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Gender in Personal Life

To most people being a 'man' or a 'woman' is above all a matter of personal experience. It is something involved in the way we grow up, the way we conduct family life and sexual relationships, the way we present ourselves, and see ourselves, in everyday situations. In this chapter I will examine some issues that arise in this intimate, personal realm, and reflect on how to understand what happens here.

Growing up gendered

When 'sex role' theory provided the main framework for discussion of gender, there was a fairly straightforward account of how people acquired gender. Babies were, from the start, called either female or male – labelled by the famous pink and blue baby clothes. Blue babies were expected to behave differently from pink babies – rougher and tougher, more demanding, aggressive and vigorous. In time they were given toy guns, footballs, and computer games. The pink babies, by contrast, were expected to be more passive and compliant, also prettier. As they grew older they were dressed in frilly clothes, given dolls and makeup kits, told to take care of their appearance and be polite and agreeable.

In the fullness of time the former blue babies would be taught to run cars and solve mathematical equations, to compete in the marketplace and earn a living, and to pursue former pink babies. The former pink babies would be taught to cook, to be good at human relations, to do

what they were told, and to make themselves attractive to the former blue babies.

Put more formally, the idea was that sex roles were acquired by 'socialization'. Various 'agencies of socialization', notably the family, the school, the peer group and the mass media, took the growing child in hand. Through an immense number of small interactions, these agencies conveyed to the girl or the boy what were the social 'norms' or expectations for her or his behaviour. This could be done by imitating admired 'role models', such as a father might be for a boy; or it could be done piecemeal. Compliance with the norms would lead to rewards, or 'positive sanctions': smiles from mother, approval from friends, good marks at school, success in the dating game, appointment to a good job. Nonconformity or deviance would lead to negative sanctions, all the way from frowns and cross voices to getting beaten up or sent to gaol.

With this mixture of positive and negative reinforcement, most children would learn the gender-appropriate behaviour as they grew up. They would eventually do it automatically, and come to think of themselves as the kind of people they were supposed to be. They would actually develop the traits of character the society thought appropriate for women or for men, and thus 'internalize' the norms. As fully socialized members of society, they would in turn apply negative sanctions to deviants, and convey the norms to the next generation. The sex role system thus seemed to have an inbuilt stabilizing mechanism, and would reproduce itself over time. Of course the process could go wrong, for instance if fathers disappeared from families and boys lacked role models, which would probably lead to deviance.

There is something to be said for this story of how gender is acquired, but there are also severe problems with it; so severe, in fact, that the 'socialization' model should be abandoned.

First, there is not just one 'sex role' for boys and one other for girls. There are *multiple* patterns of masculinity and femininity in contemporary societies. These result partly from class differences (e.g. business masculinity vs. manual craftsmen's masculinity) and the ethnic pluralism of modern societies (e.g. different traditions about wife/husband relations among Chinese-Americans, African-Americans, and Anglo-Americans, or between Turkish immigrants and native-born Germans). But multiple patterns also arise within gender relations, through the contradictions and dynamics discussed in chapter 4.

Second, the socialization model supposes that learning gender is a matter of acquiring *traits*, that is, regularities of character that will

produce regularities of behaviour. Sex role theory, basically, is a version of the 'difference' model of gender discussed in chapter 3. But as we saw in chapter 3, major differences in traits between women and men (also girls and boys) are hard to detect. Even when the scales used by psychologists detect some average differences between women and men, they are slight in comparison with the variation among women, and among men. It is clear that the business of growing up and learning about gender cannot be just a matter of internalizing role norms.

Third, the 'socialization' model pictures the learner as passive. In this model active agencies transmit role norms to a passive learner, whose only task is to internalize what he or she is given. When we turn to real situations where gender learning is going on, they do not look much like this. Consider the American elementary schools studied by Barrie Thorne (chapter 2). The boys and girls here are not lying back and letting the gender norms wash over them. They are constantly active in the matter. They take up gender divisions supplied by adults, sometimes accept them, and sometimes don't. They set up their own gender divisions in the playground, and then disrupt them. They try out gendered self-presentations (e.g. the older girls put on lip gloss), and some of them try cross-gender presentations (e.g. girls being sporty or rough). They complain, joke, fantasize and question about gender matters. Similar energy and activity appear in other studies of gender learning, such as the British upper secondary students described by Máirtín Mac an Ghaill in *The Making of Men* (1994).

The socialization model seems to miss the *pleasure* which is obvious in much gender learning, the enthusiasm with which young people take up gender symbolism (e.g. sexy clothes) and construct gendered relations (e.g. teenage dating). Nor does it give much insight into the *resistance* which many young people put up to hegemonic definitions of gender: the boys who hate sport, the girls who want to be astronauts, the teenagers who recognize themselves as gay. It also seems to miss the *difficulty* which is involved in constructing identities and working out patterns of conduct in a gender order marked by power, violence and alienated sexualities. Sue Lees' disturbing study of fifteen- and sixteen-year-old girls in Britain, *Losing Out* (1986), showed almost intolerable dilemmas about sexual reputation in dealing with boys who share a misogynist culture. As one girl remarked: 'It's a vicious circle. If you don't like them, then they'll call you a tight bitch. If you go with them they'll call you a slag afterwards.' Thinking about the presentation of women in recent popular music as 'whores' and 'bitches', it is clear this dilemma is not unusual.

