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Theoretical Foundations

> [One can't conceal one's past/parents.] They inevitably come
> along for the ride and are part of a shadow government that
> always occupies part of our being. They are, like the aspects of
> our fate that arrive before we know they are there, residues
> that we either learn how to make use of or else allow to poison us
> in one way or another. They cannot be expunged, for they are
> part of our fate, part of what made us what we are.
>
> – James S. Hans, *The Fate of Desire*[1]

The term "intersectionality" has recently become prominent in critical literature.[2] However, feminist attention to intersections is not a new phenomenon. As Angela Miles points out, many feminists have long attended to intersections in an attempt to construct an integrative vision of feminism.[3] Like Hans in the above quote, Miles reminds readers of the importance of attending to the past. Too often, she argues, feminist theorizing ignores its own past, minimizing the complexity of debates within feminism about the need to work constructively and creatively with the tension between difference and specificity – a tension arising from the intersections of privilege and disadvantage.

In this chapter, taking Miles' observation to heart, I clarify the theoretical foundations of this study by commenting on some moments in the history of feminist thought, scholarship, and practice – moments that are part of the shadow government that has made us what we are. Here, following Foucault, my goal is to attempt a genealogy of moves that have been made in the development of intersectional theory.[4] That is, I propose a conceptual "history of the present" in feminist intersectional scholarship, rather than a comprehensive history of the women's movement.

The point here is to provide a brief introductory description of the contours of intersectional theory, a description drawing in large measure on a history of discussions in the feminist community about essentialism and identity. Current intersectional theory is best understood as part of feminism's ongoing dialogue with the past that gave birth to it. Indeed, the theory carries the visible markings of a very specific kind of past, a past in which women have grappled with issues of power, essentialism, and identity – issues that were at the heart of the *Symes* case. At its best, intersectional theory represents a valiant effort to prevent some of the painful parts of feminism's past from poisoning its present and future.

Intersectional Theory: Acknowledging the Shadow Government

One of the main concerns of early second-wave feminism was with the widespread exclusion of women from positions of power in public life.[5] This exclusion, its proponents argued, was revealed not only by the numerical absence of women in politics and the professions, but also in the partiality of society's written records of its history and its knowledge. That written record, feminists argued, was "his" story, a story that purported to be universal, but which was in truth partial. Dale Spender put it thus: "Males, as the dominant sex, have only a *partial* view of the world and yet they are in a position to insist that their view and values are the '*real*' and *only* values; and they are in a position to impose their version on other human beings who do not share their experience. This is one of the crucial features of dominance ... it is the means by which one half of the human population is able to insist that the other half sees things its way."[6] Women's experiences, feminists argued, were not reflected in the records of supposedly universal human knowledge. Women were sometimes completely absent from the record, and at other times were represented in terms that did not accord with women's often unrecorded experiences of themselves or their lives.

In the face of this partial universality, women began articulating their differences from men. Feminists argued that women shared common experiences of oppression and exclusion. Women from a wide number of disciplines began exploring and documenting these exclusions. The exclusion of women was not simply a physical absence of women in certain professions, though it was that as well. It was also an absence of women and their perspectives in the construction of knowledge across a wide body of disciplines: philosophy, history, science, the arts, law, religion, linguistics, politics, and psychology. Slogans like "sisterhood is global" asserted a common female identity and were the rallying cry for united political activism designed to bring about political change, and to end a history of gender-based exclusion.[7]

But if there was widespread agreement that women were absent in many fields of human endeavour, there was less agreement about what that absence meant and how it should be rectified. One can see this in what has commonly been referred to as the "sameness/difference" debates.[8] The problem involved theorizing the meaning of women's difference. What difference should those differences make? Historically, women's "difference" had been one excuse for women's exclusion from the public world of work and politics. Arguing that women's difference should not be made the source of their oppression, one strand of thought was that the best strategy was to assert that men and women were similar in the most relevant (legal) ways. That is, women's difference could not provide a justification for exclusion. Here, the strategy was to remove the barriers that

excluded women by labelling them "different." The false universality would be resolved by simply adding women into the mix. Once women were represented in power, professions, and politics, their presence would make a difference. Women would transform the structures of power from within.[9]

