



# Women's Agency in the *Dune* Universe

Tracing Women's Liberation  
through Science Fiction

Kara Kennedy



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Auckland, New Zealand

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*To my teachers Ms. H and the two Dr. B's for introducing me to  
women's studies*

## PREFACE

They'd been there the whole time, neglected, misjudged, disregarded. The extraordinary women of the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood in Frank Herbert's *Dune* series deserved more. This book is a step toward giving them the scholarly focus their characters ought to have.

The premise of this book originated when I chose to study *Dune* for my undergraduate honor's project. It was more than a little risky choosing to analyze my favorite book, lest I ruin my enjoyment of it, but I wanted to look at something different from the traditional literary texts of my degree program. I also wanted to find a topic that could combine my fields of study—English literature and women's studies. Thus, I decided to focus on the character of Lady Jessica. During the course of the project, I stumbled across a significant gap in the scholarship: little had been written about the women of *Dune*. And the criticism that did exist was quite dismissive, resulting in an incomplete picture of the female characters in this best-selling work of science fiction. Jessica alone was an admirable, three-dimensional character worthy of study, not to mention the all-female organization she belonged to, the Bene Gesserit. Truly, how many male heroes have their mother with them every step of the way? For the project, I chose to examine the representation of Jessica as a strong woman who went beyond stereotypes despite being in a male-dominated culture. I used the concept of agency (the means through which someone exerts power or achieves their goals) because it was flexible enough to fit the roles and types of influence Jessica had. My argument covered three aspects of her agency in *Dune*—maternal, military, and religious—as well as the term 'witch,' used in the book a few times to label her. At the final

presentation of the project, I played a film clip from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* that makes a mockery of the idea of a woman being a witch. Although this term did appear in *Dune*, I concluded, this did not mean that the characterization of women was stereotypical.

When I moved on to my master's thesis, I expanded my analysis of women's agency in *Dune* to include the agency of the Bene Gesserit as an organization, as well as characters such as Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam, Lady Margot Fenring, Princess Irulan, and Chani. This allowed a more expansive view of women's activities, revealing additional evidence that the characterization of women was more complex than critics implied. Yet there was only enough space to examine the first book. I still wanted my research to encompass the original six-book series, especially since the final two books are dominated by female characters and include another all-female faction to rival the Bene Gesserit. Thus, I embarked on a PhD that would enable me to take my analysis of women's agency across the whole series, from Lady Jessica to Mother Superior Darwi Odrade. Since a doctoral dissertation required more theoretical backing, I chose a blend of feminist and historical approaches that allowed the series to be situated in its cultural moment while being analyzed within an agency framework. I focused on embodied agency, specifically, because it aligned with both second-wave feminist demands for bodily autonomy and the characterization of the Bene Gesserit. In addition, I included criticism of the trajectory of science fiction scholarship that has overlooked this series as a noteworthy part of both New Wave and feminist science fiction.

This book therefore builds on my doctoral research, in which I was supported by a scholarship from the New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women. My thanks go to my advisors and supervisors along the way who have provided valuable feedback and insight. Thanks also go to friends and family and my long-suffering partner who have conversed with me about elements in the *Dune* series and provided a springboard for working out lines of argument. Fortunately, throughout such focused study, I have only grown to appreciate the *Dune* series more, so my original choice was a risk well worth taking.

Auckland, New Zealand

Kara Kennedy



# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: The Sidelineing of the Women of <i>Dune</i></b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Introduction</i>	1
	<i>Why the Women of Dune?</i>	4
	<i>Contemporaneous Concepts of Second-Wave Feminism</i>	7
	<i>The Incomplete Narrative of New Wave and Feminist Science Fiction</i>	16
	<i>Embodied Agency</i>	21
<b>2</b>	<b>Mind-Body Synergy</b>	<b>27</b>
	<i>Theories of the Mind and Body</i>	28
	<i>Alternatives in Eastern Philosophies</i>	34
	<i>The Foundation of Bene Gesserit Skills</i>	43
	<i>Anticipation of Feminist Science Fiction</i>	58
	<i>The Matter of Prescience</i>	60
	<i>Contrast with Mentats</i>	62
	<i>Conclusion</i>	67
<b>3</b>	<b>Reproduction and Motherhood</b>	<b>69</b>
	<i>Feminist Theories on Reproduction</i>	70
	<i>The Bene Gesserit Breeding Program</i>	75
	<i>Reproduction as Oppressive or Transformative</i>	83
	<i>Alternative Means of Reproduction in Feminist Science Fiction</i>	90
	<i>Contrast with the Bene Tleilaxu</i>	92
	<i>Conclusion</i>	101