The fourth problem with the socialization model is that it recognizes just one direction of learning – toward the sex role norms. It is difficult, in such a framework, to understand the changes of direction that often appear in a young person's life, coming apparently from nowhere – that is, nowhere outside the person. Developmental crises sometimes occur, with a sudden change in gender practice. There can be a shift of attachment from mother to father, a new level of aggression, a sudden burst of sexual activity, a turning away from girls or boys. Rather than just failing to 'internalize' the gender patterns of her/his parents, a young person may vehemently reject them, criticize their political or human inadequacy, and launch out on a search for something different.

This aspect of human development is much better understood by psychoanalysis than by role theory. The view of growth first worked out in Freud's case studies emphasizes conflict and contradiction. Freud recognized that a person is often developing in different directions at the same time – for instance at unconscious and conscious levels. Whether or not we accept the models put forward by contemporary schools of psychoanalysis (they remain deeply divided), this insight seems important.

A better account of how we acquire gender must therefore recognize both the contradictions of development, and the fact that learners are active, not passive. People growing up in a gendered society unavoidably encounter gender relations, and actively participate in them. This participation is disorganized to some extent, because the patterns of their lives are not yet settled. Hence the element of anarchy in 'gender play', as Thorne describes it, with children dodging in and out of gender patterns. This anarchy can reappear later in life if there is an attempt to unlearn or re-learn gender patterns, where it may be experienced as more terrifying – gender vertigo rather than gender play.

Chapter 3 argued that we must recognize the agency of bodies in the social world, and this is true in the learning of gender. The active learner is embodied. The pleasure involved in learning gender is to some extent a bodily pleasure, pleasure in the body's appearance and in the body's performance. Bodily changes such as menarche, first ejaculation, the 'breaking' of a boy's voice and the development of a girl's breasts, are often important in the development of gender. Their meanings are nevertheless ambiguous until they are given definition by the society's gender symbolism.

Because gender practice involves bodies but is not biologically determined, the gender practice being learned may actually be hostile to bodies' physical well-being. Young men in the United States and Australia, enacting their fresh-minted masculinities on the roads, die in

appalling numbers, at a rate four times higher than young women. A large number of adolescent girls and young women go in for dieting, in an attempt to maintain their heterosexual attractiveness. For a certain percentage this escalates into life-threatening anorexia. Older men sometimes die of diseases that could be cured, because they have learnt it is unmanly to admit pain and request help.

Embodied learners encounter the gender regimes (as defined in chapter 4) of the institutions they come in contact with. The socialization model was right about the importance of the family, the school, and the media in children's lives, but rarely acknowledged the internal complexity of these institutions. Conflicting models and messages are likely. In a school, the teachers present a range of different patterns of masculinity and femininity to the children, simply as a result of the diversity in their own lives. The children are likely to pick up some of the gender politics among their elders – tensions, divisions and alliances. Their elders, in turn, may be divided about gender issues in their treatment of the children. Even in a two-parent family, there is room for argument about how to bring up a girl or a boy.

Further, the same experience may be interpreted in different ways. For instance, a boy growing up in a situation of domestic violence, where his father often bashes his mother, may incorporate violence towards women into his own repertoire of masculinity. Many do; it is common for men convicted of wife abuse to describe domestic violence in their own childhood. But the boy may also react against it out of terror (especially as violence against wives often goes together with violence against children), or may side with his mother and reach for a totally different relationship with women in his own life.

Institutions do not mechanically determine young people's learning. But they do shape the consequences of what young people do – the risks they run, the recognition they get, the networks they gain access to, the penalties they pay. For instance, adopting a particular pattern of masculinity may strongly affect the academic success a boy experiences in school, and thus the occupational paths open to him later. A pattern of combative, physically assertive masculine display, the 'protest masculinity' which is familiar in working-class schools, may result in major conflict with teachers, disruption to learning, sometimes violence and expulsion from school. On the other hand there are patterns of masculinity, more familiar in elite schools, which are equally competitive but pursue competition through the channels provided by the school. Boys developing this pattern of masculinity are likely to be headed for academic success and professional careers. (For a useful survey of boys'

differing relations to school see *Uncertain Masculinities*, by Mike O'Donnell and Sue Sharpe, 2000.)

As children grapple with their places in a gendered world, they are not, for the most part, internalizing gender-specific behaviours. (As I noted in chapter 3, strictly gender-specific behaviours are rare.) Children are, much more importantly, learning how gender relations work, and how to navigate among them.

Much of young people's learning about gender is learning *gender competence* in this sense. Young people learn how to negotiate the gender order. They learn how to adopt a certain gender identity and produce a certain gender performance. They also learn how to distance themselves from a given gender identity, how to joke about their own performance. Most boys and girls fail to match gender ideals – ideals of handsomeness, beauty, skill, achievement or recognition. But most of them cope. They eventually 'know how to go on', to borrow Wittgenstein's famous phrase.

It is helpful to think of active learning as involving a commitment of oneself in a particular direction. The learner does not simply absorb what is to be learnt; the learner engages with it, moves forward in life in a particular direction. The pleasure in gender learning, already mentioned, is the pleasure of creativity and movement. Gender learning can occur at any moment that a young person encounters gender relations in the situations of everyday life, and grapples with those situations. It is not usually planned, and it need not be explicitly named as gender – it may be thought of as 'sports I enjoy', 'fights with my parents', 'jobs I am suited for', etc.