However, a second strand of thought suggested that this strategy might not resolve the problem of false universality. While, given a chance, women might well be able to be successful on the terms of the male world, what if the problem was with the terms themselves? Perhaps the add-and-stir method could only accommodate women through assimilation, erasing differences that really did matter. That is, the system could adjust itself to allow women to compete with men, but only on the already established terms. What if one significance of women's difference lay in the ability it gave women to see the need for radical restructuring? Perhaps a strategy of inclusion would lead only to assimilation, leaving the deeper structures of oppression and exclusion untouched.[10] The better strategy, some argued, was to affirm and value women's differences from men.

In the midst of these ontological and political debates within feminism, cautionary notes began to sound. In particular, women of colour began speaking up within the feminist community, warning that feminism was replicating some of the very errors it had identified in "male-stream" thought. Audre Lorde warned that feminists tended to speak of women's oppression in universal ways, and that this language of universality sometimes effaced the experiences of women of colour. Asking that feminists be more attentive to the presence of difference not just between men and women, but also between women themselves, she said: "Differences expose all women to various forms and degrees of patriarchal oppression, some of which we share, and some of which we do not ... The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those boundaries."[11] Indeed, women of colour began speaking up about the specificity of their oppression, of their feelings of exclusion within the feminist community, and of their concern that claims of universal sisterhood often seemed premised on an unspoken norm of white sisterhood.

And, based on their history, women of colour had good reasons to be cautious of feminism's claims of a global sisterhood. In both Canada and the US, nineteenth-century discourses of women's emancipation had dovetailed with other discourses about race and class.[12] Racist assumptions and strategies were deeply implicated in much of the reproductive and sexual politics of the early feminist movements. For many women of that time, reproduction was seen as inextricable from racial and imperial politics: women reproduced the race. The suffrage movement was often the call for votes for specific kinds (and colours) of women.[13] One only had to

look at the history of the birth control movement, Angela Davis argued, to understand why women of colour were nervous about joining the fight for "women's" abortion rights.[14] Of course, if problems of race were not easily addressed within feminist communities, neither were questions of gender easily addressed within communities of colour.[15] Women of colour were often high-centred on the rocks of racism and sexism.

But women of colour were not the only ones questioning the false unity in "sisterhood." The issue of difference among women percolated to the surface and claims of exclusion proliferated. Many groups of women – Aboriginal, francophone, Third World, lesbian – articulated their sense of marginalization within mainstream feminism. Feminists began applying the essentialist critique to feminism itself, even to its "mother" texts. Elizabeth Spelman, for example, noted that Simone de Beauvoir's rightly famous work proceeded as if the viewpoint of a white, Western middle-class heterosexual woman was the viewpoint of all women.[16] Just as Aristotle's discussions of the nature and equality of men did *not* include women or slaves, de Beauvoir's discussion of woman was similarly, if unintentionally, partial. In taking this position, Spelman did not dismiss the insights contained in de Beauvoir's work. She did warn, however, against false essentialism, an essentialism that would leave feminism without the tools to dismantle structures of oppression.

