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Making Gendered People

Bodies, Identities, Sexualities

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This chapter discusses the ways gender enters into our personal lives, bodily experience, sense of self, and sexuality. The discussion concerns what psychologists call *personality*, what philosophers call *subjectivity*, what sociologists used to call *socialization* and now more often discuss under the heading of *identity*. The issues that arise on this terrain cut across disciplinary boundaries and rapidly involve questions about the nature of gender itself.

Bodies

At the center of commonsense thinking about gender in contemporary Western culture is the idea of bodily difference between women and men. There are, it is usually assumed, two types of bodies, male and female, which are sharply distinct from each other—indeed, opposed to each other. These distinct bodies, it is assumed, give rise to two different kinds of person.

In English we talk easily of "the opposite sex." When pop psychologists inform us that men are from Mars and women are from Venus, or that our lives are ruled by "brain sex," or that women can't park cars and men can't keep houses tidy, these very silly ideas find an audience because viewers and readers are already accustomed to thinking that there are deep natural differences between women and men. We are also accustomed to thinking that these deep natural differences are the basis of sexual desire. We easily assume that "opposites attract," and that

masculine-plus-feminine is the necessary basis of love, marriage, pleasure, and domesticity.

To a certain extent, any functioning member of a Western society must share these polarized categories, and experience life through them. We cannot enjoy pop songs or Hollywood movies, read love poetry, admire fashion, or go to a sporting event without participating as members in a gender-polarized world. So we are very likely to perceive our own and others' bodies in gender terms.

Yet even as we participate in these ways, disturbances are also likely. The body may not match the dichotomous imagination. Indeed, it generally does not. The image may be persistently displaced by contrary images. The most famous love poems in English, Shakespeare's sonnets, were quite possibly written to another man or to a boy; they were certainly dedicated to a man. Many people fall in love with members of the gender that is not "opposite"—that is, their own. Some people fall in love only with members of their own gender. It seems, then, that we need to look harder at the conception of dichotomy, and the place to start is the conception of distinct types of bodies.

Humans share with many other species, plants as well as animals, a method of reproduction that allows the combination of genetic material from two individuals rather than the cloning of one. Sexual reproduction in itself does not require bodies to be specialized by sex. For instance, among earthworms each individual is a hermaphrodite, producing both sperm and eggs. Thus every worm is able to perform what we think of as male and female functions. Among mammals, females carry fetuses in a womb (except for monotremes such as the platypus, which lay eggs) and feed infants with their milk. Among some mammal species, but not all, males have considerable extra bulk or carry extra equipment, such as antlers.

Humans are mammals with highly differentiated reproductive systems, but minor physical differences between sexes in other respects. We have no antlers. There are only small differences in average size or physical capacities between male and female humans; there is great overlap in physique and capacity between the two groups.

In Western popular thought, these minor differences are greatly amplified. The reproductive difference is assumed to be reflected in a whole range of other natural differences: in strength (women weaker), sexual interest (men stronger), physical skills (men, mechanical; women, fiddly work), recreational interests (men, sports; women, gos-

sip), character (men, aggressive; women, nurturant), intellectual abilities (men, scientific genius; women, intuition), and so on.

The popular ideology of natural difference has been strongly reinforced by sociobiology, the revived attempt at an evolutionary explanation of human society that became fashionable in the 1970s. According to sociobiological theorists, men's and women's bodies are the bearers of traits produced by the evolutionary pressures that bore down upon the human stock in the remote past. Thus men are supposed to inherit, with the Y chromosome, tendencies toward aggression, family life, competitiveness, political power, hierarchy, territoriality, promiscuity, and bonding with each other by forming men's clubs. Women, conversely, are programmed to care for the men's offspring, ensuring the survival of the genes down through the generations.

According to Wilson (1978), the doyen of sociobiologists, "The physical and temperamental differences between men and women have been amplified by culture into universal male dominance." Others claim more precisely that current social arrangements are an outgrowth of the endocrine system: for instance, that patriarchy is based in a hormonal "aggression advantage" that men hold over women (Goldberg 1993).