This is not to say gender learning is shapeless. From early in the process, what is learnt is likely to be connected with other pieces of learning, and made into wholes. Children learn about, and shape in their own lives, patterns of practice – the *configurations* of gender practice in personal life that we call 'femininity' and 'masculinity'.

Gender configurations, being patterns of activity, are not static. (This is one reason why the attempts by some psychologists to capture masculinity and femininity with standardized paper-and-pencil scales do not work very well.) The process of engaging with a situation, moving forward, happens not just at the level of particular pieces of learning, it also happens on the larger scale of a whole life. Masculinity and femininity are 'projects', to use a term suggested by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1968). They are patterns of a life-course projected from the present into the future, bringing new conditions or events into existence which were not there before.

Seeing gender learning as the creation of *gender projects* makes it possible to acknowledge both the agency of the learner and the intractability of gender structures. Gender patterns develop in personal life as a series of encounters with the constraints and possibilities of the existing gender order. In these encounters the learner improvises, copies, creates, and thus develops characteristic strategies for handling situations in which gender relations are present – learns 'how to go on' in particular ways. Over time, especially if the strategies are successful, they become settled, crystallizing as specific patterns of femininity or masculinity.

The existing structure of power, division of labour, etc. mean that some strategies are more likely than others to get results. So there is likely to be overlap in the gender projects, a degree of social standardization of individual lives. We might call these common *trajectories* of gender formation. They are what researchers pick up as patterns of 'masculinity' or 'femininity' in life-history and ethnographic research.

Gender projects are not one-dimensional or smooth. A young person may be developing two or more different, and perhaps conflicting, gender strategies at the same time. One thinks of the footballer who also writes poetry, the teenage sexpot who is also studying hard for university. Such conflicts are very familiar in adolescence, as teenagers try out one strategy after another. They can also continue into adulthood. The well-known novel *Regeneration* by Pat Barker (1992), set in the First World War, has such a conflict as a central theme. In it the poet Siegfried Sassoon faces an intolerable tension between two commitments: his conventional masculine commitment as a soldier to stand by his comrades and continue fighting, and his sense of care and responsibility to protest against a war which he has come to see as an outrage and atrocity.

The complexity or contradictoriness of gender relations, as seen in chapter 4, may themselves produce conflict in the course of growing up. The classic example is the 'oedipus complex' identified by Freud in early childhood, arising from the clash between emotional attachment to the mother and to the father. Another familiar example, in adolescence, is the conflict between loyalty to a same-gender 'peer group' of friends, and cross-gender attachment to a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Conflict may also develop when a young person's gender practice violates or resists convention. This resistance may find social support, as Huey Brown did (chapter 2), because there was an existing network of same-sex relationships in Nullangardie which he was able to find. But a young person may not find such support, resulting in loneliness and fear; this is a significant issue for telephone counselling services such as suicide prevention hotlines.

In the typical case, Freud considered, the oedipal crisis does get resolved. Through its resolution, the child moves on to a new stage of development. We need not agree with Freud's focus on the oedipus complex to agree with the broader argument. A life-history, and a gender project within a life-history, does not unfold seamlessly. It involves a number of distinct *moments* or *stages*, in which different gender commitments are made, different strategies are adopted, or different resolutions of gender issues are achieved.

Let me give as an example my own research with a small group of men in the Australian 'green' movement (Connell 1995: ch. 5). Most of them grew up in homes with a conventional gender division of labour, and in childhood and adolescence began to make a commitment to hegemonic masculinity. But this moment of engagement was followed by a moment of negation, as they began to distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity, for a variety of reasons including family conflict. Most then, in the counter-culture or in the green movement, encountered feminism and were obliged to confront gender issues head-on: this was a moment of separation from hegemonic masculinity. That was where some remained at the time we interviewed them. Some, however, had moved on to a moment of contestation, starting a political project of reforming masculinity and committing themselves to gender equality.

I do not believe there is a standard set of stages in gender formation – though a number of psychologists, from Freud on, have thought there are. What we know about the diversity of gender orders makes it unlikely that there are universal rules for the way gender is learnt. Perhaps the nearest thing to a universal rule is the fact of qualitative change. Any particular gender project, for an individual or a group in their distinct historical setting, is likely to involve points of transition, different moments of development. No life-course is mechanically determined by its point of origin.

The diversity of masculinities and femininities evident in a great deal of gender research implies different trajectories of gender formation. Class inequalities, ethnic diversity, regional difference, national origin and migration create different experiences of childhood. Ethnographies of childhood such as the California Childhoods Project (Thorne et al. forthcoming) clearly show this diversity of paths. The gender regimes of institutions allow different encounters with the gender order prevailing among adults. There may also be conflict among adults over gender issues for children: parents may criticize sex and violence in the media, churches may criticize laxness among parents, the media poke fun at the churches . . . .