While this "anti-essentialist" critique provided an important avenue for the exploration of differences between women, some feminists worried that the flight from false unity was leading feminism towards the equally dangerous trap of false difference.[17] Feminists needed to remember that the goal of attending to the particular was to identify commonalities that crossed the borders of different experiences. Kim Crenshaw argued: "When we pierce the veil of race and class and look to find women's issues behind that veil we will find unexpected opportunities to better women's lives and to build a coalition ... When we begin to see that a problem initially conceived somewhat narrowly has broader manifestations, we also see that problems we thought unrelated are actually somewhat familiar and that in fact feminism might have some conceptual tools to address them."[18]

While feminism needed to be wary of essentialism, it also needed to remember that essentialism was not always a tool of oppression and exclusion. As Debbie Epstein noted, "Essentialising slogans have played a necessary part in the construction of positive identities by people in subordinated groups and the development of oppositional strategies has often rested on these identities."[19] Essentialism was a double-edged sword, which could be part of a strategy of resistance and necessary in certain political contexts. The point was, according to intersectionality theorists, that anti-essentialism for its own purpose was a weak insight. As Sherene

Razack put it, to have any political value, the critique had to be combined with a strategy of antisubordination.[20]

Intersectional theory attempts to do just that. It does so by focusing on the very specific ways that gender intersects with a number of other dimensions in the lives of women. This has often meant focusing on the lives of women who had been at the margins of mainstream theorizing. The point of this focus has not simply been to document difference, nor to encourage guilt amongst the groups at the centre of traditional theorizing – though guilt and denial have been common responses to intersectional critiques. The point of intersectional analysis is to see whether or not the experiences of those located at the intersections can provide insights crucial to the construction of better theories.

The increased attention to the concrete experiences of women who have been caught between multiple systems of oppression has generated some important insights. One is the importance of focusing not only on the specific kinds of victimization that occur at these intersections, but also focusing on the unique strategies of resistance that emerge there. A view that focuses only on the double victimization of women often fails to reveal that these women have crafted innovative strategies of resistance. A view that reveals both the victimization and the resistance reminds us of Adrienne Rich's insight that power may come from the same location as wound. A second related insight concerns the need to connect a study of exclusion with a study of privilege.[21] In what ways have the privileges of some women been implicated in the marginalization and exclusion of other women? And further, how can one distinguish between privileges that need to be extended to more people, and privileges that need to be dismantled?

Patricia Hill Collins has woven these two insights together in her work examining the ties that bind different forms of oppression together.[22] Her focus is on violence as one of the mechanisms, and her study concentrates on the ways this mechanism functions at the intersection of privilege and disadvantage. The Hill Collins approach emphasizes the importance of paying as much attention to the ways that women are privileged as to the ways that they are disadvantaged. That is, one needs to examine not simply black women, but also black men, white men, and white women in order to understand how the various patterns of oppression, resistance, and benefits combine to hold these systems of disadvantage in place. She argues that each of these groups experiences specialized kinds of harm, and develops specialized traditions of resistance. The implication is that we should focus on the kinds of resistance that may be possible in specific locations. This shifts attention from a search for universal strategies towards particular locations. We may then discover the specific strategies and different kinds of resistance that might be available to people

who are inflected by varying currents of advantage and disadvantage. That is, if it is useful to look at those who are marked by multiple axes of disadvantage, it is equally necessary to examine those who are pulled by and pull on the threads of both power and wound.

Since modern theories of power have been influenced by the work of Foucault, a few observations on Foucault's approach to power may be in order. Foucault argued that many theories of power were riven with reifying metaphors, metaphors that spoke of power as if it were something that could be held, accumulated, possessed, or found.[23] Foucault argued that the use of such metaphors allowed "an extremely complex configuration of realities ... to escape."[24] Foucault, attempting to avoid the use of these metaphors, laid out his theory of power in five propositions. The five propositions are: power is not something that is held, but something that is exercised in relations; relations of power are not exterior to other types of relationships, but are immanent and productive of those relationships; power comes from below and is rooted in the social nexus; power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective; and where there is power, there is resistance.[25]

The propositions combine to generate two important insights. First, Foucault argued that if the powerless are produced by the operations of power, so too are the powerful. Second, power is not a capacity owned so much as a process shared. While individuals (whether we label them the powerful or the powerless) are the effects of power, they are at the same time the element of its articulation. All individuals both enact power and are acted upon by it. Power is not a commodity possessed only by some and wielded against others. It is a property of a system of social relations, a shared resource that can be activated from many different positions within that system. The implication is that the search for the unitary opponent is misguided; so too, the search for the unitary victim.