Sociobiological speculation on gender is not well supported by evidence. Careful examinations of the research (Kemper 1990; Fausto-Sterling 1992) show that nothing like one-way determination of the social by the biological can be sustained. Social relations can and do shape biological processes, including the production of hormones; there is a constant interplay of social process with biological process. As Kemper (1990) bluntly concludes, "When racist and sexist ideologies sanction certain hierarchical social arrangements on the basis of biology, the biology is usually false" (p. 221). Biological explanations of social arrangements remain common because of the general prestige of "science" and because they broadly justify the status quo and the privileges of those who benefit from the status quo.

In the 1970s, feminist theorists proposed a sharp distinction between *sex* and *gender* that seemed to dispose of this problem. Sex was the biological fact, the difference between the male and the female human animal. Gender was the social fact, the difference between masculine and feminine roles, or men's and women's personalities.

To many at the time, this distinction was a conceptual breakthrough. It cut through the knot of natural difference, and showed why biology

could not be used to justify women's subordination. The effects of biological difference were confined to the realm of biology itself. A broad realm of the social ("culture," "roles," and so on) remained, where most of the action took place—where gender as we experience it was constructed.

In this view, the social was above all a realm of freedom, where individuals or societies could *choose* the type of gender they wanted. As one very influential volume at that time concluded:

We suggest that societies have the option of minimizing, rather than maximizing, sex differences through their socialization practices. A society could, for example, devote its energies more toward moderating male aggression than toward preparing women to submit to male aggression, or toward encouraging rather than discouraging male nurturance activities. (Maccoby and Jacklin 1975:374)

The concept of psychological "androgyny" put forward at this time by Bem (1974) and others was precisely an attempt to define an alternative gender pattern that an individual or a society could adopt.

In the 1970s this "two-realms" model of gender supported a sunny optimism about change. Oppressive gender arrangements, being the products of past social choices, could be abolished by fresh social choices. In the language of the time, sex-role expectations could be altered, and sex-role socialization would follow suit. Agendas of change were constructed around this principle. Among them were media reforms (to change sex-role models), educational reforms (to change the expectations transmitted to girls and boys), and new forms of psychotherapy (to help individuals make the change to new roles).

The two-realms model has, however, steadily eroded since the 1970s. Pringle (1992) shows that it ran into trouble on several fronts. The idea of gender as culturally chosen difference ("sex roles") was unable to explain why one side of the difference, the masculine, was consistently more highly valued. The tendency to marginalize biology ran counter to impulses in feminism that were placing more emphasis on bodies. For instance, radical feminism focused increasingly on men's violence and heterosexual desire, whose targets were not a feminine role but women's bodies. The growing influence of certain Parisian theorists—especially Foucault and Irigaray—highlighted bodies as the objects of social power and the sources of emotion and expression.

If the two realms could not be held strictly apart, perhaps they could be added together? A commonsense compromise would suggest that

gender differences arise from *both* biology and social norms. This position was spelled out by Rossi (1985), once a feminist pioneer in American sociology, who became a critic of "cultural determinism" about gender. She claimed that there was a biological predisposition for women (but not men) to mother, that is, to learn how to care for infants, and actually to do the caring. Thus biology provided the basis of the gender division of labor in the family, in warfare, between family and workplace, and so on: "Gender differentiation is not simply a function of socialization, capitalist production, or patriarchy. It is grounded in a sex dimorphism that serves the fundamental purpose of reproducing the species" (p. 161).

There are difficulties in the additive conception of sex and gender, too. The two levels of analysis are not really being added, because they are not commensurate. As Rossi makes clear, the biological is "fundamental," it "grounds" the social. In the hierarchy of the sciences (a conception that goes back as far as Comte in the early nineteenth century), biology is routinely taken to be more basic than sociology. Its reality is somehow more real; its explanations explain more deeply.

But bodies are plural, and very diverse. There are not just two kinds. There are lots of kinds of bodies, and lots of differences among them. There are large bodies and small bodies; bodies permanently stained with soil or grease; bodies stooped from bending over a desk, and other bodies with spotless, manicured hands. Even in reproductive biology, human bodies are not strictly dimorphic. There is a complex group of intersex categories, such as people with extra or missing or damaged chromosomes. These categories have long fascinated sexologists; they do not correspond in any simple way to behavior or sense of identity.