The diversity of trajectories is well shown in a recent British study, Gillian Dunne's *Lesbian Lifestyles* (1997), which looks at the childhoods of women who are *not* heterosexual in adulthood. Some served an 'apprenticeship' to conventional femininity, some were tomboys; some grew up in families with a conventional division of labour, some in egalitarian homes. Dunne emphasizes the agency of the girls in responding to these experiences. But she also notes the intractability of the gender order. As they moved into adolescence, where the 'romance' and 'dating' culture ruled, many of the girls found the middle ground in gender relations, which they had previously occupied, disappearing beneath their feet. As one woman, Connie, recalls:

> The whole thing changed, suddenly they became totally different people. I thought what is this thing that happens to everyone else and doesn't happen to me? . . . I didn't know how to behave, quite honestly. They all seemed to have this secret code that they all learned, and I didn't. They all knew how to behave at discos, and I would sit pinned to the wall terrified. Where did they learn this? I didn't have it. It was some sort of pattern of social behaviour that everyone fell into, and I didn't have it – God! . . . The big 'goo goo' eyes came out, the painted faces, and the frocks, and all that stuff, and the act, the peacock act, basically attracting. At 12, they would stop being your mate that you had known, and suddenly they would become this minor adult, doing something that you didn't understand. They would suddenly be – Oh! With the boys, flirting big eyes, all that sort of thing; it didn't seem right for me, I could never do it.

Diversity does not mean chaos. Children's gender strategies intersect, as Thorne's school ethnography (chapter 2) shows. They deal with the same institutions and with overlapping groups of adults. One of the key competencies children learn is to know what are the prevailing masculinities and femininities in the adult world. Whatever ideology prevails in the gender order, children grow up under its shadow. They may not embrace it, but they cannot forget it. Consider Harriet Brown's trajectory (chapter 2): wildly aberrant for a working-class boy in some respects, but still reaching for a settled couple relationship that was in some respects a conventional marriage.

It is difficult to make a complete break with the gender patterns one has grown up with. With this in mind, Gay Liberation activists spoke of 'self-oppression' among gay men. A heterosexual version of the same dilemma is presented in Doris Lessing's famous novel *The Golden*

Notebook (1962). Lessing pictures her heroines Anna and Molly as trying to conduct independent lives as 'free women', consistent with the principles of British left-wing politics. But they find their autonomy constantly undermined by their emotional need for relationship with a man. Their political experience, even their financial independence, makes no difference.

Yet the gender order does change, and this makes possible new personal trajectories, new paths of learning. Young women growing up in communities influenced by the Women's Liberation movement have their own dilemmas about jobs, marriage and children, as can be seen in the autobiographies collected by Jocelynne Scutt in *Growing up Feminist* (1985). But they do not face the same impasse as women of Doris Lessing's generation.

There is some evidence that belief in gender equality has also spread among younger men. Witness the recent national study of men in Germany by Zulehner and Volz (1998), where men below fifty endorse a gender-equal model of family life, and reject 'traditional' norms, about twice as often as men above fifty. But communities with a consistently egalitarian view of gender are rare, and as the case of Eastern Europe shows (chapter 2), societies can move in the other direction. To understand the forces shaping paths of gender development we have to move outward from personal life to gender patterns in larger arenas. This is the subject of chapter 6.

Gender identity

Perhaps the commonest way of understanding the presence of gender in personal life is through the concept of 'gender identity'. The term 'identity' has a long history in philosophy and literature, and has gone through a curious shift in meaning.

When the word was taken over from late Latin into English, about the sixteenth century, it was a philosophical term that meant exact agreement, sameness. It was used when a writer wanted to refer to a thing or person remaining the same over time, or despite different circumstances. The philosopher John Locke, for instance, used the term that way in his famous book *On Human Understanding*. Initially, then, the concept of 'identity' was one of a family of philosophical and religious terms that expressed the theme of unity. By the nineteenth century the term 'identity' had become thoroughly naturalized in English and was used in literature as well as philosophy and mathematics. It was still generally

used with the meaning of 'sameness', though sometimes in the sense of personal existence, or to emphasize who I am as against who I am not.

By the late nineteenth century, however, 'who I am' had become more and more of a problem for the speakers of European languages. The feudal social order was dead, replaced by a restless capitalism, gigantic new cities, enormous labour migrations and turbulent working classes. A radical workers' movement challenged class division in the name of human equality. At the same time, global empires brought Europeans and North Americans face to face with radically different cultures, and urgently posed the question of human sameness and difference. Was the Cheyenne or the Zulu the white man's brother? Was the Australian Aboriginal, or the Bengali, on the same plane as the British conqueror? Some said yes; but more and more voices among the conquerors said no. A new language of 'race' emerged during the nineteenth century to deny human unity.

A shift was simultaneously occurring in conceptions of gender. Men and women had traditionally been thought of as the same kind of being (though one a more perfect version of it than the other). Western culture increasingly rejected this view and defined men and women as different in nature, even opposites (Laqueur 1990). Men and women were irrevocably assigned to 'separate spheres' suited to their different natures. There was a material basis for this. Fascinating archaeological research has traced the physical separation of workplace from domestic life, and the gradual segregation of cities like New York on gender as well as class lines (Wall 1994). Entrenched in the very stones of the city, the belief in separate spheres became so powerful that it was accepted even by most nineteenth-century feminists.

Thus Western bourgeois culture – now the dominant culture in the world – came to include a powerful ideology of innate differences between people. These were supposed to be differences of character as well as physical type, and were reflected in the hierarchies of class, race and gender. Yet this belief was under challenge as soon as it was formulated. It was challenged by anti-colonial intellectuals such as Mohandas Gandhi, who argued against the idea of inherited or acquired superiority on the grounds that 'all have the same soul'. Belief in fixed differences was challenged in another way by the radical psychology of Sigmund Freud. Freud came to see adult personalities as being *by necessity* internally divided and full of conflict. Freud did not share Gandhi's idea of all people having the 'same soul'. Rather, he saw the diversity of adult mental life – including feminine and masculine conduct, heterosexuality and homosexuality – as the outcomes of distinctive life-histories, leading to different mental makeups.