<b>4</b>	<b>Voices</b>	103
	<i>Feminist Resistance to Limitations on Women's Voices</i>	104
	<i>The Voice and Women</i>	109
	<i>Silencing of the Bene Gesserit</i>	119
	<i>Women's Truthsaying Ability</i>	121
	<i>Women's Roles as Advisors</i>	125
	<i>The Use of Epigraphs</i>	129
	<i>Female Voices in Feminist Science Fiction</i>	132
	<i>Conclusion</i>	134
<b>5</b>	<b>Education and Memory</b>	137
	<i>Shifting Conceptions of Education and History</i>	138
	<i>Bene Gesserit Education</i>	144
	<i>Parallels with the Jesuit Order</i>	147
	<i>Limitations on Women's Autonomy</i>	152
	<i>Women's Access to Other Memory</i>	156
	<i>Female Communities in Feminist Science Fiction</i>	168
	<i>Solidarity and Forging Bonds of Sisterhood</i>	169
	<i>Conclusion</i>	175
<b>6</b>	<b>Sexuality</b>	177
	<i>Changing Conceptions of Sexuality</i>	178
	<i>The Bene Gesserit as Case Study for Treatment of Sexuality</i>	186
	<i>Ways That the Bene Gesserit Secure Agency</i>	187
	<i>Contrast Between Honored Matre 'Whores' and Bene Gesserit 'Witches'</i>	198
	<i>The Depiction of Homosexuality as Abnormal</i>	208
	<i>Visions of Sexuality in Feminist Science Fiction</i>	210
	<i>Reflection of Changes in the Treatment of Sexuality in the New Wave</i>	212
	<i>Conclusion</i>	213
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	215
	<b>Correction to: Women's Agency in the <i>Dune</i> Universe</b>	C1
	<b>References</b>	221
	<b>Index</b>	235

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CHA</i>	<i>Chapterhouse: Dune</i>
<i>CHI</i>	<i>Children of Dune</i>
<i>DM</i>	<i>Dune Messiah</i>
<i>GE</i>	<i>God Emperor of Dune</i>
<i>HD</i>	<i>Heretics of Dune</i>



## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: The Sidelineing of the Women of *Dune*

## INTRODUCTION

Frank Herbert's *Dune* is one of the foundational texts in science fiction, having enjoyed decades of popularity after an initial struggle to find a publisher willing to take on such a long and multi-layered work. First serialized as "Dune World" and "The Prophet of Dune" in the science fiction magazine *Analog* in 1963–1965, *Dune* was published as a novel in 1965 and was followed by five sequels: *Dune Messiah* (1969), *Children of Dune* (1976), *God Emperor of Dune* (1981), *Heretics of Dune* (1984), and *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1985), with events spanning around 5000 years within the Dune universe. The first novel holds the status of being the best-selling science fiction book of all time and is frequently taught in science fiction courses.

Yet in spite of *Dune*'s popularity and the series' publication during the height of second-wave feminism in the U.S., critical attention to female characters in the series has severely lagged behind that devoted to female characters in other science fiction, particularly in the category of feminist science fiction, in which Herbert's series has never been placed. This appears strange considering that the series contains such a prominent all-female organization, the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood, whose members have an array of impressive skills and abilities. In fact, in his study of the author, *Frank Herbert* (1988), William F. Touponce calls attention to this neglect, noting that "whether or not the Dune series is ultimately feminist in the

images and voices of women it projects is an open question” (109). Therefore, this book seeks to redress this situation by answering the question ‘Is the series feminist?’ as well as additional follow-up questions: If so, what kinds of bodily agency and control do the female characters display, how do these link with feminist thought, and how do the characters compare to those in other twentieth-century science fiction?