Even when orthodox biologically, bodies may not fit comfortably into the places marked out for them by a given system of gender relations, as can be seen in sport. Elite sport is an important source of examples of hegemonic masculinity in the contemporary world (Messner and Sabo 1994). Yet elite sport can be remarkably destructive of the bodies engaged. As Messner puts it, "the body-as-weapon ultimately results in violence against one's own body." Playing hurt, accidents, drug use, and constant stress wear down even the fittest and strongest. Former athletes often live with damaged bodies and chronic pain, and tend to die early.

Some bodies are more than recalcitrant; they disrupt and subvert the social arrangements into which they are invited. The most striking example is gender switching ("transsexualism"), where bodies cross the

most fundamental of lines in the modern social order. At the boundaries of gender categories, it seems, bodies may travel without passports granted by society. People who have made such journeys (e.g., Cummings 1992; Rubin forthcoming) speak of an undeniable need for change that is bodily as well as mental. The momentum may be so strong that body awareness is transformed, with awareness of the body being that of another sex—awareness sometimes temporary, sometimes permanent.

Bodies do not stand outside of, or prior to, history; they are open to change through social processes. In gender (as in other social structures) social practice draws bodies into a historical process in which bodies are materially transformed.

Some elements of this process are familiar: lengthening expectation of life, rising average height and weight (as nutrition and child health care improve), changing patterns of disease (e.g., polio declining, TB declining but now reviving). The transformation of bodies is structured, in part, on gender lines. The demographic indicators themselves show this. In the rich industrial countries, women's life expectancy has now reached 109 percent of men's. In India, women's life expectancy is 101 percent of men's. In Bangladesh and Nepal, men on average outlive women (United Nations Development Program 1994, table 9). The gendered industrial economy has a differential impact on men's and women's bodies. There are higher rates of industrial and vehicle accidents among men, who are the majority of workers in heavy industry and transport. There are higher rates of repetition strain injury among women, who are the majority of keyboard workers.

Practical transformations of the body include the disciplinary practices, such as gendered dress and deportment, where we present and decorate ourselves as gendered. Gender presentation often includes body modifications such as eyebrow plucking and diet, and increasingly involves the cosmetic use of drugs (e.g., diet pills for women who want to slim down, and steroids for men who want to bulk up) and cosmetic surgery, especially for women (though with a subspecialty of penis augmentation for men). Research in social psychology is a rich source of information about transformations of bodies. In *Body Politics*, Henley (1977) provides a comprehensive inventory of the "nonverbal communication" of gender messages, conveyed by the use of space, posture, demeanor in interaction, touch, gesture, eye contact, and so on. Each of these techniques is informally learned and may become a permanent part of one's repertoire of bodily practice.

Bodies are also transformed in formal learning. To learn skills—whether very widespread skills such as writing or highly specific occupational techniques such as using a lathe or playing a cello—is to transform the body's physical capacities. These transformations are often gendered. Technical education has long been the most segregated sector of education; few women are trained to use a lathe, few men are trained as secretaries. That this segregated practice is historically produced is made obvious in social emergencies when the pattern is abruptly reversed. During World War II, for instance, very large numbers of women were recruited into armaments factories and trained on presses, cranes, and rivet guns as well as lathes. At the same time (though this fact is less familiar), large numbers of men were doing clerical work inside the armed forces.

It is clear, then, that bodies do not produce simple dichotomies of experience or of action—though they are often subjected to social polarizations.

Identities

If the sense of being a gendered person does not arise simply from dichotomous bodies, we might seek to explain it in psychological terms. This is most often done by reference to "gender identity" (and sometimes "sexual identity").

The concept of "identity" has a long history in philosophy and literature, but took on its current meaning around the 1950s. The most influential formulation was that of the psychoanalyst Erikson (1950) [1965], who 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" (p. 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. Following Freud, Erikson saw personality as composed of several mental agencies, marked by conflicting impulses and repressions.

But where Freud had focused on conflicts involving the unconscious agencies (the "id" and the "superego"), Erikson emphasized issues about 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. Personal identity, in Erikson's thought,

meant the integration of the ego: the coherence of the psychological mechanisms by which the ego handles the pressures that impinge on it from the unconscious agencies, on the one side, and the outside world, on the other. This feat of balance, if successful, would be 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.