Freud's conflictual view of personality was developed in varying ways by his argumentative followers, especially Alfred Adler. A socialist doctor in Vienna, Adler was concerned with the health of the working class, and was also influenced by the women's movement of the day. This background led him to the view that one's social location, especially one's degree of social power, was a crucial cause of personal histories and psychological conflicts. In a remarkable early synthesis of feminist and psychoanalytic ideas, Adler suggested that the core of the neuroses was not repressed sexuality, as Freud thought, but the 'masculine protest'. This was a distorted striving for superiority, rooted in the small child's emotional interpretation of men's power, and women's subordination, within the family. The ultimate answer to the neuroses produced by a gender-divided society, Adler (1927) later came to believe, was to develop a unifying sense of social responsibility and mutual obligation.

These insights became the basis of the twentieth century's most influential statement about identity. Erik Erikson's famous *Childhood and Society* (1950) interpreted a range of modern personal, social and political problems as difficulties in achieving identity. 'The study of identity, then, becomes as strategic in our time as the study of sexuality was in Freud's time' (Erikson 1950: 242). Erikson's concept of personal identity was based on the Freudian insight that adult personality is formed by a long, conflict-ridden process of growth.

But where Freud had focused on conflicts involving unconscious agencies of the mind (the 'id' and the 'superego'), Erikson emphasized the conscious agency, the 'ego'. The ego is the mental agency involved in transactions with the outside world, the agency where the conscious sense of self is located. To Erikson the term 'identity' meant the coherence of the psychological mechanisms by which the ego handles the pressures that impinge on it – from the unconscious mind, on the one side, and the outside world, on the other. This feat of balance, if successful, is registered in a stable sense of self. Thus the question 'who am I?' is, in principle, answered by the ego's success in mastering the trials and tribulations of psychological development. This was, Erikson thought, a particularly important issue in one stage of development, adolescence. This idea has led to a great deal of popular discussion of adolescence as a 'search for identity'.

The key application of this concept to gender was made by the American psychiatrist Robert Stoller (1968), who altered it in two ways. First, the 'core gender identity' that Stoller saw as the basis of adult personality was supposed to be formed very early in life – in the first two or three years – not in adolescence. Second, the concept of identity acquired a different frame of reference. Erikson referred to the integration of the

ego as a whole. Stoller's conception was much more specific. To talk of 'gender identity' is to talk only of *one aspect* of the person – her or his involvement in gender relations or sexual practice.

To Stoller this narrower focus did not matter because he assumed that the integration of the personality as a whole *was* largely focused on the sense of being a male or a female. But on any other view of personality and social process, an exclusive focus on gender is a problem. We can speak just as meaningfully of 'racial identity', 'generational identity' or 'class identity'. If we acknowledge the 'constant interweaving' (Bottomley 1992) of these social relations, we *must* attend to these other forms of identity in order to understand gender identity. The concept of 'identity' formulated by Stoller thus leads towards a conception of identity as inherently *plural* rather than unitary.

A model of identity built on gender dichotomy was more easily accepted by the 1970s because of the growth of American feminist research emphasizing gender difference in the rearing of children. The most influential statement of this point was Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978).

Chodorow's argument linked the gender division of labour, which assigned the task of caring for babies and infants exclusively to women, with the paths of development for girls and boys which resulted from their different emotional situations in early childhood. Girls, brought up by a parent of their own gender, tend to have less distinct ego boundaries. When they grow up they have a stronger motivation for nurturing children. Boys, pushed towards separation from a mother responding to the gender distinction, tend to have an earlier discontinuity or break in development. They have more difficulty in establishing gender identity, and stronger boundaries to the self in adulthood.

The gender division of labour in childcare is a fact, part of the broad division of labour discussed in chapter 4. Though it has been well established that men *can* 'mother' (Risman 1986), it is still the case that, in contemporary Western society, few of them do. But the reasons for this may be economic rather than psychological. In Norway, where the cost of losing a man's wage has been sharply reduced by the introduction of a 'Father's Quota' of paid parental leave, some 70 per cent of eligible men take up their entitlement and are present as carers in the first month of their child's life (Gender Equality Ombudsman 1997). There has also been increased recognition – by Chodorow (1994) among others – that we do not find dichotomous gender patterns in adult personalities. As the psychological 'sex difference' research discussed above in chapter 3 indicates, the outcomes of child development are curiously un-dichotomous.

Social researchers too have increasingly recognized variation within the gender categories. This is plain in the recent research on masculinity. In contrast to the way '*the* male role' was discussed in the 1970s, it has become common to speak of 'masculinities' in the plural. There is considerable diversity between cultures in their constructions of gender for men. This can readily be seen by comparing recent descriptions of masculinities in Latin America, the Middle East, and southern Africa (Gutmann 2001, Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb 2000, Morrell 2001). There is also considerable evidence that there are multiple masculinities within the same culture, even within the same institution, peer group or workplace. A striking example is Douglas Foley's (1990) ethnography of a high school in a Texas country town in the USA. Here the interplay of gender, class and ethnicity constructs several versions of masculinity. There is the dominant group of Anglo 'jocks', anti-authoritarian Mexican-American 'vatos', and the group which Foley calls ironically the 'silent majority'.