I focus on the women of the Bene Gesserit because they are the most prominent female characters throughout the series, making them ideal objects of analysis whose characterization can also be compared across the six novels. The characterization of individual women of the Sisterhood and the larger organization creates some of the rich complexities and key tensions in the narrative, including the tension between individual and collective agency and the tension between human agency and biological determinism, which also offers a perspective on the role of sexual differences between female and male bodies. In light of the series’ focus on the capabilities of humans rather than computer technologies and second-wave feminist demands for women to have control over their own bodies, I use the overarching framework of embodied agency in particular to explore these tensions and analyze Herbert’s representation of the Bene Gesserit, as well as map the intersections between the series, second-wave feminism, and feminist science fiction texts. I am primarily concerned with the six novels, contextual and critical material published in the U.S. in the same time period, and the American science fiction tradition in which the series sits. The fact that the series materialized during a period of transformative social and cultural movements in the U.S. makes it a particularly unique case study in American science fiction in which to examine the representation of women.

In essence, my study looks further back than the 1970s—considered to be the pinnacle of second-wave feminism as well feminist science fiction—to find what redeeming feminist features Herbert has in his writing, how these features link with second-wave feminist thought, and how they compare to aspects in the works of key feminist science fiction writers like Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Le Guin. My main contention is that the *Dune* series is feminist but not wholly liberatory in its representation of the women of the Bene Gesserit due to the development of a high degree of female embodied agency but also complexities regarding this agency. I argue that the series offers a representation of women that is

three-dimensional and much more complex than the stereotypical females in other science fiction, and that the series at times even goes so far as to position women's embodied agency as superior to masculine-associated technology. It also underscores the complexity of notions of essentialism (the idea that women and men are naturally a certain way) as well as demonstrating how women can strategically leverage essentialist notions at times to accomplish larger political goals. In order to examine agency within this framework, I have chosen to rely on essentialist assumptions in order to analyze the female characters in the texts within their historical context as well as the context of second-wave feminism, which was itself grappling with how to theorize women in terms of women's liberation. Ultimately, my analysis shows that although the series' depiction of an all-female order may not be as overtly liberatory in terms of women's roles or sexual equality as the depictions of women in other feminist science fiction, the series nonetheless presents a rich and complex speculation on the ways in which women may exert agency that anticipates and parallels similar issues in second-wave feminism.

Although a biographical approach is outside of the scope of this study, it is worth noting that Herbert's relationships with the women in his life were likely a large factor in his decision to create and characterize the Bene Gesserit as he did. Herbert's mother and her ten sisters shared in his upbringing, and his aunts' insistence that he be taught by Jesuits points to them being the model for the Sisterhood (O'Reilly 89; B. Herbert 21). Another influential woman in Herbert's life was his second spouse, Beverly. She helped support his writing in a financial sense and by assisting with plot and characterization, "particularly the motivational aspects of female characters" (O'Reilly 17, B. Herbert 170). Herbert's son, Brian Herbert, has specifically linked his father's intentions with the historical context: "Aware of a simmering women's liberation movement in the early 1960s and the desires of women in religious service for more recognition, Dad decided to postulate a 'sisterhood' in control of an entire religious system. He thought readers would accept the premise of women with occult powers of memory, since females have traditionally been said to have 'women's intuition'" (B. Herbert 187). The above insights indicate that the connections between the women in his life and the characterization of the Bene Gesserit are also worth further exploration.

WHY THE WOMEN OF *DUNE*?

It will be useful to provide a brief summary of key points in the six novels and the Bene Gesserit's role in them, with the caveat that they are rich, complex, and lengthy books despite the sometimes seemingly simple narrative arcs. The *Dune* series is set in a universe with a medieval-like feudal structure that has developed in response to the Butlerian Jihad, a human revolt in the distant past against thinking machines that saw them banned, thereby forcing humans to develop their own capabilities. *Dune* features the story of the family of House Atreides—Duke Leto, Lady Jessica (a member of the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood), and their son, Paul—as they move to the planet Dune, the only location of sandworms and the prized spice known as melange, where their enemies, House Harkonnen, have laid a trap for them. The sandworm life cycle is integral to the creation of the spice, which is an addictive substance highly valued for its geriatric properties and ability to expand the psyche. Leto is killed and Jessica and Paul escape into the desert, where she uses her Bene Gesserit skills to find safe passage among the locals known as the Fremen, whose tribal culture has been prepared by previous Bene Gesserit women of the Missionaria Protectiva to accept a Bene Gesserit woman and her child as fulfillments of a prophecy. While pregnant with her daughter, Alia, Jessica undergoes the Water of Life ceremony to become a Reverend Mother, altering both her and Alia's psyches. Because he is part of the Bene Gesserit's breeding program and his mother trained him in the Bene Gesserit Way, Paul is also able to ingest the Water of Life and alter his psyche, although he gains access to prescient visions as well. He eventually overthrows the Baron and the highest authority in the Imperium, the Emperor, agreeing to an unconsummated marriage with the royal daughter Princess Irulan to solidify his ascension to the imperial throne.