Erikson picked up the Freudian idea that there were different stages in a child's psychosexual development and elaborated it into a model of the whole life cycle. Each of the eight stages Erikson named had its characteristic psychological conflict, which needed to be resolved before the individual could move on to the next. In one particular stage, conflict around identity was central: the stage of adolescence. This idea has led to a great deal of popular discussion of adolescence as a "search for identity."

The key application of the concept to gender issues, by the psychiatrist Stoller (1968), departed from Erikson's concept 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's notion of identity referred to the integration of the ego as a whole, and philosophical and literary usages of the term referred to the continuity of selfhood for the person 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 very much, 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 for 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, with a plausible change of assumptions, toward 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 feminist research emphasizing gender differentiation in the rearing of children. The most

influential statement of this point was Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978). Chodorow's argument linked two dichotomies: a gender division of labor, which assigned the task of caring for babies and infants exclusively to women; and two paths of development, for girls and boys, respectively, 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, and when they grow up have a stronger motivation for nurturing children. Boys, pushed toward separation from a mother responding to the gender distinction, tend to have an earlier discontinuity in development, more difficulty in establishing gender identity, and stronger boundaries to the self in adulthood.

The gender division of labor in child care is a fact. Though it has been well established that men *can* mother (Risman 1987), it is still the case that few of them do. But the reasons for this may have little to do with psychology; they certainly include the economic costs to families from the loss of a man's wage. In Norway, where these costs have been dramatically reduced by the introduction of a "father's quota" of paid parental leave, some 70 percent of eligible men currently take up their entitlement and are present as caregivers in the first month of their child's life (Gender Equality Ombudsman 1997). There has also been increasing recognition—by Chodorow (1994) among others—that a gender division of labor in child care does not necessarily produce dichotomous gender patterns in later life.

The outcomes of human development, indeed, seem curiously undichotomous. Given the popularity of quantitative "sex difference" research, the results of surveys such as Maccoby and Jacklin's (1975) are scandalous. Over much of the terrain psychologists have studied, there are no consistent differences between women and men (or girls and boys) at all. In those areas where differences persistently appear, they are small by comparison with the variation within each of the supposedly "dichotomous" groups.

Debate has raged about the interpretation of sex-difference research, with some proponents of meta-analysis (e.g., Eagly 1987) arguing that there are more differences than Maccoby and Jacklin's method could identify. Yet no reinterpretation can make the findings on the psychological characteristics of men and women look anything like a dichotomy.

Social researchers, too, have increasingly emphasized variation within the gender categories. This trend is noticeable in the growth of research and debate on masculinity. In contrast to the way "the male sex

role" was discussed in the 1970s (with an emphasis on "the"), it has become common to speak of "masculinities." Research in the past two decades has shown great diversity among cultures in their constructions of gender for men (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994). There is also a considerable amount of research that documents multiple masculinities within given cultures, and even within particular institutions, peer groups, and workplaces (Connell 1995). A striking example is Foley's (1990) ethnography of a Texas high school, where the interplay of gender, class, and ethnicity constructs several versions of masculinity: the dominant group of Anglo jocks, antiauthoritarian Mexican American *vatos*, and the group Foley ironically calls the "silent majority."

Even the categories for our self-understanding, when carefully examined, appear quite complex. There is a whole spectrum of variations and fragments, painstakingly cataloged by Lorber (1994). She calculates that modern Western societies distinguish five sexes (based on genitalia), three sexual orientations, five gender displays, six types of relationships, and ten self-identifications. Leaving aside the five sexes, that makes, if my arithmetic is correct, 900 different situations one can be in. So much for dimorphism.

With the categories thus seeming more and more complex, the concept of identity has increasingly been used, not to name a box into which society puts us, but to name *claims made by individuals* about who or what they are. These claims are related to the dominance of "identity politics" since the decline of forms of radicalism that made universal claims. One becomes a member of a social movement by claiming the identity (as Black, as a woman, as lesbian, and so on) that the movement represents. "Queer" politics takes the process a step further, as queer activists have sought to disrupt taken-for-granted communities by insisting on their plurality: highlighting the presence of Black lesbians in White-dominated gay communities, for instance. At the extreme, the concept of identity becomes a way of naming one's uniqueness, rather than naming what is shared.