Some critics have argued that this view tends to erase inequalities by suggesting that all people are similarly situated with respect to power. This rests on a misreading of the insight. To say that power is a process shared is *not* to say that all individuals are equally situated with respect to their abilities to act. The costs of acting are *not* distributed evenly throughout society and the costs of participation are much higher for some than for others. However, to acknowledge that there are important differential costs is not to imply that only some selves have agency or the power to act.

Foucault's approach centres on a different problem. The issue is not to figure out "who has power" but to examine different options for action available to different people at different locations, the costs associated with those options, and how these options are connected to other locations and options. In Patricia Hill Collins' terms, it becomes crucial to pay

attention to the connections in order to gain a sense of how specifically located individuals both benefit from current configurations of power and can avail themselves of specific opportunities to resist or reconfigure current patterns. Of particular importance is Foucault's insistence on attention to the local mechanisms through which power is enacted. The crucial insight involves a decentring of the search for "who is responsible" and a focus instead on the processes that give meaning to encounters.

This decentring of the question "Who is responsible?" does not mean that there are no actors or that choice becomes a meaningless concept. On the contrary. This view accepts that selves are agents and must take responsibility for actions, but responsibility becomes a weaker notion. All people are situated at such locations, having variable potential for effective resistance and variable abilities to benefit from the actions of (even unknown) others. Further, it suggests that metaphors of power and wound should reflect the primacy of exactly this kind of experience.

These Foucauldian insights on power and the self are reflected in the work of intersectional theorist Patricia Mann. Mann argues that one of the pressing challenges for feminists is the crafting of new terms to represent a struggle without the unitary political subject "Woman," and without the unitary political opponent "Patriarchy."[26] This focus is part of her attempt to create a theory of individual agency that better responds to gendered social transformations. Current social and political frameworks of modernism, she argues, are "exhausted and incapable of making sense of most important contemporary problems."[27] Indeed, as the debate about the essential nature of woman has revealed to many, the modern notion of a unified self no longer seems plausible. To modern sensibilities, the self seems to have fragmented, to have dissolved. At the same time, the sense of dissolution is coupled with the lingering conviction that there is something at the core. As Hans puts it, "To dissolve the self completely is obviously an absurdity, for we clearly *are* in some sense, even if *how* we are and what it means to *be* are problematic."[28]

Mann suggests that one of the first important steps is to take the focus off the self and put it instead on action. As she puts it: "Insofar as social identities are presently unstable we should stop focusing so intently upon these fragile notions of selfhood. Instead, I suggest we think more about the quality of our actions ... We should think of ourselves as conflicted actors rather than as fragmented selves."[29] Rather than seeing individuals as fragmented selves, her approach views individuals as conflicted actors, involved in site-specific embodied struggles over issues of race, class, and sexual preference as well as gender. Any approach to oppositional politics, she asserts, must begin with the reality of this embodiment. Under her theory, the relevant questions deal less with who we *are* than with what we *do.* The concern is with the significance and meaning of the actions

available to us. An embodied focus is crucial to such questioning, since embodiment takes seriously the colour, race, sex, class, and physical ability of specific bodies in specific contexts. This focus also emphasizes the crucial nature of attention to the conjuncture of multiple dimensions of both oppression and agency within concrete institutional settings.

Her approach acknowledges that politically engaged individuals act in contextually interested ways. Indeed, she suggests that it can only be such interest that moves people to act, whether that action be characterized as acquiescence or resistance. Her suggestion does raise some challenging questions about the use of the language of selfishness to talk about intersectional struggles, questions I will return to in Chapters 6 and 9. At this point, however, I shift the theoretical focus and address some questions about tax theory and the public/private divide, as both feature prominently in discussions of the *Symes* case.