*Dune Messiah* details the downfall of Paul after the wars in his name resulted in the deaths of billions across the universe and his enemies plot to deny him an heir and end his reign. One of the enemies is a new group, the Bene Tleilaxu, who create gholas, which are resurrections of deceased individuals developed from skin scrapings that the Tleilaxu can train to behave in certain ways at a subconscious level. Two Bene Gesserit women, Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam and Irulan, are also part of the plot. However, after Chani dies in childbirth and Paul goes blind and resists the Tleilaxu's temptation of resurrecting a gholas of Chani, Irulan gives up her plotting to help raise Paul's twin children, Ghanima and Leto

II, for whom Alia is regent. *Children of Dune* follows the maturation of the twins, who must avoid plots against them by outsiders as well as their Aunt Alia, who has become possessed by the memory of her grandfather, Baron Harkonnen. Jessica returns to ensure that the twins are not similarly possessed, Leto starts down the Golden Path that will see him turn into a sandworm, and Ghanima agrees to a relationship with another royal heir in order to continue the Atreides line into the future.

*God Emperor of Dune* takes place around 3500 years after the events of *Dune* and is largely concentrated on Leto's philosophical musings, after he has become the God Emperor. The Bene Gesserit have survived, but Leto has taken over management of the breeding program in order to develop humans who will be free from the trappings of prescience. Eventually he allows a young woman of the Atreides line named Siona along with one of the Idaho gholas to rebel against him and cause his death, and this explains how the Bene Gesserit are able to resume their influential place in the universe in the last two books. Set around 1500 years after Leto's death, *Heretics of Dune* details how people who had gone out into what is known as the Scattering have fled back to the known universe and begun causing trouble for groups like the Bene Gesserit and Tleilaxu. Many of those who return call themselves Honored Matres, who are women using advanced sexual techniques to enslave men and gain control over whole planets. They see the Bene Gesserit as rivals to be eliminated, as do the Tleilaxu, but the Bene Gesserit have gained more abilities over the centuries: they can share memories with other members on demand and can sexually imprint men in order to gain their loyalty, in a way similar to that of the Honored Matres. The two female groups battle and have their final confrontation in *Chapterhouse: Dune*. The Bene Gesserit leader, Reverend Mother Darwi Odrade, concludes that the two groups must merge in order to curb the wildness of the Honored Matres and preserve the Sisterhood, and when she dies, the former Honored Matre Murbella becomes the new leader, having undergone Bene Gesserit training.

The question is: why have the women of such a popular, best-selling series remained so critically neglected? In general, critics have largely focused on aspects of the obvious themes—the messiah figure, religion, ecology and the environment, politics, and psychology—to the neglect of issues of gender, postcolonialism and the Other, and posthumanism. Furthermore, critics often focus solely on the first novel as the most popular and self-contained one. However, its sequels take place in the same universe and continue Herbert's exploration of significant themes. They



also provide the opportunity to see how changing social mores and political concerns may have influenced Herbert as a writer, since he wrote the novels over a span of several decades. The narrow and limited body of criticism has meant that there is much material left unexamined, and the later novels especially have very little criticism on them at all.