Sexualities

The paradox about identity is particularly sharp in relation to sexuality. Sexuality is precisely the realm of intimate contact where the strongest of bonds and solidarities are forged; yet on this very territory a trend toward fragmentation and multiplicity has emerged. The leading contemporary theorist of sexuality, Weeks (1986), argues that the

diversification of sexual practices, subcultures, and identities is characteristic of this moment in sexual history.

Sexual matters are dealt with in all cultures, but often in very different terms. 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, fertility, a kind of social prosperity. By contrast, Christianity long valorized chastity within a classification of people as chaste or unchaste. A vow of chastity was a basic part of monasticism. Chastity for priests, imposed in Gregory VII's reform of the medieval church, separated them further from the laity.

The current Western preoccupation with the homosexual/heterosexual distinction is relatively recent. In medieval and early modern European society, specific homosexual acts were often defined as shameful or criminal, but were lumped together with other disruptions of the religious or social order. Sodomy might be punished very brutally, but enforcement was erratic and did not tend to define a clear-cut social category (Greenberg 1988). Changed laws, in the late nineteenth century, criminalized homosexual behavior generally and led to regular police surveillance and arrests.

At about the same time, homosexuality was defined as a medical condition. This was part of an extension of medical classifications to include sexual behavior, crystallized in the Austrian doctor Krafft-Ebing's famous book *Psychopathia Sexualis* ([1886] 1965), one of the founding documents of modern sexology. There is debate among historians as to how far a sexual subculture had already created some kind of identity. But there can be little doubt about the importance of legal and medical discourses in shaping the modern category of "the homosexual" (Weeks 1977).

Sexuality, like gender, had often been treated as part of the realm of nature; Darwin, for instance, theorized "sexual selection" as a key mechanism of evolution. In the second half of the nineteenth century, evolutionary biology displaced religion as the dominant framework for understanding sex. At the turn of the century, Freud's "psychoanalysis," like Ellis's "psychology of sex," operated within this frame. Freud understood the conflict and unhappiness in his cases to come from the tragic incompatibility of natural impulse and the limits required by social life.

This conception of a division between natural impulse and social repression was directly adopted by the social critics who attempted to

combine Freud with Marx. The leading figures here were Reich and Marcuse, but they were far from isolated. A conception of an underlying natural impulse has been widespread in twentieth-century sexuality. The pioneering ethnographers of sexuality, Malinowski and Mead, were acutely conscious of the diversity of social forms. They nevertheless presupposed a biological impulse that the social forms expressed. Even the arch-empiricist Kinsey, who replaced Freud's subtle analysis of desire with a mechanical analysis of physical performance, shared the notion of a robust, hedonistic, natural urge, which found varying expression according to social approval or prohibition (De Cecco 1990).

Conservative ideology, too, places sexuality at the boundary of the social, as the quintessence of what is irrational, uncontrollable, or animal in human life. Readings of sexuality as "natural" or beyond the social have provided both cultural feminism and New Age religion with images of women's sexuality outside of patriarchy.

The whole framework of "natural" urge and social superstructure was dramatically rejected in the 1970s. Similar stances were taken by the sociologists of the Kinsey Institute in the United States (Gagnon and Simon 1974), who developed the idea of sexual "scripts," and by the historian Foucault (1978) in France.

Gagnon and Simon's (1974) conception of sexual scripts is, essentially, an application to sexuality 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 lifelong course of heterosexuality in the United States has a large overlap with the sex role literature of the day (Gagnon and Simon 1974:100-103).

Foucault's critique of the "repressive hypothesis" (addressed presumably to Freud and Reich) was more sophisticated, and the alternative he suggested more subtle. Foucault argued that society did not repress sexuality, which simply did 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 sexuality itself. Foucault's argument marked a decisive expansion of social constructionism, and has been followed by a flood of research on discourses of sexuality and the production of sexual identities that still shows little sign of abating.