The trend has therefore been to speak of multiple gender and sexual identities. Some psychologists, for instance, have mapped out the stages of acquisition of a 'homosexual identity' (Troiden 1989) as one among a number of possible sexual identities in modern society. But there is a significant shift of ground in moving from the concept of 'identity' to the concept of 'gender identity' or 'sexual identity'. With the categories seeming more and more complex, the concept of identity has increasingly been used to name claims made by individuals about who or what they are.

This is closely related to the growth (especially in the United States) of 'identity politics', since the decline of socialist and class-based movements which had universal objectives. One becomes a member of a social movement by claiming the identity (as Black, as a woman, as lesbian, etc.) that the movement represents. 'Queer' politics takes the process a step further. Queer activists have challenged taken-for-granted communities by emphasizing their diversity: highlighting the presence of Black lesbians in white-dominated lesbian communities, for instance. At the extreme, the concept of identity becomes a way of naming one's uniqueness, rather than naming what is shared.

Even the well-researched 'identities' of gender and sexuality prove, on close examination, to be less solid than we might think. Arne Nilsson's (1998) beautifully crafted study of homosexual history in the Swedish city of Göteborg identifies three ways of being homosexual: 'so', commonly a bit effeminate; 'real men', often working-class youth; and 'fjollor', flamboyant queens. Three identities, perhaps? But Nilsson also

shows how the patterns of homosexual life grew out of the structure of the industrial and maritime city. Among the conditions shaping sexuality were crowded housing, a sharp gender division of labour, high density of men in public spaces, a non-respectable working-class street life, connections to other cities via the shipping trade, certain patterns of policing, and the poverty of many young men, who might enter homosexual relationships for a period and then move on.

The distinctive forms of homosexual practice changed as these conditions changed. The 1950s saw rising affluence in Sweden, suburban working-class housing, the growth of the welfare state, and moral panics about the seduction of youth. A sharper cultural distinction between heterosexual and homosexual people followed the increasing privacy of sexual conduct itself. Thus the configurations of sexual and social practice which might easily be read as 'identities' were dependent on historically transitory social conditions, and for many participants were only a limited part of their whole sexual life-history.

Given such problems with the idea of 'identity', is the concept worth anything at all? Certainly the word has been massively over-used. It often serves merely as a pretentious synonym for self, reputation, or social standing.

In some cases, to use the term 'identity' for a configuration of gender or sexual practice may be actively misleading. Guy Hocquenghem (1972), one of the most brilliant theorists of Gay Liberation, argued that homosexual desire is *in principle* inchoate, anarchic, an impersonal flux not a personal unity. Homosexual desire is desire that escapes being 'oedipalized', that is, organized by the patriarchal social order. Homosexuality is, in a sense, the opposite of an identity, being desire and practice that cannot be welded into a unity. I think his argument does not go far enough. A great deal of *heterosexual* desire also fails to be 'oedipalized'. Heterosexual desire, too, is often perverse, transitory, unbounded, and pushes against the social authority that constructs fixed positions and bounded identities in a heterosexual order. As Lynne Segal puts it in *Straight Sex* (1994: 254–5): 'Sexual relations are perhaps the most fraught and troubling of all social relations precisely because, especially when heterosexual, they so often *threaten* rather than confirm gender polarity.' For instance, it is precisely in sex that heterosexual men are most likely to experience dependence, uncertainty, passivity and – quite simply – shared experience with women.

To Erikson there was never any doubt that it was desirable to have a unified identity. He saw that as a task to be accomplished in the course of growing up. Most other people who have written about 'identity' have

also assumed that everybody ought to have one. But is this really so desirable? Some identities I can think of are pretty revolting – at least in their consequences for others.

To weld one's personality into a united whole is to refuse internal diversity and openness. It may also be to refuse change. Major reform in gender relations may well require a de-structuring of the self, an experience of gender vertigo, as part of the process. I have documented this for a group of men in the Australian 'green' movement who were trying to change traditional masculinity (Connell 1995: ch. 5). The American sociologist Barbara Risman (1998) has found a comparable experience in 'fair families' in the United States. There is something to be said for living with contradictions, rather than trying to erase them.

Gender and sexualities

Sexuality is the realm of intimate contact where particularly strong emotional bonds are forged. Yet on this very territory a trend towards fragmentation and alienation has emerged. The leading contemporary theorist of sexuality, the British historian Jeffrey Weeks (1986), argues convincingly that the 'speciation' of sexuality, the diversification of practices, subcultures and identities, is characteristic of the present moment.

Sexual matters have to be dealt with in all cultures, but they may be dealt with in very different ways. The anthropologist Kalpana Ram (1991) notes how the language in which sexual matters are spoken of, among the Mukkuvar people of south India, makes women's sexuality inseparable from questions of auspiciousness and fertility, representing a kind of social prosperity. By contrast, Christianity long valued chastity above sexual fulfilment. A vow of chastity was a basic part of being a monk or nun. Chastity for priests was originally an ideal, that was turned into a rule during the great reform of the medieval church by Pope Gregory VII.

In chapter 4 I noted that the distinction between 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' is a key to the structure of emotional attachments in contemporary Western society. This distinction, so important now, is relatively recent. In medieval and early modern Europe, specific homosexual acts were often defined as shameful or criminal, but were lumped together with other disruptions of religion or social order, like blasphemy. They were not thought to define a particular kind of person, just a particular kind of sin, which anyone, if carried away by lust and

pride, might commit (Greenberg 1988). By the eighteenth century, in the booming commercial cities of Western Europe, networks of men involved in same-sex activity had formed and they began to be seen as a distinctive group. Changed laws, in the late nineteenth century, criminalized homosexual behaviour generally and led to regular police surveillance and arrests.