There are three book-length studies of Herbert and his works that vary significantly in their coverage and focus, but none of them contains a sustained analysis of female characters or gender issues in the *Dune* series. The few who have explicitly addressed women and gender in *Dune* have done so in a cursory way. For example, Jack Hand's "The Traditionalism of Women's Roles in Frank Herbert's *Dune*" (1985) is a short article that presents a scathing yet shallow critique of female characters in the first novel. Miriam Youngerman Miller's "Women of *Dune*: Frank Herbert as Social Reactionary" (1985) is more willing to consider the positive aspects of Herbert's portrayal of female characters yet draws a similar conclusion about traditional female roles subordinating women. M. Miller is one of the few critics to explicitly acknowledge the cultural context in which Herbert was writing, namely second-wave feminism, and consider how it might have impacted his characterization of women. But her apparent belief that equality between the sexes is required for the series to have redemptive feminist qualities results in her discounting the first four novels as having too traditional a view of women. The limitations of her analysis likely stem from the fact that her chapter is part of a book of conference proceedings. But both Hand's and M. Miller's articles are cited by other critics, showing that they have likely biased later critics against a more thorough and nuanced analysis of women's roles.

In an effort to understand why female characters in the *Dune* series have received relatively little criticism, C. N. Manlove's argument regarding concealment offers one convincing explanation. He finds that "the motif of concealment is central to *Dune* and its manner"—it "is of the essence, and is bound up with waiting over long periods of time" (Manlove 81). This motif can explain why female characters have been so underrated and underestimated: because Herbert deliberately conceals their motives and political maneuverings just as he does with many other aspects of the story in order to construct multi-layered novels that offer the reader more than just an entertaining story. Indeed, Herbert spent six years of research on world religions, desert environments, and sciences like psychology and ecology before putting together the story in the first novel (*HD* v, B. Herbert 141, 164); yet much of this information is layered into the

*Dune* universe such that the reader may not realize how much effort went into the world-building. As Manlove elaborates, “the readers have to work very hard as in all Herbert’s fiction to make the links, which are often hidden in the narrative or understandable only with considerable effort” (Manlove 89). In this way, the series requires an active reader to understand the depth of the complexities just as Russ’s *The Female Man* requires an active reader to grasp such a “disjunctive” novel (Bartkowski 50). In only looking at the surface level of the series—where women often operate in roles as concubines, wives, mothers, and advisors—critics miss expressions of agency that are more concealed.

### CONTEMPORANEOUS CONCEPTS OF SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM

In order to redress the oversight in the lack of feminist criticism, and in light of the rich historical context, I deemed it most suitable to undertake an approach that takes into consideration contemporaneous issues and the social climate in which Herbert was writing and publishing. Therefore, I engage with select concepts in second-wave feminist thought and works in the U.S. and look at trends in the American science fiction genre, namely the New Wave movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the rise of female-authored texts that infused New Wave concerns with those of the feminist movement, in order to see how the *Dune* series may address feminist concerns and bring them to life through a group of fictional women, without necessarily proving that there was a direct relationship. This method was successfully implemented in Jeanne Cortiel’s study of Joanna Russ, *Demand My Writing: Joanna Russ, Feminism, Science Fiction* (1999), and enables a rich exploration of intersections and connections between fiction and the real world (Cortiel *Demand* 11). In this way, I can both answer Touponce’s question about whether the *Dune* series is feminist and challenge the existing critical discourse of mid-twentieth-century science fiction that has relegated one of its most successful authors to the sidelines.

As Cortiel acknowledges, there is a “fundamental indeterminacy that governs more recent feminist thinking” that must be partially suspended to examine such texts within the context of second-wave feminism (Cortiel *Demand* 16). This study acknowledges there have been some significant shifts in feminist theories since the 1960s–1980s. It also recognizes that use of the wave metaphor can tend to emphasize differences and conflicts

between generations of feminists, obscuring the many overlapping concerns between movements, as Nancy A. Hewitt highlights in the introduction to *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (2010). In general, third- and fourth-wave feminism have paid more attention to overlapping and intersecting types of oppression and multicultural perspectives (Tong “Feminist Thought” 33). They are more open to concepts about choice, empowerment, and sexual differences, and less concerned with seeming contradictions in their feminist viewpoints. There have been challenges to prior feminist frameworks and a further destabilization of sex, gender, and sexuality. Technologies such as the internet have become an important tool through which women “claim feminist agency for themselves and each other” (Garrison 380). Yet the fragmentation of the feminist movement and the concurrent rise of individualism can make it challenging to articulate what a feminist position might look like and how many might subscribe to it. But the concept of women’s right to self-determination and control of their bodies arguably remains relevant in the feminist struggle for change. Thus, as explained in more detail below, I believe that embodied agency offers a useful tool in feminist theory for analyzing the representation of women in literature.