Gender is, notoriously, absent from Foucault's theoretical universe. Gender has been present in scripting theory mainly in the very simplified form of "sex roles," or dichotomous sexual scripts. A well-recognized weakness of role theory is its difficulty in handling issues about social power. It is significant that those feminist approaches to sexuality that have most insisted on the importance of power—for instance, in campaigns against sexual violence—have been relatively receptive to a nonsocial, even biological-determinist, understanding of male sexuality.

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 Vance (1989) observes, risk drifting away from bodily experience altogether. There are ways of talking about the politics of AIDS, for instance, that treat the matter as a problem of language, the power of medical discourse to control debate about the issue (Gilder 1989). There is a strong tendency in poststructuralist theory to treat bodies as the surfaces on which social meanings are inscribed, that is, as a neutral substratum for the play of identity and signification.

It is important, then, to insist that the bodily processes and experiences conventionally taken to be outside history are indeed elements of social process. Sexual practice is body-recursive practice, focused on people's erotic and reproductive potentials. Bodies are in play in social relations, they are not surfaces or landscapes. We have no difficulty in accepting the social character of labor, which involves bodies as much as sexuality does. A sociology of bodies now exists that shows the varieties of ways bodies are drawn into social process and historical change. Glassner (1988), for instance, traces the rise of the body-culture industry and its connection to American moral ideologies. Theberge (1991) shows the many ways bodies are regulated and reconstructed in competitive sport. Sport itself undergoes constant institutional and cultural change, as shown in Gruneau and Whitson's (1993) striking analysis of the corporate and political interests that remade the obsessively masculine sport of ice hockey in Canada.

Survey research in the United States shows how the gender patterning of sexuality persists within historical change (Laumann et al. 1994;

Turner 1989). Comparison of surveys over time reveals two broad trends in heterosexual practice. One is a rising rate of sexual contact outside of marriage, most notably a greater number of partners in youth, for both genders. The other is a gradual but far from complete erosion of the double standard, with women's patterns becoming more like those of men. The convergence still has a long way to go. In the latest of these studies, women are less than half as likely as men to report coming to orgasm in heterosexual intercourse. And though the interpretation of the questions is tricky, it seems that women are 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. 1994:333-36).

Another pattern of change involves the historical production of new categories of sexuality and new erotic objects, a process emphasized by Weeks (1986). It is possible to trace in fine detail the construction of particular sexual subcultures, their venues, styles, leading personalities, economic and political histories, as Rubin (1991) does for a particular S/M venue in San Francisco. This kind of transformation affects heterosexuality as well. Studies of fashion (Wilson 1987) and conceptions of beauty (Banner 1983) chart historical changes in the object of heterosexual desire, and show how intricate are the social processes involved. Wilson (1987) is particularly interesting in showing a sustained interplay between feminism and fashion, long before the era of "lipstick lesbians" and power dressing.

Further evidence shows the contradictory and mutable character of this desire. The very recent creation of the "transsexual" as a category (King 1981) was the by-product of attempts to provide a surgical route from membership in one gender to membership in another. Some people were delayed en route, so to speak, and found they could survive in a gender-contradictory state, for instance, as specialized prostitutes (Perkins 1983). Their customers are not other transsexuals—this is not an erotic subculture in the sense of the S/M or leather scene—but straight men, excited by the gender contradiction embodied in the transsexual prostitute.

The most profound changes in sexuality at present are not, however, in the rich industrialized countries. As shown in ethnographies such as Clark's (1997) study of a highland community in Papua New Guinea, the more sweeping changes are the transformations of sexual categories and practices during dependent capitalist development in poor countries.

Murray's (1991) study of street traders and prostitutes in Jakarta traces this process in an urban setting. One type of prostitution in this

case involves servicing the Westernized sexuality of businessmen by lower-class women, who use this trade as a way into the modernized sector of Javanese society. Another type involves middle-class housewives, excluded from useful employment by the patriarchal policies of the Suharto dictatorship. Different class sexualities, as Murray puts it, are produced despite a homogenizing official ideology of womanhood.

The impact of global capitalism also affects sexuality among Javanese men. Javanese society traditionally provided a space for *waria*, cross-dressing men who typically had sex with straight men. This pattern is now being displaced by a new sexual category, gay men, modeled on the gay sexuality of North American cities (Oetomo 1990). There is a striking parallel in Brazil. Here another pattern of male-to-male sexuality, this time involving a fundamental distinction between insertor and insertee (rather than cross-dressing), is also being reshaped by the development of gay sexuality on the North American model (Parker 1985).

