This is an enormous and remarkably

underexplored area for research; here, I make two necessarily brief, concrete suggestions about the research methods Gilligan employs.

First, although Gilligan's interviews are obviously loosely structured, many of the methodological problems sketched in this paper do seem most pronounced in the context of a girl participant woman researcher dyad. A complement to open-ended interviews is Elizabeth Frazer's use of discussion groups consisting of a small number of girls, with the investigator as facilitator. Such groups will inevitably also produce their own silencing effects, as some girls hold back from speaking in front of others or present themselves as they would like to be seen by their peer group. No method of enquiry can guarantee that all girls will speak with equal ease—indeed, the quest for such an elusive method is part of the epistemological framework I am arguing against. Nevertheless, Frazer's discussion groups, while acknowledging the researcher's powerful role, still allow for the interaction of girls who differ in important ways from one another. These groups also diffuse the power of the researcher, providing opportunities for girls to speak up together and to resist a particular conversational direction. Although some differences will always be repressed (for example, Frazer comments on the different taboos and silences surrounding social class for working-class and middle-class girls in her discussion groups [Frazer 1988]), they are less likely to be differences that reflect asymmetries of power between researcher and participant. By rearranging the relations of power, discussion groups offer a different perspective on the same issues. While they may not be a suitable forum for soliciting confidences, they are one powerful research tool for negotiating complex and power-laden identities.

The second suggestion is that Gilligan include more interaction between her research conclusions and the girls' interpretations of their own words. As she says,

> The interview process also demonstrated one of the most important benefits of speaking with and listening to girls in this way: it can help girls to develop, to hold on to, or to recover knowledge about themselves, their feelings, and their desires. Taking girls seriously encourages them to take their own thoughts, feelings, and experience seriously, to maintain this knowledge, and even to uncover knowledge that has become lost to them. (Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995, 128)

Gilligan herself mentions using feedback techniques in *Meeting At The Crossroads*, in which she describes giving interview extracts back to the girls, explaining her analysis, and inviting their response (Brown and Gilligan 1992, 228-32). Indeed, "checking back" and offering participants an opportunity to respond to the researcher's interpretations of their lives is a familiar method in progressive ethnography, albeit one with its own pitfalls (Stacey 1990; Frazer

1992). Gilligan and her colleagues would do well to develop activities that
bring their explanations of girls' disconnection and relational impasse at
adolescence more directly back to the girls themselves, for two reasons. First,
Gilligan's tendency to think that there is a "truth of the matter" in girls' initial
responses to interview questions, coexists uneasily alongside her recognition
that they may change their minds about those answers, respond skeptically
when her analyses are fed back to them, or give different responses depending
on the social location of their interviewer. Second, Gilligan urges educators
and youth workers to include girls' voices in processes of policy formation, yet
she does not fully incorporate this insight into her own work (Taylor, Gilligan,
and Sullivan 1995, 191). Engaging the girls more directly in dialogue in the
research process itself is likely not only to produce more complex and differ-
ence-sensitive stories about girls' lives, but also to achieve feminist goals of
empowerment (Frazer 1992, 100). More explicit acknowledgment both of the
power relations embedded in difference, and of the ways different research
methods create specific conditions of possibility for the negotiation of such
differences, far from hindering Gilligan's political goals, would serve to make
them more attainable.

CONCLUSION

   Just as Gilligan needs to move a collective exploration of power and
difference to the center of her feminist method, so our third wave revisions of
the political work of second wave feminists need to avoid an epistemological
critique that persistently fragments categories without exploring their empiri-
cal adequacy or political importance. This paper has pointed out how Gilligan,
far from being "an essentialist," has moved toward a politically informed
anti-essentialist method. Laying out salient differences in advance of enquiry,
as she does in Between Voice and Silence, is a necessary jumping-off point for the
construction of anti-essentialist generalizations about girls, and feminists have
been rightly skeptical of researchers who paid no heed to the significance and
interaction of gender, race, or class in formulating research problems. This
paper has suggested, however, that an anti-essentialist research methodology
needs to be even more open to the introduction of new axes of difference and
to the asymmetries of power that may obscure those axes, particularly between
researchers or theorists and the different others they seek to bring into their
narratives.
   The reconstruction of those second wave projects we have tended to dismiss
as hopelessly naive has only just begun. As third wave feminists become
increasingly exasperated with the superfluity of critique and the paucity of
political strategies and solutions, we need to bring our critical skills to bear in
excavating and restoring those projects that have been buried by the dis-
approbative rubble of theoretical anti-essentialism. One major area in which

the insights of anti-essentialist feminisms have been only tentatively applied is social research programs; yet anti-essentialism constitutes a set of claims precisely about the adequacy conditions of feminist method. By focusing on how power frames difference in the context of Gilligan's research, this paper has tried to show how the method deployed in one feminist project can be refined and nuanced in ways that advance its goals rather than simply revealing its limitations.

Finally, Carol Gilligan is remarkably perceptive about how women dissociate from relationships. One thing I may well have learned from her and her collaborators is that some recent feminist philosophy exemplifies another form of dissociation: from actual political problems that often seem too overwhelming to address. It is easier by far, but far less fruitful, to analyze the mistakes of second wave feminists than to make concrete proposals while fully incorporating a third wave commitment to anti-essentialist method

NOTES

I would like to thank Marguerite Deslauriers, Sue Dwyer, David Kahane, Vicky Spelman, Jim Tully, Jacquelyn Zita, and two anonymous *Hypatia* reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper

1 The classic second wave text is Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1949), I am also thinking of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* (1970). I consider later second wave authors to include Susan Brownmiller, Mary Daly, Nancy Chodorow, and Carol Gilligan. Of course, this use of "second wave" is selective, and I recognize that women with different identities and ideologies were both theorizing and organizing concurrently with these writers. Thus in using the term "second wave" I hope to point out the emergence of a canon of feminist theory, against which "anti-essentialist" feminist theory is juxtaposed

2 My stipulative definition of "third wave" is intended here to capture all critical work, whatever its theoretical orientation, that points, among other things, to the homogenizing or exclusive tendencies of earlier dominant feminisms for example, some of the work of Judith Butler, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Diana Fuss, bell hooks, María Lugones, and Elizabeth Spelman. I also use the term "third wave" to capture the experience of young feminist theorists, is for many of us these critical texts have been central to our academic education

3 Gilligan's work on this issue forms part of several research projects with other investigators, and is reported in numerous books and articles to date. In presenting this body of literature, by and large, is exemplary of Gilligan's method, I do not intend to erase the contributions of her co-authors minimize the collaborative nature of the research, or suggest that there is always a unitary authorial voice in these studies. Rather I want to avoid stylistic awkwardness, to stress how the later books re-work ideas first presented in *In A Different Voice* and to acknowledge that Gilligan is the only author common to all the studies

4. Neither the sexualities of the researchers nor any explicit analysis of heteronormativity is presented in any discussion either of the retreat process, the

interpretive community, or the research itself. Members of the research team may, of course, identify as lesbian or bisexual, but this is not mentioned in the book.

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