Second-wave feminism in the U.S. was a heterogeneous movement with various branches and ideologies, but there are several key ideas popularized by radical feminism in particular that are pertinent to my exploration of women’s agency. Building on a long tradition of women who advocated for women’s rights, including early feminist and British author Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and American suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, second-wave feminists offered their own interpretations and reformulations regarding how to address women’s oppression. According to Rosemary Tong’s overview of feminism, feminist theoretical approaches can be classified into the broad categories of liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, or postmodern (Tong, *Feminist Thought* 1). To illustrate: whereas liberal feminists generally advocated for equality of the sexes and believed that new laws would help eliminate inequality, and Marxist feminists believed that a socialist revolution would benefit both workers and women, radical feminists theorized that women’s oppression was based on their sex—that their bodies were sexually different and considered inferior to men—and that they needed to fundamentally change society in order to achieve liberation. They were more concerned with women’s rights over their bodies than equal pay in a

capitalist system that they saw to be based around men's needs and desires. Although a range of feminist ideas had an impact on the shaping of feminism in the second wave, it was radical feminism that was arguably responsible for the popularity of the women's liberation movement. This was largely due to media coverage of radical feminist demonstrations, as detailed by Alice Echols in her comprehensive study of radical feminism, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975* (1989). Indeed, it was the New York Radical Women's 1968 protest of the Miss America pageant that "put the women's liberation movement on the map" due to "extensive press coverage" (Echols 96, 93). In radical feminist Ellen Willis's reflections on the era, she argues, "It was radical feminism that put women's liberation on the map, that got sexual politics recognized as a public issue, that created the vocabulary ('consciousness-raising,' 'the personal is political,' 'sisterhood is powerful,' etc.) with which the second wave of feminism entered popular culture," and confirmation of her statements can be found threaded throughout Echols's study (Willis 92). Through their rhetoric, radical feminists introduced concepts regarding women's agency and bodies that would become standard feminist fare. According to Echols, radical feminism was central to the transformation of women's situation in the world in terms of improving women's self-determination (Echols 285–286). In light of the significance of radical feminism and the parallels between its theories and the characterization of the Bene Gesserit as possessing myriad bodily abilities, this book is concerned primarily with radical feminist theories. As Tong observes, "more than liberal and Marxist feminists, radical feminists have directed attention to the ways in which men attempt to control women's bodies" and "have explicitly articulated the ways in which men have constructed female sexuality to serve not women's but men's needs, wants, and interests" (Tong, *Feminist Thought* 72). The fact that radical feminist theories were circulating during the time of Herbert's writing offers a unique and fruitful opportunity for the *Dune* series to be read alongside contemporaneous feminist debates and have connections traced between them.

Yet despite being influential, radical feminism had a relatively short period of popularity before being superseded by cultural feminism in the 1970s, and it is important to note that this splintering was due in part to internal struggles within the feminist movement that illustrate the potential consequences when there are significant tensions between individuals and groups. As Echols explains, the two movements differed in key respects: whereas radical feminists sought to change society to make

gender irrelevant, cultural feminists sought to celebrate femaleness in order to reverse the devaluation of stereotypically feminine characteristics in society. In radical feminists' efforts to eliminate inequality within their movement, and through their reluctance to explore women's differences, they created tensions between individual women and the larger collective. Cultural feminists' notion of sisterhood based around women's female nature may have represented a more attractive way to unite women despite their differences. Nonetheless, in Echols's analysis, ultimately the "struggle for liberation became a question of individual will and determination, rather than collective struggle" and thus lost the notion of women's agency as a way of effecting change in society (Echols 279). What the ascendancy of cultural feminism illustrates is not only the difficulty in theorizing sexual difference, but that there must be a balance between the consideration given to individual members of a group and the consideration given to the larger group and the goals it is trying to achieve that require members' commitment.

For information about the concerns and theories of the second wave, this book relies on several key texts that were precursors to the movement, primary sources that were published during the heart of the movement, and secondary sources that analyze feminist ideas and trends with some distance from the events themselves. The precursor texts are Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (trans. 1953) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Primary sources include essays in editor Robin Morgan's anthology of radical feminist texts, *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (1970), and editors Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone's collection, *Radical Feminism* (1973), and stand-alone texts like Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) and Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). Secondary sources include Sara Evans's books on the women's liberation movement—*Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movements and the New Left* (1979) and *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (1989); the aforementioned book by Echols; and Jane Gerhard's book on feminism and sexuality, *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982* (2001). Together these texts present a multi-faceted picture of the currents of second-wave feminism that nonetheless shows that women were united about one thing: they wanted change.