A Taxing Theory

In the process of working on the *Symes* case, I was reminded time and time again that, despite the pervasive reach of tax law into the day-to-day life of the average citizen, many people feel completely intimidated by taxation. Friends who would ordinarily leap into discussions about law and politics – often beginning with a wry "Of course I know nothing about the topic, but I won't let that stop me from expressing a strongly held view!" – were quiet when the conversation turned to questions of tax. One of the barriers to discussion about tax policy is that tax law, as Neil Brooks puts it, "is embedded in a statutory scheme that few can grasp by the exercise of pure intuition."[30] Certainly, efforts to explain my subject material to friends, family, and acquaintances revealed all too clearly that, for many, tax law is experienced as a bewildering technocratic maze of dangerous traps and hidden loopholes.

However, despite being cloaked in dry technocratic legalese, questions of tax are also questions of politics. Tax is deeply implicated in social and economic policy, indirectly to the extent that there is a tax angle to nearly every social and economic policy, and directly to the extent that tax provisions themselves are often vehicles for the delivery of social services. Indeed, as Claire Young notes, the income tax regime may be one of the most important vehicles of social as well as fiscal policy.[31] And the policies embedded in the tax act are indicators of the social values pursued by our society. Joseph Schumpeter was led to argue that "nothing shows so clearly the character of a society and of a civilization as does the fiscal policy that its political sector adopts."[32]

Nevertheless, many people feel that their lack of familiarity with technical tax rules disentitles them from participating in debates about tax. While acknowledging that what I sometimes refer to as "tax-trauma" is

common, the serious social and political implications of our tax regime suggest that there are good reasons to push past a tax-induced sense of unease or intimidation. A few background comments may give the reader with little expertise in tax a greater measure of confidence to engage more actively with the tax-based debates raised in this study. In particular, let me briefly address two issues that frequently came up in debates about the *Symes* case: tax expenditure theory and the regressive nature of tax deductions.

On the first of these, tax theorists argue that the multitude of rules in the tax system can be separated into two distinct categories: technical tax provisions and tax expenditures. The technical tax provisions (sometimes referred to as the "normative tax system") are the rules that establish and define the basic structural elements of the tax regime: base, unit, period, rates, and administrative apparatus. These are the rules that deal with the raising of government revenue. Tax expenditures, on the other hand, are provisions that function not to raise revenue but to "spend it." Stanley Surrey, who developed the concept of the tax expenditure, saw tax expenditures as the special preferences found in every income tax:

> These provisions, often called tax incentives or tax subsidies, are departures from the normal tax structure and are designed to favor a particular industry, activity, or class of persons. They take many forms, such as permanent exclusions from income, deductions, deferrals of tax liabilities, credits against tax, or special rates. Whatever their form, these departures from the normative tax structure represent government spending for favored activities or groups, effected through the tax system rather than through direct grants, loans, or other forms of government assistance.[33]

Some of the debates in the *Symes* case involved the categorization of the childcare expense. Was it part of the normative or part of the tax expenditure system? The categorization matters in part because provisions from the two different categories are evaluated using different tools. Elements of the technical (normative) tax system are assessed using the traditional tax policy criteria of equity, neutrality, and simplicity.[34] Elements of the tax expenditure system, on the other hand, are assessed using budgetary criteria, such as target efficiency, government control, and administrative cost.[35] So, for example, those who saw the childcare deduction as part of the normative tax system might ask questions about equity and neutrality of application, focusing on the unfairness of applying the deduction in ways that ignored the centrality of childcare to the ability of the businesswoman to conduct her business. Those who saw the childcare deduction as part of the tax expenditure system, on the other hand, might focus on the need for courts to defer to governmental decisions as to the appropriate

amounts of money to divert (or not divert) to social programs such as childcare spending.