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 enormously complex interactions among sexual 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 massive economic inequalities. Gender remains a key way in which sexuality is structured—but in a world in which gender relations themselves are being transformed.

Gendered People, Gendered Situations

Can we fit these complexities together into a coherent picture of gender in personal life and experience, including sexuality? I think we can, but the account will not much resemble the familiar old language of sex roles or biology versus society.

Our new model begins with the observation that human bodies are active players in social life. They are neither biological machines, producing social effects mechanically, nor blank pages on which cultural messages are written. Bodies are parties in social life, sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social conduct.

In gender practices, bodies are both agents and objects; the practices, thus, are body-reflexive. Such practices are not internal to the individual. Their circuits involve social relations and symbolism; they

commonly encompass social institutions, even such large-scale institutions as states and markets. Particular versions of femininity and masculinity are constituted in their circuits as meaningful bodies and embodied meanings. Through body-reflexive practices, more than individual lives are formed: A social world is formed.

Through body-reflexive practices, bodies are addressed by social process and drawn into history, without ceasing to be bodies. They do not turn into symbols, signs, or positions in discourse. Their materiality (including material capacities to engender, to give birth, to give milk, to menstruate, to open, to penetrate, to ejaculate) is not erased. The *social* process of gender includes childbirth and child care, youth and aging, the pleasures of sport and sex, labor, injury, death from AIDS, and the struggle to live with AIDS.

Gender is the domain of social practice organized in relation to a *reproductive arena* constituted by the materiality of the body. The reproductive arena is the set of body-reflexive practices that respond to the reproductive division of humans into (mostly) males and females. To say that body-reflexive social practices *respond* to this bodily division is specifically to deny that biological reproduction *causes*, or even provides a template for, gender as practice (for debate on this point, see Hawkesworth 1997). Lesbian and gay sexualities, for instance, are gendered practices as much as heterosexuality is—they are sexualities organized with reference to women and men, respectively, as partners. Gender differentiations occur that have not the slightest logical connection to biological reproduction—for instance, the gender patterns in computer games. The connection with the reproductive arena is entirely a matter of the organization of social relations. Different societies do it differently, and they may stand on their heads with respect to each other, while still constituting gender. Thus early-eighteenth-century male Highlanders wore skirts into battle, whereas late-twentieth-century American men would not do such a thing in a pink fit. The Theban army in the fourth century B.C. required its shock troops (the “Sacred Band”) to be homosexual couples; today’s Americans would get thrown out of their army if they admitted even casual homosexual practice.

I speak of a “reproductive arena,” not a “biological base,” to emphasize that the concept is about a historical process that operates through and uses bodies, not about a fixed set of biological determinants. Gender is social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do; it is not social practice reduced to body functions.

Body-reflexive practices form—and are formed by—structures that have historical weight and solidity. When feminists first spoke of “patriarchy” as the master pattern in human history, the argument was overgeneralized. But the idea well captured the power and intractability of a massive structure of social relations: a structure that involves the state, the economy, culture, and communications, as well as kinship, child rearing, and sexuality.

The practices that construct femininity and masculinity are formative of reality. As body-reflexive practices, they constitute a world that has a bodily dimension, but is not biologically determined. Not being fixed by the physical logic of the body, this practice-made world may 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 as high as women. Young women in Southeast Asia, recruited into microprocessor assembly plants because of their supposed “natural” patience and delicacy, suffer irreversible bodily damage, which is completely determined by the labor system. Older women often suffer from chronic conditions that could be eased, or are regularly given unnecessary drugs, because there is no medical service available to them that takes their needs seriously. Older men sometimes die of diseases that could be cured, because they have learned it is unmanly to admit pain and request help.

Practice structured through the reproductive arena, generated as people and groups grapple with their historical situations, does not consist of isolated acts. Actions are configured in larger units, and when we speak of masculinity and femininity we are naming complex configurations of gender practice. As children grapple with their places in a gendered world, they are not primarily learning gender-specific behaviors or behavioral capacities (which, as noted above, are relatively rare). They are, much more importantly, learning how configurations work and how to navigate among them—what goes with what, who goes with whom, when and where one does this or that, what meanings are attached to things and acts, for what violations one is accountable.