Arguably the most crucial overarching idea of second-wave feminism—and one that is key to an analysis of the *Dune* series—is that women should

have the right to control their own bodies. Beauvoir's theory that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" challenged the idea that women came to be the way they were, namely normatively feminine, because of biology, which enabled her to argue that the weakness and inferiority associated with the female body were actually a result of socialization that needed to be changed to liberate women (Beauvoir 281). Once translated into English, her book *The Second Sex* quickly became a pivotal text within American feminist thought, with most feminist writers acknowledging a debt to her (Spender *Women* 512). Beauvoir's main argument is that women have been categorized as Other by men, limited to the physicality of the body while men are free to transcend the body and be considered autonomous individuals capable of higher orders of thinking. She blames women's socialization and conditioning for restricting them to roles as wives and mothers. However, she insists that things can change, for "Woman is the victim of no mysterious fatality; the peculiarities that identify her as specifically a woman get their importance from the significance placed upon them. They can be surmounted, in the future, when they are regarded in new perspectives" (Beauvoir 763). It is societal pressures, then, that are responsible for giving weight to sexual differences in her view, and these are malleable. Although Beauvoir has been criticized for seeming to treat the body with abhorrence, notably by feminist scholar Toril Moi in *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (1994), her recognition that it is socialization not biology that causes it to be a hindrance for women offers an important feminist perspective on the female body, as well as pointing to a possible way out of women's dilemma. Indeed, her theory about women's socialization "came to be absolutely crucial to feminist thinking" (Hughes and Witz 48) and "launched a whole generation of feminist scholars, intent on dispelling the doctrine of 'natural' difference and showing that differences between the sexes were socially rather than biologically constructed" (Davis 8). Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, credited with helping initiate the second wave of feminism, has a narrower focus: the "problem that has no name—which is simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capabilities" (Friedan 364, Bowden and Mummery 13). Although Friedan is referring mainly to middle-class American housewives, her underlying message that women should be free to make their own decisions about their futures is more broadly feminist and concerned with female agency.

Later feminists were more focused on the issue of the reproductive body and women's right to choose whether to become mothers. Firestone, who co-founded several radical feminist groups in the 1960s, rejected reproduction as an activity that any woman should partake in and was heavily criticized for her belief that artificial reproduction offered a viable solution to liberate women from the limitations of the female body. In *The Dialectic of Sex*, she detailed the subjection of women to the pain and trauma of childbirth and the unequal allocation of childcare responsibilities, then posited that an equal society was possible if women no longer had to bear the brunt of pregnancy and men shared responsibility for raising children. In contrast to Firestone, Rich—herself a mother of three who came to identify more with cultural feminism than radical feminism—embraced the sexual difference that allows women to become pregnant and give birth and argued that this was something for feminists to celebrate, not give away. She theorized that motherhood provides a valuable perspective on the debate about whether the differences between female and male bodies should be erased or acknowledged as positive, and she suggested that motherhood should be reclaimed by women.

A related issue in second-wave feminism was sexuality and women's right to define it on their own terms outside of a male-dominated or procreative framework. Radical feminists confronted Freudian theories on female sexuality and began to consider what sexual pleasure for the female body might entail. Some believed that women must create an “exclusively female sexuality through celibacy, autoeroticism, or lesbianism,” while others thought that women should be able to experiment sexually however they chose (Tong, *Feminist Thought* 5). Cultural feminists, meanwhile, defined male and female sexuality as opposed. Former radical feminist Robin Morgan maintained that men were interested in sex but women were interested in relationships, writing that men promoted “genital sexuality, objectification, promiscuity, emotional noninvolvement, and coarse invulnerability” but women pursued “love, sensuality, humor, tenderness, commitment” (Morgan qtd. in Echols 256). This theory gave women less room to maneuver in terms of sexuality since it appeared to be preprogrammed for them, but it nonetheless allowed women a reason to refrain from participating in relationships with men if they chose. Although all feminists did not agree on what they believed the female body should do once freed of its conditioning, if this were possible, they knew they wanted women to have the choice to decide.