But whether one theorizes the deduction as part of the normative or tax expenditure side of the system, one is still dealing with the support of childcare through the tax system rather than through a more direct spending program. And, as Claire Young notes, "any challenge to the tool used to deliver the subsidy for childcare is constrained by the limitations of that tool."[36] And one can see that a second set of debates raised by the *Symes* case focused on the limitations of the tool and, particularly, on the inequities inherent in tax deductions. Tax deductions are regressive. That is, the value of a tax deduction to a taxpayer varies with the economic position of the taxpayer. Given this, a win for Symes might only exacerbate pre-existing inequities in a system that already privileges wealth and responds to economic power. One can see one way that this is so by examining the operation of a tax deduction.

Imagine that two friends have their children in the same daycare facility and each pays $10,000 a year for this service. Woman A has a yearly taxable income of $100,000 and Woman B has a yearly taxable income of $30,000. Woman A pays tax in the 50 percent bracket, while Woman B is in the 30 percent bracket. Let us assume that the *Income Tax Act* allows each woman to deduct the full $10,000 paid for childcare. Though each can deduct the $10,000 before calculating her taxable income, the value of this deduction is different for each. To Woman A, the deduction is worth $5,000. To Woman B, the deduction is worth only $3,000. This difference is related to the amount of money each makes and the rate at which she pays tax.

Had Woman A been unable to deduct her childcare expenses, she would have paid $50,000 in taxes (50 percent of $100,000). But the $10,000 deduction reduces her taxable income to $90,000, and so she pays only $45,000 in tax (50 percent of $90,000). The $10,000 deduction has given her a "tax savings" of $5,000. Had Woman B been unable to deduct her childcare expenses, she would have paid $9,000 in taxes (30 percent of $30,000). Because the $10,000 deduction reduces her taxable income to $20,000, she pays only $6,000 in taxes (30 percent of $20,000). The $10,000 tax deduction has given her a "tax savings" of $3,000. The childcare deduction, through reducing the amount of tax payable, acts in effect like a childcare subsidy. But, counterintuitively, the larger subsidy goes to the woman who makes more money, rather than to the woman who makes less. Woman A is effectively paying only $5,000 for childcare (because of her $5,000 subsidy), while Woman B is paying $7,000 for that care (because of her $3,000 subsidy).

I look in more detail at the *Income Tax Act* in Chapters 2 and 3 but, for now, the point I would like to emphasize is this: because taxation is such

a powerful vehicle of social policy, it is important not to let fear of techni-
cal detail stand as an impediment to vigorous debate. It is also important
to keep clearly in mind that the technical design of the tax system is built
on socially contested visions about the appropriate structure of fiscal and
political life. Debates about taxation legitimately require one to ask ques-
tions about the theories that inform the deep structures of social life. Thus,
in the *Symes* case, it was not surprising that the debates frequently turned
to the ways that concrete tax provisions reflected specific constructions of
the public/private divide. Because debates about this theoretical divide
surface at several junctures in this work, it is useful to provide a few back-
ground comments.

The Public/Private Divide

At the heart of social and political life in any modern liberal state is the
notion that important distinctions must be drawn between public and pri-
vate domains. The public/private divide provides a conceptual framework
for drawing the boundary between these different domains and the activ-
ities that occur within them. On the one side fall those activities or mat-
ters appropriate to public or political concern. On the other side fall those
activities or matters appropriate to private or personal concern.

Of course, it can be argued that activities themselves do not have an
ontological "publicness" or "privateness": "public" and "private," like
beauty, can be said to exist only in the eye of the beholder. And the eye
of the beholder often views the world through the lens of some dominant
ideology.[37] Although standards for beauty may vary with time and place,
and though there may be individuals with unusual visions or preferences,
there can be generally widespread social agreement as to what is beauti-
ful.[38] So too, there is often widespread social agreement as to what is pub-
lic and what is private. This agreement reveals less about the nature of
the activity in question than it reveals about the influence of a dominant
ideology on how people conceptualize the world in which they live.