At about the same time homosexuality was redefined as a medical condition. This was part of an expansion of the medical idea of 'pathology' to include sexual behaviour, a shift that was brought to fruition by the Austrian doctor Richard von Krafft-Ebing. His medico-legal treatise *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1885) is one of the founding documents of modern sexology and sex law reform, and became a best-seller. There is debate among historians as to how far a sexual subculture had already been created in European cities. But there can be little doubt about the importance of legal and medical discourses in shaping the modern category of 'the homosexual' (Weeks 1977).

This is the most important, but not the only, case of diversification. New categories of sexuality, and new erotic objects, have been emerging in a ferment. In major cities there is now a considerable range of sexual subcultures, with bars, clubs, shops, mail and telephone services catering for different (though often overlapping) interests: leather scenes, sadomasochistic, fetishistic, cross-dressing, cross-age, cross-ethnic, bondage, and so on. It is possible to trace in fine detail the construction of particular sexual subcultures. This has been done by Gayle Rubin (1991) for a famous 'fisting' venue in San Francisco, describing in remarkable detail the setting, the participants, the styles of sexuality, the leading personalities, the economic and political history of the venue.

There is also a 'speciation' within heterosexuality. Here the interplay of two of the structures of gender, emotional attachment and power relations, is crucial. The power of heterosexual men in a patriarchal system makes it possible to treat women as objects in a way that not only depersonalizes desire but practically dismembers their bodies.

Folklore among heterosexual men has long distinguished 'leg men' from 'tit men'. Current heterosexual pornography shows an immense development of this specialization. Magazines and videos are now readily available in the shops which make specialized appeals to men's sexual interest in big breasts, big buttocks, shaved genitals; very young women, very fat women; white, Black and 'Asian' women; women dressed as nurses, schoolgirls, schoolmistresses, police; disabled women (e.g. amputees); women wearing high heels and lingerie; women penetrated by vegetables, animals or objects. It seems that the commodification of

men's sexuality has gone hand-in-hand with a strong fetishization of desire. The body is treated as a *thing* rather than a person.

This is not the only form of male heterosexuality – things would be very depressing if it were. Yet the advertising, music and fashion industries have increasingly picked up themes from pornography: for instance Madonna's music videos, Versace and Gaultier clothing, and many current advertising campaigns. Commodified sex in the form of prostitution, whose clients are almost exclusively men, has been re-established in major Western cities. International sex tourism has become an important industry for developing countries such as Thailand. In sex tourism even elementary communication as persons is usually ruled out by language barriers. It seems that an alienated, fetishized spectrum of male heterosexual desire has emerged as a significant element of the current gender order.

We usually think of our sexual desire in a quite different way, as an inherent or natural part of our makeup. Theorists of sexuality have often shared that assumption. Versions of sexuality as a natural drive can be found in Darwin, Freud, the anthropologist Malinowski, the philosopher Marcuse. Many followers of Freud understood human psychology as the outcome of a clash between natural sexual urge and social repression. Even the arch-empiricist Alfred Kinsey, the insect specialist who became the most famous survey researcher on human sexuality, shared the notion of a robust, hedonistic, natural urge, which found varying expression according to social approval or prohibition (De Cecco 1990).

The whole framework that contrasts natural urge with social prohibition or distortion was dramatically rejected in the 1970s. Similar stances were taken by Foucault in France, and by the sociologists of the Kinsey Institute in the United States (Gagnon and Simon 1974), who developed the idea of sexual 'scripts'.

John Gagnon and William Simon's conception of sexual scripts is, essentially, an application of the 'role' notions that were very widespread in social psychology from the 1950s to the 1970s. The logic is like that of the 'sex role' concept, and the descriptive detail in their model of the normative heterosexual life-cycle in the United States (Gagnon and Simon 1974: 100–3) has a large overlap with the sex role literature of the day.

Foucault's celebrated *History of Sexuality, Volume I* (1980) offered a vehement critique of the 'repressive hypothesis'. The alternative it suggests is more subtle than Gagnon and Simon's notion of 'scripts'. Foucault argued that society did not repress sexuality, which simply does not exist as an entity in nature. Rather, social discourses *constituted*

sexuality as a cultural form, in the historical transition to modernity. This established a new form of power over bodies and their pleasures, a power exercised not only by law but also by medicine, psychotherapy, and sexology itself. Foucault's argument expanded social constructionism to new territory, and has been followed by a flood of research on discourses of sexuality and the production of sexual identities, which still shows little sign of abating.

These were important advances; but they had problems. Gender is, notoriously, absent from Foucault's theoretical universe. Gender is found in scripting theory mainly in the very simplified form of 'sex roles', or dichotomous sexual scripts. Social constructionist accounts also seem to have difficulties understanding the bodily dimension of sexuality. It often seems to be bodily processes and products – arousal, orgasm, pregnancy and birth, menarche and menopause, tumescence and detumescence, semen, milk and sweat – that underpin the biological-determinist sense of sex as a domain of eternal repetition.