Yet *configuration* is in many situations too static a term. Masculinity and femininity in the final analysis are *gender projects*. The idea of a “project” expresses the intentionality of social conduct and the way conduct is organized and coordinated through historical time, either by an individual person or by a collectivity. Gender projects configure gender practices through time, transforming their starting points in

gender structures. They have, indeed, the capacity to transform the reproductive arena itself.

Sexuality is not the basis of the domain of gender, as classical psychoanalysis assumed, but it is a part of this domain. More exactly, sexual practice is strongly gender-structured, and the gender order includes social relations constituted through sexuality. The structure of these relations defines inequalities and gives rise to politics across a wide range of venues. Sexuality is not confined to the bedroom. What Hearn and Parkin (1987) call "organization sexuality" is a ubiquitous feature of life in offices and factories. In sexuality, the interplay between the body and the structure of social relations is unending. Henriksson (1995) gives one of the most dramatic and tragic examples. In the Swedish gay community he studied, there is more unsafe sex within committed relationships than in casual sex; so love, in his phrase, becomes an HIV/AIDS risk factor.

In much of the world, sexual social relations are constructed in conditions of gender inequality. Examples range from the Jakarta prostitutes interviewed by Murray (1991) to the London teenagers interviewed by Lees (1986). For both these groups, their disempowerment as women, and the social empowerment of men, is fundamental in the making of sexuality.

To change these patterns of sexuality requires not only material equality, but cultural resources, notably knowledge and social respect. For Lees's adolescent girls, the lack of respect shapes their sexuality under the threat of being discredited as "slags"—and behind that lies the threat of violence. Violence against women (Dobash and Dobash 1992) and violence against gays (Mason and Tomsen 1997) are key parts of current gender politics.

The personal and collective project of gender formation being undertaken within structures of inequality is likely to embed injustice within the very configurations of practice that constitute our experienced world of gender. Thus, the women's liberation and gay liberation movements spoke of "self-oppression." The project of gender formation may also give rise to struggles against injustice. The "speciation" of sexualities (Rubin 1984) within a hierarchy of power or legitimacy involves a politics of self-expression. This idea fits Young's (1990) analysis of justice, involving not only a struggle against domination but also a struggle against oppression. (By *domination* Young means the social conditions that prevent people from controlling their own actions, individually or collectively; by *oppression*, she means the social

conditions that inhibit personal growth, self-expression, or communication with others.) Similarly, the hierarchy of masculinities (Connell 1995) involves a complex bundle of antagonisms and complexities. Think, for instance, of the middle-class White men who consume exemplary Black masculinities symbolically as television sports fans.

Domination may be constituted within intimate relations, including sexual practices. The most familiar cases are within heterosexuality, where the gendered object choice brings into play the structure of gender inequalities. Research on marital rape (Russell 1982), for instance, shows sexual violence by husbands occurring in a continuum of coercion, intimidation, claims of ownership, claims of right, claims of need, economic pressure, persuasion, and customary interpretations of marriage. That sexual violence is not just a local issue is shown by Laumann et al.'s (1994) finding, for a carefully constructed national sample in the United States, that the experience of forced sex is much more widespread among women than among men.

Intimate relations, it should never be forgotten, are addressed and to some extent shaped by large-scale institutions, particularly churches, corporations, and states. Governments introduce population policies directly regulating sexuality, and sometimes they work. The Chinese "one child" policy is the best-known current example. Governments also attempt public health measures, which often bear on gender and sexuality. A historical example is the intervention that created the modern sociological category of "the prostitute" (Walkowitz 1980), and a current one is the attempted regulation of homosexual practice through AIDS education. Governments, churches, and political movements may directly target intimate relations for regulation, as seen in contemporary struggles over abortion and contraception.

Governments and political movements, in turn, are only players on a wider stage of global markets, global communications, and international agencies. Here our concerns merge into other parts of this book, and this analysis must end. It is appropriate to end it with the relation between intimate life and society on the global scale. Gender analysis works best when it is insistent about connections.

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