Now, to call the public/private divide "ideological" is not to say that the
divide is only a mental construct: it is a mental construct but with signifi-
cant material consequences. The divide involves the allocation of tasks
and responsibilities in both ideological and physical terms. Significantly,
even those who do not subscribe to the ideological framework justifying
a given allocation of tasks will find themselves nonetheless subjected to
it. Even the most cursory review of women's activism reveals a persistent
concern with how tasks and responsibilities have been allocated under
various manifestations of the public/private divide.[39] The divide has
been drawn, women have often argued, using the pen of gender: men
have claimed the public for their own concerns, relegating women's
concerns to the private.[40] Men's concerns have not only dominated but

also defined the political realm. Women's concerns, to the extent that they have diverged from men's, have been characterized as personal. And, as Gavison puts it, the labelling of something as private or personal has had far-reaching material, that is, social, economic, and political, consequences:

> One of the functions of dubbing something "personal" is to define that activity, decision, or complaint outside of the social, political, or public arena, and to connect it with the particular circumstances and respon-sibilities of the individual or individuals concerned. This definition, in turn, identifies the proper way to address the complaint or problem: The individual suffering from personal difficulties may need aid or therapy. Although the general availability of such help may be a social concern, the particular problem is of no public interest or concern.[41]

One of the central arguments in the *Symes* case involves exactly this issue: the politics of labelling childcare as "personal." Symes was arguing that the business/personal distinction in the *Income Tax Act* (a distinction examined in more detail in Chapters 3 and 5) is yet another instance of a gender-inflected public/private divide. The *Income Tax Act* language of "business/personal" resonates in significant ways with the public/private divide as it is traditionally understood. Whether the line has been busi-ness/personal or public/private, it has often been interpreted in ways that have left women and children to fare for themselves. By defining childcare expenses as "personal," Symes argued, the government was excluding it from the public world of business, designating it as the private responsi-bility of individual mothers.

Symes's strategy was to draw heavily on the famous rallying cry, "the personal is the political." This classic statement has always served to chal-lenge those manifestations of the public/private divide that suggest that women's problems are personal or private ones. As Carol Hanisch argues: "Personal problems *are* political problems."[42] But while the rallying cry has been effective at foregrounding the politics inherent in any drawing of the public/private divide, it has not resolved complicated questions aris-ing from challenges to those drawings. So, for example, is childcare more like a business expense, or more like a personal expense? Such a question does not dispute the legitimacy of dividing the world of expenses into public and private ones. Rather, it focuses on the correctness of position-ing a given expense in one or the other category. Such a challenge is in the form of an internal critique of the divide. An external critique, on the other hand, questions or challenges the legitimacy of the distinction itself, suggesting that no distinction can be drawn or rather, that the process of dividing things between the two categories is so unremittingly harmful or

discriminatory in the resulting distribution of benefits and burdens, that the distinction itself should be dissolved.

Both internal and external challenges to the divide raise pressing questions in a context where it is becoming increasingly clear that the implications of labelling something as private or public can vary significantly to the extent that gender intersects with class, race, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Indeed, if some women are disadvantaged through their relegation to the private, others are harmed through a denial of access to any sphere of privacy.[43] Neither public nor private realm is necessarily better for women. Rather, these realms function in contradictory ways. Further, the benefits or burdens attached to any given division seem to be historically contingent and contested.

Thus, statements like "the personal is the political" are not simply assertions that given issues should fall to the public rather than private side of the line. Rather, they are assertions that the drawing of the line is itself political. Their greatest value lies in their ability to trouble the obviousness of the division, and to force a social articulation of the rationale for drawing the line in any given place. The important point may be that, while there is perhaps little in life that is inherently "public" or "private," important implications flow from how the boundaries are drawn. What is of concern in this work is less the descriptive question of whether something is public or private, but rather the implicational question of what it would mean to identify childcare as an expense falling on the public side of the public/private divide.