The concept of women in control over their bodies is important to an analysis of the *Dune* series because it forms the backbone of the philosophy of the Bene Gesserit, whose members train their bodies extensively in order to establish precise control over nearly all of their functions. The basis for their skills in prana-bindu, or muscle and nerve control, will be analyzed in Chap. 2, which looks at the mind-body synergy they cultivate and the mental and physical feats they can perform because they are not bound by the dualistic thinking that Beauvoir critiques. The representation of reproduction and motherhood is examined in Chap. 3 using Firestone's and Rich's theories, as is the way that the series showcases the potential consequences of technological interference in reproduction. The complexities of sexuality are taken up in Chap. 6, in which the focus is on the later novels where there is a marked shift toward more open discussion of female sexuality and a clear refutation of the idea that women are naturally more nurturing and loving in their sexual relationships through the characterization of the Honored Matres.

Two other relevant issues in second-wave feminism are women's right to speak and their right to recover the history of their foremothers. For women, the right to speak meant having the right to not only express themselves without being silenced, but also be listened to and trusted rather than dismissed. The technique known as consciousness-raising that became popular in the second wave was one method of gaining this platform. Consciousness-raising involved groups of women across the U.S. meeting in their own communities to share the details of their lives where, by breaking the silence around notions of womanhood and taboo topics such as sex, they realized that they were not alone in suffering from sexism and being dissatisfied with the current state of affairs for women. Consciousness-raising was important to radical feminists in particular because, as the group New York Radical Women believed, "part of women claiming their authority lay in the larger process of, first, overturning male experts and oppressive socialization and, second, speaking their own truth about their experience" (Gerhard *Desiring* 101). Before women could claim an authoritative position, then, they had to set aside men's perspectives and trust in the value of their own. Although feminist texts may not explicitly state their authors' desire for an end to the silencing which women had been subjected to, it runs as a current throughout the second wave. For example, Morgan in her introduction to *Sisterhood Is Powerful* clearly thinks of the publication as a statement in itself: "This book is an action. It was conceived, written, edited, copy-edited, proofread, designed,



and illustrated by women” (Morgan “Introduction” xiii). It is not just women’s voices being expressed through the texts that matter to Morgan but the fact that it was women who were instrumental in having those voices published. The recovery of the voices and ideas of feminists from the past was also an important concern. Both the collections *Radical Women* and *Sisterhood Is Powerful* open with articles about American women’s history in an effort to contextualize the emergence of the contemporaneous feminist movement, and these articles serve to both frame the collections of radical feminist texts and underscore the need for women’s history. In fact, higher education did respond to a growing demand for courses about women spurred on by the feminist movement, and women’s topics were increasingly taken up by researchers (Evans *Born* 300).

Women’s demand that the voices of themselves and their foremothers be heard is particularly significant to an analysis of the *Dune* series because of the Bene Gesserit’s abilities in the Voice and Other Memory, which play a key role in their characterization. Chapter 4 examines the extent to which the female voice is authoritative, influential, and truthful as seen in the Bene Gesserit’s skills with the Voice and in their roles as advisors and Truthsayers. Chapter 5 looks at the Bene Gesserit’s system of education for girls and how it prepares them to use their bodies for political goals and to undergo an initiation wherein they gain access to the lives and memories of their female ancestors through Other Memory.

Two second-wave slogans that are pertinent as background information are ‘the personal is political’ and ‘sisterhood is powerful.’ The idea that ‘the personal is political’ for second-wave feminists meant that what may seem like a personal issue, such as workplace discrimination or a lack of affordable childcare, is in fact political because it reflects women’s disempowerment in patriarchal society and requires some kind of intervention to address it. Consciousness-raising was a clear example of this personalized approach to politics (Evans *Personal* 214). It saw personal issues as all potentially open to collective action and solutions (Evans *Born* 290). The idea was not without its flaws, however, because for some it encouraged self-transformation in one’s lifestyle that did not translate into collective political action (Echols 17–18). Nevertheless, for others it prompted them to “embrace an asceticism that sacrificed personal needs and desires to political imperatives” (Echols 17). Having a broad definition of what is political allows for a wide range of people and activities to be deemed politically relevant and important for feminist