Social constructionist approaches to sexuality, as Carole Vance (1989) observes, risk drifting away from bodily experience altogether. It is important, then, to recall the argument (chapter 3 above) that the bodily processes and experiences conventionally taken to be outside history are indeed elements of social process.

This social analysis of bodies connects sexuality with the structures of gender (chapter 4). In sexual practices, bodies are drawn into social processes, but they are not drawn into a featureless world. They are drawn into a social world that is structured by gender relations. Much of their practice occurs in institutions (the family, the firm, etc.) and therefore occurs within the gender regimes of those institutions. The gender order marks out places for bodies, allocates different resources, provides interpretations. Specific patterns of sexual desire and sexual conduct arise in the distinctive locations the gender order provides, and in response to socially constructed needs (e.g. for income, for security, for parenthood).

Survey research in the United States is important in showing how the gender patterning of sexuality persists over time. Comparison of surveys done in different years, and comparison of generations within the one survey, reveal two broad trends in American heterosexual practice. One is a rising rate of sexual contact outside marriage, most notably a greater number of partners in youth, and an expansion of the sexual repertoire (especially to include oral/genital sex). The other is a gradual erosion of the 'double standard', with women's patterns becoming more like those of men.

But the convergence between women and men is far from complete. In the most elaborate of these studies, the 'new Kinsey report', women are less than half as likely as men to report coming to orgasm in heterosexual intercourse. Though the interpretation of the questions is tricky, it seems that women were more than five times as likely as men to report having been forced to do something sexual they did not want to do (Laumann et al. 1994: 333–6). American heterosexuality, it appears, still reflects gender inequality.

The most profound current changes in sexuality are not, however, in the rich industrialized countries. As shown in ethnographies such as Jeffrey Clark's (1997) study of a highland community in Papua New Guinea, the more sweeping changes are in poor countries. Sexual categories and relationships are being profoundly changed in the course of dependent capitalist 'development'.

Alison Murray's *No Money, No Honey* (1991), a study of street traders and prostitutes in the capital city of Indonesia, traces this process in an urban setting. One type of prostitution in Jakarta involves lower-class women servicing the Westernized sexuality of businessmen. The women use this trade as a way into the modernized sector of Indonesian society. Another type of prostitution involves middle-class housewives who become prostitutes on a part-time basis, without giving up their respectable identities. These women were excluded from useful employment by the patriarchal policies of the Suharto dictatorship, and found a solution in the black economy. Different class sexualities, as Murray puts it, are produced despite a standard official ideology of womanhood.

Global capitalism is also impacting on sexuality among Javanese men. Javanese society traditionally provided a space for 'banci', crossdressing men who typically have sex with straight men. This is one of many third-gender categories found, in different forms, around the world. In contemporary Indonesia 'banci' communities are distinct from a new sexual category, 'gay' men, who have emerged in more affluent social contexts with stronger links to North American gay culture (Oetomo 1996). A similar process as far away as Brazil is documented by the ethnographer Richard Parker (1991). Parker finds a local pattern of male-to-male sexuality which is based on a strong distinction between the insertive and the receptive partner. The one who penetrates maintains his masculinity, never allows himself to be penetrated, and thus remains in a separate sexual category and is not regarded as a 'homosexual'. But this sexual pattern is also being reshaped under North American influence, specifically by a 'gay' model of reciprocal sexuality.

In this pattern, both partners are both insertive and receptive, and thus both are members of the same sexual category.

Dennis Altman (1996) makes the important observation that such cases do not involve the simple substitution of a 'Western' sexuality for a 'traditional' sexuality. Globalization involves an enormously complex interaction between sexual customs and gender regimes that are in any case diverse and divided. The result is a spectrum of sexual practices and categories, formed in contexts of cultural disruption and economic inequality.

This is strikingly shown in Thailand. According to Peter Jackson (1997), the traditional Thai sex/gender categories for males were 'phu-chai' (man, mainly heterosexual) and 'kathoey' (effeminate or cross-gender, receptive homosexual). Under the impact of international gay culture, these categories have not disappeared. Rather, they have been elaborated with a series of additions: 'bai' (bisexual), 'gay-king' (homosexual, preferring to be insertor), 'gay-queen' (usually effeminate, preferring to be receptive), and 'gay-quing' (masculine or effeminate, and sexually versatile). In this inter-cultural context, same-sex practices of sexuality, like the heterosexual sexuality discussed by Segal (see previous section), seem to undermine gender polarities.

6

Gender on the Large Scale

Most discussions of gender concern the local: personal relations, identities, motherhood and child-rearing, family life, sexuality – and their pathologies, such as prejudice, domestic violence and rape. We have already seen reasons to go beyond this. It is impossible to understand personal relations without taking into account institutions, economies, mass communications and governments. Chapter 4 outlined an approach to the structure of gender relations. This chapter applies the same approach to gender relations on the very large scale: in corporations, governments and global society.

Gender in the corporation

The corporation (also known as the 'firm' or 'company') is the dominant form of economic organization in contemporary society, the key institution of developed capitalism. Accordingly, if we are to understand the economic dimension of gender, the structure of production relations (chapter 4), we must examine the corporation.

Corporations are gendered institutions, with a gendered history. 'Companies' of merchants in early modern Europe were entirely composed of men. When ownership began to be divided up and became itself a kind of commodity, with the creation of joint-stock companies and the first stock exchanges in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these too were socially defined as men's institutions. The creation of the modern form of capital was part of the historical process that created a